

Migration, Islam and Masculinities: Transforming Emigration and Immigration Societies

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Theorising, representing and researching Muslim masculinities: issues for feminist and social justice research

Muslim young men occupy a sensationalized and demonized position in contemporary British society – indeed, they might be described as the new folk devils of the western imagination. They are popularly feared as the archetypal ‘outsiders within’ – and are commonly associated with a range of social and educational problems, including segregation, exclusion and low academic achievement and educational progression.

Extending Skeggs’ (2004) theorisation of the representation of working-class subjects in public life, this paper argues that British Muslims are being increasingly subjected to a narrow ‘forced telling of the self’ within popular and media discourse. These practices – propelled by the popular pre-occupation with ‘dangerous’ Islam - has rendered Muslims hypervisible within public life, yet (paradoxically) also profoundly ‘invisible’ (West 1993), without the opportunity to be represented (or to represent themselves) in complex and heterogeneous terms.

Drawing on discussion group data collected from 34 British Muslim boys from South Asian backgrounds, this paper seeks to challenge popular representations of British-Muslim masculinities by opening up ways of thinking Otherwise about the young men’s identities and self-representations.

It is argued that the boys’ constructions of racialised and religious identities are inextricably intertwined with, and organised in relation to, discourses of hegemonic masculinity. In particular, the paper discusses how the boys positioned themselves in relation to contemporary transnational discourses of ‘hard’ Muslim masculinity and ‘cool’/hard black masculinity. The production and the implications of such constructions are discussed from a feminist social justice perspective, with consideration given to the social production of research.

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