

The Self in Society

Belonging, Environment & Identity

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"When I thought of Turkish, I thought, they are all gangsters or selling drugs, but when I came [to this school] I realized, they are also normal people. The media try to give bad impressions"

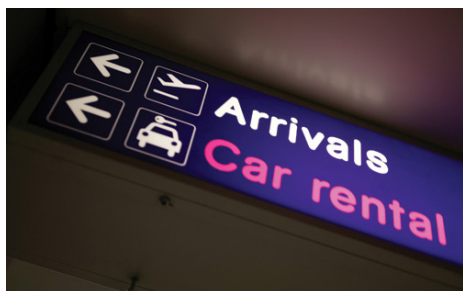
[Germany, age 19]



Belonging in a place and neighbourhood, feeling well in one's environment and a positive concept of self and identity are important for a person's well-being. The well-being of young migrant men can further be influenced by how they are perceived. They are faced with many ascriptions from the outside, foremost from the media, who produce and reproduce stereotypical images relating to migrants in general, and young male migrants in particular. Studies suggest that young migrant men 'work' with these societal ascriptions and use them, adopt, reject or re-define them. In this process they seek to construct a congruent self-image, which is important for their well-being.

Cultural differences, changes due to migration and belonging

Many respondents appreciate positively in the country they migrated to the good organisation of the societies, security, freedom, sports, job opportunities and mainly the good education opportunities. Nearly all participants of the study mentioned one major difference between the homeland and the receiving country with regards to social ties and forms of interaction: Whereas in the homeland of the migrants from the South and the East state to have stronger and tighter ties and relationships that are recalled as "real friendships", where one also supports other people altruistically, the majority of relationships and interactions in the receiving countries are materialistic, functional based on "rational choices". Some interviewees suffer from these.



Perceptions from the outside and their impact on young men's well-being

Several respondents felt that they needed to overcompensate for their immigrant status and the negative anticipation it brought with it. This was especially true for those young men who on the basis of their skin colour belonged to a visible ethnic minority.

"People judge a lot on appearance ... If you're black you're already judged negatively, if your hair is messy and you're dressed badly, you do not make a good impression." [Italy, age 21]

Being judged on stereotypes was perceived as a problem by many young men: Several respondents felt they were often perceived as potential "trouble-makers" when they are out in public spaces. They experienced this as an unjust ascription. Some reacted in a defeatist manner: *"There is nothing we can do, it is up to us to show the difference"* [UK, age 22]. Others felt hurt or claimed they did not care what others think. Common was a repeated justification against negative imagery and ensuing negative anticipation.



A lot of origin of negative stereotyping was attributed to "the media" or "the mainstream media". This affected in particular young men of Muslim faith. Many of them felt their religion was primarily associated with terrorism and violence and were concerned how this affected them. The urge to explain and justify themselves, drawing a clear line between them and extremists, was common. The feeling of being misunderstood and stereotyped on the basis of their religion caused some to stop talking about their religion altogether. A young man said: *"When I see how things are portrayed [on TV] even I get scared! And it's exactly because of these pictures that people discriminate against us."* [Germany, age 18]



Neighbourhood

Many interviewees reported of a racist climate in some neighbourhoods – mainly the deprived ones with high unemployment rates. Here even young native kids adopt the racist attitudes of their parents. This leads in the extreme to very radical perspectives on discrimination: *"White only area, I don't feel safe, I feel discrimination. (...) in a White only neighbourhood I don't feel comfortable."* [UK, age 18] In consequence certain "bad" neighbourhood(s) of their city, where troubles might be predictable, are avoided. These include areas where drunken people are regularly to be found as troubles, racial insults are predictable and areas where serious crimes and fights are happening. Some interviewees reported they already got used to it, but also got used to know how to stay out of trouble.

Avoiding to paint a picture here of a population of young migrant men that live in complete segregation it has to be corrected that there are number of respondents who perceive their city as a "safe" and as a "nice" place where one has no problems and where it also easy to live. This was stated especially for cities where other migrants and foreigners live. Some youth living in multi-cultural areas identified strongly with their neighbourhood. "Nice and safe places" build especially for young people in the city were very much appreciated by some of the interviewees. Also a need was voiced for more non-commercialised spots and meeting places. There was a desire for free-entrance meeting places that could be also used for meeting up with non-migrant youth.

References

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