Islam: The Myths & Realities

KEY TAKEAWAYS
The Winters Group, Inc. Let’s Talk About It! Series
What We Hope to Accomplish

• Learn about the history of Islam, the basic tenets, and the similarities/differences compared to Judaism and Christianity
• Dispel the myths and stereotypes of Islam/Muslims
• Consider the experience of American Muslims
• Explore the implications of Islam in the workplace and identify best practices for creating an inclusive space
What are some stereotypes/myths you’ve heard about Islam/Muslims?
Full Video Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D7JiZLSsxyw
Key Statistics

Islam is the world's fastest-growing religion: there were an estimated 1.6 billion Muslims in 2010 (23%); and it's expected that this number will rise to 2.76 billion by 2050.

At that time, Muslims will make up nearly 1/3 of the world's total projected population of about 9 billion people (30%).

Today, Muslims make up the second largest religious population in the world and were discriminated against in 121 countries worldwide between 2006 and 2010.

While a Pew Research poll found that 62% of Americans do not know a Muslim personally.

A recent Zogby poll found that only 27% of Americans surveyed had a favorable opinion about Islam.

The country with the largest number (about 209 million) is Indonesia, where 87.2% of the population identifies as Muslim.

Muslims make up a majority of the population in 49 countries around the world.

Sources: Pew Research, Zogby Analytics, dosomething.org
What Does Islam Mean?

The word Islam is derived from the Arabic root “salaam" which means peace. In the religious sense, Islam means submission to the will of God.
The Prophet Muhammad and the Quran
Abrahamic Tradition

- Islam comes from the same tradition as Judaism and Christianity
- People of the Book
- Concepts and events similar to those in the Torah and Bible
  - Heaven, Hell, Day of Judgment
The Spread of Islam

- Geographic expansion of Islam
- After Muhammad’s death
  - Caliphate rule
  - Creation of sects

The Spread of Islam. The rapid spread of Islam created within a century a unified cultural and economic zone from India to the Atlantic Ocean within.
Poll: Myth or Reality?

Myth or Reality: All Arabs are Muslim
Where Do Muslims Live Today?

Just like all Muslims are not Arab, all Arabs are not Muslim.

There are about 1.6 billion Muslims, or 23% of the world’s population, making Islam the second-largest religion.

Source: Pew Research
The Five Pillars of Islam

- Faith (Iman)
- Prayer (Salat)
- Fasting (Sayam)
- Charity (Zakat)
- Pilgrimage (Hajj)
Faith (Iman)

- Belief in one God (Allah)
- Prophets and messengers
- Individual relationship with God
Prayer (Salat)

- Five times daily
- Can be done anywhere
- Alone or in a group
- Ritual washing beforehand
Fasting (Sayam)

• Each year during the month of Ramadan
• Abstinence from sunup to sundown
• Purpose:
  • Closeness to God
  • Self-discipline
  • Appreciation for those less fortunate
Charity (Zakat)

- Similar to practices in other religions
- 2.5% of assets
- To be given to the poor or to free someone from obligation
Pilgrimage (Hajj)

• Once in a Muslim’s life, try to visit to Mecca
• Gather at the place where Abraham prayed
• Closeness to God
• Strengthens unity among Muslims
Traditions

- Hadith (sayings of Prophet Muhammad)
- Examples of outward signs
  - Clothing
- Some practices around the world differ – either due to cultural traditions or to government
  - Dancing
  - Opposite gender socializing
Islamic Law

- Sharia law
  - Personal and collective spheres of daily life
- Laws in some Islamic countries
  - Clothing
  - Women driving
- In the US
  - Islamic law is not recognized in the US, although there is some controversy
Poll: Myth or Reality?

Myth or Reality: In Islam, women have limited rights
Islam and Women

- Rights for women
  - Inheritance
  - Property
  - Divorce

- In the mosque
  - Separate prayer areas
Myth or Reality: Jihad is a holy war against non-Muslims
Islam, Jihad & the Individual

- Does not mean terrorism
- Is an internal spiritual struggle
- Specific details in the Quran regarding war
The Elephant in the Room

No-one thinks that these people are representative of Christians.

So why do so many think that these people are representative of Muslims?
Islam in America
Video Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C7l7oYS0AP0
Islam in America

• First Muslims in the US were slaves from Africa
• Muslim immigrants in 1800s were primarily from Middle East and former Ottoman Empire
• In the 1930s, Fard Muhammad introduced the Nation of Islam, succeeded by Elijah Mohammed
• Malcolm X
• One story: Keith Ellison
NEWS

President Obama Visits an American Mosque For the First Time
Let’s Talk About It

Have you ever witnessed negative action towards Muslims? What did you observe?
Islamophobia

Islamophobic rhetoric is often socially acceptable.
“My professor asked us to go to class today dressed as our favorite celebrity…. I was representing Malala Yousafzai, an 18 year old Muslim woman who was shot in the face by Taliban gunmen…. It breaks my heart to say this, but on my way to school today I experienced first-hand the fear & hatred against Islam.”
Islamophobia in the 2016 Presidential Elections

After 14-year-old Muslim Ahmed Mohamed was arrested for bringing an electronic clock he had made to school to show off to his teacher in Texas, Clinton tweeted, "Assumptions and fear don't keep us safe—they hold us back. Ahmed, stay curious and keep building."

When Syrian Muslim refugees became a campaign issue, Cruz said, that to "bring tens of thousands of Syrian Muslims to America, is nothing short of crazy."

When Donald Trump suggested the possibility of a database of Muslims in the United States, Sanders called the idea "outrageous and bigoted."

Trump has called for a “total and complete shutdown” of Muslims entering the United States.

Video Link: [http://projects.huffingtonpost.com/muslim-in-america#video-7](http://projects.huffingtonpost.com/muslim-in-america#video-7)
Islam in the Workplace

• Fasting
• Prayer at work (religious accommodation)
• Friday prayer
• Time off for holidays
What Can You Do?

• Allow flexible schedules to accommodate holidays and prayer time
• Be aware of observances during Ramadan
• Adjust the employee dress code to account for religious attire (as long as it does not pose a risk to safety in the workplace)
• Create a private place where employees can pray, such as a meeting room or unused office
What Can You Do?

- Survey employees about religious beliefs and attitudes
- Hold education forums where employees can learn about Islam
- Promote a policy of acceptance, respect and non-judgment relative to religious diversity
- Establish faith-based employee resource groups
- Be aware of biases in recruiting
How To Have Effective Dialogue...

- **Exposure:** Increased contact with difference
- **Experience:** Creating transformative experiences to build relationships and shared meaning
- **Education:** Developing new skills, knowledge and ways of thinking

Cross Cultural Effectiveness
My Muslim Family Taught Me that Love is the Foundation of all Faiths

I am a proud Christian. I grew up in the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church and as an adult worshipped at AME Zion and Baptist churches where the congregations were 100% black.

For the past decade I have worshipped at a Unity Church outside of Washington, DC where the congregation is multi-cultural and the doctrine is more spiritual than religious. The Unity Worldwide Ministries website says: We honor all paths to God as we provide a philosophy that is spiritual, not religious; and love-based, not fear-based.

We strive to help individuals have a stronger connection to God every day by helping them...
Key Takeaways

• Just like any other type of diversity, religious diversity brings new ideas and ways of thinking that can support innovation and progress. Unfortunately, increased religious diversity can also bring increased intolerance and discrimination.

• There is much in common between Islam and other major world religions.

• Increased exposure, experience and education about Islam can help to demystify some of the differences.

• In a D&I climate where we advocate that employees bring their “whole” selves to work, religion is often an integral part of one’s identity. We have to think more carefully about how we will inclusively address religion.
Thank You!