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# “My Stutter Has Put Me on the outside”: Young South African Muslim Men Who Stutter Talk about Masculinities and Religion

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## ABSTRACT

Presently, limited studies have explored how disabled Muslim men construct their masculinities. The present article examines how five young adult Muslim men in the Western Cape, who stutter, talk about their masculinities. A series of semi-interviews were conducted with these men. These semi-structured interviews were analyzed according to Edley's guide to discourse analysis. The findings showed that Islam played an instrumental role in men's discourses of masculinities. At the same time, participants indicated experiencing disablism as men who stutter, which resulted in them either resisting or reformulating dominant forms of masculinities. Implications for future research is discussed.

## KEYWORDS

Disability; discourse analysis; masculinities; South Africa; young adult Muslim men who stutter

## Introduction

“Islam is considered one of the main three religions in the world” (Al-Aoufi et al., 2012, p. 206). It is estimated that 1.5% billion of the global population adhere to Islamic law (Hasnain et al., 2019; Hassim, 2013). It is beyond the scope of this article to provide a detailed introduction to Islam as a religion and a set of beliefs, and there are excellent introductions to Islam as a religion in general and how it is practiced and understood in particular contexts (see, for example (Armstrong, 2007, 2011; Baderoon, 2014). Our interest here is not in the Muslim religion as doctrine but in how it is experienced and interpreted in the lives of the general public – and, in our case, men with speech impairments (Gökarıksel & Secor, 2017; Prianti, 2019).

## *Islam and masculinity*

Islam, similarly to other religions, have been identified as contributing to the construction masculinity (Siraj, 2014). Siraj (2014) argued that religion

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provides context for men to formulate their masculine identity, particularly with regards to performing and understanding traditional versions of masculinity. Islam promotes the idea that God created both men and women as equals from the same soul and the same spiritual nature: “O mankind! Fear your Lord Who (initiated) your creation from a single soul, then from it created its mate, and from these two spreads (the creation of) countless men and women.” (Qur’an, 4:1). The last two decades have seen researchers beginning to examine the construction of masculinities among Muslim men (Archer, 2001; Britton, 2019; Hopkins, 2006). For example, Archer (2001) explored the formation of racialized, gendered identities among 24 young British Muslim men (aged 14-15 years) through a critical feminist approach. The findings revealed that Islam was central in the formation of men’s masculine identities. Men in this study constructed fluid and contradictory versions of masculinities in relation to women and men – with an emphasis on excreting masculine power (Archer, 2001). Another study by Hopkins (2006) investigated youth masculinities of 70 Pakistani Muslim men who lived in Glasgow and Edinburgh, in Scotland, with a specific focus on gender and generational relations. This study found that Muslim men largely perpetuated stereotypical ideas of gender relations. For instance, in their narratives, men discussed the role of Muslim women in spaces of the home; the home was perceived as a space where men could freely exercise masculine control and power, particularly over women. Although men advocated for sexist stereotypes, they at times distanced themselves from the sexism commonly found within the South Asian culture – calling for gender equality within Islam. Furthermore, masculinity was seen as different across generations. Participants described how their perceptions of masculinity differed from the perception of masculinity held by their parents. Hopkins (2006) defined this phenomenon as being ‘caught between two cultures.’ Britton (2019) also sought to study Islamic masculinity. Through her research, Britton (2019) sought to highlight the importance of examining the emotional and relational factors when examining masculine experiences. Britton (2019) aimed to examine the effect the child exploitation crisis in South Yorkshire, had on eight Muslim men living in Rotherham. At the time of the study there was increased public attention on cases of child exploitation perpetrated by Muslim men in Muslim populated areas. As a consequence, Muslim men were typically viewed in a negative light. They were typically held responsible for the exploitation of children and for those who perpetrated these acts, and seen as a deviant and dangerous. The study interviews revealed that men were adamant to oppose those negative stereotypes emerging from the crisis. Men placed great emphasis on the relational, emotional and intimate roles they occupied within their personal life. For example, men typically highlighted the

caring and nurturing roles they occupied within their respective families and households. Britton (2019) concluded by emphasizing the value of focusing on the subjective aspect on men's lives. She argues such a focus resists problematizing Muslim men's lives. Instead, it outlines the different and multiple roles Muslim men occupy across different domains of their lives (Britton, 2019).

The aforementioned studies provided valuable insight into Muslim men's construction of masculinities. The current paper seeks to build on the existing body of knowledge. It examines how young adult Muslim men in the Western Cape Province of South Africa, who stutter, talk about their masculinities. Currently, limited studies have explored how disabled masculinities intersect with Islam.

### ***Islam and disability***

Several scholars have sought to trace the dominant ways in which the Quran and Muslims engage questions of disability (Claassens et al., 2019; Edd & Hatab, 2005). In critical analyses of the conceptualization of disability in the Quran and other sources of Islamic Law related text, authors, such as Al-Aoufi et al. (2012), Hayhoe (2014), Schuelka (2013), and Bengtsson (2018) have pointed out that the Quran and Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad, promote a positive attitude toward disability. These authors have argued that the Quran presents disability as an acceptable aspect of human life (Al-Aoufi et al., 2012), and that it provides practical guidelines on how to care, respect and protect the rights of disabled individuals (Hayhoe, 2014; Schuelka, 2013; Bengtsson, 2018). However, Al-Aoufi et al. (2012) argued that a number of cultural ideas and practices are at times in contradiction to what is stated in Islamic legal sources. Therefore, disabled individuals frequently experience social exclusion and oppression within Muslim communities (Al-Aoufi et al., 2012). For example, in a recent study Alenaizi (2019) employed poststructuralist and Foucauldian analyses to examine how six young disabled individuals in Kuwait, talk about culture and religion in the context of disability. Also included in the analysis was the perspective of an imam in order to provide insight into how Islam perceives disability and disabled people. Alenaizi (2019) found that in Kuwait there was a common belief that disability was God-ordained. In other words, it was believed that disability was bestowed on an individual as a result of punishment for sin, a challenge placed on an individual's path as a test, or for the fact that the individual has been chosen for an unknown reason purpose. This was the sentiment particularly shared by the imam included in this study. The imam claimed that disability is an affliction from God, hence non-disabled people should be

grateful that they escaped the affliction. He urged non-disabled people to help and sympathize with disabled people. This is a commonly held belief throughout the Muslim world. Disabled people generally rejected the sympathy of non-disabled people. They saw this act as offensive, oppressive and undermining of their capabilities (Alenaizi, 2019). Furthermore, Hasnain and colleagues (2019) reviewed the historical and religious accounts of leprosy through a disability studies framework. They found that while Quran and Sunnah promoted the social inclusion of people living with leprosy; Muslim communities did not always reflect these religious principles. Leprosy typically attracted negative responses from communities. These negative reactions often resulted in the social rejection, ostracization, discrimination and oppression of individuals living with leprosy. In some instances, individuals living with leprosy were also forced to leave their communities. Hasnain et al. (2019), associated these negative attitudes and responses to the gap that currently exists in religious literacy in Muslim societies about disability and disabled people. Hasnain et al. (2019) called for the collaborative work between Islamic scholars and other academics to bridge the gap that currently exists in literature.

### ***Islam in the Western Cape Province, South Africa***

Religion is an important aspect of South African society (Isaacs & Swartz, 2020; Lugo & Cooperman, 2010; Schoeman, 2017). The General Household Survey published by Statistics South Africa (StatsSA, 2015) showed that approximately 86% of the South African population identify as Christian. It is estimated that Muslims make up at least 1,9% of the South African population, with the majority residing in the Western Cape Province – the Cape Town metropolitan to be more specific (StatsSA, 2015).

The Muslim community living in Cape Town are categorized as Cape Muslims (Isaacs et al., 2013). However, under the apartheid regime, the Muslim community was categorized according to two distinct groups: the Cape Malay and Indian Muslim (Gabeba, 2014; Isaacs et al., 2013). Individuals who were of Indonesian or Malay decent were categorized as Coloreds or Cape Malays, while individuals of Indian or Indo-Pakistan decent were categorized as Indian Muslim (Günther, 2018). Indian Muslims were ranked more highly on the apartheid social hierarchy (Günther, 2018). They enjoyed various privileges in contrast to the Colored population (Günther, 2018). For instance, Indian Muslims were privileged and able to pursue highly respected professions, which included medicine and law (Günther, 2018).

Across these two categories are cultural norms and customs that shape individuals' lives, and more specifically the construction of masculinities

(Francis, 2018; Nauright, 1997). These norms are specific to the Islamic culture within Cape Town and cannot be generalized to the global practice of Islam (Francis, 2018). Yet, the study of masculinities among Muslim men in Cape Town, has largely been understudied. A few studies have attempted to provide insight into this category of masculinity. One such study was an historical analysis conducted by Nauright (1997). Nauright's (1997) sought to examine the symbolic role of rugby in two historical Muslim suburbs in Cape Town – District Six and the Bo-Kaap – from 1930 to 1970. He found that the Muslim communities in District Six and the Bo-Kaap, perceived rugby as a 'second religion'(sic), and symbol of masculinity. Nauright (1997) used the concept of muscular Islam to explain how rugby and Islam intersect to foster a masculine "culture of discipline that allowed for significant violence within specifically defined spheres" (p. 190). In another study, Francis (2018) examined premarital first-time fatherhood among young Muslim men in Cape Town. Participants in her study predominately defined masculinity in the context of marriage, emphasizing the need to provide and protect one's family, and to ensure that they are well fed, clothed, and sheltered (Francis, 2018).

While the abovementioned studies gave insight into the notions of masculinities found in Muslim communities in Cape Town, these studies did not explicitly examine the construction of masculinities amongst Muslim men. The current paper aims to explore how Muslim men who stutter talk about masculinities. At present, masculinities are a growing field of study in South Africa (Langa, 2012, 2020; Ratele, 2016). However, little is known about how South African disabled men construct their masculinities (Isaacs & Swartz, 2020).

## ***Methods and material***

### ***Participants***

The methodology presented in this paper stems from a larger doctoral study that examined how men, in the Western Cape Province of South Africa, who stutter, construct their masculinities (see Isaacs & Swartz, 2020 for further reference). Purposive sampling was used to select participants for this study. Participants for the larger study were gathered from a local support program for people who stutter, a local hospital, a local university, a disability service of a local university, and through posters. In addition, participants were also recruited through snowball sampling – some were suggested by other participants of the study. The inclusion criteria required participants to be young adult men who stutter between 20 and 39 years of age. These men had to voluntarily commit to engage with the first author through a series of three semi-structure interviews conducted in English or

**Table 1.** Biographical profiles of participants.

Participant	Age	Occupation/Education
Luqmaan	29	Medical doctor
Natheer	38	Business owner
Allie	23	Master's student
Agmad	27	High school teacher
Nur	30	Accountant

Afrikaans. This study particularly chose to explore gender construction during young adulthood because authors have showed how immense social pressure is often placed upon adolescents and young adult men to carry out key masculine tasks, such as performing heterosexuality, demonstrating autonomy and obtaining economic independence (Barker & Ricardo, 2005; Dutton, 2013; Langa, 2012; Martin & Govender, 2011). Fifteen men participated in the larger study. However, since the aim of the current paper was to examine how Muslim men who stutter talk about their masculinities, only the narratives of five Muslim participants were included in this manuscript. Table 1 outlines the demographic details of the five participants, using pseudonyms. All five of the participants resided in Cape Town, in the Western Cape Province, South Africa. They varied in terms of age and occupational and Muslim background. While three participants identified as Cape Malay Muslim, two identified as Indian Muslim.

### **Procedure**

After ethical clearance was received, semi-structured interviews and two focus groups discussions acted as methods for data collection for the broader study. However, Muslim men's narratives of their masculinities emerged during the semi-structured interviews. Therefore, the current paper will describe only the semi-structured interviews and the data collected through these interviews. Participants were interviewed three times over a seventh month period. These semi-structured interviews were conducted by the first author. Each interview lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. During the first round of interviews, the first author explained the aim of the study, the research process, and written consent was obtained from participants. Since the author is himself a man who stutters, he understood that oral engagements, such semi-structured interviews, may be challenging for the participants. Therefore, the first author made every effort to establish a trusting and respectful research relationship (Kathard et al., 2010) in order to allow participants to freely share their experiences of being men who stutter. In addition, the researcher and participants discussed ways to promote comfortable and respectful communication (Kathard et al., 2010). Participants were also given the option to respond verbally or in writing. All of the participants chose to respond verbally (Isaacs & Swartz, 2020).

### ***Data analysis***

The semi-structured interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed. These transcriptions were entered into Atlas.ti 8.4 qualitative data analysis software. These transcriptions were coded by the first author and analyzed according to Edley's (2001) approach to discourse analysis. Consistent with the aim of the current paper, the first author focused on Muslim men's discursive accounts of their masculinities. Specific attention was paid to the interpretative repertoires, ideological dilemmas and subject positions that emanated from men's discourses. Once the first author was done with first round of coding, it was presented to the second author for review. Once the second author completed his review, the codes were discussed and revised where necessary. This saw the finalization of the code list. The authors proceeded to merge the codes into themes, which saw the emergence of the discourses outlined in the findings section below (Isaacs & Swartz, 2020).

### ***Rigor and trustworthiness***

Two strategies were employed to ensure the rigor and trustworthiness of the research presented in this article (Isaacs & Swartz, 2020). Firstly, research bias was given much consideration during the analysis of the data. The first author is a young adult man who stutters. Taylor (2001) argued the rigor and quality of a discourse analysis can be justified by highlighting what the researcher has in common with the participants. Indeed, the first author's insider position gave him specific and critical insight into participants masculine experiences. The first author's insider status position allowed him to recognize the nuances surrounding men's masculine experiences (Isaacs & Swartz, 2020; Taylor, 2001). However, participants experience also differed from the first author. Once the first author completed the initial analysis, the data analysis was reviewed by the second author (who is not a man who stutters) to confirm that the interpretations of the research findings were representative of the experiences of the participants, instead of the ideas and preferences of the first author (Isaacs & Swartz, 2020). Finally, and more consistent with the specific focus of the paper, the first and second author do not identify as Muslim. Therefore, the authors felt it important to send drafts of the manuscript to an Islamic scholar (who is the third author of this paper) who is also an experienced public-health researcher to minimize outsider bias and with due regard to insider perspectives.

### ***Findings***

The young men in this study identified Islam as an important aspect of their masculinities. At the same time, however, men experienced the

Muslim community as insensitive and intolerable to the disabling experience of stuttering. It resulted in men rejecting of dominant masculine ideals and reformulating alternative masculinities. The findings of this study are organized according to three discourses: that of *Masculinities and Islam*, *Islam and the disablism of men who stutter*, and *rejecting and reformulating hegemonic norms of masculinities*.

### ***Masculinities and Islam***

For participants in this study, Islam shaped and played a significant role in their construction of masculinities. Consistent with previous research conducted by Archer (2001) and Francis (2018), the interpretative repertoires in participants' discourses relied on the implicit assertion that performance of masculinity in Islam happens according to a distinct gender order and in the context of marriage and family. As explained in the three excerpts below, according to the participants, within Islam, a man is someone who needs to work, be responsible, provide for his wife and family, occupy the leadership role in terms of leading prayer or salah in Arabic, and be an active member of his community. By contrast, the wife is expected to be the nurturer who stays at home:

**Agmad:** Seeing that I'm married, the man has certain roles within the context of Islam. And to be a man you are basically the leader of your household. You need to make sure that everything is done good, providing, etc., being responsible, keeping your word, helping out your community, your fellow human beings, family and friends, whether it be financially, whether it be socially, whether it be economically, etc.

**Allie:** From an Islamic point of view my first impression is basically a man within an Islamic context and I'm very sure other religions are not the same, but for my religion specifically a man is someone who is obligated to go and work. The man should be the one going out and seeking wealth in order to support his family. The wife should be at home and rearing the children. He should also lead the family in salah.

**Nur:** As an Indian Muslim man you are expected to provide security. They provide food in the home and they provide shelter. They need to clothe and feed their women.

Participants identified their fathers as influential in their construction of masculinities. In their discussion of Islam's view, though mothers are not given a lesser role to fathers, participants stated that fathers are required to lead their families and be responsible for the Islamic development of their child and future:

**Luqmaan:** My father is very sporty. I play a lot of sport as well. I do kickboxing, muay thai, mixed martial arts and things like that. As much as I annoy myself with my father, it ... is still in me. So, my identity as a Muslim man has largely been

influenced by my father. So, my father's definition of being a man now is leading his family. He believes he needs to be in charge of the house. He believes it his space.

**Nur:** I look up to my father. He influenced my idea of being a Muslim man. My father was a true 'dik ding' man [Afrikaans slang for an alpha male] He still is, but is old now. He is in his late fifties, so he calmed down. It was very hard to look up to him, but now it's much easier. I mean, he's the typical alpha male, a guy with the weapons who will take on guys that's ... he would take on gangs. I mean, I've seen him in ... in action already. I was like shocked, ja, so he was just being a man protecting his family, protecting his wife.

Men in this study described their fathers as modeling and upholding hegemonic ideals of masculinities. As evidenced in the excerpts above, the fathers of participants associated masculinity with being an alpha male, a leader, and a protector of your wife and family. Allie further stated that in Islam, if the father should pass away, the oldest son is expected to fulfill the father's role in leading prayers, being protector and provider for his family:

**Allie:** So in Islam, if the father isn't no longer there, then the son, the eldest son, he takes the responsibility. For example, he leads prayers or taking care of the family ... the mother and the daughters.

Similar to the research findings presented by Hopkins (2006), participants' discourses showed conflicting subject positions in response to these expectations outlined by Islam and their fathers. On the one hand, Luqmaan and Agmad saw these norms as an acceptable and practical guide to perform masculinity and live their lives as Muslim men, as illustrated by Luqmaan and Agmad in the excerpts below:

**Luqmaan:** Islam is very practical. It's the people that make it impractical with their rules and the interpretation. But if you boil it down to what it is: it is a guide line to how you should live. If you follow that, you live quite easily. It does not hinder you in any way.

**Agmad:** I'm married, have a wife and live life according to my *issues* and according to the books I read, what I learn according to what the Quran says and religious examples like the prophet Mohammed and how he dealt with people and his compassion. If you follow your life according to the book, whether it be the Bible or the Quran or any form of scripture, you will see that the things that they generally had in common was compassion for the people.

On the other hand, men also considered certain norms within Islam as generational and oppressive. In terms of generational norms, in Hopkins (2006) study, he found that youthful Muslim masculinities were often in conflict with their parent's generation. Hopkins (2006) argued that young Muslim adults are commonly caught in a conflict between two cultures: tradition and modernity. Hopkins (2006) argued that this conflict at times resulted in men constructing alternative masculinities. Luqmaan acted as a suitable illustration for the above:

**Luqmaan:** It depends on the generation of men. I find that the generation before you and me, they are committed to their sport. That is at least my dad. On a Saturday, my father was always on the rugby field. I mean, I never saw him on a Saturday for years of my life. So, that was my father's definition of being a man. My father also believes he needs to be in charge of the house. He believes it his space. It's that generation; I actually don't think of manliness a lot. A better word would be masculinity. I don't really think along those terms. I am really gender neutral. I am a lot like my mother. I believe in pushing yourself forward, educating yourself and learning as much as you can.

As highlighted in an earlier study conducted by Nauright (1997), rugby is seen as one of the primary signifiers for masculinity within the Muslim community in Cape Town. In the excerpt above, Luqmaan explained how rugby was a central point of his father's masculinity. Additionally, he outlined how exercising power and control in the home was an important tenant of his father's masculinity. Yet, he distanced himself from these masculine ideals because he considered these ideals specific to his father's generation. Rather, he considered himself gender neutral, identifying perseverance and education as important aspects of his masculinity.

In terms of the oppressive nature of Islam, men's discourses also focused on the perceived inequality between men and women in Islam. Men actively distanced from the sexist stereotypes, which coincided with the findings presented by Hopkins (2006). Luqmaan as well as Agmad perceived the gender order prescribed by Islam as oppressive and unequal – privileging men and oppressing women:

**Luqmaan:** We get away with a lot as men. The freedom of it. You get to work in any field you want. Islamically, I can travel, I can move around. I don't need to worry about anyone coming with me. I can live like I want. I can do what I want. I can wear what I want. I don't need to wear a scarf. Not that there is anything wrong with that, I know it's a lot easier for me. But if a woman must act like that around people, she is either full of herself or she's a bitch or some nonsense like that. We always putting labels on them and they got to deal with that. That is shit. I don't agree with that.

**Agmad:** I wouldn't say that I looked at religion and I thought that there are certain privileges maybe that males get. However, in the mosque only males get chosen to do certain leadership positions, and I kind of disagree with that in a sense.

Agmad stated that as a Muslim man, one has the privilege to occupy and function in leadership positions, while women are excluded from these positions. Luqmaan further added that, as a Muslim man, you have the agency and freedom to perform your masculinity without any limitations, whereas Muslim women encounter various limitations performing their femininity, which frequently leads to oppression. In addition to the oppression of women, participants also indicated experiencing disablism as Muslim men who stutter, which will be taken further in the next section.

### *Islam and the disablism of men who stutter*

Goodley (2014) defines disablism “as the oppressive practices in contemporary society that threatens to exclude, eradicate and neutralise those bodies, minds and community practices that fail to fit the capitalist imperative” (p. xi). Participants in this study reported experiencing disablism as men who stutter within in their families and within the Muslim community. For example, in terms of disablism experienced within families, Allie (in the excerpt above) explained how the disablism in his family alienated him for his performance of masculinity:

**Researcher:** As a man who stutters, how do you position yourself in relation to these masculine ideals?

**Allie:** I think Islam has been very influential of how I see myself as a man. In Islam, my identity has been influenced. Because like I said, that the man is seen as the head of the house. You know, the man is seen to go out and work and care for his family. He has to lead prayers. It’s someone who carries the family. Someone who can stand up for the family. I don’t actually see myself fitting into those expectations because of my disability – and more so the lack of independence I have in that regard. My stutter shaped me into the way I am. It has humbled me. I’ll say that I am a soft-hearted person. I am easy to tear up to some show on TV. I also depend on my mother to do many things for me. She also speaks on my behalf. But my dad doesn’t understand that. I think my dad expects me to be like him. My dad doesn’t hardly show emotion. He is your typical alpha male. My sister is like my dad. She loves sport and doesn’t, is hard – shows no emotion. My dad would tell me that I need to become more independent. I cannot rely on people to do things for me. If I tell my sister. I see myself as disabled. My sister, argues, and says, “No, what you have do not compare to what other people. You a man. You need to stand up for yourself.” So, my sister and my dad is the same. My mom and I are the same. I would say yes to a certain extent. I am more in touch with my feminine side when it comes to showing emotion.

In the aforementioned extract, Allie discusses how his idea of manhood is deeply rooted in Islamic norms of masculinity. He describes how his disabling experience of stuttering made it difficult for him to perform key masculine tasks. He specifically explains how his stutter removed the agency and independence needed to carry out important masculine tasks, such as leading and protecting your family. He instead mentioned how his stutter had “humbled him” – shaping him into an emotional, soft hearted individual who depends on his mother to carry out tasks in his life. This construction of masculinity was contrary to the hegemonic masculinity modeled by his father. This contradictory subject position attracted reservations and opposition from his father as well as his sister who exemplified these masculine ideals. Across the series of interviews, Allie constantly highlighted how insensitive his father and his sister were to his disabling experience of stuttering. They would constantly encourage him to move

beyond the disabling experience of stuttering and ascribe to and perform hegemonic masculinity. However, Allie felt he could relate more comfortably to feminine ideals.

As highlighted in previous studies (Al-Aoufi et al., 2012; Hayhoe, 2014; Miles, 2002), participants in this study also reported experiencing disablism as men who stutter within the Muslim communities they have been exposed to. They perceived the Muslim community to be ignorant and intolerant of stuttering specifically, and of disability more generally, which made certain Islamic practices a challenge to execute. One such practice, assigned exclusively to adult males, was the leading of congregational prayer. According to Islamic Law, it is not allowed for a person to lead congregational prayer if he has a speech impediment such as stuttering that results in the verses of the Quran being constantly repeated or its meaning changed. In the excerpt below, Allie demonstrated how stuttering made the leading of prayer a difficult task:

**Allie:** I went to a camp with my parents a few years ago. So, we normally come and visit the family because my dad grew up with family camping and so forth. I attended an Islamic institution in my area. So, my dad and my uncles were there and we needed to lead the afternoon prayer. So obviously they needed someone to lead the prayer. So, they asked me. When we were done, my uncle, he actually directly attacked me and saying, “What are you studying?” That’s how my uncle attacked me by saying that you are studying Islam for this year, but you don’t want to stand in front? But that was not the reason why. My dad became so upset. I’ll never forget, it’s the first time I ever saw my dad defending me in that way. My family knows the reason why I can’t lead. You know, we must, before the prayer, do a call to prayer. That I can do. I can lead my family in prayer. But I want to actually put it out there with regard to stuttering in Islam, you know you don’t hear a lot of people talking about stuttering in Islam. So, you know, disability in Islam. We don’t hear a lot the Imams talk about disability.

Allie’s avoidance of leading prayers because of his stutter, and thus his decision to avoid this responsibility, was strongly condemned by his uncle, and resulted in his credibility as a Muslim man being questioned. Allie attributed his uncle’s negative response to the ignorance existent within in the Muslim community about stuttering, and disability more generally.

Luqmaan similarly indicated how, as a Muslim man who stutters, he also struggled to lead prayers. Further to this, he highlighted how stuttering made other Islamic practices, such as the attendance of madrasa, a challenge. Madrasa could be defined as an “educational institution offering instruction in Islamic subjects including, but not limited to, the Quran, the sayings (Hadith) of the Prophet Muhammad, jurisprudence (fiqh), and law” (Blanchard, 2008, p. 2). In Islam, it is expected that Muslim children attend Madrassa. Yet, in Grade 8, Luqmaan, explained how the severity of his stutter made Madrassa an anxiety-provoking and painful experience, which resulted in his eventual decision not to attend:

**Luqmaan:** I actually stopped Madrassa at Grade 8 or something like that because my stutter got really bad while I was reading the Quran. I was reading and I got a block. And then the anxiety came because of the block, and I kept blocking and I kept blocking. It went on for a few weeks like that. You can imagine, Muslim school was an hour, I would stand at that table reading. Because we go to the table and read our lesson that day. And eventually I went to my parents after one of my friends made a comment and I was like, I can't do this, I need help. It's killing me. So I asked them to take me to speech therapy. That helped a lot, but it affected me quite a bit. And then it also started while I was reading salah as well and I still have avoidance to this day of reading around a lot of people. Like I don't like to volunteer to stand in front because I fear my stutter will kick in. Even though it's something I really want to do, like I'd love to be *khafi*, which is like knowing the Quran from my mind, but it's never been on my priority list. I don't join groups and all of that. Muslim people aren't very tolerant.

Luqmaan stated the disablism he endured at Madrassa (as highlighted in the excerpt above) had a lasting impact on him. Firstly, this experience showed him how intolerant the Muslim community are toward people who stutter. At the same time, he also outlined how this experience of disablism impacted on his confidence as a Muslim man; he developed a fear of stuttering, specifically when leading prayers and reading the Quran in public.

Further in Luqmaan's narrative, he illustrated how his role as a Muslim man was undermined because he was a person who stutters. Alenaizi (2019) argued that Muslim communities are generally encouraged to display sympathy toward disabled individuals. As a result, the capabilities of disabled individuals are frequently undermined. Although Muslim tradition do not require the groom to make a speech at the communal reception of his wedding, Luqmaan (in the excerpt below) desired to make a speech at his wedding. However, he considered himself robbed because it was assumed by his family that he would not want to make a speech because he is a person who stutters. Luqmaan cited similar patterns of undermining within his marriage. He described how his voice and leadership role, as a Muslim man, was constantly undermined because he was a person who stutters:

**Luqmaan:** The only time I can think where it [my stutter] had an effect was on my wedding day because you need to say your lines in front of all these people. And you know, slamse [i.e., "slamse" is Capetonian slang for a Cape Malay Muslim] have this funny tradition where they have two weddings: the nika and the reception. Now at my reception, my younger brother was the MC – he spoke to the people. In my family, my close family, they assumed that I didn't want to say anything – that I didn't want to speak on the mic. Actually, on the day things were so rushed. I actually thought to myself that I never got a chance to thank anyone. I didn't get a chance to say anything. They just assumed because I stutter that I didn't want to say anything. I mean that was actually swak [weak]. In terms of the marriage itself, when it came to arguments – speaking to her parents, and making plans, I never felt my voice was being heard.

A similar narrative was told by two brothers who participated in my study. Agmad and Nur, in the excerpts below, demonstrated how their masculine position and status as Indian Muslim men were undermined within their family because they were individuals who stutter:

**Nur:** I can say that within the Indian community, being a doctor is seen as more masculine male. I think the emphasis is because of the earning and power. You will be able to provide for your wife and family. You will be able to take them on holiday. For example, my brother who is a doctor got all the attention from my parents. But I think it started before he become a doctor. They probably gave him all that attention and focus because they wanted him to become that doctor – which he did become. So, I feel that kind of made it easier for him to always be the spokesperson. It was more of an esteem booster compared to myself who did not get that attention. It was way harder to be that spokesperson. It really affected confidence and resulted in self-doubt.

**Agmad:** It really helps speaking about our struggle as men who stutter without any fear of judgement. Like for example, we were standing in front of the *braai* [barbeque]. So, my eldest brother doesn't stutter. He's a doctor. He stood there and he couldn't say a word. He couldn't relate. Over the years, when we used to stutter, he never knew how to handle it. It made him laugh when we stuttered. My brother is the first born, he had access to more opportunities. He has taken all of that, but he has not shared them. In our culture certain people are chosen to be the leaders that the others needed to follow. So when we as Muslims are praying you must have your leader, that's called the imam that will lead the congregation in prayer. And all the times my brother has been doing that and speaking in situations. He would be the forerunner of that. So, I told him yesterday, I'm going to read. And he said it's fine, read it. I read. Now when we take that position, we have that anxiety and stuff because we are not used to that – we were not given that.

In terms of the excerpts above, Nur explained that, within the Indian Muslim community, a medical doctor is afforded a superior masculine status because he is able to provide wealth for his family. Since his brother was the oldest, a medical doctor as well as a person who did not stutter, he was allocated a superior position within the family. This meant he was responsible for leading prayers and being the family spokesperson. Agmad explained that, in their culture, certain people are chosen to be leaders while others needed to follow, hence he was required to follow his older brother. Agmad as well as Nur stated that occupying this secondary position negatively impacted on their confidence as men and resulted in self-doubt, as in the case of Nur. Agmad stated that, since his brother did not stutter, he could not relate to their struggles as men who stutter. Therefore, he would frequently find their stutter hilarious.

Participants employed various methods of coping with the disablism of stuttering. This will be discussed in the next section.

### ***Rejecting and reformulating hegemonic norms of masculinities***

As indicated in the previous section, participants reported several negative experiences due to being Muslim men who stutter. In response, participants reported using various methods of coping with the disablism they have experienced as men who stutter. Agmad and Nur (in the excerpts below) indicated drawing strength from the teachings of Islam to cope with the disablism they endured as men who stutter. They explained how the life and teaching of Prophet Moses, who was a man who stuttered, provided them with the necessary insight and guidance to deal with negative emotions associated with stuttering:

**Nur:** We feel we don't need to call upon that lifeline because we can handle it. But that's not a good thing to do. I mean, we need to actually get rid of that emotion or that feeling. Ja, I mean, Prophet Moses where God asked him to deliver a sermon and he was scared or he was tense and anxious and so on, and then God said do this dua. It's in the Quran itself. And the meaning of the dua means that, "oh, God, open up my ... open up and expand my chest and relieve this impediment on my tongue so that the people may understand what I'm saying." So, I mean, there's even a dua for us there. So, I should just definitely do it every day.

**Agmad:** I've conquered this fear. I conquered most of the stuttering through technique. For example, if I look at the Quran – the story of the Prophet Moses, yesterday my brother and I were having a very interesting conversation and I was telling him about the study and you, and then he was saying that Moses had a fear and much of the stuttering actually comes through that fear, nothing else. So basically, overcoming that fear will improve your stuttering automatically. And it was the truth and God supported him. He had support. He had his brother for support. So, we need that support. That's why I always share my experiences with my brothers who stutter and my wife.

Other coping techniques included either completely rejecting and/or reformulating dominant notions of masculinities. This finding coincided with the early work Gerschick and Miller (1994, 1997). Gerschick and Miller (1994, 1997) introduced the three R framework to describe how disabled men respond to hegemonic norms of masculinity. It is suggested that disabled men either *rely* on hegemonic ideals of masculinity to construct their male identity, or they *reformulate* and/or completely reject dominant norms of masculinity – formulating alternative versions of masculinity consistent with their impairment. Natheer acted as a fitting example for the above discourse:

**Natheer:** Well, my father is Muslim. His expectation was different. So, he wanted a rugby player. He wanted a sportsman. I was never that because I'm gay and because I stutter. He struggled with that. I didn't fit the profile that he prayed for. So, he used to beat me qui-quite badly. He thought he could beat my stuttering out of me. That just exacerbated my anxiety and my speech. Then there was my sexuality. Monotheism doesn't really give you a space to be gay. Muslims, they really hate

homosexuality. They think it's an abomination. Making peace with my sexuality was very painful. I wanted to commit suicide a couple of times because I felt so ashamed. I still don't know how I got through it. It was a miracle. I refused to feel like I'm not good enough. I bailed out right at the beginning and I just thought, you know what, I'm not going to try anymore, I'm just going to go the other way and become eccentric.

Natheer is a homosexual man who stutters. In Shakespeare's (1999) study on the sexual politics of disabled masculinity, he found that homosexual men frequently experienced masculinity more negatively than did heterosexual men, and that their sexuality often impacted on the disability of masculinity (Shakespeare, 1999). This was the case with Natheer (in the excerpt above). Natheer identified religions such as Islam, as intolerant of homosexuality. Consequently, this negative stance on homosexuality made his sexuality a painful and difficult experience. He remembered feeling ashamed and wanting to commit suicide. This pain and oppression were further intensified by his identity as a disabled man. Natheer identified his father as a devout Muslim man. Accordingly, his father believed the performance of hegemonic masculinity is the ideal version of masculinity. Therefore, his father rejected his construction of masculinity as a homosexual man who stutters, subjecting him to intense abuse. The purpose of this abuse was to rid Natheer of his stutter. Natheer described how his identity as a man who stutters as well as homosexual man negatively impacted on his self-esteem and led to alcoholism. The oppression he experienced on both levels motivated Natheer to completely reject his identity as a Muslim and fully embrace his identity as a homosexual man.

In other instances, the oppressive nature of stuttering resulted in participants reformulating dominant masculine norms associated with Islam. Luqmaan and Nur acted as fitting examples of the above. Nur 'in the excerpt below' was asked if his stutter, and the vulnerability he experienced as a man who stutters, allowed him to push against patriarchal expectations of masculinity. He agreed that it did:

**Nur:** Yes, it did. Like, I thought it would be good to settle down with a woman with a profession - who I can build with. I want to show my children one day that its because of both my parents - not just one that I obtained success. I come out of the typical Indian Muslim home where my dad was the alpha male. My mom use to always be by his side all the time...Yes, I am married to a medical doctor but I don't let that dynamic get to me. I believe the man should be the better person for his wife in terms of the way he handles his wife. Not by what he earns. But I know even though I earn less than her, I bring more than her. So, that doesn't bother me at all. The essential stuff I got it covered.

Similar reflections were shared by Luqmaan in the excerpt below:

**Luqmaan:** My stutter has been a humbling thing. It really helped me with regards to that because I'm not a typical Cape Malay boy with his hair gelled in spikes and

driving the *VTech* or the *GTI*. My stutter has put me on the outside. I mean I am different and I am fine with it. The stutter forced me to be different. I have never been one to satisfy people's norms. And I feel the stutter helped me with that a lot. Even if my girlfriend asks me to stay, so that she could work, I will be fine with that. From a religious perspective, ja, I must provide everything. But from a logical point of view, in the society we live in, there is no way in hell that only one person can provide for a family. You do need a dual income. You both need to make compromises.

Nur and Luqmaan stated that the marginalized, vulnerable subject position they occupied as men who stutter made them fluid with regards to gender roles. In the case of Nur, he explained how his stutter and the vulnerability he experienced as a man who stutters renewed his perception of gender roles. Contrary to the patriarchal, Indian Muslim household he was raised in, he advocated for gender equality within his marriage. Nur by profession is an accountant. He is married to a doctor. He indicated that there was a salary divide and it did not bother him. Yet, he believed a man should be the better person for his wife in terms of the way he treats his wife. Not by what he earns. Similarly, in the case of Luqmaan, he described how his stutter humbled him and positioned him as an outsider in relation to the dominant gender order. As a result, he resisted the predominant Cape Malay masculine norms, which he identified as "the boy with his hair gelled in spikes and driving the *VTech* or the *GTI*". This "outsider" subjective position resulted in him adopting a more progressive approach to gender roles within his relationship. The example of Luqmaan was indicative of the overall pattern that emerged in men's discursive accounts. Men's experience of stuttering held specific identity consequences. They commonly felt displaced and out of touch with dominant ideals and expectations of masculinity.

## Conclusion

In the present article, we have examined how Muslim men who stutter construct their masculinities. The findings revealed Islam was central in men's construction of their masculinities. Yet, men in this study described how intolerant, in their experience, the Muslim community can be to the disabling experiences of stuttering, and how the gender structure in their communities is oppressive to them as men who stutter. Further research is recommended to extend the current analysis and examine the dynamics of male identities and stuttering across different religions and across different local and contingent experiences within Islam itself. Ratele (2016) called for the liberation of marginalized men from traditional patriarchal gender structures. He argued that the work to liberate masculinities is only possible if marginalized men are examined in their proper and full

context. As highlighted in the analysis of our paper, there may be norms specific to the social context of the Muslim communities within Cape Town that may not be generalizable to the global practice of Islam (Francis, 2018). It is important, furthermore, to note that social practices which use religion as a base may not fully or accurately reflect the teachings of that religion. It is important, therefore, that future studies seeking to examine disabled masculinities engage with the full context in which the performance of masculinities happens. In this way those cultural norms and structures that at times exist to oppress and disable such individuals may be illuminated and addressed, which may result in the formulation of more progressive masculinities that would liberate disabled men from the oppressive structures of masculinities, while at the same time giving due appreciation to the positive contributions that religion can make to inclusive identities.

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