

HOW IS ISLAMOPHOBIA IMPACTING THE FIELD OF EDUCATION?

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In the English language when a word is suffixed with "phobia" it turns into "hate" or "fear". For example, Acrophobia is the fear of heights and claustrophobia is the fear of crowded spaces, so does that mean Islamophobia is the fear of Islam? Why did they add "phobia" to my religion? Why does a religion of peace and giving have a "phobia" in it? The actual word *Islam* translates to the word 'peace'. Take a moment to let that sink in.

In my school, at my place of work, and at my nearby grocery store people fear or hate my religion and this silent hate shattered me even more to know that my hijab spread fear and anger in the hearts of many.

The fear of Islam is exaggerated to a point where it is no longer fear anymore but it is now hatred that leads to negative stereotypes, prejudices, biases and discrimination that is maintained from our Western media and our social lives. Where did that hate originate? We are born innocent. Hatred against Muslims did not originate from the mass shooting that occurred in New Zealand at a peaceful place of prayer. It was initiated with a simple prejudice at our workplace, our communities and unfortunately at our schools.

Nassim Elbardough's informative article titled *Teacher and a Daughter: The Impact of Islamophobia*, unfolds the truth behind Western hurtful biases and the impacts it has on Muslim people and children in particular. Elbardough mentioned that ISIS killed innocent people by

executing a double suicide bombing plan against both the Lebanese and the Parisians in the same period of time. She argued that the schools, the streets and the media only showed empathy to the people who died in Paris and completely disregarded the sufferings in Beirut. Those Lebanese students will wake up in the morning ready to go to their school, will notice that all the attention is going only to the Parisians, and their teachers and “White friends” are only discussing what happened in Paris and completely ignoring what is going on all around the world. After all, we do live in a multicultural society. Due to the lack of attention that was given to their country, those children will feel that their life is less valuable than their white friend’s lives because all the mourning was dedicated to Paris and there was no mention of the innocent people that were killed by the same terrorist attack in Beirut or other non-Western countries. Why not mention the terror attacks that occurred in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Tunisia, Pakistan, Indonesia, Nigeria and many more non-western countries? No attention was given to any of these countries. Healing was not granted and understanding was not seen. Those terror attacks were carried in the name of Islam and the media confirmed it as an Islamic terror attack. Although, ISIS had no allies and they attacked both the Muslim and the non-Muslim communities, yet some people still associate them to all the Muslims all over the world. This is the danger of the media.

I was born in Toronto, I spent my childhood in both Canada and Lebanon, and both countries have a special place in my heart. During the ISIS attack in Beirut and Paris I was working at a well-known company in Calgary, all my colleagues at work were talking about the devastating news in Paris and no one mentioned Beirut. When I told them of what happened in Beirut some did not care and some were shocked by how the media was silenced. I realized that if everyone knew that Beirut was struck by the same Terrorist attack, then people will maybe stop associating ISIS to Muslim people, because if Muslims are ISIS then why would they bomb themselves? Asking critical questions is a good entry point into teaching media studies to our students. Islamophobia has a high negative impact on Muslim children in school as these young people routinely face verbal assaults, specifically by joking about bombs or calling them terrorists. Students should feel safe and brave enough to come to school regardless of the religious symbol they chose to wear.

Islamophobic stereotypes leaked into the school environment where many Muslim children are now suffering a backlash of abuse. In Irving, Texas, a 14-year-old American Muslim boy, Ahmed Muhammed, was arrested for bringing a homemade clock to school because school authorities assumed the project was a bomb and called the police (Fantz, 2015). This is an example of how Islamophobia impacted our education, as what is education if equality is not set in place? From the moment islamophobia stereotype leaked into our schools, it has impacted the mental and physical health of our Muslim children resulting in educational problems. All children need to feel safe and included in the school climate. Educators can check their own biases, move from a space of humility and willingness to learn with and from their students regardless of their race or religion. We have the power to change.

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