The Manchester Arena Bombing

The effect of Islamic terrorism and its aftermath on Muslims’ social identity

By Lianne Beringer
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INTRODUCTION

Introduction to the subject
On May 22 2017 at 10.31pm a bomb went off after an Ariana Grande concert in Manchester (Pidd, 2018). The attack tragically killed 23 people (including the perpetrator) and left almost 60 people injured (Government UK, 2017). It was the deadliest terror attack in Britain since the 7/7 bombings in London (Ben-Ezra, Hamama-Raz and Mahat-Shamir, 2017). According to the police the attack was designed to target indiscriminately and kill as many people as possible (Enoch, 2017). The prime minister stated that it deliberately targeted “innocent, defenceless children and young people” as they were leaving the concert (Government UK, 2017). The person who carried out the suicide attack was a 22-year-old man born in Manchester and of Libyan descent called Salman Ramadan Abedi (BBC, 2017). A report commissioned by the British Home Secretary stated that the attack was an act of Islamic terrorism, which is subsequently defined as a terrorist act committed in the name of Islam (Anderson, 2017). ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant) also claimed responsibility for the attack stating that “[a] soldier of the Caliphate managed to place explosive devises in the midst of gatherings of the Crusaders in the British City of Manchester” (Islamic State as cited by Phipps, Rawlinson, Weaver, Sparrow, and Johnston, 2017).

The present study focusses on the effects of this horrible event. It is important to study these effects because the bombing has most likely had a great impact on the lives of Mancunians (i.e. people from Manchester). Traumatic events such as terrorist attacks are known to have a strong effect on a population as they disrupt people’s understanding of how the world works and evoke powerful emotions by direct witnesses and individuals who learn about the events from a safe distance (Hutchison and Bleiker, 2008). Such reactions were also found in the wake of the Manchester Arena attack as data collected in the week after the bombing shows that significant parts of the population expressed severe stress symptoms and “[d]isrupted worldviews emerged as a dominant risk factor” (Ben-Ezra et al., 2017, p. 236). Moreover, the emotional response to terrorism often contributes to the development of prejudice against the members of the community of which the terrorist was a member (Steele, Rovenpor, Lickel, and Denson, 2019). A bias towards all members of the terrorist’s religious group emerges because of their affiliation with the religion the perpetrator belonged to (Steele et al., 2019). Since Abedi was Muslim and his attack was carried out in the name of Islam, the Muslim community was associated with the
terrorist and his crime. Development of prejudice was indeed observed in Manchester after the bombing. In the direct aftermath of the terrorist attack Islamophobia (Ben-Ezra et al., 2017) and hate crimes against Muslims (Halliday, 2017; Travis, 2017) rose tremendously. Important to note is that while there is no academic consensus on what Islamophobia specifically entails (Ciftci, 2012; Kaya, 2014), the present research will define it as “multiple forms of anti-Muslim feelings, behavior, or policies” (Citci, 2012, p. 293). The increase in Islamophobia and hate crimes against Muslims in the weeks after the bombing suggests that at least some people feel anger towards them as a result of the act of terrorism the city of Manchester has experienced. It shows that Muslims, who often condemn terrorism (Anderson, 2017; Hussain and Bagguley, 2012), are targeted as a result of the bombing. It seems that they are regarded as belonging to the same category as the perpetrator but Muslims themselves might feel like they don’t belong there. Thus, the attack did not only have a strong impact in terms of emotions and worldview, it also resulted in a rise of Islamophobia of which the Muslim community was the victim. This raises questions about how Muslims experienced the terrorist attack and its aftermath. More specifically, it makes one wonder what terrorism in the name of Islam and being targeted by Islamophobia because of religious affiliation to the terrorist have done to Muslims’ feelings about being Muslim. This feeling of being Muslim and therefore being part of the Muslim community is called a social identity (see the theoretical framework). The questions about the effect of the attack on Muslims their own idea of being Muslim have led to the following research question: How did Muslims in Manchester react to the Manchester Arena bombing of 2017 in terms of personal understanding of their social identity and how did they protect this social identity?

The research question clearly focusses on Muslims their understanding of their social identity and the ways in which they have protected their social identity. This focus has been selected because I suspect that being put into the same social category as the terrorist forces individuals to at least consider the meaning of this category, their relation to this category, who is part of that category, and who is excluded from it. Furthermore, it is likely that Muslims will have to protect their identity because of the backlash after the attack. Given the rise in Islamophobia, the Muslim identity has probably been the subject of some negative evaluation because of its affiliation with the attack. Therefore, I expect that Muslims’ identity will have been affected in some way by the terrorist attack. While I do not wish to link terrorism to Islam or Muslims, the terrorist claimed to have been Muslim and said to have acted in the name of Islam, and therefore the terrorist himself established a connection between his act of terrorism and his religion. This
connection might have hurt Muslims’ image of their religion and their group. Also, the rise in Islamophobia suggests that part of Manchester’s society feels and behaves negatively towards Muslims due to the latter their religious identity. As the theoretical framework below will show, social identity theory (e.g. Tajfel and Turner, 1987) suggests that in cases of such a negative evaluation people will have to react in order to protect their social identity. This study will make use of six strategies to study the protection of the Muslim social identity: individual mobility, three types of social creativity, social competition, and the black sheep effect. These strategies will be explained in detail in the theoretical framework. Each strategy represents a way to protect the sense of self that is extracted from belonging to a social group.

Moreover, Muslims’ social identity in the aftermath of Islamic terrorism is worth studying because the way Muslims’ identities are affected by terrorism might have long-lasting effects on these individuals and their relation to society. Various studies already found that terrorism impacts Muslims’ relation to society (Elsayed and De Grip, 2018; Gould and Klor, 2014; Hussain and Bagguley, 2012) and it is therefore important to further research how this exactly happens. In order to fully comprehend how Islamic terrorism impacts societies, it is necessary to study the effect is has on Muslims living is the targeted societies. Also, this study might be able to inform the public debate regarding Muslim identity. According to Weller and Cheruvallil-Contractor (2015) “[e]ver since the arrival of large Muslim communities in the UK in the 1960s/1970s, there has been an ongoing debate around assimilation, integration, and multiculturalism, not only, but perhaps especially, in relation to the identity of these newly developed Muslim communities” (p. 319). This research could help to understand how Muslims see their own identity in the wake of terrorism and thereby perhaps contribute to the understanding of Muslims relation to society.

The decision to focus on Muslims from Manchester and not from another British or Western city has been made based on assumption that any effect of the attack will be most intensely felt, and therefore best be studied, closest to the scene of the event. Muslims in Manchester are assumed to have been affected more than Muslims from other British or Western cities. This assumption finds support in the work of Skita, Bauman, and Mullen (2004), who found that individuals who lived closer to the site of the September 11 attacks showed more emotional distress (i.e. experienced fear, anger, and personal distress), outgroup derogation (i.e. negative change in opinion about the outgroup), and in-group enhancement (i.e. positive change in
opinion about their own social group) than people living at greater distant from the geographical location of the attacks.

**Muslims in Manchester**

According to the most recent available data, 5.8 percent of England’s population self-identified as Muslim in 2016, which translates into over 3.16 million individuals (Office for National Statistics, 2017). For Manchester specifically these figures are respectively 18.9 percent and 100,221 people (idem.). Hence, in comparison to the rest of England, Muslims form a significant part of Manchester’s population. Moreover, Manchester has a long history of Muslims living in the city. For example, already in 1798 there were Arab trading houses settled in the city (Manchester City Council, n.d.). In Britain as a whole the first Muslim presence dates back to the seventeenth century (Weller and Cheruvallil-Contractor, 2015). The Muslim population in Britain started to grow significantly after the Second World War when the country recruited Indian-Pakistani employees. In the 1970 the influx of Islamic immigrants mainly came from South Asian countries since those individuals had a right of entry, employment and settlement as they were British subjects due to the former British colonialization (idem.). More recently Muslims have migrated to the UK from a variety of places such as Africa and Bosnia. However, national statistics from 2011 show that the large majority of Muslims in England and Wales, i.e. 67.6 percent, is still from Asian decent (2011 Censuses as cited by Weller and Cheruvallil-Contractor, 2015). While the first generation of Muslim immigrants did not experience Britain as their home, the later generations who grew up in the UK have come to see the country as their home. For the latter group, Britishness and religious identity are combined into their sense of self (Weller and Cheruvallil-Contractor, 2015). This idea of combined Islamic and British national identity is also supported by a nationwide study which shows that Muslims in England are more likely than other religious minorities to identify their national identity as solely British (Jivraj, 2013). Only Sikhs consider their national identity more often solely as British (idem.).
LITERATURE REVIEW

The introduction provided an understanding of the focus of this research. The focus will be on the impact of Islamic terrorism on Muslims’ understanding and protection of their social identity. The literature review will show previously conducted research on the topic as well as identify the gap that still exists. First, research on Islamophobia following terrorism will be discussed. Next, an overview of studies about Muslims’ identity will be given. Lastly, the gap in the literature will be identified.

Various researchers have studied the effect of terrorism on anti-Islamic sentiment. Ben-Ezra et al. (2017) found that the Manchester bombing led to strong increase of Islamophobia in the United Kingdom. These findings are in line with other research on the effects of terrorism on anti-Muslim sentiment. Bartholomew (2016) too found a rise in Islamophobia followed the attacks in Paris in 2015. Also, Sheridan’s (2006) study on Islamophobia in Britain pre- and post-September 11 2001 found that British Muslims experienced a strong increase in religious and racial discrimination in the UK after the attack in the United States. Indeed, over 82 percent reported an increase in implicit racism and religious discrimination (e.g. being stared at or being asked to speak on behalf of one’s entire ethnic/religious group) whereas more than 76 percent of the sample experienced a rise in general discrimination (e.g. negative stereotypes in the media or experiences of violent abuse) (Sheridan, 2006). Allen and Nielsen (2002) also reported a backlash against Muslims in the UK after 9/11. They showed that the attack led to a circulation of online Islamophobic messages and that Muslims had to endure physical and verbal attacks. Victims of these hate crimes often had some sort of Muslim visibility (i.e. visual characteristics that make people categorize an individual as a Muslim) (Allen and Nielsen, 2002). Hussain and Bagguley (2012) too found that after the 7/7 London bombings especially Muslims with some visible ‘Muslim’ characteristic were victims of negative reactions. Another study about the impact of terrorism on prejudice is a recent study by Steele, Rovenpor, Lickel, and Denson (2019), who looked into the effect of the Boston Marathon bombings on negative biases towards Muslims. Their overall findings show that anger toward Muslims increased after the terrorist attack took place. To summarize this first part of the literature review, various qualitative studies (i.e. studies using statistics) have shown that terrorism in the name of Islam leads to anti-Muslim sentiment. The studies found that terrorism is followed by a rise in Islamophobia. In the words of Steele et al. (2019): “major real-world events such as acts of terrorism often lead members of the victimized group to harbor bias towards all members of religious and
ethnic groups merely because of their affiliation with the group the perpetrator belonged to” (p. 44). Thus, Islamophobia follows Islamic terrorism because Muslims are in such instances seen as members of the same social group as the terrorist, and therefore as problematic.

Quantitative studies on the effect of terrorism and Islamophobia on Muslims’ identity found less unanimous results than inquiries into the level of Islamophobia after terrorist attacks. That is to say that different studies researched different possible effects and consequently found that Islamophobia and terrorism influence a variety of aspect of Muslims’ life. Yet most studies found negative effects on Muslim identification with the Western society in which they live. For instance, Gould and Klor’s (2014) inquiry into the effect of the September 11 2001 terrorist attack on the assimilation of Muslims from foreign descent in the United States found that Muslims living in states where hate crimes rose most strongly tended to assimilate less than Muslims in other states. Moreover, the backlash against Muslims is believed to have led Muslims to stronger identify with their ethnic minority group. Similar results with regards to assimilation were found by Elsayed and De Grip (2018). Their study showed that Muslims immigrants’ attitudes towards integration (i.e. perceived possibilities to integrate and perceived attitudes of natives towards immigrants in the host county) in the Netherlands worsened after various Islamic terrorist attacks were carried out across Europe between March 2004 and July 2005. Muslim immigrants’ attitudes were much more impacted than those of non-Muslim immigrants. Within the immigrant Muslim population the attitudes of those with high potential for integration (higher educated and employed individuals) were affected most strongly. The authors suggest that the negative attitudes are influenced both by the terrorist attacks performed by fundamentalist, the discrimination that follows, and the negative socio-political aftermath (i.e. a political climate that treats Muslims negatively). Furthermore, a study by Kunst, Tajamal, Sam, and Ulleberg (2012) found that Islamophobia affected Muslim minorities’ identity. More specifically, they found that being a member of a stigmatized group “reinforces their [Muslims] perceived discrepancy between being a Muslim and being a member of the nation, they seem to be torn between their willingness to become integrated members of the nation and their wish to maintain their religious affiliation” (Kunst et al., 2012, p. 529). Hence, the study showed that Muslims want to be full members of society but that their religious identity and the stigma around this identity problematizes their national identity. Kunst et al. (2012) further found that religious identity had an overall negative effect on national engagement. However, the study showed that the effect of Islamophobia on Muslims’ national and religious identity are context dependent. Result differed per country and it is suggested that this might be due to how
ethnically inclusive the national identity is seen and to how supportive politicians are to the naturalization process of immigrants. Branscombe, Schmitt, and Harvey (1999) also showed that prejudice is related to stigmatized groups’ social identity. They did not study the identity of Muslims but of African Americans and found that perceived prejudice leads to a stronger identification with the own minority group. Their research further showed that attributions to prejudice had a negative effect on well-being. Contrary to other studies, Uz and Kemmelmeier (2014) found that Muslims in Turkey did not increase their sense of religious identification when faced with an identity threat following a terrorist attack. Instead, they reported that ambivalent identification rose, that is, participants felt uncomfortable when they shared membership to the same social group as terrorists (i.e. Muslim). However, the difference in context (i.e. a non-Western country) might have contributed to the difference in research outcomes. To summarize, quantitative studies on the effect of terrorism and Islamophobia on Muslims’ social identity showed that Muslims in Western states often come to identify less strongly with their national identity as a result of terrorism and Islamophobia. Islamophobia is found to affect integration and national identification. However, it is worth mentioning that a study from 2013 found that 57 percent of Muslims in England stated that their sole national identity is British (Jivraj, 2013). This suggests that the British national identity is important to a significant amount of Muslims.

There are also a few qualitative studies done in Britain on the effect of terrorism and Islamophobia. One of these qualitative studies on the subject has been conducted by Hussain and Bagguley (2012), who researched the effect of the 7/7 bombings in London. Their study found that Muslims’ identification with Islam grew stronger as a result of gaining of a better understanding of Islam and the hostility that followed the terrorist attacks. Muslims strongly condemned the 7/7 bombing but nevertheless felt like others saw the attack as representative for the entire Muslim community. Islamic interviewees expressed that they felt like Muslims were seen in broadly negative terms and that their religious identity was threatened. Another qualitative research on Muslims’ identity formation in relation to Islamophobia has been conducted by Chapman (2016), who studied the effect of the stigma surrounding veiling on identity management among Muslim women in Denmark and the UK. This research found that experiencing stigma made women’s identification as Muslims stronger as it “reinforced a shared sense of in-group minority identity” (Chapman, 2016, p. 359). Hence, Islamophobia strengthened Muslims’ sense of being Muslim because it reinforced the connection between members of the minority group. Furthermore, Mythen, Walklate, and Khan (2009) studied the
effect of terrorist threats and counter-terrorism measures on the experiences, attitudes, and identities of British Muslims of Pakistani heritage. This study used qualitative methods to retrieve in-depth data. Mythen et al. (2009) found that “9/11 and 7/7 have served as defining moments at which their [Muslims] religious and political identities were both thrown into question and crystallized” (p. 747). The terrorist attacks forced Muslims to think about where they stood in terms of their religion, they had to decide whether or not they were Muslim. For a lot of people, this reinforced their Muslim identity. To sum up, this short overview of the most important qualitative studies on identity formation of Muslims in light of terrorism and/or Islamophobia has shown that Islamophobia usually strengthens Muslims’ religious identity.

In conclusion, the literature review has first of all shown that previously conducted quantitative research has found that Islamic terrorism increases Islamophobia. Also, most of the studies that inquired identity formation among Muslims after a terrorist attack used quantitative methods. These inquiries have shown that terrorism, stigma, and discrimination influence Muslims’ perspective on their place in society and their identity formation. These studies are incredibly valuable given that they provide statistical evidence for correlations and/or causal relationships between terrorism, Islamophobia, and Muslims’ identity. However, it remains unknown which exact mechanisms are causing the effects found by quantitative research. Within the quantitative studies researchers had to use phrases in their conclusion such as “the participants in the present study might [emphasis added] have felt forced to choose between their identities” (Kunst et al., 2012, p. 528), “[t]he current work demonstrates that major events may [emphasis added] also affect for minority groups are treated at an everyday level” (Sheridan, 2006, p. 334), or “terrorism committed by Muslim fundamentalists, and its negative sociopolitical aftermath, could [emphasis added] negatively affect the attitudes of moderate and high-educated Muslims toward integration in Western societies” (Elsayed and De Grip, 2018, p. 60). Hence, certainty regarding the mechanisms behind the effects of terrorism on Muslims’ identity seems to be somewhat missing. Moreover, qualitative data (i.e. in-depth studies using interviewing, ethnography or participant observation) seems to be thin and therefore in-depth knowledge on the operation of underlying mechanisms remains not fully developed. While the findings of Hussain and Bagguley’s study are very insightful, they did not show how the terrorist attack itself has impacted identity formation as the study mainly focusses on the effect of the backlash following the 7/7 bombings. Chapman’s (2016) study specifically addressed stigma surrounding Muslim women and not the effect of terrorism on Muslims’ identity formation. Mythen et al. (2009) demonstrated the effects of terrorist threats and counter-terrorism on
certain parts of identity formation. Their study, albeit being very valuable, did not show the effect of Islamic terrorism and Islamophobia per se as it focussed more on the institutional changes following terrorist threats. Hence, certainty about the mechanisms and the way they operate seems to be somewhat missing. Given that especially the qualitative studies were able to contribute to a more in-dept understanding of the operation of underlying mechanism found by quantitative studies, I argue that a qualitative inquiry into the possible effect of Islamic terrorism on Muslims’ identity formation would contribute to a more thorough understanding of the overall impact of terrorism. A qualitative study is expected to add to the in-dept understanding of why particular correlations are found.
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The previous chapter gave an overview of what is already known and concluded by stating what is still missing in the literature. It showed that Islamic terrorism leads to an increase in Islamophobia and often affects Muslims’ identity. It further demonstrated that in-depth knowledge on the mechanisms behind the effects of terrorism and its aftermath on Muslims’ identity formation is somewhat lacking. The current chapter will provide the theoretical framework that will be used to answer the research question stated in the introduction. The theory addressed in this chapter will show the effects terrorism and Islamophobia can have on Muslims’ identity. It will provide an overview of the strategies that the social identity theory claims people use to protect their social identity if their group’s image is damaged. Every strategy will be hypothetically applied to the situation of Muslims in Manchester. The theory will later be used to analyse the data and will thereby assist in gaining a better, in-depth understanding of the mechanisms behind the effects of terrorism and its aftermath on Muslims’ identity formation.

The theoretical framework draws mostly on the social identity theory (e.g. Tajfel, 1974). The theory is expected to be of analytical use because it provides the tools to understand individuals’ identification with a larger group of people who have the same religion. It can therefore be used to explain Muslims’ identification with other Muslims as well as Muslims’ own understanding of this identity. Secondly, it can assist in explaining individuals’ reactions in relation to their social identity when the factor that binds the group (i.e. their religion) becomes problematized by acts of terrorism. Terrorism can make Muslims feel like the image of Islam and Muslims is damaged (Hussain and Bagguley, 2012) and the social identity theory can help to understand how people react to this damaged image. Thus, the theory is expected to assist in gaining knowledge on the mechanisms behind Muslims’ identification.

Moreover, this study researches part of individuals’ identity that is based on their self-perceived association with a certain religious community, the Islamic community. More specifically, it focusses on that part of Muslims’ identification that is retrieved from their social membership to a larger social group of people with the same religion. This identity that one has as a result of being part of this larger group of Muslims is called a social identity. A social identity is a part of someone’s identity that is based on his/her connection to a larger group of people who are in some way similar. This larger group of people is called a social group, it is an imagined
entity of people who are equivalent in some way (Tajfel, 1974). It is imagined because it is not a group in the sense of a real-life gathering of multiple individuals, but rather an idea that various people who share some characteristic, belief, action, attitude, or intention form one group. This grouping of people is called social categorization and is done to order the social world (idem.). Social categorization is “the ordering of social environment in terms of social categories, that is of groupings of persons in a manner which is meaningful to the subject” (Tajfel, 1974, p. 69). This categorization process leads to social groups, and being a member of such a social group provides an identity which is called a social identity. Indeed, social identity is defined as that “part of an individual’s self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the emotional significance attached to that membership” (Tajfel, 1974, p. 69). Accordingly, social identity is that part of the self that is derived from social categorization and identification with social groups (Spears, 2011). Thus, one first divides the social world in a meaningful way in order to make sense of it and then uses this categorization to place the self into one (or multiple) of these social groups. The group to which one belongs is called one’s in-group. The membership of the in-group provides one with an understanding of one’s own place in society and a social identity.

In line with this understanding of identification, identities can be divided among three different levels of abstraction: superordinate, intermediate, and subordinate (Turner, 1987). On the superordinate level is the most abstract identity of ‘human’ and on the subordinate level of abstraction is the self as an unique individual. The middle category, intermediate, is the part of the self that is “based on social similarities and differences between human beings that define one as a member of certain social groups and not others” (Turner, 1987, p. 45), i.e. the social identity. Examples of this latter category are religious identity and national identity. Further, social identities are both relational and comparative, meaning that how the own group (i.e. the in-group) is perceived is derived from similarities and differences between the in-group and the out-group (i.e. another social group) and the value attached to these comparisons (Tajfel and Turner, 1979). Indeed, “[t]he evaluation of one’s own group is determined with reference to specific other groups through social comparisons in terms of value-laden attributes and characteristics.” (Tajfel and Turner, 1979, p. 40). By comparison one can determine the value of the in-group compared to a specific out-group. One outcome of this comparison is the social status of a group, that is the one group’s position relative to the position of another group (Tajfel and Turner, 1979). It is assumed that it is crucial for individuals that this evaluation is positive and that the in-group receives a high status (Jackson, Sullivan, Harnish, and Hodge, 1996; Tajfel
and Turner, 1979). People strive towards what they consider a positive social identity to enhance their self-esteem, and the way to achieve this is through favourable comparison (Tajfel and Turner, 1979). Since one’s individual identification is derived in part from the individual’s social identity, the evaluation of the social group influences the self-concept. Thus, people desire a positive sense of self through an enhanced self-esteem, and in order to achieve this a positive evaluation of the in-group is required.

However, a comparison can also lead to a negative evaluation of the in-group whereby the group does not receive a high status and membership does not contribute to a positive self-esteem of individual members. Terrorism in the name of Islam by people who identify as Muslim is likely to harm the value of Muslims’ in-group. To elaborate, as was shown in the literature review, Islamic terrorism is likely to lead to a Islamophobia (e.g. Steele et al, 2019) and Islamophobia shows that part of the population has negative feelings towards Muslims. Hence, the positive evaluation of Muslims their in-group is endangered by Islamic terrorism since at least part of the population negatively evaluates Muslims in the aftermath of terrorism. If one’s in-group is negatively evaluated ones needs to act in order to remain part of a favourable in-group and achieve sufficient self-esteem. Tajfel and Turner (1979) suggest multiple strategies individuals can use if their membership to a social group does not enhance their identity in a positive manner. The first strategy is called individual mobility (Tajfel and Turner, 1979). If one uses social mobility one leaves the undesirable social group. For example, a person with a lower class job who identifies with his/her colleagues but does not derive a positive social identity from this identification can find a higher class job and thereby leave the undesirable group. This strategy is not used collectively but only by individual members of the group. When applied to Muslims in Manchester, individual mobility would entail that a person would no longer identify as Muslim and remove himself/herself from this social group. Muslims would then decide to no longer be Muslim and switch to another social group. However, this might not be desirable if the Muslim identity is too important or perceived as unchangeable. It is theorized that whether one sees individual mobility as a feasible option depends on the place of one’s beliefs on the social mobility – social change continuum (Tajfel and Turner, 1979). When beliefs lean towards the social mobility side of the spectrum, an individual believes that there exists a possibility within society to change to a social group that the individual evaluates as better suiting (Tajfel and Turner, 1979). It is in such instances that social mobility can be used and that “he [an individual from negatively evaluated group] will try to leave, or dissociate himself from his erstwhile group. This usually implies attempts, on an individual basis, to
achieve upward social mobility, to pass from a lower- to a higher-status group” (Tajfel and Turner, 1979, p. 43). When one’s convictions are more within the social change side of the continuum, one regards one’s social group membership as fixed or unchangeable. Individual mobility will not be seen as possible because society is perceived to be stratified and unable to provide any possibilities to leave the undesirable social group (idem.). In such instances, behaviour will be characterized by intergroup relations rather than personal relations: “individuals will not interact as [emphasis in original] individuals, on the basis of their individual characteristics or interpersonal relationships, but as members of their groups standing in certain defined relationships to members of other groups” (Tajfel and Turner, 1979, p. 35). Not only will members of one group act with more uniformity towards the other group, they will also treat members of the other group as “undifferentiated items in a unified social category” (Tajfel and Turner, 1979, p. 36). Beliefs on the side of social change side of the continuum, and their consequent behaviour, often occur when there is an intense intergroup conflict of interests (Tajfel and Turner, 1979). This relates to the process of reification, whereby concepts of social identity become ‘things’ (Demmers, 2012). In instances of conflict the social identity that is of importance in that conflict becomes more prominent to the individual. This social identity becomes cemented, as if it is a thing, a fixed fact, instead of a social construct (idem.). If one’s social group in under attack, one’s identification with that group becomes stronger because one becomes more aware of their connection to that group. To apply this to Muslims in Manchester, if Muslims are the victim of Islamophobia, they are attacked by other people solely on the ground of their religious identity. Other Muslims become then more aware of their own religious identity even if they are not personally attacked.

As is shown by social identity theory regarding belief in social change, the strategy of changing membership might not always be perceived as a feasible solution. In situations where an individual strategy is not feasible, people can either reinterpret the features of their social group to make it more satisfactory or they can undertake social action. Tajfel and Turner (1979) suggest two overarching collective strategies of which one can be divided into three sub-strategies. The first collective strategy is social creativity. When this method is used members of a negatively evaluated group “seek positive distinctiveness for the in-group by redefining or altering the elements of the comparative situation” (Tajfel and Turner, 1979, p. 43). Instead of leaving the group, members change either the value of the group’s characteristics or the point of reference. The first sub-strategy of social creativity is when a social group compares itself with the out-group on a new dimension (Tajfel and Turner, 1979). Instead of looking at
problematic characteristic A the group emphasizes positive characteristic B. This other characteristic is one of which the in-group perceives itself to have more or a better version of than the out-group. In the case of Muslims in Manchester this strategy could for example take the form of focusing on dignity Muslims might believe to have more than non-religious individuals. Muslims would emphasize a positive characteristic of their own social group or religion in order to still retrieve a positive evaluation. This positive characteristic would be good enough to protect the image of the group from the negative impact of the terrorist attack in the name of Islam. The second sub-strategy is used when a social group changes the values that are ascribed to certain characteristics of the group that are seen as problematic (Tajfel and Turner, 1979). Hereby the very attributions that led to a negative comparison will lead to positive one. Muslims in Manchester could redefine a characteristic that is seen as problematic, such as the veil (Chapman, 2016; Williamson and Khiabany, 2010), as positive. For example, Muslim women could perhaps say that their veils are not a sign threat (Williamson and Khiabany, 2010) or oppression (Chapman, 2016) but of agency (idem.). Muslim women’s choice of clothing would remain the factor of analysis but the outcome of the comparison with people that do not wear a veil would change completely. The last sub-strategy of social creativity is changing the out-group with which the social group compares itself. To give an example, Muslims could stop comparing themselves with average white British natives and start comparing themselves with a group that they see as having a lower status than their in-group, perhaps right-wing extremists. A comparison with a lower status group such as right-wing extremist could provide a relatively higher social status for Muslims and thereby keep the social identity positively distinct. The last strategy is called social competition (Tajfel and Turner, 1979) and it entails actions where a social group seeks “positive distinctiveness through direct competition with the out-group” and where they then “try to reverse the relative positions of the in-group and the out-group on salient dimensions” in order to bring about “changes in the groups’ objective social location” (Tajfel and Turner, 1979, p. 44). The social group tries to rise above the out-group in terms of status. A salient dimension after an Islamic terrorist attack could possibly be tendencies to violence. Muslims could challenge the accusation that Muslims are prone to violence by stating that white, native, British people are way more violent. Muslims would then change the position of Muslims from more violent than white, native, British people to less violent.

Tajfel and Turner (1979) theorize that if all five strategies (individual mobility, the three social creative strategies, and social competition) are available, individual social mobility will be used at first. If the individual strategy is unfeasible, the most likely strategy to use will be the last
sub-strategy of social creativity. That is, the social group will collectively seek a new lower status out-group to compare itself with. Tajfel and Turner (1979) do no specify which strategy will be used next if changing the out-group fails. Important to mention here is that Fisher, Aydin, Frey, and Ai (2010) suggest that Muslims do not prefer individual coping strategies to handle adversity and stressful events. Instead, Muslims are said to turn to collective strategies. It is argued by the authors that Muslims base their individual identity largely on their social identity that is derived from their religious community (i.e. Islamic community) (Fisher et al., 2010). Moreover, this is believed to be especially true for Eastern cultures and, as shown in the introduction, a lion share of Muslims in the England is from Asian descent, making it ever more likely that British Muslims will prefer collective coping strategies. Studies on identity negotiation among Muslims indeed find that leaving the in-group is not often used (Chapman, 2016; Uz and Kemmelmeier, 2014). Chapman (2016) found that Muslim women who wear veils often use strategies of social creativity instead of individual mobility. Uz and Kemmelmeier (2014) also found that individual mobility was not often used as a strategy among Muslims and that they felt a commitment to remain part of the Islamic group. Thus, various studies (Chapman, 2016; Fisher et al., 2010; Uz and Kemmelmeier, 2014) show that individual mobility is not a desirable strategy to use for Muslims. It could be Muslims their commitment to Islam is too strong, as was suggested by Uz and Kemmelmeier (2014). However, it is also possible that individual mobility is not a feasible option because Muslims might believe that their simply cannot change social groups. If their beliefs are on the social change side of the individual mobility – social change continuum, they can perceive individual mobility as impossible.

Another strategy could be added to the five strategies proposed by Tajfel and Turner (1979). The black sheep effect is another tactic that protects the social identity of the in-group (e.g. Jette, Branscombe, and Spears, 2006; Marques and Paez, 1994; Marques, Yzerbyt, and Leyens, 1988). Black sheep are deviants, meaning that their behaviour goes against the in-group norms. This behaviour reflects negatively on the social group to which they belong and deviants are therefore rejected by the rest of the social group (Jetten et al., 2006). By rejecting the undesirable in-group member, the in-group differentiates itself from the deviant (Marques and Paez, 1994). Marques, Yzerbyt, and Leyens (1988) see this rejection in light of the social identity theory’s claim that individuals strive towards an enhancement of self-esteem through memberships of positively evaluated social groups. Indeed, the “under-evaluation of dislikeable ingroup members may be an acceptable psychological strategy for preserving the group’s
Overall [emphasis in original] positivity” (p. 5). The deviants’ behaviour threatens the value of the in-group, deviants are therefore treated with more hostility than deviants from out-groups because those individuals do not threat the evaluation of the in-group. In order to protect the image of the in-group, derogating a deviant in-group member is a “possible strategy to improve the social self in the presence of threatening ingroup events” (Maques and Paez, 1994). In the case of Manchester, the deviant would be the terrorist. Muslims could reject him as a Muslim and thereby differentiate their group from this one problematic person. The image of Muslims would not be harmed by the terrorist if he is not seen as Muslim.
METHOD

The previous chapter showed the theories that will be used to inform the analysis. The current chapter adds to this by describing how this data has been collected and how the analysis will be conducted. More precisely, a description of the fieldwork and the interviews will be given as well as an explanation of the used interview method and analysis.

Entering the field

The data collected for this research has been gathered through fieldwork conducted in the Greater Manchester area between April 1, 2019 and April 28, 2019. I wanted to speak to Muslims in Manchester because the aim of the research is to learn about Muslims’ understanding of their own social identity after the Arena bombing. As mentioned earlier, the effects of the attack were expected to be most strongly felt closest to the site of the attack. Therefore, Manchester itself has been chosen as geographical location to conduct the fieldwork. Eventually, almost all of the interviews have been conducted in the last two weeks. The first two weeks were mainly focused on gaining access to the field and scheduling appointments with interviewees. At the time of the fieldwork the Manchester Arena bombing had taken place almost two years ago.

Various non-governmental organizations (henceforward NGOs) were contacted though e-mail in the weeks leading up to the fieldwork. The initial e-mail explained the purpose of the fieldwork and a brief explanation of the topic that would be studied. The selected NGOs were chosen based on either their experience with working on sensitive topics related to religion, identity, or cohesion, their involvement in the city after the terrorist attack, or their location is areas with large Muslim communities. However, out of the eleven organizations nine did not respond or did not have time for an appointment. Upon arrival in Manchester there were only two appointments scheduled with NGO’s in the area, one at the Tim Parry Johnathan Ball Peace Foundation (henceforward Peace Foundation) in Warrington and one at the Hideaway in Manchester in the borough Moss Side. The Peace Foundation was unable to provide contact details of possible participants but offered a detailed description of the actions they had undertaken after the Arena attack and their vision on the aftermath. The employees at the Hideaway gave a detailed description of the impact the attack had on the borough and brought me into contact with two female participants.
After arriving in the field, I started with sending reminders to the NGOs that had not responded to the e-mail. The organization We Stand Together responded to the reminder and invited me to sit in at one of their meetings. This meeting brought me into contact with an official from the municipality who works on community cohesion and preventing radicalisation. At an individual appointment we had one week later she described the government’s response to the attack and provided information about the context in which the attack took place. The municipality official brought me into contact with an employee from the Manchester Metropolitan University who supports the university’s religious students. This person offered a detailed description of the effect the bombing had on Muslim students but could not bring me into contact with these students.

I also visited three of the organizations which had not responded to my e-mails, taking a printed version of the e-mail with me. These visits led to meetings at three NGOs located in and around Manchester’s city centre. At each organization there was someone who had time to talk to me in person. One of these NGOs, the Muslim Youth Foundation (henceforward MYF), agreed to assist in finding participants for the research. Unfortunately, the other two organizations were unable to assist in finding participants. However, one of those two NGO did bring me into contact with Communities4all, a small NGO that was affiliated with a local mosque. Communities4all agreed to assist the research but was eventually unable to provide participants. I also visited the British Muslim Cultural Heritage Centre (henceforward BMHC) after arriving in the field. A BMHC employee said that the organization would try to find potential interviewees but eventually the BMHC was unable to find individuals who were willing to participate.

After visiting all the organizations mentioned above, I reached out to five other organizations that had not yet been contacted. Whereas I had initially mainly contacted NGOs working in specific areas or fields, I now e-mailed Islamic NGOs such as the Islamic student unions of Manchester’s universities. At first none of these organizations responded but after sending reminders two NGOs, the Islamic student unions, agreed to use their network to bring me into contact with interviewees.

Eventually, nine out of the eighteen contacted organizations (including the university employee) agreed to help me find participants. However, only four organizations were actually able to provide contact details of possible interviewees. These organizations were the MYF, the
Gatekeepers

Entering the field proved to be a difficult and time-consuming task. Every time I visited an organization there was a manager who first needed to decide if the organization would assist in finding participants. These managers had the power over the access to a specific parts of the field, this specific part being the people in their network. They could either chose to share their network and thereby open the field or chose to restrict me from entering a specific part of the field. For this reason I refer to these managers as gatekeepers (Roex, Van Stiphout, and Tillie, 2010; Sanghera and Thapar-Björkert, 2008). Roex et al. (2010) studied Salafi Muslims in the Netherlands and also found that this group was difficult to access. They stretched that the difficulty of entering the field makes the relationship between the researcher and the researched group even more important. I tried to establish this relationship by firstly meeting with gatekeepers. Sanghera and Thapar-Björkert (2008) also state that gatekeepers are often the first people the researcher meets when entering the field. Researchers are likely to have to negotiate their access through gatekeepers before they can access the people they actually want to speak to (Sanghera and Thapar-Björkert, 2008). In my fieldwork experience I indeed first needed to contact gatekeepers in order to speak to Muslims about their experiences.

Gatekeepers were often willing to have a meeting with me about my research but were hesitant to connect me to people in their network. Hence, they were cautious about opening the field. I was not completely sure about the reasons for the hesitation, but it seemed as if there was suspicion about my intentions. I did notice that after explaining that the research would solely focus on the experiences of the Muslim community regarding the attack, gatekeepers would ask more questions about the intention of the study. For example, after explaining the goal of the research one gatekeeper asked me what the title of the study would be. When I explained that I was still not certain about the exact title but that it would focus on Muslims their own understanding of being Muslim, the gatekeeper asked what I really wanted to know. This gave me the impression that the gatekeeper thought I was actually interested in something else. Also, after I explained the aim of the research, multiple gatekeepers would tell me that Muslims strongly condemn terrorism, thereby giving me the impression that they thought I believed maybe otherwise. The rise in Islamophobia after the attack (see introduction and literature
review) may have made the gatekeepers wary of how others see their community and shaped their expectations of other people’s intentions. Also, I noticed that the word ‘interview’ raised questions about the specific questions I would ask. To me it seemed that these questions showed that there was suspicion about the true aim of my research. One of the gatekeepers further told me that I should set my expectations low because British people presumable do not like to be interviewed and Muslims even less so. Muslims were said to be probably unwilling to participate because the media outlets had mistreated Muslims or twisted the information given by those individuals who were interviewed immediately after the terrorist attack. Later during interviews it became clear that after the attack a lot of Muslims felt as if they were held accountable by the media and parts of Manchester’s population for the actions of Abedi. I suspect that it was therefore that gatekeepers often wanted to know in great detail what the research was about and precisely which questions would be asked. Due to the narrative interview method – which will be explained later in greater detail – and in order to prevent the possible interviews from getting steered too much I was unable to reveal precisely which questions would be asked.

Gatekeepers were very important in deciding who I could and would meet. They had the power to determine who I could meet and how they would tell potential participants about the study, and had therefore a great influence on the willingness of potential participants to participate (Wiles et al., ac cited in Sanghera and Thapar-Björkert, 2008). Due to this power dynamic, Sanghera talks about the importance of the trust of the gatekeeper in the researcher. When describing the study on Muslims in the UK and conducted fieldwork in Brasford, Britain it is stated that: “What became apparent to the researcher in this project was that goodwill was to a large extent contingent upon how gatekeepers positioned the researcher, particularly in the broader context of a climate of fear and suspicion.” (Sanghera and Thapar-Björkert, 2008, p. 549). In Manchester there seemed to be suspicion as well and it was therefore of great importance how the gatekeepers perceived me as a researcher. I had to explain that I did not want to link Islam to terrorism and that I was interested in Muslims their own stories. Eventually, nine gatekeepers (eight high placed employees/volunteers of NGOs and an employee from the university) agreed to help with the research and were willing to assist in finding participants. The gatekeepers determined with whom I was to get in touch with. At first, they all connected me only with women, which made it more difficult to come into contact with men. This will be further discussed in the section ‘female researcher’ of this chapter. The only
organizations that brought me directly into contact with both men and women were the Islamic student unions.

Also, as mentioned before, only four organizations were able to open the field and actually find participants. The explanation I was given was that the gatekeepers either did not know anyone who fitted the profile and/or the people whom they could contact were unavailable due to the Easter holiday. After the holiday ended, UoM ISoc and MMU ISoc, the Islamic societies of the universities (two of the four organizations) were able to assist in finding participants.

**MYF**

One organization that had an especially important role in the fieldwork was the Muslim Youth Foundation (henceforward MYF). After a first meeting at the MYF the organization agreed to assist in finding participants. In this initial meeting I was told that the MYF received a lot of support in the form of flowers and cards, and that they had good contact with their neighbourhood. Also, the employee with whom I had a meeting understood that my intentions were sincere and was enthusiastic about my research. Eventually the MYF brought me into contact with ten of the eighteen participants. Given the importance of the organization in the data collecting process some information about the organization will be given.

The MYF is run by volunteers and is located in Manchester’s city centre and is, according to its employees, visited by approximately 600 people on a daily basis. Many Muslims who work in the area use the MYF’s facilities to pray during the day since it is the only mosque in the city centre. Both Sunni and Shia Muslims are welcome since the organization claims to not believe in this distinction. The organization’s slogan ‘Building bridges with the community’ is carried out in practice in the form of open days, school visits, and an open door policy whereby anyone can walk in for a conversation. The MYF sees it as its job to give a correct image about Islam, to pass the true message of Islam, and to provide guidance for both Muslims and non-Muslims. It does so through weekly classes and counselling sessions.

**Female researcher**

It is important to reflect on the role of a female researcher as it influenced the recruitment of participants as well. Other female researchers also recalled that their gender affected their research with Muslim participants (e.g. Archer, 2001; Roex et al., 2010). As a woman it was
more difficult to come into contact with male participants than it was to schedule interviews with female participants. As mentioned in the section ‘gatekeepers’, each gatekeeper always firstly suggested to introduce me to women or, as I found out later, forwarded my request for interviews only to female members and acquaintances. Hence, the first appointments were all with women. I only came into contact with men after I specifically requested to speak to male members of the organizations.

As a female researcher I was at times very explicitly confronted with my own gender. Being a woman shaped some of the interactions I had with especially the male participants. Some men were uncomfortable with shaking my hand or saw it as inappropriate to be alone with me in a room. My gender influenced the interactions I had with male participants in terms of physical greetings and the setting. Moreover, one of the interviews I conducted could not be held face-to-face because of my gender. One interviewee believed it to be inappropriate for him as a man and me as a woman to have a personal meeting without the presence of his spouse. Therefore, the interview with that participant had to be conducted through Skype. The wife of the participant was also present in the room but did not contribute to the interview nor was she visible on screen. As a researcher I had to adjust to the gender relation between myself and the participants. After being told by a male participant that he would rather not shake the hand, I stopped initiating such greetings, and I met male participants in public places or left the door open to make them feel more comfortable. That being said, most of the interviews with men were held in the roughly the same setting as interviews with women. More specifically, it were all one-on-one interviews with either a friend who would also be interviewed or no one else present. The difference in gender between the researcher and the participant did not seem to affect the quality of the interviews. I hereby mean that my gender did not affect the topics that were brought up or how comfortable I was with asking questions. For me as a researcher my gender did not influence the interviews as I felt it only affected the location and formalities prior to the interview. However, how the male participants experienced it might be different from my own experiences. Still, to me it seemed as if male participants were as comfortable with the interview as the female participants.

My gender, and more specifically my appearance, also came up in three meetings with women. In talking about their veil, they referred to my clothing as being similarly modest to their veils. Due to the cold weather I was mostly dressed in sweaters and jeans, and therefore female participants could refer to me as being in some way similar to them. The female participants
saw me as similarly modest to them. It felt like my way of clothing helped to establish report between the female participants and myself. My appearance enabled the interviewees to relate to me. However, it also made me feel that how I looked was judged by the interviewees. Given that it was brought up multiple times, my appearance seemed to matter to interviewees. I therefore kept wearing more modest clothing, even when the temperature rose.

**Participants**

At the end of the fieldwork period eighteen people participated in a total of seventeen interviews. Ten people were contacted through the MYF, three through the University of Manchester Islamic Society, two though the Hideaway, two through snowballing, and one through the Islam Against Terrorism stall. Despite the initial difficulties regarding finding male participants, almost half of the interviewees were male. Eventually, eight participants were male and the other ten were female. The MYF helped me to organize two of the interviews with men. Three other male participants were contacted through UoM ISoc. Meetings with two other men were set-up through snowballing. A last male interviewee was found after visiting the Islam Against Terrorism stall in Manchester’s city centre.

All the participants were Muslim and living in Manchester at the time of the research. Participants were all between the ages of 18 and 39, and half of them were in their early twenties. Almost all interviewees followed higher education. Fifteen were enrolled in university or had finished a university degree. One participant was still enrolled in college. Two others were working, one as event manager and one as customer service employee. Moreover, most participant had an migrant background. Eight of the interviewees were from Pakistani origin. Three of British-Pakistani participants were third-generation migrants, one was a first-generation migrants, and the other four were second-generation migrants. One of the second-generation interviewees was British-Pakistani-Indian. Two other respondents were first-generation immigrants from Iraqi origin and had migrated at an early age to Britain. One interviewee was second-generation British-Libyan. Another respondent was second-generation British-Bengali. One participant was second-generation British-Sri Lankan. Three interviewees were from African origin, one second-generation British-East African, one first-generation British-Gambian, and one first-generation British-Nigerian. Furthermore, one participant had no ethnic origin other than British, this person had reverted to Islam six years prior to the
research. Lastly, one interviewee was Belgian and lived in Manchester but had no British citizenship.

It is important to note that the participants did not form a representative sample of the Muslim community in Manchester. The individuals in the sample were all young and most of them (had) followed higher education, resulting in a sample with an above average amount of young, higher educated people. Also, most participants were in some way affiliated with an Islamic organization which suggested that their religion was prevalent in their everyday lives. The sample might therefore have included an above average amount of individuals whose Muslim identity was important to them. This selective sample did not constitute a problem for answering the research question. However, it can possibly have affected the results. The fact that most participants were affiliated with an Islamic organization might have led to a sample with interviewees who more involved with their own religion more than the average British Muslims. Their social identity as Muslim might have been more important to them than to other Muslims. Also, given the high level of education most interviewees have followed, they might have been more likely to perceive a rise in Islamophobia. Elsayed and De Grip (2018) found that especially the attitudes of higher educated Muslims worsened towards integration after Islamic terrorism, and they suggest that this is due to the higher expectations this group has with regards to being treated equally. This higher educated group would be more aware of any rise in Islamophobia because it would be differing from their expectations. Higher educated Muslims are also more likely to come into contact with non-Muslims and therefore more likely to encounter Islamophobia (Elsayed and De Grip, 2018).

**Interview method**

This study followed a qualitative method of inquiry as narrative interviews have been conducted. This interview method explicitly focusses on interviewees their own understanding of events (Creswell, 2009). The qualitative method is chosen because it provided in-dept knowledge of the effects terrorism has on Muslims’ social identity. This type of data can add to existing literature as is shown by the literature review. Qualitative data would be useful because of its potential to reveal the impact of terrorism on the social identity of Muslims and the mechanisms behind this impact. As the theoretical framework showed, reactions to a negative evaluations of the in-group can evoke a multitude of cognitive strategies that depend on how the individual perceives the situation. Moreover, strategies like social creativity can
involve a wide range of out-groups and surveys cannot not include all the possible ways interviewees could have applied these strategies. It is also possible that participants were not aware of the use of these strategies. A narrative interview can discover the use of these strategies by letting interviewees recount in great detail how they understand and experienced the terrorist attack and its aftermath. Through these stories the researcher can discover how interviewees responded in terms of their social identity. Therefore, the qualitative narrative interview method is expected to be better suited for this inquiry than a quantitative method.

The choice for narrative interviews has been made for two reasons. Firstly, the research topic could be seen as highly personal and possibly sensitive, and this form of interviewing allows for individuals to determine the focus. The method was therefore expected to allow people to comfortably recount what they had experienced, while still providing a personal and detailed account of the events. Secondly, the research focusses on individuals their own story of the effect of the bombing and this method allows for a person’s unique story to be told. This interview method allowed participants to recount what they understood as important. The interviewees could tell their own individual story without being steered into a particular direction. To explain in greater detail what the method entails, the narrative interview method is the approach whereby “the researcher sets out to elicit stories” (Bryman, 2012, p. 584). It allows for an emphasis in on the meaning and understanding the participants have of a certain issue (Creswell, 2009), the certain issue in this research being the Arena bombing and its aftermath. The conducted interviews were focused on letting participants recount how they experienced the Manchester Arena bombing and its aftermath, and how this impacted them personally. Thus, the aim is to retrieve various narratives about the attack and its aftermath, that is, the individual’s story about these events. Indeed, one way of doing narrative research is when “the researcher might ask their research participants to produce [emphasis in original] stories” (Squire et al., 2014, p. 7). Inquiries whereby participants produce stories is a “way to ‘illuminate’ the life circumstances of individuals and communities” (Squire et al., 2014, p. 74), which was precisely the aim of the interviews. The intention was to construct an understanding of how the bombing shaped the lives of Muslims in Manchester in order to learn how the event affected their social identity. By letting the participants tell in great detail about the event and the aftermath, it was possible to understand how participants their social identity was influenced and which strategies they used.
Other studies used similar methods to research somewhat similar topics. Hussain and Bugguley (2012) studied how Muslims experienced the aftermath of terrorism and what the effects of securitization were, and they also used a qualitative interview method. More precisely, they used semi-structured interviews as they were interested in specific topics that emerged from public discourse. The choice for this type of interviewing has not been made here because this study focused on what participants determined as significant rather than on previously set-up topics. However, in both studies the aim was to collect the individual’s experience, and since the present study also focussed on in how Muslims themselves perceived (the aftermath of) terrorism, I do believe that for this study the overarching method of interviewing was similarly well-suited. Chapman (2016) also studied a topic related to the present subject and used a qualitative method. The study focussed on the effect of stigmatization on Muslim women and their identity management. Chapman also used an interview method but she did not, however, specify which type of interview method was used. Nevertheless, interviewing has proven to be a successful method to research the impact of negative images of Islam on social identity management of Muslims. Jindra’s (2011) research on religious content in conversion narratives did use a narrative interview method. Although the subject of the study significantly differed from the current research, the motivation to use this method is extendable. Jindra (2011) motivated the choice for the narrative interview method for its use to map “the entire biography and life-world of a person”. In the present research is not aimed at collecting an entire biography and life-world but a part of it related to a specific experience, that is, the Arena bombing and its aftermath. Jindra and Jindra (2019) further researched the utility of narrative interviewing and biographical trajectory (i.e. how an interviewee’s life turned out) in social work and they argued that the narrative interview method provided a “deeper understanding of how people get into and out of life crises” (p. 196). It can be argued that experiencing a major terrorist attack in one’s home city and subsequently the Islamophobic aftermath are life crises. Narrative interviewing, then, would be a well-suited method for this research.

**The interviews**

The interviews have all been conducted in the Greater Manchester metropolitan area during the month of April. The data collection was therefore in line with what Creswell (2009) calls inquiry in a natural setting. Indeed, the data is collected “in the field at the site where participants experience the issue or problem under study” (p. 175). Each interview started with a variation of the question ‘where were you when you heard about the attack?’. The decision to
start with this question was made because it was expected that if the interviewee would think about the place he or she heard about the bombing, it would be easier for the interviewee to mentally go back to the experiences surrounding the attack. When this way of starting the interview proved successful in the first few interviews, it was decided to begin each interview with a variation of that question. After the interviewee recalled this time and place the next questions would be about specific thoughts or feelings the interviewee experienced at that time. These type of questions were asked for similar reasons as the first question and also to provide data on the initial reaction of the participant. Hereafter the questions would be based on the answers the interviewee gave in order to retrieve a detailed understanding of the experiences. At the end of each interview the participant was asked if there was anything else he or she would like to tell me about that had not yet been addressed. The interviews lasted between 35 and 84 minutes. A majority of the interviews continued approximately 55 minutes.

All but one interview has been held during personal face-to-face meetings. The one diverging interview was the Skype interview mentioned earlier. Another divergent interview was interview number 8, in which two individuals participated simultaneously. This was the only interview that was not one-on-one. The decision for this dual interview was made on the spot due to unforeseen circumstances. Initially each individual would have a separate interview but when I arrived at the location of the interview there were several more participants waiting than was originally planned. Hence, two friends who had come together were interviewed at the same time in order to ensure that I could interview everyone who had taken the time and effort to travel to the location. The participants answered the first questions individually but later also responded to each other’s reactions. Furthermore, there were five other interviews during which a second individual was present. However, during these five interviews the third party did not say or barely said anything and the third party was also not an official participant in the interview. These situations occurred when multiple interviews with various people were scheduled in a row and the individuals knew each other or when the participant had scheduled to meet someone right after the interview. In each of these cases it was the interviewee’s decision to have a third party present.

**Ethical considerations**

The interviewees were asked to recall events that could possibly have had a strong emotional impact on them. Some participants had experienced severe feelings of fear or sadness as a result
of the bombing and the Islamophobia that followed. Moreover, the subject of religious identity could have been sensitive in and of itself. Therefore, I stretched before the start of each interview that interviewees were always allowed to not answer questions or to stop with the interview altogether at any given moment. During the interviews the interviewee’s emotional well-being was a priority and therefore I did not ask participants to further elaborate on experiences when they seemed either highly uncomfortable or otherwise strongly emotionally triggered by recounting the events. This happened on two occasions.

Also, prior to each interview the participants got an explanation of what the study entailed, how the interview would proceed, and what would be done with the given information. A consent form was signed as well to ensure the interviewee that any given answers would be treated confidentially and to confirm that the interviewee was above 18 years old and participated voluntarily. In order to ensure the confidentiality and to protect the anonymity of all respondents their names as well as any information that can expose their identity has been removed from the transcripts.

Method of analysis

Prior to the analysis all but two interviews have been transcribed. Two interviews have not been transcribed and have also been left out of the analysis. The decision to exclude these interviews from the analysis has been made because the interviewees were not living in Manchester at the time of the attack. They were therefore unable to fully experience the impact of the bombing as their reference to life in Manchester prior to the bombing was limited. Also, other participants explicitly mentioned that the biggest effect was felt right after the attack and the two excluded interviewees were not present in Manchester at this period of time. The data that is left out of the analysis came from interviews with a 22-year-old Belgian man and a 39-year-old British, Iraqi born woman. After excluding these participants there were sixteen people left in the sample, seven males and nine females, and all between the ages of 18 and 33.

The analysis of these interviews can be summarized as searching for “patterns, categories, and themes from the bottom up, by organizing the data into increasingly more abstract units of information” (Creswell, 2009, p. 175). The analysis started with thoroughly listening, transcribing and reading all interviews (with the exceptions mentioned above). Secondly, the

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1 All transcripts and an tables with all the codes are available upon request.
interviews have been coded one by one with the use of the coding program Nvivo. During this part of the analysis small and coherent parts of data were given a label that is called a code. Codes were not set up prior to the analysis but emerged out of the data. However, as the process progressed the established codes were used to further analyse the data. Data fragments were coded if they were either repetitive throughout the data or if they had what Bryman (2012) calls potential theoretical significance or appeared “to be particularly salient within the social worlds of those being studied” (p. 568). While Bryman (2012) uses this method of coding in relation to grounded theory, I believe it is applicable in this analysis as well. Since theoretical significance was one of the grounds on which something could be coded, the data was looked at through a theoretical lens. This means, for example, that quotes concerning the difference between the terrorist and the participant were coded as ‘distancing self from terrorist’. Each interview was coded individually and resulted in a list of codes that represented the experiences and (social) actions of the participant. The names of the codes consisted one or a few words that summarized the fragments. Thirdly, codes were paired into more abstract categories. These categories grouped the codes that touched upon similar experiences, feelings, or actors. For example, all actors that participants considered to be problematic were grouped in the category ‘problematic actors’. Some categories grouped codes based on a more abstract connection. For instance, the category ‘religious identity’ consists of all codes that reflect that the participants were consciously involved in their religion. It consists of codes such as ‘reassured by Islam’ and ‘look into own religion’.
ANALYSIS

This chapter will show the most significant findings and analyse them using the theoretical framework outlined earlier. The goal of the analysis is to gain an understanding of how Muslims dealt with the terrorist attack and its aftermath in terms of their perception of their social identity and the use of social strategies. The analysis will start similarly to the interviews, with the reaction of the participants on the attack. In the same section it will be discussed how interviewees saw the reaction of the non-Muslim part of the population to the attack. The next section will describe the rise in Islamophobia as experienced by the interviewees. An overview of the emotional reaction of the interviewees, the reaction of the wider population, and the rise in Islamophobia will be given in order to understand the context in which the interviewees had to manoeuvre their social identities. After this context is explained, the theoretical concepts and strategies will be used to analyse the data. This will provide an overview of the reaction to the attack and its aftermath in terms of social identity.

To recall the possible strategies, the social identity theory proposes several different tactics to cope with a negative image of one’s social group. The first is individual mobility whereby one leaves the in-group in exchange for a more favourable social group. The second strategy is social creativity, which consists of three sub-strategies. Social creativity involves seeking positive distinctiveness for the own group by changing the comparison with other groups. One can either change the characteristics that are evaluated, change the values ascribed to problematic characteristics, or change the group with which one compares the in-group. The third strategy is social competition whereby positive distinctiveness is sought by changing the social location of the in-group compared to the out-group. The black sheep effect was also added as a possible strategy. This tactic consists of rejecting deviant in-group members.

First reactions

The immediate reaction to the attack was very emotional. A strong emotional reaction was to be expected since it is a very common response to traumatic events (Hutchison and Bleiker, 2008). The most frequently mentioned feeling was shock. Indeed, almost all interviewees experienced feelings of shock when they learned about the event.
“It was shock for a while because you hear about these things happening but when it happened so close to home, it cuts a lot deeper. Especially the fact that many kids... When you read about like, initially, when I, when I read that it was at a concert, obviously knowing that Ariana Grande was the kind of audience where there're always going to be kids. You knew even before the numbers came out, you knew it was going to be young people. But yeah it was a shock and it was disbelief for a while.” – Interviewee E

“At that moment I was obviously completely shocked. Manchester, I was like "Manchester, what?!", like, I couldn't believe it. Because normally, when normally these attacks normally happen, they will happen more in different countries. And I was just thinking, even if it were to happen in England, it's more London” – Interviewee N

Participants explained that they felt shock because the attack targeted children and took place in Manchester. The audience at the Ariana Grande concert was expected to consist of mostly young teenagers and the idea that this group was targeted was experienced as greatly upsetting. Participants could not believe that anyone would want to hurt children because this part of the population was seen as pure and innocent. Also, interviewees said that they never expected that Manchester would be the target of a terrorist attack. Even if something like that would happen in the United Kingdom, the participants said they would expect it to happen in London but never in Manchester. Manchester was seen as a multicultural, multireligious city where the different social groups were all integrated and the population was friendly and kind. These characteristics of the city were perceived as incompatible with a place that a terrorist would want to target.

The emotion that immediately followed the shock was fear. This feeling was evoked by the prospect of retribution against the Muslim community. Peoples’ thoughts went to what this attack would mean for them personally.

“Because that was the thing though, because people must have said "oh, they're Muslims so it's their fault. So if they've done that to our community, we must do the same to them". And I think that was the fear in a lot of people, that somebody might do the same to them, thinking that "oh, they're Muslims so they need to be punished for what has happened".” – Interviewee L
“And it just felt so bizarre because that's, that's home. As much as anyone says any anything else that's like, they - even I was saying they, whoever the ambiguous they is - they hit home. So it was very much, it was a like, that's on my doorstep. That's on the doorstep of my younger siblings, on the doorstep of my parents. And it was just the initial worry because immediately after that thought, immediate after the thought of like "you violated my home", comes the thought that "what does this mean for me now?". Because at the end of the day, I see it as my home, but other people might not see it like that. I was born here, raised here, my parents were born here, raised here, like I can only speak English fluently. But then you're going to tell me now I'm going to get the whole backlash of like "your people did this, and you did this" and so it was like "okay". So it was very odd kind of, you have to brace yourself for the next day.” – Interviewee I

The fear went hand in hand with the expectation that retribution would follow the terrorist attack. Almost all interviewees expected a backlash against the Muslim community because the terrorist claimed to have acted in the name of Islam. Participants expected a rise in Islamophobia and a possibly violent retaliation. They were afraid that all Muslims would be blamed for the actions of the terrorist and that they would personally or as a group be attacked as revenge. Just by being Muslim, participants felt like they would be blamed for what had happened.

“I did expect it [a backlash against Muslims] because it's been happening all over like, this, like... Okay, one Muslim does it, belonging to one group, but instead they blame the entire religion. (…) It's just, it's just basically increasing everyone’s knowledge, basically saying "oh, yeah, Muslims are all bad". So we were just like "well that's it". As soon as it happened we knew Muslims are being blamed, that's it.” – Interviewee K

“Everyone [every Muslim] is guilty by association. Everyone's always guilty by association.” – Interviewee I

Besides fear, participants also felt anger. This anger was often directed toward the media because interviewees saw the media as the aggressor in the blaming of Muslims and the expected rise in Islamophobia. (Please note that the media will later be discussed in more detail, but for now it is important to describe their role in forming the context in which the participants had to manoeuvre their social identity). Interviewees felt that the media kept blaming Muslims
for the acts of one individual and kept making a connection between terrorism and Islam. Every interviewee mentioned the problematic role of the media in the aftermath of the attack.

“[T]he way media like portrays it, it's more like Islam extremist, Islam, Muslims. Like Muslim basically, not one person, all of them. (...) It's like, they always blame Muslims, so if the fact that a Muslim was like, did it, was like, it meant that all Muslims would get blamed soon enough.” – Interviewee K

“So I always think to myself, it is the media. What they like to do is, they like to manipulate the minds of people, they're not consistent, and have, they express a double standard. When it's a Muslim they're more likely to report it, they're more like to, let's say, report it to the wider public. When it's more like, when it's someone else who's not Muslim, it's more less coverage about it, and more likely to give more excuses about it. So we've seen double standards here, so from the media.” – Interviewee N

The media was said to report in such a way that it seemed as if Islam was responsible for the terrorist’s acts. It was explained that whenever someone from a different religion would commit similar crimes, the media would not mention his/her religion and attribute the act to different causes such as mental health issues. The media was also held accountable for making the wider public believe that Islam was to be seen as supportive of terrorism. The negative image of Islam portrayed by the media made participants very angry.

“For sure, I feel hatred as well and anger towards that issue, because they labelled something they don't know about.” – Interviewee Q

It was seen as unjust and completely inaccurate that the media displayed Islam as a religion of terrorism and violence.

**Islamophobia**

As was expected by the participants, a strong increase in Islamophobia followed the terrorist attack. To recall, Islamophobia is defined as define it as “multiple forms of anti-Muslim feelings, behavior, or policies” (Citci, 2012, p. 293). The increase in Islamophobia was felt
through the online hatred on social media, stories of other Muslims being assaulted, biased media reports, and, unfortunately, individual experiences.

“But, I mean, I think everything increased after the attack. Just Muslims being blamed, the attacks on Muslims, it just all increased.” – Interviewee K

A majority of the interviewees had personally been the victim of some form of Islamophobia. Most encounters consisted of verbal attacks on Muslims’ religious or ethnic background. Muslims were called terrorists and told to go back to their own country, even though most of the participants were born in Manchester. Other interviewees spoke of being stared at by strangers or being treated differently from before the attack by acquaintances. Two interviewees were also physically attacked. One participant got eggs thrown at him and another participant got chased by people on bicycles. The few participants who did not personally had to endure Islamophobic attacks still felt like they experienced the rise in Islamophobia. Like interviewee Q explains:

“I would hear stories about it. Like, for example, after the attack, there was a viral video that went online for a Muslim lady or a woman been attacked by people in the street, because of the way she was wear, were so she was getting... It was, it was on social media as well. She was on the floor, she was getting kicked by people. So even though sometimes I'm not experiencing it, I still can see it and feel it from other people what they say, and I try my best always to tell people to be careful.” – Interviewee Q

As shown by the quote, interviewees felt like the Islamophobia hit close to home. They could feel the rise in Islamophobia even if they themselves were not personally attacked.

The rise in Islamophobia caused a lot of sadness among participants. It was painful for participants to see that their religion was portrayed in a negative way by the media and Islamophobic people, and that Muslims were attacked for merely being Muslim. Religion was important to the participants and it was therefore upsetting that unfavourable characteristics were ascribed to it.

“It was sad because it's portraying an image of something that I hold dearly as something that it's completely not.” – Interviewee B
Indeed, Islamophobic encounters proved to Muslims that their religion and its followers were seen in a very negative manner. Muslims were aware that the out-group (i.e. non-Muslims) evaluated their in-group negatively. Participants felt like Islam was seen as a religion that promotes violence and Muslims as dangerous people who were responsible for the terrorist attack. Interviewees recounted that Muslims were seen as violent, threatening, and terrorists. The Islamophobic acts can indeed be seen as a result of dislike of Muslims by certain non-Muslims. This rise in Islamophobia can be interpreted as a behavioural and vocal outlet of the out-group (i.e. non-Muslims) towards the in-group (i.e. Muslims) as a result of a negative evaluation of the latter. The individuals who belonged to the social group of Muslims were treated badly by the out-group based on their social membership to the in-group. This negative evaluation of the in-group by the out-group makes the social identity of Muslim in theory less desirable.

**Individual mobility**

According to the social identity theory people would chose to leave their social group if it is no longer judged positively. They would do so because membership to the social group by then it no longer contributes to a desirable social identity. Since the Manchester Arena attack had harmed the image of Islam and Muslims – as was proven by the rise in Islamophobia – it would be expected that Muslims would want to leave the in-group. However, the findings show that participants’ Islamic social identity was not harmed by the attack or its aftermath. Muslims did not feel less religious or identified less with their religion.

“And I'm confident enough in my own religion and in my own belief to know that that kind of stuff [terrorism] is absolutely, you know, it's so far from the teachings of Islam that it's ridiculous. So, like I said, having that confidence and a surety and certainty in my own beliefs, that things like this, they don't really waver. My religion doesn't, my belief doesn't waver.” – Interviewee O

The finding that the level of religious identification was not affected shows that Muslims did not make the decision to leave their social group. The choice of all interviewees to remain part of the in-group means that the individual mobility strategy was never used. Participants
explained that their religion was too important for them to consider leaving their Islamic social identity behind.

“[I]t [religion] has become like a core part of my identity. That it's not something that I'm willing to compromise on.” – Interviewee E

Islam was seen as a fundamental part of interviewees' identity. It was something they could not and, more importantly, would not want to leave. Since interviewees were unwilling to leave their religion, they also did not change those parts of their appearance that might identify them as Muslim. Due to the decision not to use individual mobility, most participants remained visibly Muslim. By reason of religion most of the female interviewees wore hijabs (headscarves) and a majority of the men kept a beard. Some men also wore traditional Islamic clothing because of their religion. These visual characteristics were used by non-Muslims, including those holding Islamophobic beliefs, to identify the participants as Muslims. Many participants, both male and female, feared that their so called Muslim appearance would lead to Islamophobic encounters. This made especially women with headscarves and men in traditional clothing wary of retaliation.

“[B]ecause I do wear a headscarf, I'm physically seen as a Muslim. You can't, yeah, deny that. So I would be like a walking target, I guess.” – Interviewee J (female)

“Muslim men do have it hard, but as a Muslim woman you have a certain fear because it's obvious [that you are Muslim]. And you have, there's this association that these terrorists, terrorists, terrorists or whatever are also Muslim. So because it, it's not obvious for men, it's more obvious for women. It kind of sets, it kind of sets a fear of the outside world towards us.” – Interviewee G (female)

“Thing is, so I wear that [Islamic garment] and people might see that and be like "oh, wait", they see a terrorist. You know, he's wearing the same thing. So I'm going to have to lift it up, take my hat off, you know.” – Interviewee M (male)

The last quote by interviewee M shows that some interviewees tried to make themselves look somewhat less Muslim. This tactic was only used by men and was carried out through the trimming of beards or dressing less traditional. These actions were seen as a necessary evil that
was required to stay safe but it should not be interpreted as individual mobility because identification as Muslim did not falter. Also, most interviewees did not change anything about their appearance.

The decision to remain visibly Muslim strongly contributed to the need for participants to take precautions to stay safe from Islamophobic encounters. Almost all participants restricted their movements as a reaction to Islamophobia. The rise in Islamophobia and the fear this brought about influenced Muslims’ everyday lives.

“[I]t's just, you feel worried if you're not safe. (...) And if you have concern about your safety going anywhere after a certain time or to a certain places, that makes your life difficult. Which I think, to be honest, it does make life difficult.” – Interviewee A

“It was like, let's say 3 to 4 weeks, nobody was going anywhere. Nobody was going town. Tesco was as far as we'd go. Nobody would take the car anywhere or anything.” – Interviewee L

“[S]o normally I would take public transport (...) and it did make me really wary, so obviously like, I would only just go to university and take the bus and then just come back. But now that I do drive, now I am able to go out more, but still then only limited to things, to events that I would, that I'm really interested in going to, otherwise it's not really.” – Interviewee J

The most common changes in behaviour were avoiding public transport, staying indoors, and not going out at night. For a lot of people these restrictions in movement lasted for weeks and sometimes months. Even at the time of the interviews there were still people who were too scared to take public transport or to go out after dark. However, these precautions were seen as very necessary and legitimate because of the risk of being harassed as a Muslim. The restriction of movement among almost all interviewees shows that not using individual mobility had far reaching consequences for the lives of Muslims.
Reification

Besides a strong connection to Islam, the lack in individual mobility also suggests that the participants’ beliefs could be placed on the social change side of the social mobility – social change continuum. These beliefs imply that social group membership is perceived as unchangeable, and participants indeed said that they would always remain Muslim.

“And it's really no matter what people say, nobody, some people will but a lot of people will stick to their religion no matter what is said and what is done.” – Interviewee L

According to the social identity theory, beliefs in social change trigger behaviour whereby individuals act on the basis on their group membership rather than their personal characteristics. Interviewees indeed saw the interactions they had as being shaped by their religious identity. Muslims were scared because they expected to be treated badly by Islamophobic people based on their religion. When participants had an Islamophobic encounter, they were treated not as an individual but as a Muslim. Further, Muslims also reacted as a member of their social group. Participants turned to their religion to make sense of this Islamophobia and used it to understand how best to react. They therefore responded as a member of the Muslim community.

“But for some reason, when you are a Muslim, it's like you're, you're a stranger to everyone. And to deal with the backlash, it says, it says in the Quran that Muslims will feel like strangers, because there will come a time where people will be against you for things that you've not even done. And it's true, like we see it so much.” – Interviewee H

“If I know about my religion, if it tells me to have a faith, to have a hope, to be kind, and always talk about looking at the light at the end of the tunnel, that gives me the confidence, sense of awareness about myself, my existence, the purpose of my existence. If, if I study my religion and it tells me "you're not going to live here forever, there's a life hereafter, you'll have to answer about your acts and based on that you, God will decide to give, to send you to heaven or hell, everything is temporary in this world", then I know that everything people are doing that's temporary as well. Even the wrong they're doing, it's temporary as well. It might be really bad but it's temporary.” – Interviewee A
Moreover, the restrictions of movement were also found necessary because of the realization that Muslims would possibly be targeted based on their religion. These decision to limit movement was made knowing that possible interactions would be based on the participants’ membership to the social group of Muslims. Another behavioural change that was evoked by interaction based on social identity was the exaggeration of good behaviour. Interviewees altered their actions by always being on their best behaviour in order to show to other Mancunians that Muslims are good people. They tried to counter the negative image of Muslims by being extra kind, generous, helpful, and friendly.

“And then it's, it's pressure that you have to act like extra. You have to do more to seem nice. Like, if you were, if you were to meet with someone who's thinking already "oh this is probably a terrorist because they're Muslim", you have to be overly kind, you have to act in like a, you have to be more extra about everything, more kind, more everything, to make sure that they don't think that you are the terrorists.” – Interviewee L

Participants were overly kind because they realized that they represented their community and they wanted this community to be evaluated positively. This behavioural change together with the restriction of movement mentioned earlier and the seeking of guidance from Islam show that Muslims’ religious identity became very important in the context of everyday life. It shaped where people went, when they went there, and how they interacted with others.

This process of (inter)acting on the basis of social identity can be seen as a result of reification. As explained earlier, reification refers the process whereby social concepts turn into ‘things’ and it often occurs in situations of conflict. People become more aware of their social identity if their group is under attack. In this case, the increase in Islamophobia was an attack on a social group of Muslims. Islam was heavily criticized and Muslims were both verbally and physically assaulted in the aftermath of the terrorist attack, and this made Muslims (also those who were not personally attacked) very aware of their religious identity. This process whereby one is forced to be aware of their social identity also explains why certain interviewees identified even more strongly with their religion after the attack. This process of reification can be seen in the following quote:
“So if anything it increased my belief and my certainty in the true religion of Islam. When you see things like that [negative things] being, trying to be ascribed to Islam, then your belief in Islam increases.”

The critique on Islam, which can be seen as an attack on the community, led Muslims to look into their own religion and think about it more than usual. When others ascribed certain negative aspects to their religion, Muslims came to think about who they were as a group, who they were as a Muslim person, and what their religion tells them. They came to identify as opposite of what the Islamophobic people told them they were. Further, some Muslims became more outspoken about their belief and wanted to carry it out with pride because of the negativity their social group received. Interviewee L explains that despite not being very religious before the attack, she felt the need to show her Islamic identity after Islamophobia increased.

“I was just like, a part of me wanted to like, because, you know, I'm not that religious, a part of me wanted to show that "yeah, I am religious" and be like really brave about it.” – Interviewee L

Identification with Islam and the Muslim community can thus be explained by the importance of religion to one’s identity, beliefs on the social change side of the continuum, and reification.

**Black sheep effect**

As stated above, individual mobility was not a desirable strategy. However, according to social identity theory one always strives towards a positive social identity and one will therefore fall back on collective strategies if individual mobility is an unavailable option. One of the collective strategies that was used was the black sheep effect, a strategy whereby the group differentiates itself from a deviant. The deviant, that is the terrorist, was judged very harshly and rejected as a Muslim. Interviewees were often quick to explain that the terrorist was not a Muslim and thereby created a boundary between the deviant (i.e. the terrorist) and other Muslims.

“It's almost like they [the terrorists] are not Muslim in the sense that if they did that [commit acts of terrorism], they can't have been Muslim because we don't promote that kind of thing. We don't say that "oh, you should go around and you should bomb people
or you should do something". So then when you sit there and you see news, and it's like, "oh, a Muslim person", and you just kind of like, it can't have been because you can't do that if you're a Muslim.” – Interviewee L

Participants explained that the act of terrorism is prohibited by Islam and that performing such acts is sufficient cause to no longer be regarded as a Muslim. Interviewees were certain to mention that their religion would never approve of any form of terrorism and that it strongly condemns violence. They explained that Islam can therefore not be blamed for the terrorist’s actions. The factors that led up to Abedi committing an act of terrorism were always outside the realm of religion. He was placed in different social group that had nothing to do with Islam. The terrorist was said to be mentally ill and a drug addict. For example, Interviewee F explains:

“So that's [the blame for his actions] on his state of mind, not on his religion.” – Interviewee F

Interviewees placed the terrorist in different social categories, all of which were not ‘Muslim’. Everything that was said about the terrorist himself pointed to him not being a Muslim. When the participants said that the terrorist could not have been Muslim due to his actions, they removed him from their social group. Placing Abedi in other social groups emphasized the differentiation from Islam even further. More theoretically, there is a strong differentiation made between the undesirable in-group member (i.e. the terrorist) and likable in-group members (i.e. ‘good’ Muslims). This differentiation is made by removing the terrorist from the in-group and stating that members of the in-group are not like that individual. By taking away the social identity of Muslim from the terrorist, the rest of the in-group does not suffer from the terrorist’s actions. Indeed, the connection between Islam and terrorism cannot be made if the terrorist is not a Muslim. By removing the terrorist from the in-group the evidence for the link is removed. Therefore, the group’s evaluation does not change and hence the image of the rest of the group remains unharmed. Thus, by arguing that the terrorist is by no means a Muslim, interviewees protected the in-group from the negative influence the terrorist’s behaviour caused. It is far more difficult to retrieve a positive sense of self if a member of the own social group of Muslims commits an extremely violent act. By labelling the terrorist as a non-Muslim, the image of the in-group remains unharmed. Also, the positive characteristics of the group can still be ascribed to the group because the deviant is removed from the in-group.
Social creativity
The findings further show that participants used the collective strategy of social creativity to enhance the evaluation of their social group. One of the ways in which Muslims used social creativity was through stressing an alternative positive characteristic of the in-group. Peacefulness was emphasized as a valued characteristic of Islam. A large majority of the participants explained that Islam is a very peaceful religion that teaches kindness and opposes violence.

“I kind of explained to them [non-Muslim acquaintances] that it's peace to me. Because I wasn't always so close to my religion but as I became close to it, it just brought more peace to me so for me it's like I can't even see it as a religion that is about violence and everything when it has brought me so together as a person.” – Interviewee B

“And in the Quran, it says, I need to mention the verse, it says, and this is the thing that most people forget, if you help one human, it's as you save entire humanity. But if you kill one human, as if you kill entire humanity, and that, you know, verse itself reveals everything about Islam.” – Interviewee Q

The verse mentioned by Interviewee Q was recited by multiple participants and seen as important evidence for the peacefulness of the religion. It was often used to emphasize that Islam values human live above all else and that it strongly condemns all forms of violence against human beings. By focusing on the peaceful aspects of Islam, participants did not only deny the accusation of Islamophobic individuals that their religion promotes violence, they also changed the dimension of comparison. By changing the characteristic that is compared, they used the first sub-category of social creativity. The focus of the comparison was shifted away from the violence, towards the peaceful nature of their religion. By reciting verses that promote non-violent behaviour, the participants emphasized the distinctiveness of Islam in terms of promoting peace. Hereby, the characteristic that is evaluated changed from the violent individual to the overall peacefulness of the religion. This overall peacefulness, then, could bring positive distinctness from other groups and thereby bring individuals belonging to the group a positive social identity.
Further, the third sub-category of social creativity was also used as interviewees focussed on a negative out-group to compare the in-group with. Every interviewee mentioned the media in a negative way. News outlets would unrightfully portray Islam as a violent religion and brainwash the people by constantly connecting the word ‘Muslim’ to the word ‘terrorist’. The media was said to report in an unjust manner because it would have a strong negative bias towards Muslims in general and this would be especially obvious in cases of terrorism.

“So I always think to myself, it is the media. What they like to do is, they like to manipulate the minds of people, they're not consistent, and have, they express a double standard. When it's a Muslim they're more likely to report it, they're more like to, let's say, report it to the wider public. When it's more like, when it's someone else who's not Muslim, it's more less coverage about it, and more likely to give more excuses about it. So we've seen double standards here, so from the media.” – Interviewee N

By criticizing the work of the media, participants delegitimized the media’s reporting. This protects the in-groups social identity in three ways. First of all, the connection between the attacker and Islam is weakened even more because the outlets that confirmed the religion of the terrorist are portrayed as illegitimate. Secondly, calling out the media on unfair treatment helps to dismantle the argument that Islam promotes terrorism. By attacking the source of information that would support this statement, participants illustrate that any claims against Islam or the Muslim community are invalid. Thirdly, depicting the media very negatively can be seen as a form of social creativity that protects the status of the in-group. Participants showed that their in-group is not the problem, but that the media are the ones who are really at fault. When they describe the media as a problematic actor that only hurts the people it writes about, they create a negatively evaluated group ‘the media’ that consists of all media outlets. The participants can then claim that their group is not as bad as the media portrays it to be, and not as problematic as the media itself. The media is used as the out-group in an implicit comparison with the own in-group. This comparison in favour of the in-group makes the social group of Muslims becomes positively distinct from the social group ‘the media’ (i.e. the out-group). By comparing the in-group with a problematic out-group, the in-group gets placed relatively high on the social scale, making the social identity more favourable.

The same social creativity strategy that was used in regards to the media was applied to Islamophobic people. The anti-Islam comments made by Islamophobic people could be brushed
off by labelling the people who made them as ignorant. Participants placed Islamophobic individuals in a social group and categorized the group as ignorant.

“I just think to myself "the media itself are stupid". And the people who believe them are fools, because they're deluded and they're lacking, obviously, a wider perspective.”
– Interviewee N

“When I see these hate comments I just think to myself, I just feel sorry for them because of lack of education. They don't know, because they're actually ignorant” – Interviewee N

Labelling Islamophobic people as ignorant makes their opinion worthless and therefore their comments do not hurt the image of Islam or Muslims. Interviewee A explains this when she says:

“Yeah, the name-calling stuff. But it doesn't hurt me, I feel sorry for them. They're ignorant. And they're making, they're not laughing at me, they making me feel sorry for them. If somebody's ignorant and they're showing lack of knowledge, and they think they are actually trying to disturb you, they're ruining their own image. They're being a laughing stock themselves. Because when you're educated and you're decent, you wouldn't do such thing, you wouldn't hate people anyway in general. So that's why I said, the people, it's about, it's not about me now, I think. I, I see it's not about me, if I, if I'm kind to somebody who have something negative about Islam or Muslim and they try to put me in the same image, I've got nothing to do with it.” – Interviewee A

Whenever someone verbally abuses Muslims based on their religious identity, those comments can be discarded as insignificant because of the ignorance ascribed to the abuser. If the verbal abuse can be discarded, the Islamophobic comments do not affect the evaluation of the social identity on which those comments are based. Moreover, by creating this ignorant group, the in-group has a new out-group to compare itself with. This comparison would lead to the in-group as a more favourable social group. When comparing Islamophobic people to Muslims, Muslims are more positively evaluated in terms of knowledge, which strengthens the positive distinctiveness of their social identity. Belonging to a positively evaluated social group also strengthens the self-image of Muslims.
Social competition
There was no evidence found for social competition. According to the theory, if Muslims would have used social competition, they would reverse the position of their own group with the out-group on a salient dimension. However, Muslims did not seem to reverse the roles of Muslims and non-Muslims. They did challenge the position of their own social group, but did not negatively evaluate all non-Muslims in the process. The most obvious salient dimension in the context of a recent terrorist attack would be being prone to violence or terrorism, but no one stated that non-Muslims are more prone to terrorism or violence than Muslims. Muslims did not engage in direct competition with all non-Muslims but compared themselves with selected sub-groups in society that were more negatively evaluated than the in-group (i.e. media and ignorant people). Thus, they used social creativity rather than social competition.

Mancunian identity
So far, the analysis focussed on Muslims’ social identity retrieved from their religion. However, participants did not only talk about their Muslim identity, they expressed that they belonged to other social groups as well. Multiple Muslims felt like they were also part of the social group Mancunians (i.e. people from Manchester). This co-existence of different social identities is possible because people have multiple social identities and the context determines which one is most explicit at that time (Demmers, 2012). In the context of Islamophobia, the Muslim social identity becomes most explicit. However, the attack also brought about situations in which being Mancunian was the most meaningful social identity of Muslims.

Situations where being Mancunian was more prominent than being Muslim were evoked by the positive effects the attack brought about. A majority of the interviewees described that the attack did lead to support for the Muslim community and unity among all Mancunians. Interviewees described how the Muslim community received support in the form of cards and messages of solidarity, and how Manchester’s population united as one against terrorism. In this context of support and unity the sense of self derived from living in Manchester became more salient. When interviewees described the positive reactions after the attack, they disclosed their Mancunian identity as well. When interviewees spoke of the unity after the attack they referred to themselves as Mancunian. For example, Interviewee N said about the vigil on Saint Ann’s square:
“We all got together, we all condemned it. We're all united.” – Interviewee N

Interviewee L explains similar feelings of unity:

“I think that's the thing about Manchester, regardless of what happens, it's only a small minority that don't like it, that are like, you know, so against Muslims and so against people of different religions, and different races, different cultures. And I think for a lot of us, for a majority of us, we stick together.” – Interviewee L

The ‘we’ in both quotes refers to the citizens of Manchester and interviewee N and L thereby refer to themselves as part of this collective. They clearly identified themselves as Mancunian. This feeling of being part of Manchester’s wider community was felt by a lot of participants. Moreover, the sense of belonging to the social group of Mancunians was also made explicit whenever people referred to Manchester as their home. Most of the interviewees grew up in Manchester and felt like the city was their home. The city was therefore important to them, despite the Islamophobia, Manchester was a part of their identity.

“Manchester will always be home.” – Interviewee G

Even though participants experienced exclusion and bad treatment in Manchester based on their Muslim identity, they also felt united and supported by the population of Manchester. This coexistence between experiencing Islamophobia and experiencing support was made possible though the differentiation between Islamophobic people and the other Mancunians. Participants stated that Mancunians were on average friendly towards Muslims and that it was only a minority of Manchester’s population that saw Muslims as problematic.
CONCLUSION

This research focussed on the effect of the Manchester Arena bombing that took place on the 21st of May, 2017. The attack took the lives of 23 people and wounded dozens more. Abedi, the perpetrator, committed this horrendous act in the name of Islam. In the weeks after the attack hate crimes and Islamophobia rose. It was assumed that the combination of labelling the Manchester Arena bombing as an act of Islamic terrorism and the rise in Islamophobia would affect Muslims’ social identity. This subject was studied because it was deemed important to understand how the members of the religious group that is associated with the terrorist (i.e. Muslims) understand their own social membership to this social group. Therefore, the following research question was asked: How did Muslims in Manchester react to the Manchester Arena bombing of 2017 in terms of personal understanding of their social identity and how did they protect this social identity? The research was able to find an answer to this question. In sum, it was shown that Muslims valued their religion and that their membership attached to this religion was highly important to their sense of self. Being Muslim was seen as an unchangeable part of their identity. Leaving the in-group was experienced as undesirable and impossible. After the attack Muslims continued to see their religion as peaceful and their social identity as favourable. Muslims were able to uphold the value of their religious social identity by using the black sheep effect and social creativity. By removing the terrorist from the in-group, emphasizing the peacefulness of their religion, and comparing the in-group with worse out-groups, Muslims were able to keep the evaluation of their social identity favourable.

The results will now be summarized in more detail. Muslims’ initial reaction was very emotional with strong feelings of shock about what had happened and fear for what was to come. Retaliation against the Muslim community was expected to place. Unfortunately this backlash took indeed place. Similarly to other inquiries about the effect of terrorism (Allen and Nielson, 2002; Bartholomew, 2016; Ben-Ezra et al., 2017; Hussain and Bagguley, 2012; Sheridan, 2006; Steele et al., 2019), the present study found a strong increase of Islamophobia after the terrorist attack. The Manchester Arena bombing led non-Muslims to treat Muslims disrespectfully because of their religion. The present study, like Allen and Nielson (2002), also found that the visual characteristics of Muslims were important to how much Islamophobia they had to endure. In the aftermath of the attack Muslims were important to how much Islamophobia they had to endure. In the aftermath of the attack Muslims were treated as members of a social group rather than as unique individuals. Moreover, the participants themselves also acted based on their social group membership. This behaviour was the result of reification, whereby individuals
become more aware of their social identity due to conflict. Due to fear for retaliation and knowledge of the increase in Islamophobia, Muslims behaved differently after bombing. Participants restricted their movements or exaggerated good behaviour because they were conscious of being seen as a representative of the Muslim community. Muslims were very aware of the guilt that was ascribed to Muslims as a social group and of the (violent) Islamophobic encounters this might trigger. However, despite the negative evaluation of their in-group, Muslims never left their social group or became less religious. None of the participants used individual mobility as a strategy to cope with the negative evaluation. The absence of individual mobility is in line with other studies (Chapman, 2010; Fisher et al., 2010; Uz and Kemmelmeier, 2014) that also showed that individual mobility is an undesirable strategy for Muslims. Moreover, for some participants Islam became an even more important part of the self. Muslims spoke, read, and thought more about their religion and came to stronger identify themselves with it. This result is similar to the findings of other studies (Chapman, 2016; Hussain and Bagguley, 2012; Mythen et al., 2009) that also showed that Islamophobia reinforces Muslims’ social identity. Instead of using individual mobility, Muslims in Manchester used the black sheep effect and the social creativity strategy to protect their social identity. Individual mobility and social competition were not used to cope with the attack and its aftermath. The black sheep effect was carried out through rejection of the deviant, in this case the terrorist. Committing acts of terrorism was seen as a more than sufficient cause to remove Abedi from the in-group. The value of the Muslim social identity was uphold by distancing the in-group from the terrorist. If the terrorist is not part of the group, he cannot hurt the image of the group. Furthermore, social creativity was used in two ways. Muslims used the first sub-strategy of changing the characteristic of evaluation and the third sub-strategy of changing the out-group with which the in-group is evaluated. Muslims repeatedly emphasized the peacefulness of their religion. They thereby focussed on a positive characteristic of their in-group in order to retrieve positive distinctiveness from other social groups. They also focussed on out-groups (i.e. the media and ignorant people) that were in comparison worse off than their own group. This provided their in-group with more positive distinctiveness and a relatively higher status. In turn, membership to the group remained favourable because membership still led to a positive sense of self. There was no evidence found for the use of social competition. This might be because it was unnecessary to use this strategy due to the sufficient use of other strategies. Surprisingly, Muslims’ identity as Mancunian also became very important to them after the attack. This identity became especially explicit when participants talked about the support and unity that followed the attack. In these contexts, being a Mancunian was more
relevant than being Muslim. While other studies found that terrorism negatively affected Muslims’ identification with the Western society in which they live (Elsayes and De Grip, 2018; Gould and Klor, 2014; Kunst et al., 2012), this study did not find such results. Muslims in this study kept feeling connected to Manchester. This difference in findings might be due to the type of Western identity that was studied. The studies of Elsayes and De Grip (2018), Gould and Klor (2014), and Kunst et al. (2012) all looked at the effect on national engagement, while this study touched upon a more local identity. Perhaps Muslims’ social identity as citizens of a city is less strongly affected by terrorism than Muslims’ national social identity. Muslims explained that they felt connected to other Mancunians through the support they received and the signs of unity such as the gathering on Saint Ann’s square. Support from and unity with the whole of Britain might be harder to experience as there are no national gatherings. To conclude the outcome of the research, Muslims coped with the attack and its aftermath by using collective social strategies that protected the positive distinctiveness of the group. Hence, the in-group remained a favourable group to be a member of. Leaving the religion was therefore not necessary and was also expressed as undesirable.

In order to find an answer to the research question fieldwork in Manchester was conducted. It was initially difficult to enter the field and find participants, and this process was also highly dependent on the cooperation of gatekeepers. Being a female researcher also added extra complications to meeting male participants. Nevertheless, eventually the fieldwork was finished successfully as a series of fruitful interviews has been conducted. A total of sixteen people have been interviewed over the course of a month. Participants all identified as Muslim, they were all between the ages of 18 and 33, most were born in Manchester, a large majority was higher educated, and a small majority was female. The interviews were all qualitative and based on the narrative interviews method. This method provided in-dept information about the life circumstances of Muslims in Manchester. It allowed participants to thoroughly explain (1) how they perceived the bombing and its aftermath, and (2) how this affected them personally. This recount of life in the period around the attack produced highly personal stories that showed how people made sense of the events that took place on the 22nd of May and the months afterwards. The method allowed participants to tell their story of events and thereby produced very valuable and personal data on the subject of inquiry. These stories were later transcribed, coded, and analysed using NVivo. The theoretical framework that was used to analyse this data consisted of the social identity theory. This theory suggests that a positive evaluation of the in-group is crucial for individuals because it leads to an essential positive sense of self. The act of
terrorism committed in the name of Islam and the rise in Islamophobia would suggest that the image of the in-group is damaged. It would therefore be necessary for Muslims to react in order to retrieve a positive sense of self. The theory suggests multiple strategies: individual mobility, social creativity, and social competition. The black sheep effect was added as a possible strategy. The data showed that multiple of these strategies were used. Overall, the social identity theory proved to be a useful tool in understanding the effect of terrorism and Islamophobia on social identity of Muslims. Especially social creativity and the black sheep effect were valuable in analysing Muslims’ reactions to Islamic terrorism and its aftermath.

While the results of this research are deemed significant and of great importance to understanding of the effect of Islamic terrorism on Muslims’ social identity, it should be noted that the study has its limitations. Firstly, the limited scope of this research did not allow for a large sample and could not include Muslims from all backgrounds. Hence, the sample was not representative of Manchester’s Muslim population. It contains a bias towards higher educated, young Muslims who were members of Islamic organizations. This may have affected the findings because this group might respond in a specific manner to the attack and its aftermath. For instance, Elsayed and De Grip (2018) found that especially higher educated Muslims’ attitudes towards integration worsened after terrorism took place because this group experienced more discrimination and lived in less segregated areas with less social support from the own ethnic community. Since this study mainly includes higher educated Muslims, this study’s findings are perhaps more significant than they might have been if Muslims of all education levels were included. Future studies could include a more diverse and more representative group of people in their sample in order to see if lower educated Muslims experience the same amount of Islamophobia and use similar social strategies to protect their social identity after an Islamic terrorist attack.

Secondly, due to the focus of the research on the Muslim population in Manchester, the only people who participated in this research were individuals who identified as Muslim at the time of the fieldwork, that is two years after the Arena bombing. Therefore, the research does not include individuals who identified as Muslim before the attack and changed this identification. Given that the current research found that religion is seen as a core part of Muslims’ identity and that previously conducted studies (Chapman, 2010; Fisher et al., 2010; Uz and Kemmelmeier, 2014) have shown that Muslims are unlikely to use individual mobility, it is unlikely that a lot of people who were religious prior to the bombing identified as Muslim and
stopped identifying as such after the attack. However, the possibility that such changes in identification took place cannot be ruled out. There might be individuals who chose to leave the in-group because of the negative evaluation it got after the bombing. Some participants in the current research also mentioned that they thought that Muslims who were not strongly religious might become even less religious after the attack. Further research should look into this possibility.
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