Framing Muslims in the Era of the Trump Presidency: Examining the Perceived Impact Media has on College-Age Muslims in America

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Abstract

Drawing on qualitative research, this study analyzes the experiences of college-age Muslims in the U.S. and examines how they negotiate their religious identities in an era of negative media framing of Islam. The study reveals that Muslim college students labor under the multiple burdens of explaining and representing their religion, negotiating perceived disapproval and mischaracterizations of their faith and practices, and navigating their minority identities in the face of mass media's portrayal of Islam as "dangerous," "corrupt," and "a threat to the U.S." This paper presents an overview of the way Islam has been perceived in the United States in both eras before describing the current climate for Muslims. This project is used to present the impacts of media framing of Islam on Muslim college students' evolving identities and experiences as minorities on campuses, the struggle to trust media, and, finally, the change they hope to see in the future.

I. Introduction

The terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, changed the way the United States government and the American people viewed Islam. This was the beginning of the "Us versus Them," or the U.S. versus Islam narrative that pulsated throughout American media systems (Powell, 2011, p. 14). The concept of Muslims being the enemy has continued to be a source of tension for Muslims in U.S. media and in their perceptions of the media's impact on their evolving sense of self. According to a recent report by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, there has been a significant increase in hate speech toward those identifying with Islam. This rate is higher than in the post-9/11 period ("Hate Crimes"). Although only 1.2% of Americans are Muslim, that means 3.6 million individuals face constant tension and pressure from the media to "live quietly and make sure they don't do anything that could result in negative news" (Personal Interview 5/12/2019). There is significant research on media framing of Islam following 9/11, but less is known about its impact in the last four years. Additionally, with the Trump candidacy and election, there has been a new wave of violent speech, biased news coverage, and harmful rhetoric towards Muslims in America (Powell, 2015). The advent of the "Trump Era" brought public expressions of Islamophobia, as evidenced by policies such as a travel ban to certain countries. Muslims, especially those in youth communities, have had to reestablish, defend, and apologize for who they are and how they speak about their faith (Ali, 2018).

The ages of 18-23 are some of the most formative years in a person's life (Ali, 2018). It is a time for critical development when children become adults and are typically forced to solidify their understanding of the world around them and their place in society. Distinct from other individuals on college campuses, Muslim students are developing their sense of self in an intensified era of unfavorable public opinion, aggressive speech, and unapologetic Islamophobia (Klaas, 2019). According to a 2017 Pew Research Center study, 74 percent of Muslim-Americans say the current president and media systems are "unfriendly to them." Many Muslims see the implementation of the travel ban, aiming for a "total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States," as taking blatant actions against their religion. These feelings have only intensified with the perceived negative representation of Muslims in the media ("U.S. Muslims"). Drawing on 20 one-on-one interviews with students ranging from 18-23 years old, this study will present the idea that 9/11 is the baseline, not the point of rupture, for young Muslims who have never known a world without the impacts of 9/11 on their social identities. It will also present the perception of media framing of Islam as negative, scary, and foreign, and discuss the perceived impacts these sentiments have on college-age Muslim students in the U.S.

II. Literature Review

Scholarship on the framing of Islam in mass media has interested professionals and researchers, particularly as part of understanding hate crimes, Islamophobia, and the overall attitudes pertaining to Muslims in the U.S. A variety of disciplines and approaches have studied Muslim representation of the media, and a growing number of resources provide a comprehensive view of how 9/11 was a turning point for the public's understanding of Islam (El-Aswad, 2013; Kimberly, 2011; Kimberly, 2018; Nacos et al., 2011; West & Lloyd, 2017). This literature review is focused on two areas. One is the aftermath of media representation of Islam post 9/11. Second is the continuation of negative framing in subsequent years, including violent, intolerant imagery of Muslims. Finally, this review will present the ways Muslim youth have experienced Islamophobia through discrimination, religious and racial slurs, and an increased pressure to defend and reconcile inaccurate portrays of Islam in the media. The researcher considers framing, cultivation, and spiral of silence theories in order to better understand how Muslims have been represented to the public, how that image as been internalized by the masses, and the reaction Muslim youth might have to this imagery.

Post 9/11 Muslim Identities in Media

For Muslims in the U.S., their lives can be distinguished between who the world thought they were pre-9/11 and how they were seen post-9/11. For many, this was the moment they no longer felt a sense of belonging in the United States, a struggle that adults would later pass down to the next generation (Ali, 2014). Beyond the attitudes of their fellow citizens, this was marked as a time when Muslim-Americans feared for their safety. One student wrote about her family being incarcerated after being reported for "suspicious activity" (Bayoumi, 2012, p. 12). Previously, suspects could only be detained for 24 hours, but this process shifted after 9/11 such that once a tip was reported, suspects could be held until the case was closed, which could have taken up to four months. Despite their innocence, this family was held in prison for over half a year (Bayoumi, 2012). Due to experiences and stories such as these, Muslims have felt like they have targets affixed to their backs, which has not diminished over the years.

In post-9/11 America, some media outlets have used terrorist attacks to build negative, fear-inducing, and unwelcoming images of Islam for its audiences (el-Aswad, 2013). Scholars argue that this type of presentation of Islam has triggered the incline of discriminating and stigmatizing experiences Muslims have faced based on factors such as race, language, dress, customs, and heritage (el-Aswad, 2013). The limited knowledge the U.S. public has about Muslims has been tainted by the framing of Islam as a "major terrorism threat" (Powell, 2018, p. 14). Powell writes, "The fact that Western media participates in bias and creates stereotypes against Islam is accepted in the academic world," and continues that media for the most part "do not separate Islam and Muslims, the actions of one Muslim are equated with all Muslims" (Powell, 2018, p. 2).

Media and Manufactured Images of Islam

Powell argues that Islam entered many Americans' homes for the first time via news, and the coverage was often focused on oil, war, and terrorism (Powell, 2004). Following 9/11, some media figures

on the political right described the prophet Muhammad as a "terrorist" and the *Qur'an* as the "enemy's book" (Varisco, 2005, p. 6). Additionally, some media outlets presented images of Muslims as "mad religious imams or mullahs," airplane hijackers, skyscraper terrorists, or suicide bombers (Bowman, 2006; el-Aswad, 2013). Some media outlets portrayed Islam as something that was innately scary, tantalizing, and different (Ryan, 1991). After 9/11, Powell found that media framing often continued to connect terrorism to Islam, further perpetrating "a fear of the 'other," increasingly dividing American-Muslims and their non-Muslim neighbors (Powell, 2018, p. 3).

Cultivation Theory and Spiral of Silence Theory

Cultivation theory suggests that exposure of images within media, over time, subtly "cultivate" viewer's perceptions of reality (Shanahan & Morgan, 2004). A 2018 study found that those accused of a violent plot who looked Muslim, or had a "Muslim sounding name," received seven times more media attention than non-Muslim counterparts, despite similarities in their alleged crimes (Roa et al., 2018, p. 13). Similarly, Muslim-perceived perpetrators accused of violence were referenced in the media at four times the rate of their non-Muslim counterparts. One content analysis of news media in the U.S. found that nine in ten news reports about Muslims, Islam, and Islamic organizations are related to "violence and some form of terrorism." This study also found that a large majority of articles referencing a Muslim-perceived perpetrator contained the "terror-focused" terms "terror," "terrorism," and/or "terrorist" (Powell, 2004, p. 34-35). Powell also suggests that media are drawn to cover and mislabel "terrorist attacks" in order to create "shocking and sensational" acts, resulting in nonstop coverage of events that "create a climate of fear" (Powell, 2004, p. 3). This type of coverage comes at a cost of making religious minority groups afraid to speak up and defend their traditions.

Many Muslims are wary of representing themselves in the media, creating a void of voices and inaccurate representations of Islam. The notion of staying silent because a person is in a marginalized minority can be seen in the Spiral of Silence theory. Originally proposed by German political scientist Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann in 1974, the theory describes the tendency of individuals to remain silent when they feel that their views are in opposition to the majority view on a subject (Slater, 2004). Typically, people remain silent because they fear isolation when the group or public realizes that they have a different opinion, or they fear reprisals such as loss of a job or status. This theory accurately captures the current narrative of Muslims, specifically those born during or after 9/11, and their personal engagement and perceived impact of media systems in the U.S. For present-day college students, there has not been a world where this type of media coverage has not been the basis of their social identities.

Muslim Students' Lives: The Last Seven Years

In her book *Young Muslim America* (2014), Shabana Mir revealed the scrutiny Muslim students face from their American influences and their Muslim communities for being too religious or not religious enough. Mir highlighted that these students struggle with fitting in, often as a result of minimal community, negative stereotypes of Islam, and the pressures to limit their outward expression of their religion. Similarly, Sumbul Ali-Karamali (2012) presented the notion that Muslim students are constantly faced with defending Islam and helping non-Muslims recognize the misconceptions of the religion. Finally, Author Muna Ali (2018) distinguishes further the pressures Muslim students face in the divergent origins and converging histories surrounding Muslims in the U.S. She recognized three major cultural narratives that confront many Muslim youth – balancing home life and societal influences, the need to recover "pure/true" Islam from cultural contamination, and saving America from cultural takeover by Islam and Muslims (p. 291). Each of these authors aimed to present a case for the unique positioning Muslims students find themselves in era beyond 9/11, where differences are evident, identities are challenged, and students' sense of self are seen as incompatible with U.S. values, traditions, and political structures. Although these authors conducted ethnographic research, spending time in college spaces, little information was collected surrounding the perceived impact the media portrayal of Islam has had on these students in their evolving identities and experiences as minorities on campuses.

Purpose and Research Questions

Through in-depth interviews, the researcher sought to answer two questions: What role does mass media play in the current rise in religious hate speech and crimes in the United States? How has media framing impacted the behaviors and evolving identities of college age Muslim-Americans? The first question

is essential in understanding where hate crimes and hate speech may come from. The second question highlights a group of people that has been silenced out of fear and who are struggling to preserve their identities in the U.S. This research is important because themes presented in these interviews may provide valuable insight in understanding the ways a variety of media outlets might impact minority populations in America. Additionally, understandings of the perceived impact of media may jumpstart new prevention efforts in decreasing religious and racial discrimination. Other studies have looked at the amount of negative media coverage Muslims received, but did not analyze or address the perceived impact that coverage had on Muslim youth communities. Therefore, this research builds on previous studies and intends to fill the research gap by identifying the perceived impacts and reactions mass media has had on college-age Muslims in America.

III. Methods

The researcher conducted 20 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with college-age (18-23) Muslim students, ten female and ten male, in North Carolina. A one-on-one interview is used as a qualitative method to better understand a subject and collect "free and spontaneous" responses from the subject, in contrast to what can happen in focus groups or surveys, where the atmosphere can be intimidating or isolating (Bryman, 2007). The interviews were taken in comfortable, relaxed atmospheres where prompts were personalized in order to discover a deeper understanding of the student's reactions to mass media in the U.S. Each interview lasted 30-40 minutes in length and took place in private settings on their campuses or mosques. There was no incentive offered to the participants for the information they provided.

Each interviewee was protected under Institutional Review Board guidelines and signed a confidentiality waiver, so their names will not be mentioned in this project. The researcher located the participants through Muslim Student Associations (MSA) on four different university campuses, and then used the snowball method of sampling to connect with the friends of the interviewees. These interviews were collected over one month during the fall of 2019. Several specific questions asked during these interviews were: What is the most prominent Muslim figure presented to mainstream U.S. media? What is the most negative and most positive depiction of Islam in the news? Where do you see Muslims in entertainment? How would you change the current portrayal, coverage and depiction of Muslim in mass media? This method of research was used to explore the subjects' personal experiences and emotional interactions with the way that the media portrays and frames their religion.

IV. Findings

After analyzing responses from the 20 in-depth interviews, several interesting findings emerged. These interviews showed unique patterns and perceptions of how college Muslim students interact with media and their over-all understanding of how Islam is represented to the masses. This section includes a detailed examination of common trends, unique perspectives, and a look into potential solutions to the representation of Muslims in American media.

Although these students were in the same age range and living in the same state, two extremes emerged in the way students consume media. Eleven out of the 20 students said that they "rarely watch the news," while the other nine said they "consume news daily" and were "very informed" about national news. Although there was a clear difference between how students consume news media, the respondents said that they consume media of some sort outside of traditional news, including radio, video, online publications, social media, and video games. On average, these students reported to have been on their phones between 3-6 hours a day.

Perceived Media Impacts

One student was in the seventh grade when he felt impacted by Islamophobia. He recalls one morning watching the news and his family cheering that Osama bin Laden had been killed. He walked to school like any other day, but this time his friends walked towards him as he arrived. "I heard your granddad

died yesterday," the student reenacted the voice of a boy in his class. He remembers how it was the first time he realized how little people knew about Islam and what they did know came from national events such as this one. Another student said he had a similar epiphany when he arrived in the U.S. after living his whole life in Lebanon. "When I got [to the U.S.], it dawned on me that the main way non-Muslims learned about Islam was through the media, and that is extremely scary, especially since every fourth person is a Muslim." Later he discovered that people's media-informed knowledge of Islam led teachers to put him on the spot to explain *jihad,* students asking him if his cousins were the Boston bombers, and him no longer viewing himself as someone people wanted to be around. He explained, "I just felt like I wasn't someone people would feel comfortable going up to. I look Arab, and therefore Muslim, and I think people were and still are scared of me." For this student, these instances of discrimination and exclusion were thought to be connected to the ways the media uses "scary, dark, foreign" imagery to portray Islam.

A recent study by the University of Alabama showed that terror perpetrated by Muslims received 357 percent more attention in American media than attacks committed by non-Muslims, despite the fact that the latter committed nearly twice as many assaults between 2008-2016 (Kearns et al., 2018). According to the study, terrorist attacks committed by Muslims received 105 headlines in national news outlets, compared with merely 15 headlines covering attacks by non-Muslims (Kearns et al., 2018). When the interviewees were asked if they were surprised by this statistic, each of them said no. One student said, "Media throws around images and quotes from the *Qur'an* of Muslims being violent, but rarely do they show the other 1.8 billion practitioners feeding the homeless and taking care of the poor." Other students agreed that the representation of Muslims is not equally balanced between the negative and the positive. One interview said she is not surprised there are acts of discrimination against Muslims: "Think about it. If all you see of Muslims on the news and in movies is someone who kills people, they will look at me and think that is who I am. Those images, even if you reach a certain point of open-mindedness, are probably still in your mind."

Another student expressed his thoughts that the U.S. antagonizes the Muslim community in order to be united in something. He explained, "We've been used as a scapegoat since 9/11. Nothing has changed about that, if anything, it has just gotten worse." One student went as far to say that media "hijacks" Islam, a sentiment not only seen in the news, but also in movies, T.V., and video games.

One interviewee grew up watching cartoons and the Disney channel just like the other children in her neighborhood. It wasn't until her friends wanted to dress up as princesses that she realized there wasn't one fit for her. She recalled one specific memory from her childhood, "None of them looked like me and I was subconsciously bummed. That's when the idea that my family was weird and not like the average American family started. Sometimes I still struggle with feeling like I don't really fit the 'American' image." For another student, looking different did not matter when he was relaxing behind a screen with his gaming console. He chose a "non-Muslim" sounding name so that he would not face any problems online, an action his parents prompted him to take. But, when he moved to college, he decided to use his real name and it was then when he began receiving threatening messages online. He shared his concern: "Whenever a person realized I was Muslim, that was it … they would say whatever they wanted. It's really concerning what people will say behind a screen and gives you insight into how they feel about you, especially when that person could be your neighbor."

Perceived Presidential Impact

The memories of these students from a young age have deeply informed the way they view themselves and the way they view their role in society. Students expressed that these sentiments are not solely stemming from media representation, but from a president that uses mass media to show his "outward expressions of hatred" toward those practicing Islam.

Each of the 20 interviewees expressed their own stories of people speaking against their religion in ways they had never seen in the past. One student said this administration has made people feel "much more confident in their hateful speech." He explained, "Being president is president. People look up to that and when they hear his opinions and his rhetoric towards Muslims, it makes them think it's okay to have it too." He elaborated on the notion that the hateful words the president was saying were broadcasted nightly for his family and friends to hear. To him, this felt like the quickest way to "use media as a weapon against Islam."

Another participant agreed, saying Trump's Twitter platform has set a precedent for average people to act violently towards their religion. These sentiments were confirmed by two researchers who compared the number of Trump's tweets in a given week that used keywords related to Islam and the number of anti-Muslim

hate crimes that followed. Another interviewee said Trump's rise to fame was because he "doesn't follow political rules" by saying whatever is on his mind, but that has sparked others to outwardly express their own hatred towards others. One student explained, "People feel like they can be 'unapologetically you,' even if that 'you' is an Islamophobic, racist individual. People are shameless about things they should be ashamed of." Beyond the hateful words they have received, this presidency and corresponding media coverage have caused Muslim students to react in two distinct ways: pressure to perform and a fear that leads to isolation.

Pressure to Perform

A majority of the students interviewed expressed that being Muslim in the U.S. meant "a lot of explaining yourself." From a young age students felt like they had to "always be on" in order to show non-Muslims how inaccurate of a representation media portrayed their faith. One student said, "Especially today with the media misrepresenting Islam, it's important for every Muslim, regardless of age or anything, to be on the spot." Another said she was in a unique place when coming to college in the U.S.: "I have this pressure on me to behave really nicely so that people can see that, 'Oh, this is what Muslims are like.' I feel like I am representing a part of my community, which I don't think other people have." Other students shared this idea that they have a unique responsibility to carry and defend their religious images, particularly in the face of disaster. One student expressed: "When a Christian man shot members of a church, no one demanded the Christians condemn his action. It was assumed that that man was mentally unstable and not acting on his religion. But, when a Muslim across the world hurts someone, it is expected that the American Muslim community speak out against it."

Despite some of the "exhausting" pressures to be a "mouth piece of all of Islam," multiple students said that they felt like being a Muslim in the U.S. deepened their practices and made them an even better practitioner of their religion.

One participant said that the challenges of being Muslim in the U.S. have been beneficial. She explained, "I feel encouraged to be a better Muslim because of my surroundings. I know that I need to serve as a better example and show people how Islam is the religion of peace." She also said that when she makes a small mistake it will "make a huge difference in how people view Muslims," but said it is a responsibility she is willing to take. These students also expressed an awareness of their presence that seems rare to a majority of college students. One student recounted what it was like on the anniversary of 9/11: "I walked out of my house and onto campus and saw hundreds of little American flags that honored the deaths from 9/11. I instantly thought about how I had forgotten to trim my beard that morning." This moment was a manifestation of an insecurity of being Arab and Muslim where his ethnicity and religion were directly connected to a national attack. Despite not having been born yet, he was aware that his presence in certain spaces might feel "threatening" to others.

One *hijabi* student said she also faces the pressures of physically representing her faith. She recalls a night where she was verbally attacked by a man yelling at her to "go back to ISIS" when she was at an arcade with her family. This instance made her aware of the way she carried herself in order to portray that she was "not a threat." She added, "Knowing there are people who hate me because of how I look, even if it doesn't impact them is tough. Just because I dress differently or believe differently doesn't mean I'm not as American as anyone else." These moments have not only cause many to be hyper aware of their presence, but has also festered a sense of fear for their safety.

Fear That Leads to Isolation

After the New Zealand attacks, where 51 people from two mosques were murdered, many students recognized for the first time that they might be in danger due to their religious orientation. One university Imam explained how increased national and global hate crimes committed against Muslims have caused many students to disaffiliate from their religion. The Imam explained, "These students come from a religion where their places of worship are being bombed and shot up. It's my job to make them feel safe and if not identifying with their religion does that, then I will support them." One university chaplain said they have had a hard time knowing who is Muslim because so many people do not self identify. "I can't say I blame them," said the chaplain. "They just feel like people are suspicious of them, that the essence of their religion is being misunderstood."

For many Muslims going to college for the first time, their biggest fear is finding community. Having been rooted in their home mosques and surrounded by a microcosm of Muslims, it is daunting to step into a space where they cannot identify who is like them and who may be afraid of them or even cause harm. One student admitted that he struggles with trusting people and building community on campus. He shared, "The way I view Islam has stayed the same, but the way I approach others, with all the prejudice out there, that is very different now." He continued to explain how much more guarded he is in expressing his faith outwardly. One example is public prayer: "A lot of students at my school feel comfortable praying on the lawn. I would never do that. What if someone saw me and just took out a gun?"

V. Discussion

The interviews suggested that media does play some role in how Muslim college students view themselves and interact with others, but the primary point of rupture for fear, isolation, and silence has been the Trump presidency and the increased use of media to publicize negative and potentially harmful attitudes of Islam. These findings support previous research that Muslim college students feel alienated from mainstream culture due to misunderstandings about Islam, sparking many students to feel angry and afraid (Ali, 2018; Mir, 2014).

Results of this study align with previous scholarship that found Muslim students' perceptions about the impact of media have not changed since 9/11, and have only intensified with average individuals feeling like they have a platform to contribute to the negative representation of Islam (Ali, 2018). The notion that average people are outwardly expressing their attitudes toward Islam are seen by the students in print media, broadcast media, television, and video games. It is rare for students to have first-hand experiences with a hate crime or religious slur, but those that had were all outwardly Muslim, meaning at that moment they were wearing a *hijab* or some other type of religious attire. This notion was also seen in Ali's study where women who chose to wear a *hijab* experienced three times the amount of prejudice that those not wearing it. Ali argued the increase in accessible, negative speech has made hate speech towards Muslims "cool" in conservative spaces (Ali, 2018). With the increase in social media platforms and usership, many of these individuals now have a platform to threaten, embarrass, and/or, impact the way people view Islam. Students agreed that this type of media has impacted the way they express their faith, view themselves, and interact with others.

The students also expressed a struggle with the dueling narratives that Islam is "dangerous and scary" and "peaceful and loving." Such feelings are related to social identity theory, which describes the process of a person identifying with what others label that person, or what role that person has in society (Ali, 2018, p. 87). This can be seen in a society were Muslim women are often portrayed as "helpless, vulnerable, and without rights" in movies, television series, and international news. This has led many students to speak out against this stereotype, particularly those choosing to wear head covering. Many college-age women confessed their desire to wear the *hijab,* but did not feel like they were adequate representations of the faith. Therefore, those who did choose to wear the covering said they do feel an extra sense of responsibility on their identity solely because they could not hide their religion. This extra sense of pressure stems from the desire these women have to change a media-induced stereotype of Muslim women. Although past research has found that there are many students that disaffiliate with their religion in college, these students generally acted opposite to the spiral of silence theory, which claims members of a minority group may be afraid to express their opinions due to a fear of isolation and rejection (Slater, 2014). Despite the intensified presence of those speaking against Islam, there has also been a shift in outward support shown to those practicing the religion.

Students participating in this study agreed that although they have had to fight the ways people frame Islam in a negative light, they also have tangibly experienced support from non-Muslims. Following the New Zealand shooting, people around the world showed their solidarity with the mosques in their area by becoming active on social media and uniting crowds of people to surround Muslims during prayer (Mezzofiore, 2019). Multiple interviewees had experienced small-scale, yet intensely meaningful encounters where individuals approached them to say that they are loved, welcomed, and supported in the U.S. These examples shed light on the changing attitudes of Islam in America, but most students agreed, the support still was not enough to make them feel fully welcome and able to practice their religion freely and openly at all

times. The reality for many Muslim students is that the attitudes towards Islam are heightened, both positively and negatively, leaving students unsure of when they are safe to speak up or when they are in danger due to their religious beliefs.

VI. Conclusion

These interviews sought to explore the impact media representations of Islam have on the evolving identities of college-age Muslims in America. The study determined that students overwhelmingly felt like media presents Islam as "dangerous," "scary," and a "religion of terrorists." These students experienced discrimination from an early age and have undertaken their college careers in the face of extreme Islamophobia, hate crimes, and an intensified outward hatred. The interviewees unanimously agreed that American media does a poor job of accurately representing their religion to the masses. Many students identified a lack of positive Muslim figures in the news, in television, and movies, and other entertainment media, leaving them with no role model and no exemplary figure for non-Muslims to connect with. This lack of representation and the history of Islamophobia have sparked two reactions in these students: the need to increase positive Muslim experiences in public spheres through religious knowledge, self-discipline, and kindness, and the need to limit their outwards expression of Islam due to the perceived risk to their personal safety.

Overall, this qualitative study builds on the notion that Muslims are negatively framed in U.S. media. In some quarters, there are indications that media practices may be slowing changing. Some news organizations have reported on uplifting Islamic stories and brought in scholars of Islam to highlight that not all Muslims are connected to one negative event. Additionally, there is an increasing presence of Muslims in mass media. As the number of Muslim contributors to mass media increases, the neutral and positive portrayals of Muslim-Americans may also rise. If this is so, future Muslim generations could finally begin to see a more accurate representation of their religion.

It is important to note limitations to this study. Interviewing more students beyond North Carolina would better determine how media framing of Islam has impacted or changed their behaviors and identity. Two-thirds of the students interviewed were born and raised in the United States, with most of them having never lived outside of North Carolina. Future researchers could include voices of first-generation immigrant students and/or those who are here solely for college. Additionally, surveys and focus groups could be used to determine what media outlets have the greatest impact on students, how often students use certain media, and whether they feel influenced to make changes as a result of that exposure. It may also be important to speak to more professors, chaplains, and Imams to note if they have seen shifts in students' behaviors following a particular media event. While there is room to deepen and broaden this study, this research brings to light several impacts media has had on Muslim youth in America.

Acknowledgments

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