

'Not one of them'

Students with traditional Islamic beliefs work to overcome negative stereotypes



Freshman Fatuma Abdalla wears a hijab, commonly worn by Muslim women. She said she does sometimes feel she is negatively judged because of what she wears. However, she is proud of her religion and her beliefs and works to educate people about the real philosophical beliefs of Muslims. (Photo by Anna James)

anna james • news editor

Freshman Fatuma Abdalla said it is difficult sometimes to live a day-to-day life being a Muslim teenage girl in America.

"I go out in public wearing a hijab and I see people staring at me. I just know they're thinking in their minds 'terrorist'," Abdalla said.

Recent attacks by ISIS-sympathizers have elevated an unfounded fear and distrust of Muslims in general.

In fact, Republican Presidential front-runner Donald Trump has suggested he would temporarily ban all Muslims from entering the United States and potentially initiate a program where Muslims already in the U.S. would have to register.

But, ISIS is a far different organization than the large population of people referred to as Muslim, which in general means someone who follows the practices of Islam.

Some very radical members of this group have become associated with terrorist organizations.

Professor Vernon Schubel at Kenyon College, said only around 30,000 people are ISIS fighters in comparison to the large majority of Muslims, which has approximately 1.6 billion followers world-wide.

ISIS (Islamic State in Iraq and Syria) is a radical Sunni Muslim organization whose aim is to restore an Islamic state in the region encompassing Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Jordan, the Palestinian territories and southeastern Turkey.

Their actions and the reactions of many concerned citizens has led to stereotyping and targeting of all Muslims.

Senior Shafi Chowdhury, a practicing Muslim, understands Abdalla's feelings.

He said, "It (ISIS) just gives a bad name to us [Muslims] and it is a shame, because it's the few that do it to so many of us," he said.

Violence is not part of Muslim beliefs. The Pew Research Center, a survey done in 2011 found that 86 percent of American Muslims said tactics like suicide bombings and other forms of violence are never justified.

Abdalla said, "I don't understand why one act makes all of us the same person when really Islam means peace."

Still, there are some Americans who believe all who practice Islamic beliefs are terrorists.

Following the attack in San Bernardino, someone left a threatening voice message at the Islamic Center of Greater St. Louis. Other Muslims reported being threatened personally.

"If I were to encounter someone who believed that all Muslims were that way then I would have to overlook it and treat them with respect. Bashing these people and getting mad at them when they accuse you is just

supporting their beliefs, so you just have to be nice and show that you're not one of them," Chowdhury said.

Though he said he has not experienced any direct backlash since the recent attacks in Paris and San Bernardino, incidents have been on the rise in the U.S.

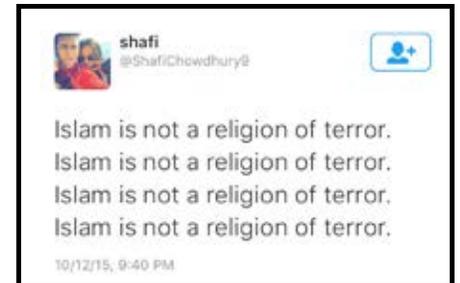
The Center for the Study of Hate and Extremism at California State University in San Bernardino released a study earlier this month indicating that hate crimes against Muslims have tripled since the two attacks.

"It's really hard for me to watch some people judge our religion when Islam is supposed to be a nation of peace. We weren't meant for violence but one crazy radical will spark a whole new issue for our rather accepting religion," Abdalla said.

Chowdhury agreed and said he has learned to curb his anger most of the time. "You have to be tolerant. It's the best thing you can do. I try to tell them what the religion is really like so they can stop making assumptions from what they see on TV."

This positive attitude is shared by Abdalla.

She said if she encountered discrimination "I would have to act with kindness and show them what our religion is actually about. You can't let it be spoiled with your anger."



Senior Shafi Chowdhury expressed his feelings on Twitter about ISIS attacks and some backlash that followers of Islam were subjected to online and in person. Chowdhury said strongly believes Muslims express peace and the few that spoil it in the name of their religion don't deserve to be called Muslim.



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