

Stanford | Peace Innovation Lab



DECEMBER 2013  
STANFORD, CALIFORNIA

# Turban Myths

THE OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR REFRAMING  
SIKH AMERICAN IDENTITY IN POST-9/11 AMERICA

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

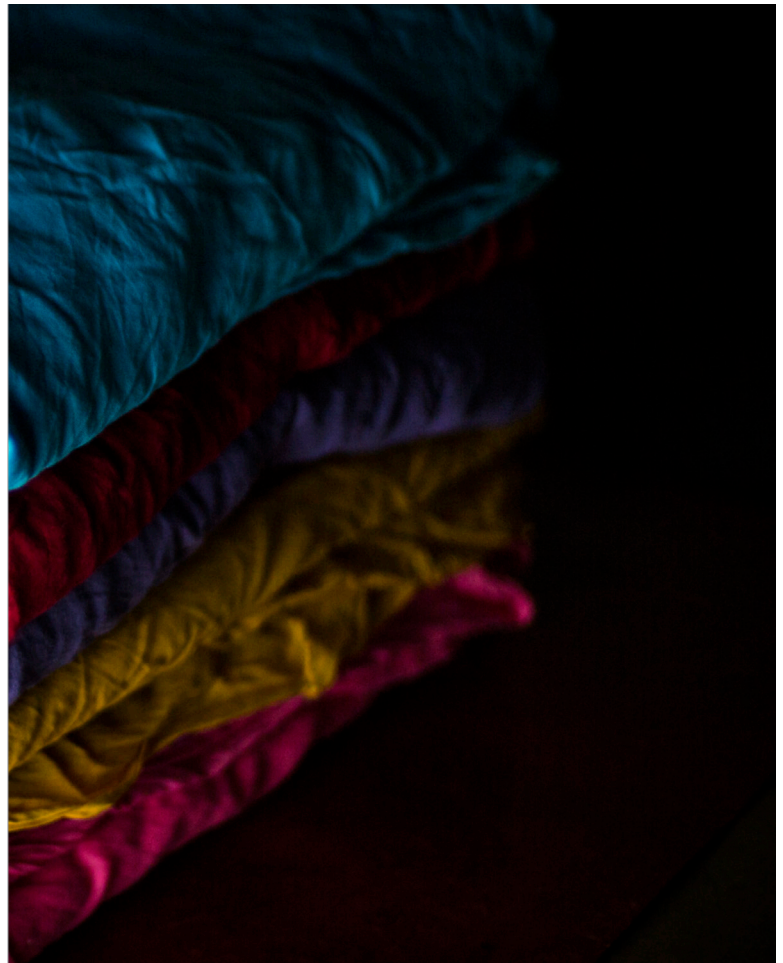
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This report was prepared by the Stanford University Peace Innovation Lab and the Sikh American Legal Defense and Education Fund (SALDEF) with the assistance of SocialxDesign to better understand the public perception of the Sikh American community and how to create a stronger, accepting, and diverse America.

The design concept and art direction of the report were created by Eighty2degrees. The photography was conducted by Les Talusan Photography under the art direction of Eighty2degrees.

This initiative is possible due to the generous support of Ik Manzil.

The authors and publisher are solely responsible for the accuracy of statements and interpretations contained in this publication.





BEYANT S. BAWA, *High School Senior*

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## ABSTRACT

How does a growing minority community in the US prepare itself to prevent and/or respond to hate crimes when advocacy alone has not been effective? That was the question posed by the Sikh American Legal Defense and Education Fund (SALDEF) in the summer of 2013 when it commissioned the Stanford Peace Innovation Lab to conduct a study on perception of Sikh Americans and to develop recommendations based on the Lab's conceptual framework of "behavior design" – an emerging science that applies the precepts of behavioral psychology to optimize technology and communication programs for behavioral outcomes. A combination of conditions – America's profound lack of knowledge of the Sikh community, widespread American bias against the turban, the limits of advocacy in the context of hate and bias – makes the case for a series of community-designed interventions optimized for more positive behavioral responses to the turban and "the people who wear them." Drawing on a number of data resources, community surveys, and academic studies the SALDEF/Stanford initiative presents a new approach to managing a specific cultural bias that may have an impact on how other communities manage their relations in an increasingly multicultural world.

## TOP LEVEL FINDINGS

- » *Roughly 70% of respondents (seven out of ten) could not identify a Sikh man in a picture as a Sikh.*
- » *Respondents associated turbans with Osama bin Laden more so than with any named Muslim and Sikh alternatives.*
- » *When asked what religion they most associate with a turban and beard, roughly half of all respondents (48%) chose Muslim.*
- » *Roughly half (49%) of all respondents said Sikh is a sect of Islam.*
- » *Roughly two thirds of all respondents (64.7%) could not identify where Sikhism originated.*
- » *Anti-turban bias exists even among people with a greater knowledge of Sikhs.*
- » *There is a bias against the turban itself.*
- » *Academic consensus is that bias is unconscious, charged by emotion, and reinforced by images.*
- » *A sizable gap in the integration of Sikh Americans into the mainstream of American life reinforces bias.*
- » *A sizable gap in institutional capacity in the Sikh American community exists.*

DRAWING ON  
A NUMBER OF  
DATA RESOURCES,  
COMMUNITY SURVEYS,  
& ACADEMIC STUDIES  
& A UNIQUE DESIGN-  
BASED INTERVENTION  
FRAMEWORK, THE  
SALDEF/STANFORD  
INITIATIVE PRESENTS  
A NEW APPROACH...

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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In the summer of 2013, the Sikh American Legal Defense and Education Fund (SALDEF) commissioned the Stanford Peace Innovation Lab – a research and development group based at Stanford University – to conduct a study on American perception of the Sikh community and to develop recommendations for a citizen education and engagement campaign. The impetus for the project was interest in the Sikh American community for innovative strategies for both preventing and responding to hate crime where traditional advocacy programs have fallen short. The Stanford team, in collaboration with SocialxDesign, a citizen engagement consulting firm, conducted a multi-threaded research project, the first of its kind, which enabled the team to formulate recommendations based on its top-level findings (see page 9).

The Stanford team concluded that a combination of conditions – viz., America's profound lack of knowledge of the Sikh American community, widespread American bias against the turban, the limits of advocacy in the context of hate and bias – made the case for a series of community-designed interventions optimized for more positive behavioral responses to the turban and “the people who wear them.” Drawing on a number of data resources, community surveys, and academic studies and a unique design-based intervention framework, the SALDEF/Stanford initiative presents a new approach to managing a specific cultural bias, an approach that may have an impact on how other communities manage their relations in an increasingly multicultural world.

## SCOPE

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The project is the first known multi-threaded research of its kind, mining perception of Sikh Americans and the challenges they face from numerous sources:

- » *Two independently managed consumer survey projects (Google Consumer Surveys and Politix)*
- » *A comprehensive review of academic literature in the neurosciences, psychology, sociology, and criminology on bias and hate crimes A study of Internet conversation regarding Sikh Americans*
- » *Qualitative interviews with leaders in the Sikh American community and their peers in other ethnic and faith-based communities*
- » *A review of best practices and case studies in design-based interventions in the areas of conflict prevention, conflict resolution, and peacemaking*

The research was conducted from July through September 2013.

THE PROJECT IS THE  
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AMERICANS AND  
THE CHALLENGES  
THEY FACE FROM  
NUMEROUS SOURCES.



SUNJEET SINGH SIDHU, MD, *Internal Medicine Physician*

## METHODOLOGY



### SURVEYS

The Google Consumer Survey questions yielded roughly 1,500 responses each. The Politix surveys – conducted in two separate polls – yielded close to 700 and 250 responses respectively.



### LITERATURE REVIEW

The team surveyed the most recent academic literature (more than 60 articles) on neuroscience, behavioral sciences, and news accounts of hate crimes against Sikh- and Muslim-Americans. The academic literature was selected with a strong focus on recent research in the behavioral sciences on hate and bias.



### QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

The research team also interviewed close to 20 leaders in the Sikh American community and other ethnic and faith-based communities as well as leaders in conflict engagement and resolution. Among the leaders interviewed for the project were managerial and communication professionals in the Jewish, Muslim, African American, Asian American, and LGBT communities.



### RESEARCH ON DESIGN-BASED SOCIAL INTERVENTIONS

The team conducted a review of best practices and case studies in design-based interventions in the areas of conflict prevention, conflict resolution, and peacemaking. This final review enabled the Stanford team – experts in the area of behavior design – to bring a unique perspective through which to interpret the findings of its research.



# SUMMARY FINDINGS

The top-level findings from the research are as follows:

79%

CANNOT IDENTIFY INDIA AS THE GEOGRAPHIC ORIGIN OF SIKHISM.



ANTI-TURBAN BIAS EXISTS EVEN AMONG PEOPLE WITH A GREATER KNOWLEDGE OF SIKHS AND THEIR ARTICLES OF FAITH.

20% OF RESPONDENTS SAY THAT IF THEY ENCOUNTER A STRANGER WEARING A TURBAN THEY ARE LIKELY TO BECOME ANGRY OR APPREHENSIVE.



## THE PRESENTATION OF THE TURBAN AND BEARD BY THE MEDIA

reinforces biases which create an environment in which wearers are considered acceptable **TARGETS OF DISCRIMINATION AND APPREHENSION.**

49%

OF AMERICANS BELIEVE "SIKH" IS A SECT OF ISLAM. (It is an independent religion.)



## BIAS IS UNCONSCIOUS, CHARGED BY EMOTION, AND REINFORCED BY IMAGES.

The literature on bias suggests that the turban may be a particularly challenging cultural and religious symbol in post-9/11 America.



70%

CANNOT IDENTIFY A SIKH MAN IN A PICTURE AS A SIKH.

## ACCORDING TO THE FIRST SURVEY PROJECT, AMERICANS TEND TO ASSOCIATE TURBANS WITH OSAMA BIN LADEN

MORE SO THAN WITH NAMED MUSLIM AND SIKH ALTERNATIVES AND MORE THAN WITH NO ONE IN PARTICULAR.

"Whether they're holding a steel coffee mug or a gun, **PEOPLE ARE JUST MORE LIKELY TO SHOOT AT SOMEONE WHO IS WEARING A TURBAN.**"

(Dr. Christian Unkelbach, Turban Effect, 2008)

## HATE & BIAS

The team focused the academic literature review on studies on hate and bias in neuroscience and behavioral sciences. There are three reasons why. First and foremost, a cursory review of the academic literature on hate and bias would reveal the preponderance of research in these two areas from these two fields. Second, and as discussed in later in this report, neuroscience and behavioral sciences are beginning to influence one another in an unprecedented way; there's a synergy that the research team believed should be explored. Third, and perhaps most significantly, the large ecosystem of professionals in design thinking are finding comfort in leveraging the research from neuroscience and behavioral sciences because of the simple but precise scientific rigor that's applied in both the sciences and design thinking. The team made a decision to constrain its research in these two key areas to expand the opportunities for discovering viable, empirically-tested interventions on behalf of the Sikh American community.

## BACKGROUND ON SIKHS

Sikhism is an independent faith that originated in what is modern-day India during the 15th century. Sikhs believe in one God, equality, freedom of religion, and community service. Observant Sikhs are distinguished by their articles of faith which include, most visibly, uncut hair, beards, and the turban. These articles of faith are representative of those values and a commitment to justice.

The almost 25 million Sikhs worldwide constitute the fifth largest religion in the world. Sikhs arrived in North America in 1897. In 1912, Sikhs established their first gurdwara (house of worship) in the United States in Stockton, California. There are an estimated 700,000 Sikhs in the United States. Almost all persons who wear a turban for religious reasons in the United States are adherents of the Sikh faith.

Sikh Americans suffered the deadliest act of violence against a religious minority on Aug. 5, 2012 when a white supremacist stormed a Sikh gurdwara in Oak Creek, Wisconsin. Six Sikh Americans were killed. Balbir Singh Sodhi, a Sikh American targeted expressly because of his turban was also the first fatality after 9/11 in a series of backlash crimes. To date, Sikh Americans encounter discrimination in the workplace, denial of public accommodation, bullying, and are victims of hate crimes due to the lack of understanding about their religious beliefs and practices.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See e.g., Jaideep Singh, *Sikh Formations* (2013); *MEMORY, INVISIBILITY, AND THE OAK CREEK GURDWARA MASSACRE*, *Sikh Formations: Religion, Culture, Theory*, Neha Singh Gohil, Dawinder S. Sidhu, (2008); *The Sikh Turban: Post-9/11 Challenges To This Article of Faith*, *Rutgers Journal of Law and Religion*, Volume 9:2; and SALDEF, [www.saldef.org](http://www.saldef.org), for more information on Sikh Americans and their experiences in America.

## THIS STUDY

CORROBORATES, THROUGH LITERATURE  
THE EXISTENCE OF A SPECIFIC CULTURAL  
DAILY LIVED EXPERIENCES OF THE SIKH

REVIEW AND DATA ANALYSIS,  
BIAS AND ITS IMPACT ON THE REAL,  
AMERICAN COMMUNITY.



DEVINDER S. BAWA, *Healthcare/Technology Entrepreneur*

## RESULTS & ANALYSIS

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### I. SURVEY FINDINGS

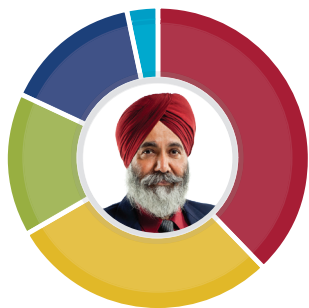
#### Google Consumer Surveys

As noted earlier, the research team conducted two survey projects. The first, using Google Consumer Survey (GCS), yielded roughly 1,500 responses each. The survey collected the following demographic data: gender (male, female), region (Northeast, West, Midwest, South), age, and income, and urban density (rural, suburban, and urban). With methodology certified by the polling group Harris Interactive, GCS has emerged as a reliable tool for organizations looking for statistically significant consumer polling which takes into account geography, income, gender and other variables. Google makes extensive use of its publisher network to poll readers via simple one-two question surveys and aggregates results in real time. While GCS has not been time-tested, the Pew Research Center recently concluded that GCS samples appear to “conform closely to the demographic composition of the overall internet population” and that “there is little evidence so far that the Google Consumer Surveys sample is biased toward heavy internet users.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> See <http://www.google.com/insights/consumersurveys/pew>

## GOOGLE CONSUMER SURVEY RESULTS

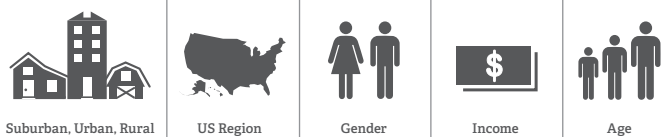


### THIS MAN IS MOST LIKELY A...

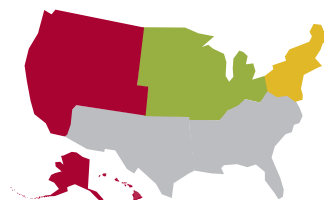
- 37.8%** » I don't know  
(+3.4 / -3.3)
- 29.1%** » Sikh  
(+3.1 / -2.9)
- 15.2%** » Hindu  
(+2.7 / -2.4)
- 14.8%** » Muslim  
(+2.9 / -2.5)
- 3.1%** » Buddhist  
(+2.4 / -1.4)

Results for respondent with demographics. Weighted by Age, Gender, Region. 1121 responses. Winner statistically significant.

### DATA IN THE FOLLOWING PAGES IS WEIGHTED BY:

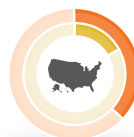


### THIS MAN IS MOST LIKELY A...



- 49.9%**  
US Midwest
- 36.2%**  
US West
- 33.7%**  
US Northeast

**"I DON'T KNOW"**  
People in the US Midwest picked 'I don't know' more than those from the US West or US South.



- 37.0%**  
\$50-74K
- 16.8%**  
\$25-49K

Among people in the US Midwest, those earning \$50-74K picked 'Sikh' 2x more than those earning \$25-49K.



- 45.9%**  
Midwest
- 27.0%**  
South

Among men, those in the US Midwest picked 'I don't know' more than those in the US South.



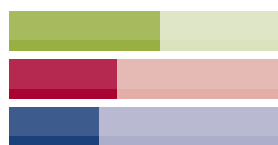
- 43.5%**  
\$25-49K
- 28.3%**  
\$50-74K

Among people in suburban areas, those earning \$25-49K picked 'I don't know' more than those earning \$50-74K.



- 37.7%**  
Men
- 27.0%**  
Women

Men picked 'Sikh' more than women.

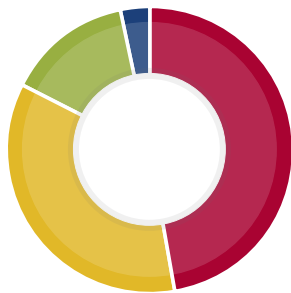


- 54.7%**  
US Midwest
- 38.9%**  
US West
- 32.4%**  
US South

**\$ 25-49K**  
Among people earning \$25-49K, those in the US Midwest picked 'I don't know' more than those in the US West or the US South.



**Q:** THE PERSON YOU WOULD MOST ASSOCIATE WITH A TURBAN AND A BEARD IS:



- 47.3%** » No association  
(+3.3 / -3.3)
- 35.3%** » Osama bin Laden  
(+3.2 / -3.1)
- 14.3%** » Ayatollah Khomeini  
(+2.4 / -2.1)
- 3.1%** » Gurpreet Singh Sarin  
(+2.0 / -1.2)

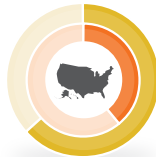
Results for respondents with demographics. Weighted by Age, Gender, Region. (1184 responses). Order statistically significant.



Among people in urban areas, those in the US West picked **'no association'** more than those in the US South.



Women picked **'Osama bin Laden'** more than men.

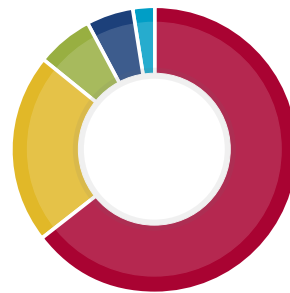


Among people in the US West, those aged 35-44 picked **'no association'** more than those aged 55-64.

355 insights investigated. 7.1 false discoveries expected on average (p value: 0.02).



**Q:** DO YOU KNOW? SIKHISM ORIGINATED IN OR NEAR:



- 64.7%** » I don't know  
(+4.0 / -4.3)
- 21.4%** » India  
(+3.8 / -3.4)
- 6.3%** » Iraq  
(+2.9 / -2.0)
- 5.2%** » Turkey  
(+2.7 / -1.8)
- 2.4%** » Canada  
(+3.0 / -1.3)

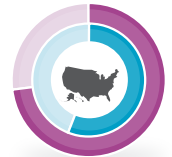
Results for respondents with demographics. Weighted by Age, Region. (920 responses). Winner statistically significant.



Women picked **'I don't know'** more than men.



Among people in suburban areas, men picked **'India'** 2x more than women.



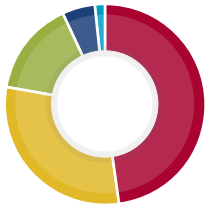
Among people in the US Midwest, women picked **'I don't know'** more than men.

222 insights investigated. 4.4 false discoveries expected on average (p value: 0.02).



### YOU MOST ASSOCIATE A TURBAN AND BEARD WITH SOMEONE WHO IS:

Results for respondents with demographics. Weighted by Age, Region. (869 responses). Order statistically significant.



- 48.0%** » Muslim (+4.2 / -4.2)
- 30.0%** » Sikh (+4.1 / -3.8)
- 15.2%** » Hindu (+3.5 / -2.9)
- 5.3%** » Buddhist (+2.7 / -1.8)
- 1.5%** » Shinto (+3.4 / -1.0)



**47.8%** \$50-74K | **27.0%** \$25-49K

Among people in the US West, those earning \$50-74K picked 'Sikh' more than those earning \$25-49K.



**36.6%** West | **21.6%** Midwest

Among people in suburban areas, those in the US West picked 'Sikh' more than those in the US Midwest.



**56.4%** Age 45-54 | **37.6%** Age 65+

45-54 year-olds picked 'Muslim' more than those aged 65+.



**51.0%** \$25-49K

**35.2%** \$0-24K

**\$ 25-49K**

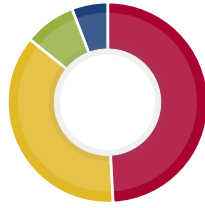
People earning \$25-49K picked 'Muslim' more than those earning \$0-24K.

214 insights investigated. 4.3 false discoveries expected on average (p value: 0.02).



### WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING IS NOT A SECT OF ISLAM?

Results for respondents with demographics. Weighted by Age, Gender, Region. (1183 responses). Order statistically significant.



- 49.2%** » All are sects of Islam (+3.2 / -3.1)
- 36.8%** » Sikh (+3.1 / -3.0)
- 8.3%** » Sunni (+2.3 / -1.8)
- 5.7%** » Shiite (+2.2 / -1.6)



**44.4%** Men | **29.7%** Women

Men picked 'Sikh' more than women.



**50.4%** Suburban | **39.9%** Urban

Suburban areas picked 'all are sects of Islam' more than urban areas.



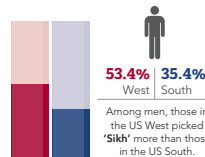
**44.8%** Urban | **27.0%** Rural

Urban areas picked 'Sikh' more than rural areas.



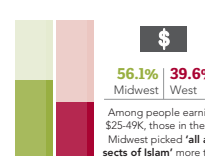
**58.8%** South | **43.0%** Northeast

The US South picked 'all are sects of Islam' more than the US Northeast.



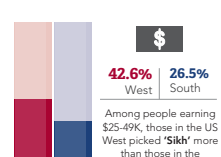
**53.4%** West | **35.4%** South

Among men, those in the US West picked 'Sikh' more than those in the US South.



**56.1%** Midwest | **39.6%** West

Among people earning \$25-49K, those in the US Midwest picked 'all are sects of Islam' more than those in the US West.



**42.6%** West | **26.5%** South

Among people earning \$25-49K, those in the US West picked 'Sikh' more than those in the US South.

372 insights investigated. 7.4 false discoveries expected on average. (p value: 0.02)

## THE GOOGLE SURVEYS PRODUCED A NUMBER OF NOTEWORTHY RESULTS:

ROUGHLY **70%**  
OF RESPONDENTS  
(7 OUT OF 10)  
COULD NOT IDENTIFY  
A SIKH MAN IN A  
PICTURE AS A SIKH.

Respondents were given several answers to choose from: "I don't know," Sikh, Hindu, Muslim, or Buddhist. A majority (37.8%) answered "I don't know," and roughly 33% answered incorrectly. A review of the demographic data on gender, income, and location yielded a few interesting insights. Gender was the most significant determinant of the correct response. For example, men answered the question correctly more often than women (37% versus 21%). Women were more likely to pick "I don't know" or "Muslim" than men. Across all geographic regions, except the Midwest, approximately one out of three respondents picked "Sikh" and a similar number in each region picked "I don't know." In the Midwest, respondents were less likely to pick "Sikh" (23%) and more likely to pick "I don't know" (50%) than other regions. Among people earning \$25,000–\$49,000 annually, respondents in the Midwest answered "I don't know" more often than those in other regions. The utility of the demographic data in GCS is one area of focus for future work in advocacy and engagement. In the meantime, the size of the overall number of respondents failing to answer this key question correctly is noteworthy.

RESPONDENTS  
ASSOCIATED TURBANS  
WITH **OSAMA BIN  
LADEN** MORE SO  
THAN WITH NAMED  
MUSLIM AND SIKH  
ALTERNATIVES.

Respondents were given three other choices: "no association," Ayatollah Khomeini, and Gurpreet Singh Sarin, a Sikh American that came to prominence in 2013 after being selected as a contestant on American Idol, the popular reality-television competition show. Gender was a significant variable as women indicate a stronger association between the beard and turban and Osama bin Laden more than men (40.3% versus 30%). Age played a role in association. As the population aged, they picked "No Association" less and Ayatollah Khomeini" more. 56% of 18–24 year olds picked No Association, the highest of that selection, and 7% Khomeini, while those 65 and older selected "No Association" 41%, the lowest of that selection, and 25% picked Khomeini, indicating a significant association with popular presentations in the media and the news. Bin Laden was picked fairly consistently across age groups. The named Sikh, Gurpreet Singh Sarin, was picked by approximately 4% or less of all respondents, close to the margin of error, indicating a low level of awareness of a recent Sikh American figure with exposure across American popular media.



WHEN ASKED WHAT RELIGION THEY MOST ASSOCIATE WITH A TURBAN AND BEARD, ROUGHLY **48%** CHOSE MUSLIM. (HALF OF ALL RESPONDENTS)

30% chose Sikh, 15.2% chose Hindu, 5.3% chose Buddhist, 1.5% chose Shinto. Again, variables such as gender, income, and location appear to factor into the respondent's selection. For example, among respondents in the US West, those earning \$50,000–\$74,000 answered correctly more often than those earning \$25,000–\$49,000. While respondents in the Northeast, West, and in urban areas were more likely to pick Sikh (approximately 35%), the highest rate of all respondents, the majority of respondents across all demographic segments picked Muslim.

ROUGHLY **79%** OF ALL RESPONDENTS (TWO THIRDS) COULD NOT IDENTIFY WHERE SIKHISM ORIGINATED.

There was not a significant variation across density or geographic region when viewed as independent factors. Women answered "I don't know" more than men (70.1% versus 59%). In suburban areas, men answered India more than twice than women (29% versus 14%).

ROUGHLY (HALF) **49%** OF ALL RESPONDENTS SAID SIKH IS A SECT OF ISLAM.

Men answered the question which is not a sect of Islam correctly more often than women (44.4% versus 29.7%). Respondents in urban areas answered correctly more often than those in rural areas (44.8% versus 27.0%). Gender remained significant when coupled with other factors. A majority of women picked "All – Sikh, Sunni, Shia" across all density and income categories, and more women picked that answer than men in those cases. Rural populations were one of the only categories where both a majority of men and women picked "All". Responses varied across geography, with respondents from the West and Northeast picking Sikh as a distinct faith approximately 45% of the time, the highest percentage of correct responses, and 59% Southern respondents picking "All" (29% picked Sikh), the lowest.

### The Politix Surveys

The two Politix surveys yielded close to 700 and 250 responses respectively. The sample represents a demographic that generally is more affluent, educated, and aware of news and trends. The addition of Politix surveys to the mix of tools for the SALDEF/Stanford research project enabled the team to gauge both knowledge and bias among more educated Americans.

In the first poll, respondents were asked to test their knowledge of religion. This poll demonstrated that Politix readers had a greater knowledge of Sikhs. For example, when asked which religion requires men to wear a turban, 62% of the respondents answered 'Sikh'. The second survey explored the respondent's reaction to someone in a turban. Twenty percent (20%) of respondents answered either "angry" or "apprehensive." Respondents who chose "other" explained their answers and indicated that the turban provoked other kinds of negative responses. Aggregating all the data from this survey, the research team concluded that more than one out five readers admitted experiencing negative sentiment when encountering a stranger in public wearing a turban.



#### WHEN YOU ENCOUNTER A STRANGER IN PUBLIC WEARING A TURBAN, YOU ARE LIKELY TO BE SOMEWHAT:

56% » Neutral

19% » Other

17% » Apprehensive

5% » Happy

3% » Angry

### SUMMARY ANALYSIS

It is important to view the data gathered in these survey projects both separately and together. The Google surveys provide strong evidence that the "average" American lacks an understanding of who Sikhs are and where they are from. The Google surveys also provide evidence that many Americans wrongly associate Sikhism with Islam. And it is on this point, that the data from the Politix surveys becomes meaningful. While the first Politix survey showed that Politix readers had a far greater understanding of Sikhs (identity, place of origin, and a key article of faith, the turban), more than one in five still admitted negative sentiment toward the turban.

Significantly, the results indicate that while Sikh Americans have been in certain regions, such as the American West, for over 100 years, the majority of the population still does not have an association or understanding of the Sikh faith and its articles of faith, specifically the highly visible turban and beard. If there is an association, it is often a misperception or, as demonstrated, in certain contexts a negative association. This indicates that the lack of knowledge about Sikh Americans is not tied exclusively to any particular region, but any campaign to address perceptions can be successfully designed for implementation in localities across the country.

Further, the results indicate the term "Sikh", by itself, has little or no meaning in American discourse and can be counter-productive in education efforts when used without additional context or explanation. For example, as the results indicate, saying an individual is of the Sikh faith is as likely to make the listener believe the individual is a practicing Muslim as a member of an independent religion. Similarly, the listener may not have any context of the geographic origins of the Sikh faith and associate it with another region.

For the Stanford staff on the research team, the Google and Politix data combined suggested three potential courses of action: (a) a close look at the demographic data gathered by the Google surveys to identify key regions where education and more traditional approaches to advocacy might make a difference; (b) a close look at the scientific literature on hate and bias to beginning establishing a framework for approaching the challenging if not intractable problem of emotional bias against the turban and the people who wear them; (c) a practical application of design principles for staging interventions aimed at changing the way Americans feel and respond to the turban when they see it.

EVIDENCE SHOWS  
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ANIMOSITY AMONG  
AMERICANS IN THE  
POST-9/11 ERA.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The research team surveyed the most recent academic literature (more than 60 articles) on neuroscience, behavioral sciences, and news accounts of hate crimes against Sikh- and Muslim-Americans. The academic literature was selected with a strong focus on recent research in the behavioral sciences on hate and bias. Internet conversations on popular online community sites, and entertainment (games and film). And while the team looked at studies on hate crime against different groups, there was a stronger focus on Sikhs and Muslims because of the widespread misunderstanding of these two groups by Americans, as was confirmed in the consumer surveys. Further, the Sikh American community has not been studied as in depth, and the Muslim American experience is particularly instructive and analogous to the research. What follows is a summary of the team's findings in the literature review, and analysis and recommendations for further research and action.

### Science of Bias

For the purposes of this project – which seeks to bring insight from the sciences to complement the iterative empirically-based design thinking that informs the approach of the Stanford Peace Innovation Lab – the richest source of studies comes from the growing literature on the biological and cognitive basis of bias. A good place to begin a review of this literature is with the general concept of “heuristics.” “A heuristic is a procedure which is perhaps not guaranteed to solve a problem, but which will more than likely lead

to a good solution.” (Esgate and Groome 2004). There are various kinds of heuristics that are relevant to the science of bias and hate. The “availability heuristic” – introduced in 1973 by Amos Tversky and Daniel Kahneman, the Israeli-American psychologist and winner of the 2002 Nobel Prize in Economics – is seen as an unconscious process driven by the notion that “if you can think of it, it must be important.” (Esgate and Groome 2004). The concept has been applied in numerous studies to help explain how available information about people, news, and trends tends to create a bias. (Riddle 2008). The “affect heuristic” is the rule of thumb whereby “people consult or refer to an “affect pool” containing all the positive and negative tags consciously or unconsciously associated with the representations” of objects or events. (Slovic, Finucane, Peters, and MacGregor 2002). The affect heuristic has been cited in numerous studies in the behavioral sciences and criminology to show how emotion can often subvert and trump reasoning. Similar to the availability heuristic, the lesser-known “similarity heuristic” whereby decision makers who use it judge the likelihood that an instance is a member of one category rather than another by the degree to which it is similar to others in that category. (Read and Grushka-Cockayne 2007).

The work in heuristics has been strongly complemented by the literature on unconscious bias. This literature here in fact has grown so extensive as to include popular authors Malcolm Gladwell, whose 2007 book *Blink* examined the strong role that intuition (unconscious) versus executive-functioning (conscious) plays in decision-making both good and bad. (Gladwell 2007). More recently, Kahneman, who earlier helped coin the term availability heuristic, published *Thinking, Fast and Slow*, which draws on decades of research that support a framework for understanding the way humans think in two different systems, where System 1 is fast and intuitive and System 2 is slow and more deliberate. (Kahneman 2013). Even more prominent in the media, *The Invisible Gorilla* (Chabris and Simons 2011) looked at the science behind a wildly popular viral video that tricked people into not seeing a dancing gorilla because of “inattentive blindness.”

The related concepts of heuristics and unconscious bias have found their way into the literature on negative bias and actions resulting from negative bias. In one particularly influential study, Anthony G. Greenwald of the University of Washington and Mahzain R. Banaji of Yale University, examined evidence supporting “the view that social behavior often operates in an implicit and unconscious fashion.” (Greenwald and Banaji 1995).

The authors recently elevated the conversation in their book *Blind Spot*, which looks at negative biases that exist even among people who are educated and seen as “good” in their communities. (Banaji and Greenwald 2013). The Greenwald/Banaji view on bias – e.g., that “it can happen to the best of us” – has been adopted in other popular works with origins in the world of academia. In *The Hidden Brain*, Shankar Vedantam, a science writer for The Washington Post, mined a treasure trove of academic studies that demonstrate the non-autonomous way in which humans think about everything, from puppies, romance and genocide. (Vedantam 2010).

The notion that “bias can happen to the best of us” thus begs the question: how do we become vulnerable to bias? The section that follows – on the role of the media – looks at that question. There is another topic that arises frequently in the literature on bias, and that is the notion of the other. One study looked at how social and visual cues cast Arabs as both foreigners and terrorists. (Freeman, Penner, Saperstein, Scheutz, Ambady 2011). Another study – also co-authored by Banaji – looked at the tendency that Americans associate whiteness with American identity. (Devos and Banaji 2005). With unconscious processes wielding so much influence, and with the American tendency to relegate what’s dark and different as the other, it stands to reason that certain populations could be more at risk than others. It also stands to reason that the media – a primary source of information feeding the so-called availability heuristic– might in fact play a key role in escalating risk, or – through interventions – in mitigating risk.

### Role of Media

A number of studies on role of media in bias and hate approach the topic through the lens of heuristics, namely the availability bias (Riddle 2008) and the affect bias. (Keller, Siegrist and Gutscher 2006). Conclusions from these studies range from acknowledgement that the media in fact does play a role in creating and/or amplifying bias to the more extreme view that the media has served as an unintentional instrument of terror. But perhaps the most comprehensive and influential study on the effects of media on bias against the turban in America is Jack Shaheen’s *Reel Bad Arabs*, which chronicles Hollywood’s role in “vilifying a people”, prior to 9/11. (Shaheen 2009). Shaheen’s analysis shows that, out of 1000 films that have Arab & Muslim characters (from the year 1896 to 2000), 12 were “positive” depictions, 52 were “even-handed,” and the remaining 900 were “negative.”

Shaheen also notes the participation of the US Government and military in action films and story lines in the late 80's and 90's that promote the stereotype of Arab/Muslim/Turban wearing character as terrorist. A review of the literature did not return a similarly scaled study on the Sikh American community and their specific articles of faith, however, the results of Shaheen's review and other studies discussed are instructive in analyzing the Sikh American experience and approaches to address their challenges.

Vit Sisler's comprehensive review of Arab representation in video games confirms the continuation of stereotypical representations in first person shooter games such as *War in the Gulf* (Empire, 1993), *Delta Force* (NovaLogic, 1998), *Conflict: Desert Storm* (SCi Games, 2002), *Full Spectrum Warrior* (THQ, 2004), *Kuma/War* (Kuma Reality Games, 2004) and *Conflict: Global Terror* (SCi Games, 2005). (Sisler 2008). The first version of *Hitman 2* (Eidos, 2002) featured a scenario in which the player shot turbaned Sikhs inside a gurdwara (house of worship). The stereotypes and accompanying simplistic narratives reinforce the dark turbaned 'Other' as the enemy. A few notable games, *America's War* and *Kuma/War* have other purposes beyond entertainment as recruitment tools for the US military or as a means to rationalize the 'war on terror.'

The cumulative effect of repeated cultural images and associations of Islamic appearance plus terror operates as a passive reinforcement to unconscious biases Americans hold regarding Muslim and Muslim appearing Americans – how Sikh Americans are often categorized in the post-9/11 context. (Singh 2013). And there is evidence – again from the world of gaming – that the turban in fact has evolved as an unconscious object of enmity. Christian Unkelbach, Joseph Forgas, and Thomas Denson used a "shooter bias" paradigm to assess participants aggressive tendencies toward targets wearing a turban or hijab. (Unkelbach, Forgas, Denson 2008). As predicted, this experiment demonstrated a shooter bias for targets wearing a turban or a hijab and the results were comparable regardless of gender target confirming a negative stereotype associated with Islamic appearance. The evidence further supported the prediction that the shooter bias against Muslims was the behavioral manifestation of acquired negative stereotypes towards this group. This study and others also lend weight to the hypothesis that the turban misassociation problem needs to be approached from a behavioral perspective.



**"THE TURBAN EFFECT"**

Image from the Shooter Bias study by Unkelbach, et. al. looking at representations of turbans & Muslims. The study was not conducted using representations of Sikhs

Christian Unkelbach, visiting scholar at Australia's University of New South Wales, says:

“ Whether they're holding a steel coffee mug or a gun, people are just more likely to shoot at someone who is wearing a turban. Just putting on this piece of clothing changes people's behaviour. ”

The impact of the images and portrayals in the media and the biases they reinforce in the post-9/11 experience is recorded by Dr. Jaideep Singh. The manner in which religious and racial bias combine to impair a community is clearly reflected in the experiences of Sikh Americans.” Following a series of interviews examining experiences in the aftermath of 9/11, Dr. Jaideep Singh (2013) found that:

“the one consistent theme [was]...for a Sikh man with a beard and turban in the USA, life was very much like walking around with a target on your body.”

These biases are exacerbated by the media's inability to displace the fears surrounding the appearance of a person with a beard and turban when the media does not acknowledge the identity of the individual victim. As Singh found, while Balbir Singh Sodhi was the first death attributed to an act of post-9/11 backlash, “almost none of the national television reports or print media articles about his death included a photo of him.”

*Dr. Jaideep Singh (2013):*

“Although Sikh Americans were disproportionately singled out for harassment during the national hate crime epidemic, due to their visibility and appearance, you would not know this from media reports. The media regularly failed to mention Sikh Americans in the headlines of news stories examining hate violence after 9/11. The titles of most such articles mentioned only Muslim and Arab Americans, although the body of many of these pieces began with or referred to the murder of Mr. Sodhi, and numerous other attacks directed at members of the Sikh faith.”

Compare the media's role in preventing bias with their role in playing into and reinforcing the biases held against the turban. In the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, the image of a Sikh American projected throughout the news media was not that of Balbir Singh Sodhi, but that of Sher Singh, who was taken off a train in Rhode Island for appearing 'suspicious'. His image appeared in major news outlets and across television screens around the world for days even after all charges had been dropped against him and it was clear he had no association with the attacks.

*As Singh found (2013):*

“Media misrepresentations of Sher Singh's arrest added further animus to the prejudice already being engendered against bearded and turbaned individuals by media outlets' concurrent bombardment of images of bin Laden and the Taliban. The images on television neatly fit the stereotype of a terrorist the western media had fabricated. By showing Sher Singh being led away in handcuffs, and mentioning that the train was stopped because of the presence of 'suspicious' individuals, the media managed to firmly associate Sher Singh – and those who looked like him – with the terrorist attacks.”

Singh concludes that reporting on the Sikh American and larger Asian American experience demonstrated these communities are viewed “as outside the purview of the mainstream of society. The direct implication was that those in these stories were not part of that mainstream, but were marginal figures in society. Their problems were ‘minority’ issues, not issues for all Americans to ponder,” exacerbating and condoning the biases against these ‘other-ized’ communities.

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### SUMMARY ANALYSIS

For the research team, there were three things that stood out prominently in the literature review. First, the consensus that bias is largely unconscious argues for an approach to community intervention that goes beyond traditional advocacy, which is largely based on conscious awareness and reasoning. Second, there appears to be a consensus around the need to design proactive behavioral interventions to alter unconscious bias. In fact, a number of recent studies concluded that bias while unconscious is “not wired,” and can be eradicated by “coalitional alignment,” i.e., social interventions that enable people to see “the other” in a different way. (Kurzban, Tooby, Cosmides 2001). Third, the notion that “bias can happen to the best of us” suggests the need to implement these behavioral interventions with populations both educated and non-educated. As one of the participants interviewed for the qualitative community survey stated, the turban may have become collateral damage from the war on terror, and the damage may be deeper than one might think. According to the second Politix consumer survey in the SALDEF/Stanford research project, more than one in five of a comparatively educated American sample reported having negative feelings toward the turban. It must be noted, that the results only account for respondents admitting the bias. If bias is in fact unconscious, the numbers are likely higher.

As the literature review indicated, the media plays a significant role in perpetuating these biases. The turban was associated with figures who have played the role of antagonist in news narratives over the past few decades. As demonstrated, the bias against the turban and beard, when coupled with the lack of knowledge about Sikh Americans, creates an environment in which they are considered acceptable targets of subtle and not so subtle discrimination and become ‘deserving’ of apprehension indicated by survey respondents.

Importantly, the literature review revealed that the Sikh American community and experience have not been subject to similar levels of analysis as other communities and remain an understudied population.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> M. K. Ahluwalia, Neha S. Gohil, Davinder S. Sidhu, and Jaideep Singh are some of the scholars who have begun to address this problem of a lack of data.



## 700,000 SIKHS IN THE UNITED STATES

ALMOST ALL PEOPLE IN THE  
UNITED STATES WHO WEAR A  
TURBAN ARE ADHERENTS OF  
THE SIKH FAITH.

GURPREET SINGH SARIN, *American Idol* Top-40 contestant, Season 12



### III. COMMUNITY SURVEY

The research team also conducted a series of interviews with leaders in the Sikh American community and peers from other faith-based and ethnic groups. The goal for this particular workstream was to identify gaps in competency for meaningful advocacy work or behavioral interventions. The research team created a framework for evaluating these competencies – dubbed the “capabilities graph” – and for guiding communities on how to build on them.

The diversity of the community for this survey – which comprised more than 20 leaders – was crucial given the overall objective of the SALDEF/Stanford project which was to not only to create a framework for community interventions on behalf of the Sikh American community, but to also learn from the experience of leaders in peer communities. Among those interviewed for the community survey were managerial and communication professionals in the Jewish, Muslim, African American, Asian American, and LGBT communities. The research team thus tapped the collective wisdom of this small sample to identify key gaps in capability in the Sikh American community.



THE CAPABILITIES GRAPH



### INTELLIGENCE

**Objective:** The ability to detect and respond to crises before they happen.

**Gap:** Infrastructure is in very early stages.

Both the leaders at SALDEF and respondents in the qualitative research agreed on the need for a more sophisticated data platform for comprehending consumer sentiment and for detecting potential conflict before it arises. On this topic, the research team learned of several projects in ethnic and faith-based community that leveraged either custom or off-the-shelf tools for mining consumer sentiment and for responding to events in real time. The emerging technology category of sentiment analysis is a good area of focus for any group hoping to understand consumer sentiment, and its place in the technology ecosystem – large technology companies are developing their own services or looking to acquire smaller players – ensures that the category will continue to evolve.

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## IDENTITY

**Objective:** To leverage the depth and diversity of the Sikh American community.

**Gap:** Alignment as well as representation of different groups (e.g., women).

Respondents also recognize the need to follow a best practice in the world of conflict resolution – dubbed “identity-based engagement” – that recognizes that communities must first engage and align themselves internally. In addition, the research team learned of an ambitious multi-year initiative in the San Francisco Bay Area that was carefully designed to achieve better alignment in a religious community that had recently been sharply divided on a number of issues.<sup>4</sup> This case study, and several others that have been informally documented over the last decade, speak persuasively to the power of community alignment for not only helping to reach consensus but to strengthen a community’s overall capability for acting with force.

There is a great deal of diversity within the Sikh community. If more of the community were aligned and mobilized – engagement potentially could have a greater impact.

<sup>4</sup> See <http://www.jcrc.org/ydc.htm> for a description of the Jewish Community Relations Council’s (JCRC) “Year of Civil Discourse,” a project focused on promoting greater dialog in the SF Bay Area Jewish community. “The Year of Civil Discourse (YCD) Initiative is designed to elevate the level of discourse in the Jewish community when discussing Israel. We envision an inclusive Jewish community where people from across the political spectrum can come together, discuss challenging topics, inspire and empower one another, leading to a stronger and more vital Jewish community. YCD will provide Jewish community members, institutions, and leaders with the tools to have respectful, vibrant, engaging conversations about Israel and emerging controversial issues.”

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## INTEGRATION

**Objective:** Mixing well into the “manystreams” of American public life.

**Gap:** Sikhs stay “inside,” so they are seen as outsiders.

One of the key findings from the community survey was the near unanimity of the topic of how poorly integrated Sikhs are into the so-called mainstream of American life. One Sikh leader commented, “while it is true that Americans don’t know Sikhs, it is also true that Sikhs don’t necessarily mix very well with other Americans. Truth is, we don’t get out much.” One risk that Sikh Americans face because they are not well integrated is the tendency for people to simply rely on what they know (see earlier discussion about the availability heuristic). Another is that the separation of Sikh Americans – who, as one Sikh leader said, are often more comfortable “hanging out at the temple” – might tend to frame Sikh Americans as outsiders. To correct this problem it is important to identify interventions that (a) enable Sikhs to better mix in other communities, and (b) can be scaled with the aid of technologies. In the section in this report following the community survey, the tools for intervention from the world of behavior design are explored in some detail to help illuminate a number of other potential paths.

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## INFLUENCE

**Objective:** Leverage the “long tail” of influence, both inside and outside the Sikh community.

**Gap:** Biggest challenge is countering the post-9/11 narrative.

The research team uncovered a further gap in “integration”: the Sikh community’s relative lack of engagement with general influencers on hate crime, human rights, peace building, etc. In addition, the community has the opportunity to think more broadly – and more granularly – about the marketplace of Sikh influence. There are influencers with great sway with older Sikhs (“inside the temple”). There are influencers with greater pull with younger Sikhs. There are influencers who might have pull with mainstream American culture where one of the number-one tasks may be to counter the effect of anti-Islamic propaganda which has additionally resulted in anti-Sikh bias. But without the infrastructure for harnessing this influence, it will be challenging to do anything at scale.

Influence mapping is another technology category that is emerging, and the science behind the technology has been steadily improving over the past few years. The SALDEF/Stanford team engaged Traackr, a Silicon Valley based influencing mapping company, to get a preliminary list of influencers that the Sikh American community might engage because of their influence in both national and regional communities on topics such as community engagement, hate crime, human rights, civil rights, and religious freedom. While the general approach of the SALDEF/Stanford project is to look beyond traditional media influence, the engagement of the “long tail of influence” makes sense for potential community based interventions.

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## INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY

**Objective:** A sustainable organizational infrastructure for the benefit of the entire Sikh ecosystem.

**Gap:** Infrastructure is at the very early stages of development.

As reported in the top-level findings, there is also a considerable gap in capacity for advocacy work. While Sikh Americans appear to be evolving their capabilities in this area, it will need to go further if it hopes to change the cultural dynamic in a sustainable way. One recommendation is to develop a new type of collaboration between groups of common cause, replacing the traditional Interfaith model with a broader model that incorporates other kinds of affinity groups. Over the past decade, a number of Sikh American groups have emerged to address challenges facing the community.

At the same time, there was consensus that the Sikh American community could learn a great deal from other communities that have built long-term capacity. In particular, there was great interest in learning from the Jewish American community and the African American community. As several leaders in the community survey noted, these two communities have evolved by (a) professionalizing the work of the community, going beyond what volunteers could provide, and (b) building long-term capacity by engaging specialists in development and fundraising. But whereas professionalization will proceed along a longer timeline, efforts to congregate and align existing Sikh American groups could benefit the Sikh American community in the short term.

## SUMMARY RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the findings of the community survey, the Stanford team made the following observations on possible directions for building community capabilities:

- » **Intelligence:** Commencing work in 2014 to identify data sources and partners. Both the leaders at SALDEF and respondents in the qualitative research agree on the need for a more sophisticated data platform for comprehending consumer sentiment and for detecting potential conflict before it arises.
- » **Identity:** Hosting a series of regional public forums designed to get consensus and alignment.
- » **Integration:** Designing effective and scalable community interventions to enable Sikhs and others to better understand one another.
- » **Influence:** Developing a robust platform for identifying the new ecosystem of influencers that the Sikh American community must learn to engage.
- » **Institutional capacity:** Developing a two-phased plan for capacity building, with the first phase focused on coalition building.

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## IV. BEHAVIOR DESIGN

Finally, the team conducted a review of best practices and case studies in design-based interventions – where the approach involves the application of the principles and practices of design thinking – in the areas of conflict prevention, conflict resolution, and peacemaking. This final review enabled the Stanford team – experts in the area of behavior design – to bring a unique perspective through which to interpret the findings of its research.

### The Principles of Behavior Design

The Stanford personnel on the team are affiliated with two research facilities: the Stanford Persuasive Technology Lab (PTL) and a related group called the Stanford Peace Innovation Lab (PIL). The former group has earned a great reputation for evolving and applying the principles of operant conditioning (behavioral psychology) to the design of technology systems and applications. The PTL has designed curricula and programs for enabling technology developers to design technology systems for specific behavioral outcomes. (Fogg 2002). In one well-known case study, Facebook applied the principles of behavior design to optimize the user experience for uploading profile photos. It was at a time that the platform was first being introduced to post-college adult populations, and profile photos were seen as a tool for promoting openness and positive behavior versus the culture of anonymity that was one of the defining experiences of Myspace, a

competitor at the time. The principles of behavior design inspired the launch of the PIL, which seeks not only to apply these principles to a vertical market (peace and creative conflict engagement) but to apply these principles beyond technology systems, and to communication systems that incorporate technology. SocialxDesign and Stanford researchers have applied the principles of behavior design to other vertical markets including education, entrepreneurship, and citizen empowerment.<sup>5</sup>

In the context of peace innovation, the principles of behavior design can be summarized as follows:

**EMPIRICAL** – all behavior designed is conducted in environments that allow for testing in small control groups.

**ITERATIVE** – consistent with the empirical approach, behavior design seeks to iterate design concepts quickly until a viable candidate emerges for production.

**INCENTIVIZED** – consistent with the precepts of operant conditioning, behavior design seeks to create systems that elicit desired behaviors through incentives, i.e., positive reinforcement. In addition, behavior design seeks to apply models for incentivizing desirable behavior, and de-incentivizing undesirable behavior, in a range of markets including conflict resolution, citizen empowerment, and social entrepreneurship.

**CO-CREATIVE** – one of the most promising models for incentivization is co-creation, an approach to engagement that involves members of the community to take part in the actual development and implementation of the intervention. Co-creation not only ensures that the intervention will be acceptable to the community but that the community will actually be more motivated to make sure the intervention results in success.

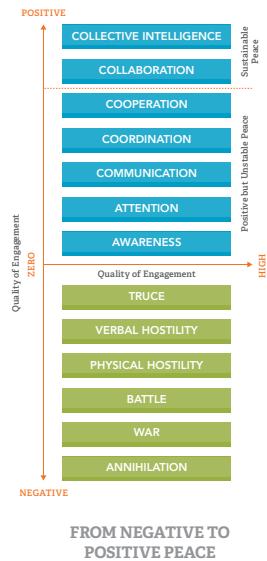
**SCALABLE** – With roots in the technology arena, behavior design also seeks ways to scale systems once they have been tested and optimized. In the world of peace innovation, the technology can span the gamut of communications technology (social media and other “mediating technologies”), sensor technology (mobile systems that automate the collection, aggregation, and analysis of relevant data), and educational technology (e.g., Massively Open Online Courses (MOOCs), which are being developed for coaching on

<sup>5</sup> Among the organizations that SocialxDesign and PIL have jointly advised are The White House, the US Department of Education, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and one of the world's largest NGOs (researching potential designs for engaging and empowering a multi-million member community).

resilience and training in conflict engagement. Technology is not just a medium but an accelerant with a special strategic value on projects where an undesired behavior appears to be intractable (e.g., where mass media may have unconsciously conditioned many people to react negatively to certain visual cues).

**Peace intervention frameworks**

There are a number of frameworks for approaching interventions for conflict engagement which can create solutions in this context. The first, foundational to most of PIL's work in peace innovation, is the negative/positive peace framework, which looks at the range of human interactions from all out war/destruction to collaboration and collective intelligence. While SocialxDesign and PIL have been engaged to design interventions across the spectrum, they have a bias for designing interventions for "positive peace,"<sup>6</sup> i.e., interventions that build sustainable positive relations regardless of the presence or absence of conflict. An example of this is the work that SocialxDesign is beginning to do in Silicon Valley between Israeli immigrants and Hispanics. The two communities are beginning to learn more about one another and through a series of interventions – events – they will begin to explore common strengths and interests and points for collaboration (e.g., mentorship and entrepreneurship).



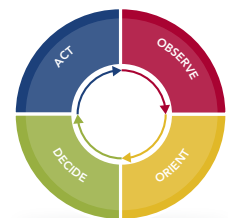
<sup>6</sup> The term "positive peace" was first coined by the Norwegian sociologist and mathematician Johan Galtung, one of the principal founders of modern peace and conflict studies. Galtung (1964). The concept has developed in parallel in psychology, with the rise of the "positive psychology" movement that focuses on what make people well and whole versus what ails them. Both movements are founded on the notion that preventative interventions have the potential of delivery a greater positive net effect for the populations that are engaged and at lower cost to society.

Another framework is based on a model from the world of gaming, which, like behavior design, borrows heavily on the principles of operant behavior. The model, known as the core loop, gives peace practitioners a way to understand and design interventions so as to encourage the first instance and repetition of a desired behavior (positive), or inhibit the repetition of an undesired behavior (negative). The model has been applied in the world of gaming and conflict engagement, with the core loop used to address both positive and negative behavior – which involves breaking the core loop – the team looked at how unconscious bias might be addressed by activating "slow thinking" in Kahneman's fast thinking/slow thinking construct. This model has been applied in the world of education, mentorship and leadership, and political organization.

Another useful framework is a model that originated in the defense industry, known as the OODA loop. Developed by US Air Force Colonel John Boyd, OODA (Observe, Orient, Decide, Act) looks at a sequence of behaviors that can be accelerated in order for the protagonist (e.g., the party staging the intervention) to "get ahead of" the antagonist. The team looked at how OODA and similar models for crisis response in instances involving bias and hate provided that the party staging the intervention has access to good data and has the ability to act (the conclusion of the OODA cycle) on time to in fact "get ahead." This model has been used in the world of social media marketing and political campaigning.



CORE LOOP OF HATE CRIMES



OODA LOOP

### Demonstration of Co-Creation

Applying the principles of behavior design with community participation can develop solutions which leverage and enhance existing structures to address the perception of the Sikh American community. First, consider solutions to the following four questions:

- 1 **What's working really well already in the Sikh community? What are our strengths?**
- 2 **What are our key distinctions that can make us MORE valuable to American society than homogeneous members can be?**
- 3 **What's working really well between the Sikh community and the rest of American society? What are our biggest successes?**
- 4 **What's the smallest, simplest, pro-social behavior we can imagine, that we can measure, which makes a difference?**

Ideas for the Sikh American community to explore in response to the questions include:

- » **Looking at the concept of seva – selfless service – as an important element of the Sikh brand that needs to be surfaced.** The leaders surveyed overwhelmingly agreed that the Sikh brand needs to be framed in a way that not only positions Sikhs positively but that actually subverts the idea that they are outsiders. The opportunity is to position Sikhs as champions of peace.
- » **Looking at both big media and little media (social) to counter unconscious bias and changing what people really think about both Sikhs and the turban.** Overt branding – which is largely about what is conscious – is not enough to counter bias. The opportunity is to address the long and protracted propaganda war against the turban with a campaign designed to unbundle the turban and frame it as a symbol of peace.
- » **Looking at ways to mix better with a number of populations using existing resources and assets such as meals at Sikh temples.** Gurdwaras (Sikh houses of worship) – which have already welcomed many communities – were a great asset for organizing meaningful connections with people who may not know Sikhs very well. The opportunity is to do this at scale.

The consensus on focus from the co-creation exercise captures three of the research team's top recommendations: a focus on rebranding the Sikh American identity around community service and peacemaking; a focus on media interventions using behavior design to subvert unconscious bias against Sikhs and turbans; and, a focus on community engagement making use of existing practices and resources. These three areas of focus leverage key discoveries in each of the areas of research in the SALDEF/Stanford project: the general lack of knowledge of Sikhs, the existence and intractability of unconscious bias, the usefulness of behavior design principles for addressing unconscious bias, and the gaps in community capabilities among Sikh Americans. In addition, the research team decided on four other recommendations for further exploration:

- » **Investment in technology for sentiment analysis.**
- » **Investment in technology for influencer mapping and engagement.**
- » **The development of a long-term plan for aligning various organizations to work more closely with one another.**
- » **The development of a short-term plan for regionally-based community forums.**



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## CONCLUSION

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This study corroborates, through literature review and data analysis, the existence of a specific cultural bias and its impact on the real, daily lived experiences of the Sikh American community. Bullying in schools, denials of public accommodation, employment discrimination, and subtle forms of micro-aggression find their roots in the confluence of a lack of knowledge, conscious, and unconscious bias. The results also reaffirm the feedback loop of bias, that lack of knowledge and stereotypes can reinforce themselves, whether due to images seen in the media or observing a man with a turban always subject to extra-screening at the airports.

The Sikh American community has a unique opportunity to tackle the challenges presented by the impacts of these biases. By defining the meaning of its articles of faith and repositioning the Sikh American brand, the community has the opportunity to share its values and promote its contributions to society and be viewed as an integral part of the American fabric. To define the brand and change the public perception of the turban, the community must invest in national media and local interactions using a consistent and coherent message based around this long-term strategy and time-tested analysis.

This report represents the first step in telling the Sikh American story. It represents an investment in understanding the community, understanding the position of the community in respect to its peers and in relation to its environment, and defining a path forward to change the real experiences of all Americans.



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