

***Clip: ITV Pridecast w/ Mohsin Zaidi***

**Name: ITV Pridecast w/ Mohsin Zaidi**

**Mohsin** **00:00:00:20**

This is a story about queer Muslim identity, but at its core, it's a story about family, and it's a story about relationships, and it's a story about nuance. I think that so much of the time we are politically divided at the moment, and we're told we should be one thing or the other, that we can't be both. And if anything, I hope that what this story illustrates is that all of us live in the grey. None of us live in the black or the white.

**Liam** **00:00:26:02**

Welcome to Pridecast. This is a podcast about all things LGBTQ+ brought to you by ITV. During the show, we chat about being proud to be LGBTQ+ today. We speak to people from across the community to find out where they are on their journey and where they're headed. We'll also keep you updated on the latest LGBTQ+ news and the things that matter to you. This is the ITV Pridecast.

**Liam** **00:00:58:18**

Hello there everyone, and welcome to the latest ITV Pridecast. Now on this episode I catch up with award winning author Mohsin Zaidi. In 2020, Mohsin rose to prominence after the publication of his memoir *A Dutiful Boy*. In it, he shares his journey of coming to terms with being a gay Muslim. As well as exploring the topics of race and sexuality, Mohsin also looks at the issue of class and how he navigated growing up in a poor part of London to become the first person from his school to go to Oxford University. I caught up with him earlier this summer off the back of him attending Pride in New York, where he now lives.

**Liam** **00:01:51:11**

Thank you very much for doing this today. I really appreciate it. And I know you've had it in the diary for a little while. So yeah, I've been really looking forward to kind of catching up and chatting with you really.

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**Mohsin** **00:01:59:04**  
Thank you for inviting me on.

**Liam** **00:02:01:08**  
No, no problem at all. Um, well, to start with, I mean, how is your day going so far? So we were just discussing there how you're in New York and it's around about 11:00. It's about 4PM British time. Yeah, how's the morning so far?

**Mohsin** **00:02:16:09**  
Oh. It's great. It was pride weekend here, just gone. And that was our kind of second summer in the city, our first pride, because last year we couldn't really we couldn't really attend. And so it's been a lovely weekend and it's been a nice kind of, I guess experience as new New Yorkers to see what it's like here during Pride Month.

**Liam** **00:02:41:10**  
Is it very different to what you'd expect in London?

**Mohsin** **00:02:44:16**  
No, I think it's equally celebratory. And there's lots going on all over the place the whole month. Uh, so no, I'd say it's similar in that respect.

**Liam** **00:02:56:17**  
Ah no, that's nice to hear. It's at the moment, all I ever seen to talk to people about is actually them celebrating pride, which is, of course, wonderful. And I kind of feel as well it's the month where not only to celebrate, isn't it? It's also to be kind of reminiscent of those that have gone before us and, you know, the kind of struggles that they had and of course, the struggles that continue to go on as well.

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**Mohsin**

**00:03:16:23**

Yeah, I think so. I mean, I think one of the challenges with pride is it started off as a protest, and I think it's fair to say that in most places that it is celebrated at the same scale that it is in places like London, New York, there's a risk that it's becoming too much of a party and not enough of a protest or not enough of a recognition of the fact that the majority of queer people in the world live in places where it's unsafe or indeed illegal for them to be who they are. So, yeah, I mean, that is an inherent tension, I think. And if it were up to me, I would try and pivot back towards a more political movement.

**Liam**

**00:04:03:03**

I think that is a view shared by a lot of people, actually. And I think it's one of those, isn't it, where, um, you know, when you see the kind of struggles that people went through in our history, I think we can take for granted now as to where we are. And it's, um, yeah, it's something that has crossed my mind many a times actually, that it's so important that we don't forget. And as I said before, you know, we're in we're still, you know, especially at the moment. I mean, I know you're in America now, but, you know, we're just, uh, in the throes of an election in the UK, of course, there will be one in America coming up. And this is, you know, the issues that face us today are still as political as they were, you know, 20, 30 years ago.

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**Mohsin**

**00:04:46:05**

Yeah. And I think it's not just in our history. I think that's the bit that I find hard sometimes is when you look at coverage of pride in the kind of broadsheet newspapers. They talk about the Stonewall riots, and they talk about historical figures, uh, that have paved the way for today. And whilst I definitely believe that our history is an important part of our heritage and one to be recognised and to be and for people to be educated on, there is so much still to fight for, and there are so many activists who are working today in countries where their lives are at risk and we don't know who they are. And to me, it seems a shame that we don't know who they are because they should be celebrated and supported globally. And they're not.

**Liam**

**00:05:33:22**

Oh, no, indeed there. And I think one of the things that you're touching on there actually is that when we think of people from across the world and who might be going through the LGBTQ+ struggles that, you know, we can we can all kind of vouch for there, you know, there's often areas of intersectionality, I think, that we can overlook and we can forget sometimes, don't we? And that seems to be, I think, I suppose, part of the, um, part of the...I was going to say part of the protest, but part of the forward thinking when it comes to LGBTQ+ rights now, in seeing people as part of lots of things, it's their intersectionalities that exists as well as their, you know, being an LGBTQ+ person.

**Mohsin**

**00:06:17:08**

Yeah. I don't think that, uh, any of us are defined by just one characteristic. I don't think any of us is made up of just one thing. Um, equally, I don't think that we fit neatly into separate boxes either. Um, my faith and my race, for example, are just as important a part of me as my sexuality, albeit that I wouldn't consider myself a practicing Muslim. But culturally I am. And all of these things make up the ingredients of who I am. And so trying to remove one and isolate it would be like trying to remove the egg from a baked cake.

***Clip: ITV Pridecast w/ Mohsin Zaidi***

**Liam** **00:06:56:02**

Yeah. What a lovely description there. And, um, I wanted to chat with you about *A Dutiful Boy*, which you wrote now a good while ago, isn't it? Actually, it's, when did it-- when was it, um, published?

**Mohsin** **00:07:12:09**

So the paperback came out in 2021.

**Liam** **00:07:14:05**

Wow. And so I because I seem to recall, um, was it during lockdown that you that it was or it roundabout at that moment wasn't it when it came out?

**Mohsin** **00:07:24:19**

Yeah, it was. It was supposed to be published in May 2020 and then Covid hit and so it got pushed back to August. And it was, yeah, in the middle of lockdown, which was a, uh, a bizarre experience, but in some ways, for the book at least, a positive one, because it probably meant it got more attention than it otherwise might have done.

**Liam** **00:07:45:14**

For anyone that's listening to this actually, that's never read the book. Uh, it's kind of a memoir, isn't it of your kind of early life and then kind of coming to terms with, with your sexuality, as you know, and kind of as we were discussing there, the intersectionality of life, really. And, um, yeah. What was it like to be able to pen it all down? Because I suppose, you know, when you hear people talk about, you know, doing their own memoirs, it can be quite cathartic, really.

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**Mohsin**

**00:08:14:08**

So, yeah, the book is about, among other things, race, faith, sexuality and class. Uh, because I grew up in Walthamstow, in public housing, in a council house and, uh, was raised in a strict religious household, a Muslim household, um, went to a local comprehensive school that was doing quite badly and then ended up becoming the first person from my school to go to Oxford, where I was routinely the only non-white person in a room. And so the idea is that I was trying to write about all of these different parts of my identity and the ways that they interacted with one another and with the world. Um, I the idea of writing being cathartic is, I don't know, I find it a bit indulgent and I maybe it was, maybe it was cathartic, maybe it's indulgent to have written a memoir in your early 30s. I think that writing at its best is not just about the person. In fact, it's probably not about the person very much at all. And my intention was to try and tell a broader story about us as people, us as British people. And so if the book has done a good job, then it doesn't matter whether you're a queer brown Muslim from Walthamstow or a upper middle class, heterosexual, cisgendered white man from Surrey, uh, there should be something for the book -- for you in the book.

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**Liam**

**00:09:44:19**

You know, when I read it, it was a real, um, not only an eye opener, a lesson of life I thought in many ways. And actually, I've got it right here, actually. And I read it quite a while ago, and I was like, flicking through just last night, actually, just to remind me of some of the, the stories that you had in there and, you know, on the, on the front of the book, you know, "an emotional roller coaster, heartfelt and heartbreaking". And I think that kind of sums it up in many ways. You know, that you do go on...there's lots of the humour that we get from life in there, but also, you know, the gut wrenching moments of struggle and, and what you went through. And that's not all just to do with sexuality or faith or anything like that. You like you mentioned there in terms of, you know, the kind of growing up in quite a poor environment that, you know, you do definitely go on a roller coaster, that's for sure when you read it.

**Mohsin**

**00:10:35:17**

Yeah, I think the... I can't say that the intention was to take the, the reader on a, on that sort of roller coaster type journey. I think the intention was to hopefully tell a good story and have people learn something from it. Um, the... I suppose at its heart a good story is one that takes you along with it. And so hopefully the roller coaster is really just a euphemism for a story that you want to keep listening to or reading.

**Liam**

**00:11:08:01**

I mean, when you, uh, were growing up, I mean, from what I can tell, it seemed to be that you were very forward thinking. And I'm thinking of when I was reading the point where, um, you were getting ready to, to celebrate Eid and you wanted to help your mother cook, and your father didn't really want you to get involved, or it wasn't... you wasn't supposed to. And I suppose I felt through when I read the book, it felt like in many ways that you found yourself in situations where you were naturally the other, if that makes sense. I, you know, you felt like, you know, you felt like you wanted to go against the grain in, in a natural way, in many ways in some instances.

***Clip: ITV Pridecast w/ Mohsin Zaidi***

**Mohsin**

**00:11:49:12**

I don't know if it was an intentional action to go against the grain or to challenge. I think that my natural inclination is to be inquisitive and to question what it is that is being presented to me and why. And even at a young age when, you know, I was told actually, "because you are a boy, you shouldn't be in the kitchen" kind of instead of going, "okay, well, that makes sense to me" I kind of said, "well, why?" Um, and I, you know, I trained as a lawyer. I worked as a lawyer for 15 years. There is something, I guess, innate about the sense of fairness and equal treatment that runs deep in me. And that was probably why I was attracted to the law. But my instinct runs way beyond it, I think, and it becomes societal. So that's why one of the that's one of the reasons why class is so important to me. Because I think that fundamentally, we live in a deeply unfair society, and there are small instances of that that I write about in the book, and there are larger instances of that. But I think you're right. At its core, it was a sense of wanting to challenge something that I perceived to be somehow unfair or in some ways, people being treated differently for reasons that might not always be just.

**Liam**

**00:13:18:24**

What was...I mean, you know, we hear it in the book, of course, and how it was such a kind of a shock, I suppose, to you when you went to Oxford and, you know, you meet people who you've never, never had any association with before, and it must have been a real kind of, you know, I suppose you learnt a lot about yourself at that point as well, that you've perhaps never learned before in terms of, you know, that class system, that is very much in your face there I imagine when you witness that.



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**Mohsin**

**00:13:51:12**

I think in your face is probably the wrong way of putting it for me in my experience. I think for a lot of people it does work out that way. But for me it wasn't so in-your-face. It was much more pervasive. It was much more subtle. It was much more insidious in the sense that when I got to university, I didn't really know much about the class system. I didn't really know much about race, actually. I didn't know much about my place within British society and hierarchy. And I learnt that slowly and with, through experience, after experience where things would happen and I would learn something more about myself, is I realised that actually I was the other and I was treated like the other, and I was expected to behave like the other. And so by the time it really hit me, I was already an adult and carrying it all.

**Liam**

**00:14:41:20**

I imagine, you know, exhausting, really. And of course, when you're carrying those different layers, um, it kind of, um, covers you as your true self, doesn't it, really? And I imagine, yeah, you get to a point where it just you can't cope anymore, I imagine.

**Mohsin**

**00:15:01:08**

I definitely had, uh, that point arrive. I mean, the way I put it is my 18 year old shoulders were too young and too weak to be able to lift the gravity of the issues I was being confronted by. And so I, at university, had a mental breakdown. I ended up having to see a counsellor, um, for quite a while, and I almost got kicked out of university. So yes, there were, there was, there were moments where everything felt too hard and too heavy. But they... but I also learned ultimately to push through.

**Liam**

**00:15:41:04**

What made you, uh, want to practice law? Did you feel that... Was that a, you know, an expectation for you to want to practice that and...? or is that something that you naturally went into?

**Mohsin**

**00:15:51:17**

So kids from poor backgrounds are disproportionately more

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likely to choose law and medicine, mainly, I think, because they don't know what else is an option and because they are encouraged by their families, especially migrant families, to choose a profession. Because if you choose a profession, it will keep you safe or more likely to keep you safe. The problem with that, by the way, is that law and medicine are the two of the most competitive courses that you can apply for. Um, and I mean, I think the deeper problem is that it means that children, when they are picking what they do at university, are picking based on what they think they should do, rather than what might speak to them, rather than what might make their soul, you know, nourished, what might make their heart sing. Instead, they're doing the things that they think will keep them safe. And I think one of the things I did was pick law, because I believed it would keep me and my family safe, and in some ways it did. Um, it trained me in how to articulate defiance. It trained me in how to acknowledge and call out unequal treatment. And so it did teach me the rules of safety and how to navigate a society that is unequal. But it also robbed me of the ability to know myself because, when I think about it now, I loved history at university and I didn't do history at university, and I now I'm a writer and I wish I had read English. I would love to have spent my days reading plays and poems and novels and memoirs, And instead I read law because of safety. So, um, law was not a choice I would necessarily repeat in terms of studying, but in terms of...I mean, although I really enjoyed reading law, I should say, but practicing law was also something that I got a lot from and I don't regret for a moment. I think one of the biggest challenges we have in the UK with university is that you're expected to specialise straight out the gate, and I don't understand that. In America I think they do have a much better system where you are a generalist in your first year and then you kind of choose some a major and maybe a minor, but the whole system is designed for you to take courses in lots of different things. And I think between the ages of 18 and 22, what a wonderful way to start your adult life, to be able to be inquisitive, to be able to say, "oh, I'm going to go and learn about French wine. And then I'm also going to learn about Russian history, and I'm also going to learn about economics and see

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what really speaks to me". So I think that we should change the system to make our degrees more general in nature.

**Liam**

**00:18:56:00**

I suppose in a way there as well, when people are picking their degrees at the age of, you know, often 17 to go to start when they're 18, how do you really know exactly what you want to specialize in for, for that time? It's quite a lot of pressure isn't it really?

**Mohsin**

**00:19:11:19**

Absolutely, absolutely. I think it... I don't think it makes sense to ask 17 year olds to pick what they're going to do for the next 3 or 4 years, which will also have an impact on what they'll do for the next, you know, 40, 50 years.

**Liam**

**00:19:26:02**

Yeah. And I suppose in one way, you know, if you if you don't kind of follow through with it and enjoy it, it kind of puts that pressure on you to think, "oh, I've picked the wrong thing and I may have not done the right thing there", which is quite sad, isn't it, really? But do you do...do you still I mean, because you, you qualified as a barrister, didn't you? Was it a criminal barrister? And do you, do you still do that or has the writing kind of taken over that side of your life?

**Mohsin**

**00:19:53:01**

So I am still writing and I'm no longer a criminal barrister, but I work for a consulting firm here in New York, so I now have two jobs. Um, I've just finished my first play. Um, so I am still firmly writing, but I'm doing it alongside the other job.

**Liam**

**00:20:09:21**

Oh, fantastic. And what's the, uh, what's the playwriting world like? Is that going well?

***Clip: ITV Pridecast w/ Mohsin Zaidi***

**Mohsin**

**00:20:15:06**

Well, I'm early days. Very, very early days. I've just started sending the play out to people to read. So, um, we'll see. It's nerve wracking because I think, you know, all of the arts are such competitive fields and there are so many really talented people trying to get their work made, and I am hoping to be one of them.

**Liam**

**00:20:36:05**

Oh well. We will keep our fingers crossed for you, that's for sure.

**Mohsin**

**00:20:39:19**

Thank you.

**Liam**

**00:20:40:11**

Well, um, one of the things I wanted to discuss with you, um, was, I mean, as I when I say when I was reading the book, it was an emotional roller coaster, of course. And I loved at the end, actually, where, um, you and your partner at the time at Matthew, he, um, he features obviously for much of the book. And what I loved at the end is that you asked him to marry you and we never got to... he said yes, but we don't know did you get married in the end? That's, uh. But we waited to find out.

**Mohsin**

**00:21:10:15**

We did, and we're still together. It's funny, the number of people that are like "Oh, so are you still with Matthew?" And I'm like, "yes."

**Liam**

**00:21:19:23**

One of the things I loved about the book, and especially towards the end, was you taking him to meet your parents and, gosh, I mean, I think we can all visualise it when you when you're, you know, when you've written it. But to be in that moment, it must have been such a heart stopping moment when you're taking him to, to meet your folks and, um, what all of their reactions were going to be. But, you know, from reading it, I don't think you could have wished for a better reaction, could you?

***Clip: ITV Pridecast w/ Mohsin Zaidi***

**Mohsin**

**00:21:48:15**

It's interesting you used the phrase heart stopping, and I would probably argue it was heart starting. And what I mean by that is that up until that moment, so much of me had... so much of my heart, had always been in different places. So I fell in love with a man who my family refused to meet. I obviously love my family, and those two pieces could never be in the same room together, so to be able to bring him into that world was not only the uniting of different parts of my world, but it was the kind of true union of my love for all these different people in one place. It was the union of my heart actually as one whole thing. So it was exciting and it was terrifying and I'm glad I don't have to do it again.

**Liam**

**00:22:43:07**

Haha, no quite right! I mean, what a lovely sentiment there, you know, union of your heart there. You know, I'm sure for a lot of people who would listen to this, that you know, that they hope for something similar really. And um, you know, I suppose there as well from, you know, what I, you know, took from the book as well was the again and I've used this word a few times now, but the intersectionality there of your life, because, you know, you're referring to taking, you know, a white man, you know, not just a man home. It was a white man home. And I, you know, I imagine that, um, you know, as you're saying that dealing with the different layers, you know, that's a lot to, to kind of take on really and something that actually, you know, for a lot of I'm not just saying heteronormative society, but also, you know, society in general that they perhaps don't realize in many ways.

***Clip: ITV Pridecast w/ Mohsin Zaidi***

**Mohsin**

**00:23:34:03**

Yeah, I think that my parents, who were immigrants from Pakistan, when they got to the country, they were told in the way that the country treated them, both in political discourse, in access to economic opportunity, in the spaces that they were entitled to inhabit and the many spaces that they weren't within London, which is one of the richest cities in the world. Um, what that did was tell them that they did not belong. And so their reaction, as you might think is natural, is to hold on to things, the things that they knew and to protect their children from the threat of the other. And so I think sexuality or sexual difference was a threat to, to what they knew. And so they associated it with whiteness. So to bring home a white man as my partner was almost to vindicate all of the fears that they had. And so that was a very complicated thing to have to navigate. Interestingly, I think the fact that he was Irish helped because Irish people have an affinity with other communities that have faced oppression because they were also, their history. So their recent history, uh, is so associated with colonialism. So I do think that that helped. Ultimately, my mum and dad are loving people and Islam is a loving religion. And so they used that love to overcome their own prejudice.

***Clip: ITV Pridecast w/ Mohsin Zaidi***

**Liam**

**00:25:16:05**

I think that really shines through, actually. I really, really felt that when I was reading the book, uh, you know, the warmth of your family and you know, you can see the context there of, you know, the very strict perimeters that, um, that they live within, you know, of through religion and the like. But you can see that the love that they have for you and, you know, the way that they embrace Matthew at the end. I mean, I must admit you know, I don't have any qualms in saying this, but I filled up quite a few times in reading it like, you know, it was just so moving to read that. And, you know, for any LGBTQ+ person reading it, I'm sure they would feel the same. Um, it's a lovely coming together of, um, not only your family and Matthew, but also, you know, I suppose, a coming together of, um, you know, people from different backgrounds and showing a great sense of, you know, people can come together. There can be unity amongst people.

**Mohsin**

**00:26:17:01**

Yes! I believe that one of the most powerful parts about the story is the fact that we all have prejudice that we can overcome. And the best way of doing that is through acts of love. And yes, this is a story about, uh, you know, queer Muslim identity, but it's, at it's core it's a story about family, and it's a story about relationships, and it's a story about nuance. I think that so much of the time we are politically divided at the moment, and we're told that we can't be, you know, one thing or the other. We have to choose-- Um, sorry that we should be one thing or the other, that we can't be both. And if anything, I hope that what this story illustrates is that all of us live in the grey. None of us live in the black or the white.

***Clip: ITV Pridecast w/ Mohsin Zaidi***

**Liam**

**00:27:04:18**

Yeah. No, absolutely there. And, um, you know, I mean, I've interviewed several people before, uh, you know, on the topic of, you know, being LGBTQ+ and having a sense of faith and religion in their lives. And I wondered, you know, I mean, how... like nowadays especially, is that getting... is being a Muslim and being gay getting easier or is that something...I mean, I know, I know, you were saying there that you, you don't practice being a Muslim as such anymore in terms of the religious sense, do you? But in terms of culturally, um, you do. And, um, yeah, I wondered what that if things are changing for people and it is getting easier for those that, um, are gay and a Muslim?



***Clip: ITV Pridecast w/ Mohsin Zaidi***

**Mohsin**

**00:27:50:18**

Yes. I think it is getting easier. And I think one of the main reasons for that is that we're finally talking about it. And that's kind of what the book was about. When I published the book, I was deeply fearful, and I'm kind of willing to say probably harbored my own Islamophobia without realizing it, worried about the reactions I would get from people, from Muslims around the world. And yes, I have had some negative comments, by the way, both from Muslims and non-Muslims. But the overwhelming majority of messages I received from Muslims and non-Muslims are messages of support and of love and of gratefulness. And they're not just from LGBT Muslims. I think that, uh, Muslims are portrayed as hateful, as somehow being...Uh, I would say unhuman. They're dehumanised. Uh, we are all treated as if we are radicals. And either we exist outside of that dehumanisation because we say we're gay and then suddenly, "oh, well, you're one of us then", or you exist inside of it. But the problem for me is that I don't feel like... I identify as Muslim, and my family are Muslim, and so what just because I'm gay, I'm an acceptable Muslim? Or I'm not a dehumanised vision of what people think a muslim is? Whereas my brothers, just because they happen to be straight, are. Um, I think that the misconception is that Muslims are somehow preoccupied with, uh, with particular narratives when actually, in fact, what they're trying to do is to lead the same lives that all the rest, everybody else is trying to lead. They're just trying to keep their families safe, to teach, to bring their children up with, um, principled values, uh, and to navigate in a world in which they are too often vilified.

***Clip: ITV Pridecast w/ Mohsin Zaidi***

**Liam**

**00:29:51:11**

Gosh, that's um, again, I suppose that's another layer that you don't even think of, actually, that you're having to contend with, of course. And that's, that's quite something there, of, um, I suppose from... it's awful in a way, isn't it, is that you're not only experiencing that from your own community, I suppose, from the LGBTQ+ community or but also those within from, you know, the Muslim community as well? It's coming at both angles, which is... that must be quite exhausting to take, I imagine.

**Mohsin**

**00:30:22:14**

I think that in every community there are extremes. And the challenge that we face as a society is not allowing those, uh, small but loud voices to speak for everybody. And that is true in Muslim community. It's true in the LGBT community and in other communities. My own view is that it's very easy to lean into stereotypes and to believe the things that we are subjected to in the media and elsewhere. But I fundamentally believe that human beings are loving people who need one another. And I think that most of us recognise that about each other. And if that's something that we can hold on to, then I think we have a chance of overcoming all of the division that we see today.

**Liam**

**00:31:30:03**

No, absolutely. And, um, just going on to, you know, talking about married life then, so we know that you actually got married. That's, uh, we get to the end of the story. We know that you get married. And how is married life been so far then?

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**Mohsin**

**00:31:44:23**

It's lovely. We got married about two years ago in London, and then we moved very shortly thereafter to New York. Embarking upon an adventure at the start of your married life is something I recommend. So for us, that adventure was moving through to New York, and it's been a really wonderful, uh, time. We've got to explore New York and the states more broadly. We got to spend a lot of meaningful time together. And it's, it's great because it makes you reflect on not just on what you want from today, but maybe what you want from tomorrow.

**Liam**

**00:32:26:23**

No, definitely. And looking ahead then, so obviously we're hearing that you're going into the world of playwriting by the sounds of it and seeing how that goes as well. But yeah, how are things going in general anyway?

**Mohsin**

**00:32:41:13**

Good! So I've, um, I've got a second book deal with Penguin, which is great. So I'm just writing a second book now. And as I mentioned, I'm writing a play. I'm about to have a piece published, uh, for a small publication, a US publication called Off Assignment, which I'm quite excited about. It's a, it's a short letter, um, which comes from the heart. So that's going to be published in August. And so now I think my, my plan is to just keep writing and to keep looking for opportunities to, uh, to tell stories.

**Liam**

**00:33:11:05**

So in terms of your second book, then is that kind of autobiographical or is it... is it fiction or?

**Mohsin**

**00:33:17:19**

It's... it's another memoir and it's writing about the journey to becoming parents, which we are on at the moment.

**Liam**

**00:33:25:03**

Oh wow! Oh, gosh. And how is that going then?

***Clip: ITV Pridecast w/ Mohsin Zaidi***

**Mohsin** **00:33:29:06**

Slowly - haha - is the answer. I mean, I don't know if you mean the book or the, or the journey, but both.

**Liam** **00:33:33:04**

But both. Yeah. So are you, if you don't mind me asking in terms of becoming parents, I mean, in what way? Are you going through surrogacy or are you, are you adopting?

**Mohsin** **00:33:43:13**

We're going through surrogacy and we have found an egg donor who we hope will be the right person for us. She's going through testing at the moment, and so it will be a case of making sure that all the tests come back fine, then creating embryos and then hopefully finding a surrogate.

**Liam** **00:34:03:12**

Oh, absolutely. And, um, are you ready for the, uh, the early feeds and, uh, you know, keeping you on your toes?

**Mohsin** **00:34:13:08**

No, I'm absolutely not ready. And I think that anybody who tells you they are is probably lying. Uh, although I'm not a parent, so, I don't know, maybe some people were born to do it. I don't know, but, um. No, I don't think I am ready. I'm not sure I ever will be. And I think that's the point is, I think when I was 20 years younger, I thought, oh, there will come this magical day when I will say, "I am ready to be a parent". And I think that what I am realising, at least for me, is that that day will never come and that you just have to bite the bullet and say, "all right, it's kind... of might as well try now".

**Liam** **00:34:46:22**

Well, I suppose any parent that is fully prepared... I don't think that's quite normal, is it really?

***Clip: ITV Pridecast w/ Mohsin Zaidi***

**Mohsin**

**00:34:52:01**

Well, I don't know, but I don't think so.

**Liam**

**00:34:55:16**

No, no not at all. Wow. You know what an incredible thing to, to document as well. Like you say, you're doing your second book for me that, that's quite interesting there. So I guess will you be - - are you documenting the stages as we speak?

**Mohsin**

**00:35:06:08**

Yes, yes.

**Mohsin**

**00:35:07:07**

So I'm writing about it as we go. And, uh, the, the idea is to talk about the highs and the lows and the challenges and the moral conundrums and the internal complexity of, uh, of going through the process. You know, I acknowledge that there are some challenges, right? So for us, first of all, the question about the ethics of it all? And then there's the question about the finances of it all. Uh, and then there's the question of choosing egg donors. And, uh, it's not straightforward. And I think that's what makes it rich for writing about, but it's also what makes it so terrifying in a way.

**Liam**

**00:35:57:15**

Are you looking to... I mean, of course, you know, gay parenting is much more commonplace now, but is that going to be part of your writing as well? Because I suppose, you know, there are still people, there are still sections of society, that don't think that, you know, gay couples should be parents. And, um, yeah, I wondered, is that part of your... going to be part of your narrative as well?

***Clip: ITV Pridecast w/ Mohsin Zaidi***

**Mohsin**

**00:36:19:20**

I think it's absurd to argue that, uh, queer people can't be parents. Uh, families come in all different shapes and sizes, and they have done for centuries. Uh, and so I will acknowledge that, but I will probably stick more to the personal. So one of the things, for example, that I sometimes worry about is my child not having a mum. Now, actually, there are plenty of kids that don't have mothers for, for one reason or another. Um, but that is something that I think about is "okay, what will it be like for my kid not to have a mum, given the fact that I have such a close relationship with mine?" Uh, but the idea is not to say "Oh, and here's the here's the best thing for children". I'm not a child psychologist. I'm not doing any research on it. I'm not evaluating and analyzing, analyzing, evaluating and making a conclusion. Uh, I am seeking to acknowledge the complexity and to try and work through it. And the idea is that, you know, I said earlier that the best stories are stories that you can, um, learn something from, but you can also see yourself. The idea is to write about something where people can read about this internal struggle and hopefully recognise some of their own challenges in thinking about becoming parents and becoming parents.

***Clip: ITV Pridecast w/ Mohsin Zaidi***

**Liam**

**00:37:51:05**

I think you did that so well in the first book, of course. And it's often, you know, a case that things get through to people, not in a way that you, you know, people preach to them, but actually you tell them and share your own story and kind of, um, kind of show them what life is like for you. And I, you know, I'm sure that that will be done in the second book. And one area I think actually that does that brilliantly well is, of course, television and dramas and things like that. And, um, I always love to ask people on the podcast because obviously, you know, being ITV, we produce lots of programmes and things like that. But, you know, of, of content that you've watched, especially of an LGBTQ+ nature. And I, I guess you'll probably say Queer as Folk, actually, because I know, obviously you refer to it in the book and how, um, that played an influence on you. And you know how, like so many other people, uh, you know, in secret watched it on the TV when you were younger, but I wondered if there were any other things that you, you've watched in the past that have, um, really struck a chord that are of an LGBTQ+ nature?

**Mohsin**

**00:38:55:23**

I mean, It's a Sin is another example. That's obviously another Russell T Davies film. Um, there's a film called, uh, Breaking Fast, which is about a gay Muslim guy who is, uh, it's during Ramadan and he meets, uh, a guy and they kind of think about dating, and it's about navigating his identity, uh, during Ramadan with his family and with, uh, this new love interest. So I thought that was that was a really a fantastic story, uh, that I felt seen in probably one of the first times.

**Liam**

**00:39:36:17**

Do you think there needs to be more of that kind of content? Because I don't suppose within the mainstream, you know, like the likes of ITV, BBC, Netflix and that we've actually seen like a gay Muslim drama, I suppose? And actually that could be, you know, you know, great for a lot of people to, to see what life is like on both those sides, really.

***Clip: ITV Pridecast w/ Mohsin Zaidi***

**Mohsin**

**00:39:56:10**

I mean, maybe it's obvious, but I would say for me to say this, but I would say yes. So my book has been optioned and so they're trying to turn it into a film at the moment. And the challenge that we've had, and I've spoken to production companies about this, is the TV industry, particularly in Britain, says we're desperate for diverse content. But then in the same breath they say, oh, but we need famous talent to be able to get the show commissioned. Now, the only way that talent becomes famous, particularly diverse talent, is if you have diverse stories that they can appear in. If no one's telling diverse stories because there isn't enough diverse talent, then you're never going to have enough diverse talent to tell diverse stories. So can you see that you're in this horrible cycle, uh, where it's kind of constantly being told, well, we need diverse talent, but we don't have enough of them because there aren't enough diverse stories? But the only way to tell diverse stories is by having diverse talent. Um, and I think that that is a problem for you know, the likes of ITV to grapple with. Um, I think shows like *Bridgerton* that are doing colour blind casting are helping to, uh, provide a solution to that problem. Uh, but, you know, I also think that I know that the media industry is going through a big change at the moment, but if commissioners play it safe too often, then the people that pay the price are the ones whose stories have historically not been told. Because if they're not told, then you can't prove that they are popular. And if you can't prove that they're popular, then you won't take a risk on them. So yes, I agree with you. I think these stories should be told more often, and I think that there are systemic challenges to that which can only be overcome by commissioners being more brave.



***Clip: ITV Pridecast w/ Mohsin Zaidi***

**Liam**

**00:41:51:14**

And often, you know, when we've seen commissioners be brave, um, you know, it's sometimes the best outcome really. You know, some of the stories that have been told, you know, where...I, you referenced it there, but It's a Sin. It's a Sin was a bold move for Russell T Davies to, uh, you know, write that kind of content and, you know, especially something where people didn't want to talk about HIV at all. It was fear to talk about HIV and look how well that did. You know, I think I do think you make a really strong point there. And, you know, something I think, you know here at ITV, you know, it's something that we all need to kind of take note of and, um, you know, be very aware of really.

**Liam**

**00:42:30:15**

Well, Mohsin, thank you. I just wanna say thank you so much for for chatting with me and taking the time. Uh, you know, it sounds like things are going incredibly well for you so far. And, you know, really, I think something, uh, you know, to congratulate you on is A Dutiful Boy. It was a, you know, a really great read. And for anyone that's not read it so far, then I would really recommend it, because, uh, yeah, it does take you on that roller coaster, even if you, you know, didn't necessarily intend to. It certainly does that for sure.

**Mohsin**

**00:42:58:07**

Thank you very much and thanks for having me on.

**Liam**

**00:43:08:01**

Well, a really insightful episode there with Mohsin Zaidi. And thank you once again for joining me on the ITV Pridecast. And if you want to learn more about the work that Mohsin does, just head over to his website, [MohsinZaidi.com](http://MohsinZaidi.com). And a reminder if you're looking to meet fellow members of the LGBTQ+ community, there's plenty of ways that you can do that. If you work for ITV, why not join the ITV Pride network if you haven't done so already? Thanks again for listening to this edition of the ITV Pridecast. I hope you tune in for the next episode.

***Clip: ITV Pridecast w/ Mohsin Zaidi***