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### **Muslim Girls can't have it all**

Many minorities living in America are the children of immigrants; they grow up with morals that greatly differ from their parents. First-generation Muslim kids have had their parents migrated from foreign countries and with them, they brought their culture, beliefs, and morals. These children grow up with modern beliefs of how to act and how they view life at school and traditional beliefs of living your life for your parents at home. The difference of beliefs begins to create a divide within their lives and they start to understand that these identities are meant to be kept separate as if their world collided they would be looked down upon and in some cases disowned. The traditional beliefs and cultural values of the immigrant parents are used to raise their kids, sometimes showing that culture and family matter more than individuality. Children grow up to create different identities for each component of their life as a mechanism to get away from the expectations. Teens who come from generations of family living in America, grow up unsheltered from drinking and drugs. They get to live their rebellious years of partying and experimenting freely with parents who have once rebelled in the same manner, but first-generation teens aren't granted that same opportunity. Muslims Women of Southeast Asian culture living in America face difficulty when cultural factors and societal roles keep them from having a regular teenage life like their peers. When religion is involved these three facets clash in their differing ideals, making it difficult to live up to these expectations. These teens are limited to living a life with multiple identities because they don't have the privilege of freedom to live an

open life like their white peers do. They struggle more than their peers when it comes to being a regular teen as many people expect different things from them. Women and girls from the southeast Asian culture are judged at home for who they hang out with and how they act and when with their friends they are mocked about how they have never done anything or lived their life for themselves. The wants and desires of the young women aren't taken into account as the culture dictates 'the parents always know best'. The ideals of these cultures clash with the ideals of where their parents brought them, they are meant to live in a modern world but still told to keep traditional beliefs. Women and young girls of these cultures have to live separate identities in an attempt to have regular teenage lives. They have to manage multiple identities during the most crucial years of their lives.

Being young and in the developmental years of your life, you make the decisions that affect your life in the future. This is the time where you become your own person and develop into adults. With high school at the start of this journey, many teens, not just Muslim girls, begin to discover who they really are, and with that so do their peers. With everyone trying to assimilate and find their clique, many fall to peer pressure and do whatever they can to relate to others and they will do things they never thought of doing to belong. To stop feeling guilty about doing things their parents would never expect of them a wall gets put up, and here a boundary is created of what they can do around their parents and what they can do with their friends. The ones who once thought of themselves as girls now rush to become young adults as their peers were exposed to live in a way they've never seen before. Muslim girls who are modest start wearing tight pants and shorter shirts because that's what their friends do and in their mind, it's what their friends expect them to do. These young girls are influenced by the media and the things they see on tv; parties and boys become all they think about. Lur Alghurabi

is a Muslim woman herself and in her article, “*So Many Rules to Break: On the Struggles of a Modern Woman*” she states how as a Muslim she was expected to act a certain way. Lur also refers to sins in the Islamic religion, how they can justify committing any sin but eating pork is the one that almost all Muslims never commit. “Muslim kids committing every sin under the sun except eating pork. We’ll do it all: we’ll break our fast, we’ll have the sex, we’ll do the drugs, we’ll eat that steak, we’ll go to the club and we’ll drink the beer and we’ll smoke that cigarette and that weed, but don’t you get that pork anywhere near us. Do you want us to go to hell?” (Alghurabi 2019). So Muslim teenagers end up trying to hide their religion from their friends to get acceptance and validity, they will commit certain actions that are acceptable for their friends to do but sinful in the Muslim religion. They realize that it’s easier to push away the lives they are expected to live and keep the life they want to live separate from the life that is filled with expectations. This keeps Muslim girls from discovering who they truly are as they are caught between two worlds and don’t know which version of themselves is the true one.

In the time meant to discover themselves Muslim teens end up complicating it further and end up not knowing who they truly are. Those years are meant to be the ones where you figure out who you are as a person and what you want to become, meaning planning a future around an intended career and fully committing to a college. Seniors in high school decide where they want to spend four years of their lives and many people stick with the plan they created when they were a teenager. Teens from southeast Asian cultures face difficulty when starting to pick colleges, they are stuck because they have multiple lives that have different paths that never meet. These girls have their desires but have to consider their parents and cultural expectations as to not let them down. An article by the Ministry of Education states, “Peer pressure, then, represents both a challenge and decision for teens, as they struggle to choose between what they

know is right and what their friends are doing...Conflicting pressure from friends and parents to behave a certain way can cause stress” (Ministry of Education). Girls from Southeast Asian cultures are often caught between their lives as they create different personalities and when they have to make life decisions such as these they are caught in an inner war with themselves. When they are with their friends they act differently than how they would act around their parents and that is also different from how they act in religious settings. Therefore they live three separate identities while living one life. As teenagers, Muslim Girls manage their multiple identities as they have to make decisions that will directly affect themselves as adults.

An article published by the New York Times called “*The Secret Lives of Just About Everybody*” shares a story of a man who led a double life for ten years. He led a life of peace and a life of clubs. “So far more than 10 years, he ruthlessly kept his two identities apart: one lived in a Westchester hamlet and worked in a New York office, and the other operated mainly in clubs, airport bars, and brothels. One warmly greeted clients and waved to neighbors, sometimes only hours after the other had stumbled back from a "work" meeting with prostitutes or cocaine dealers.” (Carey 2005). This man was able to live his life in this way and one day it came crumbling down, he received a notification on his computer that said he was being monitored and that started his life of therapy. The story of this man shows that while maintaining a double life can be difficult it is harder to recover from a lifestyle such as that. Teenage Muslim girls use this same method to cope with their identities, certain parts of their lives don’t allow them to act a certain way to just create a new identity and do what they please. The double life is a coping mechanism to be a regular teen, if they can't see the problem then in their eyes the problem was never there.

To escape the expectations from everyone around them Muslim teens begin to separate their lives, creating psychological burdens. An article by Beth Sherman, *Leading a Double Life Is More Common Than Many Suspect : Psychology: Who Harbors the Mysteries of a Secret Self? It Could Be Just about Anyone, the Experts Believe. Even You*, states how it isn't easy to get away with living a double life. Sherman shares that it is not uncommon for people to live double lives and how it is hard to manage and very difficult to keep the two separate. A method shared by Sherman is where people create public and private lives, to allow themselves to act out and do things that are frowned upon but never have to face consequences as that isn't a part of their public life. Being a respectable person around your family and friends and acting out when alone seems manageable to some, but what if you have to manage a third life as well. This is what Muslim teens from certain cultures have to do to escape the eyes of their judging family and friends. Sherman states, "The double life unravels when the person is caught and the secret revealed. Some actions may be an unconscious cry for help..." (Sherman 1992). If you aren't caught you continue to lift your double life as you distance yourself from the truth, you don't recognize the person you have become, and spiral into a pattern of burying down the secret. What starts as a coping mechanism to escape the expectations from everyone around them, Muslim girls end up in situations where they aren't at peace with themselves.

While religious expectations do have a toll on Muslim girls, cultural expectations play a part as they live in their parents' houses and are surrounded by those expectations. Being a teenager there are many stress factors and coming from a culture that doesn't believe in mental health or mental illnesses is difficult. An article from the National Register of Health Service Psychologist states, "the Asian and Pacific Islander American Health Forum (APIAHF) that a higher percentage of South Asian Americans, particularly those between the ages of 15 and 24,

had been found to exhibit depressive symptoms.”(Bhat) Having your mental health be a taboo topic leads one to push that part of them away and seek an outlet to relieve their emotions. Cultural factors such as these are why many southeast Asian teens struggle more in their teenage years than their peers.

If these teenage girls were born into white families then they would not feel the same amount of pressure as the cultural factors religious factors and societal factors are different and have more of an effect on a brown Muslim girl than a white girl. Though whiteness does not equate with a life of complete freedom, whiteness does come with more freedom than any other religion. This is seen through mental health statistics, an article from the American Public Health Association states, “Major depression and factors associated with depression were more frequent among members of minority groups than among Whites.” This article compared the different rates of major depression between different races. Falling into the minority category of the data, Teenage Muslim girls do have higher rates of depression than their white peers. Related articles researching social anxiety disorder and panic attacks had similar results to major depression article, a link can be seen between the pressures of being a Muslim girl in America and their mental health.

The pressures of being a Muslim girl comes from many components; family expectations, religious obligations, cultural factors as well as societal roles. It is difficult to be a teenager when your religion, cultural, and social life beliefs start to crash and collide. Muslim girls who come from southeast Asian cultures are labeled as that, religious girls who come from strict cultures. Assumptions come to play and a girl can't live the typical teen life of and parties because you are criticized

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