Muslim gender and sexual minorities have in the last decade displayed unprecedented visibility and political activism, through both self-representations and grassroots organizing in diasporic and local contexts. Consequently, a paradigmatic shift in the way queer genders and sexualities in Muslim contexts are studied is taking place in the academy.

In the last decade, we began to glimpse what is perhaps a uniquely new field of enquiry, that is, scholarship that emerges from the juncture of Islamic and queer/sexuality studies. The traditionally institutionalized field of Islamic Studies has not had an easy relationship with this emergent fusion and this new field is yet to be institutionalized in a process similar to the institutionalization of women’s, gender and sexuality studies. Similarly, Queer Studies, in its current institutional configuration is also not unproblematically fusible with queer Islamic studies, or with queer Muslim scholarship, largely because sometimes, all that “queer” denotes in the latter is “gender and sexual minority persons,” who for reasons of cultural specificity may not be suitably labeled “gay” or “lesbian.” Often, in queer Islamic thought, there is not an outright rejection of the gender binary or even of normativity, nor is there an outright rejection of sexual identification or an essentialist view of sexuality and orientation, all of which tend to characterize queer discourse in Western contexts. This is necessitated by the fact that scholars who engage with Islam and gender and sexual diversity from a theological perspective cannot wholly circumvent the gender binary so evident in both scripture and living cultures of Islam. Additionally, the argument regarding the innateness of homosexuality and transgenderism is central to the theological rebuttals of prohibition (Bin Jahangir 2010, Kugle 2010), which traditionally relies on constructing homosexuality not as an orientation/identity but a chosen behavior (Abdul-Latif and Bin Jahangir 2012, Bin Jahangir 2010, Kelly 2010b, Zollner 2010). Nonetheless, Queer Islamic Studies has certainly earned its “queer” stripes, in that it builds on a collage of socio-cultural studies that highlight a gender and sexual continuum which is anything
but privileging of gender and (hetero)sexual normativity, and one which spans 1,400 years of Muslim cultures across vast geographic and temporal expanses.

Until recently, most scholars writing on the subject of Muslim sexualities were from Western and secular backgrounds. A perusal of Frédéric Lagrange’s list of secondary references on this topic in this encyclopedia is a case in point (Lagrange 2003). Of course that is not to say that this scholarship holds any more or less value or analytical accuracy than writings carried out by (believing) Muslim gender and/or sexual minority scholars themselves. However, Islamic feminism of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century impacted the fields of gender and sexuality studies relevant to Islamic cultures, fostering queer Muslim scholarship. This is discussed in greater detail later. Another factor that has contributed to the rise of a queer Islamic studies framework can be seen in the rising visibility of queer Muslim counter cultures, both in diaspora and in homelands. There is an awakening across borders of a Muslim queer identity, and this has led to the activation of the “inclusive mosque” and the queer Muslim activist, vis-à-vis scholar. These two notable developments have led to a shift in research emphasis, methodologies, approaches and outcomes and will also be discussed in greater detail later.

The last decade’s most remarkable outcome of the intersection of sexuality, queer and Islamic studies can be found in the emergent scholarly works engaging with Islamic theologies and the permissibility of gender and sexual diversity therein. While discussions of the permissibility of same-sex relations from a theological perspective in Abbasid and Andalusian texts were in circulation (Habib 2007), a revival and queering of such approaches was first revisited by Camilla Adang (2003) in her case-study on Ibn Hazm, and by Scott Kugle in his chapters in Omid Safi’s collections Progressive Muslims (2003) and Voices of Islam (2007). Additional contributions in this area include several chapters in the two-volume edited collection Islam and Homosexuality (Habib 2010, Zollner 2010, Zanghellini 2010, Bin Jahangir 2010, Kelly 2010b, Musić 2010), and Scott Kugle’s book-length theological treatise Homosexuality in Islam (2010). Mohsin Hendricks also contributed a seminal article on queer acceptance in Islam (2010), while Vanja Hamzić produced an article on Human Rights Law and “Islamic legal and social ethos” (2011). Mohamad Zahed published the book Le Coran et la Chair in 2012.

What is noteworthy is how authors from various disciplines, deploying a variety of methodologies and relying on differing textual evidences, often converged on the same result: this being that same-sex attractions