

Hamza, Ayesha, and Saboor

PRINCETON, NEW JERSEY



I can hold my
breath for
three minutes
verified.

I yawn when I'm nervous.

I'm bad with directions.

I'm studying medicine.

I like photography and art.

I have bowed legs.

I wore shorts even in the winter.

I broke my elbow
on a tightrope.

Saboor: Culture plays a big role in my life. Islam is my culture. I love when my family prays together. It gives me a sense that we will always be together.

Most of my classmates are Christian, and that makes me different, because when they go to church I have to say I go to mosque. And they're like, "What is the mosque?"

At field day, when other kids score, most of them make a cross across their chest, but I make the *dua* on the field, which is when you kinda bend your arms outward to worship.

Hamza: Do people know you're Pakistani, or do they just know you as a Muslim?*

Saboor: People know I'm Pakistani because whenever I forget my lunch, most of the lunches at school are made of meat. And I'm like, I can't eat that because I'm Pakistani *and* Muslim, and I eat meat called "*halal*."

Hamza: I asked Saboor that because I've always felt more Muslim than Pakistani. I think the most Pakistani thing about me is that I'm Islamic, and that I follow Islam in my own personal way. Like, I consider myself a feminist. I don't harbor homophobic views.

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* In 2017, hate crimes targeting U.S. Muslims rose by 15 percent.

Ayesha: For me, Islam is meant to be a culture and a way of life. If anything skews its message, it's cultural representation. There's a history of masculine dominance, women are oppressed. It is pretty much the case for a majority of countries.

Islam has a human component. It's specifically stated that you follow the Qur'an *and* Sunnah, or the teachings of the prophet Muhammad. Because God recognized that just words aren't enough to completely understand how to live a life.

Some Muslims are culturally aware but religiously lacking. They forget that the Sunnah is just as important. It's what you interpret day to day, because the world is ever-changing. The Qur'an was written so long ago, so it's hard to relate to something like that. Our prophet's last sermon, where he says, "All mankind is from Adam and Eve. An Arab has no superiority over a non-Arab, nor does a non-Arab have any superiority over an Arab; a White has no superiority over a Black, nor does a Black have any superiority over a White; [none have superiority over another] except by piety and good action," stressed a legacy he wanted to leave behind. I think the Pakistani culture, set forth by entitled and empowered men, takes away from that. They cite the Qur'an without context and use it for their purpose, keeping uneducated people in the dark. This happens in America too. I mean, Pakistan even had a woman for prime minister, something the U.S. hasn't accomplished yet.

Hamza: Yeah, I agree that the problem isn't a problem with Islam itself, but with America's perception of the Muslim. Like, in Saudi Arabia, they didn't allow women to drive. But what people have to understand is that it's not like in the Qur'an they said women couldn't ride camels! What also adds to the confusion about us is the geographic ambiguity—how Americans understand the Middle Eastern versus someone of *desi* origin who's Muslim. We're constantly clumped together. We constantly have to explain ourselves. That singular conception of Muslims from all across the world is where I feel more boxed in, rather than within Islam itself.

Ayesha: I like to read up on world news, like, for example, how Palestinian people are being treated—but every time I talk about it, people shake it off, like it's not their issue, not important. If I talked about a shooting that happened in a U.S. state, though, which I think is equally as important, then people care. Terrorist attacks are 100 percent accepted to speak out about if it occurs in Western countries, but if those same terrorist attacks occur in Pakistan and the Middle East, it's their fault.

** As of April 19, 2018, "At least 9,600 Palestinians and 1,251 Israelis have been killed by someone from the other side since 2000."

Hamza: There's definitely a lot of apathy toward issues outside of the Western world. I was having a conversation with an academic, and after giving me his explanation of the conflict between Israel and Palestine,** he called it an unfixable problem. But just imagine if the social issues we care about in America, like sexual harassment or environmental justice or guns or race, were all labeled as "unfixable problems." That would be such a disservice.

Ayesha: My grandparents have gone through the separation of Pakistan, and the mass murder that happened there, so it makes it more relevant for me. I don't blame people for not knowing about global issues, but I do blame them for not caring, or not caring to know. Why don't people feel the same about all human lives?

Hamza: I don't really feel like I have a choice to be apathetic. I don't perceive myself as just American, because I have the hyphenated identity of being both Pakistani American and Muslim American—that being said, I don't just care about what I'm hyphenated next to. I don't just care about Pakistani issues or American or Muslim issues. My ideal world would be one where people say, "I'm Human American" or "I'm Human French."