

We Are All Good Muslims

Unpacking the Perception of Good vs. Bad Muslims

What is Intersectionality?

The term intersectionality was coined by Dr. Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989. Intersectionality is a way of understanding how power and privilege work in society based on the identities that people hold, such as gender, sex, race, ethnicity, class, religion, and many others. These identities intersect to create a unique experience of the world, and its opportunities and oppressions.

Queer Muslims hold many intersecting identities and often these identities are misunderstood and seen as conflicting by people in the queer and Muslim communities, and western society more broadly.

This misunderstanding can create many issues and barriers for queer Muslims, including:

- Feeling invalidated and/or alone in one's experiences
- Inappropriate or ineffective services provision
- Experiences of discrimination

Experiences of Intersectional Oppression

Queer Muslims often experience intersectional forms of discrimination because of the many identities they hold. It can be especially difficult for queer Muslims to navigate the world while experiencing discrimination, violence, and microaggressions from their peers, family, and society.

For queer Muslims, experiences of intersectional trans/bi/homophobic violence may show up as:

- Bullying and physical harm
- Rejection and isolation
- Shame

Many queer Muslims experience significant fear of judgment from their communities and may withdraw from these groups or from society in general. This could lead to negative mental health outcomes, such as feelings of depression and anxiety

As a result of these experiences of discrimination and violence, queer Muslims often worry for their personal safety and for the safety of other queer Muslim friends and family members.

Systemic Forms of Oppression

Systemic oppression occurs when prejudices are built into the systems, institutions, and organizations that make up society.

Systemic oppression can show up in many ways, including:

- Underrepresentation of queer Muslims
- Racism and Islamophobia
- An understanding of “normal” as heterosexual and cisgender

In some cases, queer Muslims share that they feel pressure to represent Islam in the west. Because of this pressure, queer Muslims may choose to interact and communicate in a way that does not feed into negative stereotypes about Muslim communities and countries, and Islam in general, when they are in predominantly white spaces. This prevents queer Muslims from being able to speak freely and live authentically.

In cases where queer Muslims have moved to Canada from another country, they may also feel the additional pressure of being seen as a “good” Canadian citizen. The burden of adhering to the norms of Canadian society, such as individualism, can negatively impact queer Muslims and lead to feelings of isolation.

Barriers to Accepting Diversity within the Muslim Community

Below we will discuss some of the barriers that family members and kin of queer Muslims might experience on their journey to accepting diversity. By identifying and overcoming these barriers, it will help to strengthen the relationship between queer Muslims and their kin.

Obligations and Norms

Queer Muslims may experience pressure from their families and their ethno-cultural communities to follow norms and obligations. It may be understood that individuals who follow norms and obligations are “good Muslims”, while individuals who go against norms are “bad Muslims”.

Some norms and obligations placed upon queer Muslims include:

- Adhering to responsibilities based on gender and/or birth order
- Maintaining the family’s reputation and honour
- Familial and cultural obligations to get married

Reputation and honour can be important factors for Muslim families. If sexual and gender diversity is seen as dishonourable, it can be a significant barrier for family members in accepting their queer Muslim kin. Family members may choose to distance themselves to maintain their own reputation or that of their family.

Within society, getting married is considered a milestone of success in a person’s life. However, there are many queer Muslims who do not want to get married or who cannot share their marriage with their families. It can be very difficult for family members to understand why their queer Muslim kin is not married and, in some cases, families may attempt to arrange a marriage on their kin’s behalf.

Generational Perspectives

As the awareness and representation of queer Muslims increases throughout society, younger Muslims show greater acceptance and support of their queer Muslim kin. However, Muslims from older generations may be less accepting or may need more time to become accepting because of the beliefs and values they were raised with.

Queer Muslims often choose to share their sexual orientation and/or gender identity with their younger family members and kin, such as younger siblings and cousins who they anticipate will be accepting and supportive.

Alternatively, queer Muslims may choose not to disclose their identities to Muslims from older generations because they anticipate that their family member and/or kin will have a negative reaction.

FURTHER READING

If you would like to learn more about these topics and find out what resources or supports are available in your area, check out the following options!

Books:

An Arab Melancholia

by Abdellah Taïa

We Have Always Been Here: A Queer Muslim Memoir

by Samra Habib

Resources:

Brown, trans, queer, Muslim and proud

by Sabah Choudrey

How to be culturally competent when supporting LGBTQ+ Muslims

by Rahim Thawer

What is Islamophobia? Safety and Resistance for LGBTQ+ Muslims

by Salaam Canada

A Muslim Non-Heteronormative Reading of the Story of Lot: Liberation Theology

by Franz Volker Greifenhagen

Community/Social Groups and Organizations:

Salaam Canada

Masjid el-Tawhid / The Unity Mosque

Queer Muslim Network Toronto

MASGD

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In July 2022, Salaam Canada shut down its operations as a national organization.