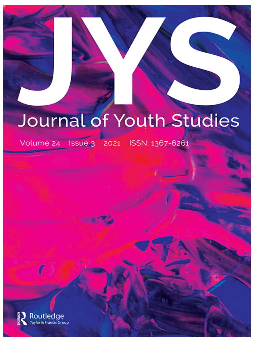

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Pragmatic, pious and pissed off: young Muslim girls managing conflicting sexual norms and social control

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ABSTRACT

In this study, we explore how ethnic minority Muslim girls in Norway manage social control as an everyday experience within a political context where minority communities are portrayed as performing excessive control. Theoretically, our analysis draws on perspectives on social control, interactionist perspectives on identity, and Hage's (2010. "The Affective Politics of Racial Mis-interpellation." *Theory, Culture & Society* 27 (7-8): 112–129. doi:10.1177/0263276410383713) concept of vacillation. Based on interviews with 17 girls self-identifying as Muslim, we identify two strategic positions from which the girls manage and respond to social control. From what we label a pragmatic position, they oppose categorisation as victims as well as certain gendered norms in minority as well as majority contexts. From what we label a pious position, the girls employ religious norms as a rationale when they define themselves as moral subjects rising above social control. We also find that negotiating contradictory norms and expectations may be perceived as double-bind situations (Bateson, G. 2000 [1972]. *Steps to an Ecology of Mind: Collected Essays in Anthropology, Psychiatry, Evolution, and Epistemology*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press), leaving the girls in an affective state that we label 'pissed off'. Our analysis contributes to the literature by connecting the concept of vacillation to youth's identity work in a minority position, and more specifically to the strategic positionings Muslim girls speak from as they manage social control.

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Introduction

In this article, we examine how ethnic minority Muslim girls in Norway experience and respond to social control related to gender and sexuality. Views on gender and sexuality have come to play an important role in narratives of difference between ethnic minority and majority communities in Europe (Kalmijn and Kraaykamp 2018). The backdrop for our study is the recent shift in Nordic policy and public discourse in which conservative

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gender and sexual norms in ethnic minority communities are discussed as problems of social control. According to policy discourse, ethnic minority (Muslim) girls and young women are the main targets of social control, which is considered to originate in patriarchal norms regulating young women's sexuality in so-called honour culture (Gill and Brah 2014). In the Nordic context, policy attention to the control of young women's sexuality is linked to strong social and legal protection of sexual autonomy and integrity, for women and sexual minorities in particular (Skilbrei 2020). Hence, progressive attitudes towards sexuality are constitutive of the Nordic countries' self-image (Jacobsen 2018), and conservative norms constitutive of 'the other' (Røthing and Svendsen 2011).

Based on interviews with girls self-identifying as Muslim in Norway, the aim of this article is to shed light on the experience of being in a position where particularly intense struggles over the legitimacy of social control are played out. As an analytical tool for studying social organisation, the concept of social control has been defined in a constructive tradition as 'the capacity of social groups to effect self-regulation' (Janowitz 1975) as well as in a more conflict-oriented tradition as 'ways in which society responds to behavior and people it regards as deviant, problematic, worrying, threatening, troublesome or undesirable in some way or another' (Cohen 1985, 1). Social control is thus envisioned to constitute both constructive (enabling) and potentially problematic (restricting) societal forces depending on perspective and point of view. Understood broadly social control can refer to anything from the internalisation of an individual's tacit knowledge about the rules of social interaction to the formalised control practiced in social institutions and national states. In this paper, our starting point is Mead's (1925) claim that social control depends on the degree to which the individual assumes the attitudes of the group, which we take as a cue for considering the coexistence of conflicting norms as potentially leading to more social control.

While social control previously was confined to the writings of social scientists, it is now used also by political authorities in the integration field in Denmark and Norway (Regeringen (The Danish Government), 2016; Regjeringen (The Norwegian Government), 2017), by ethnic minority feminist activists (Bile, Srour, and Herz 2018) and consequently by the media, professionals, and people in general. In the policy documents from which this new usage emerges, social control, most often specified as negative social control, is defined as undue 'pressure to conform with group norms' (Department of Education, 2017). On the one hand, this definition reflects the construction of the individual as a prime value of Nordic societies (Skilbrei 2020). On the other hand, it reflects the unequal power relationship between minority groups and the majority state, where the latter has the power to define what constitutes illegitimate forms of social control.

Brubaker (2013) reminds us of the different meanings concepts may have as a concept of practice and a concept of analysis. It is thus important to be cautious when the distinction between social control as a concept of analysis and as a concept of practice is blurred. In the context of our paper, this means that the ongoing social and political construction of ethnic minority women as victims of excessive social control must at the same time be separated from and integrated into the analysis of how ethnic minority Muslim girls in Norway manage social control as an everyday experience in family and peer relationships.

Our study thus contributes to the literature on how girls navigate contexts where young women's bodies have come to be located at the centre of struggles around the politics of belonging (Yuval-Davis 2011; in Phoenix 2019). Muslims have a prominent position in these struggles, as gender norms seen as a threat to Western liberal views, such as gender segregation, premarital sexual chastity, and non-acceptance of homosexuality, have come to be associated with Muslims (Mepschen, Duyvendak, and Tonkens 2010). Populations previously defined by national origin or socio-economic and legal categories have, as a consequence, increasingly been referred to in religious terms as Muslims (Brubaker 2013, 2.) This shift in representation is reinforced by growing concerns about securitization and violent extremism in Europe, with consequences for Muslim women's self-understanding and performance of Muslim identification (Ryan 2011).

Our study also contributes to the debate about the consequences of representing social control as a phenomenon specific to 'immigrants'. In research based on Nordic case studies, one strand highlights the links between honour culture and severe forms of control and violence (Schlytter and Linell 2010), while another strand critiques how this connection both constitutes and fuels culturalizing and racializing discourses (Keskinen 2016). In a study dealing specifically with social control, Honkatukia and Keskinen (2018), based on interviews with ethnic minority girls in Finland, argue instead that all girls and women experience social control of their bodies and sexuality and that it must be understood in light of universal (hetero)sexual norms and from an intersectional perspective.

In our study, we take a middle position, as we depart from an interest in ethnic minority Muslim girls' particular experiences with social control as well as in the 'particularisation' of minority ethnic Muslim girls, and ask the following question: How do ethnic minority Muslim girls manage social control in their everyday lives and what strategic positionings are produced in the process?

Muslim girls in the literature – portrayals and contestations

Our study adds to the existing literature on young ethnic minority Muslims' positioning and identity work in light of portrayal of Muslims and Muslim families in non-Muslim majority societies. Which specific aspects of Muslim identity and practice are problematised varies between national contexts and has changed over time. Research from France and Canada highlight how the controversy over the Muslim headscarf affects young Muslim women (Mir 2020; Najib and Hopkins 2019; Zine 2006), whereas several recent studies from the UK have focused on how young British Muslims forge identities against the backdrop of Islamic extremism (Phoenix 2019; Shazhadi et al. 2018; Thompson and Pihlaja 2018).

Young women's self-determination in Muslim families is another subject of public concern which has spurred quantitative research on ethnic minority young people's experiences of parental restrictions and sanctions across the Nordic context (for an overview, see Smette, Hyggen, and Bredal 2021). A number of qualitative studies have contested this tendency to problematise ethnic minority and Muslim families, from Basit's (1997) early study of British Muslim girls' perspectives on freedom to recent studies arguing that intergenerational relations in ethnic minority families are based on negotiation and allow for young people's agency (Peltola et al. 2017).

An enduring theme in the literature is how ethnic minority girls, and Muslim girls in particular 'construct their identities in opposition to the stereotypes they encounter in the media and in their public school experiences that portray them as "oppressed", "backward" and "uneducated"' (Zine 2006, 239). Ryan (2011) explores, based on interviews with

Muslim women in Britain, how anti-Islamic stigma is experienced and resisted through the assertion of moral integrity and laying claim to 'the normal'. Building on this study, Harris and Kharmishah (2019) based on a study of young Muslim women in Australia identify a number of different strategies young people employ to come across as normal. While these studies in general do not address gender, Keddie et al. (2021), also based on a study of young Muslim women in Australia, use the concept of double bind to describe the situation of at the same time having to deal with patriarchal norms and Islamophobia.

Studies of Muslim religious revivalism find that this can be a response to the public portrayal of Muslims and to many young Muslims' experiences of not being acknowledged as belonging to European nations (Phoenix 2019; Yuval-Davis 2011). When focusing on girls and young women in such movements, as in Jacobsen's (2011) study of young Muslim women in Norway and Liebmann and Galal (2020)'s study from Denmark, Islamic revitalisation has been interpreted as functioning as a way to challenge both culturalised representations as well as contest the parental generation's gendered cultural traditions. In a similar vein, Al-deen (2020), based on interviews with Muslim young women in Australia and their relationship with the veil, argues that both veiling and unveiling can be seen as a way to construct an authentic, religious subjectivity, but unveiling, speaks against the assumption of religiosity – and veiling – as something imposed by others. Revivalism is thus fundamentally interpreted as an expression of a quest for authenticity and recognition of an authentic self.

In line with this, contributions departing from perspectives from youth research highlight that Muslim young people, like other young people, construct identities drawing on generalised discourses on individualised, authentic selfhood. Ryan (2014), based on interviews with young Muslims from the UK, highlights the heterogeneity in how young people represent themselves as Muslims and argues that religious identities are part of the general processes of youth identity processes. Based on data from Australia, Lam and Mansouri (2020) argue that young Muslims are able to forge hybrid identities that transcend perceived opposition between engaging with majoritarian Western culture and upholding beliefs as practicing Muslims. Perspectives from youth research have thus proven important to capture the agency of young people as they establish positions from which to forge minoritized identities in majority contexts.

Theoretical starting points: self, social control, and double-bind situations

Our analysis of ethnic minority Muslim' girls experiences with social control draws on the interactional perspective of the Chicago school. Their central idea was that the reactions of others' shape the meanings people ascribe to their own actions, and thus to their selves, a process Cooley (1909/1962) captured through the notion of 'the looking glass self'. Mead (1925) built on this notion when he coined the concept of the generalised other in his theory of the self. The generalised other can be defined as the internalisation of voices representing 'the organized community to which an individual belongs and against which she is poised and defined' (in Jenkins 2004, p. 41). Because these voices make it impossible to see ourselves without 'also seeing ourselves as other people see us' (19), the generalised others represent a form of internalised social control.

There may be more than one generalised other and thus more than one set of voices through which a person sees herself at the same time. In our analysis, we regard

Norwegian majority society as well as ethnic minority communities and multicultural peer groups as generalised others that represent such internalised forms of social control. Moreover, there is an important meta-dimension here, constituted by how generalised others are just generalised – individuals reduced to the categories they represent. For the minoritized person, the generalised other representing the majority community may be experienced as someone poising and defining her as different, and thus demanding some sort of response on her part.

This dynamic is akin to Hage's (2010) theorising on racialisation as the experience of being 'fixed' in a negative particularity. His argument is that a desire to be both similar to and different from others is inherent in the human condition. The racialised subject, like all human beings, tends to strive for the contradictory, driven simultaneously by the fear of being particularised and having their universality denied, and the fear of being universalised and having their particularity denied (Hage 2010). However, the discomfort felt by the racialised subject lies first and foremost in the experience of being denied the ability 'to vacillate at will between the universal and the particular' (ibid. 117), between being similar and different from others.

Being denied the possibility of vacillation in one's identity construction is reminiscent of Bateson's (2000 [1972]) notion of a double bind: A double-bind situation is characterised by irreconcilable demands in different relationships, where one is forced to choose one relationship at the expense of the other, and is emotionally demanding. This fear of being fixed in one or the other, through self-identification or identification by others, and thus be forced to choose one community of belonging at the expense of the other, results in identity work that requires particularly demanding strategic positionings in face of social control. Such strategic positionings, to borrow Barth's (1969) concept, refers to positions from which one may simultaneously be similar and different, in constant negotiation over social boundaries, and thus have selfhood recognised as agentic and authentic.

Methodological approach and ethical considerations

The interviews analysed in the following were part of a study of ethnic and religious minority young people in Norway and their experiences of social control. The study was funded by the Norwegian authorities through a government action plan to prevent negative social control as well as forced marriages and gender mutilation (Regjeringen (The Norwegian Government), 2017). The study was reported to the National Centre for Research Data. Interviews and data management were carried out following the guidelines on qualitative research set out by the National Committee for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences and the Humanities. All the participants were given written information about the purpose of the study and informed that participation was voluntary and that data would be treated confidentially.

We recruited participants from two different upper secondary schools and a sports club. All three arenas recruited students from culturally diverse parts of Oslo, the capital city of Norway. The two schools were assigned a government-funded social worker or 'minority advisor' (*minoritetsrådgiver*) specifically dedicated to working with young people potentially affected by 'negative social control'. At one school, the advisor was directly involved in recruiting students, while at the other, we introduced the topic of our study and recruited students ourselves from classrooms. Finally, some informants were recruited through a youth leader at a sports club that had been making active efforts to include Muslim girls in their activities. All the group interviews and some individual interviews took place in offices made available by social workers and teachers while the rest of the interviews took place at the sports club, at our university, or in a public library. The interviews were organised around the flexible use of an interview guide that explored themes around peer and family relationships, and norms relating to gender and sexuality at home and among peers.

In total, we interviewed 35 young people (23 girls and 12 boys). The participants' family backgrounds were from Pakistan, Somalia, Morocco, Turkey, Iraq, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Chile, and Norway, and most of the participants were born in Norway. The participants differed with respect to how they expressed the relevance of the topic. Our decision to focus on girls identifying as Muslim in this article was based on field experiences, from both this and previous projects (Rosten 2015; Smette 2015) where we found that young people would often refer to parental restrictions and gossip related to reputation as topics that were particularly relevant for Muslim girls. In line with the young people's own understanding of social control as a practice, we have chosen to focus on interviews with young women in our sample who identified as Muslim, using interviews with non-Muslims and boys as a backdrop.

Out of the 17 girls we interviewed who defined themselves as Muslims, five were interviewed individually. The rest were interviewed together in small groups of 2-3 friends, in some cases also including friends who did not define themselves as Muslims. The group interviews generated an exchange of experiences facilitated by the fact that the informants knew each other. While individual interviews often provide richer data on the dilemmas and ambiguities in complying with, avoiding or resisting social control, the group interviews provided more insight into the mechanisms of stereotyping and young people's strategic responses and identity construction at the threshold of adulthood.

As our study did not involve long-term fieldwork, we have limited insight into the participants' perception of us and how the purpose of our research impacted their narratives. The participants probably positioned us as being aligned with others who expressed concern about the situation of ethnic minority young women. Our premise is that our participants can't speak about their experiences of social control without referring to the expectations they meet as young Muslims and ethnic minority girls. However, as many interviews were with small groups of friends, there was also dialogue among the participants about shared experiences of social control and strategies to deal with different expectations. We, therefore, consider the kinds of strategic positioning we identified through the interviews as more than a product of a majority-minority dialogue but as being reflective of the young women's everyday experiences.

In the analytical process, we read the transcripts and searched for descriptions of how the interviewees managed norms and expectations related to gender and sexuality. The analyses focus on descriptions of parental rules and restrictions as well as descriptions of how others responded to the girls' conduct – including peers, family, and more distant relations. Based on these descriptions, we tried to identify shared meanings (cf. Braun and Clarke 2019) relating to how to manage social control and justifications for a particular strategy. We also searched for passages where the girls referred to representations of ethnic minority (Muslim) girls in the media and other public contexts and paid attention to their views on and responses to these.

Analysis: strategic responses to social control

In our material, we identified two strategic positions from which the girls manage and respond to social control and label these *pragmatic* and *pious,* respectively. Our concept of strategic positioning is inspired by Fredrik Barth's work on the social construction of difference and ethnic boundaries (Barth 1969). In line with Barth we do not consider these strategic positions as clear-cut, but rather as shifting, depending on the situation. We also identified a third type of response that we refer to as being *pissed off*. This does not refer to a third strategic position, but rather to an affective state produced by the struggle of strategic positioning. Pissed off refers to experiences of being exposed to irreconcilable expectations combined with a perceived lack of recognition of one's efforts to handle them.

Speaking from a pragmatic position – taking social control into account

What we refer to here as a pragmatic position was the most common position in our material. Pragmatism in this context refers to what we interpret as the girls' acceptance of the need to manage gender and sexual reputation carefully, even though they would have preferred to give it less consideration. The pragmatic position implied acknowledgement of an inescapable conflict between the gender and sexuality norms of their parent's generation and the Norwegian majority society. Instead of presenting their values and ideals, the girls speaking from this position appeared to be concerned with finding pragmatic solutions in landscapes of cultural complexity and friction.

Speaking from a pragmatic position involved being critical of both the public discourse of victimised and oppressed ethnic minority Muslim girls as well as of gendered social control. In our material, criticism of victimising discourses often referred to a fictional film that had been released around the time of our interviews. Many of the girls we interviewed had seen it, either at the cinema with friends or at a teacher's initiative in class. The film, entitled *What Will People Say* (*Hva vil folk si?)* (Haq 2017) tells the story of a girl growing up in Norway who is taken to Pakistan to stay with relatives against her will when her parents find out that she has a boyfriend. When this film came up in our interviews, the girls referred to the plot as being an unrealistic and exaggerated situation that they did not recognise among any of their friends or family. Comparing their own parents with the girls' parents in the film, some stressed that their parents would back them when 'aunties' (older women from their ethnic communities) raised their eyebrows in response to seeing them 'with a boy' or 'without covering their hair and legs properly'. Some girls explicitly described their pragmatism as something they had learned from their parents who allied with them to protect them from the impact of other people's social control. The girls thus took a moral stand in defence of the parental generation, against what they saw as an exaggerated, one-dimensional representation portrayed in the film.

Criticism of the public portrayal of minority families did not, however, prevent the girls from disagreeing with the gender norms in their parents' generation. During the interviews, they brought up many examples of disagreements between them and their parents on issues such as wearing tight clothes, spending time with boys outside of school, staying out late, and being allowed to choose their own partners. Some of them explicitly said that they wished their parents were less concerned with traditional ideas of being ‘a good Muslim girl’, but that they accepted their parents’ views and did not generally challenge their parents upfront.

Various reasons were given for not openly challenging the norms. Some talked about the risks related to breaking the rules. Siblings and peers could tell on them at home or hamper their social life among peers if they did. A few mentioned more severe consequences, such as a girl with parents from Pakistan who, in a group interview, described how her dad had threatened to throw her out of the house if she did not respect her curfew. As if to reassure her friends as well as the interviewer, she said that she knew ‘he would never actually do that’.

Another reason for not openly challenging norms they disagreed with was that they understood their parents’ worries and acknowledged the pressure they felt raising children in a society where they might not be familiar with the dominant norms related to gender and sexuality. A girl with parents from Afghanistan started the individual interview by talking about how much she disliked ‘honour’. At the same time, she insisted on being able to see things from her fathefs point of view:

> But the fact is … I hate honour [laughs], I don’t care. I will let my children do as they want. But I can also see it from my father’s point of view. The problem is marrying, for example. If there are nasty rumours about me, then none of the Afghan families would want their sons to marry me, you know. So that’s a problem as well.

As for whether they complied with the gendered norms and expectations they were critical of, the girls reacted with acceptance or resignation rather than open resistance. The girl whose father threatened to throw her out said that ‘Staying out late is not that important to me anyway’. In reference to the aforementioned film, some said that the kind of double life that the young female character was leading (e.g. escaping through the window of her room at night to attend parties) would not have been possible for them or their friends. A girl with parents from Morocco said that as much as she would have liked to go to parties and smoke cigarettes like ‘normal teenagers’, it was simply not an option for her:

> Moroccans are so sneaky. They snitch and gossip about each other. If a woman who knows my mother sees me with a guy; first, it goes all around the world, and then my mother hears about it and it gets back to me.

The omnipresence of observers and gossip meant that she could not smoke cigarettes except with a few trusted friends, and never in front of her brothers who attend the same school. ‘In my parents’ heads, female smokers are whores, because that’s what it was like in the village in Morocco where they grew up’, she explained. She added, with visible annoyance, that they did not care about her brothers smoking, yet her brothers would still tell on her immediately if she did the same.

Acceptance of social control as a fact of life could nevertheless represent resistance by undermining the effectiveness of parents’ control. The girl above described how she sabotaged her parents’ attempts to monitor her activity on social media. She exploited their lack of knowledge of the different platforms and blocked them from following most of her online activities without their knowledge so that they were unable to find out if she was involved in 'something that might bring shame on the family'. Similarly, the girl who 'hated honour' objected to the restrictions imposed on her by her parents by saying she was at school or in the library when she was in fact going to the cinema or hanging out with friends. She regarded particularly her father as being too strict, and she, therefore, considered white lies and bending rules a legitimate strategy to deal with unreasonable demands.

While speaking from a pragmatic position, the girls distanced themselves from the portrayal of ethnic minority Muslim girls as victims of parental control while recognising that they experienced restrictions in their daily lives that could be defined as social control. They insisted, however, that their decision to consider their parents' situation and renounce certain aspects of personal freedom was their own. They also argued that within this acceptance, they had room for manoeuvre. In this regard, the pragmatic position can be understood as a claim for the right to vacillate between criticism and defence of the parental generation, and between acceptance of and resistance to the norms they uphold.

Speaking from a pious Muslim position – beyond social control

The other position we identified in the material is what we label a 'pious' position. The girls who positioned themselves as pious would speak against both Norwegian majority society and the ethnic community of their parents' generation in a more confrontational or principled manner, compared to girls speaking from a pragmatic position. Four of the girls in two of our interviews consistently spoke from this position, whereas others shifted between pragmatic and pious positions.

From the pious position, controlling family members, neighbours, and peers were criticised in accordance with the girls' own understanding of true Islamic values. In an individual interview, a girl with a family background from Iraq told us that she had been in a relationship with a boy with Norwegian parents for the last two years. Her parents refused to discuss the situation; according to her, they simply hoped it would go away. In the meantime, her boyfriend had converted to Islam and had started studying the Qur'an, something that should have, in the girl's opinion, made her parents change their mind:

> A: I asked my cousin about it; he spends a lot of time at the Mosque and knows all of the Qur'an by heart. He said that in Islam … I can marry him; it's not a problem. It's what my parents do that is haram because they have no legitimate reason for not accepting my relationship.
> I: As long as he is a Muslim, you mean?
> A: Yes. Then they have no legitimate reason (…) In my mind we are already married because Allah can see that our relationship is pure.

The girl argues that her parents' refusal to acknowledge her relationship is based solely on her boyfriend's Norwegian family background and that they let their cultural preferences trump their Islamic values. The girl, however, refers to Islamic moral values to defend being in a relationship against her parents' will. Her relationship is 'pure' according to Islam and she defines her parents' attempt to prevent her from marrying the young man she loves as *haram* ('forbidden'). She emphasises that it is her parents' responsibility to handle the situation according to true Islam rather than focusing on the social and cultural norms around them.

The pious position also implied speaking against the individualistic values associated with Norwegian majority society as well as the sexualised and promiscuous popular culture of the Western film and music industry in general. Three friends with parents from Somalia, Pakistan, and Turkey respectively expressed alternative ideals for themselves as pious Muslim girls:

> A: Before it was more like, 'I want to have a boyfriend because it's cool to have one. Everyone has one'. But now we have adult thoughts and we are adults, so it's not like we want to have boyfriends.
> B: Yeah, and it ruins your reputation, it is shameful.

The girls were drawing a line between the teenage desires they used to have and the 'adult thoughts' that replaced them as if the girlish desire to blend in and have a boyfriend (and possibly even sex before marriage) was something they had overcome. The girls were thus making a moral distinction between themselves and other young women their age, both within and outside the Muslim category.

In line with this logic of placing oneself outside the dominant culture of their multicultural peer groups and Norwegian majority society at large, pious young women stressed that it was not their parents who encouraged them to avoid spending time alone with boys. One of the girls from the excerpt above phrased it as follows: 'I know my own limits, I think about what I want for myself before I think about what my father wants'. She and her friend instead referred to Islam as the moral code ordering them not to get romantic with boys:

> A: My religion says that you should not be alone with a boy because then the third person will be the devil. So I stick to that, so my parents don't need to tell me, because I personally …
> B: Yes, I can look after myself. I follow my religion, and Islam tells me that you shouldn't have a boyfriend or girlfriend when you're not married, or don't have a ring, *nikah*, and all that. So I can't have a boyfriend, I don't go that far, I watch out, that's the way I am.

The girls point to Islam as their frame of reference while simultaneously stressing how adhering to this moral code does not give anyone (especially not people outside the family) the right to judge them. Like the aforementioned girl with the boyfriend with Norwegian parents, these girls were speaking out against pressures from different directions while insisting that Islam and God are the only legitimate sources of judgement. In principle, this enabled them to respond to all situations with visible pressures related to gender and sexuality norms by 'rising above' other peoplés attempts to evaluate their actions based on 'cultural' criteria.

Shaming by peers based on gender and sexuality was an important theme throughout this interview, and one of the girls referred to an episode where she had been the subject of nasty rumours and called a 'whore' at school:

> I just laughed because I know better than them who I am, I don't listen. I don't believe in rumours myself, and I'm not a whore, so I don't have to make a big deal out of it.

We interpret this claim as a way to ‘rise above’ what she sees as unjustified social control from peers. More generally, however, we understand such principled and often somewhat confrontational pious positions, as a response to controlling practices within (Muslim) minority communities in combination with the Norwegian majority’s negative portrayal of Muslims and Islam.

As with the pragmatic position, the girls spoke of their decision to wear headscarves or avoid being alone with boys as something that came from within them and their relationship with God, and not something imposed on them by parents or peers. Vacillation may at first glance seem less important from the pious position as it establishes a fixed point from which the self is constructed. However, it can also be read as, by establishing some points and positions as fixed, providing them with more space to vacillate.

Pissed off – the fatigue of irreconcilable demands and stereotypical representation

While the pragmatic and the pious position both represent solutions to the problem of conflicting norms, some girls stressed how difficult it was to try to find such solutions and how frustrating it was when their efforts were not acknowledged. For some of our participants, these frustrations were expressed as anger – what we describe here as the emotional state of being ‘pissed off’. Their anger was directed at individuals, groups, or society in general who they felt were executing a form of illegitimate control: overly strict parents, gossiping aunties incapable of ‘minding their own business’, intolerant peers, boys with double standards, or prejudiced majority Norwegians ignoring racism and Islamophobia as a major problem in society.

One example was the girl whose parents refused to accept her newly converted Muslim boyfriend. Her anger and frustration were vented in different directions during the interview. She appeared to be particularly annoyed when discussing female Muslim characters in Norwegian films and TV series, who, in her opinion, always ended up in one extreme position or another:

> We have all these films and series but none of [the characters] will be like me. They are all just stereotypes […]There is never any middle ground where things are stripped back and real […] I don’t mean to be rude, but when a bunch of white people tries to make a film about foreign girls, no thanks[…] It feels like people are supposed to feel sorry for us, but I don’t want that.

We interpret this girl’s anger in the interview situation as a product of a context larger than social relations and control within the family, ethnic community, or peer group – or the researcher-participant relationship for that matter.

Anger could also be expressed in the ethnic minority community in solidarity with their parents’ experiences of social control. A girl with parents from Pakistan told us how her father, who had been raised in a European country, had been forced to marry her mother even though he already had a girlfriend. As a consequence of his anger at his parents, he had always insisted on giving his daughter the right to dress how she wanted and choose her own partner. The girl, however, described how she felt constantly judged for freedom she had never asked for, by ‘other Pakistanis’ – both her peers and people in her parents' generation. The girl found that her father's choice made her social position vulnerable. Although she felt that her father had somewhat abandoned her in this difficult situation, she explicitly shared his anger, saying 'I just hate Pakistanis'.

In our study, we found that some of the girls were 'pissed off' as a result of having to deal with the 'double bind of racism and patriarchy' (Keddie et al. 2021, 167) in their everyday lives. Their anger and frustration were thus firstly a result of being othered by the majority through stereotypical representations of Muslim girls as submissive or rebellious rather than ordinary (Ryan 2011), Secondly, and at the same time, their feelings came out as a result of being shamed and othered within the ethnic minority group for being 'too Norwegian'. In both respects, they felt restrained in their ability to vacillate (Hage 2010) between being similar and being different.

Conclusion

The increasing tendency in public representation to cast, categorise, count, and hold people accountable as Muslims inevitably leads to a heightened self-consciousness, reflexivity, and explicitness about Islam among young people with Muslim family backgrounds (cf. Brubaker 2013). Whereas the literature has identified themes of securitisation related to Islamic terrorism as dominant themes in the representation of Muslims across the globe, the tendency to describe ethnic minority Muslim girls as victims of excessive social control is particularly evident in the Nordic context. In our study, we have explored how ethnic minority Muslim girls in Norway manage social control and what strategic positions are produced in the process. Our analysis shows that girls talk about managing social control in ways that enable them to simultaneously sympathise with and criticise expectations from parents, peers, ethnic communities, and majority society, without compromising their multiple belongings. Our analysis thus contributes to the literature by highlighting the possibility to vacillate, in Hage's terms (2010, 117) between similarity and difference, as a fundamental aspect of agentic selfhood.

We identified two strategic positions from which such vacillation is enabled: Speaking from a pragmatic position, the girls acknowledge the existence of cultural differences that are challenging for their parents, and that requires skilful negotiation and adaptation from their part. From this position, they shift between criticism of parents' and peers' social control, particularly related to gender norms, and criticism of public discourses which construct ethnic minority families as overly controlling. As the most common position in our material, it is in line with Lam and Mansouri (2020)'s argument that young Muslims' identity work must be analysed beyond the framework of misrecognition and counter-identities, in order to capture generalised discourses on individualised, authentic selfhood on which it also builds. The pragmatic position may thus also be read as a claim to be seen as a normal youth by contesting or challenging parental restrictions, akin to the strategies of normalisation described by Ryan (2011) and Harris and Kharmishah (2019). At the same time, speaking from this position means claiming recognition for their particularity as young people whose parents have a different set of references.

Speaking from a pious position, girls managed social control by distinguishing localised cultural traditions and a universal 'real' Islam. From this position, social control originating in cultural norms – whether from peers, family, or majority society – was refuted as illegitimate while defending a correct understanding of Islam whereby God is the only legitimate judge. Instead of positioning themselves as skilful and 'pragmatic' multicultural code-switchers, girls speaking from a pious position invested in uncompromising religious subject positions. The same line of argument has been found in other studies among minority Muslim women in Europe (DeHanas 2013; C. Jacobsen 2011; Liebmann and Galal 2020; Ryan 2014) where young Muslim women position themselves either against what they consider misinterpretations (or even misuse) of Islam by the older generations, or in opposition to the un-Islamic values of the majority. The pious position can, at first sight, appear as a form of identity work based on the rejection of the generalised other. Yet, as Ryan (2014) has argued, 'claims to a universal identity [as Muslims] must be interpreted on the background of youth as a phase of identity formation, and as actively negotiated through particular social relationships and interactions in specific contexts' (Ryan 2014, 447). Like the pragmatic position thus, the pious position can be seen as produced through specific ways of managing social control.

Our study contributes also by theorising the frustration and anger that young people feel when being denied the right to vacillate. What we labelled the affective state of being 'pissed off' refers to the experience of not having one's claim to authentic selfhood acknowledged. Our examples pointed to experiences of misrepresentation (in majority media), but also to social control in the form of rigid expectations from the ethnic minority community. We see such double-bind situations, or what Keddie et al. (2021) refers to as the double burden of patriarchy and racism, as produced by specific minority-majority relations, where ethnic minority Muslim girls are framed as victims of excessive patriarchal control within their families and local communities. There is thus an important gender aspect here, as the constrained position of the female victim (of social control) intersects with the position of the minority person 'fixed' in a negative particularity (Hage 2010, 115). The ethnic minority Muslim girls' age and dependence on family relations also contribute to the double-bind nature of their situation, as they cannot leave the field of interaction in which they find themselves (Bateson 2000 [1972], p. 157).

Our study thereby demonstrates the importance of not overlooking the specific experiences of managing conflicting gender norms from a minority position. Thus, while we concur with Honkatukia and Keskinen's (2018) argument that social control is ubiquitous and linked to heterosexual and patriarchal norms, we highlight that both the character of such control and the consideration with which it is managed should be analysed in its own right.

Phoenix (2019) found in her longitudinal study of British Muslim women that their perspectives and understandings of their position as Muslims in Britain changed over time. As these girls approach adulthood, enter new social arenas, and become parents themselves, new forms of social control and thereby new postionings may emerge. More longitudinal research is needed in order to conclude on the long-term importance of positions assumed by ethnic minority Muslim girls in their mid-teens facing social control.

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