

ORIGINAL

Navigating Identity and Conflict Through Social Identity Theory: Muslim Women's Resistance Against Western Stereotypes in Seema Yasmin's Muslim Women Are Everything

Navegando la identidad y el conflicto a través de la teoría de la identidad social: la resistencia de las mujeres musulmanas contra los estereotipos occidentales en Las mujeres musulmanas lo son todo de Seema Yasmin

Liyana K¹ , Alagesan M¹ 

¹Department of English and Foreign Languages, Faculty of Engineering and Technology, SRM Institute of Science and Technology, Kattankulathur - 603 203, Chengalpattu (District). Tamil Nadu, India.

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Corresponding author: Liyana K 

ABSTRACT

Introduction: Seema Yasmin's Muslim Women Are Everything challenges prevailing stereotypes by showcasing the diverse identities, roles, and achievements of Muslim women worldwide. This study explores the intersection of identity and conflict within Yasmin's work, focusing on how Muslim women navigate the tension between self-perception and the reductive labels imposed upon them by societal and media narratives. By examining this struggle, the paper seeks to contribute to the broader discourse on representation and empowerment.

Method: this study employs Social Identity Theory to analyze how Muslim women assert their complex identities as an act of resistance against external stereotypes and societal expectations. The analysis focuses on Yasmin's portrayal of Muslim women in various fields, including science, the arts, and activism. The research examines how these women negotiate their identities within both public and private spheres, emphasizing their resilience and agency.

Results: the findings indicate that the conflict between personal identity and external perceptions creates an ongoing struggle for recognition and acceptance. This struggle is often reflected in the tension between embracing one's cultural and religious background and the pressures to conform to dominant societal narratives. Yasmin's work illustrates that Muslim women actively challenge these imposed labels, asserting their agency and rejecting monolithic representations.

Conclusion: by highlighting the resilience and achievements of Muslim women, this study underscores the need to move beyond simplistic portrayals. The research reveals that Muslim women's identities are not fixed but fluid, shaped by their responses to both internal and external challenges. This fluidity contributes to a broader understanding of identity construction amidst ongoing social conflicts, reinforcing the importance of diverse and nuanced representations in contemporary discourse.

Keywords: Muslim Women; Identity Conflict; Stereotypes; Empowerment; Agency.

RESUMEN

Introducción: el libro Muslim Women Are Everything de Seema Yasmin desafía los estereotipos prevalecientes al mostrar las diversas identidades, roles y logros de las mujeres musulmanas en todo el mundo. Este estudio explora la intersección de la identidad y el conflicto en el trabajo de Yasmin, centrándose en cómo las

mujeres musulmanas navegan la tensión entre la autopercepción y las etiquetas reductivas que les imponen las narrativas sociales y mediáticas. Al examinar esta lucha, el artículo busca contribuir al discurso más amplio sobre la representación y el empoderamiento.

Método: este estudio emplea la teoría de la identidad social para analizar cómo las mujeres musulmanas afirman sus identidades complejas como un acto de resistencia contra los estereotipos externos y las expectativas sociales. El análisis se centra en la representación que hace Yasmin de las mujeres musulmanas en varios campos, incluida la ciencia, las artes y el activismo. La investigación examina cómo estas mujeres negocian sus identidades tanto en las esferas públicas como privadas, enfatizando su resiliencia y capacidad de acción.

Resultados: los hallazgos indican que el conflicto entre la identidad personal y las percepciones externas crea una lucha continua por el reconocimiento y la aceptación. Esta lucha se refleja a menudo en la tensión entre aceptar el propio trasfondo cultural y religioso y las presiones para adaptarse a las narrativas sociales dominantes. El trabajo de Yasmin ilustra que las mujeres musulmanas desafían activamente estas etiquetas impuestas, afirmando su capacidad de acción y rechazando las representaciones monolíticas.

Conclusión: al destacar la resiliencia y los logros de las mujeres musulmanas, este estudio subraya la necesidad de ir más allá de las representaciones simplistas. La investigación revela que las identidades de las mujeres musulmanas no son fijas sino fluidas, moldeadas por sus respuestas a los desafíos internos y externos. Esta fluidez contribuye a una comprensión más amplia de la construcción de la identidad en medio de los conflictos sociales en curso, lo que refuerza la importancia de las representaciones diversas y matizadas en el discurso contemporáneo.

Palabras clave: Mujeres Musulmanas; Conflicto de Identidad; Estereotipos; Empoderamiento; Capacidad de Acción.

INTRODUCTION

In *Muslim Women Are Everything*, the central theme revolves around challenging stereotypes and celebrating Muslim women's diverse roles and identities. The book showcases Muslim women who defy societal norms and expectations, pointing out their resilience and multifaceted nature. Seema Yasmin's work challenges the stereotypes imposed on Muslim women, portraying them as individuals who break barriers, pursue diverse paths, and refuse to conform to limiting societal expectations. The book emphasizes the complexity and richness of Muslim women's experiences beyond traditional narratives. It celebrates the diversity within the Muslim women community, showcasing their achievements, struggles, and triumphs across various fields. The book highlights the multifaceted identities of Muslim women, from space explorers to entrepreneurs, emphasizing their strength and resilience in navigating identity conflicts.

Societal and media stereotypes surrounding Muslim women often portray them as subordinate, small, and quiet, reinforcing traditional gender roles that limit their perceived capabilities and opportunities. Such representations not only perpetuate the notion that Muslim women must remain passive and compliant but also overlook the diverse and empowered Muslim women who actively break barriers and excel in various fields. The media's tendency to express surprise when Muslim women achieve success reveals a deeper bias that fails to acknowledge their true potential. These oversimplified and monolithic portrayals ignore the complexity and diversity of Muslim women's identities and lived experiences, reducing them to a single narrative that does not reflect their multifaceted realities.

Seema Yasmin's work serves as a powerful counter-narrative that empowers Muslim women by challenging reductive labels. She emphasizes that Muslim women are not a monolithic group. They come from varied backgrounds, ethnicities, and life experiences, as reflected in the stories of women who defy stereotypes. Her work depicts Muslim women as leaders, professionals, and creatives, engaging in diverse activities—from reading to performing open-heart surgery—thus showcasing their multifaceted roles and identities. The inclusion of examples like Tesnim Sayar, who blends religious expression with punk fashion, portrays the complexity and richness of identity among Muslim women.⁽¹⁾

Yasmin also confronts societal expectations by showing how Muslim women navigate multiple identities in unconventional ways. She highlights women who challenge traditional gender roles, pursuing higher education and careers, and redefining their societal positions. By showcasing diverse stories, Yasmin encourages Muslim women to embrace their identities freely and confidently, seeing resistance to societal norms as an act of empowerment. Her work broadens perceptions by reflecting on her experiences and those of others, showing that Muslim women engage in all facets of life—from politics to fashion. In doing so, Yasmin promotes a more nuanced and inclusive understanding, empowering women to reclaim their narratives and challenge stereotypes.

METHOD

This paper uses Social Identity Theory (SIT) as the primary theoretical framework to analyse Seema Yasmin's *Muslim Women Are Everything*, focusing on how Muslim women navigate identity and resist stereotypes. Social Identity Theory, developed by Henri Tajfel and John Turner in the 1970s, is instrumental in examining group dynamics, identity formation, and intergroup relations. This framework is especially relevant for exploring how individuals construct and assert their identities within social contexts that impose restrictive labels.

Social Identity Theory posits that an individual's self-concept is largely shaped by their membership in various social groups, such as those defined by religion, ethnicity, or gender. It outlines three key components: social categorization, social identification, and social comparison. Through social categorization, individuals classify themselves and others into groups, often leading to stereotyping. This categorization process creates in-groups (to which one belongs) and out-groups (those perceived as different). Social identification then involves internalizing the identity of one's group and adopting its norms and behaviours. Finally, social comparison is the process by which people evaluate their group relative to others, often resulting in in-group favouritism and out-group discrimination. These dynamics can be seen in the experiences of Muslim women who are often stereotyped based on visible markers, like the hijab, which positions them as part of an out-group in predominantly Western societies.⁽²⁾

The relevance of Social Identity Theory to Yasmin's work lies in its ability to emphasise the ways Muslim women resist and redefine their identities against the backdrop of societal stereotypes. In *Muslim Women Are Everything*, Yasmin challenges monolithic portrayals, showcasing the diverse realities of Muslim women who defy societal expectations. The theory aids in understanding how these women spread their identities in spaces where they are often reduced to narrow, oversimplified categories. By examining how these women assert their agency, the analysis explores the strategies they employ to resist marginalization and assert their individuality, thereby challenging the social labels imposed upon them.

A key aspect of this analysis involves examining how Yasmin addresses social categorization and stereotyping. The text reveals how Muslim women are often categorized based on superficial characteristics, which leads to generalized assumptions about their beliefs, behaviours, and roles. For instance, Yasmin points out the struggles of women who wear the hijab, confronting the stereotypes that reduce them to symbols of oppression or backwardness. In the story of Gisele, a Brazilian Muslim convert, and her perspective on wearing the niqab. Gisele addresses the stereotypes surrounding Muslim women's attire:

"Many Brazilians associate the burqa with oppressed women who don't have a say in how they dress. She stresses that her decision is a personal one. 'My Muslim friends and I are trying to combat this stereotype. I'm a great believer of individuality, and wearing the niqab is a personal choice. I'd never impose it on anyone else. One should be free to wear what they want to,' she said".⁽¹⁾

This passage reflects Gisele's advocacy for agency and freedom of choice in how women express their identities. By resisting these imposed identities, the women in her narratives assert their right to self-definition. Social Identity Theory helps explain how these acts of resistance not only reclaim agency but also subvert the out-group perceptions that seek to confine them.

"The group members may seek positive distinctiveness for the in-group by redefining or altering the elements of the comparative situation. This need not involve any change in the group's actual social position or access to objective resources in relation to the out-group. It is a group rather than an individualistic strategy."⁽²⁾

The process of social identification is another critical focus. Yasmin's narratives depict Muslim women reclaiming their identities by embracing their diverse experiences, whether within their cultural communities or in broader, often hostile, social environments. The methodology will explore how these women draw strength from their in-group solidarity to challenge both Western misconceptions and conservative pressures within their own communities. Through Social Identity Theory, this paper will focus on how these women use their group identity to foster resilience and solidarity, transforming what is often seen as a marker of difference into a source of empowerment. As Tajfel and Turner suggest, changing the values assigned to a group's attributes allows previously negative perceptions to transform into positive ones. For example, the statement "Muslim women are everything" reframes the traditional narratives surrounding Muslim women. This phrase celebrates their multifaceted identities, shifting the focus from stereotypes of oppression to narratives of empowerment, individuality, and agency. By embracing their group identity, Muslim women foster resilience and solidarity, turning what was once viewed as a marker of difference into a profound source of strength and pride.

Social Identity Theory provides valuable insights into the dynamics of group affiliation and the strategies individuals use to navigate societal hierarchies. According to Tajfel and Turner, individuals may dissociate themselves from their original group in pursuit of upward social mobility, particularly in belief systems that emphasize the possibility of changing one's social status. This often involves attempts to align with a higher-status group to escape the stigma attached to their initial identity. In Yasmin's *Muslim Women Are Everything*, the text challenges this notion of dissociation by showcasing characters who navigate complex, intersecting identities rather than abandoning their Muslim identity. Yasmin dismantles the binary of the "good" versus

“bad” Muslim, presenting individuals with multifaceted roles that resist simplistic categorization. Through Social Identity Theory, this analysis examines how Muslim women engage in social comparison—not only between themselves and non-Muslim groups but also within their diverse communities. These comparisons influence self-perception and behaviour, shedding light on how individuals resist stereotypes and reclaim their identities. Yasmin’s work reveals that, rather than seeking upward mobility through dissociation, her characters draw on resilience and solidarity within their group, reframing their identities as sources of empowerment. This perspective underscores the importance of intersectionality in understanding how group dynamics intersect with broader societal structures.

Finally, the paper will explore in-group bias and out-group hostility as depicted in Yasmin’s narratives. By showcasing Muslim women’s efforts to challenge stereotypes, Yasmin encourages readers to question the dominant narratives that cast these women as perpetual outsiders. The application of Social Identity Theory helps to reveal how Muslim women navigate the “us versus them” mentality that is often perpetuated by both Western media and conservative elements within their own communities. This analysis will demonstrate how Yasmin’s work not only challenges these divisive perceptions but also emphasizes the need for a broader understanding of identity that transcends rigid categorizations.

This methodological approach will involve a qualitative content analysis of *Muslim Women Are Everything*, focusing on how Yasmin’s subjects resist stereotypes through their everyday acts of defiance and self-expression. By applying Social Identity Theory, this paper aims to provide a deeper understanding of the complexities of identity formation and conflict. Yasmin’s work serves as a powerful case study for showcasing how marginalized groups navigate the intersection of identity, resistance, and social cohesion in an increasingly polarized world.

Theoretical Framework

Social Identity Theory (SIT), developed by Henri Tajfel and John Turner, serves as a lens to understand how individuals derive their self-concept from their membership in social groups. According to SIT, self-esteem and identity are closely tied to group affiliations, often resulting in an in-group vs. out-group dynamic. This theory is particularly relevant when analysing how Muslim women navigate the tension between their self-perception and the external stereotypes imposed upon them. By exploring the conflict between internal identity and societal expectations, SIT provides a framework to better understand the complexities of Muslim women’s experiences.

Internally, many Muslim women perceive themselves as multifaceted individuals whose identities extend far beyond the stereotypes placed upon them. They engage in various professions, pursue higher education, and achieve professional success, which contributes to a positive self-image and counters societal expectations. The diversity among Muslim women is vast, reflecting different cultural backgrounds, lifestyles, and choices, such as the decision to wear or not wear the hijab. This personal decision is often a reflection of spiritual and individual autonomy, not merely a response to societal pressures. The support from their communities also plays a significant role in bolstering their self-confidence, allowing them to fully embrace their identities.

Externally, however, Muslim women face a barrage of stereotypes that often portray them in a monolithic light. Society frequently reduces them to a single narrative, ignoring the rich diversity within their communities. Common stereotypes depict Muslim women as oppressed or submissive, which starkly contrasts with their self-perception as empowered individuals. These misconceptions are fuelled by a lack of understanding of Islamic practices, leading to judgment and discrimination based on attire such as hijabs and niqabs. Additionally, political discourses can weaponize cultural symbols, further skewing perceptions of Muslim women. The rise of Islamophobia adds another layer of complexity, as visible markers of Muslim identity can lead to increased scrutiny and even fear for personal safety.

The conflict between self-perception and stereotypes can create cognitive dissonance, where Muslim women may struggle to reconcile their internal sense of strength and independence with external perceptions of weakness or subjugation. However, many develop resilience in the face of these stereotypes, using their experiences to reshape their identities and challenge societal norms. Increasingly, Muslim women are speaking out and advocating for themselves, seeking to correct misconceptions and foster a more nuanced understanding of their identities. By engaging in public discourse and sharing their stories, they work to combat stereotypes and highlight the diverse realities of their lives.

Moreover, embracing an intersectional approach is essential to fully comprehend the challenges faced by Muslim women. Their identities are shaped not just by religion but also by intersecting factors like gender and cultural background. Recognizing this intersectionality allows for a deeper appreciation of the unique barriers they face and the strength they demonstrate in overcoming them. Applying SIT to these experiences reveals how Muslim women navigate the tension between their internal self-concept and external stereotypes, ultimately fostering a more empathetic understanding of their individuality and societal contributions.

Analysis

Exploration of Diverse Identities

Seema Yasmin's book *Muslim Women Are Everything* presents a powerful portrayal of the diverse identities of Muslim women excelling across various fields. Yasmin discusses Muslim women who have made significant strides in sports, such as athletes who challenge stereotypes. For example, Ibtihaj Muhammad, the first Muslim woman to wear a hijab while competing for the United States in the Olympics, serves as a symbol of empowerment.

"Ibtihaj took up fencing when she began attending Columbia High School in 1999. A sport with aristocratic roots that is typically the reserve of wealthy white people, Ibtihaj was the lone Black girl lunging and jabbing across the piste. With a hijab tucked beneath her fencing helmet, she scored points by thrusting at her opponent's head, torso, and arms".⁽¹⁾

Her achievements in fencing not only showcase her athletic prowess but also redefine perceptions of Muslim women in sports, emphasizing resilience and determination. The book features women like Nadiya Hussain, a British-Bangladeshi baker and television personality who gained fame after winning "The Great British Bake Off." Hussain uses her platform to celebrate her heritage and challenge culinary norms.⁽¹⁾ Through her success, she showcases how Muslim women can excel in creative fields while maintaining their identity, inspiring many to embrace their cultural backgrounds.

Yasmin also portrays women involved in activism, such as Dr. Mehreen Faruqi, Australia's first Muslim woman senator, in her fiery first Senate speech in 2018, boldly acknowledged the stolen land of the Ngannawal and Ngambri people, recited Urdu poetry, and vowed to continue her "troublemaking streak" on issues like LGBTQIA+ rights and environmental protection. Meanwhile, Ilhan Omar, challenging patriarchal norms in her Somali community, persisted despite opposition and won a stunning victory in 2016, unseating a 44-year incumbent to join Minnesota's House of Representatives.⁽¹⁾

The entrepreneurial spirit of Muslim women is captured through stories like that of Halima Aden, a refugee turned model, who made history as the first Muslim woman to wear a hijab and burkini in Sports Illustrated's Swimsuit Issue and British Vogue. Describing her hijab as her "crown," she says, "It shows the world who I truly am."⁽¹⁾ Halima continues to break stereotypes, blending faith with fashion. Her success story is a testament to the diverse roles Muslim women can occupy in the business world. Yasmin points out that women in STEM, such as Tahani who left Cairo in the 1980s to study mechanical engineering in the U.S., earning degrees in engineering and aerospace from Old Dominion University. Despite limited English, she excelled academically, sparking her passion for NASA. Working with NASA's Computational Fluid Dynamics Team cemented her dream of becoming a researcher. Her achievements emphasize the potential for Muslim women to lead in innovative fields, inspiring future generations to pursue careers in science and technology.

Western media often portrays Muslim women through a monolithic lens, reducing their identities to symbols of oppression or religious conservatism. "Many Muslim women have been aware for some time that the Western media, particularly in the US, tends to present them as being in need of sexual freedom or, on other occasions, oppressed and submissive or, worse, associated with terrorism".⁽³⁾ This narrow depiction where religious identity is framed as deeply ingrained and tied to prejudice, fosters in-group and out-group distinctions that fuel negative attitudes toward diversity.⁽⁴⁾ Such representations reinforce the stereotype that religiosity, particularly within Islam, inhibits progress and promotes exclusion.

In contrast, Seema Yasmin's *Muslim Women Are Everything* challenges these reductive narratives by celebrating the diverse identities and accomplishments of Muslim women. Through stories of athletes, artists, activists, and scientists, Yasmin presents a counter-narrative that defies stereotypes and highlights the agency, empowerment, and multifaceted lives of Muslim women. Her work underscores that religiosity does not limit diversity or individuality but can coexist with dynamic personal and professional achievements. These contrasting narratives reveal the media's tendency to oversimplify Muslim women's experiences, often focusing on their religious identity as a source of conflict or limitation. Yasmin's portrayal calls for a broader understanding that moves beyond stereotypes, embracing the complexity and richness of Muslim women's lives in ways that challenge Western media's reductive framing.

Resistance to Stereotypes

Muslim women across diverse contexts actively resist stereotypes and assert their identities in various ways. For instance, Sumayyah, a transgender activist, faced exclusion at the Islamic Community Center of Tempe despite providing official documentation to confirm her gender identity. Being publicly outed and expelled from the mosque was a deeply challenging experience, yet Sumayyah documented her struggle and advocated for the rights of transgender Muslim women.⁽¹⁾ This act of resistance highlights her resilience against transphobia within her community, asserting her identity and fighting for inclusivity.

Another powerful example is Ilyana, a *hijabi* scuba-diving midwife who challenges stereotypes by advocating for Muslim women's participation in activities like scuba diving.⁽¹⁾ By passionately pursuing her interests despite societal judgments on her choice to wear the hijab, she demonstrates that Muslim women can excel in diverse

fields without being defined by their attire. Similarly, Samra's journey underscores the complex interplay between faith and identity. Growing up in an Ahmadiyya community, she initially distanced herself from the mosque due to her struggle with reconciling her queerness with her Muslim identity. However, she eventually found acceptance in the inclusive environment of the Toronto Unity Mosque, where she could embrace both her faith and her sexual orientation, exemplifying her resistance to societal norms and her journey toward self-acceptance.⁽¹⁾

The narratives of these women underscore the diversity within the Muslim community. Muslim women are not a monolith; they come from various backgrounds and actively challenge narrow definitions imposed on them. Whether through activism, sports, or artistic expression, they assert their identities on their terms, resisting societal expectations. The choice to wear the hijab or not is deeply personal, and shaped by cultural, spiritual, and political factors. And yet Islam is frequently portrayed in the media as being in opposition to Western practices. Consequently, the Western perception of Muslims is heavily shaped by the numerous negative representations propagated by Western media.⁽⁵⁾

Muslim women often find themselves at the centre of debates about modesty and many assert their agency by making conscious decisions about how they present themselves, pushing back against patriarchal interpretations of modesty. Muslim women are redefining strength and success in sports, breaking stereotypes associated with femininity and athleticism. By excelling in various physical activities, they showcase resilience and determination, challenging the conventional perceptions of their capabilities.

The political implications of their clothing choices also play a significant role, as they navigate societal pressures and legislation that may attempt to regulate their attire. For many, reclaiming their clothing as a statement of faith becomes a form of resistance against external control over their bodies and self-expression. Finding supportive communities further empowers these women, providing the confidence to advocate for their rights and express their unique identities, as individuals derive a sense of self from their membership in social groups, often leading to in-group favouritism and out-group bias.⁽⁶⁾ Through these acts of resistance, they contribute to reshaping the narrative around what it means to be a Muslim woman, countering the misconceptions that often surround their lives.

Public vs. Private Identity Negotiation

Muslim women navigate their identities across both public and private spheres, a process deeply informed by Social Identity Theory (SIT). According to SIT, groups are central to an individual's self-concept,⁽⁷⁾ with associations to positively valued groups serving to maintain self-esteem.⁽⁶⁾ In intergroup contexts, this motivation often results in ingroup favouritism, where individuals positively differentiate their group from others through behaviours such as resource allocation, trust, and cooperation.⁽⁸⁾ Shared social identity has been identified as a strong predictor of trust behaviour, especially when cues about individual characteristics are absent.⁽⁹⁾ This understanding sheds light on how Muslim women assert themselves in diverse social contexts, navigating identity salience and in-group solidarity while demonstrating that identity is not static but shaped through continuous interaction in both public and private domains.

Publicly, many of the women featured in Yasmin's work embrace their identities to challenge stereotypes and societal expectations. By engaging in activism and showcasing their achievements in diverse fields, they assert that Muslim women are far from the one-dimensional portrayals often seen in the media. Their public visibility and participation in these spheres help foster a sense of solidarity among Muslim women, encouraging them to defy traditional roles and build a more inclusive community. For instance, Malala Yousafzai defied the Taliban's oppressive ban on women's education, risking her life to attend school. She hid textbooks under her tunic and avoided wearing a uniform to evade detection by armed patrols. While fear kept many girls at home, Malala persisted. At just eleven, she boldly addressed the Peshawar Press Club, asking, "How dare the Taliban take away my basic right to education?" Supported by her activist father, Ziauddin Yousafzai, she became a powerful voice against oppression.⁽¹⁾ These acts of public self-expression not only break down barriers but also enrich cultural representation, as Muslim women use media to amplify their voices, share experiences, and promote dialogue around their identities.

Conversely, the negotiation of identity in the private sphere involves a more introspective process. Many women, like Samra, grapple with personal conflicts between their faith and other aspects of their identity, such as queerness. In her memoir, *We Have Always Been Here: A Queer Muslim Memoir* (2019), Samra weaves together themes of culture, faith, immigration, queerness, activism, and community.⁽¹¹⁾ This internal struggle often arises from reconciling deeply held religious beliefs with personal experiences and societal expectations. Family dynamics further shape these private negotiations, as women navigate the tension between traditional roles and their individual aspirations. Inclusive religious communities and safe spaces play a pivotal role in this process, offering refuge for exploration and fostering personal growth and acceptance without fear of judgment.

Public identity reflects how individuals present themselves in social contexts, shaped by their group

affiliations and societal roles. In contrast, private identity relates to their self-concept and personal traits that may remain hidden or independent of group ties. Social Identity Theory explains how people navigate between these identities based on context and social dynamics. For Muslim women, the salience of identity often shifts. In public, their Muslim identity may be more prominent as they navigate societal perceptions, while private spaces allow them to explore personal facets like sexuality and passions. These intimate spaces often foster support networks, reinforcing selfhood and offering emotional resilience. Yasmin points out this fluid negotiation of identity. Through activism, community-building, and introspection, the women in her book embrace both their cultural heritage and individuality. This dynamic process not only underscores the diversity within the Muslim community but also highlights the strength found in solidarity and self-acceptance in confronting modern challenges.

DISCUSSION

In *Muslim Women Are Everything*, the ongoing struggle for recognition faced by Muslim women is vividly portrayed as a dynamic interplay of conflict and empowerment. The book, rooted in Yasmin's frustration with the persistent misrepresentation of Muslim women, seeks to redefine societal perceptions by showcasing a spectrum of stories that defy monolithic stereotypes. These narratives posit that individuals derive their self-concept and social identity through group affiliations, often seeking to maintain a positive social identity despite external pressures.

"Group identification", a major concept in Social Identity Theory,⁽⁶⁾ plays a pivotal role in fostering community solidarity and resilience. In one of the striking stories, she recounts the experience of Stephanie Kurlow, a young Muslim ballerina who faced rejection from dance schools for wearing a hijab. Yasmin writes, "To non-Muslims, a ballerina in a headscarf was unacceptable. To some Muslim traditionalists, the fact that a girl was dancing was unacceptable."⁽¹⁾ Stephanie, a young Muslim ballerina, faced rejection from dance schools for wearing a hijab—a decision deemed unacceptable by some non-Muslims for its incongruity with traditional ballet norms and by some Muslim traditionalists for her participation in dance. Despite these challenges, Stephanie's determination inspired her mother to establish an art academy to support her passion, reflecting the collective strength and cohesiveness within the Muslim community. This narrative aligns with SIT's emphasis on in-group identification, strengthening morale, unity, and cooperation, especially in the face of antagonistic intergroup relations. While Realistic Conflict Theory (RCT) acknowledges that competition over scarce resources and conflicting group interests can heighten intergroup conflict, it views in-group identification as a secondary consequence rather than a primary factor. In contrast, SIT foregrounds how positive attachment to one's in-group serves as a mechanism for navigating and countering broader societal challenges.

Yasmin's exploration of "Positive Distinction", that is social change based on the pursuit of positive distinctiveness,⁽¹²⁾ shows the importance of celebrating the diversity within the Muslim community as a source of empowerment. Muslim women, as Yasmin asserts, are "everything," capable of excelling in areas traditionally considered off-limits to them. Through these narratives, Yasmin emphasizes that Muslim women are not a monolith; instead, their multiplicity enriches their identities and strengthens their group solidarity. Here the individuals strive to see their in-group as positively distinct from the out-group. For instance, she describes the triumph of Amirah Sackett, a *hijabi* dancer who effortlessly blends hip-hop with her Islamic faith, demonstrating that her identities as a Muslim and a dancer are not mutually exclusive but rather complementary. As Yasmin notes, "When you get in that circle, it's about the skills you have. It doesn't matter what colour you are... or how much money you have".⁽¹⁾ This affirmation of inclusion and diversity serves to foster a positive social identity among Muslim women, countering societal attempts to homogenize their experiences.

"In-group Favouritism"⁽⁶⁾ is further exemplified in Yasmin's accounts of Muslim women who are making strides in various fields, from academia to entrepreneurship. These success stories not only defy external stereotypes that discriminate against the out-group but also bolster the confidence and self-esteem of Muslim women as a group. Yasmin highlights the impact of representation, stating, "I was tired of writing the same narrative: 'Look at this Muslim woman run a marathon! Wow!' I wanted to show that Muslim women can—and do—everything".

⁽¹⁾ By shifting the focus from proving their worth to celebrating their achievements, Yasmin's work contributes to the empowerment of Muslim women. This fosters in-group pride and can mitigate the negative effects of societal discrimination, thereby reinforcing a collective sense of identity.

Through empowerment in education, arts, sports, and activism, Yasmin celebrates Muslim women who refuse to be defined by societal limitations. These stories act as catalysts for change, encouraging others within the community to embrace their unique identities while contributing to the broader social discourse. Yasmin writes, "We are shedding other people's narrow definitions of success, of piety—of us,"⁽¹⁾ reflecting the collective effort to redefine what it means to be a Muslim woman in today's world. This redefinition not only challenges stereotypes but also helps Muslim women carve out a space for themselves in various public spheres, thereby enhancing their social identity.

CONCLUSION

Seema Yasmin's *Muslim Women Are Everything* challenges the reductive stereotypes perpetuated by societal and media narratives about Muslim women, presenting diverse identities that transcend monolithic portrayals. This study, grounded in Social Identity Theory (SIT), reveals the intricate dynamics of how Muslim women navigate their identities within the intersections of internal self-perception and external stereotypes. Yasmin's portrayal of Muslim women as athletes, scientists, artists, and activists underscores their multifaceted identities, which reflect their agency and resistance to societal limitations.

Social Identity Theory's framework of social categorization, social identification, and social comparison provides a vital lens for understanding the processes that shape the experiences of Muslim women. Yasmin illustrates how societal labelling often positions Muslim women as an "out-group," reducing them to symbols of oppression or cultural conservatism. She counters this through narratives like that of Ibtihaj Muhammad, the first Muslim woman to compete in the Olympics for the United States while wearing a hijab. Such portrayals emphasize resilience and determination, dismantling the stereotype that Muslim women are constrained by their religious or cultural identities.

Yasmin's use of stories like that of Halima Aden, the first Muslim woman to wear a hijab and burkini in Sports Illustrated's Swimsuit Issue, further exemplifies the process of positive social comparison. Aden's assertion that her hijab is her "crown" reflects how she reclaims her identity as a source of pride and empowerment. By celebrating Muslim women's agency and diverse roles, Yasmin's work demonstrates how individuals resist societal stereotypes and redefine what it means to belong to a marginalized group.

In-group solidarity, a key aspect of SIT, is vividly portrayed in Yasmin's accounts of women who find strength in their shared identity. For instance, Stephanie Kurlow, a hijabi ballerina, overcame rejection from dance schools to pursue her passion. Stephanie's story of perseverance, bolstered by her mother's support, points out how collective in-group support fosters resilience and enables individuals to thrive despite external pressures. This aligns with SIT's emphasis on the transformative power of positive in-group identification.

Yasmin's narratives also delve into the complexities of internal conflicts and the negotiation of public versus private identities. Women like Samra, who reconcile her queerness with her Muslim identity, represent the multifaceted nature of Muslim women's experiences. These stories underscore the dynamic interplay between faith, culture, and individuality, challenging both external misconceptions and internalized limitations. Yasmin's affirmation that "Muslim women are everything" captures the essence of her work, reflecting the limitless potential and agency of Muslim women. By redefining stereotypes and celebrating the diversity within their identities, Yasmin's narratives serve as a powerful counter-narrative to the dominant media portrayals. Her call to "shed other people's narrow definitions of success, of piety—of us" ⁽¹⁾ emphasises the necessity of embracing individual agency and collective empowerment.

By applying Social Identity Theory to Yasmin's work, this study reveals how group solidarity and representation can counteract societal biases and foster resilience. Yasmin's portrayal of Muslim women as empowered agents of change not only challenges reductive narratives but also enriches the discourse on representation and identity. Her work exemplifies how the intersection of resistance and identity negotiation can lead to a reimagining of societal perceptions, urging a shift towards inclusivity and understanding. In conclusion, *Muslim Women Are Everything* is not merely a celebration of Muslim women's achievements but a striking voice for recognition, representation, and empowerment. Through their stories, Yasmin demonstrates that Muslim women are not bound by stereotypes but are dynamic, multifaceted individuals who redefine boundaries and inspire change. As a result, this work contributes to a broader understanding of identity formation and resistance, reinforcing the importance of reclaiming narratives and challenging societal constructs to foster a more equitable world.

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AUTHORSHIP CONTRIBUTION

Conceptualization: Liyana K, Alagesan M.

Data curation: Liyana K, Alagesan M.

Formal analysis: Liyana K, Alagesan M.

Investigation: Liyana K, Alagesan M.

Methodology: Liyana K, Alagesan M.

Project administration: Alagesan M.

Resources: Liyana K, Alagesan M.

Supervision: Alagesan M.

Validation: Liyana K, Alagesan M.

Visualization: Liyana K, Alagesan M.

Writing - original draft: Liyana K.

Writing - review & editing: Liyana K, Alagesan M.