Original Research

WALDEN UNIVERSITY

Emotional Experiences of Muslim Americans Regarding the Intolerance Displayed by Non-Muslims

Munder Abderrazzaq, PhD
Walden University, Minneapolis, Minnesota, United States
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9933-5315

Contact: *DrMunderA@gmail.com*

Abstract

Muslims in the United States report experiencing unequal treatment and racial profiling from non-Muslims. Recent literature (Simon et al., 2018) suggests the need for further research on the intolerance displayed by majority members from the point of view of minority members in the United States. The unwillingness or refusal to respect or tolerate individuals from a different social group or minority groups, who hold beliefs that are contrary to one's own, is referred to as intolerance. The display of intolerance among members of different cultural and religious backgrounds can hinder the discovery of new information needed to promote positive social change among non-Muslims and Muslims in the United States. To explore the emotional experiences of Palestinian Muslim Americans in Cleveland, Ohio, I conducted semistructured interviews regarding the display of prejudice and discrimination by non-Muslims. The theoretical framework used for this study is the theory of planned behavior. To recruit the 10 participants in the study, purposeful and convenience sampling were used. Data analysis was performed using Giorgi's psychological phenomenological method, template analysis, and coding. Findings of the study revealed that participants experienced emotional distress from the intolerance displayed by non-Muslims, which involved experiences such as verbal attacks "anywhere" and "everywhere." The study also found the participants describing the intolerance among Muslims and non-Muslims using terms such as "we vs. they" or "us vs. them." The discovered information from this study can be used to develop social strategies that promote and improve interactions among non-Muslims and Muslims in the United States.

Keywords: *culture, discrimination, emotional experiences, intolerance, Muslim Americans, non-Muslims, and prejudice*

Introduction

Muslim Americans in the United States have reported experiencing verbal abuse, racial profiling, and physical threats based on their religion, color, and ethnicity (Zainiddinov, 2016). Concern among non-Muslims over the integration of Muslim populations in the United States has continued to grow since the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks in New York City (Rosenthal et al., 2015); concerns which were also openly expressed

through verbal threats, racial profiling, physical attacks, and a 2016 presidential campaign that proposed a "ban on Muslims" (Samari, 2016). Some non-Muslims in the United States believe Muslim Americans pose a threat to American society, which has led to Muslim Americans being attacked by fellow Americans (Selod, 2014). The negative emotional experiences of Muslim Americans regarding religious and cultural expression in the United States can have a significant impact on the mental and physical health of members of this population.

The participants selected for this study were Palestinian Muslim Americans living in Cleveland, Ohio. Research literature regarding Muslim Americans has shown Islamophobia in the United States has contributed to negative health outcomes and health disparities among members of this population while also alienating them from the health system (Samari, 2016). As a result, Muslim American women have described removing their hijab, which is a traditional headscarf worn to express their religious and cultural beliefs (Ali et al., 2015; Mohibullah & Kramer, 2016), in fear of being profiled or physically attacked by non-Muslims (Ali et al., 2015).

Intolerance is described as the unwillingness or refusal to tolerate members of different social groups or minority groups who hold different beliefs or opinions (Dictionary.com, n.d.). The profiling of Muslim Americans in the United States has led to some being denied employment (Samari, 2016), which has caused economic hardships and additional challenges involving their ability to assimilate into Western society. Negative emotional experiences associated with Islamophobia can motivate some Muslim Americans to avoid social events, employment opportunities, and health care services; while also influencing their perception of non-Muslims, their social identity as Americans, and their decision making. Non-Muslim is a term used to define a person who does not hold any Islamic religious beliefs or identify as Muslim. The racial profiling and physical threats experienced by Muslim Americans have been reported in airports, mosques, college campuses, and communities throughout the United States, which can affect the health of members of this population by reducing access to resources and health care, while increasing physiological processes, risk factors, and stress (Samari, 2016).

Heightened levels of threats and actual violence toward Muslim Americans can have adverse consequences for members of this population (Rosenthal et al., 2015) by negatively affecting all aspects of their lives, such as leisure and workplace settings (Zainiddinov, 2016). Conflict among Muslims and non-Muslims in the United States has been shown to continuously involve violence and is often associated with Muslim terrorism. Emotional experiences are defined as experiences through which individuals come to understand relationships or events in a different or unexpected way that results in an emotion coming to terms with it (American Psychological Association, n.d.-a).

Muslim women in the United States reported being targets of verbal and physical assaults, as well as experiencing increased hostility in public as the result of being perceived as a threat to American society (Selod, 2014). There is a need for psychologists to better understand and help improve the well-being of Muslim Americans, which is mostly ignored in the previous psychological literature (Amer & Bagasra, 2013). Muslim men in the United States have reported avoiding discussions involving politics and religion for fear they will be perceived as anti-American (Selod, 2014). As the result of perceived emotional or physical threats, many Muslim Americans disidentify or conceal their group identity (Khan, 2014). Negative emotional experiences associated with stress, anxiety, fear of physical and verbal assaults, and the concealment of one's desired social identity can influence the decision-making and behavior of Muslim Americans towards non-Muslims.

An outgroup is defined as any group that one does not identify with or belong to (American Psychological Association, n.d.-b). According to recent research literature, social pressures involving surveillance, hate crimes, and institutional discrimination experienced by Muslim Americans demonstrate the need for further research regarding this population (Amer & Bagasra, 2013). Also emphasized by recent literature, there is a

need for further research in understanding the point of view of minorities regarding the intolerance displayed by majority members, a gap in the literature that was addressed in this research (Simon et al., 2018). The research question addressed in this study was: What are the emotional experiences of Palestinian Muslim Americans regarding the intolerance displayed by non-Muslims?

Ajzen's (1991) theory of planned behavior was used as the theoretical framework for this study, which suggests that the intentions of individuals are influenced by their experiences and beliefs about how they are perceived by others. According to Ajzen (1991), the intentions of individuals are influenced by their expectations of others, the perceived attitudes of others, and the degree of control regarding the behavior performed. In order to promote positive intergroup relationships, intergroup trust is needed, which is the assurance that outgroup members have positive intentions (Choma et al., 2018).

According to Ellis and Abdi (2017), conducting research that explores the emotional experiences of Muslim Americans can help in the discovery of new information that can be used to help identify and understand the consequences and functions of the intolerance displayed by non-Muslims. Further research is needed that describes and identifies the diverse ethnic, religious, and cultural orientations in the United States, which is needed to understand the environmental and social factors that influence the behavior of individuals (American Psychological Association, 2003). The potential knowledge obtained from this research can also help in developing new social strategies, which are needed in promoting and improving intergroup relationships among Muslims and non-Muslims in the United States.

Theory of Planned Behavior

Ajzen's (1991) theory of planned behavior was applied to this study to help gain a better understanding of how the emotional experiences of the participants influence their decision-making towards non-Muslims. According to Ajzen's (1991) theory of planned behavior, behavior is influenced by the social pressures people experience, which in turn influences their decision-making. The intentions of individuals are believed to be influenced by the person's beliefs regarding the attitudes and expectations of others, as well as the outcome of the behavior performed (Ajzen, 1991).

The theory of planned behavior states that decision-making is influenced by the person's beliefs and perceived ability regarding the behavior performed and perceived emotional experiences (Ajzen, 1991). According to this theory, behavior that is perceived to involve negative or uncertain outcomes is less likely to occur and tends to be avoided (Ajzen, 1991). Behavior is believed to be motivated by normative, behavioral, and control beliefs (Ajzen & Fishbein, 2000), which influence the degree of effort that is planned towards a given behavior, as well as significantly contributing to the prediction of behavior (Ajzen, 1991).

Method

A qualitative research method was chosen to explore the emotional experiences of Palestinian Muslim Americans regarding the intolerance displayed by majority members, which allowed me to obtain a holistic picture and study the phenomena in its natural setting (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Thompson, 2018). While other qualitative designs, such as case studies or ethnography, could have been used, a phenomenological design was chosen for this study based on its focus on understanding how specific experiences, firsthand, detailed descriptions of events, and views held influence how individuals interpret their social environment (Alase, 2017; Matua & Van Der Wal, 2015). Previous studies involving Muslim Americans have reported experiencing difficulties regarding the recruitment and the unwillingness of Muslims to participate in studies based on their suspicion and fear that "the researcher is working for the government or would manipulate the data to cause harm to the community" (Amer & Bagasra, 2013, p. 139). As the researcher, I socially identify as Muslim American and share the same origin of descent as the participants who were recruited for this study.

Possible issues of distrust regarding the purpose of the study among the participants may have been mitigated by the shared social identity and origin of descent of the researcher.

Participants

After receiving approval from Walden University's Institutional Review Board in 2020, I recruited participants with flyers that were posted at local Middle Eastern businesses in Cleveland, Ohio. Interviews were conducted to reach saturation, with 10 participants meeting the eligibility criteria required to participate in the study. The representative sample for this study consisted of five male and five female Palestinian Muslim American adults residing in Cleveland, Ohio. The eligibility criteria involved in the recruitment of, selection, and interviewing were: (a) identify as a Muslim; (b) be at least 18 years old; (c) be of Palestinian descent; and (d) reside in Cleveland, Ohio. To maintain the confidentiality of the participants, all the names of the participants were changed. The demographics of the participants are indicated in Table 1.

Table 1. *Participant Demographics*

Participant identifier	Gender	Age	Occupation
Sara	Female	40	Childcare worker and college student
Mona	Female	29	Stay-at-home mom
Fatima	Female	22	College student
Miriam	Female	36	Stay-at-home mom
Dena	Female	31	Stay-at-home mom
Ahmad	Male	27	Business owner
Hasan	Male	29	Barber
Kamal	Male	38	Undisclosed or unknown
Abed	Male	18	Undisclosed or unknown
Musa	Male	24	Undisclosed or unknown

Procedure

Consent was obtained from partner organizations prior to posting flyers at local businesses. Local businesses—serving a predominantly Middle Eastern clientele—consisted of restaurants, barbershops, and Middle Eastern grocery stores located in Cleveland, Ohio. The demographics of Cleveland, Ohio in 2020 were 47.6% Black or African American; 39.7% White; 5.8% two or more races; 3.5% other; 2.5% Asian; 0.4% American Indian; and 0.1% Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.). All participants selected for this study responded through information obtained from the flyers, which included information on (a) the possible contributions and benefits of the study; (b) a phone number to call for individuals interested in participating; and (c) the need for participants for research regarding the experiences of Palestinian Muslim Americans residing in Cleveland, Ohio. Purposeful criteria sampling, data saturation, and information power were used to recruit and select the participants. All individuals who called and expressed interest in participating were screened to determine their eligibility prior to being selected.

After eligibility was determined, participants were contacted and invited to meet in a private conference room at a Cleveland public library location to sign a consent form expressing their willingness to be interviewed for

the study and were provided information regarding the potential benefits of the study, purpose, the voluntary nature of their participation, and procedures involving participant confidentiality. All interviews were conducted in a private conference room at a local public library in Cleveland, Ohio. Prior to being interviewed, participants were informed that the interview process might take 30 minutes to an hour to provide participants ample time to answer the interview questions (see Appendix). I developed the interview questions (which were reviewed and validated by a content expert) that were used to conduct the semistructured, face-to-face interviews for this study.

Analysis

After consent was obtained, handwritten notes and an audio-recording device were used during all interviews to ensure the accuracy of participant responses. Depending on the responses of the participants, the average length of the interviews was approximately 12 minutes. Microsoft Word was used to transcribe participant responses. Participants were then asked to review the transcripts to ensure the accuracy of their responses (member checking). Bracketing or epoché was also used to manage and avoid the influence of any researcher bias. Giorgi's principles of psychological phenomenological method and template analysis were used to analyze the data collected in this study, allowing for an extensive review of the data.

Giorgi's method was used to interpret the data. Giorgi's method is consistent with a phenomenological design focusing on how individuals interpret and understand their social world (Giorgi, 2012; Giorgi et al., 2017; Jackson et al., 2018). Template analysis was used for hierarchical coding, which allowed for the identification and coding of significant meanings and emergent themes during the analysis of data using Giorgi's method (Brooks et al., 2015; Terry et al., 2017). Microsoft Excel was used to create tables that contained the transcribed (and participant reviewed) raw data (member checking), which was used to identify, code, and review significant meanings and emergent themes. I created two tables (one for male and one for female participants), which were divided into four columns—Column 1 for participant identifiers, Column 2 for interview questions, Column 3 for participant responses, and Column 4 for emerging themes and codes.

Using Giorgi's psychological phenomenological method, raw data was read as a whole to gain a holistic understanding of participant responses. Data was reviewed again to highlight and identify significant meanings and descriptions, which allowed for the categorization of meaningful units. Meaningful statements, emerging themes, words, and significant phrases from the participant responses were recorded and categorized using codes. The meaningful units were reviewed to help identify subthemes and thematic categories, as well as to merge relevant similarities. To discover the underlying trends, similarities, differences, or meanings in the participants' emotional experiences repeated and similar code words and phrases were highlighted, which led to the creation of themes and subthemes while also establishing the trustworthiness of the interpreted data.

Results

The interview questions I developed were used to address the research question for this study, which allowed me to obtain a full description of the participants' emotional experiences regarding the intolerance displayed by non-Muslims (see Appendix). Themes and subthemes emerged from participant responses to the interview questions, providing explanations and meanings of their emotional experiences regarding the intolerance displayed by non-Muslims. Themes that emerged during the analysis of the data were the result of the emotional similarities described in participant responses.

The emotional experiences described by participants consisted of avoiding or ignoring non-Muslims, being verbally attacked, being looked at or treated differently, emotional distress, observing or experiencing intolerance, and the location or event where intolerance was experienced or observed. The participant

responses also indicated that intolerance among Muslims and non-Muslims in the United States is "good and bad" or "it depends," and the concept of "we vs. they" or "us vs. them" was also emphasized. The emerging subthemes during the analysis of the data were based on similarities in specific characteristics within the themes, which involved identifying as Arab or speaking Arabic in public, the hijab, and the name of the participants regarding the emotional experiences described by the participants. The following sections provide an overview of the participants' emotional experiences regarding the intolerance displayed by non-Muslims.

Theme 1: Ignoring or Avoiding Non-Muslims

Three of the participants interviewed for this study reported ignoring or avoiding non-Muslims to avoid similar negative experiences. Musa stated he felt "violated" and "honestly, I don't take it to heart. I'm the type of person that I try not to let it bother me." Ahmad also stated, "I never took it personal. For me, it was just always 'kill them with kindness.'" Dena similarly expressed, "I just ignore them. I just move along with the day. I just try not to get involved with them."

Theme 2: Verbal Attacks

Five of the participants interviewed in this study reported experiencing verbal attacks from non-Muslims. Three of the five participants described being told "to go back to their country." Mona described an incident at a local grocery store involving her mother, where "a lady literally got in her face and was like, 'go back to your country, you don't deserve to be here.'"

Dena also reported a similar incident in which she stated, "Every time I go to places, I do get a lot of hate, they tell me to go back to my country or stuff like that." Ahmad described being verbally attacked when he was younger. He stated, "I heard every joke you can think of. I've been teased about it." Miriam also described being verbally attacked at a pool with her children stating, "[She said], 'you Arabs, you Arabs are animals you don't know how to take care of your kids. Your kind, your kind, you're garbage. Get out of here, go back to where you came from.'"

Theme 3: Looked at or Treated Differently

Nine of the participants who were interviewed described experiencing being looked at or treated differently based on identifying as Arab or speaking Arabic in public, as well as the hijab. The following sections describe the categorized subthemes that emerged based on the similarities in participant responses.

Subtheme 1: Identifying as Arab or Speaking Arabic in Public

Three participants described experiencing prejudice and discrimination because of the language they spoke in public, which was Arabic. Sara stated, "I was in a cab, and I had gotten a call he asked me, 'What language was that?' I told him Arabic. He was like, 'Oh so you're one of them?'" She stated the incident made her uncomfortable, and she asked the cab driver to stop the cab so she could get out. Miriam also described an incident where a woman walked up to her while she was at a grocery store talking on her phone. "She said to me, 'You're in America, speak English' and walked away." Similarly, Kamal described an incident that occurred as the result of the language he was speaking in public, stating, "You start speaking a different language, they look at you like you're going to do something or starting to do something or trying to do something."

Subtheme 2: The Hijab
Six of the participants interviewed described experiencing or observing prejudice and discrimination because of the hijab being worn. Fatima stated, "[Muslim women] get discriminated just for wearing the headscarf and it's truly sickening." Hasan also stated, "Our Muslim sisters [who have] the hijab on, there's a lot of people who say smart remarks. There's a lot of people that ask stupid questions about it, why they wear it." Dena, who wore a hijab, stated, "I used to wear the hijab. A man flips me off and he was cussing me out and throwing stuff at me." Lastly, Miriam stated, "My hijab does not in any way say who I am as a person. It's normal now. You anticipate it at this point, to be honest."

Theme 4: "We vs. They" or "Us vs. Them"

Four participants interviewed for this study described themselves as "we vs. they" or "us vs. them" when asked how they felt regarding the intolerance among Muslims and non-Muslims in the United States. For example, Sara stated:

> Muslims tolerate a lot. We're more passive when it comes to this kind of things. We don't blame anybody for us. We just think that they're less educated when it comes to us. We don't get mad about it. The other part, on the other hand, they get angry because they think that we are the ones who are closed-minded, but the matter of fact is [it's] because they're not taking the time to educate themselves, and some of them don't want to educate themselves. It might be because they just don't want to or they're just too lazy to learn about other religion[s]. I think they don't tolerate us because of them.

Musa similarly expressed, "I think Muslims have more patience because of their faith, but that can be challenged sometimes. I just think we have more patience." Hasan also responded by saying,

> Non-Muslims, some of them look at us differently. I feel like some of them try taking things out on you and try to feel you out. Seeing if you really are religious or if you are not. They'll ask questions or try to influence you into things you shouldn't. I think people try to test you.

Similarly, Fatima also stated, "If it's very clear they're Muslim, people don't hold back. It's like they have no fear of being rude or hurting somebody's feelings, or it's like you have no guilty conscience, it's really sad." Finally, Sara stated, "I live my life normal. I eat like them. My kids go to school just like their kids. We go to the park the way they do."

Theme 5: Locations

When asked where he has experienced or observed intolerance from non-Muslims, Musa stated, "It happens at work a lot, the airport is one, in a more affluent neighborhood, restaurants." Similar incidences were also reported by Hasan, who stated, "I've seen it in schools, with schools the most; kids bullying other kids. Out in public, even being at the barber shop." Kamal stated he usually experiences intolerance by non-Muslims in areas that are predominantly "White." He stated, "[I] usually saw it when I was up north in the country, like [in] Maine, [where] the community is mainly White and when they see somebody that is not White." Sara also described the locations of the intolerance she experienced by stating, "at the dentist office, at the gym, it's where I'm at. That's where they see me." Similarly, Abed described an incident at a café. He reported the cashier told him, "I don't serve your kind."

Theme 6: Emotional Distress

Eight of the 10 participants, who were interviewed for this study, described experiencing emotional distress when asked how they felt regarding the intolerance they experienced by non-Muslims. Sara recalled an incident involving a cab driver stating, "It made me feel unsafe. It hurt me. It made me sick." She also

described how she felt regarding an incident involving a woman who asked her if she knew about Jesus and began verbally attacking her in public. She stated, "I was actually stunned, confused. I didn't know how to react. I didn't know how to feel."

Dena expressed a similar emotional experience regarding an incident she experienced, which involved a man who threw objects and shouted profanities at her while she walked home from school. She stated, "I didn't know what I did wrong, and I just went home. That traumatized me to this day." She further expressed,

> I'm traumatized. I had to take off my hijab the next day. I honestly was too scared to even walk home by myself, I quit cosmetology, until this day honestly, I just don't walk by myself anymore. I just don't leave anywhere as much as long as it's with my husband.

Additionally, Miriam described an incident at a local grocery store involving her mother, in which she recalled feeling "angry" and "upset; I was very surprised more than anything." She observed a woman who she stated, "yanked my mother's hijab off her head."

Some male participants also described experiencing emotional distress regarding the intolerance displayed by non-Muslims. Hasan described feeling "uncomfortable, looked at differently or didn't belong here, didn't feel wanted" when praying in public. He also stated he felt "hatred, unwanted. People just look at you differently." Similarly, Musa reported feeling "violated, not trusted, ashamed to be an American" when describing his emotional experiences regarding his interactions with non-Muslims.

Kamal also described feeling "sad and to be honest ashamed because the people that treat you that way are also minority just like me." Additionally, Abed recalled an incident at a local café, which "led to an altercation," and he "really got offended" regarding a cashier who refused to serve him based on his ethnicity. He stated the incident made him "feel really bad" and "really sad," because "we're all the same, we all bleed the same color. It doesn't have to be that way."

Discussion

Results of this study support the argument presented in previous literature by Simon et al. (2017) and the need for understanding the point of view of minorities regarding the intolerance displayed by majority members—as well as the need to better understand the emotional experiences of Muslims Americans and how their experiences can influence their emotions, intentions, and decision making towards non-Muslims. Some participants who were interviewed for this study reported ignoring or avoiding non-Muslims based on their previous emotional experiences, a social process described by Ajzen's (1991) theory of planned behavior. According to the theory of planned behavior, the intentions and behavior people display are influenced by their emotional and social experiences with others, as well as the perceived social pressures the individual experiences.

The participants who were interviewed for this study reported experiencing emotional distress as the result of experiencing or observing the intolerance displayed by non-Muslims. Some participants also reported being verbally and physically attacked by non-Muslims. As a result of the emotional distress experienced by the participants in this study, some participants used the terms "them" to describe non-Muslims and "us" to describe themselves and other Muslims, which reinforces the social boundaries and perception of ingroup and outgroup members. Social boundaries that are influenced by the negative emotional experiences of Muslims and non-Muslims can limit the discovery and exchange of new information needed in improving the social interactions among these groups.

Findings from this study also support previous literature regarding the stereotypes and generalizations experienced by Muslims, in which participants reported experiencing or observing the intolerance displayed by

non-Muslims in schools, parks, grocery stores, and cafés. Some female participants in this study reported being verbally or physically attacked because of the hijab they wore, which one participant described as "traumatizing." Other participants interviewed in this study reported being verbally attacked based on the language they spoke in public, their perceived ethnicity, and religion. The majority of participants interviewed in this study described the importance of educating non-Muslims about the religion of Islam and Middle Eastern culture, which they expressed is needed in order to change the negative preconceived judgments of non-Muslims towards Muslim Americans. Kamal, for example, stated the importance of the exchange of information among Muslims and non-Muslims when describing his social experiences with his neighbors. He stated:

> If you have a neighbor that's non-Muslim and he knows you personally, he knows what kind of character you are and how you practice your religion; they know what the religion is as a whole. They cannot pinpoint "just because this person did this, everybody in the religion or the religion as a whole are bad."

The findings from this study demonstrate the need for and importance of understanding the emotional consequences and functions regarding the intolerance displayed by non-Muslims towards Muslim Americans, through the discovery of new information not revealed in the recent research literature. The findings from this study also reinforce the need for the development and implementation of new social strategies that help promote and improve the social interactions among Muslim Americans and non-Muslims in the United States.

Limitations of the Study

The emotional experiences explored in this study were limited to Palestinian Muslim Americans located in Cleveland, Ohio, and does not represent the overall experiences of Muslim Americans who reside in other states or of different ethnicity. The emotional experiences explored in this study were of adults over the age of 18. The study does not explore the emotional experiences of individuals under the age of 18, who may have different experiences depending on their age, daily activities, or routines. The phenomenological design used to explore the emotional experiences of the participants is dependent on the ability of the participants to accurately recall previous events, which may not include important factors that were not recalled by the participants regarding the phenomena being explored. There is also the possibility of unintentional bias involving the responses of the participants based on their emotional experiences regarding the event being described.

The events described by the participants were not directly observed by the researcher and are dependent on the testimony of the participants. Although face-to-face interviews were conducted in obtaining the information for this study, the information represents the point of view of the participants, which may be indirectly altered based on their emotions. Also, it was assumed that all participants in the study provided truthful and accurate details regarding their experiences.

Recommendations

Further research is needed that explores (a) the emotional experiences of Muslim Americans of different ethnicity; (b) those under age 18; and (c) those who reside in other cities and states within the United States. Expanding on the findings of this study can be helpful in identifying variables not discussed in this study, which are needed in creating a broader understanding of the emotional and social experiences of Muslim Americans regarding the intolerance displayed by majority members. Also, further research that expands on the findings of this study may help in the development and implementation of new social strategies that are needed in promoting positive social change among Muslims and non-Muslims in the United States.

Developing and implementing new social strategies that promote and motivate the interactions among Muslims and non-Muslims can allow for the exchange of new information that may help mitigate the negative

preconceived judgments of outgroup members. Newly exchanged information among members of different religious and cultural backgrounds can help increase trust and cohesion based on the discovery of shared interests and concerns. Through the exchange of newly discovered information, the recategorization of ingroup and outgroup members can occur by influencing an inclusive shared identity, which is needed to reduce intergroup bias and increasing trust among members of different religious and cultural backgrounds (McDowell-Smith, 2013). Developing and implementing social strategies that educate individuals and create awareness of the positive contributions of diversity and the importance of understanding cultural differences is needed in creating healthy and safe communities for all members of society.

Educating individuals regarding the importance of diversity at the earliest stages of social development can influence the way people perceive themselves and others throughout adulthood. Social strategies, such as programs and events that emphasize the importance of diversity within schools and promote the interaction among students of different cultural and religious backgrounds, can help change negative preconceived judgements developed during childhood towards those of different religious and cultural backgrounds. Other social strategies can be implemented at the community level through programs and events that motivate the interaction among members of different religious and cultural backgrounds.

Social strategies involving community members can consist of cultural festivals or community groups that share similar interests and concerns within the community, which can help in creating a shared social identity among community members of different religious and cultural backgrounds. Developing social programs and conditions that strengthen ties and increase civic engagement are needed to strengthen the social cohesion among individuals and groups of different religious and cultural backgrounds (Ellis & Abdi, 2017). Developing and implementing the social strategies described in this study can help improve the overall safety and well-being of students and community members, while also promoting positive social change among members of different religious and cultural backgrounds.

References

Ajzen, I. (1991). The theory of planned behavior. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes, 50*(2), 179–211. https://doi.org/10.1016/0749-5978(91)90020-T

Ajzen, I., & Fishbein, M. (2000). Attitudes and the attitude-behavior relation: Reasoned and automatic processes. *European Review of Social Psychology, 11*(1), 1–33. https://doi.org/10.1080/14792779943000116

Alase, A. (2017). The interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA): A guide to a good qualitative research approach. *International Journal of Education and Literacy Studies, 5*(2), 9–19. http://dx.doi.org/10.7575/aiac.ijels.v.5n.2p.9

Ali, S. R., Yamada, T., & Mahmood, A. (2015). Relationships of the practice of hijab, workplace discrimination, social class, job stress, and job satisfaction among Muslim American women. *Journal of Employment Counseling, 52*(4), 146–157. https://doi.org/10.1002/joec.12020

Amer, M. M., & Bagasra, A. (2013). Psychological research with Muslim Americans in the age of Islamophobia: Trends, challenges, and recommendations. *American Psychologist, 68*(3), 134–144. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0032167

American Psychological Association. (n.d.-a). Emotional experience. In *APA dictionary of psychology*. https://dictionary.apa.org/corrective-emotional-experience

American Psychological Association. (n.d.-b). Outgroup. In *APA dictionary of psychology*. https://dictionary.apa.org/outgroup

American Psychological Association. (2003). Guidelines on multicultural education, training, research, practice, and organizational change for psychologists. *American Psychologist, 58*(5), 377–402. https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.58.5.377

Brooks, J., McCluskey, S., Turley, E., & King, N. (2015). The utility of template analysis in qualitative psychology research. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 12*(2), 202–222. https://doi.org/10.1080/14780887.2014.955224

Choma, B. L., Jagayat, A., Hodson, G., & Turner, R. (2018). Prejudice in the wake of terrorism: The role of temporal distance, ideology, and intergroup emotions. *Personality and Individual Differences, 123*, 65–75. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2017.11.002

Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (5th ed.). SAGE Publications.

Dictionary.com. (n.d.). Intolerance. In *Dictionary.com*. https://www.dictionary.com/browse/intolerance

Ellis, B. H., & Abdi, S. (2017). Building community resilience to violent extremism through genuine partnerships. *American Psychologist, 72*(3), 289–300. https://doi.org/10.1037/amp0000065

Giorgi, A. (2012). The descriptive phenomenological psychological method. *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology, 43*(1), 3–12. https://doi.org/10.1163/156916212X632934

Giorgi, A., Giorgi, B., & Morley, J. (2017). The descriptive phenomenological psychological method. In C. Willig, & W. Stainton-Rogers (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research in psychology* (2nd ed., pp. 176–192). SAGE Publications.

Khan, S. R. (2014). Post 9/11: The impact of stigma for Muslim Americans. *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology, 20*(4), 580–582. https://doi.org/10.1037/pac0000063

Matua, G. A., & Van Der Wal, D. M. (2015). Differentiating between descriptive and interpretive phenomenological research approaches. *Nurse Researcher, 22*(6), 22–27. https://doi.org/10.7748/nr.22.6.22.e1344

McDowell-Smith, A. (2013). Can the heuristic model of positive terror management enhance prosocial values and reduce intergroup conflict? The case of Muslims in the USA. *International Journal of Teaching and Case Studies, 4*(4), 367–382. https://doi.org/10.1504/IJTCS.2013.060643

Mohibullah, H., & Kramer, C. (2016). "Being true to ourselves . . . within the context of Islam": Practical considerations in hijab practice among Muslim American Women. *Practical Matters Journal,* (9), 102–117. http://practicalmattersjournal.org/2016/05/04/being-true-to-ourselves/

Rosenthal, L., Levy, S. R., Katser, M., & Bazile, C. (2015). Polyculturalism and attitudes toward Muslim Americans. *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology, 21*(4), 535–545. https://doi.org/doi:10.1037/pac0000133

Samari, G. (2016). Islamophobia and public health in the United States. *American Journal of Public Health, 106*(11), 1920–1925. https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2016.303374

Selod, S. (2014). Citizenship denied: The racialization of Muslim American men and women post-9/11. *Critical Sociology, 41*(1), 1–19. https://doi.org/10.1177/0896920513516022

Simon, B., Eschert, S., Schaefer, C. D., Reininger, K. M., Zitzmann, S., & Smith, H. J. (2018). Disapproved, but tolerated: The role of respect in outgroup tolerance. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin. 45*(3)*,* 406–415. https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167218787810

Terry, G., Hayfield, N., Clarke, V., & Braun, V. (2017). Thematic analysis. In C. Willig & W. Stainton-Rogers (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research in psychology* (2nd ed., pp. 17–37). SAGE Publications.

Thompson, R. (2018). A qualitative phenomenological study of emotional and cultural intelligence of international students in the United States of America. *Journal of International Students, 8*(2), 1220–1255. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.1250423

U.S. Census Bureau. (n.d.). *QuickFacts: Cleveland city, Ohio* [Data set]. https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/clevelandcityohio/RHI825220

Zainiddinov, H. (2016). Racial and ethnic differences in perceptions of discrimination among Muslim Americans. *Ethnic and Racial Studies, 39*(15), 2701–2721. https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2016.1164877ss

Appendix: Interview Questions

1. Tell me about a situation in which you feel that your religious or ethnic background influenced the way you were treated.

   - Probe: Tell me how this experience made you feel? (If not directly answered)

2. What is your experience as a Palestinian Muslim American, living in the United States?

   - Probe: Could you describe some of the activities you experience throughout your day? (If not directly answered)

3. Tell me about your experience regarding the prejudice and discrimination displayed by non-Muslims.

   - Probe: Where have you experienced it the most? (If not directly answered)
   - Probe: Why do you think it occurs more in this type of setting? (If not directly answered)

4. Can you tell me how you feel regarding the tolerance among Muslims and non-Muslims in the United States?

5. I appreciate your time and willingness to participate in the interview. Is there anything else that you would like to share with me that you feel is important for me to know?