



Insights for Muslim American Youth Development: Culturally-Centered Youth Approaches in the Black American Community

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Author Biography

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Abstract

Islamophobia by proxy and through lived experiences poses an internalization risk for Muslim American youth. Internalization of negative stereotypes about Islam and Muslims may have adverse effects on various developmental outcomes and adherence to Islamic practice. Before we can generate specific developmental models for Muslim American youth, a beneficial starting place is to consider the empowerment strategies developed by the Black American community to assist their youth overcome internalization of racial oppression. By reflecting on insights that may be relevant to Muslim youth, this paper describes the rise of culturally-centered approaches to youth development within the Black American community. The paper also provides some of the significant outcomes associated with the application of culturally-centered approaches for Black children. The paper concludes with implications for Muslim families, communities, and research into Muslim youth development in the US.

Youth development in the United States of America

Procuring positive developmental outcomes for youth is thought of as a process of preparing young people for a healthy and productive adulthood. At present, generalized models of youth development, also known as universal approaches, are the most common methods used to inform practice for youth within the United States. The formation of modern universal approaches to address the concerns of youth development began formally in the 1960s. Early approaches focused on the utilization of fear-provoking techniques and dramatized attempts to discourage youth from drug use and other forms of delinquent behavior with most programs lacking a strong theoretical basis—they instead were based on the best *thinking* of the time.¹ Faced by failures, prevention program developers began turning toward

¹ Jeffrey M. Jenson, Catherine F. Alter, Nicole Nicotera, Elizabeth K. Anthony, and Shandra S. Forrest-Bank, *Risk, Resilience, and Positive Youth Development: Developing Effective Community Programs for At-Risk Youth: Lessons from the Denver Bridge Project* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

data from longitudinal and intervention youth studies.² The outcome of this change was that in the 1980s, prevention efforts began to focus on specific problem behaviors such as drug abuse and school failure. Moreover, prevention programs then began to be guided by theories developed in psychology and sociology.³

By the 1990s, scholars, practitioners, and policymakers began to challenge past paradigms of seeing youth as broken or at risk of being broken.⁴ Also, they began to call for an expansion from the focus on single problem behaviors to a broader range of indicators influencing prevention efforts. Based on growing evidence of the etiology of both problematic behaviors and positive behaviors, a substantial body of support had been amassed that both positive and negative experiences influence youth outcomes.⁵ Protective and resilience factors were acknowledged as playing important roles in youth development; this new wave of thinking today is known as the Risk and Resilience Framework.⁶ By the beginning of the 21st century however, yet another shift in conceptualizing youth development arose within the literature—instead of focusing on problem prevention and deterrence as the primary objective, resilience and asset building among youth was taking primacy.⁷ This shift is known as Positive Youth Development (PYD).⁸ Theoretically, PYD draws on the Five Cs: Competence, Confidence, Connection, Character, and Caring, which are considered desired outcomes for *all youth*.⁹

² Robert J. Haggerty and Patricia J. Mrazek, eds., *Reducing Risks for Mental Disorders: Frontiers for Preventive Intervention Research* (Washington, DC: National Academies Press, 1994).

³ Richard F. Catalano, David J. Hawkins, and John W. Toumbourou, “Positive Youth Development in the United States: History, Efficacy, and Links to Moral and Character Education,” in *Handbook of Moral and Character Education*, ed. Larry P. Nucci and Darcia Narvaez (New York: Routledge, 2008), 1–483.

⁴ Richard M. Lerner, Jacqueline V. Lerner, Jason B. Almerigi, Christina Theokas, Erin Phelps, Steinunn Gestsdottir, Sophie Naudeau, Helena Jelacic, Amy Alberts, Lang Ma, Lisa M. Smith, Deborah L. Bobek, David Richman-Raphael, Isla Simpson, Elise DiDenti Christiansen, and Alexander von Eye, “Positive Youth Development, Participation in Community Youth Development Programs, and Community Contributions of Fifth-Grade Adolescents: Findings from the First Wave of the 4-H Study of Positive Youth Development,” *The Journal of Early Adolescence* 25, no. 1 (2005): 17–71.

⁵ Catalano, Hawkins, and Toumbourou, “Positive Youth Development.”

⁶ David J. Hawkins, Richard F. Catalano, and Janet Y. Miller, “Risk and Protective Factors for Alcohol and Other Drug Problems in Adolescence and Early Adulthood: Implications for Substance Abuse Prevention,” *Psychological Bulletin* 112, no. 1 (1992): 64.

⁷ Jenson et al., *Risk, Resilience, and Positive Youth Development*.

⁸ Jenson et al., *Risk, Resilience, and Positive Youth Development*.

⁹ Jenson et al., *Risk, Resilience, and Positive Youth Development*.

Despite great strides in developmental approaches to inform practice and prevention with youth, the specific resilience and asset needs of youth from minority backgrounds has gone largely understudied. The Black American community was amongst the first for decades to champion the application of culturally centered approaches for their youth. Not because the dimensions of standard universal models are not beneficial, but because of the belief of some scholars that Black American youth require approaches that address additional social, cultural, and historical dimensions they must navigate as they transition during their adolescent years—such as race in America and kinship dynamics.^{10,11} As a result, the utility of current universal frameworks like the Risk and Resilience Framework and PYD has been argued by some scholars of prevention-focused approaches to Black American youth development to be insufficient.

Muslim youth in America

Muslim youth form a minority group in America whose experiences related to religious identity need to be better understood. Among Muslim communities across the US, a growing concern is that Muslim youth are deviating from their religious practices and beliefs. While Muslim youth absconding from their faith not only is worrisome from a faith-based perspective, it may also be potentially worrisome from a developmental perspective. Religious upbringing and daily religious practice are associated with a host of desirable outcomes for youth. Some of the known potential benefits include greater positive affect, emotional processing and expression, greater volunteering, and a greater sense of mission and self-esteem.¹² Given these benefits, it is important that Muslim youth participate in supportive Islamic environments not only for spiritual benefits but also for their secular life outcomes.

¹⁰ Shawn Ginwright, “Racial Justice through Resistance: Important Dimensions of Youth Development for African Americans,” *National Civic Review* 95, no. 1 (2006): 41–46.

¹¹ Tony P. Jackson, *Black Male Violence in Perspective: Toward Afrocentric Intervention* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2015).

¹² Ying Chen and Tyler J. VanderWeele, “Associations of Religious Upbringing with Subsequent Health and Well-Being from Adolescence to Young Adulthood: An Outcome-Wide Analysis,” *American Journal of Epidemiology* 187, no. 11 (2018): 2355–64.

However, a potential risk-factor that may serve as a significant barrier to religious adherence and community belonging amongst Muslim youth is the reality of Islamophobia. By definition, Islamophobia results in negative stereotyping, sentiments, hatred, and or prejudice of Islam and or Muslims.¹³ How Muslim youth experience Islamophobia is both by proxy through media outlets and also in their lived experiences. With respect to Muslim youth in America specifically, many have reported being bullied, teased, and physically assaulted by not just other youths but also adults.¹⁴ Yet, there remains limited research that demonstrates the full impact of Islamophobia on the lives of Muslim children—in particular, their adherence to their Islamic faith system. Given that research on stigmatized identities has shown that internalization of the stigma is linked to psychological distress, low psychological well-being, and increases in depressive symptoms, amongst other detrimental outcomes—it is not unreasonable to hypothesize that some Muslim youth may, in an attempt to preserve their self-concept, choose to distance themselves from Islam or attempt to conceal their Islamic identity.¹⁵

Purpose of the paper

The Black American community, since the first enslaved Africans were brought from Africa's western and central coasts to America, has been confronted by the challenge of hate in America, in particular white supremacy. The community continues to resist unabating racial oppression on all fronts—socially, psychologically, economically, and spiritually. One important resistance measure to racial oppression, which may have particular relevance today for Muslim American youth, as new ideas and approaches are considered on how to best protect and bolster developmental outcomes for this population, is the Black

¹³ Siham Elkassem, Rick Csiernik, Andrew Mantulak, Gina Kayssi, Yasmine Hussain, Kathryn Lambert, Pamela Bailey, and Asad Choudhary, “Growing Up Muslim: The Impact of Islamophobia on Children in a Canadian Community,” *Journal of Muslim Mental Health* 12, no. 1 (2018): 3–18.

¹⁴ CAIR California. “Misabeled: The Impact of School Bullying and Discrimination on California Muslim Students,” CAIR, 2016.

¹⁵ Diane M. Quinn and Valerie A. Earnshaw, “Concealable Stigmatized Identities and Psychological Well-Being,” *Social and Personality Psychology Compass* 7, no. 1 (2013): 40–51.

community's pursuit of culturally-centered education and socialization for their youth members. Dr. Martin Luther King in some of his final writings called for the need for specific education and programming for Black American children that would allow them to thrive in light of environmental hazards and the very real presence of hatred for Blackness in America.¹⁶ Thus, the push for culturally-centered approaches for Black youth became one response by the community at large.

To reflect on insights that may be relevant to Muslim American youth, in this paper I highlight the development of culturally-centered approaches to youth development within the Black American community as a case example. The Black American community's quest for culturally-centered programming demonstrates how knowing the unique needs of one's youth population and how it may overlap with and differ from other youth groups, is an essential step to resolve the problems marginalized minority youth face. Thus, the paper begins with some of the major reasons Black American communities who apply culturally-centered approaches to youth development have done so, and what have been the implications. The paper then concludes with implications for Muslim families, communities, and Islamic-based youth developmental research.

Context of culturally-centered programming in the Black community

A key consideration of specific approaches to youth development for Muslim American youth is the *broader* contextualization of their experiences. For the Black American community, the broader contextualization was the lack of attention to the racial and ethnic inequality impacting Black American young people by universal approaches and programs.¹⁷ The majority Black American youth, unlike many other youth populations of the United States, begin their

¹⁶ Martin Luther King Jr., *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?*, vol. 2 (Boston: Beacon Press, 2010).

¹⁷ Anne Nordberg, Mary K. Twis, Mark A. Stevens, and Schnavia Smith Hatcher, "Precarity and Structural Racism in Black Youth Encounters with Police," *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal* 35, no. 5 (2018): 511–18.

American heritage not with voluntary immigration, but with the tragedy of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, which is an important element that is overlooked by universal approaches.¹⁸

Turning toward this history, the paradox of the US involvement with the trans-Atlantic slave trade, was that ideas of human brotherhood and social equality flourished amongst Western societies during this same period. Consequently, to overcome this great contradiction, justifications were developed. Beginning in the 17th century, Western writers such as Jean Barbot began the process of developing rationales to save the moral consciousness of Western societies involved in the human trafficking of enslaved Africans.¹⁹ One of the rationales was that many of the Africans enslaved were of non-Christian backgrounds. It was argued the enslavement of non-Christian Africans would be a benefit to them and save them from their “heathen” ways of animism and also *Islam*. Later, more elaborate rationales based on ethnocentrism and racial categories of White superiority and African/Black inferiority were developed.²⁰ Western scholars in support of this belief argued that Black Africans had never developed anything correlated with civilization because they were not fully human. As a result, the national laws of protection of human beings, such as those articulated in the United States Constitution, did not apply to enslaved African people.²¹

After slavery, the Black American community, including its *youth*, continued to experience micro- and macro-level injustices due to race through government-sanctioned segregation known as “Jim Crow Laws.” These laws reinforced inequalities in education, housing, and essentially every other human institution in which they were involved.²² Moreover, up until the 1940s, the Black

¹⁸ Faye Z. Belgrave and Kevin W. Allison, *African American Psychology: From Africa to America* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2018).

¹⁹ Madeleine Burnside, *Spirits of the Passage: The Transatlantic Slave Trade in the Seventeenth Century* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997).

²⁰ W. E. B. Du Bois and Mahmood Mamdani, *The World and Africa: An Inquiry into the Part Which Africa Has Played in World History and Color and Democracy*, The Oxford W. E. B. Du Bois, vol. 9 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

²¹ Burnside, *Spirits of the Passage*.

²² Elmer P. Martin and Joanne Mitchell Martin, *Spirituality and the Black Helping Tradition in Social Work* (Washington, DC: NASW Press, 2002).

American community was greatly plagued by the reality of public lynchings, the majority of which involved Black American male victims. Currently, there are no studies that have been conducted on the psychological impacts lynching had on the Black American community. However, it is known that during this same period, Black Americans migrated out of the south in vast numbers, heading north and west in the hopes of better opportunities to support their families and to escape Jim Crow.²³ Yet, by the 1960s, many of the newly formed Black American communities created in cities like Los Angeles and Chicago, emerged as ghettos due to concentrations of poverty, growing unemployment, increased crime, substandard housing conditions, and racist housing practices such as redlining. In response to the growing poverty in urban Black American communities, local governments failed to address issues of unemployment and housing discrimination; instead, they focused on increasing crime control by police, which led to increased police brutality reports (Abu-Jamal, 2004). Numerous police killings of unarmed Black American community members across the country, mainly Black American men, were reported as justifiable homicides.²⁴

The historical trauma brought about by systemic racism is a concern the Black American community continues to fight to address, particularly for its youth members.²⁵ The issues that have stemmed from systemic racism in many Black communities continue to exist as daily realities in which Black American youth find themselves forced to develop.²⁶ Moreover, Black American children are regularly bombarded with visual stereotypes that reinforce Western notions of Blacks and or Africans as physically less attractive, less intelligent, hypersexual beings, which present additional stressors for developing healthy self-esteem and respect for others who are similar in phenotype.²⁷ Likewise, the regularity of police

²³ Joshua Bloom and Waldo E. Martin, *Black Against Empire: The History and Politics of the Black Panther Party* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2016).

²⁴ Bloom and Martin, *Black Against Empire*.

²⁵ Sterling Stuckey, *Slave Culture: Nationalist Theory and the Foundations of Black America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

²⁶ Belgrave and Allison, *African American Psychology*.

²⁷ Cheryl Grills, Deanna Cooke, Jason Douglas, Andrew Subica, Sandra Villanueva, and Brittani Hudson. "Culture, Racial Socialization, and Positive African American Youth Development," *Journal of Black Psychology* 42, no. 4 (2016): 343–73.

killings of unarmed Black men, women, and children reinforces notions of the historical lack of value that Black Americans have had within American society.²⁸

Kinship and family dynamics

Similar to the broader level context, the interpersonal experiences within the lives of Muslim American youth should be considered in the development of specific approaches that inform youth development for this population. For the Black community, this has been the transformation of home life for many Black American youths. Despite constant stereotyping of the Black family structure as dysfunctional, prior to the end of the 1970s, the vast majority of Black American youth lived in two-parent households with both mother and father present.²⁹ However, by the 1980s, the number of mother-headed households within the Black American community expanded.³⁰ Today a significant number of Black American children live in mother-headed households, but also Black American youth are also more likely to be reared by their grandparents than any other youth group living within the US.³¹ Also, a significant number of Black American youth are growing up in foster care and currently make up the majority of children within the foster care system.^{32,33}

The transformation of the Black American family from its historical two-parent model to majority single-parent model in the 1990s has been attributed in part to the devastating drug epidemic of the 1980s and the lack of humanist approaches taken by the federal and state governments to assist Black families—unlike the approach taken today in response to the opioid crisis which plagues largely White American youth and their families. However, the increase in incarceration of Black

²⁸ Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, *From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2016).

²⁹ Yvette R. Harris and James A. Graham, *The African American Child: Development and Challenges* (New York: Springer Publishing Company, 2014).

³⁰ Harris and Graham, *The African American Child*.

³¹ Faye Z. Belgrave and J. Brevard, *African American Boys* (New York: Springer, 2016).

³² Belgrave and Brevard, *African American Boys*.

³³ Harris and Graham, *The African American Child*.

American men due to injustices in sentencing in the 1990s for a majority of non-violent offenses has also been seen as a contributing factor.³⁴

Many who invested in the empowerment of Black children through culturally-centered approaches found it also noteworthy that the vast majority of Black American children had not lived without the support of both their mothers and fathers before the 1990s since their ancestors' enslavement during the late 1600s to 1865.³⁵ During enslavement, the African ancestors of present-day Black Americans were overwhelming female-headed.³⁶ It was not uncommon for fathers, mothers, and children to be sold away from one another, never to be seen again.³⁷ Consequently, the enslaved African ancestors of Black Americans were forced to adapt, forming new family structures in an attempt to provide stability for children when stability was never fully possible.³⁸ Commonly, enslaved African men, women, boys, and girls would serve the role of mother, father, uncle, aunt, brother, sister, grandmother, and grandfather for Black American youth severed from some or all of their biological family, which scholars refer to as the "Fictive Kin" system.³⁹

Without an alternative, enslaved Africans were forced to utilize a communal system lens of family, a retention from their African homelands, which in many cases places emphasis on shared collective responsibility for youth members.⁴⁰

Universal approaches to youth development do not address the reality that many Black American children have uniquely different family and kinship dynamics from other youth populations. These differences have been found to potentially impact how prevention and or intervention programs for healthy development among Black American children should be designed and implemented. Travis and Leech have noted that the empirical validity of the universal models like the Five

³⁴ Belgrave and Brevard, *African American Boys*.

³⁵ Belgrave and Allison, *African American Psychology*.

³⁶ Martin and Martin, *Spirituality and the Black Helping Tradition*.

³⁷ Martin and Martin, *Spirituality and the Black Helping Tradition*.

³⁸ Martin and Martin, *Spirituality and the Black Helping Tradition*.

³⁹ Martin and Martin, *Spirituality and the Black Helping Tradition*.

⁴⁰ Belgrave and Allison, *African American Psychology*.

Cs for Black American youth is questionable since only small percentages have been included within the evaluative studies.⁴¹ As a result, our current understanding of how well a PYD model performs is based on samples of children who come from majority two-parent homes, which is not the reality for the majority of Black American children today.⁴²

Additionally, Ginwright noted that even in cases where Black American children may individually have the benefits associated with having a two-parent household and other nuclear family supports, the majority of such children still live amongst other children impacted by the lack of a two-parent home and other social supports, and thus may be potentially still negatively impacted by their peers' lack of supports.⁴³ Consequently, for Black American youth, prevention/intervention programs that emphasize youth development as a collective response and focus on collective dimensions versus primarily on individual assets and support systems involve a significant shift in addressing their healthy developmental process from advocates of culturally-centered approaches to Black youth development.

The African-Centered Framework and positive development of Black children

Once the considerations of broad context and interpersonal factors are considered, theoretical approaches for Muslim American youth can be developed and later evaluated for relevance. Within the Black American community, taking the considerations of race, ethnicity, and family into account, cultural theorists, community activists, and members during the late 1960s and early 70s began the push for communities to engage in culturally-centered programs to bolster healthy development for its youth population.⁴⁴ One consequence was the development of

⁴¹ Raphael Travis Jr. and Tamara G. J. Leech, "Empowerment-Based Positive Youth Development: A New Understanding of Healthy Development for African American Youth," *Journal of Research on Adolescence* 24, no. 1 (2014): 93–116.

⁴² Travis and Leech, "Empowerment-Based Positive Youth Development."

⁴³ Ginwright, "Racial Justice through Resistance," 41–46.

⁴⁴ Patricia Reid-Merritt, *Righteous Self Determination: The Black Social Work Movement in America* (Baltimore, MD: Inprint Editions, 2010).

what is known interchangeably as the Afrocentric or African-Centered framework. The rationale for the usage of African-Centered frameworks endorsed by many within the Black American community is based on both an historical and societal premise.⁴⁵ With regard to youth, the application of the African-Centered Framework is most commonly expressed through community-based initiatives such as rites of passage programs, after-school programs, charter and homeschooling groups. A common thread that many African-Centered programs seek to bolster is the development of positive perceptions in youth participants of their racial and ethnic identity as Black people and Black Americans.^{46,47}

A central assumption of youth programs that apply an African-Centered framework is that mainstream American culture has failed to empower Black American youth. Moreover, an assumption of the African-Centered framework is that the information widely distributed in schools and media outlets has been centered on protecting what DiAngelo calls *White fragility* and also maintaining a subservient identity amongst Black children to maintain the White dominance over non-White Americans.^{48,49} Consequently, African-Centered programs seek to address this issue by bolstering a sense of positive identity amongst Black youth emphasizing a strengths-based approach to viewing and utilizing their African and American heritage.⁵⁰ This emphasis on ethnic and racial identity is thought to result in numerous benefits for the youth participants and is thought to be key in their capacity to navigate experiences of being Black in America and becoming positive members of society.⁵¹

⁴⁵ Wade W. Nobles, "Extended Self: Rethinking the So-Called Negro Self-Concept," *Journal of Black Psychology* 2, no. 2 (1976): 15–24.

⁴⁶ Dorie J. Gilbert, Aminifu R. Harvey, and Faye Z. Belgrave, "Advancing the Africentric Paradigm Shift Discourse: Building toward Evidence-Based Africentric Interventions in Social Work Practice with African Americans," *Social Work* 54, no. 3 (2009): 243–52.

⁴⁷ Arthur L. Whaley and John P. McQueen, "An Afrocentric Program as Primary Prevention for African American Youth: Qualitative and Quantitative Exploratory Data," *Journal of Primary Prevention* 25, no. 2 (2004): 253–269.

⁴⁸ Robin DiAngelo, "White Fragility," *International Journal of Critical Pedagogy* 3, no. 3 (2011): 54–70.

⁴⁹ R. A. Winbush, "Back to the Future: Campus Racism in the 21st Century," *The Black Collegian* 32, no. 1 (2001): 102–3.

⁵⁰ Asa G. Hilliard, *SBA: The Reawakening of the African Mind* (Gainesville, FL: Makare Publishing Company, 1999).

⁵¹ Mwalimu J. Shujaa and Kenya J. Shujaa, eds., *The SAGE Encyclopedia of African Cultural Heritage in North America* (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2015).

In addition to identity, African-Centered programs tend to focus on bolstering positive social connections amongst youth with members of their community. This assumption is based on a concept familiar to many African cultures according to Mbiti that social connectedness or the bolstering of the communal self is key to individual success.⁵² Consequently, many African-Centered programs also focus on developing a strong sense of community connectedness among youth.

Today, burgeoning research is documenting that African-Centered programs with their focus on positive *racial* and *ethnic* identity and community connectedness provide a host of supports conducive to positive youth transitional success indicators among Black American children including self-esteem, life satisfaction, academic and personal adjustment, anti-drug attitudes and behaviors, and racial identity.⁵³ For example, when Burlew et al. the mediating role of Afrocentric socialization in alcohol use amongst youth participants, they found that the program's bolstering of youths' Afrocentric identity was correlated with a decrease in both their intended and actual usage of substances.⁵⁴ Similar findings have been reported by Flay et al. and Liu and Flay who found that Afrocentric self-concept programs were associated with less favorable attitudes toward substance use and also fewer friends among youth participants who encouraged substance use, or who used themselves.^{55,56} Moreover, African-Centered programs may also serve as a buffer against anti-Black racism for Black youth—providing them with a framework that allows them to articulate for themselves the *fallacy* of White supremacy and Black inferiority.

⁵² John S. Mbiti, *African Religions & Philosophy* (Oxford: Heinemann, 1990).

⁵³ Aerika Brittan Loyd and Brittney V. Williams, "The Potential for Youth Programs to Promote African American Youth's Development of Ethnic and Racial Identity," *Child Development Perspectives* 11, no. 1 (2017): 29–38.

⁵⁴ Ann Kathleen Burlew, LaTrice Montgomery, Andrzej S. Kosinski, and Alyssa A. Forcehimes, "Does Treatment Readiness Enhance the Response of African American Substance Users to Motivational Enhancement Therapy?," *Psychology of Addictive Behaviors* 27, no. 3 (2013): 744.

⁵⁵ Brian R. Flay, Sally Graumlich, Eisuke Segawa, James L. Burns, and Michelle Y. Holliday, "Effects of 2 Prevention Programs on High-Risk Behaviors among African American Youth: A Randomized Trial," *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine* 158, no. 4 (2004): 377–84.

⁵⁶ Li C. Liu, Brian R. Flay, and Aban Aya Investigators, "Evaluating Mediation in Longitudinal Multivariate Data: Mediation Effects for the Aban Aya Youth Project Drug Prevention Program," *Prevention Science* 10, no. 3 (2009): 197–207.

African-Centered programs also address the kinship concerns of Black American youth by providing participants mechanisms of forming positive community-based relationships with Black American adult male and female role models. Within the African-Centered literature, kinship factors are commonly addressed in the form of providing youth participants with rites-of-passage programs.⁵⁷ Based upon a practice widespread in many indigenous African cultures, rites-of-passage programs allow Black American youth the opportunity to bond in a positive semi-structured environment with other youths and adults of their gender, engaging in activities that promote brotherhood, or sisterhood, and activities that promote prosocial behaviors.⁵⁸ Moreover, the adult members chosen to facilitate rites of passage programs are often intended to take on family-like roles, which are known within Black American culture as “fictive kin,” providing youth participants the opportunity to develop positive adult paternal and maternal relationships.⁵⁹

Implications for Muslim families and communities

This paper highlighted how the Black American community came to envision culturally-centered approaches to youth development in part due to the failure of universal approaches to address the concerns of racial and ethnic identity their children face being Black in America. While culturally-centered approaches are not the only response or unanimously accepted approach for Black youth empowerment by the Black American community, it is one that continues to show promise for their youths’ adjustment during their adolescent years.

There are takeaways from the case example of culturally-centered approaches by the Black American community for those rearing Muslim youth. The first is the necessity for adult Muslims to begin with accepting the undeniable fact that no

⁵⁷ Paul Hill Jr., *Coming of Age: African American Male Rites-of-Passage* (Chicago: African American Images, 1992).

⁵⁸ Hill, *Coming of Age*.

⁵⁹ Hill, *Coming of Age*.

matter how outstanding Muslims may be in their citizenship, there is an element of hate and or negative stereotyping of Islam and Muslims that exist to the detriment of our youth. The Qur'an and *seerah* of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ demonstrates this fact—local and national state media coverage reflects this fact. This author does not take for granted that in America, there are civil rights and hate crime laws that provide Muslims, like other faith groups, protections by law from discrimination and harm. However, it should be kept in mind that these laws exist because of the *real* potential for religious discrimination by individuals in America. For many Black American parents and communities, racial socialization is used to anticipate and prepare their children for what they will have to navigate.⁶⁰ This process often includes both direct conversations by parents with their child(ren) regarding race in America and also modeling specific behaviors of how to confront racism. Similarly, Muslim parents and communities need to prepare Muslim youth for experiences of Islamophobia through a socialization process that engages them in 1) dialogues about the reality of Islamophobia in America; and (2) provides strategies to navigate Islamophobic spaces.

Today's Muslim American youth are not developing their Islamic identity in an environment where being Muslim evokes an ideal of social justice and uprightness as was provided for Black American Muslims during the 1930s through the 1960s.⁶¹ Moreover, many second-generation Muslim youths, unlike their parents, are unable to perceive a deep connection and identity outside of America. Thus, the potential resiliency factor of having a context of home outside of America, has not been inherited by the present generation of Muslim American youth.⁶² Instead, today's Muslim youth are developing their Islamic identity in a post 9/11 American society where the negative actions of a few are used to rationalize hate for and negative perceptions of the whole.

⁶⁰ Stephanie I. Coard and Robert M. Sellers, "African American Families as a Context for Racial Socialization," in *African American Family Life: Ecological and Cultural Diversity*, ed. Vonnice C. McLoyd, Nancy E. Hill, and Kenneth A. Dodge (New York: Guilford Press, 2005), 264–84.

⁶¹ Sherman A. Jackson, *Islam and the Blackamerican: Looking toward the Third Resurrection* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

⁶² Sherman A. Jackson, "Muslims, Islam(s), Race, and American Islamophobia," in *Islamophobia: The Challenge of Pluralism in the 21st Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 93–108.

Also, as was noted in the discussion of African-centered programs for Black youth, with their emphasis on cultural and ethnic identity socialization, the goal of these programs is set to improve the overall self-concept of Black youth as it pertains to their ethnic and racial identity. The same must be considered for Muslim American youth—their education, youth programming, and conversations at home must be prepared to embolden them to feel a sense of empowerment in their identity regarding what it means to be a Muslim and being a part of the Muslim American community. In conjunction to empowerment, like the example illustrated through the case example provided in this paper, Muslim youth must be equipped with the knowledge and an environment that provides them with the *skillsets* to guard and protect their Islamic self-concept from messages and experiences of Islamophobia they will have to navigate.

Implications for Islamic youth development research

There remains a need for research to inform evidence-based approaches to improve the developmental outcomes of Muslim youth. Despite the proliferation of Islamic educational and cultural programming events that engage Muslim youth, there still remains a void in empirical research with a focus on intervention and prevention. This research can provide answers to the impact of Islamic socialization programs for Muslim youth and which may be the most predictive of long-term outcomes related to religious adherence and community connection, which have noted benefits for youth in addition to well-being. Moreover, as Muslims, we share universal principles of faith, daily practices, and perspectives on living derived from the Qur'an and Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. When developing a model of youth development for Muslim American youth, the nuanced differences in their intersecting identities (e.g., ethnicity, race, socioeconomic status of their households, gender) need to be considered. How does the intersection of Muslim American youths' multiple identities associate with their healthy Islamic identity formation and adherence? Moreover, how do neighborhood, state location and

other community factors impact how Islamic education and youth programming should be centered? These are questions that remain for Islamic researchers concerned with youth development to answer as they may have important implications on how Islamophobia may vary in impact on the lives of Muslim American youth. Failure to consider unique nuances of identity among Muslim American youth may also contribute to short-sighted approaches, which has been the critique of universal approaches of youth development for Black American youth.

Conclusion

The development of culturally-centered approaches and community-based programs reasserts the legacy of the Black American community's empowerment strategies to overcome oppression. Culturally-centered approaches to youth development within the Black community formed in direct response to the systemic and historical nature of racism in America and its negative impact on the lives' of Black American children. Its focus has been to start with the realization that Black children must not be made subservient or to feel inferior to Whiteness, nor to overt or subtle expressions of White supremacy.

Muslim communities can benefit by reflecting on the history of Black Americans to empower their youth in a society that still demonstrates a lack of full support for the healthy development of Black lives, a societal ill with historical antecedents. Muslim children must be provided with the tools to be resilient and thrive within societies where Islamophobia and prejudice threaten to undo many of the beneficial outcomes of belonging to a faith-based community. Therefore, including within their education, conversation and discussion around navigating hate and negative stereotyping of Islam and Muslims, and how to make sense of these perspectives is unquestionably an obligation we must fulfill.