

## Activity 3

### Young Muslims in Britain

– differences and things in common

#### Summary

Young people are given extracts from interviews with young British Muslims. They select those which are closest to their own feelings and thoughts and imagine themselves contacting the people concerned, for example through Facebook or Bebo. In their messages they make similar remarks themselves. Also they write to some of the people from whom they feel different. They may then develop their messages into video diaries or other kinds of self-portrait.

#### Why?

The benefits that young people gain from this exercise include the following. They:

- gain a sense that they are not alone – there are other people out there who have thoughts, feelings, anxieties and aspirations similar to their own
- feel young people are respected and trusted, and recognized as being resources from whom they can learn
- gain therefore a preliminary sense of safety and security
- receive permission, so to speak, to talk more openly than they might do otherwise about their own feelings and experiences
- are stimulated to reflect on differences and commonalities amongst human beings, including people broadly similar to themselves in age and religious heritage
- develop empathy for other people
- are reminded there is great diversity amongst Muslims in general and British Muslims in particular
- Learn to disagree respectfully and find ways of coping, co-existing and respecting difference.

#### Preparation

You need a collection of extracts from interviews with young people, similar to those in Handout 5. Other things being equal, it is useful to provide each quotation on a separate card or slip of paper. This makes the extracts literally more manageable and easier to handle, and gives a sense of mutual interaction as distinct from communication that is only one-way. More elaborately than in print, extracts can be presented through video diaries or self-portraits on a social networking site.

Or, of course, extracts can be provided live by real people, either rehearsed beforehand or off-the-cuff.

Or the young people you are working with can provide the extracts, perhaps anonymously.

#### Procedure

Working in pairs, young people do one or more of the following:

- select three extracts which, taken together, best summarize the identity and situation of young British Muslims today, and arrange them in a triangle on a wall chart with the addition of some carefully chosen images
- imagine and role-play a conversation or email exchange between two of the people represented in the extracts
- make a list of the personal strengths and positive qualities of the people represented in the extracts
- write a set of brief messages to the people represented in the extracts, in the form of 'Do's and Don't's', and make these into sayings or slogans that could appear on posters, postcards or PowerPoint slides.

## Continuation

Young people may:

- create collages, using material from lifestyle magazines, youth magazines and colour supplements to portray themselves and their situation
- make a podcast that mixes and juxtaposes spoken quotations from young people with pieces of relevant music or *nasheeds*
- choose a news item or feature article in their local newspaper, and on the basis of their consideration of the situation and identities of young Muslim people, write a letter to the editor for publication and/or to their ward councillor for their attention
- on the website today of a national newspaper or their local newspaper, and on the basis of their consideration of the situation and identities of young Muslim people, send a message through the Have Your Say facility.

## Identity, Empowerment and Change, Handout 5 Voices and Views of Young Muslims

### Proud

'I am proud to be a British Muslim. I didn't used to wear a scarf. But now I follow my custom to show how proud I am of my religion. We have free will to understand our own religion, it's not as though we are forced to wear the scarf. Women have a lot of freedom within Islam.'

*Hina, 16*

### We need to come out

'It is upsetting when you see that all Muslims are tarred with the same brush. We are all Osama bin Ladens or something and we all want to kill everyone. And it's not true. Sometimes you get people looking at you funny. They assume that you are Muslim so you must be a terrorist .... For things to change people need to go out and portray the true Islam. Muslims always go into a corner and never come out to express their views. We need to come out and teach people about Islam. That's the only way people will recognize us and who we are. My parents' generation didn't have that opportunity, but we do.'

*Farid, 15*

### Way of life

Islam teaches you to be self-disciplined in the conduct of your everyday life. For example praying five times every day, you do this at a set time. It's a way of life. This all makes you very disciplined, you don't really have time to waste when you live your life according to Islamic belief. In addition, Islam really places a high value on the pursuit of knowledge, which I wholeheartedly believe in and that's why I work hard at my studies.

*Shahzaman, 16*

### So angry and helpless

'It's horrible when your own government is helping to kill Muslims. You just feel so helpless. Sometimes I feel ashamed to be British when I go abroad .... I have been called names. I was with a friend in East Ham once and we were both wearing scarves. An old man came up to us and shouted that we were 'bloody Muslims'. You just feel so angry and helpless.'

*Fazeela, 15*

### Normal people

'The media only shows a negative view of Islam. On television, sometimes they show Muslims, but it's always them doing some sort of Islamic ritual or being extremists. They don't show us as normal people.... If a reporter wants a nice big headline, an attractive front-page story, they aren't going to go to someone nice and peaceful.... I think it is quite hard for them because they don't know about Islam, but sometimes it feels like a conscious decision.'

*Othman, 16*

### Stereotyped

'People have a stereotyped view of Islam. They think Muslims are old fashioned and live in tents with camels. They see us as people who haven't moved with the times or technology. They compare people to the West - the way they dress, the way they live their lives, the way they work. And they see it as all old style.'

*Yasir, 16*

### Angry

'They talk about democracy and then they put men in shackles at Guantanamo Bay. Where are the human rights? .... I don't agree with suicide bombings. But if you are a little boy and you see your parents killed in front of you; if you are a teenager and you see your little brother getting shot, you are going to grow up feeling angry. But people don't want to listen.'

*Nael, 16*

*Source: The quotations in Handout 5 are from interviews conducted by Laura Smith in 2004 and were first published in Islamophobia: Challenges, Issues and Action, Trentham Books, 2005.*

Published in this form by the UK Race & Europe Network (UKREN), 2009. Further information at [www.youngmuslimcitizens.org.uk](http://www.youngmuslimcitizens.org.uk)

