

Dr Krista Riley

“God is Greater than our Limited Understanding”: Muslim Feminist Strategies and Sexual Diversity

This paper focuses on blogs as sites where new Muslim feminist approaches are being explored and developed, arguing that online spaces such as blogs often serve as particularly fruitful platforms for Muslim feminist work to take place. More specifically, it examines how queer issues are discussed on four blogs based in Canada and the United States. All four bloggers identify as Muslims, and all have frequently referred to canonical religious texts on a number of issues, from using hadiths to argue against excluding women from mosque spaces to re-reading contentious passages of the Qur'an to argue in favour of gender equality. And yet, in the writing about queer issues on all four of these blogs, re-readings of Qur'an or hadith are almost never the main focus, although never are they rejected either. Instead, the writers rely most heavily on a range of other strategies, including the use of personal testimony and appeals to principles of compassion, and justice, and personal integrity, in order to affirm queer sexualities and to denounce homophobia. In doing so, they find other ways of locating their perspectives within Islamic traditions and values. Importantly, these strategies also point to the gaps that exist in many of the discussions about sexual diversity within Muslim communities, which often centre on the legal permissibility of particular acts and entirely omit many of the other personal, relational, and societal dimensions of the issues. I argue that the examples provided by these blogs reflect a productive broadening of conversations about gender and sexual diversity among Muslims, and point to more expansive possibilities for what it means to bring an Islamic perspective to such conversations.



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Krista Melanie Riley is a pedagogical counsellor and researcher at Vanier College in Montreal, where she supports several of the college's academic programs and leads work on equity and accessibility in education. Dr. Riley holds a PhD in Communication Studies from Concordia University in Montreal, where her research focused on discussions of gender, bodies, sexuality, and space among Muslim feminist bloggers in North America. More recently, she co-directed a Participatory Action Research project alongside her colleague Leila Bdeir to look at the experiences of Muslim cégep students in Quebec. She is the former Editor-in-Chief of Muslimah Media Watch, a blog dedicated to looking at media and popular culture representations of Muslim women.