
A Common Misconception Of Muslims

A Common American Stereotype

“So far this year, Americans have been more likely to be killed for being Muslim—than by a Muslim.” (Kruzman) That may come as a surprise to a majority of Americans, and it seems ironic, but it is completely accurate. “Islamophobia,” a fear of people who practice the Islamic faith and the ignorance of the teachings of Islam, has been created and over exaggerated by a majority of news companies since the terror attacks in New York on November 11, 2001, and increased since the formation of ISIL (the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant), a terrorist group that uses Islam and the teachings of Allah to justify their violent acts. The stereotype that all Muslims are terrorists is a very inaccurate way of defining a group of people, and can be blamed on ISIL and the mainstream media misinforming the public.

ISIL, one of the leading contributors to America’s Islamophobia problem, uses the Qur’an incorrectly to justify its terrorism and violence. This can aid in proving the stereotype invalid. Passages from the Qur’an, such as 22:39, “Permission to fight has been granted to those for they have been wronged. Verily Allah has the power to help them: those who were unjustly expelled from their homes...” can be used against the actions of the Islamic State to verify they are defying the very teachings of Islam. Murdering innocent civilians in the name of Islam opposes Allah’s “permission to fight.” They are not being “wronged” in any way by being “unjustly expelled from their homes,” and therefore do not have “permission to fight” granted by Allah. This example from the Qur’an can be used as proof that ISIL stands for the opposite of what the teachings of Islam stand for, can verify the incorrect association between Muslims and “Islamic Terrorism,” and can help reverse the stereotype/Islamophobia that has consumed America.

Islamophobia is a problem because of the media’s coverage of terrorist attacks by Muslims. According to Charles Kurzman in an interview with The Young Turks (an online news program) in February 2013, “Islamic terrorism ‘doesn’t even count for 1 percent’ of the 180,000 murders in the US since 9/11.” (Washington's Blog) Surprising to many Americans, statistics like these are verified and accurate, and there are many more that oppose Islamophobia and the belief that Muslims promote violence. A variety of news companies contribute to the over-exaggeration of Islamophobia, such as Fox News. Bill O’Reilly, the host of “The O’Reilly Factor” on Fox News has said many times on his show that “we [the US] are at war with Islam” and that there is nothing peaceful about the Islamic faith, where O’Reilly is obviously incorrect about both statements, proven in the previous paragraph. The misinformed public by the mainstream media is a key representation of why Islamophobia has spread like a wildfire throughout America.

A common misconception of Muslims is their dress and their behavior. American Muslims are no different from American Christians, Jews, or people of any faith. The distinctive attribute of Muslim women’s clothing is the headscarf, or hijab. Identifying someone who practices Islam based on clothes alone is simple for women, but much more difficult for men. While just as obligated to wear their version of the hijab, men do not wear the required garment as often as the women do. It is a personal decision that comes down to how other Americans would look at

them and judge them. Americans are quick to assume the worst of the Muslims in America. For example, some Americans portray Muslims as dressing in long robe-like clothes (Thawbs) with assault weapons in their arms running around in the desert screaming "Allahu Akbar!" with bombs strapped to their torsos. This does not represent the entirety of the Islamic community, especially those located in the US. There is some validity to this appearance, though. There are people in the middle east who dress in Thawbs but they may not be terrorists, and they may not even be Muslim. The dress is more so associated with the culture of the middle east than it is with being Muslim or being a middle-eastern terrorist. The misconception is fueled by people associating middle-eastern people with terrorism and associating terrorists with Muslims, therefore making the false assumption that all middle-eastern Muslims are terrorists and that they dress a specific way because they are a terrorist. It is an incorrect assumption because there is a small minority of middle-eastern Muslims that are associated with a terrorist group. The behavior of American Muslims is no different from the way Americans act and behave. They may follow the Islamic faith and pray at certain points in the day, but they usually act no different in America than other Americans act.

American Muslims are affected being labeled into this stereotype by how other Americans treat them. There are multiple accounts of physical and verbal harassment against American Muslims. For example, at a Donald Trump rally on Friday, January 8, a Muslim man and woman were standing silently in the audience as a peaceful protest against Trump's racist remarks against Muslims and his call to ban all Muslims from entering the US. Trump supporters around them started chanting Trump's name, while other supporters were shouting rude comments like, "You have a bomb, you have a bomb," "Get out!" and from Trump himself, "There is hatred against us that is unbelievable. It's their hatred, it's not our hatred." (Diamond) The two were then escorted out of the rally after silently protesting for a just cause. It's this kind of hatred and harassment that American Muslims have to put up with on a daily basis because of the stereotype that they are associated with. Another example of how this stereotype affects American Muslims is how airport security treats them. While passing through various checkpoints in airport security, people who look Muslim or who look middle-eastern are profiled based on their appearance. A large majority of Muslims who go through airport security are not terrorists and do not intend to take down the airplane with any explosives or other deadly materials. The fact that Muslims have to deal with this racial profiling in airports is another representation of how the stereotype has enveloped America. The labels that American Muslims have affects them in how they are treated by other Americans and influential people in this country. The harassment and mistreatment of Muslims in America is an effect of the stereotype.

The stereotype that all Muslims are terrorists and that Islam is a violent religion is absolutely false. The misconceptions of the Islamic faith and misinformation about Muslims are major factors that contribute to the stereotype existing. It's wrong to make assumptions based on the appearance of a group of people and it's wrong to make assumptions based on the minority of a group of people and apply it to the majority of the same group. Many Americans are misinformed or under-informed about Muslims, which contributes to the ever growing stereotype about Muslims. Stereotyping a majority of a group of people based on the minority of the group seems outrageous and it's confusing why humans would fail to look at the big picture before the small picture. Stereotyping is a major issue with Americans, especially against American Muslims. Informing the population with facts and information will help (or attempt to help) eradicate the false stereotype that all Muslims are terrorists and that the Islamic faith promotes violence.