

Exploring the Faith and Identity Crisis of American Muslim Youth	
Authors	Omar Suleiman - Bachelor's in Islamic law, Bachelor's in Accounting (University of New Orleans), Master's in Islamic Finance, Master's in Political History (Southern New Hampshire University), and PhD in Islamic Thought and Civilization (IIUM)
Muslim American youth	Muslim American youth are experiencing not only a crisis of identity formation but also an extreme lack of belonging <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A sense of belonging is a fundamental human need, and its absence results in a sense of anxiety and isolation</li> </ul>
Islamophobia Reaction	Islam has been cast as irrational, incompatible with modern civilization, and inherently violent <p>Western Muslims are 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</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- This creates harmful effects on the religious identity and perceptions of Muslim youth in America</li> </ul>
Civic engagement	A study of American Muslims 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
Internalized discrimination	Subconscious acceptance of the dominant society's stereotypes of one's ethnic group <p>In a 1947 study, black children were found to overwhelmingly associate beauty and positive themes with white dolls</p>
Internalized oppression amongst Muslim children	Study on American Muslim children between the ages of 5-9 showed that the insecurities developed by these children led them to try to develop dual personalities that helped them blend in <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 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</li> </ul>
Wearing hijab	Girls need to navigate the fashion trends that label them as "religious," "liberal," "extreme," or anywhere in between <p>"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."</p>

	<p>“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.”</p>
Intimidation	<p>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 for young Muslim women who wear hijab</p> <p>Between April 2012 and April 2013 a British initiative determined that 60 percent of Islamophobic attacks targeted Muslim women, of whom 80 percent were wearing hijab</p>
Young Muslim women	<p>Resent that men don’t have to undertake a similar public exercise of faith</p> <p>Feel like religious leadership doesn’t empathize with them</p> <p>Feel compelled to construct their identities in ways that allow them to appear unique, even when these choices are not in line with their value systems</p> <p>British Muslim women between the ages of 16 and 52 from various backgrounds, reported experiencing “low-level” harassment, most often in the form of verbal abuse. They reported that it was their veil that seemed to spark the ire of their aggressors and half of the women said that the attacks made them question their British identity</p> <p>Face the greatest pressures in society, yet are the least accommodated in the mosques that are responsible for generating spiritual strength</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “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”</li> </ul>
Health effects	<p>Workplace discrimination and “chronic daily hassles”, including insults, can increase risk of common mental disorders</p> <p>Parental stress may exacerbate the effects of similar experiences Muslim children face in the school setting</p>
Perceptions of their religion	<p>People can feel distant from or even traumatized in their relationships with God if they have been hurt by those closest to them</p> <p>Having an abusive parent, or belonging to a culture that appears regressive in certain areas, may be likely cause one to feel that some of the concerns raised about Islam are true</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Participants were asked if they thought their parents were more loving than those of their non-Muslim friends. 18 out of 30 answered no. When asked if they thought Islam was a restrictive religion, 18 of them said yes with 16 of them having</li> </ul>

	<p>said that their parents weren't as loving as those of their non-Muslim friends</p> <p>Young Muslims often have a hard time discerning which elements of their upbringing are rooted in culture, religion, or personal idiosyncrasies</p>
Association with repression of women	<p>An audience of Canadian Muslim women and girls were asked how many of them thought that Islam considers men superior to women. Almost the entire audience 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</p> <p>The American public is largely unconvinced most Muslims believe in gender equality</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- This is largely augmented by degrading media portrayals of Muslim women in the United States. Muslim women were six times more likely to be portrayed as victims than were Muslim men in movie scripts</li> </ul>
Islamic Spaces	<p>When asked if they felt welcomed in the masjid, only 3 out of 26 American Muslim youth said yes</p> <p>"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."</p>
Counseling	<p>Non-Muslim counselors may be influenced by media projections of Islam and then falsely portray those notions on vulnerable youth. A therapist who may consciously or subconsciously perceive their religious affiliation to be an issue, may sway young Muslim Americans to forsake the Islamic component of their identities under the guise of "liberation"</p> <p>A non-Muslim female psychologist who assumes that a hijab is oppressive against women, she may unconsciously try to steer her client away from covering</p> <p>When those who went to non-Muslim therapists were asked 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</p>
Dating	<p>The culture around dating and casual sexual encounters can lead some Muslims to become frustrated with Islam's prohibition on premarital relations</p> <p>Many young Muslims paradoxically want to believe negative impressions about their religion so that they don't feel guilty abandoning it</p>

	<p>“We all talk about how we’re going to do things our parents wouldn’t let us do 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.”</p> <p>“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.”</p>
Islam as an impediment	<p>There is a commonly-held belief that our restrictions are a burden, not a protection</p> <p>“It’s no secret that we have to compromise our principles to get up there.”</p>
Role models	<p>There is a need for contemporary Muslim philanthropists, sports heroes, and champions of peace and justice that have excelled while staying true to their convictions and identity</p>