



## Keeping It Halal: The Everyday Lives of Muslim American Teenage Boys

**John O'Brien**

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*Keeping It Halal is compellingly relevant and paints a picture of the modern Muslim-American experience.*

Comprehensive fieldwork and engaging candor elevate John O'Brien's *Keeping It Halal: The Everyday Lives of Muslim American Teenage Boys* to the upper echelon of cultural study.

Following a group of teenaged male friends, collectively known as the "Legendz" after their sometimes active hip-hop group, O'Brien paints a picture of young men constructing identities despite living within a system of discrepancy.

The desire to maintain religious mores as young Muslim men while also participating in and focusing on decidedly teenage concepts like being cool, having romantic relationships, and keeping up with the latest music is a source of much planning and effort, and many of the young men struggle to strike an adequate balance.

Though it focuses specifically on the lives of the Legendz, the research presented in *Keeping It Halal* is compellingly relevant and paints a picture of the modern Muslim-American experience.

The young men are shown to present "low-key Islam" in public—a constrained means of maintaining their cultural identity while trying to avoid public scorn. It becomes clear that this burden is universal for many Muslim Americans because, though Muslim Americans are citizens, "almost half of the American people still believe that there is an inherent association between Islam and violence."

Despite navigating a country rampant with extreme Islamophobia, the Legendz, along with their cultural contemporaries, work together to establish individual autonomy while still adhering to the tenets of Islam. They do this by adapting popular teenage behavior into more Islamic-friendly modes—for example, by adapting prominent hip-hop dance moves in order to desexualize the motions while maintaining their "cool" factor and cultural relevance.

The text is a tight mix of analytical examination and genuine kindness. O'Brien's great success is that his experience with the subject is firsthand; he worked with the young men for over three years in the City Mosque. It is this involvement that gives the text a fresh perspective. Instead of just peering in for the sake of composing sociological research, O'Brien dedicated his life to the study—a commitment that shines through in his writing.

*Keeping It Halal* is truly enlightening, offering a snapshot of lives that are vastly underrepresented in American cultural discourse.

AMANDA ADAMS (University Press 2017)

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