Outspoken is a UNC Charlotte speaker series focused towards the LGBTQ+ community. It is focused on supporting, educating, and providing a positive forum for discussion about issues that may not hit the main stream. This year’s Outspoken was focused towards the queer Muslim community with speaker Samra Habib a queer Muslim woman who started her own queer Muslim photo project called, Just Me and Allah. The event was sponsored by several organizations including the Women’s and Gender Studies Department, The Counseling Center, The Chancellor’s Diversity Challenge Fund, The 49er Family Fund, Department of Philosophy, Center for Professional and Applied Ethics, and TownePlace Suites Marriot in University Area. The project is focused on unraveling this group of individuals who seem absent from all media and nonexistent. The photos are taken all around the world and are attached with stories about the individuals that express their true identity accompanied with their religion and queerness.

Having been to every Outspoken since my college career began, I was very excited to attend my now third series since I had enjoyed the previous two so much. This year’s event was unlike the other two Outspoken events I have been to because the previous two years were based around comedy and in both cases the individuals were lively and entertaining, in comparison to this year’s event which was a little more focused on the serious issues and not as much of a discussion where the audience could feed off the speaker. With that said the event was still enjoyable and I liked the different vibe that came from the event and can’t wait to see the future Outspoken speakers and how they interact with others. Although I am neither queer or Muslim, I see the true need to stray away from the binary images pushed by media. I think this program always related to the Gender Excellence Learning Community because we have a very diverse group of students, many of which struggle with fitting into the binary that the media presents. Whether that be queer students, Muslim students, transgender students, or any other oppressed group, it is nice to present students at UNC Charlotte with a wider variety of ‘categories’ that just the typical ones. Since this class is directed at freshman I think it is also important to have freshman feel safe and like they have a place if they are part of an oppressed group. High schools more often than not do not provide a diverse and safe place for students to express themselves, and having programs like this differentiate college. This program specifically was also great for feminist and activist freshman to see because it is a true example of someone who is using activism to change the main stream. Samra wanted to start this project not because there is a lot of money in it or benefit, but because she saw the need to reveal this undiscovered group and show their existence, something that was all feel at times. I know in the Learning Community as a freshman I often struggled with understanding how activism worked and how one even fathomed getting started with an activist project. Being an activist can be scary and far stretched sometimes but Samra’s simple project revolutionized the identities of queer Muslims.

I learned from this event that there was a confliction between someone who identifies as both Muslim and queer. Being neither I have never thought about the struggle between ones religion and one’s identity sexually. I also learned that the Muslim faith is not so strict, although I had already seen this before I never processed it. Both American and white, I don’t often see different depictions of the Muslim faith other than the extremist views, so it was both refreshing and insightful to learn more about the Muslim faith. I also learned about who Allah is. Again, I am not Muslim so I have never had an interest in the Muslim faith until now. I find it so interesting that the depictions of Allah that I heard talking to Muslim people at my university differed so much from the main stream. I though the Muslim faith was strict and that Allah had a limited scope of the individuals he sought out to be his followers, when I heard over and over that Allah is a god that teaches love and acceptance. Lastly, I learned to have a wider scope of what identities can overlap. Even with queer individuals who break the binary, they still hold their own binary in which stereotypes are withheld. I now have been introduced to something that so many people view as two conflicting identities, when in reality your multiple identities do not have to conflict. This information can be useful in my future because it can be a talking point for individuals who claim to know these identities and conflict and for individuals who may need help validating their identities. Learning information like this is also just good to know, it broadens one’s abilities see through different lenses. Something additional that I will remember about the event is that a student in our class identifies as both Muslim and queer just like Samra and has been following her works for a while. It was so heartwarming to see how truly excited she was to meet Samra and be in the presence of someone who shares so much in common with her.

I will clearly remember Samra herself because she is so soft spoken and intelligent and exactly the opposite of what the media is telling us. I had the opportunity to talk with her in person at the photo gallery the night before the event and it was truly eye opening to hear her journey and how she decided that this was the path for her. I would suggest this event to classmates and friends and I have in the past and will continue! I think Outspoken is one of the better events on campus and provides many lenses and comedies that are not heard by the main stream. I like to surround myself with people who are open to learning about new perspectives even if those perspectives are not an everyday part of their lives. This event allows people to see and hear oppressed groups flourish and do good and I truly think that it is something that all students should try at least once.