

**We're here, we're queer, we don't
drink beer": The intersections of
gender, sexuality, race/ethnicity,
religiosity and non-heterosexual
British South Asian women and the
implications for mental health care**

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Definitions

- **British South Asian Women**
 - Born in Britain of South Asian decent
- **South Asian Descent**
 - South Asian women consist of an extremely diverse group of individuals from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, the Maldives, Afghanistan to name a few

Definitions

- **Mental Health and Well being**
 - A “subjective sense of enduring life satisfaction” (Sharma & Sharma, 2010, p121) in terms of happiness and pleasure and the absence of pain.
- **Mental or psychological distress**
 - Emotional suffering and a subjective sense of enduring life dissatisfaction in all or any specific area.

Definitions

- **Resilience**
 - Ability of individuals to endure and flourish despite hardship and adversity.
- **Coping**
 - The effort exerted by individuals in the response to adversity.

Aims/Purpose

‘Left out of histories of homosexuality because of lack of evidence, excluded from cultural constructions of sexual agency because of gender stereotypes, unnamed because of scholarly prohibitions against imposing anachronistic or culturally inappropriate terms, women who love women face an uphill battle....’. (Garber, 2008, p54)

Aims/Purpose

My Interest in the Topic

- **Insider**
 - Non-heterosexual
 - Female
 - British
 - Minority group member

- **Outsider**
 - White
 - English descent

Research Aims

To study how non-heterosexual British South Asian women understand the experience of being non-heterosexual in Britain, to explore their mental health and wellbeing and to assess their help seeking behaviour.

Methodology

- Qualitative Hermeneutic Phenomenological Research Method
- Purposive, snowball sampling
 - Challenging process

Participant No.	Pseudonym	Age	Self-identified Ethnicity	Self-identified Sexuality	Parentage	Religious Background
S1	Haira	30	British Indian	Gay	Punjabi	Sikh
S2	Saraah	24	British Indian/Malay	Gay	Malay/Indian	Sikh
S3	Muneerah	25	British Indian	Gay/queer	Sikh/Punjabi	Sikh
S4	Adeela	Late 20's	British	Gay	Indian	Hindu
S5	Naz	53	British Indian	Lesbian	Indian	Hindu
S6	Amber	47	English Asian	lesbian	Indian	Hindu
S7	Anisa	37	British Pakistani	Gay	Pakistan	Muslim
S8	Zainab	38	British Indian	Lesbian/Bisexual	Punjabi	Hindu
S9	Aysha	37	British Asian	lesbian	Punjabi	Sikh
S10	Amara	25	British Indian	Lesbian/Bisexual	North India	Sikh
S11	Fazana	44	British East African Indian	Bisexual	East African Pakistani	Muslim
S12	Fatimah	37	British	Queer	Punjabi	Sikh

Methodology



Are you a British woman of South Asian descent?

Are you attracted to other women?

Would you be willing to talk about your experience confidentially?

If you have answered yes to the questions above I really need your help and would appreciate a couple of hours of your time. I would like to learn more about your experience of being non-heterosexual in Britain today and what you do in order to cope with understanding, developing, expressing or concealing your sexuality. In this way I hope to inform support services and policy makers of the specific needs of this very invisible group of women. I would like to speak to ladies and girls (over 18) of different ages and ethnicities and faiths who are of South Asian descent face to face, via email or skype.

I realise that your safety and privacy are crucial and I will keep your contact details completely confidential. You do not need to give me your real name to take part.

If you are interested please contact:

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If you have any concerns about this research please contact The School of Human and Health Sciences, Research Ethics Panel, University of Huddersfield on hhs_srep@hud.ac.uk



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Any cost incurred as a result of your participation in this study will be reimbursed.

Methodology

- **Stage 1 Study**
 - 2 Semi-Structured interviews
- **Stage 2 study**
 - 12 Semi-structured interviews
 - Included the two initial interviews in the stage 1 study
- **Critical Narrative Analysis (Langdrige, 2007)**
 - Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991)
 - Minority Stress Model (Meyer, 2003)
 - Psychological processes framework (Hatzenbeulher, 2009)

Analysis - Minority Stress Theory

- **Lesbian Gay and Bisexual people face chronic stress due to homophobic and heterosexist social conditions.**
- **This chronic stress may potentially result in negative mental health outcomes.**
- **Identity pride and community support can create resilience factors and may result in more positive mental health outcomes.**

Analysis - General Psychological Processes

- Established cognitive, affective, and social risk factors for mental health out-comes. (Hatzenbeuhler, 2009)
 - Coping/emotion regulation
 - I. Rumination
 - II. Coping motives
 - Social/interpersonal
 - I. Social isolation
 - II. Social norms
 - Cognitive
 - I. Negative self-schemas
 - II. Hopelessness

Analysis - Moderators & Mediators

- **Moderators - Minority stress Theory**
 - Characteristics of the individual and/or his or her social network prior to the stressor
 - Status > Stress > Positive/Negative Mental health outcomes (Meyer, 2003)
- **Mediators - Psychological Process Framework**
 - Mediators are “activated, set off, or caused by” a stressor (Grant et al., 2003, p.453)
 - Stress > Psychological mediator > Psychopathology (Hatzenbuehler, 2009)

Emerging Findings

Identity/Identity Work

- “I need to feel connected to my culture but this culture doesn’t want me as a gay women.....”
- “It’s hard sometimes to just be gay and Asian because you, even though I live within the culture, I live on the margins of the culture,.....”
- “We’re not English for all our English quirks, we’re still not English and, you know um, that’s important to me” Hajra, 30

Emerging Findings

Identity/Identity Work

- “...like I always really modelled myself on always wanting to distance myself from my Indian side because I had a certain loathing towards you know Punjabi attitudes around women, marriage.....” Muneerah, 25
- “...I feel just really ridiculous, I do have this anger towards whiteness which I don't want to have you know but this is just where I am, I am trying to make sense of myself and the world.” Muneerah, 25

Emerging Findings

Identity/Identity Work

- “...more than anything else to do with feeling out of place, not belonging, not being like anyone else, to being Asian, being British, being gay, being Indian. All of these things kind of set against each other for me.”
Adeela, late 20’s
- “...we have got stories that we can share that no one else will understand and, and me being out, I know that’s really helped some of the Asian women. I mean I have always worn a Sari to Pride...” Ambarin, 47

Emerging Findings

Identity/Identity Work

“The way I feel about having samosas and you know the feeling is different it’s not just taste, it’s subtle, it’s multi-sensory.....” Hajra, 30

“it’s the British Indian that I would need I think because they are my two identities, I am not wholly British, I am not wholly Indian” Hajra, 30

“I’m quite, um, particular when it comes to girls as well, like I, I, I want someone that’s like me, that’s Indian because I think it would soften the blow a bit....” Saarah, 24

Emerging Findings

Identity/Identity Work

- “.....I think has made me more acceptable is because I am not westernised.... , I think that’s what makes me acceptable because my dad saw that she still speaks the language perfectly, she still wants to go to India erm, she wants to have an Indian life” Hajra, 30
- “...if the South Asian person is part of an LGBT community but outside of that I don’t really mix you see with, generally my friends are white or non-Asian” Anisa, 37

Emerging Findings - Mental Health

- **Positive Outcomes**
 - Developing individual/community resilience
 - Positive self-schemas
- **Negative Outcomes**
 - Suicidal feelings
 - Substance misuse
 - Anxiety
 - Depression
 - Social isolation
 - Self harm

Emerging Findings - Mental Health

- “...I suppose the escapism of dancing, drugs and alcohol um and I say that as a coping strategy...”
Muneerah, 25
- “I’m in full time work but I’m definitely going to quit in a months time. I’m currently off sick cos of just the stress of it all unfolding.....quite a few days in the week I can’t out of bed...” Muneerah, 25
- “...I’m always like thinking of loads of stuff so it’s like, oh, I’ve pissed these friends off, am I ever going to be ok with being gay, why does it bother me so much, why am I obsessed thinking about race, sexuality um, am I reading too much about it...” Muneerah, 25

Emerging Findings - Mental Health

Help Seeking Behaviour

“I think, yeah, I think I feel like some organisations won’t understand the type because of my culture, my background,.....I didn’t think there was such people like that to help a gay Asian girl cos then again I thought I was the only one. No, because I felt shamed. I didn’t want to speak to anyone about that. I just deal with it myself.” Saarah, 24

Emerging Findings - Mental Health

Help Seeking Behaviour

- “I think my parents would have felt, the idea that we don't take it outside of the family um, cos that was before I came out to my parents, it was very secret.” Adeela, late 20's
- “looking on the therapist list, you know, feel bad saying it but I would like to see someone who is a minority and gay” Muneerah, 25

Emerging Findings - Mental Health

Help Seeking Behaviour

- “No, no, um, again my GP, like most of the doctors are Sikh, Indian (laughs) going to them with this kind of history even if it’s you know, not about my sexuality just about mental health...” Amara, 25
- “I didn’t like this psychiatrist, she asked me if I would show her my scars where I, no, absolutely not, never. She was also Asian so that didn’t help...” Adeela, late 20’s

Emerging Findings

Coping and Resilience

Coping - Saarah, 24

“I just leave it alone just forget that I’m gay, just carry on as normal with my dad and my family.” Saarah, 24

Individual Resilience - Saarah, 24

“you know what, I actually like being a girl and being gay (laughs) and I can’t believe I’m saying that, I actually feel alright saying that before I’d be like my gosh, I wouldn’t dare say I was gay.....”

Emerging Findings

Coping and Resilience

Hajra - Community Resilience

“but K’s family they help. They help normalise something, I feel a sense of belonging that I have never felt and I think it does make me healthier mentally”

Emerging Conclusion/Implications

Status (including individual/community resilience) >
Stress > Psychological Mediator >
Positive/negative mental health outcomes

Emerging Implications for Mental Health Care

- Role Models
- Cultural competency
- Impact of being in Inter-racial relationships
- Further understanding of Risk and Resilience within this group
- Create further understanding of the complex model of intersecting identities which impact on coping which is influenced by both community and individual resilience which affects help seeking behaviours and therefore mental health outcomes.

Limitations

- Relatively small sample size
- Larger sample from one specific South Asian Heritage
- Valid for the specific sample analysed
- Culturally and socially specific

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