Internalized Islamophobia: Exploring the Faith and Identity Crisis of American Muslim youth

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Contending Epistemologies: Euro-Centrism, Knowledge Production and Islamophobia

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ISLAM has a centuries long tradition of inspiring its adherents to contribute to humanity based on conviction in its tenets. Previous generations of Muslims were on the forefront of contributing to medicine, philosophy, architecture, and governance among other areas. With the rise of Islamophobia, Islam has been cast as irrational, incompatible with modern civilization, and inherently violent. This has put Western Muslims in a defensive position in which they constantly have to justify their convictions, and fight off the doubts and insecurities that arise in such a climate. One of the most understudied and underestimated impacts of Islamophobia is the ingestion of problematic notions about the religion by Muslims themselves, particularly those of the younger generation who are experiencing multiple attacks against their faith. This paper documents the harmful effects of Islamophobic rhetoric on the religious identity and perceptions of Muslim youth in an urban American setting. Using qualitative interviews and expert analysis, it also explores solutions for how to counter Islamophobic narratives.

Reseach participants

In depth interviews were conducted with 30 young American Muslims: 19 girls and 11 boys, for this research. Fifteen of the girls reported wearing hijab regularly. All of them were born citizens; 24 were children of immigrants, most of whom were eventually naturalized. The ages of the interviewees ranged from 16–20. All of them live in United States. Of the 30, 21 of them either attended, or are currently attending, public or private schools that did not identify as Islamic schools. Twenty-six of them described themselves as regular Mosque-goers.

Instrumentation

The interviewees were asked a series of questions about whether they had experienced Islamophobia, and if they had how they were coping with it. This led to other questions about their identity struggles, their perceptions of religion, and other relevant personal, family, and community experiences. Of the interviews 26 were conducted by phone, and 4 in person.

Measuring the impact of Islamophobia on Muslims

Due to the fact that organized studies of Islamophobia are relatively recent for the most part, the discipline has not yielded many scales to measure its adverse impact comprehensively. This is particularly true in measuring to what extent it has impacted Muslim religious identity. A few studies have assessed fear-based Islamophobia among non-Muslim majority groups. But very few of these studies measure the psychological effects of Islamophobia on Muslim minorities. Of the first known reports on this scale is that of Kunst, Tajamal, Sam, & Ulleberg in 2012 titled "Coping with Islamophobia: The effects of religious stigma on Muslim minorities' identity formation."[1] The study was helpful in that it proposed a model of the key variables involved in the intersections of religious and national identities and how they might be impacted by Islamophobia (see figure-1).

It also empirically demonstrated a connection between strong religious identities and civic engagement. It also demonstrated that religious discrimination was negatively related to national identity, and emphasized the importance of nurturing intercultural relations in the face of religious prejudice and stigma. The researchers studied the stigmatizing effects of religious meta-stereotypes, religious discrimination, and negative representations of Muslims in media. They concluded that developing a healthy national/religious identity predicted increased confidence in young Muslims, as well as increased civic contribution.

This was notably re-emphasized in the Institute for Social Policy and Understanding's 2016 study of American Muslims which noted that "frequent attendance at religious services by Muslims is linked to civic engagement. Muslims who regularly attend mosques are more likely to work with their neighbors to solve community problems, be registered to vote, and are more likely to plan to vote."[2]

However, the items used in the Kunst et al. study to measure Islamophobia were critiqued by others for neglecting important psychometric properties essential to cross-cultural comparative studies.[3]

Internalized racism—internalized Islamophobia

Internalized racism involves ingesting, often subconsciously, acceptance of the dominant society's stereotypes of one's ethnic group. The harms of internalizing oppression go far beyond legitimizing discriminatory practices to neutral observers; they destroy the first line of resistance to bigotry. Colonized mindsets and internalized racism are often subconscious, their messages primarily subliminal. The most susceptible group to these subliminal messages are young children whose cognitive limitations do not allow them to consciously reflect on those negative messages. As the pioneering "black doll" study of Kenneth and Mamie Clark in 1947 demonstrated, black children were found to overwhelmingly associate beauty and positive themes with white dolls.[4] The study was criticized for its binary categorization of race, but was enhanced through replicated studies which broadened ranges and categories to test the same hypothesis.

Indeed, as Charles Parrish notes, junior-high students tended to use as many as 145 different terms to describe skin color; some of them being: "half-white," "high-yellow," "chocolate," "red bone," "dark," "inkspot," and "tar baby".[5] The warped views of blackness fed to children at an early age result in degrees of blackness determining status, with darker complexions being deemed most repulsive. Younger children were less likely to notice such variances.
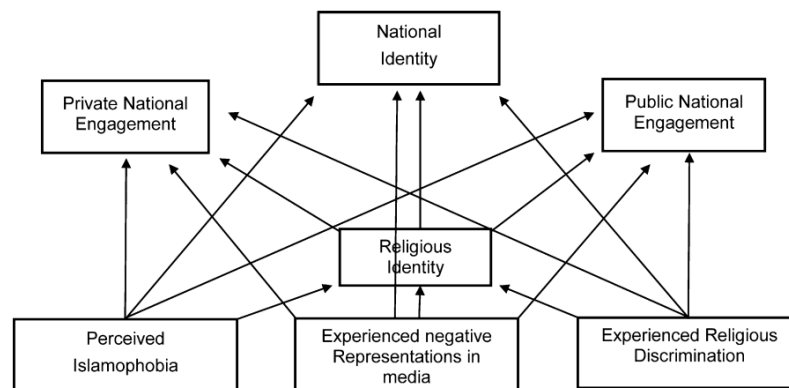
Figure 1: Hypothetical structural equation model presented by J.R. Kunst et al. in their research.

This brings me to my own analysis and reasons for choosing my subset. Sana Aaser, a fellow with New Sector Alliance, recently used the doll test as inspiration for her study on internalized oppression amongst Muslim children in a study out of San Francisco State University for Noor Kids.[6] The study exceptionally used various protocols of instrumentation to capture the extent of damage that negative portrayals of Islam and Muslims are having upon American Muslim children. Her subset exclusively focused on children between the ages of 5–9 capturing the brutally early honesty expected from young children.[6] The study found that the insecurities developed by these children led them to try to develop dual personalities that helped them blend in as efficiently as possible. Kids distinguished between "American" and "Muslim" in their conversations demonstrating that they often felt like they had to choose the easier identity to fit in depending on their environment. The study concluded that 1 in 3 children did not want to tell others that they were Muslim, 1 in 2 children did not know whether they could be both Muslim and American, and 1 in 6 children would sometimes pretend not to be Muslim.[6]

Inability to construct an identity

As research has shown that identity confusion is present in young American Muslim children, this issue becomes compounded as these children progress into young adulthood. Just as with internalized racism amongst Black youth, where adolescents distinguish between levels of "blackness," Muslim youth may make similar distinctions of "Muslimness." The measures by which those categories arise in internalized Islamophobia are not shades of color, but often displays of religiosity. This is especially true for young Muslim women. Just as young children are less aware of variations in skin color and the levels of prejudice associated with this, Muslim children pay very little attention to the different ways religious symbols are adorned. As they get older, Muslim teenagers who choose to wear hijab find themselves in the complex world of modern Islamic fashion. Rather than hijab represented as an individual and personal relationship with God, girls need to navigate the fashion trends that will label them as "religious," "liberal," "extreme" or anywhere in between. Whether conservatism is judged solely based on the

donning of a black abaya, rebelliousness by the level of makeup worn, or coolness by the careful attention paid to how many hairs are left unexposed, young Muslim American women become even further entrapped in the vortex of adolescent identity development. Lena, age 17, said "every time I put on my hijab, I feel like I have to wear it in a way that tells Americans I'm not some oppressed Saudi girl, tells the aunties in the Masjid I'm still a good Muslim, while telling other Muslim girls that I'm still prettier and cooler than the rest of you." Another participant, Fatima, age 16, who doesn't wear hijab said, "I feel like I'm never Muslim enough anyway so why even bother trying fitting in with the Masjid. But at the same time, when I have to pray around my non-Muslim friends, I find myself not wanting to because I don't want to remind them that I'm different."

One thing that consistently stood out with all of my respondents was that their need to prove their "Americanness" was an exhausting endeavor. Because Muslims are often cast as being predominantly Arab, or at least non-white, young Muslims are viewed with racial skepticism in ways that members of other faith communities are not.[7] In addition to routinely feeling the need to justify their practice of faith, which is often deemed insufficient when in Muslim spaces, they have to consistently prove they're not foreign.

In studies of the effects of Islamophobia on British Muslims, the Runnymede Trust reported that British Muslims routinely felt that their values, loyalties and commitments were being questioned by their colleagues and fellow students.[8] People who find that the British part of themselves is incompatible with their renegotiated identities are more prone to anti-Western sentiment, which generally manifests in isolation, whereas those who felt compelled to abandon the Islamic part were more prone to consistent assimilation measures.

In one study, Alia, a student who was harassed by a fellow student claiming she was intimidating be-

cause of her hijab, said, "It makes you think about integrating…you just put your boundaries up."[9] The pressure and aggregated fear of an Islamophobic encounter that young Muslims living in the west have is overwhelmingly high with a severe lack of outlets to cope with the harsh climate. This is particularly true with young Muslim women who wear hijab. Out of my subjects, 23 of the 30 reported having at least one Islamophobic encounter in the last year. The 23 included 17 girls and only 6 boys.

According to an initiative of the British government that deals with anti-Muslim incidents, 584 Islamophobic attacks took place between April 2012 and April 30, 2013.[10] Almost 60 percent of them targeted Muslim women, of whom 80 percent were wearing hijab.[10]

Of the 19 girls I interviewed, 15 of them wear the hijab. All 15 of them said they've considered taking it off due to fear. Eight of them said they actually have taken it off in certain settings because they felt threatened. When I asked them if they started to resent the hijab, all of them said no but some of them resented that men didn't have to undertake a similar public exercise of faith. One of the girls said, "I think its unfair that they get to walk around in t-shirts and shorts and blend in. Sikh men have to go through more than Muslim men." Another girl actually expressed anger with Muslim leadership saying, "the Imams always yell at the Muslim women about their hijabs but never really put any pressure on the men. It's like we have to face pressure from everybody."

This seems to be a common sentiment among young Muslim women in the West. They feel like religious leadership doesn't empathize with them. The most striking sentence to me in these interviews was from the youngest girl, who just turned 16, and doesn't wear hijab. She said she had thought about wearing it but was sick of being told that she was a failure for not wearing it. "It's like you have no idea what pressure I already face for being a young brown

Muslim girl; don't tell me I'm not struggling for my faith."

This young girl, like many other young men and women, became very emotional when she felt her struggle was called into question. As one report titled, *Muslim patients and health disparities in the UK and the US*, notes: "The routine experience of overt and indirect prejudice has health effects. Workplace discrimination and "chronic daily hassles", including insults, can increase risk of common mental disorders."[11] Parental stress may therefore exacerbate the effects of similar experiences Muslim children face in the school setting, such as the increased verbal and physical harassment post-9/11."[12]

As the 2012 study on coping with Islamophobia stated, mental health experts stated that "many Muslims not only experience religious discrimination in their daily lives, but are fully aware of their devalued position in society."[1] They found that perceived Islamophobia has a "distinct effect on Muslim minorities' health and identification."[1]

These encounters are often unreported, and not to an extent to which they can be deemed criminal. In Chris Allen's in-depth interviews with 20 British Muslim women between the ages of 16 and 52 from various backgrounds, most of the women reported experiencing "low-level" harassment, most often in the form of verbal abuse. Women reported being taunted with comparisons to terrorists, and reported that it was their veil that seemed to spark the ire of their aggressors who shouted things like "Take that f***ing thing off" and "Yuck." One woman was called "Mrs. Osama Bin Laden" and told to "go back to Afghanistan."[9] Half of the women said that the attacks made them question their British identity.[9]

The racialization of the Muslim identity, coupled with the pressures mentioned above, has led young Muslims to a place of trying to hyper-counter the hampering assumptions made of them within their societies and Muslim communities. Young Muslim women in particular are denied the right to construct their own identities. When they are deemed simply as *Pakistani* Muslims or *Hijabis*, they feel compelled to construct, and frequently renegotiate, their identities in ways that allow them to appear unique, even when these choices are not in line with their value systems. The focus on identity formation in most of these studies is on national identity, not religious identity. In other words, how these young Muslims start to view their faith and religious identity is enormously understudied.

It is important to take into consideration the far-reaching issues that these sentiments indicate: Muslim American youth are experiencing, not only a crisis of identity formation, but also an utter lack of belonging.[13] Baumeister and Leary (1995) assert that a sense of belonging is a fundamental human need. One of the essential components in satisfying this need is engaging in positive interactions with others within a framework of long-term, stable care and concern. Without a sense of belonging, Muslim American youth lack this framework, which results in a sense of anxiety and isolation.

The role of personal experience in what types of Islamophobia are ingested

When I questioned my interviewees on how they viewed elements of their faith deemed restrictive or regressive, many hesitated to openly discuss their issues. Yet upon careful examination, many admitted that their personal concerns, primarily family, played a role in negatively shaping their perceptions of their religion and religious identity. People's relationships with God are often very similar to their relationships with people. People can feel distant from or even traumatized in their relationships with God if they have been hurt by those closest to them. Someone with an abusive parent, or coming from a culture

that appears regressive in certain areas, is likely to feel like some of the concerns raised about Islam are true. I asked all of my participants if they thought their parents were more loving than those of their non-Muslim friends. Twelve of them answered yes, while 18 answered no. When I asked them if they thought Islam was a restrictive religion, 18 of them said yes with 16 of them having said that their parents weren't as loving as those of their non-Muslim friends. Second generation young Muslims often have a hard time discerning which elements of their upbringing are rooted in culture, religion, or personal idiosyncrasies.

This is also the case with community grievances. A bad experience in the mosque can serve as a reinforcement of Islamophobic messages. Young Muslim women face the greatest pressures in society, yet are the least accommodated in the mosques that are responsible for generating spiritual strength. As one of the older participants in my group, Samina, age 20, said, "I stopped coming to the Masjid because I got sick of being treated like a second-class citizen. I already feel like that outside. I've actually felt better about my Islam when I don't hang out with too many Muslims. It allows me to tell myself that they don't represent Islam. Otherwise, when I come to the Masjid and see how girls are treated, I start believing that we really are as backwards as they say we are."

Women's issues vs. violence

This brings me to one of my most important observations on how we respond to Islamophobia on the outside, vs. tackling its effects internally. From a policy and public relations perspective, the priority of Muslims has been to push back on the association of Islam with violence. Internally however, the issue of gender injustice is a bigger priority. Many young Muslims have not capitulated to the idea that

Islam is as violent as the media makes it out to be. But they do believe in the association of Islam with oppression of women.

Dalia Mogahed, director of research at the Institute for Social Policy and Understanding, relays a story of an international conference speaker asking an audience of Canadian Muslim women and girls how many of them thought that Islam considers men superior to women. Almost the whole room raised their hands. She then asked how many of them thought that in Islam men and women are equal. Only two girls raised their hands. Then she asked, "and who thinks in Islam women are superior to men?" No one raised their hand.[14]

The association of Islam with the repression of women is more believable to the general public as well. According to Gallup (see figure-2), "the American public is largely unconvinced most Muslims believe in gender equality—81% of respondents disagree that most Muslims around the world think both sexes should have equal rights and 16% agree."[15]

This is of course largely augmented by degrading media portrayals of Muslim women in the United States. In a pre-9/11 survey of Muslims in American press, 73% of the images of Muslim women depicted them in "passive" capacities.[15] Muslim women were also six times more likely to be portrayed as victims than were Muslim men in movie scripts.[16]

Historical events

Groups like isis, Boko Haram, Al-Qaeda, etc. tend to render problematic texts or historical events as justifications for their barbarity. Muslim youth are then exposed to these practices, with the help of sensationalizing Islamophobic media, having no background to counter uncomfortable narratives of Islamic history. Islamophobes regularly use videos from extremist groups as scare tactics to substantiate
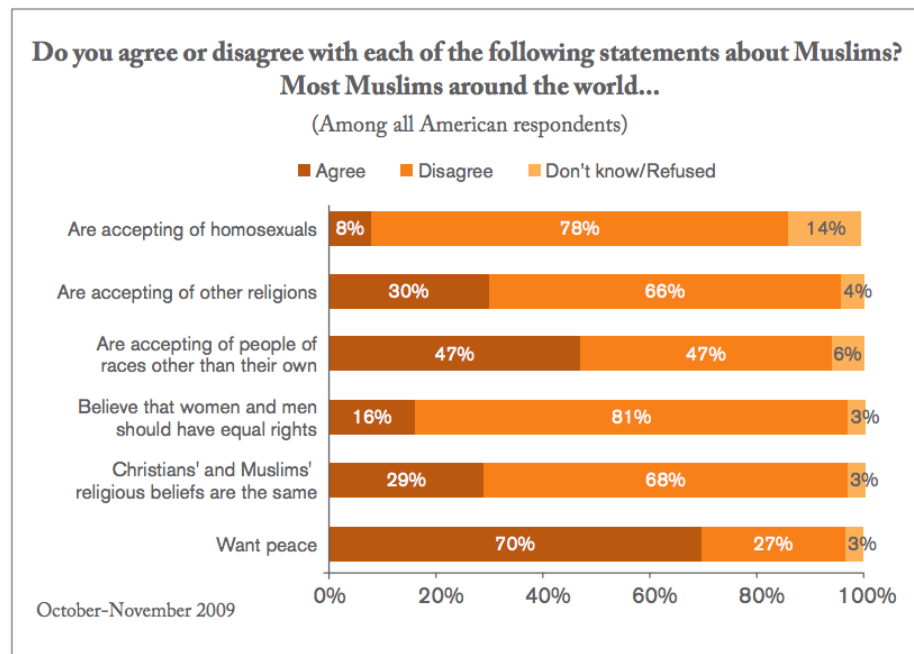
Do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements about Muslims? Most Muslims around the world…

(Among all American respondents)

- Agree - Disagree - Don't know/Refused

	Agree	Disagree	Don't know/Refused
Are accepting of homosexuals	8%	78%	14%
Are accepting of other religions	30%	66%	4%
Are accepting of people of races other than their own	47%	47%	6%
Believe that women and men should have equal rights	16%	81%	3%
Christians' and Muslims' religious beliefs are the same	29%	68%	3%
Want peace	70%	27%	3%

October-November 2009

Figure 2: Responses to Gallup survey on general public perception of Islam and Muslims.

their ghastly claims about the religion. Many young Muslims are first exposed to controversial texts either packaged by extremists or Islamophobes in imagery difficult to erase even with an intellectually satisfying answer. In our first publication at Yaqeen institute on pathways to doubt (see figure-3), we covered doubts stemming from historical events in Islam. The study concluded, "in addition to bumping up against doctrinal tenets, social norms can also render certain episodes in Islamic history problematic in the minds of American Muslims. The marriage of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) to Aisha is a case in point. A favorite target of Islamophobes, this key moment in the prophetic history can provide an opening for doubt if not properly contextualized. Similarly, the issue of slavery in Islam has become a recurring topic of concern, particularly as younger American Muslims are now more sensitive to the is-

sues of social injustice around them. As one scholar who gave an in-depth lecture on this topic put it, "The 'Islam came to abolish slavery' response is simply insufficient." "[17]

I asked my 30 interviewees if they were bothered by the marriage of the Prophet (peace be upon him) to Aisha. 28 of them said they were. When I asked those 28 if they could recall the first time they were exposed to the idea that the Prophet married Ayesha at a young age, 25 of them said they heard about through the media. I asked them how it made them feel about their religion and received varied answers. One of the interviewees, a 17-year-old boy, answered without hesitation that it made him feel like "the religion is just as flawed as every other religion. Islam isn't as rosy as we were taught in our Quran classes." When I asked him why he felt that way, he said he thought that the "Arabs were just as messed up as

we are." A 17-year-old girl added, "it made me uncomfortable when talking about the Rasul. It kind of made him seem more like the hardcore guys we see on TV." This girl forthrightly admitted that her association of the Prophet (peace be upon him) with extremists was due to her own media consumption.

As our report at Yaqeen concluded, "References to certain historical events and battles in the early history of Islam figure into these associations and simple reassurances that "Islam means peace" do little to curb the resultant doubts."[17]

Reinforcement of Islamophobic messages in Islamic Spaces

Of the 30 participants I interviewed, 26 described themselves as "Masjid-goers". When asked if they felt welcomed in the Masjid, only three of them said yes. All but two of the young Muslim girls I interviewed felt like the Masjid was not welcoming to women. Both of the young girls who thought it was, were also Islamic school goers. One of the interviewees, an 18-year-old girl who goes to public school, said that she was embarrassed to bring her non-Muslim friends to the mosque because she felt like it would reinforce their stereotypes about Islam. When I asked her why she felt that way, she said "I couldn't get over why men in the Masjid are so cruel. It's like they really hate women. And it's not like they're misunderstood. They just are really mean. I almost left Islam because of how they treated me." When I asked her if she found that to be the case in all mosques, she said that going to a mosque where women were treated well actually helped her realize that not all Muslims are alike.

The bad mosque experience reinforcing stereotypes wasn't only experienced by the female participants. The young men also seemed to find issue with the treatment of women in many mosques, as well as

perceived harshness. Ali, 17, said that the Imam of his Masjid always seemed angry and it bothered him. "He's always shouting in his Khutbahs especially when he talks about Palestine or Syria. It's like, man, why are you always so angry?" Ali said that his sister stopped coming to the Masjid because of something offensive his Imam said. He couldn't recall what it was and said that he remembered thinking it wasn't a big deal, but his sister felt like the Imam was a misogynist.

The three who said they felt welcomed in their Mosques all said that they felt like their Imam connected with them, and that they were proud to bring Non-Muslim friends to the Masjid. Ariana, 20, recalled how her Imam gave a sermon after the San Bernardino shootings, praising Muslim women for their bravery in the face of Islamophobia. She said it made her feel appreciated and gave her the courage to combat the scrutiny she would receive for wearing Hijab.

Non-Muslims counseling and the mental anguish of young Muslims

The therapeutic alliance is considered to be one of the most important aspects of successful psychotherapy and has been found to be a consistent predictor of treatment outcomes in over 30-years of research (Horvath & Bedi, 2002[18]; Horvath, Del Re, Flückiger, & Symonds, 2011[19]; Horvath & Symonds, 1991[20]; Martin, Garske, & Davis, 2000[21]). Non-Muslim counselors may be influenced by media projections of Islam and then falsely portray those notions on vulnerable youth. The therapeutic relationship is based on a sense of trust; therefore, in sharing their vulnerabilities with a therapist who may consciously or subconsciously perceive their religious affiliation to be an issue, young Muslim Americans may be swayed to forsake the Islamic

Figure 3: Network representation of categorized "sources of doubt in Islam." Higher resolution image and futher reading available at: https://www.yaqeeninstitute.org/publications/modern-pathways-to-doubt-in-islam/

component of their identities under the guise of "liberation."

As one study noted, "If a non-Muslim female psychologist assumes that a hijab is oppressive against women, she may unconsciously try to steer her client away from covering, instead of understanding the significance of the hijab in her Muslim client's life."[7]

Out of the 30 Muslim youth interviewed, six of them, all girls, had been to therapy. Four of them went to Non-Muslim therapists and all four of them reported feeling judged by their therapists, and swayed away from their religion.

When I asked the four youth who went to Non-Muslim therapists why they didn't go to Muslim

therapists, all of them responded that their parents did not want Muslims in the community to find out about their therapy. Sadly, 1 of the 2 girls who went to a Muslim therapist reported her confidentiality being betrayed thereby confirming the fears of the others who opted to go elsewhere. While part of the solution to Muslim mental health is indeed to encourage more Muslims to engage in relevant career pursuits, the reality is that the fear of stigma will likely continue to keep young Muslims away from Muslim counselors.

One of the girls ironically said she found her strong identity by fighting off Islamophobic comments from her therapist. She said, "Every time she'd talk about my family and why I'm struggling,

she would make these assumptions that if I just gave it all up I'd be fine. She kept on asking questions about my parents assuming they were barbarians. So while I was telling her '*It's not like that,*' I was getting more confident in my religion."

Our report on pathways to doubt noted, "The culture around dating and casual sexual encounters can lead some Muslims to become frustrated with Islam's prohibition on pre-marital relations. Doubt, then, can come about through a desire to alleviate mental anguish: '*[Those that] have dated […][that] have been sexually active […] it's not in their benefit to make Islam out to be the truth. They want it to not be the truth so they don't feel so guilty about doing those things.*' "[17] This is an important point in that many young Muslims paradoxically want to believe negative impressions about their religion so that they don't feel guilty abandoning it. Fady, 17, actually shared that he told all his non-Muslim friends he left Islam and was celebrated for it. He went to the prom and actually made up a story about his parents threatening him which impressed his date. Yasmine, 17, shared a similar experience even though she goes to an Islamic school. She said, "we all talk about how we're going to do things our parents wouldn't let us when we get to college. It's not that we don't think Islam is true, it's that we want to get a break sometimes and do normal teenage things."

Dalia Mogahed relayed a story of an encounter she had with a young Muslim woman when she was a youth counselor in 2002. "A young Muslim woman, about 16, said to me, '*To get to know someone before marriage, we have to live with them before marriage. This way, we know their real personality and we don't get fooled. But we can't do that as Muslims but it is better to.*'

It was an interesting window into her mind where she believed that our restrictions were a burden not a protection."[14]

Islam: empowerment or impediment

Insecurity often begets idleness. If young people are not confident in their faith and identity, their sense of contribution is either abolished, or motivated through other frameworks. The feeling is that the pursuit of greatness comes through breaking the shackles of Islam and the Muslim identity rather than embracing it.

When asked if they felt hindered by their religion and religious identity to pursue their dreams, 16 of the youth answered yes. Many of them felt like they had to fight off both the prejudices of people who hate Islam, and the restrictions of Islam itself. Rayyan, 19, said, "*It's no secret that we have to compromise our principles to get up there.*"

Notably, those who were involved in charity efforts and volunteerism through Islamic organizations felt empowered by their religion and identity to do good. Nine of the youth I interviewed were involved in youth groups and regular charitable activities. All nine of them answered in the negative when asked if they felt hindered by their religion and religious identity.

Zaynab, 17, said that she wasn't proud of her hijab until she wore it when she was 14 to a serve the homeless event; saying "Someone came up to me and said, '*I always see your people around here passing out food.*' "

In racism-related clinical interventions, young people are taught to seek same-race role models as a means of reframing the self-blame experience.[22] The need for contemporary Muslim philanthropists, sports heroes, and champions of peace and justice that have excelled while staying true to their convictions and identity offers a reassuring narrative capable of modifying perceptive attributions that promote internalized Islamophobia.

Discussion

It is very powerful to experience validation for your struggles and experiences. And the opposite, i.e. having them invalidated or undermined, is also powerful. Muslim adolescents living as minorities have to deal with a dangerously high level of cognitive dissonance when attempting to formulate a cohesive identity. At school, they often feel as though they betray the "Islamic" part of themselves by engaging in things they know are displeasing to God. At home, they feel as though they betray the "American" part of themselves by doing things their classmates would laugh about. The more they act in opposition to their values, the deeper the struggle becomes. Constructing a strong identity based on deep conviction and confidence can lead to a healthier young Muslim individual that feels valued and responsible for contributing to society as a whole. Family and communal spaces serve as natural reinforcements or refutations for Islamophobic messaging that can devastate the core of an adolescent. Young Muslims should also be intellectually equipped with how to deal with the onslaught of doubt inducing claims leveled against Islam routinely in this climate. Solutions for misguided counseling and the lack of competent youth directors must also be studied and implemented.

Acknowledgements

About the Author

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