Second Generation, Not Second Class

How Role Models Can Help Second-Generation Muslim Youth Form Positive Hybrid Identities

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Introduction

My interest in youth role models stems from a personal experience I had several years ago in the United States. During high school, I tutored teenage refugees at a regional resettlement organization called the International Institute. After the students’ homework was finished, I always stayed to chat, enjoying the camaraderie that built up over the sessions. But one Afghan 17-year-old never stayed with the others. Fatima always left early, hurrying out of the Institute with her headscarf trailing behind her.

One week, Fatima arrived early and pulled me aside, asking if we could go somewhere private. Although I was surprised, I agreed, and we entered the empty computer lab, where Fatima revealed that she had a secret boyfriend. She told me that her parents and friends disapproved of pre-marriage dating, and she was worried they would find out. Then she asked me what she should do.

Her question made me enormously uncomfortable. I never like advising friends or peers to disobey their parents, but I also couldn’t truthfully tell her I thought it was wrong to date someone she cared about. I thought about Fatima’s question for awhile after I left the Institute that afternoon. In fact, it was her question that first sparked my interest in immigration policy. I wondered why Fatima approached me with her problem – why didn’t she have anyone else to talk to about the conflict she felt? Teenagers everywhere have wishes that diverge from parental rules, but Fatima’s confusion was compounded by the particular loneliness that often accompanies migration. Not only did she have to make new friends, but she also had to balance the possibilities of a new environment with her parents’ expectations in a way that her American friends didn’t have to. Her problem indicated to me a gap in the coping mechanisms available to immigrant girls. Fatima obviously wanted to talk to another teenager, and I was the only teenage tutor at the International Institute. I began to wonder what other “non-traditional” needs immigrants had, and how social service agencies like the International Institute could best cater to them.

When I arrived in the Netherlands this spring, I didn’t expect to relive my experience with Fatima. But through our lectures and discussions with activists, scholars, and leaders in the Muslim community, I quickly learned that second-generation Muslim
youths in the Netherlands may have an equally difficult time balancing cultures and expectations. Soon after many Muslim guest workers arrived in the Netherlands, they began raising families in the country. Now their children comprise the next generation of Dutch citizens, having grown up in the Netherlands speaking Dutch and taking part in Dutch civil society through schools and community programs. The Dutch government uses the word “youth” (or “jongeren” in Dutch) to denote people aged 14-24. In fact, many more second-generation immigrants fall into this range than “native” Dutch youths. According to the EU Cities Report, over 40% of the foreign population in the Netherlands is below the age of 20.¹

As most teenagers do, many Muslim teens go through a searching process where they question and redefine their values, customs, habits, and preferences. It’s a process that has a reflection in Islamic theology as “itjihad,” or “searching.” Teens may seek guidance with questions about important religious or social issues, ranging from praying to dating to sexuality. Equally important are questions of building a “dual” or “hybrid” identity as Dutch Muslims. Of course, the idea of a dual identity is controversial. Some scholars suggest that it reinforces the idea of a divide between a Muslim and a Dutch identity, and some youths don’t consciously ‘assign’ themselves an identity. However, in practical terms, many youths take cues from a variety of sources, including their religion, traditions from their parents’ home country, Dutch culture, and media sources. Youths attend local schools and mosques, they listen to Dutch and Moroccan musicians, they adopt Dutch and Turkish habits, and they may speak Dutch and another language. In short, in practical terms they may feel equally at home in, or equally alienated by, two different cultures.

What most captivated me most about young Dutch-Muslims’ situation is what captured my attention in Fatima’s situation as well. Who can (and do) youths turn to for advice about balancing parents’ expectations with peers’, combining cultural loyalties and practices, or creating a ‘multicultural’ identity? Unlike some of their “native” Dutch counterparts, Muslim teens may find traditional avenues of support unhelpful. For

second-generation youths, the generation gap between youth and adults can be difficult to manage. Parents may not speak Dutch well, and may not have dealt with the same pressures when they were teenagers as their children do in a Dutch context. On the other hand, school counselors may not understand religious or cultural concerns. According to Farid Tabarki, a researcher on Muslim youth identity in the Netherlands, “counselors and parents aren’t making the link” between generations of Muslims in the Netherlands.² Religious leaders, too, may be poorly positioned to offer youths advice. Many religious leaders themselves originate from foreign countries such as Turkey, Morocco, or Saudi Arabia, so they are as ill-prepared as parents for offering advice about concerns specific to a Dutch context. Furthermore, many imams don’t speak Dutch, making it difficult to mentor youths who’ve lost the connection with their parents’ mother tongue.

With these difficulties in mind, I chose to focus my research on the role models, mentors, and ‘heroes’ that Muslim youths turn to for guidance about forming a Dutch-Muslim identity and dealing with discrimination, cultural pressures, or other social problems. Role models provide multiple functions for youths with identity issues: they answer religious or cultural questions, they offer guidance about specific careers, and give advice about dealing with competing loyalties or discrimination. They also provide inspiration; youths learn that Muslims can be socially and professionally acceptable, helping them accept the multiple facets of their identities.

Young Muslims in the Netherlands have a much wider existing network than Afghan refugees in St. Louis, so the guides and advisory resources available to them are much more varied and widespread. Nonetheless, my research uncovered similarities in the qualities and personalities that youths seek in role models. Many youth workers and youths reported that, like Fatima in St. Louis, youths sought people who were similar to them in age, demographic, and social situation. Youths admired older peers and relatives, but also sometimes famous Muslim comedians and sports stars, who were thought to provide inspiration and an example of social acceptance.

Perhaps most telling, however, is that youths sought role models who had successfully dealt with social discrimination and personal confusion to become

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competent, well-respected professionals. Instead of politicians, who reacted to youths in
the most politically beneficial way, youths admired members of their community who
have overcome personal frustration or social ostracization. They admired figures who
stood up for injustice, but who also had a positive outlook on life.

In addition to my research about role models’ qualities, I also investigated how
the Dutch government and civil organizations approach role modeling. Many
government programs target youth unemployment, criminality, and radicalization, but
identity issues are left mainly for community organizations, which rely on role models to
help youths set goals, build self-esteem, and integrate into community social networks.
In my recommendations, I suggest ways to strengthen current government and
community approaches to role-modeling and identity formation.

After laying out my research question and methodology, I describe and analyze
these findings further throughout my paper, which is divided into five sections. In
Section One, I describe the difficulties that second-generation Muslim youths face when
growing up in the Netherlands. In Section Two, I illustrate how these difficulties may
lead to social alienation and its symptoms, such as radicalization, low self-esteem, or
criminality. In Section Three I present existing government or community programs
which target these symptoms, and in Section Four, I describe how they may fall short of
preventing social problems because they fail to address youths’ identity crisis. In Section
Four I (finally) introduce the concept of role modeling, and analyze its divergence from
traditional approaches, as well its benefit for youths in an identity crisis. Finally, in
Section Five I analyze the most effective qualities of role models from the perspective of
two different groups: people who work with youths as social workers or community
leaders, and key youth figures in the Dutch-Muslim community, through a discussion
about the best approach to role modeling.
Research Question

My initial research questions were:

*What role models are available to second-generation Dutch-Muslim youths?* and *How do these role models help Muslim youth balance identities and shape their behavior?*

After talking with several interview subjects and hearing certain topics consistently come up in conversation, I shifted the focus of my question to include government approaches to role modeling and qualities of effective role models:

*“What qualities make role models effective?”* and *“How can municipal and national government best support programs which encourage role models for second-generation Muslim youths?”*
Methodology

Many youths have expressed frustration – to me, to their mentors/social workers, and to the media – that they are tired of being talked about rather than being talked to. I must admit that I am doing just that by writing this paper; my experiences interacting with young Dutch Muslims were limited to a few personal meetings and the cyber sphere. However, I try to present issues affecting youth from a youth perspective, sympathetic to the confusion surrounding youth identities and the frustration of being constantly discussed.

I conducted my project in three parts, all of which contributed to my analysis in parts three and four of this paper. First, I used internet databases and local media to research the current status of Muslim youths in the Netherlands, from the difficulties they face while maturing, to Dutch society’s general viewpoint/stereotypes of Muslim youths, to government or municipal-level programs targeting youths. In addition, I relied on several of the class lectures presented at Alleato. I was especially influenced by the lectures of Ben Abdul, Farid Tabarki and Mohammed Cheppih, who inspired interest in the topic of youth and led me to my eventual research question.

Second, to gain a wider perspective on the opinions of Muslim youths, I interviewed social workers and community leaders who work with a broad cross-section of youths, through their positions as official (government-paid) social workers, leaders of community organizations, or researchers. By talking to these figures, I hoped to gain a general idea of what Muslim youths, as a generalized group, think about role models in Dutch society. My interviewees work with multiple youths in a variety of situations, and I hoped that they could synthesize youths’ opinions as well as providing me with some analysis stemming from their extended work. (Many of the figures were, in fact, role models for youth themselves.) I interviewed: Farid Tabarki, researcher at the University of Amsterdam and for FORUM and Dutch PBS; Ferdinand Visser and Assouz Naouri, director and manager (respectively) of the Buurtvader Program in Ijsselstein; Mustapha Ouatiq and Miriam Zandvliet, researchers at Alleato; Faisal Mirza, co-founder of the youth website www.wijblijvenhier.nl; and Fatimazohra Hadjar, a social worker, founder of the Stichting KAP and consultant on youth issues. I also sat in on a discussion
between Ferdinand Visser, Assouz Naouri, and Said Bensellam about “best practices” in youth programs. Bensellam runs a community-funded social service and youth organization in the Slotervaart area of Amsterdam. His organization, Elsevier, arranges language, technology, and practical classes for Slotervaart residents, provides an area for local youth to hang out, runs a neighborhood role model program (also called “Neighborhood Fathers”), and organizes service projects for Morocco.

Each of the interviews took place in person, except for one over the phone. None of the interviews were recorded, although I took careful notes during each and wrote down specific quotes if I thought they’d be useful for my project.

I initially planned a third part of the project: talking to youths themselves by posting questions on the website marokko.nl. However, due to time and logistics constraints, this part wasn’t completed. Therefore the third and final part of my research was a meeting of key youth figures at the Al Kabir mosque in Amsterdam. The meeting, which was arranged through Mohammed Cheppih, occurs once each month at the mosque and involves a book discussion. There were approximately 15 people present, all of whom were involved in the mosque in some way and most of whom were under the age of 30. I attended the meeting with two other students, and we described our individual research topics and asked the group for feedback after introducing ourselves. Although I didn’t ask specific questions, a couple of different people explained what they thought of about Muslim role models in the Netherlands, and then other group members responded. It was almost a process of free association, where members were speaking of what they first thought of when I asked about role models.

I organized my paper based on these divisions, tracing youths’ problems to existing and future solutions. For context, I begin by describing second-generation youths’ current situation in the Netherlands, including youths’ identity concerns and their external manifestations as misbehavior. As part of youths’ current status, I describe government programs targeting youths, and then move to an area that government programs have largely missed: role modeling. After attempting to define a “role model,” I first discuss their possible function for youth, and then describe the role model qualities that youths find most engaging. Although a role model’s function and personal qualities are deeply intertwined, I separate them until the conclusion in order to expose youths’
varied and sometimes competing ideas about what makes role models effective. In the conclusion, I integrate theory and evidence by analyzing what role models’ effective qualities say about role models’ function for second-generation Muslim youths. I also suggest ways for the Dutch government to support role models through community-based programs.
Youths in any culture have difficulty defining their identities and differentiating themselves from their parents and families. During their teenage and early adult years, youths must learn how to control their behavior away from their parents, to deal with outside society, and to discover the values that will guide their lives. For second-generation Muslim immigrants in the Netherlands, however, this process is especially difficult. Muslim youths face four difficulties that non-Muslim, non-immigrant-background Dutch youths don’t have to consider.

The number of Muslim immigrants to the Netherlands has tripled in the last 50 years. Now number almost one million, these immigrants have carved out a niche in Dutch society for their language, food, and traditions, as evident from the proliferation of “teehuizer” and döner restaurants. However, the spread of ‘ethnic’ food and language don’t ensure the easy combination of cultures in the Netherlands. These immigrants’ children, now teenagers facing a media and culture still rooted in very traditional ideas of “Dutch-ness,” may have difficulty forming dual identities as Dutch Muslims, since their parents, teachers, and religious leaders are unable to provide advice on issues affecting contemporary teenagers.

There are four primary areas in which ‘native’ Dutch youths’ experiences differ from second-generation Muslim youths’. Not all second-generation Muslim immigrants face the same social issues, of course. In particular, there are differences in the ways Turkish and Moroccan youths deal with society through family, language, and social or religious organizations. These differences will be discussed in further detail below when they become relevant.

**Different family environments than Dutch youths**

The first divergence that second-generation youths may have from ‘native’ youths is that their parents’ methods of child-rearing differ, utilizing different techniques and

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emphasizing different values. Several interview subjects mentioned that immigrant parents, especially those from Turkey and Morocco, may be accustomed to letting children run around their neighborhoods without supervision. In non-Western societies, particularly in Africa and the Middle East, child-rearing is a community process, where neighbors, friends, and family members collectively look after children. As a result, individual parent supervision isn’t necessary; parents don’t have to take children to different activities and can leave them in the street.\(^4\) This contrasts with Dutch child-rearing habits, which tend to emphasize individual parental responsibility and supervision. When immigrants from Islamic countries allow their children to play in the neighborhood, then, many Dutch parents misinterpret the youth gatherings as nuisances.

Similarly, immigrant parents are less likely to watch after their children’s peers. Since parents don’t usually supervise their children as directly as Dutch parents, they are less aware of their children’s peer group. Mohammed Cheppih suggested that parents are usually the first people who serve as youths’ role models, and who direct them towards positive role models and peer groups. Parents who don’t take an active role in guiding their children’s peers are more likely to have children who veer towards neighborhood leaders or powerful peers as models, whether these mentors are positive or not. As sociologists Trees Pels and Mariette de Haan note in their research on Moroccan families in the Netherlands, “due to the social distance between the worlds of peers and adults, the socializing role of peers may be substantial. Precisely for this reason peers are both praised and feared for their influence. Moroccan parents have become more wary of the influence of peers in the Dutch context. Due to the fragmentation of the informal network of family and friends after migration, social control by the wider community has become less self-evident and children’s whereabouts and choice of friends are less easily monitored.”\(^5\)

Sometimes differences in family experiences are more attributable to socioeconomic status and class differences. Many immigrant parents originate from rural areas, meaning they are often less educated and less wealthy than their Dutch peer


These parents might not have the time or financial resources to pay attention to their children constantly or to pay for childcare services. Parents’ education influences youths in another way as well: studies in the Netherlands point to a mother’s education level as the best predictor of her children’s educational success. Second-generation youths with low-education parents are thus more likely to attend schools that offer fewer advanced career opportunities, such as VMBOs or HAVOs. Lower-educated parents of any religion or ethnicity are also more likely to have inter-familial problems, such as divorce, abuse, and neglect. Fatimazohra Hadjar stressed that one common but frequently overlooked problem is that of sexual abuse. Second-generation immigrant youths are likelier than ‘native’ Dutch youths to have suffered from sexual abuse. At the same time, both Moroccan and Dutch society refuse to openly acknowledge these problems, leading youths to internalize them and possibly have emotional problems later.

Immigrant parents are also likely to maintain cultural ties with their homeland, including practicing religious or cultural rituals, celebrating Islamic or national holidays, cooking traditional food, wearing traditional clothing, watching media from their country of origin, or teaching children traditional games. Maintaining these practices is natural and expected for immigrants, but when young Muslims discover that they have different traditions at home than their peers, they may feel alienated.

Closely related to differences in rituals are differences in cultural values that are stressed in Dutch and Muslim immigrant families. “Cultural value differences” are controversial, because they over-emphasize difference rather than acknowledging similarities, but the concept is nonetheless useful on a general level. According to cultural philosopher Youssef Azgheri, Western and Eastern cultures (generally defined) prioritize different values when dealing with other people. In particular, Western cultures, particularly Dutch culture, stress the importance of bluntness, honesty,

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7 Lecture by Farid Tabarki at Alleato, February 28, 2008.
individuality, and self-sufficiency. In contrast, Eastern cultures, such as Turkish or Moroccan society, value connection with family, politeness, and community relationships over individual values. Familiar with openness between parents and children, but rather loyalty, for example. These value differences will be discussed more in-depth in the next section, but I introduce them here because they first arise from the focus in the family environment. Parents who emphasize familial responsibility, for example, will raise children who have different values from those whose parents emphasized self-sufficiency. A survey of second-generation youths in 1994, for example, found that “Moroccan as well as Turkish adolescents value conformity and achievement more and egalitarianism and individualism less than Dutch adolescents.”

These cultural and value differences ensure that youths learn different “proper” types of behavior in different contexts. The differences are especially stark for Moroccan youths, who lack a strong ethnic community and are therefore more “acculturated” into Dutch society. As Pels and de Haan point out, “Moroccan adolescents are traditionally expected to acquire a social sense that enables them to ‘behave’ in different social situations. They may be assumed to acquire such skills more than Dutch adolescents because they are socialized in multiple social contexts, such as those dominated by peers, by family members and other adults of their in-group and by the Dutch and their institutions.”

Feeling of disrespect or injustice from Dutch society

Although dual nationality has been acceptable in the Netherlands since 1991, in practice Dutch government and society seem unwilling to accept dual identities, either legally or culturally. Most Moroccan and Turkish-origin youths maintain the citizenship of their parents’ host country, but are also eligible to apply for Dutch citizenship, leading one immigration scholar to argue that “the transmission of citizenship to the second

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Many youths report feeling “caught” between two cultures. As mentioned above, second-generation youths’ parents and families may emphasize different traits than Dutch youths’, leading Muslim youths to feel conflicted as to which ones are most “acceptable.” They exist in a “dynamic socializing context. They have to deal both with the (changing) child rearing values and practices in their homes and with the challenge of moving through social contexts that may pose widely different demands.”

The conflict extends to language and religion as well. The Netherlands strongly emphasizes Dutch language skills as a “measure” or “symbol” of integration. However, when friends, teachers, family, and imams speak a different language it can be difficult. Second-generation youths may not speak Dutch at the same level as youths who speak it at home, leading to a sense of estrangement from Dutch peers. Many youths grow up speaking Dutch, however, and may also worry about losing a language connection with parents and religious leaders. This is especially true of Moroccan-origin youths; because the Moroccan community is less tightly organized than the Turkish one, youths are less likely to speak Arabic and therefore more likely to speak a different language than their parents or imam.

Beyond simply perceiving conflict between their families’ and communities’ values, Muslim youths may feel that Dutch society, as represented by media figures, politicians, co-workers and neighbors, stereotypes, misrepresents, and unfairly maligns their religion, cultural values, or even ethnicity. Youths may realize that stores offer special Easter foods but no Eid foods at the end of Ramadan, for example. Or they might resent that Muslim youths born in the Netherlands are still referred to as “allochtoons” – “non-native Dutch.” It is always difficult to create a religious or cultural community as

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16 Interview with Farid Tabarki on April 14, 2008.
17 Although this word is fraught with tension and political controversy, it loosely means ‘non-Dutch’
a minority, but Dutch society actively and aggressively targets perceived differences between its minority groups and ‘native’ citizens, leading not just to feelings of neglect, but of victimization. Some prominent politicians have openly criticized not only individual Muslims, but the entire Islamic religion. Geert Wilders’ film “Fitna,” for example, targets Qur’anic passages as inherently oppressive. During a parliamentary meeting, he explicitly stated “I don’t hate Muslims, I hate Islam.”\(^{18}\) Similarly, newspaper columns or media shows like Pauw & Witteman often feature conservative Muslims and highlight theological differences between Islam and Christianity or secularism.

These attacks create a perception that Dutch society wants Muslim immigrants to leave to country, but so does the Netherlands’ delay in offering social integration services to immigrants. Because Turkish and Moroccan migrants originally emigrated as temporary workers, the Dutch government didn’t provide Dutch language classes or social and economic integration help. The government’s hesitance to provide language services (among others) angers young Muslims, who think that society disrespected their parents’ labor contributions.\(^{19}\) Similarly frustrating are continuing disparities in education and employment between second-generation Muslims and non-Muslims. Although they mainly exist for youths of Moroccan and Turkish backgrounds\(^{20}\), disparities help create the perception that the government isn’t interested in Muslim youths’ success. Muslim youths also have much lower levels of employment than their peers, which is partially as result of discrimination.\(^{21}\) Small-scale studies have shown that job applicants with “Muslim” or “allochtoon” names in a variety of career paths fare worse among employers than their colleagues with “Dutch” names.\(^{22}\) In turn, second-generation Muslim youths are further stereotyped as lazy or uneducated. One famous migration scholar sums up the paradox well, arguing that “if the original immigration

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\(^{18}\) Ian Traynor. “‘I don’t hate Muslims. I hate Islam’ says Holland’s rising political star.” The Observer. February 17, 2008.

\(^{19}\) Farid Tabarki notes that many young Muslims see their parents as heroes for sacrificing a stable home to achieve opportunities for their children. When society fails to provide social integration services, then it angers youth. From an interview on April 14, 2008.

\(^{20}\) In fact, Iranian and Iraqi youths have, on average, higher educational attainment than native Dutch youths, according to a lecture by Dr. Isabelle Vitters at Alleato, February 22, 2008.


\(^{22}\) Lecture with Farid Tabarki at Alleato, February 28, 2008
policies were designed to keep migrants in the status of temporary mobile workers, then they make it likely that settlement will take place under unsatisfactory and discriminatory conditions. Moreover, official ideologies of temporary migration create expectations within the receiving population. If a temporary sojourn turns into settlement, and the governments concerned refuse to admit this, then it is the immigrants who are blamed for the resulting problems.”

Second-generation youths, who speak Dutch and pay attention to popular media, are especially attuned to this discrimination, stereotyping, and perceived injustice. A survey by the research organization Top-X, for example, found that 85% of Muslim youths surveyed were offended by Geert Wilders’ film. Youths have responded to the perception that Dutch society wants immigrants to leave in their own initiatives. The youth website wijblijvenhier.nl (“We’re Staying Here”) emphatically states that Muslims are a part of the Netherlands, publicly countering any suggestions to the contrary.

Lack of approachable religious leaders

Religion is often one of the primary guiding forces in a teenager’s life. Religion provides a stable set of rituals, values, and mentors that can help guide a teenager through the difficult process of maturation and development. Theological texts like the Koran, hadith, and sunna provide philosophical answers, or at least guidance, when youths first begin to question their values and surroundings. Islam actually has a term that acknowledges the process of spiritual searching: “itjihad” mirrors adolescents’ soul-searching by stressing personal inquiry and contemplation. Imams help lead youths through this process, by serving as mentors who advise youths about life questions and provide practical advice about adapting religious values to modern life.

Islam becomes especially important for second-generation immigrant youths, who may identify more as Muslims than as Moroccans, Turks, or even Dutchmen. Recent research suggests that “there is a marked difference in how the first and second generations perceive their religious identities. The first generation retains strong links to their national identity, while the second generation is more likely to view their shared

25 Lecture by Ben Amar at Alleato, February 14, 2008
religion, Islam, as being of more importance than a shared origin and language.” Part of the connection comes from Dutch society’s constant association of second-generation youths with Islam. Says anthropologist Martijn de Koning, Muslim girls and boys “are categorized first and foremost by others as Muslim. Therefore it’s not so crazy that Islam is an important part of Muslim youths’ identity.”

Aside from the guidance provided by imams themselves, mosques and religious organizations also offer youths a religious community for emotional support. They provide a physical meeting space to engage youths and keep them off the streets. In this meeting space, during worship or other activities, youths can meet older Muslims who can provide advice. They can also meet peers who have similar values. Their peers may be dealing with similar issues, and may in fact be better poised than the imams to offer advice about teenage problems.

Unfortunately, fewer youths than expected can take advantage of their mosque’s community, because few imams in the Netherlands preach in Dutch. For Dutch-Turkish youths, who often speak Turkish and are part of a tighter-knit ethno-religious community, the prayers’ language isn’t as important to the amount of guidance they have. For Dutch-Moroccan youths, however, who often speak only Dutch, Arab or Moroccan imams aren’t equipped to answer youths’ questions. As a result, youths have a religious gap in their lives. They may develop questions about the interpretation of specific Qur’anic passages or about the ‘proper’ role of Islam in their lives in the Netherlands. Lacking guidance from a local leader, they may turn to the internet, which is dominated by conservative Salafi interpretations and which may not provide the answers youth are seeking.

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28 Lecture by Mohammed Cheppih at Alleato, April 6, 2008;

29 Lecture by Mohammed Cheppih at Alleato, April 6, 2008. Cheppih referred to “Sheikh Google,” a term used to describe the increasing influence of religious authorities on the internet.
Lack of connection with Dutch-Muslim ‘pioneers’ and mentors

Cultural, upbringing, and religious differences create a divide between second-generation Muslim youths and their ‘native’ Dutch peers. They also face a divide between parents and imams, however, because parents faced different issues at the same age, and imams might not even speak the same language. These gaps ensure that second-generation youth are in a unique situation; neither Dutch peers, teachers, social workers and politicians, nor religious or ethnic community leaders can share the experience of balancing competing expectations and created a multicultural or hybrid identity. In a sense, second-generation Muslim youths inherently lack substantial numbers of role models, because they are the first generation in Europe to balance religion, culture, language, and family ties. Role models among second-generation peers simply haven’t had as much time to develop. The oldest second-generation youths are around the age of 30, and are just reaching an age where they can achieve prominence as successful professionals or in national media forums. However, role models are also poorly connected to youths by mentoring programs. Some youths have responded to this lack of older role models by positioning themselves as mentors and seizing media attention for youths – I will discuss this more in-depth in the following section.
Part Two: Effects of Cultural Confusion and Social Alienation

The scholars, activists, and community leaders I spoke to saw Muslim youths’ social alienation and cultural confusion as the “root causes” behind social problems that are usually attributed to second-generation immigrant youth. Newspapers and political shows often portray Muslim youths, and especially Moroccan youths, as “social menaces” or “nuisances.” Young men are branded with the term “hangjonggeren,” or “youths who hang around,” which has an annoying and even threatening connotation. Articles about young Muslim criminals and radicals capitalize on already-present Islamophobia and latent distrust of foreigners to create fear of an entire demographic (generation?) in the Netherlands. Politicians, in turn, play up on this fear to create socio-politic cleavages and advance politically. The oft-discussed criminality and radicalization are just the external consequences of social alienation, however. Youths also face internal confusion, which can lead to lack of self-esteem, social discomfort, and a feeling of disconnectedness or disengagement in the local community. As previously discussed, many youths, particularly Moroccan youths, feel they must balance different values and identities in different contexts. This personal confusion is one of the primary causes underlying poor performance in school, criminality, and radicalization.

Youths facing differences between their lives at home, at school, at the mosque, and in larger Dutch society could be described as undergoing an identity crisis. The term is controversial; many youths would not necessarily describe themselves as undergoing an identity crisis. According Mohammed Cheppih, youths may be embarrassed about their feelings or have too little self-esteem to talk with peers or mentors. Some youths may not even realize their social alienation is linked to identity issues; many teens (whether Muslim or not) are still developing self-reflection skills that would enable them to describe their identity concerns. A further problem with the concept of “identity crisis” is that it may not occur until youths face social disrespect, and in particular labor discrimination. Mustapha Ouatiq and Miriam Zandvliet mentioned that many youths in the Chrifi training sessions were attracted to the program because it emphasized

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techniques for finding jobs. Youths’ sense of displacement in the Netherlands often began when they had difficult applying for jobs, especially if they perceived discrimination because of their ethnicity or religion.

Perhaps even harder to define than an “identity crisis” is the word “identity” itself. As with an identity crisis, youths may not consciously “create” or acknowledge a specific identity, especially a “dual” identity. When asked to describe themselves, for instance, Muslim teenagers might say Dutch-Muslim, Dutch, Muslim, Dutch-Moroccan, Moroccan, or even “Dutch with an Eastern flair,” as writer Naeeda Aurangzeb described herself. Or they might choose another term unaffiliated with nationality, ethnicity, or religion, such as “female” or “soccer player.” Culture isn’t the only marker of identification, contrary to the immigration debate’s focus on it. Indeed, as Farid Tabarki noted, ‘culture’ is difficult to define. In ethnographic terms, culture means more than just a set of ethnic rituals, but rather any group’s set of habits and practices. Thus anthropologists can study rural culture, or high-school culture, or working-class culture, rather than just “Dutch” culture. Tabarki pointed out that there can be many different “cultures” within a supposedly homogenous group, including rural vs. urban origin, level of education, socioeconomic differences, and affiliation with a minority group (such as Berbers in Morocco or Kurds in Turkey).

In this framework, “multi-cultural” and “bi-cultural” identities are difficult because they focus on ethnic labels as the only significant “cultural” differences. Second-generation Muslim youths might have multiple “cultural” differences with children of native Dutch parents: differences in parents’ education level, marginalization status within a ‘home’ country, and rural or urban origin. Muslim youths may have been raised differently than autochtoon children, and they might have a different socioeconomic level than youths they encounter in schools, discos, or other public locations. Dutch-Muslim youths, just like ‘native’ Dutch youths around the country, share multiple ‘cultural’ differences. These differences might account for many of the confused feelings that Muslim youths have regarding their place in society, but asking

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31 As an example: ‘native’ Dutch youths living in Maastricht may feel more connected with Muslim youths from Maastricht than with autochtonen youths from Amsterdam, due to regional differences in habits and speaking style.
youths about a ‘bi-cultural’ identity ignores class or other differences in favor of religious and ethnic ones.

The idea of a ‘bi-cultural’ identity is also problematic because it reinforces the idea of a divide between a Muslim and a Dutch identity. Many Islamic values from the Qur’an, such as honesty and tolerance for people of other religions, are also embraced by Dutch citizens as hallmarks of their democracy. Speaking of a Dutch-Muslim identity implies that Muslims aren’t naturally included as part of Dutch society, and that being “Dutch” must mean something different from being Muslim.

As noted before, some youths don’t consciously ‘assign’ themselves an identity. However, in practical terms, many youths take social cues from a variety of sources, including their religion, traditions from their parents’ home country, and Dutch popular culture, which is often reflected in the media. A recent research study by the FORUM organization in Rotterdam found that Muslim youths are a diverse group; “men jonge moslims niet over een kam kan scheren.”

Youths listen to Dutch and Moroccan musicians, they celebrate Dutch and Turkish festivals, adopt Dutch and Surinamese habits, and they may speak Dutch and another language. So a better term might be a ‘hybrid’ identity, which doesn’t imply a single conception of culture and acknowledges the variety of influences on second-generation Muslim youths. Although the term isn’t often used in either popular discourse or by youths themselves to describe identity, I will use it to characterize the multi-faceted identities of Muslim youths.

Likewise, although the term “identity crisis” is imprecise and imperfect, in practical terms it could be used to signify a range of emotions that youth experience. Contrary to its popular use to signify social paralysis and emotional shock, an identity “crisis” does not necessarily imply that youths are non-functioning. I will use the term to describe second-generation Muslim youths’ personal confusion and feelings of social isolation, which stem from perceived ‘cultural’ differences and competing expectations of family, community, and the larger public. An identity crisis includes some level of recognition of, and subsequent frustration with, differences and disparities between

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33 Farid Tabarki, interview on April 14th, 2008

groups in the Netherlands, including discrimination, prejudice and lack of opportunities. These disparities, or a youth’s perception thereof, can lead to both internal and external manifestations of social discomfort.

On a personal level, youths’ social confusion can lead to diagnosable mental health problems. Youths may become depressed, anxious, or even schizophrenic (stats?), which highlights the duality of personalities that some youths feel they must maintain to satisfy competing cultural expectations. Tabarki notes that second-generation immigrant youth, especially those with a Moroccan background, are five to six times more likely to be diagnosed with schizophrenia than their ‘native’ Dutch peers.\(^{34}\)

Social discomfort may also lead Muslim youths to perform poorly in school. Children of immigrant parents are overrepresented in the least challenging Dutch educational tracks, and underrepresented in the highest levels, including VWO, HBO, and universities.\(^{35}\) This disparity is partially attributable to differences in parents’ educational level and socioeconomic status, but social confusion and alienation also contribute. Youths facing anxiety or depression are much likelier to perform poorly or even drop out of school. They are also less likely to be engaged in extra-curricular activities at school or in the community.\(^{36}\) The effects of school dropout can be compounded later, as youths with lower educational background have difficulty finding and keeping jobs. Unemployment can lead to further depression and lack of self-esteem, continuing a vicious cycle.

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\(^{34}\) Lecture with Farid Tabarki at Alleato, February 28, 2008.


\(^{36}\) For example, according to the National Youth Policy Report, “relatively few ethnic minority young people or young people with disadvantaged backgrounds are involved in organized sport activities. The Dutch government has recently announced a new programme especially targeted at stimulating sport activities by migrant young people.” (p 26)
Part Three: Government Approaches to Youth Alienation

Since its creation in February 2007, youth policy in the Netherlands is coordinated by the Ministry of Youth and Families, headed by Deputy Prime Minister Andre Rouvoet. The Ministry cooperates with four other ministries: the Ministry of Health, Welfare, and Sports, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Education, Culture, and Science, and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment. While the responsibility for guiding the general direction and overarching goals of youth policy lies with the national government, provincial governments are responsible for the youth foster and health care system, and municipal governments are responsible for “general and preventive youth measures,” including “education, leisure time, health care, but also specific preventative tasks, such as access to help and care coordination at the local level (with special focus on parenting support).”

Recently the Dutch government, particularly at the municipal level, has taken steps to augment allochtoon youths’ education levels, community engagement, and access to the job market. The province of Utrecht, for example, sponsors a program that links youths in primarily-allochtoon schools with potential employers, to encourage apprenticeship and eventual employment. The national government has also taken steps to combat discrimination by employers, who have been shown to favor applicants with “Dutch” names when hiring new employees.

Social alienation may also lead youths to criminal behavior, which is higher among Moroccan youths than native Dutch youths. However, the perception of criminal youths is much greater than the reality. Many Dutch citizens, especially older

38 Interview with Mustapha Ouatiq and Miriam Zandvliet, April 23, 2008; also accessible online at http://www.u-shake.nl/?menuId=37&mainAlias=HotTopics&PHPSESSID=2641b6c0c8a0a72c9b47907948a9714f
residents, fear muggings or vandalism from second-generation immigrants in their neighborhoods, who even have a special name: “hangjongeren” (literally “youths that hang around”). Continuing the misunderstanding of child-rearing practices, these residents interpret youth gatherings on the street as menacing. The fear has even led some politicians, such as the mayor of Utrecht, to install special youth-targeted alarms in immigrant-heavy neighborhoods. The alarms, which are meant to disperse gatherings of teenagers, are specially calibrated to emit a sound that becomes unbearable to youths – and only youths – after several minutes of listening to it.

Local and national government agencies have also taken more constructive measures to curb youth criminality. Various municipalities, such as Overvecht and Ijsselstein, are investing in youth centers and playgrounds to keep youths engaged and supervised after school. The Ministry of Justice also recently unveiled a new policy targeting youth criminality, with the goal of reducing reported youth crimes by 10% in the next several years. The Ministry’s program has four “action points” to combat criminality: early intervention, person-specific treatment, fast and effective implementation of sentences, and appropriate readjustment. Several of these points come close to an approach which targets youths’ underlying identity issues. In stressing prevention and early intervention, for example, the Ministry of Justice suggests giving parents support (albeit from a Dutch social worker’s perspective) and personalized youth counseling. However, the Ministry also acknowledges that the mechanisms for providing counseling are “not yet sufficiently coordinated.” But punishing people faster is also a recommendation, because society must “remove the idea from young people that they will not be punished for criminal behavior.” One further measure is the Jeugd Terecht, or “Youth Correcting” initiative. The initiative includes facets of youth criminal law,

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41 Although the program doesn’t specifically target allochtoon youths, they are overrepresented in the criminal justice system, so the program affects their position.
42 The Ministry acknowledges that “no youngster is the same. Also the causes of criminal behaviour differ by youngsters. For this reason person-specific treatment is very important at restricting youth crime.” Translated from Dutch and accessed online at http://www.justitie.nl/onderwerpen/jeugd/jeugdcriminaliteit/
43 Accessed online at http://www.justitie.nl/onderwerpen/jeugd/jeugdcriminaliteit/
44 Accessed online at http://www.justitie.nl/onderwerpen/jeugd/jeugdcriminaliteit/
such as a new measure that allows youths to be charged with negatively influencing peers. It also proposes research into the most effective behavior interventions.\textsuperscript{45}

Beyond criminality, social alienation is also seen as one of the primary forces behind radicalization. In fact, Dutch writer-philosopher Abdulwahid van Bommel points to youths’ perception of disrespect from Dutch society and the lack of approachable religious leaders as two of the five primary causes of youth radicalization. The other two include the search for moralization with commandments and prohibitions, the search for something to “hold on to” when everything else is changing, and the tendency of young people (\textit{all} young people) to search for respect and own identity.\textsuperscript{46}

The Dutch Secret Service (AVID) focuses on youth radicalization as one of the primary problems facing Dutch society. In their 2004 report to the Ministry of Interior and Kingdom Relations, the AVID estimated that 5\% of Muslims in the Netherlands are at risk of radicalization; the percentage of these who are youth is unknown.\textsuperscript{47} However, youths are often seen as the most at-risk group for performing radical actions. In its 2007 action plan for combating radicalization, the Dutch Ministry of Internal Affairs and Kingdom Relations writes that “the people who are susceptible to polarization and radicalization are primarily youths (generally younger than 30) who are looking for their identity or calling… Islamic radicalization generally occurs among young people looking for meaning (religious/ideological dimension) or seeking to establish a bond and gain recognition within the group (social-cultural dimension).”\textsuperscript{48} The report lays out a “three-track” approach to stopping radicalization, including prevention, signaling and intervention. Some of its recommendations are similar to already-existing programs: to align Muslim students with the labor market, combat discrimination, and promote ‘cultural’ dialogue. Preventive suggestions also include empowering groups or

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\textsuperscript{45} The Ministry notes that “learning sentences and other judicial interventions do not last long enough to change behaviour of a repeating youngster effectively.” The Ministry is “examining how the sentences and interventions can be made more effective.” Accessed online at http://www. justitie. nl/onderwerpen/jeugd/jeugdcriminaliteit/

\textsuperscript{46} From Abdulwahid van Bommel’s postings on the Internet site www. wjblijvenhier. nl


individuals prone to radicalization, increasing the skills and competencies of parents and people working with young people, and early detection of signs of radicalization. However, the report focuses most on “hard” methods of combating radicalization, including strict measures to stem school drop-outs, monitor those susceptible to radicalization, and isolate radical youths from society by cutting off their media access or physically detaining them. Interestingly, the action plan doesn’t include any reference to positive role models or identity formation, although both were offered (vaguely) in the AVID report as suggestions for combating radicalization.49

While the national and various municipal governments have undertaken measures to curb external actions like crime and radicalization, however, politicians have shown little initiative in targeting youths’ underlying confusion and identity crisis. As Fatimazohra Hadjar quoted in the Trouw newspaper, "I see the hidden scars of those youth. But society sees youth who hang around turn into rascals. And rascals into unscrupulous bulldozers, into criminals. Nobody asks themselves where this desire for self-destruction comes from. Society doesn't want to see them as victims, but as offenders."50 Although politicians are beginning to understand the importance of prevention and rehabilitation, government programs to combat radicalization and criminals often focus on punishing youths. Even programs with a more constructive focus, such as combating discrimination and encouraging workforce participation, don’t connect youths’ behavior to their inner confusion. Either way, government programs only seem to address external effects of social alienation; the symptoms of inner confusion rather than the cause.

To be fair, an “identity crisis” is difficult to target with any social program, partially because it is so difficult to define and pinpoint. As I noted above, Muslim youths are rarely explicit about experiencing an identity crisis. Many are embarrassed

49 The AVID’s report noted that “In some way or other we have to help particularly the younger generations in coping with their identity crisis…This is a task for both the Muslim community and educational institutes.” and “In line with the previous point, it is important that the community has its own positive role models with whom the members of the community can identify themselves and who may stimulate positive actions. The problems involved in criminal role models who are sometimes idolised by young people are to be solved in no uncertain terms.” In “From Dawa to Jihad: The Various Threats from Radical Islam to the Democratic Legal Order.” (Leidschendam: AIVD, 2004.) Report from the Ministry of Interior and Kingdom Relations. Accessed online at http://www.fas.org/irp/world/netherlands/dawa.pdf.
about their confusion and may not openly seek counseling from peers, mentors, or counselors. Furthermore, youths may only develop an identity crisis in response to perceived disrespect or social difference, such as discrimination or difficulty getting a job. In this case, discrimination and lack of labor opportunities would be seen as underlying causes, rather than social confusion itself.

How do you take preventative measures or design social policies for a phenomenon that’s readily acknowledged, but still hard to explicitly define and diagnose? I propose that politicians and community leaders pay more attention to the concept of role models, to which I now turn.
One possible way to target youths’ identity crises and to take preventative steps against mental illnesses, criminality, and radicalization is to focus on the idea of role models in the Dutch-Muslim community. “Role model” is a vague term, and is often interchanged with “mentor,” “hero,” “someone to look up to,” or “public figure.” As with the term “identity crisis,” it is an artificial designation; youths might not be able to name a role model or explicitly describe themselves as following a role model. Farid Tabarki said that many youths themselves use the term “hero” to describe people that they look up to, but many youths don’t use any specific term at all. However, most youths can name figures in their family, community, or national public spotlight whom they admire or go to for advice. These people serve as role models whether they are described as such or not.

But how do these role models actually affect young Dutch Muslims’ identities? In the absence of direct feedback from young Dutch Muslims themselves, I will first analyze their theoretical effect. Role models are commonly thought to provide two functions for youth, both of which are relevant for Dutch-Muslim role models. First, role models can serve as examples of physical processes, such as a profession or a position. This could be at a local level, such as someone who serves as a mentor and advice-giver, or at a national level, such as a famous figure who sets an example and a path for youth to follow. For youths seeking advice about how to get a job or do better in school, role models can provide guidance and concrete steps for achieving certain goals. Research into role models in the Netherlands suggests that Turkish student mentors help teenagers develop better studying skills, but in doing so build confidence and trust that lead to more emotional resilience and self-esteem.

Second, some role models’ mere presence can serve as a confirmation that certain identities and positions, especially for minorities, are possible in a society. This is


especially important for youths who feel torn between multiple influences, whether cultural, familial, civic or religious. At a national level, television figures can confirm that hybrid identities are possible, acceptable, and even welcomed. In a television scene that was dominated by Dutch-focused language and cultural figures, the appearance of “De Meiden van Halal”, the Moslima’s, and Dunya from “Dunya en Desie” marked a transition to a more inclusive representation of “Dutchness,” at least in the media sphere. If, as Adeno Addis writes, “in the case of the media, those who are not represented do not exist,” then these programs confirm that Muslims are, in fact, a part of Dutch society. This sends a symbolic message to Muslim youths that they can embrace a Muslim identity while still remaining “Dutch.” Non-media role models perform the same function, perhaps even more effectively. Successful citizens who embrace both their Dutch and Muslim identities show youths that it is possible to break the mold of “traditional” Dutch and have multiple parts of a personality.

Sometimes the inspirational and advisory functions of a role model intertwine. As media scholars Huntemann and Morgan write, “the stories on television and other media demonstrate modes of problem solving, with lessons of what works and what does not, and for whom.” The Moslima’s and Dunya lead by example; Muslim teenage girls can analyze their behavior and imitate it. The Meiden van Halal provide guidance and information directly, by answering questions about their religion on national television. Either way, female Muslim youths can watch the shows and find answers to their religious questions from a youth’s perspective, as well as gain an idea of how to combine their religion and their parents’ customs with the values and norms of Dutch society. (There isn’t, unfortunately, as viable an opportunity for male Muslim youths.) In a local or community context, youths can emulate successful entrepreneurs, professionals, civic or religious leaders. Youths can use their figures as examples of how to reach desired goals and combine praying with daily career life, for instance.

However, the impact of role models is more complicated than a simple leader-follower relationship. Youths choose their role models based on identity,

approachability, and perceived similarity. In the media sphere, identity can dictate television consumption, just as television figures might shape identity. As psychologist Jeanne Steele writes after studying American youths’ use of television role models, “teens look for people or situations ‘like them’ in the media. When they find people or story lines that resonate with their lives, they pay attention.” Her research suggests that ethnicity and credibility, or believability of a situation, are important factors that influence which media youths pay attention to, how it affects them, and how they respond to it.

Youths don’t respond to everybody as a role model, after all. In fact, one of the reasons youths don’t turn to anyone about their identity concerns is a lack of openness and trust. Government programs that rely on anonymous social workers to deal with youth in crisis, which includes many of the programs targeting employment, crime, and radicalization, are therefore poorly equipped to help youths, because they cannot expect youths to openly discuss their underlying problems. Effective role models, in contrast, can identify and connect with youth, using their own experiences and rapport to build trust with individuals. They encourage self-reflection and goal-setting as a way to create trust and self-esteem, which encourages youths to recognize and share their identity concerns. However, youths also don’t have to explicitly accept an identity crisis in order to be helped by a role model. They can address the underlying causes of identity crisis, such as social isolation and lack of guidance about cultural conflicts, without describing it as such. This is an advantage of the role-modeling approach: as opposed to the approach of treating only the ‘symptoms’ of an identity crisis, youths don’t have to diagnose themselves to benefit.

Additionally, role models are often part of a larger community of activists, community leaders, or other youths. Role models offer youths the possibility of connecting with their existing network of friends and colleagues, further increasing the possibility for alienated youths to feel socially connected and accepted in their multiple identities.

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Encouraging Dutch-Muslim role models could provide a method of including alienated youths in civil society that addresses both the external symptoms of an identity crisis, as well as the internal causes of it. However, as suggested above, role models aren’t simply successful individuals in the Dutch-Muslim community. They must, in Mohammed Cheppih’s words, bring their success “to the youth level.” This implies that role models must be, by definition, members of a local community rather than national figures. In a small country like the Netherlands, however, national figures also have the possibility of connecting with youths through mentoring programs and workshops. Jihad of the “Meiden van Halal,” for example, participates in many youth trainings and can connect directly with youths.

So far, government programs targeting radicalization, crime, school dropouts, or discrimination don’t utilize role models very heavily. Even the national radicalization and polarization action plan neglects the possibility of strengthening connections within the Dutch-Muslim in its recommendations for combating radicalization. However, local governments are beginning to understand the potential of programs which target youths’ personal and identity concerns. The municipality of Utrecht subsidizes a training designed by Abkadr Chrifi, for example, entitled “The Road to Success: How to Get What You Want.” The training emphasizes youths’ own skills, and encourages youths to reflect on figures in their own community who have successfully combated discrimination to have successful careers. Job Cohen, the Mayor of Amsterdam, is also moving towards support for programs which target youths’ underlying issues rather than their external manifestations. According to Fatimazohra Hadjar, he expressed frustration with prior youth programs that relied on professional social workers instead of community figures. He maligned the slow progress that had been made in reducing youth crime and social alienation, especially when the city gave so much money to youth-targeted programs.

57 The ‘action plan’ for preventing youths from radicalizing is rather vague: it recommends “Reinforcing the ties which bind youths to society through education, traineeships and work,” “promote knowledge of youths in general about various cultures and their similarities, the principles of the democratic state, our foreign policy, religions and their joint, recent history,” “make and maintain contacts with key figures and Muslim organizations in order to jointly increase resilience,” and “involve parents via education, citizenship/integration projects and child-rearing support in the socialization and development of their children.”
Additional programs that utilize or emphasize role models originate primarily from the community, through civil organizations and grassroots programs. I will highlight several of the programs which currently exist, many of which began only recently (in the past two years). Although youths also look for mentors in many informal, unrecognized ways, these programs differ from others in that they explicitly acknowledge the importance of Dutch-Muslim, Dutch-Moroccan, or Dutch-Turkish role models and facilitate relationships between youths and potential mentors.

**Buurtvader Program:** The Buurtvader program is a community initiative run out of Ijsselstein, a town to the southwest of Utrecht. The program relies on “neighborhood fathers,” or older local males, for the dual functions of mentoring youths and providing nightly neighborhood patrols. The “buurtvader” concept subscribes to the idea that youths are most likely to respond to supervision from local mentors they trust, so the neighborhood fathers who teach youths sports during the week are the same ones who visit youth hangouts late on weekend nights. Ijsselstein entrepreneur Ferdinand Visser joined after several Moroccan young men from the neighborhood broke into his shop. Originally started by a mosque, the program was taken over by Visser in 2006, and is now managed by Azzouz Naouri, who oversees the daily implementation and acts as a guide for the youths. Visser and Naouri have added several components to the program: after-school sports lessons for teenage males, which are taught and managed by older youths who’ve gone through the Buurtvader program; self-expression and communication classes; familiarization workshops with police officers; and job training with local entrepreneurs. Since the changes, reports of youth crime or “hangjongeren” have dropped by 70%. Nonetheless, there’s more in store for the future: Visser and Naouri will soon begin a “Buurtmoder” (Neighborhood Mothers) program, as well as communication lessons for Dutch seniors in the neighborhood, to enable them to better understand second-generation youth habits. In the fall, they hope to build a youth center for youths to play sports and do activities, all overseen by Buurtvaders.

**Abkadr Chrifi Training:** The “Road to Success” program was created by Abkadr Chrifi, an Utrecht resident, labor consultant, and former drug addict who began the program as a way to enable other youths to take advantage of opportunities the way he did. Often administered to youths in MBOs, prison or juvenile detention centers, its primary
beneficiaries are young Moroccan men. The training emphasizes personal reflection, goal setting, personal initiative, and recognizing one’s own talents in a safe setting. Over a series of workshops, trained facilitators encourage participants to share personal stories, seek advice from others in the group, and look to role models for guidance about careers. The training uses role-playing activities to practice sharing personal stories, and also focuses heavily on giving participants job-seeking advice. In fact, one of the primary goals of the training is to help youths cope with discrimination and employment difficulty without seeing oneself as a victim.  

**Polder Mosque:** The Polder Mosque is an initiative of Mohammed Cheppih and Tasneem Sadiq, among other Muslim and non-Muslim leaders in the Netherlands. Located in the Slotervaart neighborhood of Amsterdam, the mosque (scheduled for opening in mid-May 2008) aims to strengthen the Dutch-Muslim network and integrate Dutch and Muslim identities, primarily by hiring young imams who preach in Dutch and networking a variety of different offices and organizations within the mosque’s building. While the mosque has physical praying spaces (combined for men and women), it also includes office space for Moroccan and Turkish youth organizations, for the premier Dutch-Muslim women’s organization, and for youth productions like websites and magazines.

**Moroccan-Dutch Leadership Institute:** The Moroccan-Dutch Leadership Institute, or MDLI, is an organization which promotes leadership and networking among young Moroccan-Dutch professionals, in order to create a stronger and more cohesive Moroccan-Dutch community. The Institute was created by four young Moroccan-Dutch students; several of the leaders were themselves born in Morocco, but grew up in the Netherlands. MDLI runs a leadership academy to train young Moroccan-Dutch professionals, many of whom are second-generation Muslims. It also advises different municipal government councils on policies targeting the Moroccan-Dutch community. Prominent non-Muslims, such as the mayor of Amsterdam, also sit on MDLI’s advisory council.

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**Elsevier Foundation:** The Elsevier Foundation is a neighborhood organization run out of the Sloterdijk neighborhood in Amsterdam. Funded almost entirely by community donations, the Foundation does not solely target youth. Among other initiatives, it sponsors a wheelchair exchange with Morocco, childcare, and Dutch or Arabic language classes. However, Elsevier also sponsors a ‘Neighborhood Fathers’ program like the one is Ijsselstein, which pairs local men with youths in the neighborhood for outings and programs at the foundation. Additionally, Elsevier tries to incorporate youths into different aspects of its charity programs. Elsevier’s director, Said Bensellam, noted that youths often hang out in the basement of Elsevier’s building, where much of the wheelchair repair takes place. Over time, many youths become involved with the repair, gaining mechanical skills that are helpful when applying for jobs. As a result, youths learn skills that can increase their self-esteem and make them more employable.

**Youth Websites:** Perhaps the best example of youth-targeted, youth-initiated and youth-controlled role modeling programs are the popular websites marokko.nl, maroc.nl, and wijblijvenhier.nl. Marokko.nl and maroc.nl serve as online youth forums, where youths can discuss controversial or relevant issues and post job listings, announcements, or other action items. Marokko.nl also includes links to various blogs, whose authors cover different perspectives about Islam and Moroccans in the Netherlands. The site wijblijvenhier.nl also includes perspectives of different youth writers, who do everything from posting news items to writing essays to creating political cartoons. The site also invites contributions from activists in the Dutch-Muslim community. In contrast to the two Moroccan sites, wijblijvenhier.nl targets Muslims of all ethnicities, and includes writers from a variety of backgrounds (including converted Muslims). The posts and articles have a more in-depth focus than the Moroccan sites, which serve more as forums.

**Stichting Kinderen in Achterstand Posities (KAP):** Although not a project that deals with role models explicitly, this organization, run by Fatimazohra Hadjar, provides advice and counseling to youths and parents with immigrant backgrounds. Literally called “Children in Bad Positions,” or children who don’t belong anywhere, KAP addresses youths’ school performance and behavior problems by targeting root causes: feelings of social alienation, abuse, or Fatimazohra attempts creates bridges between parents, school officials, and institutions. She presents herself as a figure that youths can
trust, since she stands up for youth rights and also faces discrimination herself. Through an “approachable relationship of trust,” she aims to “bridge socio-cultural problems” that underlie poor school performance, misbehavior, and criminality.

This list of initiatives isn’t exhaustive; small programs are often poorly connected with other role-modeling projects, especially because most programs are locally-based and funded. Not all receive subsidies from their municipality, however; local governments are often used to working with one “preferred partner” social organization to implement social programs. Ferdinand Visser of the Buurtvaders explained that it was quite difficult to get public subsidies for the program because the city council was accustomed to working through a different organization to reach Moroccan youth in Ijsselstein. Most subsidized programs utilize trained or “professional” youth workers rather than members of the Dutch-Moroccan or Dutch-Muslim community itself. Unfortunately, Visser, Fatimazohra, and Bensellam agreed that programs which rely solely on “9-to-5” professionals fail to connect with youth, because they refuse to adapt bureaucratic rules to youths’ needs (and schedules). Their comments echoed research on minority student mentor relationships, which suggest that school counselors and professionals can’t handle Turkish and Moroccan students’ problems because they “do not fit into any of the slots.”\(^5^9\) Moroccan-Dutch and Dutch-Muslim youths may also find it more difficult to connect with “professional” workers who don’t share their ethnic background.

Interestingly, this contradicts several of the Dutch government’s recommendations in its criminality and anti-radicalization campaigns, where it suggests “professionalizing” teachers, counselors and youth workers.\(^6^0\) If the municipality is to be successful in reaching young Muslims, it must give resources to those who can reach them most effectively: community-based organizations who utilize local mentors and role

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\(^5^9\) Maurice Crul notes that “at school there is a dean for academic advice, a mentor for personal matters, a tutor for practical problems and a school psychologist for emotional issues. The tasks are allocated to trained professionals, but many Turkish and Moroccan students have problems the schools cannot handle well because they do not fit into any of the slots. The Turkish student-mentors are quicker to recognise these problems and see the connection between personal issues and difficulties at school.” From Maurice Crul. “Success Breeds Success: Moroccan and Turkish Student Mentors in the Netherlands.” *International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling* 24: 275–287, 2002.

models. But what kind of role models most effectively influence youths? I discuss the results in the next section.
Part Five: Qualities of Effective Role Models

Given the diversity of programs utilizing role models or mentors, what patterns can be drawn about the most effective role models? Through interviews and a visit to the Al Kabir Mosque, I explore the answer from two perspectives: those of people who work with Dutch Muslim youth, and those of Dutch Muslim youth leaders themselves. In particular, these interviews help illuminate exactly how youths use role models to form hybrid identities.

Social Workers and Community Leaders Who Work with Dutch Muslim Youth

Since I interviewed social workers and leaders from a variety of professions, it is difficult to precisely compare the results of each interview. However, I asked each subject about role models that youths found inspiring or looked up to. The answers varied, but there was a surprising amount of consensus about the qualities that the role models or heroes exhibited. The interviewees highlighted several qualities that Muslim youths found particularly helpful or inspiring in their role models. According to the interviewees, these qualities were attractive to youths, and they (consciously and unconsciously) sought role models who exemplified these traits:

Similar background or social circumstances: Contrary to my expectations, several of my interview subjects reported that the youths they worked with didn’t look up to famous singers, sports figures, or actors. These figures were perceived as too “far” from the youths’ own concerns of school, family, and social alienation.\(^61\) Instead, youths looked up to people who had come from similar social and economic circumstances, and could therefore identify with their perspective. This focus on similar role models extends to the media sphere. Farid Tabarki noted that youths he interviewed for the Dutch PBS station named parents, local students, and other community members as heroes, rather

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\(^{61}\) Two of my interviewees didn’t share this perspective. Ferdinand Visser and Assouz Naouri of the Buurtvader Program said that youths in the program looked up to actors in ‘gangster’ movies such as “American Gangster.” Visser and Naouri characterized this idolization in a negative way, saying that youths looked up to “tough” film stars, who portrayed an unrealistic idea of masculinity and who led youths to emulate the actors’ ‘toughness’ through criminality. However, they also acknowledged that local role models – what they called “sub-heroes” – were important for providing a concrete example. Mustapha Ouatiq also said that youths in his trainings sometimes mentioned actors, sports figures, or comedians as role models, but that they also named relatives and community members as heroes.
than public figures. Although the coordinators of the Buurtvader program thought youths emulated film stars (see footnote below), they also said that youths sought “sub-heroes” in the community. These figures, such as successful entrepreneurs or students, were thought to provide direct role models and more attainable goals than public figures.

Peers were especially important as role models. In a sense, peers are best situated to offer youths advice about dealing with alienation, because they are the only group in the Netherlands to have experienced the same cultural influences and contradictory expectations. Peers could also be seen as less judgmental than parents or imams. Mohammed Cheppih noted that youths are both influential and influentiable; if they recognize themselves in a peer or leader from their community, they quickly look up to that figure and change their behavior. Different organizations have begun to utilize the peer approach. Visser and Naouari, for example, use older neighborhood youths as sports leaders in the Buurtvader program. The youths receive recognition and respect as sports leaders, and local youths receive guidance from someone who shares their background and perspective. In Amsterdam, youths at a center in the Slotervaart neighborhood began organizing lectures about Islam for their peers. Their first audience had two listeners; now there are over thirty participants. Initiatives such as these empower youths to influence their peers and illustrate how effectively youths respond to their peers.

Youth websites provide one of the best examples of peer influence. Tabarki noted that youths, especially Moroccan youths, often used peer-run online social networking sites for communication and advice. In particular, forums on sites such as maroc.nl, marokko.nl, and wijblijvenhier.nl provided an avenue for youths to research information about Islam or Islamic judgments about contemporary youth problems, to network for jobs, and to ask peers for advice.

However, peers were also seen as exerting a negative influence on youths by some. Visser and Naouari spoke of a “street culture” defined by peers’ lifestyle choices, including ‘gangster’ behavior and a certain style of dress. They thought that some youths in the Ijsselstein area looked up to the façade of toughness and the expensive clothes of neighborhood teenage leaders. These alienated or ‘criminal’ youths could pull peers in their neighborhood into a cycle of criminality, unless the leaders were secluded and their peers were provided with both activities to keep them busy, as well as positive examples.
This fits with the Dutch government’s anti-radicalization report, which recommended “squashing” or excluding radical youths from larger political debates as a way of curtailing their influence.

**Competency in their profession:** Consistent with their desire to be seen as contributing members of society, many youths apparently look up to successful members of their family or community, such as an uncle who starts his own business or a cousin who attends medical school. In fact, this attribute was just as important to youths as the perceived approachability of a hero. Tabarki stated that, contrary to some who believe ‘token’ ethnic representation in the media and community is enough, youths don’t seek heroes solely because they share an ethnic background, but rather because they want role models who are appreciated by Dutch society for their social and professional contributions. Youths especially want to see these role models – everyday citizens who are appreciated for their competency – reflected in popular media. Tabarki gave the example of youths who named as a role model a local Moroccan girl recognized for her medical research, rather than for her ethnicity.

**Dealt with injustice:** As I wrote earlier, many youths feel that they lack recognition and respect from Dutch society. As a result, their role models include figures who have successfully dealt with injustice, whether by combating it through a social movement or by ignoring it personally. Fatimazohra mentioned that youths see figures like Osama bin Laden or Nelson Mandela as role models, because they were “rebellious” and stood up against oppression from an overarching institution (the West, in Osama’s case, and the apartheid regime in Mandela’s). In contrast, Fatimazohra noted that most youths don’t like Muslim politicians, who are seen as having betrayed Muslim youths by agreeing with the predominant negative Dutch stereotypes of Muslim youths. On a more personal level, Mustapha Ouatiq stressed the Chrifi training program’s emphasis on teaching participants to move past discrimination and achieve career success. He noted that he always encourages youths to move past seeing themselves as victims, and instead recognize the opportunities available to them as a way of showing that discrimination can’t occlude their talent.

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62 In particular, youths dislike Ahmed Aboutaleb, State Secretary of Employment, who is perceived as giving up his Muslim identity and turning his back on Moroccan youths.
Consistently involved or present: Most of the social workers and community leaders I interviewed strongly emphasized that youth workers and role models must be consistently present in a community, on a schedule that is convenient for youth. As mentioned before, many government programs and social workers often only work “nine-to-five” jobs during the week, which ignores youths’ schedule of staying up late, going out on the weekends, and going to school or work during the day. Mohammed Cheppih, for instance, noted that youths who are arrested during the weekend don’t have anyone to call until Monday morning. Ferdinand Visser stressed the importance of having Buurtvaders on the street late at night, when youths are most likely to lack guidance and become involved in criminality. Said Bensellam and Assouz Naouri further emphasized the importance of having youth workers who were familiar with a specific group of youths and had a long-term relationship. Bensellam and Naouri suggested that having youth workers “on the street” makes them more aware of events or problems in youths’ lives, and also makes youths more likely to trust youth workers with their problems. Cheppih pointed out that having a figure consistently present makes youths feel important and recognized, which contributes to self-esteem and positive identity formation.63

On a closely related note, many of my interviewees suggested the need for a physical meeting space where youths could interact with community members, religious leaders, or peers. Mohammed Cheppih’s Polder Mosque idea is based on the idea that physical proximity increases the likelihood that different organizations will work together. The architectural plans for his mosque also include space for youths to simply “hang out.” Likewise, the Buurtvader Program hopes to build a neighborhood center in the next year, including space for youth males to engage in sports and leisure activities under the supervision of youth sports leaders or Buurtvaders.

Accepts multi-faceted identity: Although not all youths explicitly acknowledge an “identity crisis,” many youths are attracted by figures who seemed to accept multiple parts of their identity. According to Tabarki, girls in focus groups run by the Dutch PBS reacted positively to the TV show “Meiden van Halal,” where three girls answer questions from viewers about Islam in a Dutch context. The girls wear headscarves in the

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63 As previously discussed, many of the interviewees - Bensellam, Visser and Naouri, Cheppih and Fatimazohra – maligned initiatives by the national or municipal government which target youths through social workers.
colors of the Dutch flag, emphasizing their “Dutch-ness.” Faisal Mirza further noted that the writers he chooses for his website proudly and openly embrace the multiple facets of their identity, writing about their religion but also about political topics, family issues, and items in the Dutch news. Mirza says that he doesn’t want writers to ‘confuse’ youths who may be in the midst of an identity crisis, and that he hopes visitors to the site can use the writers’ perspectives as models for their own identity formation. In fact, Mirza notes that readers often respond to writers’ columns with requests for more information, and may even ask to speak to the writer for advice (in which case Mirza connects the reader). Such examples show that youths find peers who proudly accept multi-faceted identities both inspiring and helpful.

**Key Figures in the Dutch Muslim Community**

As described in the Methodology section, I attended a meeting of young leaders at the Al Kabir Mosque in Amsterdam. There were approximately 15 people present, all of whom were involved in the mosque in some way. Although not all of the attendees were youths, most appeared to be between the ages of 20 and 30, making them youths and youth role models themselves. After I described my research topic as the importance of Dutch-Muslim role models, a couple of different people explained what they thought of about Muslim role models in the Netherlands, and then other group members responded. I let people talk freely, so their answers were more a process of free association than direct responses. Several figures were particularly outspoken in their answers: Noureddine writes for the website wijblijvenhier.nl, Yasmin is the spokeswoman for the Al Kabir Mosque, and Abdelmalik is involved with the mosque’s board.

The first respondent, Mohamed, thought that different youths required different role models based on their “position” and interests, which I interpreted as their socioeconomic position, career goals, and leisure interests. If a youth was interested in comedy, for example, Mohamed thought they would be more drawn to a Dutch-Muslim comedian than a Dutch-Muslim sports figure. The next couple of respondents also gave examples of youths looking up to famous figures, such as rappers, politicians, or musicians, saying that it was important for people to see Dutch Muslims in national positions. After Mohammed Cheppih asked the group whether success and national
recognition was a precondition of being a role model, however, the group started to
debate each other. Mohamed and Abdelmalik noted that youths looked up to and
appreciated the Dutch-Moroccan rapper Ali B., because he talked to them on their level
using “street” language. The success question was never definitively answered, because
Noureddine noted that success tended to make famous Dutch-Muslims eschew or
downplay their religion. He argued that sports figures and politicians, even those who
had previously been religious, refuse to publicly identify themselves as Muslim once
they’ve achieved national prominence. This could be perceived as a political decision,
but also as an entrenchment in Dutch society and therefore a betrayal. Indeed,
Noureddine named State Secretary Aboutaleb, the same politician who Fatimazohra
mentioned as someone youths see as betraying them by refusing to identify with young
Moroccans. As a result, Noureddine said, there were no famous Dutch-Muslims that
youths could look up to; only the outspoken public intellectual Tariq Ramadan openly
claimed his religious identity. Noureddine thought that famous Muslims in America felt
freer to express their religions, and gave the example of Hakeem Olajuwon, a major-
league basketball player for the Houston Suns who took mid-game prayer breaks.

Interestingly, almost all of the respondents conceived of role models in religious
terms. In contrast to the individual interviewees, who gave examples of ethnically-based
role models such as Dutch-Moroccan or Dutch-Turkish leaders, the mosque respondents
all judged role models by their willingness to identify as Muslims and the sincerity with
which they practiced Islam – both the rituals they maintained and the fidelity to Muslim
values like honesty, modesty, and honor. This religious focus probably had much to do
with the context of the meeting. As a religiously-based group meeting in a mosque, the
respondents all see Islam as a big part of their lives, and so are primed to relate role
models to religion. Additionally, the group was ethnically mixed, with respondents who
had several different ethnic backgrounds. As such, role models that are similar for the
group would be based on religion, a common factor they share.

The questions about whether success and religious sincerity are prerequisites for
good role models lead back to the larger question of what a role model’s function is.
Noureddine stated that “whenever someone becomes a source of comfort for someone, he
or she is a role model.” Noureddine’s response implied that the function of a role model
is to provide comfort and support. However, this doesn’t necessarily have to be at a personal level, such as from a parent or neighborhood leader. As previously discussed, some youths find comfort in seeing that certain multi-faceted identities are “merely possible.” When a popular soccer star proudly proclaims that he is a Muslim soccer star, for example, he gives comfort to youths who feel disrespected by Dutch society. Yasmin and a couple of other girls echoed this comment, saying that it was important for youths to have role models in multiple different positions, such as judges, TV presenters, sport stars, doctors, and all other professions. As with Mohamed, Yasmin implies that Muslims in different career paths show youths that these career paths are open to Muslims, and that participation in society as a professional is accepted, respected, and appreciated. Additionally, having Muslims in various careers could help provide concrete advice for Muslim youths who want to enter those fields as well. Most importantly, both Yasmin’s and Mohamed’s comments echo the earlier assertion that role models were different for each youth, further confirming the importance of helping Dutch Muslims achieve in many different careers, social levels, and communities.

Perhaps more telling than their responses about youth role models are the respondents’ answers about their own role models. At the end of the session, after I’d allowed the group members to ‘free associate’ and share their thoughts about Muslim role models, I asked several of the remaining members who their personal role models were. Interestingly, each person gave an example of someone in the room, not just in the larger Muslim community. Abdelmallik named Noureddine as his role model (while Noureddine was busy talking with someone else). He admired Noureddine’s openness about his religion, and his blogging position on the website wijblijvenhier.nl. Similarly, Noureddine, when asked about his role model, named Mohammed Cheppih, because he “changed his beliefs openly” and because he started the Polder Mosque, which brings many different groups together in a Dutch setting. Thus, even though the young mosque members talked primarily about Muslim role models, they named role models within their own religious network. Perhaps this is because, as Noureddine suggests, that few national role models embrace Islam. However, it could also suggest the importance of having personal contact with role models and using local individuals for guidance and inspiration, as many of my individual interviewees stressed.
Conclusions and Recommendations

Second-generation Dutch-Muslim youths continue to be a much-discussed topic at both the policy and media levels. From “hangjongeren” to youth radicals, second-generation youths are presented in a highly unflattering light. They face expectations from Dutch peers, teachers, and politicians, but also from their parents and ethnic or religious communities. In a sense, they serve as symbols and scapegoats in the Dutch debate over integration and multiculturalism. Little wonder, then, that many Muslim youths experience confusion and identity crises, which can lead to problems as varied as mental disorders, poor school performance, criminality, and even radicalization.

While government programs target many of the “symptoms” of youths’ identity crises, they rarely target the underlying cultural confusion, social alienation, and loneliness that accompany second-generation Muslim youths’ unique social position. Faced with questions that neither parents nor native Dutch citizens are prepared to answer, second-generation youths need role models who can help provide social or religious guidance, bridge cultural gaps, and promote acceptance of hybrid identities. But the effects of role models on Muslim youths are not self-evident; role models may serve a number of functions. In my research and interviews, I attempted to elucidate how role models help youths form hybrid or multicultural identities, in order to suggest how community groups and government organizations can best support the role modeling process.

If there’s one generalization to be made about my findings, it’s that role models are as varied as the youths who look up to them. Second-generation Muslim youths in the Netherlands have different experiences, based on their family circumstances, peer group, religious upbringing, ethnic background, gender, and even location. All contribute to differences in feelings of identity confusion, dislocation, and social alienation. Moroccan youths, for example, may feel more caught between cultures than Turkish youths, and may therefore have more problems with criminality and school performance. Girls may have more concerns about appearance than boys. Those whose parents look after their peer group might have a more positive group of friends who can provide advice and emotional support.
Regardless of their circumstances, all youths – Muslim or not – benefit from positive role models. But which role models are most effective for Muslim youths? Not all of the results were clear. In particular, interviewees offered competing ideas about whether success and prominence were necessary. Some interviewees thought that youths looked primarily to national figures like sports stars and comedians, perhaps as indicators of society’s acceptance of Dutch Muslims. “Success” doesn’t necessarily entail national media prominence, however; successful local entrepreneurs can also serve as mentors for neighborhood youths, as can peers, parents, and teachers. Indeed, several of my interviewees thought that local, neighborhood role models were most effective, both in changing youths’ behavior and inspiring them. My research suggests that both types of role models are important. The distinction between the types is related to the differences in the concept of a “role model” which Adenis Addo described: one can serve as a general inspirational hero, or as a heavily-involved mentor and behavior guide. National figures provide one type of “comfort” for youths – they address youths’ perception of injustice and social disrespect, and in doing so encourage youths to engage with society. However, the consistent involvement and personal attention offered by local successful people, such as business leaders, can truly change youths’ behavior by providing supervision as well as inspiration.

My interviewees also disagreed about the importance of an ethnic or Muslim identity. Fatimazohra argued that national figures are only valued as role models so far as they outspokenly defend and practice their Muslim identity. At the mosque, Noureddine echoed her comments by saying that there are almost no role models for Dutch-Muslim youth, because famous figures are unwilling to identify with Islam. However, Farid Tabarki thought that Muslim youths were turned off by a constant focus on their religion or ethnicity, perhaps because they feel confined to one identifier. He noted that focus groups of young Muslims respected role models more on the basis of professional success than ethnic or religious similarities. Perhaps the difference in perspectives has something to do with the youths themselves. While Fatimazohra works with youths in “bad positions,” for example, Farid Tabarki interviewed a more general selection of young Muslims. If an identity crisis is indeed behind social alienation and criminal behavior, then those who perceive the most injustice from society are also the
ones who will ‘act up’ the most, and who will most value role models who speak out against society’s perception of Muslim youths.

Some of the trends revealed from my interviews were more consistent. Positive role models make youths feel respected, either by standing up for them to media and politicians, or by investing time in them, especially if the role models are busy and successful. Engaging role models have also achieved some sort of accomplishment, which was important for elucidating respect from youths.

Perhaps the most important aspects of a role model relationship are trust and openness – unsurprising given Muslim youths’ constant negative scrutiny from Dutch society. Role models can create trust by having a similar background, and particularly by sharing their personal experiences dealing with issues such as discrimination. Constant involvement with youths, membership in a religious or social network, and standing up for youths’ rights also help create a trusting relationship, which encourages honesty and makes youths more open to guidance.

I’ve spent the last 38 pages analyzing the qualities of effective role models, and the possibility of using role models as antidotes to youth alienation. However, I should note as I close that the concept of a role model is not an end-all solution to social problems that second-generation Muslims face. Focusing solely on role models places responsibility for mentoring and personal achievement on individuals, removing the onus of social change and action from larger society. In the Netherlands, for example, politicians might call for more Dutch-Muslim role models as a way of avoiding the need for Dutch society to pass anti-discrimination laws, or address the lingering educational achievement gaps between ‘native’ and second-generation Dutch youths. Of course, as several interviewers noted, it’s important to emphasize youths’ own agency and responsibility for finding a place in society. Few programs succeed by encouraging youths to see themselves as victims. However, society’s receptiveness to diversity and multicultural identities can either facilitate or hinder youths’ attempts to find a place in society, which even the best role models cannot change.

Despite these limitations, I think the idea of a “role model” has strong potential for changing Dutch society’s approach to addressing Muslim youths’ alienation. When used in conjunction with initiatives to diversify the Dutch labor force, combat
discrimination and educational disparities, and welcome Muslim organizations as part of the civil community, role models and role modeling programs can provide youths with strong examples of successful multicultural living. Role modeling programs are inseparable from a network of other initiatives, just as role models themselves are inseparable from a network of other community leaders and youths. Indeed, one of the most important results of my research was that effective role models enable youths to find or build their own social networks, a process which is only possible if role models are themselves connected with welcoming networks of youths and adults.

Professional social workers, then, are ill-equipped to deal with “hangjongeren” and other youths facing identity crises. Separated from the Muslim network and often distant from the issues facing youths, social workers cannot address youths’ identity issues, not least because youths don’t trust them. Although the government has begun to recognize the importance of measures preventing criminality rather than merely punishing it, it has yet to explicitly acknowledge the importance of Muslim role models. The government needs to provide the Dutch-Muslim community with the resources to expand its own youth programs. Providing money or administrative support to community programs like the Polder Mosque or the Buurtvader Program would allow organizations to recruit role models, plan mentoring activities, or invest in a community center. In turn, the Dutch-Muslim community could hasten the development of role modeling relationships by networking with other community role-modeling programs and sharing ideas or “best practices.”

A 2003 survey found that 80% of second-generation youths are under 20 years of age.64 As these youths find their way in Dutch society, they will undoubtedly face the same social confusion and discrimination that their parents and older peers did. However, by developing strong role models and mentoring relationships, government and community organizations can offer youths more guidance than earlier generations enjoyed.