# Religious Identity and Acculturation of Immigrant Minority Youth

## Toward a Contextual and Developmental Approach

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**Abstract:** This review proposes an integrative contextual and developmental approach to religious identity development and acculturative adaptation among adolescents with an immigrant background. Relevant research with minority adolescents has addressed three main research questions: (1) What is distinctive about religious identity development in (Muslim) minority youth? (2) How does religious identity relate to their acculturative adaptation? and (3) What is the role of interpersonal and intercultural relations in specific acculturation contexts? In line with multiple developmental pathways in specific acculturation contexts, Muslim youth in Europe showed either stability or an increase in religious identification throughout adolescence, yet religious identity development varied greatly across religious communities and receiving societies. In support of the adaptive function of identity development in acculturating youth, (2) the religious identity of Muslim adolescents contributed positively to their psychological adaptation through the commitment to heritage culture values and identities; and it was either unrelated or conflicting with mainstream culture adoption and sociocultural adaptation, depending on specific acculturation contexts. Finally, religious identities reflect the bicultural social world of minority adolescents: strong and stable religious identities were premised on religious transmission in interpersonal relations with immigrant parents and minority peers. Moreover, religious identity conflict or compatibility with mainstream cultural values and identities was contingent on intercultural relations: perceived discrimination and Islamophobia fuel identity conflict in Muslim youth, whereas more harmonious intercultural relations enable compatible and adaptive pathways of religious identity.

**Keywords:** religion, Muslims, acculturation, youth, intergroup relations

Public debates over immigration in Europe – and more recently across the Atlantic – highlight religious differences as one aspect of migration-related diversity. Feeding into European debates are dramatic demographic changes in the scale and forms of demographic diversity over the last decades, in particular the presence of significant and increasingly internally diverse Muslim immigrant and refugee populations originating from North Africa, the Middle East, East- and West-Asia, and Eastern Europe. Despite Europe's history of religious diversity and Islamic presence, public attitudes toward Muslim immigrants and minorities have long been ambivalent or overtly hostile – opposing Islam to liberal family values, democracy, and secularism (Sniderman & Hagendoorn, 2007). Current geopolitical tensions and national security issues are further straining already tense intercultural relations with Muslim minorities in European societies. Moreover, restrictive European immigration policies complicate the social integration of many Muslim refugee families and children who are crossing the Mediterranean to escape political turmoil and economic hardship.

Against this backdrop, the present review focuses on religious identity development and acculturation among adolescents with an immigrant background (shorthand minority adolescents). Until recently, psychological acculturation studies have neglected the religious identity development of minority youngsters and how it meshes with their (bi)cultural identities (Güngör, Fleischmann, Phalet, & Maliepaard, 2013). In parallel, most research on religious identity development is limited to majority Christian children and adolescents; and the few longitudinal studies of immigrant minority youth focus mainly on ethnic – rather than religious – identity development (cf. infra). Reviewing recent research among Muslim minority youth mainly – other religious affiliations than Christian or Muslim are usually too small in numbers to allow any specific conclusions – our focus is on the religious identity development of minority youth, its interplay with acculturation processes, and how religious acculturation is shaped by specific acculturation contexts.

In order to bridge parallel research streams on religious identity development and acculturative adaptation in
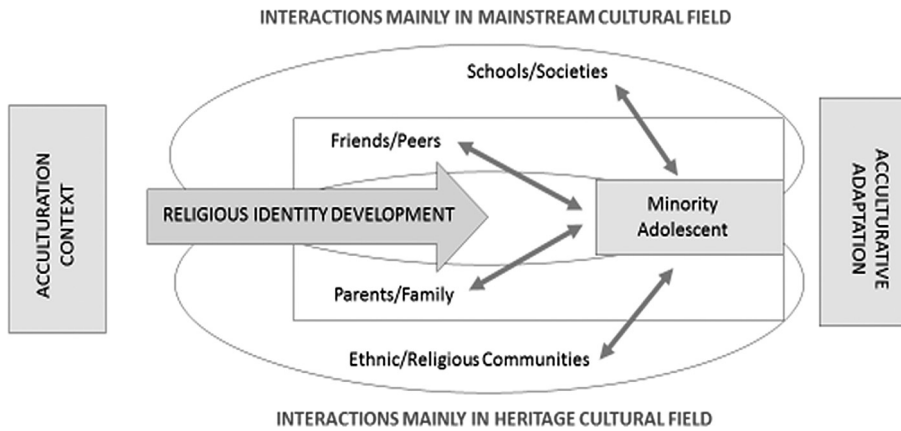
**Figure 1.** A contextual developmental model of religious identity and acculturative adaptation in minority adolescents.

minority youth, we propose an integrative contextual and developmental model of adolescent religious identity (see Figure 1). Taking a developmental and contextual perspective on religious identity, we will address three main research questions: (1) What is distinctive about religious identity development in Muslim minority youth? (2) How does religious identity relate to their acculturative adaptation? and (3) How do specific acculturation contexts shape the acculturation and religious identity of Muslim youth? To conclude, we will summarize the state of the art, reiterate the need for more longitudinal and cross-culturally comparative research, and briefly reflect on limitations as well as wider scientific and applied implications.

Our theoretical framework extends Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model of human development and Lerner's (2002) "developmental contextualism" to the acculturation context – as distinct from more commonly researched (allegedly) monocultural contexts of development (Sam & Oppedal, 2003). The special focus of this review is on the development of religious identity in minority adolescents. Religious identity is distinct from other identities, such as ethnic identity, because of the uniquely self-defining and prescriptive-normative qualities of specifically religious identity contents (Ysseldyk, Matheson, & Anisman, 2010): believers find in their religious faith an eternal source of ultimate meaning and moral direction. At the same time, religious identity formation is subject to general developmental processes of identity exploration and commitment during adolescence (Saroglou, 2012). We conceive of multiple pathways of adolescent identity development as socially grounded in relationships with significant others and geared toward adaptation within specific sociocultural environments (Sam & Oppedal, 2003). By implication, acculturation processes are part and parcel of normal developmental processes during adolescence. Acculturation refers specifically to the adaptation of (mainly) minorities to growing up in a bicultural

social world. As minority adolescents engage in social interactions across mainly heritage cultural and mainstream cultural fields, they learn to navigate cultural difference and minority status in their relations with (other) minority and majority friends and peers (Sam & Oppedal, 2003). In parallel, later adolescents' enhanced capacity for perspective taking and socio-moral development raise the awareness of (strained) intercultural relations in the wider society (Rutland & Killen, 2015). Zooming in on religious identity, and in line with Bornstein's (2017) "specificity principle" in acculturation science, we expect that minority adolescents' experiences and understandings of interpersonal and intercultural relations will give rise to different pathways of religious identity development with adaptive value in specific acculturation contexts. For instance, when Muslim minority youth attend a school where headscarves are banned, this contextual constraint on the expression of religious identity may entail the experience of their religious and mainstream identities as less compatible, thus increasing the psychological costs of acculturative adaptation (Fleischmann & Phalet, 2018).

## Religious Identity Development in Immigrant Minority Youth

Compared to a large research literature on ethnic/racial identity development among youth (see Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014, for a recent review), there is relatively less research on the role of religious development among children and adolescents. In their recent review of this work, King and Boyatzis (2015) conclude that most research so far is based on adolescent samples in the US and only few of these studies have explicitly paid attention to the role of migration. Similarly, Suárez-Orozco, Singh, Abo-Zena, Du, and Roeser (2011) state that the literature on religion and migration has largely focused on adults and neglected

children and adolescents. Their empirical work is among the first to study religion among youth with a migration background. Their analyses of the *Longitudinal Immigrant Student Adaptation* (LISA) survey of Asian-, Caribbean-, and Latino-American immigrant youth in the Boston area show that religious affiliation and participation are high in almost all immigrant families, with recent Chinese immigrants as partial exception. They demonstrate the positive effects of religious involvement, through increased religious identity, enhanced social support and more positive peer networks, on well-being, sense of purpose and decreased risk behavior in 1.5 generation immigrant youth. Their additional qualitative findings reveal that adolescents turn to religion as a moral compass for inspiration and to stay away from risk behavior. Moreover, adolescents considered religion as containing the core cultural values that are transmitted across generations within their immigrant family and community. Similarly, in a European migration context the religious identity of Muslim youth was associated with cultural values of interdependence, such as tradition, conformity, and benevolence values, which are of central importance in the heritage cultural context (Saroglou, Delpierre, & Dernelle, 2004); and which were reaffirmed by religious youth in the acculturation context (Güngör, Bornstein, & Phalet, 2012).

Other US-based studies examined group differences in religious development between ethno-racial categories of youth, which indirectly speak to the role of migration. A 3-year longitudinal study of 15–18-year-old Latino, Asian American and European Americans found that religious identification remained stable across the high school years whereas participation in religious practices declined (Lopez, Huynh, & Fuligni, 2011). In line with religious reaffirmation in acculturation contexts, Latino and Asian American youth in this study, who were primarily second generation as well as first generation, reported higher levels of religious identity than European American youth, who were mainly third or higher generation. When different religious affiliations were included in the analyses, however, the ethnic differences in religious identification were much reduced. In the US context under study, apart from a significant share of (self-defined) nonreligious youth (around 30%), religious affiliations were mainly limited to Christian denominations, except for a significant share of Buddhists among Asian American adolescents. Although the evidence may be limited to Christian affiliations in a predominantly Christian and religious receiving context, these findings suggest that sustained religious identification may have specific adaptive functions for minority adolescents in the acculturation context.

In contrast with the US context, the European migration context is characterized by substantially larger immigration from majority Muslim countries, in combination with more ambivalent or overtly hostile public attitudes toward religion in general and Islam in particular (cf. Voas & Fleischmann, 2012 for a review). In line with religious reaffirmation in a European acculturation context, a 3-year longitudinal study among Muslim Bulgarian middle adolescents found religious identification to increase over time (Dimitrova, 2014). In the Netherlands, another cross-sectional study with Muslim minority youth found the level of religious identification to increase from early to mid-adolescence, and to decrease again from mid- to later adolescence (from age 15 onwards; Verkuyten, Thijs, & Stevens, 2012). Possibly, the latter finding of religious decrease in late adolescence reflects temporary adaptations to life transitions in later adolescence. Thus, Phalet, Gijsberts, and Hagendoorn (2008) estimated age-related trends in religious identification and practice while taking into account life transitions in repeated cross-sections of Dutch Muslims. Controlling for life transitions, the religious identification and practice of Dutch Muslims was mostly stable from ages 15 to 20 and above. Specifically, entering higher education and leaving the parental home entailed small decreases in religious practice, whereas transitions into marriage and parenthood marked a rebound. We conclude that there seems to be converging evidence of stable or increasing religious identification among minority youth. Note that the absence of a significant increase in religious identification in some studies may be due to ceiling effects in view of relatively high mean levels of religious identification and restricted variation around the mean among Muslim youth (Verkuyten, 2007).

Further evidence of religious reaffirmation in European acculturation contexts comes from comparisons of Muslim minority youth with their Christian peers. A cross-sectional study comparing Muslim minority youth with majority Christian peers in Belgium contrasted stable and significantly higher levels of religious identity from mid- to late adolescence (age range 15–20) among Muslims with lower and declining religious identification among majority adolescents (Güngör et al., 2012). Likewise, recent school-based surveys of self-identified Muslim minority youth in four European countries (England, Germany, the Netherlands, and Sweden) yielded no religious changes during mid-adolescence (14–17 years), in contrast with a significant overall decline in religious identification among their minority as well as majority Christian peers in the same countries (Simsek, Fleischmann, & Van Tubergen, 2017). Moreover, the same study found religious practices (service attendance and praying) to decline more strongly and uniformly among Christian youth (both minority and majority) as compared with their Muslim age-mates. Also, there is some first longitudinal evidence of religious polarization among Muslim youth, such that religious practices decreased over time for some Muslim minority youth and

increased for others (Simsek, Van Tubergen, et al., 2017). We conclude that apparent religious stability among Muslim minority youth in Europe may result from aggregating multiple pathways of religious identity development, which may be adaptive for specific acculturating individuals or groups in specific acculturation contexts (Bornstein, 2017). Similarly, an overall trend toward religious decline among Christian youth in European studies may be adaptive to specific sociocultural contexts. Thus, there is some longitudinal evidence of a distinct U-shaped curve of religious change, as well as religious polarization between low and high identifiers among majority Christian adolescents in generally more religious US contexts of development (Dillon, 2007; Hood, Hill, & Spilka, 2009). Looking across different sociocultural contexts in the US and in Europe, Saroglou (2012, p. 397) proposed that religious identity development serves "the more general adaptive functions of distancing oneself from what is known and familiar and exploring new and challenging alternatives" – before committing oneself to a newly redefined religious identity.

Complementing European studies of religious trends among Muslim minority youth, some studies with Muslim adolescents in the US add mainly qualitative insights into Muslim religious identity in another migration context. Thus, in line with findings of persistently high religious identification among European Muslims, Ajrouch (2004) found religion to be a more salient identity marker than national origin (e.g., Lebanese, Palestinian) in focus groups of 14–15-year-old Arab Americans. Likewise, in their study of 12–18-year-old Muslim Americans in the Greater New York area, Fine and Sirin (2008) found religious identification to be significantly higher than American identification, despite the fact that most adolescents in the sample were born in the US or had spent the largest part of their life there. Addressing the question of religious identity development, Cain et al. (2017) interviewed 13–19-year-old Muslim American youth about their experiences of religious change. About 60% reported a change in their religious identification and religious practices, which often followed a shift in their social and cultural environment around critical life transitions in their family life or school career. Similarly, in her study of Muslim university students in two US states, Peek (2005) found that leaving the parental home and entering college triggered qualitative changes in religious identity development such that religious identity became a "chosen" or even "declared" identity, after being a more unquestioned or foreclosed identity during childhood and early adolescence. These findings echo Phinney's (1989) approach to ethnic identity development among minority youth, as well as mainstream research on religious identity development in majority youth (cf. Saroglou, 2012 for a review). While empirical work applying a developmental perspective to the religious identities of minority youth is

still rare, Lewis (2007) used generic identity statuses (such as identity foreclosure, exploration, or achievement) as interpretive framework for her qualitative data among British Muslim youth. Relatedly, in a four-wave longitudinal study among mostly Canadian-born late adolescents and early adults, Hardy, Pratt, Pancer, Olsen, and Lawford (2011) found declining rates of religious identity diffusion, foreclosure, and moratorium, but stability in the levels of religious identity achievement over time. Their study analyzed religious identity development along with the development of political and occupational identities, and found domain-specific developmental pathways and cross-lagged effects of community ethnic and religious involvement. Both ethnic and religious involvement were declining over the study period. Yet, those who declined relatively less in religious involvement showed higher levels of religious identity achievement and foreclosure, and lower levels of moratorium and diffusion. These longitudinal findings suggest that acculturation into religious communities indeed stimulates the development of religious identities in youth, but it might foster commitment without an elaborate exploration of alternatives (Saroglou, 2012). To what extent these developmental pathways apply to the religious identities of Muslim minority youth in European acculturation contexts is yet to be examined.

To address our first research question, we summarize what is distinctive about religious identity development in Muslim minority youth. Overall, minority youth in general and Muslims in particular seem to be more religious than their majority peers, yet developmental trends suggest multiple pathways of religious identity development for minority and majority adolescents in North America and in Europe, with comparatively most stability or increase in the religious identification of Muslim youth in Europe. Reasoning from the adaptive function of identity development, high levels of religious identification among minority adolescents suggest specific adaptive functions of religious identities in the acculturation context, for instance, helping Muslim minority youth to cope with acculturative stress or minority status. As Suárez-Orozco et al. (2011, p. 257) proposed, the adaptive benefits of religious identity "are important for individuals all over the world, but they may be particularly compelling for immigrants who are uprooted and feel disconnected from their familiar roles and social ties."

In view of the key role of the sociocultural context in shaping the religious identity development of youth (King & Boyatzis, 2015), there is a need to further contextualize different pathways of religious identity development in acculturating youth, which may in turn contribute to different adaptation outcomes. With a view to further contextualize what is distinctive about religious identity development in minority adolescents, there is a need for longitudinal research on the effect of the migratory event, as well as for

comparative studies of immigrant children and adolescents across different types of migration, such as refugees versus labor migrants, which may overlap with religious group differences. Ideally, research among accul turating youth should include premigration religious identification measures to assess the influence of migration and culture contact on religious identity development. Such studies among adult movers suggest that migration might be a "theologizing experience" when religious ties are continued or replaced after migration (Connor, 2008; Massey & Higgins, 2011; Van Tubergen, 2013). While there is indirect evidence of the distinct adaptive value of religious identity for minority youth in the acculturation context, we do not know how the migratory event impacts religious identity among minors whose religious development is at an earlier stage. In the absence of premigration measures of religious identity, most research relies on comparisons of broad ethno-racial categories, which differ not only in religious affiliation but also simultaneously in their histories of migration and incorporation into different receiving contexts. As a first step toward considering the premigration context of religious identities, Güngör et al. (2012) compared Muslim youth in Turkey and in Belgium as sending and receiving societies, respectively. Their comparative findings suggest that religious identity is reaffirmed in the acculturation context, as Turkish minority youth were more religious than their peers in Turkey; and this difference in religious identity was maintained from mid- to late adolescence. Future research should further contextualize the distinct adaptive functions of religious identity development in the acculturation context, for instance, by disentangling ethnicity and religious affiliation, migration generations, and receiving contexts.

## Religious Identity and Acculturative Adaptation in Immigrant Minority Youth

The psychological acculturation of minority adolescents refers to the process of adaptation to the bicultural (or multicultural) social environment in which they grow up (Mesquita, Deleersnyder, & Jasini, in press). This adaptive process is part of general developmental processes, which give rise to multiple pathways of identity development with adaptive value in specific sociocultural contexts. Yet, acculturative adaptation refers more narrowly to the ways in which minority youth adapt to their bicultural social world. This review focuses specifically on the role of religious identity in the acculturation and adaptation of minority adolescents. While religious acculturation has been more extensively studied for immigrant and minority adults (cf. Güngör et al., 2013 for a review), less is known about the religious identity of minority children and adolescents and its interplay with acculturative adaptation.

For Muslim youth their distinct religious identity is a salient marker of difference in social interactions with friends or peers across heritage and mainstream cultural fields. In line with a well-established bidimensional approach to acculturation (Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006), we distinguish between mainstream and heritage cultural attitudes and cultural identifications in minority youth – and related integrationist (combining both cultures), assimilationist (prioritizing mainstream culture adoption) or separationist (preferring heritage cultural maintenance) acculturation preferences (but see Brown & Zagefka, 2011 for a critical review of different measures, outcomes, and contexts of acculturation). Importantly, the adaptive value of different acculturation attitudes depends critically on the quality of intercultural relations in specific acculturation contexts. Thus, integrationism has been associated with psychological (i.e., well-being, self-esteem) and sociocultural adaptation (i.e., problem behavior, achievement) mainly among young adults and in North American migration contexts (Berry et al., 2006). Yet, the adaptive benefits of integrationism are less clear-cut in adolescents at a younger age (e.g., Rutland et al., 2012) or in European acculturation contexts (e.g., Brown et al., 2013). The latter findings suggest that the integration of heritage and mainstream cultural attachments may be psychologically demanding for individual minority adolescents in less supportive social environments, for instance in societies that are less sympathetic toward multiculturalism.

A growing body of research on Muslim minority youth documents adaptation problems, such as heightened risks of depression (Fassaert et al., 2011 in the Netherlands), internalizing problem behavior (Oppedal & Røysamb, 2007), or lower levels of psychological well-being (Stuart, Ward, & Adam, 2010 in New Zealand; see Khawaja, 2016 for a review). These findings should be qualified, however, for several reasons. As most studies lack a non-Muslim minority comparison group, we do not know what is distinctive about the (acculturative) adaptation of Muslim minority youth. Moreover, few studies have directly assessed religious self-identification, hence adaptation problems cannot be unambiguously attributed to the religious identity of Muslim minorities. Finally, a review of mainly qualitative and clinical studies with Muslim American minority youth highlights a possible upside of religious identity as a source of psychological well-being, self-worth, and social support (Goforth, Oka, Leong, & Denis, 2014). The latter findings raise the question whether a possible adaptive advantage of religious identity generalizes to minority youth across the Atlantic.

In a cross-cultural study including Muslim and non-Muslim youth on both sides of the Atlantic, Berry et al. (2006) compare distinct patterns of acculturation and adaptation among Muslim and other minority youth. Their comparative findings contrast prevailing integrationism

among Western and non-Western Christian minority youth with more prevalent separationism among Muslim youth, as evident from high heritage culture maintenance, strong ethnic identification, and sustained ethnic language use across generations. To the extent that mainstream culture adoption contributes to the social adaptation of minority youth, separationist minorities are likely to experience adaptation problems, such as problem behavior or poor school achievement. Note, though, that Muslim youth in this cross-cultural study were mainly sampled from European countries, where Muslim communities face pervasive anti-Islamic prejudice and discrimination (cf. supra).

Looking beyond cross-cultural comparisons of acculturative adaptation, some recent studies with Muslim adolescents have included individual-level measures of religious identity along with acculturation and adaptation measures. These studies allow a more direct empirical test of the role of religion in the acculturation of Muslim youth. Religious parenting in Muslim immigrant families and religious identity in Muslim minority adolescents are associated with heritage culture maintenance and may thus contribute to psychological adaptation. Thus, childhood religious socialization in Turkish-Belgian immigrant families – as indicated by regular paternal mosque visits and Koran lessons outside school – predicted enhanced and sustained culture maintenance into young adulthood (Güngör, Fleischmann, & Phalet, 2011). Likewise, comparing Muslim, Christian, and secular minority youth in Germany from 54 origin countries – including Turkish, Italian, Greek, Bosnian, Kosovar, Croatian, and Russian youth – the importance of religion at home predicted higher heritage culture maintenance (Schachner, Van de Vijver, & Noack, 2014). Comparing Muslim-Belgian late adolescents to majority and other minority peers, Saroglou and Galand (2004) reported that the former were not only more religious but also more strongly attached to their heritage cultures. Also, more religious Turkish-Belgian early to mid-adolescents were more oriented toward maintaining their Turkish cultural heritage (Güngör et al., 2012). Along those lines, religiosity was found to increase self-esteem among Turkish-Dutch adolescents who were high on culture maintenance (Bender & Yeresyan, 2014).

Furthermore, religious and ethnic attachments form distinct yet related self-identities in Muslim adolescents. Thus, more strongly ethnically identified Muslim-Belgian adolescents were also more strongly committed to their religious identity, and more invested in continuing and passing on their Islamic religious heritage; and religious identification supported core heritage cultural values of interdependence, in particular tradition, conformity, and benevolence (Güngör et al., 2012; Saroglou & Galand, 2004). Moreover, religious self-identification was related to more general processes of identity development during

adolescence, so that Muslim-Belgian adolescents with an identity status of achievement or foreclosure (vs. exploration or diffusion) were most committed to their religious identity (Saroglou & Galand, 2004). In a retrospective study of Muslim American youth, about 60% reported meaningful qualitative changes in their religious commitment or understanding, or toward new religious practices (Cain et al., 2017). As compared to their peers who did not report religious change, they showed higher levels of ethnic identity exploration – and also slightly higher levels of identity commitment. Interestingly, religious change was also related to perceived discrimination in intercultural relations with mainstream society (cf. infra).

Despite Berry et al.'s (2006) finding of more prevalent separationism among Muslim minority youth, the evidence of culture conflict – opposing a distinctive religious identity to mainstream cultural identities – is mixed (Fleischmann & Phalet, 2016), and it depends on characteristics of specific acculturation contexts (cf. infra). To illustrate, studies among Turkish-German adolescents consistently found negative associations of religious parenting (Spiegler, Güngör, & Leyendecker, 2016) and religious identification (Dimitrova & Aydinly-Karakulak, 2016) with the adoption of, and identification with, the German mainstream culture. In their cross-cultural study of minority youth in Germany, Schachner et al. (2014) found that the importance of (Islamic or Christian) religion at home negatively predicted mainstream German cultural orientation, and impacted negatively on adolescents' sociocultural adaptation in this country. In a similar vein, high intrinsic value of religious faith, as well as religious certainty and practice, negatively predicted mainstream culture adoption and identification among Muslim-Belgian late adolescents (Saroglou & Galand, 2004; Saroglou & Mathijsen, 2007). On the other hand, studies with Turkish-Belgian and Turkish-Bulgarian Muslim youth found that their religious identification was unrelated to mainstream culture adoption (Dimitrova & Aydinly-Karakulak, 2016; Güngör et al., 2011). Whereas German Muslims most consistently experience conflict between their religious and national identities, findings in Belgium are mixed and suggest that identity conflict might be more likely at the transition into young adulthood, or with more intense religious involvement and understanding.

To summarize, the religious identity of Muslim adolescents is entwined with their attachment to heritage cultural values and identities and either unrelated or conflicting with mainstream culture adoption. More research is needed to better understand when and how religion entails identity conflict. From a contextual and developmental approach of religious identity, however, religious change at the transition into adulthood as well as perceived religious prejudice or discrimination in mainstream society seem potentially

relevant factors. In view of converging evidence of the psychological benefits of culture maintenance, and parallel evidence of a protective effect of strong and sustained religious identities in acculturating youth, religion can contribute to psychological adaptation. At the same time, religion can come at the cost of sociocultural adaptation in mainstream cultural settings, for instance in school, when minority youth perceive the mainstream culture as rejecting their religious heritage. In line with an adaptive advantage of religious identity, for instance, religious identification was negatively associated with externalizing problem behaviors among Turkish- and Moroccan-Dutch early adolescents (Maes, Stevens, & Verkuyten, 2014). In the presence of perceived discrimination, however, more strongly religiously identified Muslim-Dutch girls in particular were more at risk of experiencing adaptation problems than their less religious peers (ibid.). The latter finding suggests that future research should inquire into the gendered nature of religious identity and acculturative adaptation (cf. Güngör & Bornstein, 2013).

## Contextualizing Religious Acculturation

Adolescent experiences of acculturation and adaptation are anchored in their relationships with peers and parents as key developmental contexts. While immigrant parents transmit the heritage culture to their children, social relationships outside the family become more important during adolescence. Through daily social interactions with peers outside their home, minority youth learn to negotiate cultural difference and to balance mainstream and heritage cultures. Adolescents' acculturation and adaptation primarily reflect parental acculturation expectations: for instance, children were more oriented and better adjusted to the mainstream culture when their parents valued adoption of mainstream customs (Schachner et al., 2014). In addition, peer norms of acculturation were also shown to impact adolescent acculturative adaptation. Thus, children whose acculturation preferences misfit with peer acculturation norms, for instance when they prefer integration and peers stress assimilation, experienced more peer rejection (Celeste, Meeussen, Verschueren, & Phalet, 2016; Kunst & Sam, 2013). Looking beyond adolescents' personal relations with parents and peers, the way in which culturally diverse schools, cities, or societies at large represent and regulate intercultural relations makes for more friendly or hostile acculturation contexts. In line with an intercultural relations approach to acculturation (Brown & Zagefka, 2011; Guimond, De la Sablonnière, & Nugier, 2014), perceived discrimination was revealed as a robust predictor of acculturative adaptation problems across minority youth in 13 countries (Berry et al., 2006). Conversely, perceived fair treatment or integrationist policies were shown to protect minority well-being and achievement (Baysu, Celeste, Brown, Verschueren, & Phalet, 2016; Hoti, Heinzmann, Müller, & Buholzer, 2017). This final part of our review focuses on the role of parental, peer, and intercultural relations in the religious acculturation of minority youth.

### Contextualizing Acculturation: Immigrant Parents and Peer Relations

Most immigrant parents effectively transmit their religious identities, beliefs, values, and ties to the next generation such that more religious parents have more religious children. At the same time, the success of religious transmission across generations should be qualified in light of the evidence of small but significant religious decline over generations (Maliepaard, Gijsberts, & Lubbers, 2012; Maliepaard & Lubbers, 2013; Phalet et al., 2008). The evidence of overall religious decline among immigrant populations compared older to more recent migration generations while taking into account age-related religious changes throughout the individual life cycle. Importantly and in line with the previously described notion that religion is considered central to the transmission of immigrant families' heritage culture, there is some evidence that religion is (even) more effectively transmitted to the next generation in immigrant families – and especially in Muslim families – than in majority families (De Hoon & Van Tubergen, 2014; Jacob & Kalter, 2013). In spite of relatively secular visions of religion in Dutch society, for instance, religious preferences and practices were effectively transmitted in Dutch-Muslim families (Maliepaard & Lubbers, 2013), and religious socialization in childhood predicted sustained religious identification, belief, and practice in young adulthood for Turkish- and Moroccan-Belgian Muslims (Güngör et al., 2011). In another study on Turkish- and Moroccan-Dutch Muslims, Verkuyten et al. (2012) found parental religious identification to be significantly positively related to the religious identification of early adolescents, but by mid-adolescence, the association turned nonsignificant, attesting to the waning influence of parents on adolescents' religious identity in the course of development.

As adolescents venture outside the home and peer relations gain in normative impact, religious acculturation is also shaped by their social contacts with both co-ethnic and cross-ethnic peers. In line with general findings in Muslim minorities aged 15 and older (Maliepaard & Phalet, 2012), more minority contact with co-ethnic peers and more religious peers reinforce – while more cross-ethnic contact with majority peers slightly attenuate – religious identification and practice among Muslim youth (De Hoon & Van Tubergen, 2014). Countervailing normative pressures from co-ethnic and cross-ethnic friends on religious

identity development should be situated against the background of significant ethnic and religious segregation in adolescent friendship networks. Network studies show that cross-ethnic friendships are more often unrealized or unreciprocated and also less embedded than co-ethnic friendships – with Muslim minorities being among the most excluded groups (Leszczensky & Pink, 2016; Schachner, Van de Vijver, & Noack, 2018). Along those lines, Simsek, Van Tubergen, and Fleischmann (2017) found evidence of religious segregation in ethnically diverse classrooms in England, Germany, the Netherlands, and Sweden. In addition to similarity in religious affiliation and after taking into account preferences for same-ethnic and same-gender friends, sharing the same level of religious identification predicted a greater likelihood to become friends.

To summarize, the religious identity of acculturating youth – in particular Muslim youth – is successfully transmitted by immigrant parents and further reinforced by religious peer groups. In contrast, more majority contact has been related to attenuated religious identification and practice among Muslim youth. In view of converging evidence of ethnic and religious segregation in friendship networks, however, peer relations tend to reinforce a shared religious identity in minority youth.

## Contextualizing Religious Identity: Intercultural Relations With Receiving Societies

Beyond the family and peer context, the acculturation of minority youth is affected by the specific acculturation context in which they grow up. For Muslim minorities, in particular, this context has become increasingly hostile in most Western immigrant-receiving societies in the last two decades, which adds additional challenges to the religious identity development and acculturation of this particular minority group (Phalet, Baysu, & Van Acker, 2015). In their review of psychological research on Muslim minorities in North America, Amer and Bagasra (2013) document that the number of studies increased dramatically after the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, and the largest share of the literature published after this date analyzes the position of Muslim minorities in the West from an intercultural perspective. These studies contribute to our understanding of how acculturating Muslims deal with the increasing and more blatant Islamophobia they encountered after this watershed event, and most focus on measures of perceived discrimination in relation to religious identity (development) and acculturation outcomes. However, most findings in this literature pertain to (young) adults, and fewer studies have addressed Muslim youth' responses to the specific acculturation context in which their religious development occurs.

The 2017 study by Cain and colleagues is an exception as it documents an association between religious change

during adolescence and heightened experiences of discrimination (Cain et al., 2017). This finding echoes the positive association between perceived discrimination and religious identification that has been found in (young) adult samples (Fleischmann, Phalet, & Klein, 2011; Kunst, Tajamal, Sam, & Ulleberg, 2012; Maliepaard, Gijsberts, & Phalet, 2015; Verkuyten & Yildiz, 2007). Although these findings reveal that tense intercultural relations generally go together with increased orientations toward one's religious group, longitudinal or experimental evidence that establishes the causal order of the relation between discriminatory experiences and religious identification is lacking to date.

Going beyond religious identification, other studies additionally examined the national identification of Muslim minorities in line with a bidimensional approach to identification patterns among acculturating groups (cf. supra). This research attests to the importance of the local and national acculturation context in shaping the acculturation of Muslim minority young adults. Specifically, religious (and ethnic) minority identities were more negatively associated with European national identities across cities and countries at higher levels of perceived personal discrimination and Islamophobia, whereas the absence of discriminatory and prejudiced treatment implied greater compatibility between these identities, thus facilitating integrationist identification patterns (Fleischmann & Phalet, 2016; Kunst, Sadeghi, Tahir, Sam, & Thomsen, 2016).

In addition to the local and national acculturation context, gender affects the acculturation process of Muslim minority youth and how they react to discriminatory experiences. In their comparison of middle and late adolescent Turkish-Belgian youth, Güngör and Bornstein (2009) found lower levels of perceived discrimination and better adaptation among girls compared to boys, and this gender gap was widening over time. This suggests that the challenges brought by a tense acculturation climate disproportionately affect Muslim boys. Heightened levels of perceived discrimination do not only result in lower identity compatibility and adaptation among acculturating Muslim boys, they were also related to more conservative gender-role values which distinguished Turkish boys, but not girls, more strongly from the cultural values of the mainstream in a study of same-sex Turkish-German parent-child dyads (Idema & Phalet, 2007).

To summarize, existing research documents that tensions in local and national acculturation contexts are related to religious identity, its compatibility with other identities and adaptation among Muslim youth and young adults. Against this background, the prevalent separationism among Muslim youth compared to the preference for integrationism among non-Muslim immigrant youth (Berry et al., 2006) may be explained from the more hostile

acculturation climate that this religious minority group has been facing (Amer & Bagasra, 2013). Longitudinal and cross-cultural comparative evidence is needed, however, to assess the causal mechanisms involved, as most studies to date have been using cross-sectional designs and based developmental conclusions on the comparison of different age groups.

# Conclusion

Against the background of increasing societal and scholarly interest in a religious dimension of acculturation, this review brought together empirical research on the role of religious identity in the acculturation of immigrant origin youth. Our overview mainly focused on Muslim minority youth (complemented with findings from [young] adults when no research on children and adolescents was available) since this religious minority is at the center of research attention as well as societal debates, and other religious minority groups are often not present in sufficiently large numbers to allow meaningful cross-cultural comparisons. While our review is thus able to shed light on acculturation among a religious minority group that is under heightened scrutiny and can therefore contribute to debunking some of the recurrent ideas in public discourses about the position of Muslims in Western societies, it also highlights the need for future research that takes a more comprehensive comparative approach and also studies immigrant children with other religious denominations. With the present state of the field, it is hard to say whether the patterns we identified are generic to the role of religion in the acculturation of immigrant youth, or to what extent they document a specific Islamic variant of religious acculturation.

With this limitation in mind, we conclude our review by returning to the proposed developmental and contextual approach (see Figure 1) with a view to answering our three research questions. In reply to our first question which compared religious development of Muslim minority youth with that of non-Muslim peers, we found that levels of religious identification tend to be higher among Muslim youth compared to other minority and majority youth at all ages. In line with multiple pathways of identity development, the religious identification of Muslim minorities is mostly stable or increasing throughout adolescence, yet the pace and direction of religious changes differ within and between Muslim minority youth and their Christian minority and majority peers and across the Atlantic. Second, we asked how religious identity affects the acculturative adaptation of Muslim youth. In line with the adaptive function of identity development, and looking beyond ethnic or religious group differences in adaptation problems, religious

identification contributed significantly and positively to the psychological adaptation of Muslim minority youth. The adaptive benefits of religious identity in the acculturation context are related to the fact that religious involvement is closely entwined with a strong orientation toward heritage culture values and identities. At the same time, being a religious Muslim was either dissociated or conflicting with being part of the mainstream culture: depending on the specific acculturation context, a negative or no significant association was found. In Germany, for instance, being a religious Muslim negatively predicted German culture adoption, which suggests an adaptive disadvantage for religious Muslim youth in mainstream cultural settings. Third, we applied an ecological approach to the religious identity development of minority youth. More specifically, we discussed how interpersonal relations within immigrant families and adolescents' peer networks – and intercultural relations with the majority society, for instance when minority adolescents perceive religious discrimination, affect the acculturation and religious identity of Muslim youth. Not surprisingly and in line with research among nonimmigrant youth, religious identity development is strongly tied to the religious identities of parents and (particularly co-ethnic) peers. What is distinctive about Muslim youth, however, is the success of intergenerational transmission, with less religious decline across generations compared to other minority and majority youth. We have interpreted relatively strong and stable religious identities among Muslim minority youth in light of religious reaffirmation within immigrant families and in response to public hostility in the receiving societies. Moreover, Muslims either self-select or are more channeled into co-ethnic and co-religious rather than cross-ethnic and cross-religious friendship networks, which in turn bolster their religious identity. Starting from findings of religious identity conflict with the commitment to mainstream cultural values or identities in some acculturation contexts, our review revealed the importance of the quality of intercultural relations for the acculturative adaptation of Muslim youth (and young adults). Contradicting the widespread notion that – due to an allegedly inherent cultural conflict between Muslim and Western values and lifestyles – Muslim religious identity would be at odds with an orientation toward the mainstream culture and identification with the receiving society, several studies showed that this is only one possible outcome, which can be explained from higher levels of perceived discrimination and Islamophobia. In a nutshell, this review on the religious identity development and the acculturative adaptation of immigrant minority youth highlights multiple developmental pathways which come with adaptation benefits as well as costs depending on the quality of interpersonal and intercultural relations in specific acculturation contexts.

## Acknowledgment

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