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Including Islam: Muslim Students' Experiences at Colorado Universities

Introduction

I first experienced racial prejudice in December 2001. I was at Denver International Airport with my parents when the woman at the ticket counter stopped checking us in and asked if an "Alia Reza" was flying in our party. My father said yes, and pointed at me; I was six years old and less than four feet tall. The woman informed us that we were not allowed to go any further at this point because I was on the no-fly list. We were all taken to a small room and questioned for hours. All of our bags were opened and our items spread out on the floor. We missed our flight and ended up driving back home, shaken and deflated.

Since being placed on a terror-watch list, my life as an American Muslim has been scattered with incidents of hate and racism. Following the beginning of the 2016 presidential campaigns, the rate of those incidents has increased dramatically. With the election of Donald J Trump as the 45th president of the United States, the sociopolitical atmosphere of many American communities has shifted against minority groups. As much of my own university experience has been influenced by the events of 2015 and 2016, I set up a project to study the ways that Muslim students across the state of Colorado have been affected by the sociopolitical environment created by the Trump campaign, election, and administration. I chose to focus on the relationship between today's rhetoric regarding Muslims and the way Muslim students perceive their individual identities and places at universities. This allows us to perceive and contextualize how interactions and occurrences can impact peoples' personal identities.

While economic factors cannot be disregarded in voter's decisions in the 2016 election, "racism and sexism were much more important" and can explain the majority of the gap between whites with higher educations who voted against Trump and whites without higher educations who voted for him.¹ By examining the real experiences of Muslim students, the manifestation of these racist and sexist beliefs within modern society can be clearly seen. This project will allow firsthand voices and narratives of Muslim students to be recorded. Having a written account of how today's political and social climate impacts the lives of these students will contribute to promoting active campaigning against prejudiced rhetoric within sociopolitical systems.

For this study, I recruited participants from across the state of Colorado. Participants had to be students at a university within the state, and had to voluntarily choose to fill out the research survey, while remaining completely anonymous. This allowed students to express opinions and relate personal experiences without the worry of being outcast by their peers or pinpointed by administrations and/or government officials. They then revealed their own experiences, fears, and perspectives. My choice to limit participants to Colorado students also helped condense the sample pool to one state in order to prevent broad generalizations regarding Americans as a whole. I collected data through an anonymous Qualtrics survey, where thirteen participants — undergraduate and graduate students at Colorado universities — answered questions about the manifestation of Islamophobia in their own lives (Appendix A). As even I do not know the identities of most of the participants, they will be referred to in this project by

¹ Brian F Schaffner, Matthew MacWilliams, and Tatishe Nteta, "Explaining White Polarization in the 2016 Vote for President: The Sobering Role of Racism and Sexism," Presented at the Conference on the US Elections of 2016: Domestic and International Aspects, January 8-9, 2017, paper, 3.

letters based on the order of their responses to the survey (Participant A being the first, Participant B the second, and so on).

In addition to these entries, I have included journal entries of my own. These revolve around my experiences with racism while attending the University of Denver. Each attempts to delve into my own mind and analyze the fears and worries that I experienced in those specific moments. I hope that the addition of such personal narratives will allow readers to begin to understand the mindset of Muslim American students, as well as rationalize why we have begun to feel afraid.

Lastly, it is important to note that, although many of these students admit to fear, the unexpected occurrences of the past few years seem to have sparked a social defiance amongst them. Colorado students are using the United States' increase of open racism as a starting point for sociopolitical change. Whether through raising awareness, reaching out to their communities, or publicly speaking out against political actions, Muslims in Colorado are acting out against the rise of hatred in today's world. This project is another attempt at moving those changes forward. As an anthropologist, a Muslim Student Association president, and an American citizen, I am using my networks and experiences to sift through the prejudices and stereotypes that exist in our country today to unearth the reality of being a American Muslim.

Methods

Journal entries were collected through a Qualtrics survey. All questions remained the same throughout the project. Only I, as the administrator, was able to view responses and all entries were completely anonymous; I have no information on the participants other than what

they chose to include in their entries. This paper is an ethnographic analysis based on the collected journal entries.

The three questions participants were asked are listed below:

- How does “Islamophobia” manifest in your daily life? Is this a personal experience? A story you’ve heard? A public issue?
- How has the rhetoric of the Trump campaign, presidency, and administration shaped perceptions of American Muslims? Has this affected your own experiences?
- Do you have any other thoughts/experiences/opinions about discrimination you would like to share?

It is important to note that Participant Q did not directly fill out the survey. Rather, they answered these questions in a face-to-face interview in order to give more detailed responses. I then transcribed the interview and eliminated all elements which might identify the participant, leaving only those which the participant approved (Appendix B).

As an ethnography should, this project “destroy[s] prejudices, open[s] horizons, and promote[s] creative thought and action... [and] encourage[s] social and cultural critique.”² Through this, it will encourage Muslims and their allies to speak out against the rhetoric of the Trump administration and its supporters and will advocate for students to actively participate in creating more inclusive environments at places of education for Muslims and other minority students. Anthropologically, this project contributes to our understandings of how interactions, or

² Denielle Elliott and Dara Culhane, ed. *A Different Kind of Ethnography: Imaginative Practices and Creative Methodologies* (United States: University of Toronto Press, 2017), 18.

perceived interactions and occurrences, can impact peoples' personal identities and feelings of belonging.

Personal Entries

Below are four journal entries of my own, in which I describe my personal experiences with Islamophobia and terrorism during the Trump campaign and administration. This short auto-ethnography serves as the only non-anonymous story in the project. As none of the other experiences have names attached to them, I felt it was important to include aspects of my own life in order to strengthen the personal connections the stories make with the reader. Although these events may seem distant for many people, I hope that my own stories will allow them to see that these are real issues Muslims face every day in today's world.

These entries introduce a handful of themes which continue throughout the project: the power of public media, prejudiced political ideologies, and social backlash in the form of direct racism. The first entry highlights how media depictions of terror attacks impacts all American Muslims by focusing on my imminent fears regarding the Paris attacks of November 2015. In the second, I use the Orlando shooting of 2016 as a case study to discuss the dichotomy between the way most Muslims react to the horror of an attack, and the way many politicians portray Islam in light of such attacks. The third is a written account of the fear Muslims have felt in the face of Trump's Travel Ban. The fourth, and final, entry is an instance of direct racism which occurred in the process of researching for this project. It reflects how commonplace such occurrences are within the lives of American Muslims. Additionally, following each entry is a brief summary of outside context regarding the history and logistics of the event itself.

26 April 2016

I was sitting in my dorm room doing research for a paper on twentieth-century photography and global feminism when a notification appeared on my phone; “Paris attacks: Who were the attackers?”³ I stopped and sighed, pushed my laptop away and picked up the phone. As I clicked on the article I silently prayed that the names I read would not be the Arabic names I am used to; the ones that incorrectly roll off the tongues of my peers and politicians, the ones that scroll by on television news banners with mugshot-like photos of young, lost, broken, often dead men. I prayed and I hoped, but it was all a futile ritual. I knew what I’d see.

“French officials investigating the deadly Paris attacks on 13 November have identified most of the people they believe to have carried out the assaults, claimed by the Islamic State group.”⁴ It doesn’t matter that the so-called “Islamic State” is not a representation of Islam, or that the eleven boys who carried out the attacks were lied to and manipulated by a terrorist organization who promised them freedom from lives of oppression. All that matters are the sounds of their names. And we take the backlash for this.

Context: Before the Paris attacks, I had never experienced direct racism from anyone affiliated with the University of Denver. However, after the attacks and the media coverage of them, my social media inboxes began overflowing with notifications of prejudiced comments from fellow students. Some directly called me a terrorist. Others claimed that Islam was “oppressive” and offered to pull me away from it with the “virtues of Christianity.” One even told me that, if I stood for peace, it meant I was not a “real Muslim” and I should stop pretending

³ “Paris attacks: Who were the attackers?” BBC, April 27, 2016, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-34832512>.

⁴ “Paris attacks”

to be one, as “all Muslims uphold violence.” The media portrayal of the Paris attacks and their focus on the attackers as members of the so-called “Islamic State,” combined with the fully underway Trump campaign in which Trump directly claimed that Muslims hate Americans,⁵ provoked a backlash against Islam in the United States, which manifested as direct racism towards Muslim Americans.

12 June 2016

I watched in horror as the numbers on my screen grew greater; thirty, forty, and finally an even fifty. Fifty dead and even more wounded in a nightclub in Orlando, and the name Omar Mateen rushing from one internet source to another and opening the gates to a resurgence of the word “terrorist.”⁶ Less than a day later, then presidential candidate Donald Trump tweeted, “Appreciate the congrats for being right on radical Islamic terrorism.”⁷ I silently hoped against hope that this did not become everyday life for American Muslims.

Context: One of the common phrases used throughout the Trump campaign was “Islamic terrorism.” Although Muslims and politicians alike have asked the president to refrain from the use of the term, he continues to embed it in many of his speeches and tweets. After the Orlando nightclub shooting, Trump tweeted:

⁵ Donald Trump, “Donald Trump: ‘I think Islam hates us,’” Interviewed by Anderson Cooper, CNN, March 9, 2016, video, 0:52, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C-Zj0tfZY6o>.

⁶ “A timeline of what happened at the Orlando nightclub shooting,” *Tampa Bay Times*, June 13, 2016, <http://www.tampabay.com/news/publicsafety/crime/a-timeline-of-what-happened-at-the-orlando-nightclub-shooting/2281363>.

⁷ Donald J Trump (@realDonaldTrump) “Appreciate the congrats for being right on radical Islamic terrorism, I don’t want congrats, I want toughness & vigilance. We must be smart!” Twitter, June 12, 2016, <https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/742034549232766976?lang=en>.

Appreciate the congrats for being right on radical Islamic terrorism, I don't want congrats, I want toughness & vigilance. We must be smart!

thereby implying that the event somehow had the consent of the Muslim community. He continued to refer to the shooting as an example of violence in Islam for nearly a year afterwards, and claimed that the government had to monitor all Muslims in order to stop attacks on Americans.

27 January 2017

I got my first real view of Executive Order 13769 — commonly referred to as President Trump's Travel Ban, probably best described as his Muslim Ban — through a BBC app. The order banned all people coming in from seven Muslim-majority countries — Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, and Yemen — from entering the United States, claiming that the visa-issuing process “did not stop attacks by foreign nationals who are admitted to the United States.”⁸ It seemed to include people with valid paperwork, visas, and Green Cards. It seemed to include people with families. It seemed to include people without homes to which they could return. The president called it “extreme vetting.”⁹ We called it “terrifying.” Muslims were no longer allowed to come in. The way we saw it, it might have only been a matter of time before Muslims really were registered, hunted down, and forced into monitored settlements.

⁸ “Executive Order Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States,” Executive Orders, White House, January 27, 2017, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/executive-order-protecting-nation-foreign-terrorist-entry-united-states/>.

⁹ Donald J Trump (@realDonaldTrump) “Our country needs strong borders and extreme vetting, NOW. Look what is happening all over Europe and, indeed, the world - a horrible mess!” Twitter, January 29, 2017, <https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/825692045532618753?lang=en>.

Context: A mere week after being inaugurated into office, President Trump signed an executive order which he called a “travel ban.” His administration has been unable to release any data supporting the ban of people from these nine Muslim-majority countries. Although many have claimed that these countries harbor terrorists, the data analyzed in the next section shows otherwise. It seems that the main basis for choosing these nine countries is that their populations are largely Muslim, and hindering their entry into the US would severely limit the amount of Muslims entering or re-entering the country.

13 October 2017

In order to complete this project, I reached out to students at the University of Denver, University of Colorado at Denver, University of Colorado at Boulder, Colorado State University, Colorado School of Mines, and Metropolitan State University of Denver, via various social media outlets, most notably Facebook and WhatsApp. As the president of DU’s MSA, I found it useful to post links to all my surveys on the DUMSA Facebook page. On this particular day, I had posted the link with the caption:

“Salaam! My name is Alia Reza and I am DUMSA’s [DU Muslim Student Association] president. As part of my anthropology capstone, I am researching how the personal identities of Muslim students, and other students who have experienced Islamophobia, have been affected by the current sociopolitical environment... Inshallah, we can use this data to combat Islamophobia and allow Muslim voices to be heard.”

I was quite proud of myself. It was, after all, a very eloquent way of saying, “Please fill out my survey.” The first comment, however, was not what I had hoped.

“Muslims cannot feel oppressed over an evil they have created,” wrote a white, middle-aged man. He went on to cite the Vegas shooting of October 1st, 2017 as a result of ISIS

meddling in US affairs, and explained that Muslim students should be banned from universities as they should not be given a platform to "corrupt the ways of Americans."

I sighed, deleted the comment, and blocked the user. By this point, I had lost count of the number of racist incidents I had experienced via social media. The internet, I have discovered, is truly a dangerous place. Although it can be used to connect people from all corners the world and to educate us on one another, it can also be used to spread hate and falsehood. The Vegas shooting was not the influence of the so-called Islamic State. The shooter, Stephen Paddock, was a 64 year-old caucasian American male. Muslims cannot be banned from universities because many of us are US citizens. And Muslim students do not spread teachings of terrorism because terrorism is not Islam.

I've realized in the last couple years that the internet is our most effective ally, and our most deadly enemy. Whether through Facebook, Twitter, political outlets, or personal blogs, there will always be those who seek to destroy the truth. But the truth can live on through us.

Context: "The head-covering is a symbol of male-domination." — Facebook 2015

"Except... Islam is a cruel male-dominated culture." — Twitter 2016

"The Muslim Student Association breeds ISIS terrorists." — Facebook 2017

Three of the many examples of prejudiced comments I've received via social media. Although none of these statements are true, they are widely believed amongst those who are uneducated on the basics of Islam. Although these falsities flood the internet every day, convincing many to believe stereotypes, today's Muslim community is determined to fight off these attacks against truth. As the following study will show, Muslim students at universities across Colorado have

noticed the increase in racism and hostilities, both on the internet and outside of it, and they are each stepping up to change the lack of education surrounding Islam in America.

Over the last three years, Americans seem to have become more outspoken with prejudice and racism. On university campuses, the effect of this increase of open racism has caused many students to feel less comfortable and more fearful of their place at their institution. For the remainder of this paper, I will discuss the impact of mass media, personal abuse, and complex identity on students, while interspersing comments from the research participants in order to expand the narrative of modern racism and Islamophobia.

American Racism

“As a Muslim American wearing a hijab, Islamophobia is a personal experience. There is not a day that goes by without me questioning whether or not I will be subjected to discrimination, stereotypes, or hate-based crime just for being a Muslim American.”— Participant R

“I come from a rural, very privileged, very pro-Trump area, so Islamophobia is common. I’m not even Muslim, but I’ve been berated and people have made ‘bomb jokes’ about me simply because my mom is Syrian.” — Participant A

Racism — according to the Oxford dictionary, “a belief that one’s own racial or ethnic group is superior, or that other such groups represent a threat to one's cultural identity, racial integrity, or economic well-being” — is deep-set in many areas of American society.¹⁰ A report from the *Huffington Post* reveals that, between 2014 and 2016, hate crimes in the US rose by 6.8

¹⁰ “Racism,” *Oxford English Dictionary*, accessed 27 December 2017, <http://www.oed.com/du.idm.oclc.org/view/Entry/157097?rskey=IaJQjl&result=1>.

per cent and anti-Muslim hate crimes rose by 67 per cent¹¹ Although hate crime rates have not risen in Colorado specifically, incidents of hate — situations that do not rise to the level of “crime,” but are still motivated by hatred — have risen since the beginning of the Trump campaign in June 2015.¹² Colorado students have an interesting perspective on why this might be the case.

“It [Islamophobia] manifests because so much of the public seems to have this idea,” writes Participant I. “It comes in the form of stories I’ve heard from friends and from others.” Participant L explains, “I hear Islamophobic comments fairly often and get the impression that most of my peers are uncomfortable around Islam. I think it is a public issue that has capitalized on people’s ignorance and lack of information.”

Census data from the 2016 election seems to support the idea that Islamophobia and other forms of racism often come from a lack of education: over 70 per cent of white Americans without a college education voted for Donald Trump (Figure 1).¹³ As stated above, these people are more likely to believe generalized statements and stereotypes regarding other racial groups, as they have not been educated on the realities of these groups and likely don’t know many people outside of their own socioeconomic class. In addition, politicians consistently have a

¹¹ Brian Levin, “FBI: Hate Crime Went Up 6.8 Percent in 2015; Anti-Muslim Incidents Surge to Second Highest Ever,” *The Huffington Post*, November 13, 2016. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/brian-levin-jd/fbi-hate-crime-up-68in-2_b_12951150.html.

¹² Scott Levin, “Are Hate Crimes On The Rise In Colorado Or Are They Just Getting More Attention?” interview by Ryan Warner, *Colorado Matters*, CPR, January 4, 2017, audio, 08:12, <http://www.cpr.org/news/story/are-hate-crimes-on-the-rise-in-colorado-or-is-more-notice-being-taken>.

¹³ Schaffner, McWilliams, and Nteta, presentation, 3-4; Jon Huang, Samuel Jacoby, Michael Strickland, and KK Rebecca Lai, “Election 2016: Exit Polls,” *The New York Times*, November 8, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/11/08/us/politics/election-exit-polls.html>.

greater influence on popular opinion than most people in the United States.¹⁴ As Trump consistently promotes anti-Muslim philosophies, these philosophies are spreading faster than they have since 2001.¹⁵ Participant O sums up this phenomenon by pointing out that people often “follow without really knowing the true facts. They’re not willing to research.” This directly leads to the backlash against Islam that correlates with the Trump campaign; “[O]nce you have this kind of negativity from the top leadership,” writes Participant J, “it seeps into all parts of society.”

Trump and the Rise of Islamophobia

“Trump... led an Islamophobic campaign that called for Muslim American surveillance, a hint at internment camps, and more. To know that this campaign won the presidency, normalizes this Islamophobia, which has been evident through the rise of white supremacy and hate-crimes against Muslims and mosques. Personally, I am more cautious of my surroundings, and more committed to convincing local and state government to take extra measures to protect my community.” — Participant R

In November 2017, Pew Research Center published a study of levels of assault against Muslims in the US. Their data — which comes from anti-Muslim assaults reported to the FBI in each year, shows the three highest peaks of assaults in the twenty-first century occurred in 2001, 2015, and 2016 (Figure 2). Additionally, the 127 reports from 2016 far exceed the 91 reports from 2015 and even the 93 from 2001, right after September 11.¹⁶

¹⁴ Marina Poudret, “Islamophobia in America” (BA thesis, Fordham University, 2016), 15.

¹⁵ Daniel Bush, “Could Trump’s anti-Muslim rhetoric influence politics well beyond 2016?” *PBS News Hour*, December 11, 2016, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/could-trumps-anti-muslim-rhetoric-influence-politics-well-beyond-2016>.

¹⁶ Katayoun Kishi, “Assaults against Muslims in US surpass 2001 level,” Fact Tank: News in the Numbers, Pew Research Center, November 13, 2017, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/11/15/assaults-against-muslims-in-u-s-surpass-2001-level/>.

It is no coincidence that this spike in assaults comes at the same time as the Trump campaign. Participant F calls the campaign “the icing on the cake” for those with bigoted views. As Participant Q further explains, “The way he [Trump] portrayed Muslims... gave people who were supporting him the justification to just go out and say whatever they wanted to say because they saw their president elect saying whatever he wanted to say. Usually, your president is supposed to be that leader who’s accepting of everything and doesn’t talk bad about people.”

It seems to American Muslims, however, that President Trump takes every opportunity to denigrate them. For instance, in a *Fox News* interview in 2016, Trump stated that Muslims are “going to have to turn in the people that are bombing the planes. And they know who the people are” implying that every Muslim is part of a terrorist group.¹⁷ Later, at a rally, Trump blamed “children of Muslim American parents” for “a growing number of terrorist attacks,” even though these children are often American-born citizens.¹⁸ Most notably, though, is Trump’s “travel ban.”

2017 TRAVEL BAN

Executive Order 13769 — issued on 27 January 2017 — temporarily bans travel and immigration into the United States from seven Muslim-majority countries (Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, and Yemen).¹⁹ Since then, Chad, North Korea, and Venezuela have also

¹⁷ Fox News, “Fox & Friends: Donald Trump Interview, Miss USA 2015 weighs in on Trump,” filmed May 20, 2016, video, 1:15:35, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=388ZzbaPIYc>.

¹⁸ Candice Smith and John Santucci, “Donald Trump: Number of Muslim Immigrants Have ‘Hostile Attitudes,’” ABC News, June 14, 2016, <http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/donald-trump-number-muslim-immigrants-hostile-attitudes/story?id=39844183>.

¹⁹ White House, “Executive Order.”

been added.²⁰ Although Trump claimed that the ban was “to protect Americans,”²¹ many viewed it as a legal manifestation of Trump’s personal prejudices against Muslims. Participant N formerly worked in the intelligence field in Washington DC. They state that “Trump’s travel ban seem[s] to be partially based upon religion, not terrorism risk... I know which countries harbor terrorists. One of the more notable terrorist-incubating countries was absent from this ban, and it was also one where Trump development was occurring.”

The Travel Ban has had a tremendous impact on Muslim students in Colorado. At the University of Denver, for instance, minority groups have campaigned for DU to become a sanctuary campus, in order to protect their students’ rights to life and education in the US, regardless of their ethnicity and/or religion. The movement, termed “Sanctuary DU,” involved student affinity groups writing letters to administrators, organizing and posting signs and posters which called for a sanctuary campus, and reaching out to fellow students for support in protecting their minority peers. Ultimately, the DU administration declined to become a sanctuary campus, which simply raised the number of racist incidents occurring on their own campus.

Firsthand Abuse

“I thought the travel ban was going to be okay for us because we’re US citizens. But when my parents came back from Syria, immigration at Denver International Airport made them stay for four and a half hours. We’ve always gone back and forth and we’ve never had to wait. Then, I have an aunt who has had a Green Card for the past ten years and she always comes back and forth to Colorado. Right after the travel ban, she was coming to America. When she got to JFK

²⁰ Greg Toppo, “New travel ban adds North Korea, Venezuela,” *USA Today*, September 24, 2017, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/2017/09/24/new-travel-ban-adds-north-korea-venezuela/698645001/>.

²¹ White House, “Executive Order.”

airport in New York, they stopped her, took away her Green Card, and sent her back to Syria. This was going to be her last time before getting her citizenship. She just needed to stay for another month and she would've gotten it. But they took it away and they sent her back. She's been trying to come back ever since but she can't because there's no Green Card anymore... I have a friend who's lived here for the past two years and was on a visa to go to school at CU Denver, and then her visa got taken away and she was sent back. And now she can't come back." — Participant Q

Muslim students experience firsthand racism as a part of their daily lives. The previous stories of my own experiences with racism are only the beginning of a much larger narrative of Islamophobia in the US. In an undercover test of American airport security checkpoints by the Department of Homeland Security, the TSA's equipment and security protocol was found to fail eighty percent of the time.²² Many, such as lawyer Yevgenia Kleinder, point to racially insensitive instructions for TSA agents as part of what directs the TSA's attention away from real threats, and towards those of minority races. For example, the list of behavioral indicators of suicide bombers includes aspects such as "clothing is loose," which often applies to Muslims, as modest and loose clothing is a common practice in Islam, and "does not respond to authoritative voice commands or direct salutation from a distance," which often applies to people of Middle Eastern and South Asian nationality, as their cultural practices differ in these respects.²³ Such practices reinforce the stereotype that Muslims are terrorists, which creates a social environment where those who are, or who "look", Muslim are the targets of passive and confrontational racism. These instances of racism can be anything from direct attacks, to situations such as the

²² David Kerley and Jeffrey Cook, "TSA fails most tests in latest undercover operation at US airports," ABC News, November 9, 2017, <http://abcnews.go.com/US/tsa-fails-tests-latest-undercover-operation-us-airports/story?id=51022188>.

²³ Yevgenia S Kleinder, "Racial Profiling in the Name of National Security: Protecting Minority Travelers' Civil Liberties in the Age of Terrorism," *Boston College Third World Law Journal* 30, no. 103 (2010): 138.

one Participant I describes: “My roommate's mother came to town the other day,” they state, “and, when I asked her how her flight was, she said it was okay but she was nervous because there was a woman wearing a hijab on the plane.”

Although airport security might assist in breeding this type of racism, it comes to full light in the lives of college students on their very campuses. Participant C discusses a simple action which targeted a wide population of Muslims, one to which many Muslims, myself included, have unfortunately borne witness. “In my neighborhood in Denver before the [2016] election,” Participant C writes, “someone took to the sidewalk with chalk to write ‘Fuck Islam.’” Whether on sidewalks, graffiti walls, or T-shirts, the phrase “Fuck Islam” is one that has become common in the last few years. The phrase has even become a Twitter hashtag which contains posts such as “Islamists should be banned”²⁴ and “I have been noticing more and more women in burqas and niqabs... i do not want this religion spreading any more than it already has.”²⁵ Social media has become a breeding ground for keyboard racism, something students at universities are experiencing as part of their normal lives.

One example is a series of repeated attacks experienced by Participant Q. “I’ve gotten three [social media] comments from students at DU [University of Denver],” they state. The content of these messages included, “You don’t belong here,” “Go back to your country,” and,

²⁴ Kidd Gallahad (@KiddGallahad), “WAKE UP FOOL! America DOES welcome everyone but not in an open borders, wreck wages and the economy kind of way. The US has always had a merit based immigration system and we need it now more than ever. Islamists should be banned though. #FuckIslam,” Twitter, January 31, 2018, <https://twitter.com/KiddGallahad/status/958875552269479936>.

²⁵ Matthew Paul (@IVB2013), “I have been noticing more and more women in burqas and niqabs. #fuckislam i do not want this religion spreading any more than it already has. Fuck all religions but none so much as Islam cuz it is the worse,” Twitter, January 27, 2018, <https://twitter.com/IVB2013>.

“Terrorist.” Once the third message came into their inbox, Participant Q decided to report it to the DU staff. “The first person I contacted was someone from the advising department. They made me fill out a report sheet and then they said the dean or someone else would look over it. They said someone would contact me.” Participant Q was never contacted. They attempted to follow-up but did not know who to talk to as they were never told who would call them.

“[N]othing happened after reporting it,” they exclaim in frustration, “No one did anything about it.” Not only are such instances of racism occurring amongst university students, but universities sometimes deem them less important than other concerns, and they go unnoticed even when reported to faculty and staff. This lack of action on the part of some universities has likely contributed to the increase in racism and Islamophobia that has been seen on college campuses and across the US in recent years. These prejudices have become so engrained into campus life, that students like Participant J often feel passive racism from other students “in undertones.” Participant J elaborates, “I can feel it when I am talking to someone, especially when I have ethnic clothes on in public.” Others may not direct racist statements towards Muslim students but sidelong glances, intense stares, and slowed down speech from other students leads to a feeling of not belonging.

Mass Media and Racial Profiling

“Islamophobia comes from the media portraying Muslims as terrorists and thus people are scared of them... This is very much a public issue.” — Participant I

“Islamophobia manifests in... not being able to portray a ‘normal’ (for lack of better word) Muslim character on a TV show or movie. (In this, I mean that Muslim characters are either terrorists or they’re non-practicing Muslims who don’t even show what’s it like to be a practicing American Muslim). It’s the fact that people honestly don’t seem to understand that these two identities, Muslim

and American, can coexist in a person. These two identities are not separate.” — Participant P

Western mass media often portrays Islam in a negative light; either as terrorists or oppressed young women. Many scholars point to the dichotomy of “West versus East,” created during western Imperial Expansion, as a likely cause of this skewed view of Islam in the west.²⁶ In recent years, the media has shifted its focus to terrorists who claim to be Muslim, and have convinced many Americans that terrorism and Islam go hand in hand. One of the major sources of such false claims is the conservative news network Fox News. Fox has used misconceptions of Islam and objectively incorrect data in their reports, which further the narrative that “Islam” and “terrorism” are synonymous. In a November 2017 interview with Trump advisor Sebastian Gorka, Fox emphasized the term “Islamists” — a western term not used by Muslims — and began to use it as a replacement for “terrorists.” Additionally, they expanded on Gorka’s ideas of helping leaders of Muslim countries who are against ISIS to combat terrorism so that “their version of Islam” becomes the more “dominant version.”²⁷ This idea establishes a belief that most modern Muslims are aligned with ISIS, rather than against it. In reality, this is mathematically not the case. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights estimates that ISIS has between 80,000 and 100,000 fighters, and possibly 60,000 followers.²⁸ But, as of 2010, Pew

²⁶ Amir Saeed, “Media, Racism, and Islamophobia: The Representation of Islam and Muslims in the Media,” *Sociology Compass* 1, no. 2 (2007): 444 & 446-448.

²⁷ “Sebastian Gorka: ‘Attractiveness of Jihad’ Must be Destroyed Just Like Fascist and Communist Ideologies,” Fox News, November 25, 2017, <http://insider.foxnews.com/2017/11/25/sebastian-gorka-attractiveness-jihad-must-be-destroyed-just-fascist-and-communist>.

²⁸ “Islamic State ‘has 50,000 fighters in Syria,’” *Al Jazeera*, August 19, 2014, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2014/08/islamic-state-50000-fighters-syria-2014819184258421392.html>.

Research Center estimated that there were 1.6 billion Muslims worldwide, and they say that number has almost certainly grown since then.²⁹ Proportionally, this means that only about 0.01 per cent of those who identify as Muslim are involved with the so-called “Islamic State.”

Therefore, Gorka’s and Fox News’ claim that the majority of Muslims are not already against ISIS is inherently incorrect, but is still being spread throughout their news outlets.

The reporting of misleading news in the media impacts the lives of Muslim students even in their own classrooms. Often, prejudice is spread passively, by using phrases and wording which degrade Muslims and imply that Islam is something other than what it truly is. Participant P states:

[I]n some of my textbooks, they try to be inclusive and break stereotypes by saying that not all Muslims are terrorists, but the wording of certain books doesn't sit well with me. For instance, my sociology textbook talks about Islam post 9/11, and it says, “As it turns out, not all Muslims are terrorists.” That really made me upset, as it's treating this subject as though the author made this huge discovery that Muslims are not terrorists, suggesting that at first they were. I know it's small, but it's things like this that suggest Islamophobia is more deeply rooted than we'd expect.

Another example of passive prejudice can be seen in the different ways acts of violence are reported in US media with regards to the perpetrator. As a case study, I look at *New York Times* coverage of the Orlando shooting of 2016 versus the Las Vegas shooting of 2017.

²⁹ Drew Desilver and David Masci, “World’s Muslim population more widespread than you might think,” Fact Tank: News in the Numbers, Pew Research Center, January 31, 2017, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/01/31/worlds-muslim-population-more-widespread-than-you-might-think/>.

The *New York Times* used the word “terrorist” five times in their article on Orlando shooter Omar Mateen.³⁰ The word was not used at all in their article on Las Vegas gunman Stephen Paddock.³¹ The word “violence” was used three times in the Orlando article, and not used once in the Las Vegas article.³² In addition, the Vegas article emphasizes that Paddock might have had “unidentified medical conditions” and that his “physical and mental health seemed to have deteriorated in recent months.”³³ Rather than acknowledge the possibility that Mateen, as well, may have had an untreated mental health condition, the Orlando article simply states that the shooting “was the worst act of terrorism on American soil since Sept. 11, 2001.”³⁴

Although these articles had the potential to be very similar — both are about men who committed extremely violent mass shootings in American social spaces and likely had untreated health conditions — they are written in extremely different tones. Through this, it becomes clear that the media is painting Mateen as a voluntary terrorist and Paddock as the victim of mental illness. Such reports do influence the perceptions of Americans, which affects Muslim communities and increases racism and hostilities towards them.

³⁰ Lizette Alvarez and Richard Pérez-Peña, “Orlando Gunman Attacks Gay Nightclub, Leaving 50 Dead,” *The New York Times*, June 12, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/06/13/us/orlando-nightclub-shooting.html>.

³¹ Adam Goldman and Jennifer Medina, “Las Vegas Gunman Took Elaborate Steps to Hide His Tracks, New Documents Show,” *The New York Times*, Jan 12, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/12/us/las-vegas-attack-gunman-paddock.html>.

³² Alvarez and Pérez-Peña, “Orlando Gunman.”; Goldman and Medina, “Las Vegas Gunman.”

³³ Goldman and Medina, “Las Vegas Gunman.”

³⁴ Alvarez and Pérez-Peña, “Orlando Gunman.”

The Ideology of Fear

“So many people have bought in to this false fear and will not accept the religion of Islam as anything but terrorists. I guarantee you my best friend isn’t.” — Participant I

“When the Las Vegas shooting took place, I prayed that I did not see that the attacker was a Muslim. I was afraid of suspicious looks from classmates [and] neighbors had that happened.” — Participant E

Throughout history, minority groups have been “othered” by biased sociopolitical systems which attempt to place blame for larger problems on those they do not understand. Islam has been misunderstood in the west since European explorers developed skewed ideas of what they called “The Orient” and began painting fantasized representations of what they believed was the Middle East. The lack of education regarding Islam has made it a prime target for blame and racism in today’s world. Quite simply, people are often afraid of Islam.

Participant D writes, “I... absolutely fear that Trump’s rhetoric has poisoned many minds, or made people think that certain behaviors are allowable.” As discussed above, levels of hate crimes against American Muslims have risen drastically over the last two to three years, paralleling the Trump campaign and administration. Trump’s rhetoric and policies have not only played on the fears of those uneducated in Islam, but have subsequently increased fear within Muslim communities regarding their own safety. University students bear a large portion of this fear, as they are actively seeking their place in the world and on their campuses at this stage of their life. Below, I have analyzed stories of fear and lack of acceptance from two Muslim students who participated in this project. The stories are meant to convey the immense impact that Trump-influenced America has had on individuals, and how that can affect the identities of Muslim students and communities.

Participant P summarizes her own experiences with Islamophobia and explains the change in her own view of the world after the Trump election:

Islamophobia manifests itself in many ways in my life. Having been raised in the US, I often do not face the same kind of discriminations that other "non-American" Muslims might experience. I do not have an accent when I speak, so unlike my parents, others do not attack me on the basis of sounding foreign. However, after the election of Trump, I have become a little more aware of my surroundings and the fact that I wear the hijab. I get antsy in places that are secluded especially when there are only white middle aged men in my vicinity. This might sound crazy, but sometimes I fear someone will pull out a gun and try to shoot me because I am a visible Muslim. I am thankful to be living in Colorado, but these fears still persist.

Here, Participant P touches on one of the core issues of racism in America — feelings of acceptance. Although she implies that she has not been directly attacked in her home state of Colorado, the very increase in anti-Muslim hate crimes makes her fearful and self-conscious of her appearance. Women across the country really are being violently harassed and attacked for wearing the hijab. A prominent example is that of an incident on public transportation in Portland, Oregon in the spring of 2017. Thirty-five year-old Jeremy Christian was on a MAX train when he began to verbally harass two Muslim women wearing hijab. When three men attempted to stop him, he attacked them, killing two and hospitalizing the third.³⁵ Such incidents do increase the fears of American Muslims and, as Participant P's story illustrates, can often make them feel as if they stand out negatively, or that their appearance can bring unwanted trouble.

³⁵ Aimee Green, "Jeremy Christian will remain in jail pending trial for MAX train killings," *The Oregonian*, November 20, 2017, http://www.oregonlive.com/portland/index.ssf/2017/11/judge_says_jeremy_christian_sh.html.

Participant Q has another kind of story, in which their family experienced direct racism in a public setting. As mentioned above, Participant Q's parents were stopped for hours at Denver International Airport on their way back from Syria right after the institution of the travel ban. Although they were US citizens, they were pulled into a small room, questioned, and had to open all their luggage. Participant Q says:

My family was just scared. They were terrified of the ban. Even though we have no family members — except my aunt — who came here they were still scared in general for their friends that would go back and forth. Even themselves; they have a citizenship — they've had it for the past seven/eight years — but they were still really scared. They didn't really want to go back [to Syria] any more but they ended up going back just because they can't really stay away from there. But, this last time, they came back and said, "We learned our lesson. We don't know if we want to go back again." It was terrifying for them, being held there for four and a half hours and being asked questions.

Because of the racism they experienced at the hands of a government policy, Participant Q's family no longer feels comfortable visiting their friends and family in their Syrian hometown. The travel ban has not only created an atmosphere of anti-Muslim rhetoric, it has caused Muslims to feel out of place and unsafe in spaces where the innocent should be protected, and travelers should have equal rights. On top of this, Participant Q is unable to see the people they care about back in Syria. When I asked them if they had any other thoughts to add on the topic of Islamophobia and Trump's travel ban, they explained:

I miss my family and friends the most when it comes to Syria. Also, over there, you go out and it's just so much fun. Places are open until four or five o'clock in the morning. So, you literally start going out at 10 pm and everyone is out in the streets. While, here, you go out at nine and streets are dead and empty. I miss that. I was also never alone. I would always have family and friends by my side. They love going out to restaurants and going shopping. It was always light over there. It was never dark. Lights were always on. It was fun. It was nice.

Participant Q's fond memories of Syria can no longer be relived without them spending hours in rooms with airport security, afraid to not be let back into the US, regardless of citizenship. The push towards forcing American Muslims to choose between their religion and their nationality becomes extremely strong in instances such as this, where wishing to experience one side of their personal identities, by default, pushes them away from the other in the eyes of society.

Education and Muslim Identity

“While mainstream media has to be responsible in their portrayal of Muslims, educational institutions too should step up in discarding the propaganda about Muslims.” — Participant E

American Muslims have been strongly affected by the sociopolitical changes that have come with the Trump campaign and administration. University students have been forced to reevaluate their places on their campuses and within their societies as a whole, as they now stand out in a more negative light and are subject to even more passive and direct racism. But they are not submissive to these negative changes. Rather, these survey responses show that students across Colorado — both Muslims and their allies — are taking an active stance against much of the rhetoric and political action promoted by the Trump administration. As Participant F summarizes,

It is the responsibility of every human being to look after each other as a member of one family. It is... the responsibility of every human being to work ceaselessly and to fight... to end oppression and evil toward other human beings wherever it may lie and no matter what the cost.

This ideology has led Colorado students to establish campaigns for the equality of every student on their campus, such as the Sanctuary DU movement, or the Colorado MSAs group (made up of executive board members from all Muslim Student Associations in Colorado) who organize

statewide events to spread awareness and education of Islam. Through the use of the anonymous survey, this study has collected the stories of individuals who have worked to make a difference in their Colorado communities by wading into the growing environment of hatred and Islamophobia and leaving a positive mark. Participant C is an example. Their story is recorded above, where they found the phrase “Fuck Islam” chalked on the sidewalk. Rather than leave it there, they “got some water and a sponge to get rid of [it].” It was a simple action, but it eliminated the possibility of the phrase inspiring or motivating another act of hate in the area.

Another effort students have made, is that of educating their peers in Islam and social justice. Many of the participants pointed to lack of education and exposure to Islam as a primary reason Islamophobia is so prominent in today’s world. Participant C writes, “Islamophobic sentiments stem from utter ignorance; I expect the people who believe Islam is evil don’t really know any Muslims.” They believe that “personal connections” are an effective way of changing these perceptions. Participant E agrees, and states that, in order for people to learn what Islam really is, “Muslims, too, need to be friendly with others.” Participant G’s perspective is also significant, as they often observe Islamophobia from their parents, who are Evangelical Christians. “I strongly disagree with my parents beliefs,” they write, “but I have not seen them actively discriminate against Muslims. I largely believe this is because they do not know any and I wonder how they would interact if they got to know one.” This reinforces how important it is for Muslim students to familiarize their peers with Islam; if Islamophobia truly does stem from ignorance, then it must be combated with education.

Participant L discusses their own efforts to correct misconceptions of Islam at their university. “Since Trump began his campaign,” they write, “I have heard... more comments that

are either blatantly Islamophobic or rooted in ignorance about the true teachings of Islam.” They explain that they find themselves “having to call people out and attempting to educate [their] peers” more often than they ever needed to before the Trump campaign.

The efforts to expose more people Islam does seem to have a positive effect. Participant D is a prime example. As a non-Muslim, Participant D has never experienced Islamophobia firsthand. But they do say that, in recent years, they "have felt a greater kinship than ever, being extra-mindful to be aware of [their] Muslim peers.” They accredit this mindfulness to “education around the Muslim religion and tenets.” Although they admit to not being as knowledgeable about Islam as they would like, their personal connections to and understandings of their Muslim peers has significantly increased through the simple education of the core values of Islam.

Conclusion

In recent years, American Muslims have been subject to greater amounts of violence and hatred than in the years before. As this project has shown, university students are increasingly fearful of their identities as Muslims, as media and politics have constructed an environment where they feel unsafe and out of place. While these concerns are supported by recent attacks and other incidents of hate against Muslims since the beginning of the Trump campaign, Muslim students in Colorado do not seem to be losing their senses of self, as they continue to identify strongly as both Muslims and Americans.

Ultimately, Colorado students see the lack of education regarding Islam as the groundwork for racial prejudice and Islamophobia in the US. The data collected through the Qualtrics survey shows that the majority of these students have doubled their efforts to help their Muslim communities and to educate their peers in the real teachings of Islam.

Another important method for combating Islamophobia is to promote discussions of what prejudice and racism look like in the daily lives of American minorities. This project has been my use of this strategy in order to give a much needed voice to the students who regularly see and experience Islamophobia. Americans with these experiences are often silenced by the larger scope of mass media and statistics reporting. In order for racism to be recognized as a reality in the modern world, personal stories of racism must become available to the public. As participant R writes, "It's time we let Muslim Americans speak for themselves, to share their narrative." By spreading individual accounts of Islamophobia, such as those in this project, as well as putting effort into expanding education of Islam, Colorado Muslim students are rebelling against misconceptions of their place within society, and maintaining their personal identities through unveiling the truth of Islam in America.

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Images

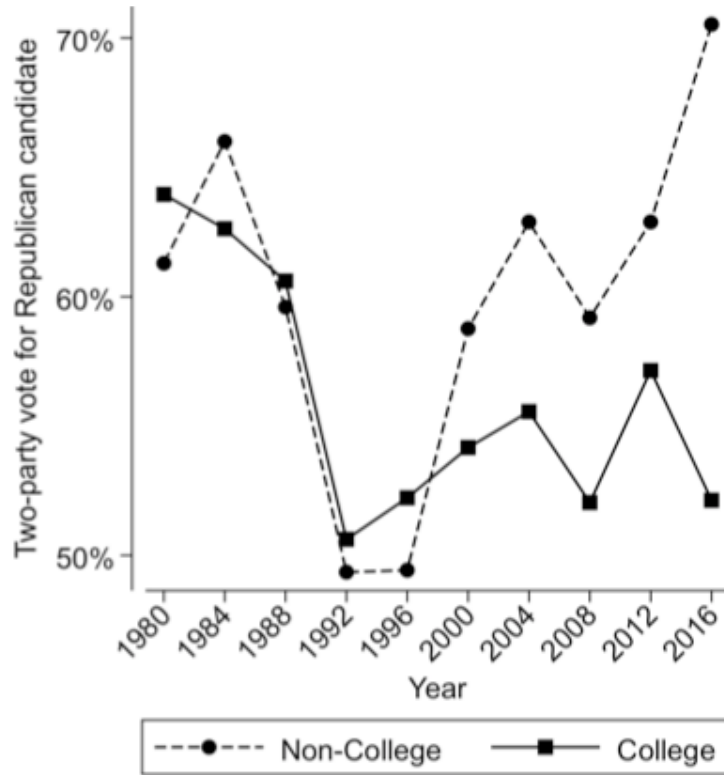


Figure 1: Percent of two-party vote for Republican presidential candidate among whites without a college degree. Source; National exit polls.

Anti-Muslim assaults in U.S. reported to the FBI

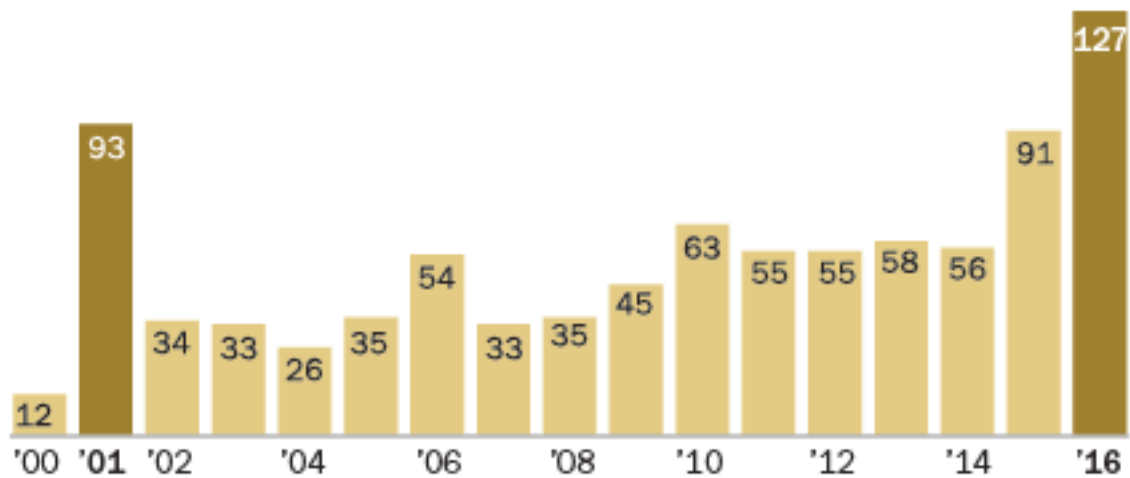


Figure 2: Anti-Muslim assaults in 2016 exceeded 2001. Source; Federal Bureau of Investigation via Pew Research Center

Appendices

Appendix A: Qualtrics Survey Data

Default Report

Including Islam: Muslim Students' Experiences

February 17th 2018, 7:22 pm MST

Q1 - How does “Islamophobia” manifest in your daily life? Is this a personal experience? A story you’ve heard? A public issue?

How does “Islamophobia” manifest in your daily life? Is this a personal experience? A story you’ve heard? A public issue?

As a Muslim American wearing a hijab, Islamophobia is a personal experience. There is not a day that goes by without me questioning whether or not I will be subjected to discrimination, stereotypes, or hate-based crime just for being a Muslim American. The statistics and my community organizing will also show it’s a rising public issue that needs national attention and efforts to ensure the safety and well-being of my community. It’s time we let Muslim Americans speak for themselves, to share their narrative, not white, old men that they know a thing or two about Muslim based on some biased articles they read.

It tends to come up about every other day.

I think Islamophobia manifests itself in many ways in my life. Having been raised in the US, I often do not face the same kind of discriminations that other "non-American" muslims might experience. I do not have an accent when I speak, so unlike my parents, others do not attack me on the basis of sounding foreign. However, after the election of Trump, I have become a little more aware of my surroundings and the fact that I wear the hijab. I get antsy in places that are secluded especially when there are only white middle aged men in my vicinity. This might sound crazy, but sometimes I fear someone will pull out a gun and try to shoot me because I am a visible Muslim. I am thankful to be living in Colorado, but these fears still persist.

The media also portrays islam in a way that makes me furious. Its frustrating to see "Islamic terrorism" as a phrase, because it continues to suggest that terrorism has a place in islam, when all muslims know it doesn't. even in some of my textbooks, they try to be inclusive and break stereotypes by saying that not all muslims are terrorists, but the wording of certain books doesn't sit well with me. For instance, my sociology textbook talks about racialization of islam post 9/11, and it says "as it turns out, not all muslims are terrorists" That really made me upset, as it's treating this subject as though the author made this huge discovery that muslims are not terrorists, suggesting that at first they were. I know it's small, but its things like this that suggest islamophobia is more deeply rooted than we'd expect.

More a public issue but I do advocate for Palestine because of the inherent racial profile that Israel casts against the Palestinians whether they be Muslim, Christian, or Jewish. I have a new friend of whom I helped him leave Gaza and come here last April. He's gone on to make a better life for himself and his family in Europe because there is no life in Gaza. So, the more I learn of their plight, the more I learn of the plight of those in Rohingya, (sp), it's all based on racial profiling and very unfair. I've made it personal experience.

I have many friends who are Muslim. I am saddened by how they, and especially their children, are treated. These are people that have grown up in the US, are tax paying hard working well-educated professionals. Racists tell them to "go back to their own country" and call them terrorists. I've cried tears because of the hatred their US born children have experienced.

It is a public issue-

Seeing it on the news, reading it on social media is disgusting- I can not imagine what it is like for people that see or experience in their daily lives.

I am not Muslim so I'm not directly targeted by Islamophobia but I hear Islamophobic comments fairly often and

get the impression that most of my peers are uncomfortable around Islam. I think it is a public issue that has capitalized on people's ignorance and lack of information

I have witnessed people make assumptions about an individual because of their religion. People assume that those with hijabs are assumed to be prude, radical, etc.

It is more in undertones. I can feel it when I am talking to someone, especially when I have ethnic clothes on in public.

It manifests because so much of the public seems to have this idea. It comes in the form of stories I've heard from friends and from others. It comes from the media portraying Muslims as terrorists and thus people are scared of them. I do not have personal experience and I don't experience it daily but my friends do and the stories I hear make me sad. This is very much a public issue.

Being a Muslim, Islamophobia affects me first hand

I experience Islamophobia the most at home because my parents are evangelical Christians and, in my own opinion, I believe perpetuate Islamophobia. It is their belief, and the belief of their church, that Muslims are the enemy that exist to kill Christians. They view the majority of Muslims as violent because it is their belief that Islam is inherently violent. I have also heard that the resurgence of Islam today is an indication of the coming of the end times, aka the Rapture.

I am somewhat distanced from it, as I lead a very solitary life, but I have known many Muslims over the years through work, school, and friendships, and though I am not Muslim, I am deeply angered by prejudice of any kind, including Islamophobia.

It affects psychologically as a Muslim when you hear the news about Islamophobic incidents. I used to go to Friday prayers in mosque wearing cap which traditional Muslims wear. I no longer feel comfortable in wearing that on my way to mosque.

As a brown person who is non-Muslim, I have certainly been painted with a broad brush and had others assume I belong to any particular religion. I feel that I have faced bias based on my race, however, I do not feel I have experienced persecution based on my religion.

While I do not experience it first hand, I bear witness to it frequently and find it very disturbing, speaking out against it when I have the opportunity. For example, in my neighborhood in Denver before last year's election, someone took to the sidewalk with chalk to write, "Fuck Islam." Now that I'm living in Geneva, Switzerland, I've seen the same thing scrawled on the side of a neighboring building. I also saw "Islam = Merde [shit]" written right on the front of a train station building here. Thankfully, these writings get adjusted almost immediately--the first writings scratched out and the latest one changed to, "Islam = Paix [peace]"--so I am encouraged by the fact that there is at least an equal presence of supporters who don't tolerate harassment like that. (I got some water and a sponge to get rid of the chalked version; I don't have the guts to add more vandalism to a building in a foreign country right now, unfortunately.)

I've definitely heard stories from my friends about people making comments to them that they hadn't dealt with before they got to the US.

I come from a rural, very privileged, very pro-Trump area, so Islamophobia is common. I'm not Muslim, but I've been berated and people have made "bomb jokes" about me simply because my mom is Syrian. This is absolutely an issue.

Q2 - How has the rhetoric of the Trump campaign, presidency, and administration shaped perceptions of American Muslims? Has this affected your own experiences?

How has the rhetoric of the Trump campaign, presidency, and administration shaped perceptions of American Muslims? Has this affected your own experiences?

The Trump campaign led an Islamophobic campaign that called for Muslim American surveillance, a hint at internment camps, and more. To know that this campaign won the presidency, normalizes this Islamophobia, which has been evident through the rise of white supremacy and hate-crimes against Muslims and mosques. Personally, I am more cautious of my surroundings, and more committed to convincing local and state government to take extra measures to protect my community.

Yes. People think they can treat people badly because they see their president doing it.

I think it demonstrated this in the above question, but basically it made me more apprehensive because people know and it's acceptable to be racist and are not afraid to hold back. Trump has normalized Islamophobia and all other forms of racism.

I think most people are sheep. They follow without really knowing the true facts. They're not willing to research. It's unfortunate that an idiot like President Trump got into the office in the first place, but the American public was looking for a way to prosper out of the hardship of their lives. Hillary Clinton would have been worse, much worse. Her record in the state department backs that up. Donald Trump is just unbelievable in what he says and does. I would vote for impeachment.

My Muslim friends have definitely noticed an increase in hostility towards them since Trump was elected. Trump's travel ban seemed to be partially based upon religion, not terrorism risk. I previously worked in the intelligence field in Washington DC...I know which countries harbor terrorists. One of the more notable terrorist incubating countries was absent from his ban, and it was also one where Trump development was occurring.

Trump is divisive in his language about Muslims, and about anyone who isn't a white man it seems.

I feel like it has amped up the hate- it seems more out in the open now.

Since Trump began his campaign I have heard a lot more comments that are either blatantly Islamophobic or rooted in ignorance about the true teachings of Islam. Because of my own experiences traveling and studying abroad in the Muslim world, I find myself having to call people out and attempting to educate my peers much more often than was ever necessary pre-Trump.

People are more openly telling people to "go back to where they came from," ignoring the fact that people born in the states can also be practicing Muslims.

I have not experienced anything directly but once you have this kind of negativity from the top leadership, it seeps into all parts of society.

It has made me angry that's for sure. At one point he wanted to deport American citizens and have them on a roster. He has increased the fear.

It's made Muslims Americans seem like monsters. This has caused awful stereotypes to become very prominent.

I feel the predominant impact of the Trump campaign has been to embolden conservative acquaintances to speak up on their intolerant views. Specifically, these acquaintances are happy with Trump's travel ban and feel that someone is finally protecting them from terrorists.

Trump's campaign has been the icing on the cake of the American right's embrace of fascism. Personally, I'm wondering how long it will be before civil war ensues between cis-het-wasp bigots and literally everyone else.

The rhetoric has victimized Muslims in America. When the Las Vegas shooting took place, I prayed so that I do not see that the attacker is a Muslim. I was afraid of suspicious looks from classmates, neighbors had that happened.

I have felt a greater kinship than ever, being extra-mindful to be aware of my Muslim peers and stand up whenever possible. This is primarily through education around the Muslim religion and tenets (as little as I know).

However, I know that the folks I associate with are not representative of the perspectives all throughout the US, and absolutely fear that Trump's rhetoric has poisoned many minds, or made people think that certain behaviors are allowable. This has increased my fear for my personal safety as well as for that of other brown and black folks around me.

Racism, xenophobia, and nationalism have come out in full force across the U.S. and Europe, though, and they are disgusting to me, especially considering our countries' histories in accepting different types of people, refugees, and economic migrants over hundreds of years. It seems that people never learn from history, which is so discouraging sometimes. These Islamophobic sentiments stem from sheer ignorance; I expect the people who believe Islam is evil don't really know any Muslims. I think personal connections can make all the difference in these cases.

It's created a kind of hate mongering environment. I haven't been affected directly, but I do see it.

It has had, I think, a very negative impact on perceptions of American Muslims. So much of his platform is based on hate, and I have certainly seen a rise in hate speech in action in my own neighborhood since he became president.

Q3 - Do you have any other thoughts/experiences/opinions about discrimination on you would like to share?

Do you have any other thoughts/experiences/opinions about discrimination on you would like to share?

I still remember vividly the traumatic experience of my dad's life being threatened before my eyes on the night of 9-11. It was that experience that convinced to make the commitment to being unafraid and to demanding that my narrative and identity as a Muslim American is recognized and respected.

No

its just frustra ng too when you see that ppl cant even understand that islamophobia manifests itself in things like the media and textbooks. Ppl dont get that its not just blatant acts of racism, like calling a muslim a terrorists, but its trea ng white shooters as lone wolves and anyone who has any es to islam as terrorists. Its not covering the largest bombing in Somalia in the news, because the vic ms were black and muslim. Its even not being able to portray a "normal" (for lack of be er word) muslim character on a tv show or movie (in this i mean that muslim characters are either terrorists or theyre non-prac cing muslims who dont even show whats its like to be a prac cing american muslim). its the fact that ppl honestly dont seem to understand that these two iden es, muslim and american, can coexist in a person. these two iden es are not separate, and ppl need to stop seeing them that way.

I'm white middle class, fairly educated. I usually mark anything and usually something di erent when lling out the demographic sec on on any applica on asking for my race because I think we're all created equal regardless of our beliefs or our skin color. I teach for a Na ve American school district, I have taught for Na ve American schools for 21 years now. I advocate for and make KIVA loans to mostly women of Pales ne. I advocate against Israel's apartheid and I like to educate those that do not know but must because of their posi on in government. When Wyoming introduced a bill to go against BDS, I wrote each and every one of the 70+ Wyoming representa ves to educate them upon why legisla on against boyco ng would be taking away our right to freedom of speech and how it would do that. I will con nue to expose those legislators who un inchingly promote Israel to the public with while showing the public the dirt that Israel con nually brings upon the world.

I think how brazen people have become is really scary. I can not imagine what it must feel like for POC.

In my experience, most people who are expressing Islamophobic ideas publicly have virtually no accurate informa on on Islam as a whole. They have not met or spoken to many (if any) Muslim people and it shows in ignorance.

no

This poli cal environment and lack of unifying leadership is e ec ng nega vely, general popula on. If it starts like that from top, it will e ect the bo om levels too.

I go to a diverse school and have diverse friends so while I do not experience it first hand those who I am close to have. The most memorable stories come from having to go to the airport and getting there super early because TSA always checks them. Meanwhile I fly regularly and never have been checked. My roommate's mother came to town the other day and when I asked her how her flight was she said it was okay but she was nervous because there was a woman wearing a hijab on the plane. That made me angry. So many people have bought in to this false fear and will not accept the religion of Islam as anything but terrorists. I guarantee you my best friend isn't. The few that are are radicals. We have larger problems with white Christians in the US than any other group yet we have a fear of something else. It makes me angry and sad to see a group discriminated for nothing more than their beliefs.

Aertrumps election has fueled hatred and discrimination which affects everyone in the country.

I strongly disagree with my parents' beliefs but I have not seen them actively discriminate against Muslims. I largely believe this is because they do not know any and I wonder how they would interact if they got to know one.

Additionally, my mother supports Facebook posts that condemn teaching Islam in public school (common core exercises that showed Arabic calligraphy or lessons on the Quran) while stating how sad she is that Christians are persecuted in school (no public prayer, can't teach about biblical means, and her struggles that evolution is taught as the truth). I think that there is a strange misconception on discrimination that some of these evangelical communities have opted to focus on themselves while they discriminate against Muslims.

It is the responsibility of every human being to look at each other as members of one family. It is furthermore the responsibility of every human being to work ceaselessly and to fight if need be to end oppression and evil toward other human beings wherever it may lie and no matter what the cost.

While mainstream media have to be responsible in their portrayal of Muslims, educational institutions too should step up in discarding the propaganda about Muslims. Muslims too need to be friendly with others so that they know what Islam is.

I have been relatively lucky that I have not experienced any violence or threats based on my race or ethnicity. I have, however, been discriminated against in subtle but insidious ways, and find myself increasingly afraid of the environment we live in.

Appendix B: Complete Transcription of Participant Q's Approved Comments

I still have family in Syria. They just can't get out. It's really hard to stay in touch with them because they don't really have any internet, and no electricity or anything. Maybe once a week we get to talk to them. The ones that left Syria and are now in Hungary or Germany, we can't talk to them at all. They have no source of communication whatsoever, because they're just living in camps in little tents. They have nothing.

Even though I was born in America and lived here for almost my whole life I still felt out of place over here, while, back home, I was surrounded by family and people who had the same culture as me and same values as me.

My grandmother is in Damascus. We talk whenever we can, around once a week.

I thought the travel ban was going to be okay for us because we're US citizens. But when my parents came back from Syria, immigration at Denver International Airport made them stay for four and a half hours. We've always gone back and forth and we've never had to wait. Then, I have an aunt who has had a Green Card for the past 10 years and she always comes back and forth to Colorado. Right after the travel ban, she was coming to America. When she got to JFK airport in New York, they stopped her, took away her Green Card, and sent her back to Syria. This was going to be her last time before getting her citizenship. She just needed to stay for another month and she would've gotten it. But they took it away and they sent her back. She's been trying to come back ever since but she can't because there's no Green Card anymore.

I know of friends who have similar stories but this was really scary because it was a close family member. I have heard a lot of stories like that, though, where people were on visas but they were sent back. I actually have a friend who's lived here for the past two years and was on a visa to go to school at CU Denver, and then her visa got taken away and she was sent back. And now she can't come back.

It's really confusing still because a lot of people call it a "Muslim ban" and a lot of people call it a "travel ban." Right when it came out it didn't really make sense to me because there are a lot of other Muslims in a lot of other countries but they weren't banned. So, why is it that those seven countries were banned rather than other countries?

My family was just scared. They were terrified of the ban. Even though we have no family members — except my aunt — who came here they were still scared in general for their friends

that would go back and forth. Even themselves; they have a citizenship — they've had it for the past 7/8 years — but they were still really scared. They didn't really want to go back [to Syria] any more but they ended up going back just because they can't really stay away from there. But, this last time, they came back and said, "We learned our lesson. We don't know if we want to go back again." It was terrifying for them, being held there for four and a half hours and being asked questions. The questions were mostly, "What were you doing there? Why were you there? Are you partnering up with anyone? Why'd you come back to the US?" And then they opened up all their suitcases and looked through every single shirt and pants pocket: everything. They just kept asking them over and over again why they went there and why they came back.

I've been trying to work with refugee agencies here. I go and talk to refugees — Syrian refugees in particular — and see if they need anything. For Ramadan we did food packages to give out. We made 43 packages and gave them to 43 different people. I can't really do anything about it over there [in Syria] so the most I can do is try to change something here.

I've talked to Lutheran Family Services, African Community Center — even though they're not all Syrian there — and here on campus there's a club called No Lost Generation. We've been working a lot with the African Community Center and trying to get refugees to come and talk to students and tell them about their stories, and how they came, and how they ended up here. It's been a success.

The packages had easy food to make. We got soup, beans, pasta, frozen vegetables, frozen sweets and desserts, juice — they love drinking apricot juice during Ramadan; it's one of their biggest things during Ramadan — dates. Just easy, simple food that we know they eat during Ramadan.

Today's political climate is a really touchy subject. I am totally against him. I don't like the fact that he's president at all, or elected at all. I think, recently, what has made me really angry was the fact that he went to Saudi Arabia and he showed all that love for Muslims, apparently, and was saying all these good things about them. But, before that, he was saying all these bad things about them. So, I just think he's a very fake person. Under the Obama administration, I would remember Obama going out every single year on the first day of Ramadan and saying *Ramadan Kareem* to all Muslims and, I was sitting with my dad [on the first day of Ramadan] and we were both waiting for Trump to say it because it was three days after he got back from Saudi Arabia.

But he didn't and we were — not shocked — but mad. He doesn't *have* to go out and say it but, having Obama go out and say it the past four years was nice. We felt like we belonged in America. But now we all just feel like we're shut down. I've had a lot of people tell me — after

Trump became president — “You don’t belong here. Go back to your country. Terrorist.” I’ve gotten a lot of those. I’ve gotten three comments from students at DU, and others outside of school. I got two over Facebook Messenger and then one to my face. I reported one of them. The other two were the first ones and I thought it wouldn’t happen again. But, as the third one came, I got really fed up with it, so I did report it. But nothing happened after reporting it. No one did anything about it. The first person I contacted was someone from the advising department. They made me fill out a report sheet and then they said the Dean or someone else would look over it. They said someone would contact me but no one ever did after that. And I never knew who to contact because they never told me who was going to contact me. So I just let it go.

The way he [Trump] portrayed Muslims in the beginning — and everyone else he was against; he just talked about people in such a bad way — it gave people who were supporting him the justification to just go out and say whatever they want to say because they saw their president elect saying whatever he wanted to say. Usually your president is supposed to be that leader who’s accepting of everything and doesn’t talk bad about people. But, because he was talking bad about people, he was letting people say whatever they wanted to say and they thought it was okay.

When Trump did the airstrikes in Syria, my parents were in Syria. They came back and were telling us all about it. They said that no one died, no one was even at the airport. Everyone had known previously that it was going to happen. He had told Russia it was going to happen, told Syria it was going to happen, so I don’t think he really wants to do anything about it [Russia’s involvement in Syria]. He just wants people to notice him more than he’s already being noticed. But I definitely don’t think it [the airstrikes] was a good idea. It didn’t benefit anyone. It was just hurtful that it turned out that Russia had known and Syria had known. It was all staged. None of it was real.

I miss my family and friends the most when it comes to Syria. Also, over there, you go out and it’s just so much fun. Places are open until four or five o’clock in the morning. So, you literally start going out at 10pm and everyone is out in the streets. While, here, you go out at nine and streets are dead and empty. I miss that. I was also never alone. I would always have family and friends by my side. They love going out to restaurants and going shopping. It was always light over there. It was never dark. Lights were always on. It was fun. It was nice.

I’m always excited when the courts put a stop to the travel ban. At the same time, I get really scared because it’s only a temporary stop. I’m currently just scared as to what will happen when

this takes full effect. I don't really know what's going to happen and I don't want to know what's going to happen. I wish it would just stay stopped and blocked.