VOICES OF MUSLIM WOMEN IN AMERICA: IDENTIFY

AND ISLAMOPHOBIA

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ABSTRACT

This study covered several areas about Muslim women, including stereotypes of Muslim women in the media in the United States, how Muslim women are perceived, and the way Muslim women are understood or treated. This study aimed to explore Muslim women’s experiences in America and how they are living their lives. It aimed to answer two research questions about Muslim women. The research questions focused on their identity, hijab, feminism and thoughts about Islamophobia. Islamophobia made them more aware of their surroundings. Stereotypes in the media can be hard to change, because the imagery shown of a Muslim woman wearing a burqa has been shown for a very long time. Interviews were completed with a total of nine participants, and several different themes that emerged: Muslim women submit to God for living life in any culture, Muslim women must negotiate their identities in a western context with or without the hijab, Muslim women must deal with misconceptions and stereotypes in the media about what it means to be a Muslim woman, Muslim women live in a climate of Islamophobia and Muslim women clearly distinguish between culture and Islam whether they are compatible or incompatible. Each of the themes gave insight into the lives of Muslim women in the United States.
DEDICATION

For my family
This thesis would not have been possible without the support of many people. Many thanks to my adviser, Dr. Kathleen Clark, who read my numerous revisions and helped make some sense of the confusion. Also thanks to my committee members, Dr. Kathleen Endres and Dr. Mary Triece who offered guidance and support. Lastly, thanks to my cohort and family who have supported me during this time.
### TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTERS</th>
<th>PAGES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. Review of literature</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Islamophobia</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Listening to Muslim Women</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Muslim Women’s Identity</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Women seen as oppressed in Islam</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. Women in Islam</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F. Standpoint theory</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G. Intersectionality</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. Methodology</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Participants</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Data collection</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Data analysis</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. Findings</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Theme One: Muslim women submit to God when living life in any culture</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Theme Two: Muslim women negotiate their identities in a western context with or without the hijab</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Theme Three: Muslim women deal with misconceptions and stereotypes in the media about what it means to be a Muslim woman</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Theme Four: Muslim women live in a climate of Islamophobia</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. Theme Five: Muslim women clearly distinguish between culture and Islam, whether they are compatible or incompatible</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
V. Discussion and Conclusion 53

REFERENCES 61

APPENDICES 66

- Appendix A- IRB Approval 67
- Appendix B- Informed Consent Letter 68
- Appendix C- Interview Guide 69
- Appendix D- Codebook 72
CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Western civilizations should endeavor to understand Muslims better, particularly Muslim women. People in or from the Middle East are portrayed negatively, especially in the media and movies (Merskin, 2003; Merskin, 2004). Many of the negative portrayals are from those who do not understand their religion or culture. As Orbe (2010) and Droogsma (2007) argue, that understanding cultural identity and the differences in what cultural characterizations are ascribed to Muslims and what cultural characterizations Muslims avow or claim. My experience as a Muslim woman in America has helped me understand that women in the United States are under scrutiny from many different directions. Many believe that those who wear the veil are considered backward and oppressed. Some scholars ascribe a voice to the experience of Muslim women that is not theirs (Huntington, 1993). In Samuel Huntington’s book “Clash of Civilizations” (1993), he argues that there are irreconcilable differences based in culture between Western civilizations and the Arab world such that they clash. His argument that the East and West will always be incompatible has influenced media and foreign policies, including the representation of the experience of Muslim women. This has prompted researchers such as Cloud (2004), Kumar (2010), and Powell (2011) to critique such rhetoric to help challenge such representations, especially those of Muslim women. On the other hand, Edward Said (1979) challenged Orientalism by critiquing music and paintings by Western artists representing their vision of Muslims. Orientalism is a term to capture the
way many Western art historians and literature have shown those in the Middle East and
the Far East in an unflattering way. Said found that this fabrication is used to show the
differences between the east and the west, and his research was used as a guiding hand in
this research, to help in interpreting the images and views about Muslim women, Arabs,
and the Middle East. In writing this thesis, my goal was to explore and understand
Muslim women in America based on their experiences and perspectives.

The stereotype of Muslim women in the media is usually an image of a fully
covered woman who does not participate in the public sphere and is considered
subjugated in the view of many Westerners. The other image is that of Muslim women
being part in a harem, also in service of men (Dubrofsky, 2006). Samuel Huntington’s
clash of civilization influenced both academics and the mainstream media, where Muslim
women are viewed negatively without truly understanding where they come from. Not
many try to understand the reasons why they wear the headscarf, and it is often assumed
that they are being forced. Problems arise when individuals hear about women being
forced to wear the headscarf and consequently view all Muslim women as oppressed. In
Afghanistan, women have been forced to wear a burqa, but those in the US have a choice
in whether they want to wear the hijab (headscarf) or not.

Cloud (2004) found that Islam in the West is scrutinized in many ways because it
is misunderstood. People of the West have a very strict view about what freedom means.
They believe that wearing the hijab is not an act of freedom, that Muslim women have no
rights. Cloud notes that Western civilizations see Islam as a religion that takes freedom
from those who follow it, and that many people in the world view the religion of Islam as
something backwards and problematic. She argues that these views are only getting
worse, and that many fear the religion because of how misunderstood it is. The fear of Muslims is rampant and on a rise, making Islamophobia a real domestic issue in the United States (Powell, 2011). American media continuously portray a negative image of Islam as those of terrorists (Powell, 2011). News services also show a biased depiction when documenting the Middle East (Powell, 2011), such as when the actions of ISIS are reported as representative of the entire religion. Yet, when a "white" man commits a brutal act, he is deemed mentally ill and no one associates his race or culture to an entire group of people (Powell, 2011). We are in an age of great intolerance for Muslims in the United States. For example, recently the government implemented a travel ban against Muslim countries, from six majority Muslim countries Syria, Chad, Iran, Libya, Somalia and Yemen it has been a point of contention in the courts. Many people in the United States, whether they are citizens, members of the media, or politicians, have a strong hatred or misunderstanding of Islam (Powell, 2011). This results in a lot of anger against a religion because of a small group of people and how they treat others. ISIS, and their violence against others, has abused the name of the religion by committing vile acts against women and killing innocents.

Women around the world are fighting for their most basic rights, including property rights, the right to vote, reproductive rights, equal pay and more. Afghanistan is one of those Islamic countries, where women are fighting for their rights (Mohibullah & Kramer, 2016). Some of these include reproductive rights, as well as inheritance rights (Oja & Yamin, 2016). Back during the time of the Prophet Muhammed, Peace Be Upon Him (PBUH) in 800 C.E women had rights (Shirvani, 2006). Also the Prophet (PBUH)
himself helped his wives in the kitchen and cleaning of the house as partners not slaves (Stadibaur, 2012).

There is a conflict of interests between Islam and the West (Cloud, 2004). This leads to many different people who disapprove of things they don’t understand. Their minority status keeps them from getting all the rights that are given to them. There are people who believe that Islam needs to redefine women’s rights and to stop oppression (Cloud, 2004), but they do not see or believe that it is the culture of the patriarchal societies that oppresses women (Shirvani, 2006). It is not the religion of Islam, but those who interpret the texts then make mistakes when they enforce some of the rules. Another thing in Islam that is often misunderstood is that women have the right to choose who they will marry (Shirvani, 2006). The identity of a Muslim woman is an important aspect of who she will become. Young Muslim women who live in the United States have to deal with what their identities would be. The age range of high-schoolers and those older need to hold onto their religion or risk being confused about who they are. It is a clash with who they are and who they will be.

Many academic studies that have been done before have not given the women of Islam a voice, whether or not they wear the veil. For example, Cloud (2004) found in her research that there were many different people who have problems with Islam. Her article, entitled, ““To Veil the Threat of Terror”: Afghan Women and the Clash of Civilizations in the Imagery of the U.S. War on Terrorism,” shows us how she uses the image of Afghan women as a way to show the differences between the West and the East. By only focusing on images, and not stories about what these women have to say, we can never truly understand their views.
One of the things that is now emerging through hate and misunderstandings is Islamophobia, literally the fear of Islam. The term Islamophobia has an in-depth history that starts in the late 1980s/early 1990s and boils down to the fear and hate of Muslims (Lopez, 2011) and belief that Islam is the enemy. It shows an intolerance against those who are different because they practice a different faith. Islamophobia has a wide range of meaning and can have aspects of racial, ethnic or religious prejudice.

This study attends to the voices of Muslim women in the United States, seeking to provide a more accurate representation of their lives by focusing on understanding their experience through consideration of different aspects like identity, Islamophobia and feminism, listening to their views about issues that are usually ascribed to them, and challenging the typical images that we are used to seeing in the media.
CHAPTER TWO

Literature review

The literature review will focus on several different areas to bring an understanding about how Muslim women are viewed, they are usually viewed as silent bystanders with no voice. Looking at Islamophobia and how Muslim women have a hard time overcoming the negative aspects that it brings, because they are usually the most affected by Islamophobia. Muslim women’s identity is very complex because of intersectionality, the many different backgrounds that she can have, which will also be discussed. Some literature has sought to have women represent themselves, which I will incorporate here. Next, in articles and the media the view that Muslim women are oppressed and have no rights is another issue that is often the focus. For the theoretical framework I draw on Standpoint theories, both feminist standpoint theory and co-cultural theory to provide a lens through which to consider Muslim women in the US. Identity negotiation theory directs attention to see how Muslim women deal with their identities as Muslim women living in the United States. With each of these sections in the literature review we see many different aspects that Muslim women in the US have to negotiate.

Islamophobia

Many people have analyzed the inherent fear and hatred of Muslims, including Kimberly Powell. Powell (2011), a scholar who wrote an article “Regarding framing Islam,” studied men who had committed different crimes and how those who were immediately viewed as terrorists were primarily brown and Muslim. The term Terrorist
is now linked to Muslims, whereas when an act of “terror” is committed by a non-Muslim the media and officials always seem to say it is because of a mental disability and not because of their faith states (p.106). Here, Powell argues that this phenomenon is the “contemporary beginning of an Us versus Them, or the United States versus Islam that created animosity between East and West …and sustained a climate of fear of terrorism that is linked repeatedly to Muslims” (Powell, 2011, p. 90). Dylan Roof (Sanchez & Payne, CNN, Dec 16 2016) is one example of many, of a white man who committed terror by shooting African-Americans in an Episcopal church and was portrayed as a mentally ill individual; the word terrorist was never used. Mass shootings in the United States are, unfortunately common and primarily committed by white men, but they are never labeled terrorist. Such hypocritical rhetoric is harmful to the Muslim community.

According to Powell (2011), in the U.S. “White” is viewed as the superior race, while those from the Middle East, especially Muslims, are seen as the “Other.” The media are able to create such a divisive ideology. Powell states that, “the mass media are distributors of ideology. …This ideology is created and distributed primarily through framing, or the way that information is organized and presented” (p. 93). In the media coverage of the tragedy of The Chapel Hill shootings that resulted in the deaths of three Muslim students Deah, Yusoor and Razan, we saw an inherent refusal to call the shootings a “hate-crime.” (Ose, 2015.) We encounter other crimes that happen in a different light. Powell (2011) also states the same idea that no matter the small amount of positive light in which Islam is portrayed, “Because the majority of coverage through photos and words reinforce negative images of Muslims and Islam, in spite of some positive coverage, the audience is likely to conclude that Muslims are terrorists” (p. 94).
In an article written by Kumar (2010), “Framing Islam: The Resurgence of Orientalism During the Bush II Era,” she explores “the dominant taken-for-granted frames that underpin discussions of Islam and Muslims in the post-9/11 world in the United States” (p. 256). Kumar reviews how Orientalism defines or frames Islam. “The ideologically loaded term “Islam,”” (p. 259). Kumar looks at several different frames of Islam. The frame that Islam is a monolithic, uniquely sexist religion, that the “Muslim mind” is incapable of science, rational thinking, and reason, and that Islam is an inherently violent religion. Each of these frames shows how Islam was referred to as a backwards, unchanging, static world which then warranted US intervention and “modernization.” Orientalism today is inflected by these terms and takes the form of “Islamophobia” or a fear/hatred of Islam and Muslims. Its main form in public life is the supposed threat of terrorist activities” (p. 6).

Orientalism is a term coined by Edward Said (1979) and as an ideology it dates back to the time of the European Enlightenment. Said showed how stereotypes of Muslims during this time were established and his argument has been extended by many scholars to contemporary times. Said claims that the Orient was an idea that Europe invented. Said analyzed books and paintings that focused on different aspects of the Orient. Orientalism has a bigger definition and a history that started in the 1800s. Through geography, those in America consider the Orient to be part of the Far East, whereas Europeans consider the Orient to be in the Middle East. The image of those in the Orient are “shown to be gullible, devoid of energy and initiative,’… Orientals are inveterate liars,” the opposite of “the clarity, directness and nobility of the Anglo-Saxon race” (p. 39). There are a lot of different ways those from the Orient are described, there
are many ways that the imagery is influenced, whether it is political, cultural, religious or social. With Europe in control of the imagery and rhetoric of the Orient a construct of negative stereotypes is created.

There are films that depict many negative aspects of Arabs and Muslims: “Using representations and language in news, movies, cartoons, and magazine stories, the media have participated in the construction of an evil Arab stereotype that encompasses a wide variety of people, ideas, beliefs, religions, and assumptions” (Merskin, 2003, p. 1). They generate a stereotype of Arabs as terrorists. These images came from many different influences and construct an ideology of Arabs and Muslims as the boogeyman.

Mass media generated and perpetuated stereotypes play an important role in the construction of images of Arabs as “the enemy” … in recent films, "Barbarism and cruelty are the most common traits associated with Arabs...which tend to lump Arabs, Muslim, Middle East into one highly negative image of violence and danger (Merskin, 2003, p. 2)

Merskin (2003) has shown that there have been 900 films that show Arabs as uncivilized and brutal and bent on terrorizing others, they also like to show that they are the number one public enemy.

Said (1979) laid the foundations for demonstrating how stereotypes were formed. Stereotypes of Muslims are rampant in the media where we tend to see how they are portrayed. Muslims are usually seen as barbaric, terrorists and that their religion is backward. The media uses different frames and stereotypes with many different layers. Stereotypes happen through movies, the news, and articles. Brinson and Stohl (2012) show us why and how stereotyping, discrimination, and racism occur, and how other related concepts can help one to understand exactly what the potential impact is on the minority groups themselves. They argue that the media creates and reinforces stereotypes
and narratives about groups, thus, creating a context in which minority members must live and respond to subsequent media portrayals of their group, events, and treatment by majority members.

Politics, movies or the media, as well as our parents are where our views and thoughts come from. When politicians, teachers and public discourse are negative, those representations shape our views and thoughts and opinions. “All the information a child or young adult learns becomes assimilated into a particular worldview” (Merskin, 2003, p. 3). It is not just movies, but music as well, that can influence young minds.

The gap in knowledge that this research worked on closing was allowing Muslim women in the US to tell their side about issues that are misunderstood about their lives. Examples of things that are misunderstood about Muslim women are that they are submissive, unequal to men. The Council on American- Islamic relations (CAIR) note some of the different myths about Muslim women: Hijab is a form of women’s subjugation, women hold a lower status in Islam, education is forbidden for women, a Muslim woman has no share in inheritance, and honor killing is justified. Since there is not a lot of research in the lives of Muslim women in America, if we try to understand their perspectives and how misconceptions impact their lives, then we may get a fuller story of who they are and will be one step closer to breaking down stereotypes. Using the theories that have been proposed throughout the literature review as a lens will help us understand Muslim women.

**Listening to Muslim Women**

A part of the purpose of this thesis is to listen to Muslim women and help to address overcome the things that were ascribed to them, especially their voices on the
meaning of the veil. Stadibauer (2012) and Droogsma (2007) show us a different view of women in Islam. They want to give women their voices back, for them to be able to talk about themselves, and also to fix the image of women and Islam in the media by letting them tell their own stories and not have people assume things about them without asking their thoughts on matters like identity, hijab, and Islamophobia. Droogsma (2007) states that researchers have “seldom consult veiled women in order to understand how the veil functions in their lives. Indeed, scholars tend to ascribe meaning rather than describe the meaning the veil has for women” (p. 295).

Stadibauer (2012) interviewed Muslim women who had “the desire to rectify the negative image of Islam in the United States media. In narrating how the women have matured as Muslims, they integrate the Islamic rituals they associate with their childhood into a narrative of modernity and progress” (p. 348). Muslim women have to fight against ideas that state that they are not modern, “agency, self-transformation” and finally, the de-objectification of religion. When the media formulates this narrative, it often associates the "anti-modern" Muslim subject with the lack of these same qualities, positioning Muslim women as backwards due to their perceived oppression by Islamic societies, and more specifically Muslim men” (Stadibauer, 2012, p. 348).

Muslim women who are seen as “anti-modern” have to fight a battle. Because many believe that they have impeded their abilities toward “self-realization and self-transformation,” they fight the battle to overcome the idea that they are “anti-modern” because society and the media tell them what and how they are supposed to be perceived. Stadibauer (2012) argues “that the women stress their individuality and defend Islam by constructing themselves as agentive Muslim women who freely chose Islam as their way
of life and thereby challenge harmful images in the media” (Stadibauer, 2012, p. 349).

Rituals in Islam may be viewed as old fashioned, but they are also essential for the religion. Islam is a religion of rules that have to be followed and the rituals that are a part of it tend to have a feel of repetition.

The women do not eliminate discussion of the Islamic rituals from their faith based narratives, but they resignify, the salat (praying five times a day), saw[m] (fasting during Ramadan), and hijab (wearing the head scarf) by delinking it from the material, ritualistic, and pure-repetitious nature that is characteristic of religious rituals more generally. Instead, they assign ritual a new meaning and logic that is in accordance with accepted "secular" values. (Stadibauer, 2012, p. 350)

Certain ideas have to be re-established so that we can understand certain aspects of Islam. We have to take into account that the opinions about Islam is that they are viewed as being different than what is acceptable. Muslims try to change how women are portrayed:

[A] "typical Muslim woman" of the American media: wearing the burqa (an enveloping garment covering a woman's body and face) and walking two feet behind her husband while her husband is married to multiple women at the same time. As she mocks the American tendency to view typical Muslim men as "women-beating suppressors," she sighs over the media's one-sided portrayal of Islam as "a sort of backwards religion" and frames her use of ritual not as a requirement, but as a choice. (Stadibauer, 2012, p. 350)

The media have a certain view of Islam and women, as Stadibauer stated above, and it has a one-sided view. She also states that women are seen as “lesser beings, not human” (p. 350).

Generally, Tuchman (1979) argues that women in the US media have not had their perspectives and voices represented and they have been angry that they are not included in their own representations. Tuchman notes that while American media grew significantly after WWII, women were edged out in the public sphere. Tuchman tells us that "the very underrepresentation of women, including their stereotypic portrayal, may
symbolically capture the position of women in American society and their real lack of power" (p. 533). Tuchman believes that representations of women will change when the status of women changes. The dynamic she describes also helps us understand why there is a lack of representation of marginalized women, including the voices of Muslim women in the US. While there will always be frames that are inherent in the media, we should know much more about the media's effect: The structure of frames, like the structure of language use, may contain its own questions and responses, its own "Guess what?"/what?.... understanding the depiction of women ... for understanding the production of news, the field of women studies will have instructed mass media researchers how to rebuild their enterprise and to escape the limitations of intellectual error (p. 542).

Tuchman's (1979) understandings that women are underrepresented in the media, and Kumar's (2010) views on Islam and women in the media, shows us that all women in the US have fought for women's rights, and that there is a similarity between both sides that led to the downfall of women's status, especially by male-dominated media and public sphere. "These restrictions on women’s rights are due in no small part to the influence of the Christian Right on U.S. politics. This is similar to the dynamic in various Muslim majority countries, where the emergence of Islamist groups has led to a downfall in women’s status" (Kumar, 2010, p.263)

**Muslim Women’s Identity**

Identity negotiation theory, as stated by Ting-Toomey (2013), “posits that human beings in all cultures desire identity, respect and approval and that individuals have multiple images of self that are affected by cultural, social, and personal identity” (p. 114). This is a useful theoretical lens through which to look at Muslim women in America for many reasons. It will help us understand how they view themselves and what can influence their identities, those influences can be religious, cultural and personal.
There is also the fact that “clothing plays a vital role in displaying one’s identity to others …; it acts as ‘‘a kind of visual metaphor for identity’’ that works to relieve the identity ambivalences in Western culture (Droogsma, 2007, p. 296). This works for those who wear the veil, but not also taking into account other Muslim women.

There are some Muslim women in Western societies who feel confused about their identity simply because they are both Muslim and American. “Their narratives presume that these are two discrete identities and categories, echoing the way that these categories are constructed in mainstream American media” (Stadibauer, 2012, p. 351). Being Muslim takes over most of the identity of who you are, but being in a non-Muslim country you can become assimilated into their identities and start losing yourself a bit. Many are told that they are one or the other and are “othered” in western countries. Often those who are different than the typical “American” are considered un-American, and are encouraged to let themselves change what they believe in. Stadibauer (2011) states that, “…an American-born Muslim of Egyptian heritage, told me that when she walked through the gate at the Philadelphia airport on her last trip home, a middle-aged, European-American woman — a complete stranger — put an arm around her shoulder and said in a supportive, motherly tone "It's okay, honey, you can take your scarf off now. You're in a free country!"” (p. 351), suggesting that Muslim women have to take off their hijab to be considered free. Some countries like Germany, France, Belgium and Austria have banned the hijab or full veiling. France has even had a law passed to prevent it “in school’s passage of a law prohibiting ‘‘conspicuous’’ religious symbols in public schools” (Croucher, 2008, p. 202).
Culture and religion clash and people tend to be mistake culture and religion for each other. According to Shirvani (2006) cultural traditions can sometimes not be considered religious. Culture has many things that are different than what Islam says is right. Child marriages of young girls, for instance, is a cultural practice and not religious, as is the lack of education for women and others. These and others are examples of cultural traditions that oppose religious teachings. This is shown through how women are being treated in different countries around the world, which also can contribute to identity confusion for Muslim women. Saudi Arabia’s ban on women driving would perhaps be viewed as the culture of the country and not a religious obligation. This has recently been changed to women now being allowed to drive. If it were a religious decree, it would not have changed to allow them to drive. One aspect of Islam is that the Qur’an is known to not have changed since the beginning, that it is timeless. Women in the United States have more opportunities, and that they could easily confuse culture practices and their religion. How can they be American in their culture but stay true to their religion as well? Croucher (2008) explains that “Cultural identity is an individual’s sense of belonging to a particular ethnic group or culture…cultural identity stems from three different, and often complimentary idioms: biological identity, psychological identity, and cultural identity” (p. 209). Through an article we see how different identities and perspectives can influence women.

In an article written in *The Muslim World*, “Faith Drives Me to Be an Activist” Two American Muslim Women on Faith, Outreach, and Gender,” Anna Manson McGinty (2012) stated that:

The diversity of Muslim identities and perspectives, ethnically, racially, culturally, and politically speaking, and the various ideas of what it means to be
an American Muslim, suggest the complex and contested nature of the presence of Islam in the U.S. Complex, due to the heterogeneity of Muslims in the U.S. contested, due to the political nature of Islam and the struggle between various groups and strands of Muslims in defining “American Islam” (p. 374).

The variety of Muslim identities are very vast throughout the world as part of the fact that Islam is a growing religion. With Islam as the main identifier for many of these women, the ethnic and national identifier takes over.

**Women Seen as Oppressed in Islam**

Muslim women, whether or not they wear the veil/hijab, have a stigma attached to them that they are letting patriarchal society oppress them, and that women need to be saved (Cloud, 2004). Women are seen as lesser in the eyes of many. By choosing to wear the hijab/veil, the women of Islam get scrutinized as a minority who needs to be set free and join modern day society. Cloud (2004) reviews arguments in the literature that suggest that Muslim women need to be rescued. The idea there is a clash of culture and religion, and that the West and the East also has a clash, causes problems. Islam and Western religions also have the same problems of always being misunderstood. Religion and culture are seen as fighting a battle because of misunderstandings. Cloud (2004) shows us that there is an argument that those of the Muslim faith need to move forward and abandon a faith that is seen as “backward” and where Muslim women and children are seen as victims. “I do not deny the terrible reality of women’s oppression in Afghanistan or, to greater or lesser degrees, in any society marked by theism, disparities in wealth between men and women, and oppressive social norms regarding domesticity, dress, and appearance” (p. 294). There is a presumption by non-Muslims that modern women are freer of the oppressive nature of being shackled by those around them, from
men and religion. It is prevalent in the media and most articles to see Muslim women presented as inferior and given a voice that is not their own.

Lengel (2004) stated that “contemporary Muslims need to rethink the validity of Islamic traditions and the gender oppression resulting from them” (p. 220). She thinks that Muslim women are limited in what they can do in life and are subjected to the will of the men around them. Non-muslims think that Muslims require the wife in a marriage to live "under the direction of the husband, [that] It is evident in education, religion, and government discourse. It is evident in daily life, in cultural production, and in the interpretation of performed texts” (p. 220). Lengel argues that in their daily lives Muslim women live under the stance that they have an “idea that ‘women are naturally, morally and religiously defective’” (p. 221). She also suggests that women in Islam are seen as sexual entities that are a threat to men; they are objectified and seen as having only one use. Stating that women are defective and problematic has a lasting negative image that many will also associate with Islam.

As stated by Shirvani (2006), women in Islam have been undervalued throughout the centuries because of how the men give women an identity of being: “Men’s history represents them as at once the most vulnerable, valuable, exploited, resourceful, ignored, and possibly, indispensable segment of the population. Today the description applies accurately to Muslim women.” (p. 2). Many women have been attacked by men throughout the ages. Women in Islam have a harder time not being attacked throughout everyday society because they are easier to identify. According to Shirvani, Islamic fundamentalism has long been associated with varying degrees of the oppression of women. The problem of understanding fundamentalism is in terms of definitions and terminology. Muslim women do not use the term “fundamentalist.” They argue that they are “revivalist” and are returning to the
roots of Islam to regain a purified vision lost in the world. Their intent is to recapture both the purity and the spirit of Islam at its inception (p. 3).

Islam at its inception shows us that women were revered and welcomed into society. Women had a say about what they wanted out of life (Shirvani, 2006). They were given equality that many nowadays wish for, but many believe just because they have chosen to cover that they are oppressed. Interpretations of Muslim texts by male theologians may be why women seem oppressed since only male views then influence understandings of the Islamic texts (Shirvani, 2006). There is a gap in knowledge between who interprets the texts and those who represent a certain aspect of Islam. We see most of the negative representations of Islam through the practices of certain countries that have done most of the oppression of Muslim women. An example of people who oppress women are the Taliban and how they oppress the women in Afghanistan. Another is Saudi women who weren’t allowed to drive. Other things that can come up and cause problems would be the misunderstandings that have been shown lead towards Islamophobia. These small issues add up to create a negative image that leads some to become afraid of a religion.

**Women in Islam**

There are many Muslim women in the history of Islam who were influential; they made a difference in Islam. Some of them were the Prophet Muhammed’s (PBUH) wives, each of whom had a high standing in Islam and influenced interpretations of the Qur’an. Muhammed’s (PBUH) first wife Khadija was a business woman who had control over her own affairs. “This story indicates that fourteen centuries ago Islam recognized the existence of women’s legal and economic independence separate from their fathers, brothers, husbands, and sons” (Shrivani, 2006, p. 4). Aisha, Muhammed’s second wife,
was his confidante and helped with decisions. Aisha is one of the reliable scholars of *Hadith* (teachings of the prophet), but she had challengers to her contributions especially after the death of the prophet. The caliphs after the prophet’s death became harsh about gender equality. “The Muslim community was denying essential rights that Islam had granted women in the seventh century, namely equality between men and women to learn and educate themselves about Islam” (Shirvani, 2006, p. 5). Many Muslim women in history have had an impact throughout the ages. As mentioned earlier, during the time of the prophet each of the women during his time had a place.

By having a women’s point of view of directing the religion after the death of the Prophet, we understand more about what his life was like, but when other scholars start to ignore those teachings then we stray and break apart from the origins of what we understand. One result has been that Muslim women started to lose some of their rights. For example, one of those who have taken rights away would be the Taliban, which took the worst cases and interpretations of Islam and enforced them (Merskin, 2003/4).

Smith (1979) notes that women in Islam face controversial issues. In essence, she finds that women have been seen as secondary to men. Women have shown us that they were given rights but we have to fight for the ideas that were shown in the Qur’an. The difficulties arise when fighting the traditional cultural roles of men that have been shown throughout the time. The things that contribute to the lack of Muslim women’s rights are a wide variety of things. Non-Muslims are unable to tell the difference between societies’ rules, and what is Islam. The Arab world has stunted the rights of women, which is where the arguments about Islam begin. The reforms about women in the Qur’an helped
because pre-Islamic girl infants might be buried alive, but the Qur’an prohibited that from happening at all (Smith, 1979).

According to Smith (1979), there are instances where Muslim women were given their rights through marriage, divorce, inheritance religious rights and responsibilities. Women were given the ability to dictate the marriage certificate, start the divorce process, given inheritance rights that they didn’t have before. Another aspect that they were also given the same responsibilities for religious rights. There may be many different women who are scholars but they are hidden from view. They have influenced things without our knowledge, but we only see the men’s contributions. This may be because cultures have turned more patriarchal. By using different standpoint theories, we will have a better understanding for why some cultures have turned patriarchal.

**Standpoint Theory**

Standpoint theory deals with many different issues in society. Standpoint theory looks at different positions to understand certain principles. It “takes science and politics to achieve a standpoint. Standpoints are socially mediated; perspectives are unmediated” (Hallstein, 2000, p.1). Standpoint theory deals with power structures: dominant groups versus non dominants. Standpoint theory argues that different social groups and hierarchies create power structures where one is more powerful than the other. A standpoint develops within a collective, when more than one problem arises. Standpoint deals with marginalized groups, women, minorities and others. “Others focus on standpoints defined by, for instance, race-ethnicity and sexual orientation. It was not until the 1980s that feminist standpoint theory was developed and named by feminist social scientists working primarily in sociology and political theory” (Woods, 2005, p. 61). By
doing so, standpoint can create instances where a group will be marginalized. Two standpoint theories that are relevant for this study are feminist standpoint theory and co-cultural theory.

Feminist standpoint theory focuses on a person’s knowledge that is based on social position in the social world. This helps us understand how we use our experiences of the world, the self to understand how their experiences matter (Droogsma, 2007). According to Droogsma, “Standpoint theory assumes that some centralized social groups control social structure and cultural expectations, consequently exerting control over more marginalized groups… men in the dominant races, classes, and cultures tend to control power in American society” (p. 297).

Empowering women through understanding feminist standpoint theory is important to understand with Muslim women. Middle-Eastern Muslim countries such as Yemen, Iraq, Pakistan, Turkey, Iran, Jordan and Saudi Arabia, are patriarchal societies where, men are in charge and have the most power. This goes against what and how it was like during the time of the prophet where Muhammed (PBUH) had given women more rights in Islam. The differences in thought about women came after the death of the prophet, “Man-made laws that have been detrimental to them and their interests. With the death of the Prophet, Muslim women lost their most important champion” (Afshar, 2008, p. 15).

American Muslim women are in a hard place because they have to work against a status quo that has been around for a long time. Gender equality has been fought in every country around the world, but Muslim women have a harder time because of how culture can influence some religious expectations. By having the women talk about their
experiences through the lens of feminism we get to see a better look into what we need to understand, and learn to change the main view of Muslims women being subordinate.

Asking different Muslim women about their views and experiences is important for many reasons. Previous research had a tendency to “ascribe meaning rather than describe” (Droogsma, 2007, p. 295). Droogsma also states that “standpoint theory offers the opportunity to examine the meanings veiled Muslim women ascribe to the veil while recognizing the complex forces that shape their experiences and, thus, their insight” (p. 298). Droogsma didn’t include non-veil wearing Muslim women around the world, but instead focused on thirteen hijab wearing American women. To get a full rounded understanding of Islam; we need to see the other side of women in Islam. Their thoughts and feelings about the hijab and their experiences. Muslim women who don’t choose to wear the veil are not taken into account when doing research. Muslim women through standpoint theory will be given a voice while examining the experiences of Muslim women in America. They will be able to tell their side and experiences while living in the US.

Orbe’s (1998) co-cultural theory is a standpoint theory that deals with culture and hierarchy. According to Orbe (2010), it “assists in understanding the ways in which persons who are traditionally marginalized in dominant societal structures communicate in their everyday lives with a particular focus on how they communicate with in-group, as well as dominant group, members” (p. 86). Muslims are a great example of a group that has been marginalized by dominant cultures. Muslims in America are being seen in everyday society, they work and send their kids to school. One of the many problems we see is that Islam is seen as a culture, but Islam and culture are not the same. that Islam
needs to be changed in order to better co-existence with other cultural groups. The dominant culture that Islam deals with is against the dominant group and how they are with American society. Many believe that Islam and western countries cannot co-exist because there is a clash of ideals. As is stated by Cloud (2004), “The phrase ‘clash of civilizations,’ popularized in the 1990s by Samuel Huntington, refers to the idea that the United States and its people face an incontrovertible conflict with Others, particularly Islamic Others” (p. 286).

Being a Muslim woman in America would be considered as a co-cultural group member because of the fact that they are marginalized by the dominant culture due to both their gender and their religion. Not only will the focus be on Islam, but on Muslim women, who have always also been considered a marginalized group. In a previous study, researchers looked at Japan-residing Koreans and how the Koreans are considered as a co-cultural group in Japan. They are considered foreigners despite having lived there their entire lives. They are “othered” in Japanese society. As shown in an article by Masaki Matsunaga and Chie Torigoe (2008), they show the same things that Muslims in America could be feeling since they are also “othered.” This is also where Orbe’s theory of co-cultural communication can come in.

Past research demonstrates its utility as a theoretical framework to understand diverse communicative practices enacted by marginalized individuals. Although originating from the research on the interethnic relationships in the United States … co-cultural theory has been utilized to address a wide variety of identity-related issues such as communicating with disabilities…, gay men in Israeli media … and identity of native Hawaiians…. (Matsunaga & Torigoe, 2008, p. 352)

This study also looked at how Muslim women in America are viewed as others and marginalized in the US. Women in Islam have never been considered using the lens of co-cultural theory. This study aimed to close the gap in knowledge in understanding
how Muslim women are viewed as others. The study will also look at how Muslim women define themselves. Whether or not they view themselves as others, by looking at different kinds of Muslim women, helped create an image on how they deal with different things that they might go through, the rise of Islamophobia, stereotypes and their identities.

**Intersectionality**

Intersectionality is when multiple identifiers mix with each other to create different identities. According to Patricia Hill Collins (2015), intersectionality “references the critical insight that race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nation, ability, and age operate not as unitary, mutually exclusive entities, but rather as reciprocally constructing phenomena” (p. 1). Understanding intersectionality can help in understanding many complex individuals. With intersectionality it would help with understanding how Muslim women in America are viewed. Muslim women have a lot of aspects to them that work well with intersectionality. It has complex layers of political issues and problems that are embedded in everyday life. Gender, religion and social standings are things that Muslim women in America have to deal with. Each of these identities has a history of oppression. The origins of intersectionality go back to Black American experiences, where there has always been the idea of the double bind. That they are both black and women, the same can be said with the Muslim women population. It helps us understand the historical implications of those who have been marginalized. The victimization of many because of who they are is a result of the patriarchal society that we have grown up in, with more than one kind of feminist not just being the typical American woman, who has always had some troubles in equality in
everyday life. We then see a different version where women of different backgrounds/religions have also the same need to find equality. According to Dhawan (2016), there are diverse forms of social categories that have to be considered when talking about different issues of feminism. not to have it limited to one category, of just gender issues.

“Marginalized women, whose experiences of discrimination could not be sufficiently captured by single-issue politics, always questioned and challenged the foundational premises of feminism, even as they refashioned the tools that have constituted the arsenal of feminist scholarship” (p.14).

Feminist scholarship and intersectionality have always gone hand-in-hand because many social issues that arise deal with oppression and inequality. Feminist scholarship is focused on giving equality to many different individuals include, African American women, gays/lesbians, women who want to work and more. There is a set hierarchy in many settings in everyday life. where those who don’t look a certain way, act a certain way will be looked down upon or “othered.” In most societies they have one set of hierarchy where men are in charge more than women these are usually patriarchal societies. Most of the countries that Muslim women come from are from those countries for example Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Afghanistan and many others. Those who live in the US are mostly minorities and because they are minorities they are usually looked down upon. However, white Western feminists may not fully understand the intersectionality of Muslim women in America. Muslim women have many different ideologies that they fight against. They tend to be rooted in a binary and against other axes of powers. They have to fight against “upper middleclass white women who dominated the feminist movement in the United States. Well-connected, outspoken, and wealthy, these women
promoted a liberal feminism, which ignored differences between women and assumed a homogenous stereotype of nonwhite women” (Ahmed, 2010, p. 12). They fight against what they believe is inequality for women and many believe that the hijab/veil detracts from the Western feminist ideal.

In Western feminist discourse, agency and choice with respect to religious women are associated to liberal concept of emancipation. The focus on autonomy and choice implicitly refers to secularism…In such framework, religion is perceived as oppressive and modernity is secular…suggests that “one way to reconcile agency with religion is to reconceptualize the concept of agency itself” … by focusing on the lived realities of women who are religious, using intersectionality as a framework (Zimmerman, 2015, p. 148).

Muslim women have been in the middle of controversy since the 1960s in the US. When Muslim women first migrated to the US, they were supposed to have been welcomed. But when they arrived they found negativity from people because of the media as well as the set ideologies that were around. So “Migrat[ing] to the US represented an opportunity to live a life of equality. But when they arrived in America, Muslim women found themselves at the heart of controversy” (Ahmed, 2010, p. 11).
Those women who are living in the United States have been disregarded in most research that surround Muslim women (Droogsma, 2007). They have become buried underneath dominant discourses that have been around for a long time (Droogsma, 2007).

Today, the controversy that Muslim women find themselves in is whether or not the hijab is considered symbolic of oppression or freedom. Many non-Muslim people in the West have no idea what to make of the veil. They had to fight against stereotypes that are seen through the media. It is hard being a Muslim woman in America, as they have to overcome some of the prejudices against them. The intersectionality of these Muslim women mean they have to negotiate a mix of different binaries. That they have to fight,
while trying to overcome the one dimensional route of Western feminism that mainly deals with the experience white women in America.

Having looked at the different theories and how they can help understand Muslim women in America, we begin to see that their lives and identities are complex. We saw that they have a lot to overcome especially in dealing with many people who believe that they are oppressed. By listening to their opinions and views, we began to see that they are misunderstood because of the negative images that is portrayed. By having looked at each of these things we may begin to close the gap in knowledge. Therefore, the research questions for this study are as follows:

RQ1: How do Muslim women in the US negotiate their identities?

RQ2: How do Muslim women in the US interrogate the way they are portrayed in US media?
CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

This study is a qualitative inquiry with data gathered (Tracy, 2013) through in-depth semi-structured interviews with nine Muslim women in America. I wanted “rich and holistic” stories of how things are understood. I wanted to “interpret participant’s viewpoints and stories,” to have an “understanding [of] a range of societal issues” (Tracy, 2013, p.5-7) from a mix of converts, hijabi’s, non-hijabi’s and long time practicing Muslims. I inquired about their lives as Muslims in America and asked them about their experiences and thoughts about stereotypes and Islamophobia. The goal here was to bring to light to a religion that is misunderstood in America and to understand more about Muslim women’s experiences.

Participants

I interviewed 9 different Muslim women, aged 21 to 31 years. They are all acquaintances that I know, women that I have met throughout the years, and one of the participants is my sister. While some of the topics of interest in this thesis had come up in conversations over the years, the specific in-depth focus of this research had not. The participants were a mix of hijab-wearing and non-hijab-wearing women, converts and those who have been Muslim since birth living in the US. Participants were encouraged to choose the location they felt most comfortable with for the interviews. I received consent from all of them and used pseudonyms to protect their identities. I went to a
house, masjid, a coffee shop, and Bierce library to conduct the interviews, and three of the women chose to reply by e-mail. I included some relevant data from an interview during a pilot study (Karina). The interviews lasted between 20-60 minutes. The following lists the women who participated. The names are pseudonyms. All self-identified their age, race, ethnicity and/or nationality, religious status, whether or not they wore a veil (hijabi or non-hijabi), and how long they had resided in the US:

- Alesha, 24/ White/ Palestinian and American mother and father/ hijabi.
- Aliyah, 21/ White/ Algerian American /non-hijabi.
- Eliza, 21/ White/ Egyptian/ in the US for 11 years /hijabi.
- Hannah, 26/ White / Lebanon, Lithuania and English American/ lived all her life in the US.
- Karina, 30/ Caucasian/ Macedonian American/ convert/ hijabi.
- Mary, 29/ Caucasian/ American/ convert/ hijabi/ lived all her life in the US.
- Maya, 22 White/ Palestinian/ American/ hijabi.
- Noha, 29/ White/ Egyptian American/ hijabi
- Sara, 31/ Black/ Sudanese American/ hijabi/ lived all her life in the US.

**Data Collection**

The sample came from a mid-size regional Midwestern state university in the US, as well as a local Islamic Society, a masjid, and its Muslim community. Since I am Muslim, I had access to the sites I wanted to explore, and therefore could easily find participants to interview. However, another site I thought of accessing was the Muslim Student Association at the university, to be introduced to other Muslims on campus who I did not know. I knew all the women but I am not close to any of them. There were three
different kinds of sampling that I used for finding different women to interview; purposeful sampling, convenience and snowball (Tracy, 2013). Each of these sampling techniques was useful because I was looking for participants with specific characteristics. Purposeful sampling, according to Tracy, is “choosing data that fit the parameters of the project’s research questions, goals and purposes” (p. 134). Convenience sampling comes from a “convenient, easy and relatively inexpensive site to access” (p. 134). Also, I employed snowball sampling when asking individuals that I had already interviewed to recommend others who might participate in my research. Reviewing the transcribed in-person interviews versus the emailed answers showed those who replied to the interview questions by e-mail provided more in-depth answers.

Approval to conduct research on human subjects was obtained from the University’s Institutional Review Board (Appendix A). All participants were asked to sign an Informed Consent Letter (Appendix B). The semi-structured in-depth interviews were facilitated with the use of an Interview Guide (Appendix C) and an audio recording device. The recorded interviews were transcribed for analysis. Interviews lasted between twenty minutes to an hour, to elicit the most information possible.

Data analysis

The interview transcripts were analyzed using thematic analysis (Tracy, 2013) where I was looking specifically at things that were similar to each other in the transcripts using the constant comparison method. Sensitizing concepts from the literature review, such as Islamophobia, stereotyping, standpoint, feminism, and intersectionality, were used to guide coding categories as well as interpret themes that arose from the interviews. (Codebook: Appendix D.)
CHAPTER FOUR

Findings

Identity negotiation theory and standpoint theory guided this research, to help understand Muslim women’s lives in the United States. Identity negotiation theory deals with identity and how it can be different for those with different cultural and religious backgrounds. Using these theories helped with answering the research questions about Muslim women’s identity. Some Muslim women in the US either consider themselves not American or hyphenated American such as Egyptian-American. Many Muslims consider themselves Muslim first, followed by their country of origin or ethnicity. The participants were a mix of women with different ethnic or racial backgrounds: Algerian, Sudanese, Egyptian, Palestinian and American. Mary was an American convert who said that she would identify with Muslims more because she was living in the US. She would also rather live in a Muslim country. She would also “try to ID myself as little as possible because I don’t think anyone should be identified by anything because identities can change and should be interchangeable.”

The different themes that arose from the analysis of the interviews were Muslim women’s identity, Muslim women in Islam, stereotypes in the media, and feminism in Islam. Each one of the women had different thoughts that were important to listen to, especially to see if stereotypes could begin to be broken. Currently, more women are starting to speak up on issues that matter to them. More bloggers and fashionistas want to
make a difference. By bringing issues about Muslim women into the media in everyday society, we begin to see a small change in how they are being viewed. Still, before Muslim women are able to overcome their issues, women as a whole need to have rights of equality addressed. Many of these issues revolve around equal pay and sexual harassment issues. Overcoming the hegemonic discourses about gender equality through the different races is something that a lot of women must overcome.

Co-cultural communication helps to understand what level of communication certain groups have to deal with. Co-cultural theory covers minorities, women and religions that are different than the status quo. This theory is useful as a lens for understanding Muslim women, since they are considered as part of a group that is a part of the non-dominant culture in the United States. This theory fits the experiences of these women for many different reasons. They are women of different races and ethnic or national backgrounds. These women’s voices fill in the lived in experiences of a less dominant group in American society. They must deal with their thoughts about the scrutiny they are placed under, and the necessity of being placed in a different position than the majority. As such, they are able to express a perspective of those who are marginalized and unrepresented in everyday society. Being different leads them to negotiate other ways to communicate. By speaking about who they are and their standpoint, the typical ideas of them not being worthy can be changed. Recently there has been a rise in Muslim women who are trying to overcome stereotypes of lacking a voice, or being submissive to men.
Theme One: Muslim women submit to God when living life in any culture

Each and every one of the women interviewed described Islam “as a way of life” and felt that it is a guide to how they should live their lives. Islam is a religion with rules that guides about how they should do certain things. One of my interviewees once said that whenever she had a struggle, she opened up the Qur’an for answers. Usually she would find her answer right away. It is a way for Muslims to understand what they want out of life, as it is essential for them to feel that God is with them; as the Qur’an is believed by Muslims as the words of God. The understanding that “submission to God” is the underlying principle of Islam shows us how to deal with situations, to understand that women have rights, and how violence is viewed in Islam.

One thing that we have to realize is that the term Islam has a root word that means “salam” (peace). Islam is a peaceful religion. This is counter to misconceptions shown every day in media in the United States. Through the misuse of words such as Jihad that are considered violent. As one of the participants said, the word jihad has many different connotations. The very act of persevering to get a degree and working with it can be considered as Jihad, not just the meaning of jihad as going to war and fighting. All the interviewees believe that Islam is not a violent religion and it does not promote or support violence. Eliza’s thoughts were that “I think that most of the foundation of Islam that we have doesn’t promote violence it is about how we should be living our life.”

In Islam, women wear the hijab (veil/headscarf) as a way to protect themselves and to reverse society’s emphasis on beauty and clothes. Hijab means both the act of covering and also the act of avoiding the emphasis of beauty. Aliyah finds the hijab to be modest and said it is “a way of opting out of the social pressure to place enormous value
on what we look like rather than who we are, by choosing not to dress in a way that entices men and attracts the male gaze.” Hijab is an important aspect for women, showing submission to God as both a requirement in the Qur’an and a choice for the individual to make. At the same time, many wear it to become empowered by being known as Muslims. Aliyah thinks that it helps to fight against “social pressure…we rid ourselves of a lot of doubts and sources of insecurity, and we’re able to face life more confidently with God's approval.” The two women that do not cover consider it a personal weakness that they are not confident enough to wear, as it is an identifier that tells people that they are Muslim. Eliza states “Hijab tells people that I am Muslim um like it is a sign for people to see I practice this specific faith…so what happened people often stereotype and put me and Islam in a category and negative so like people like ISIS.” Maya’s reasoning for wearing the hijab is “because it represents my religion. I want them to know that because um I want them to see Islam through me and not what they see through TV.” Noha said,

“Yes, I do [wear the hijab], I started wearing it when I was 14. My thoughts on it have changed over the years. I first was wearing it as a way to gain a closer relationship with God and help me focus on a life not distracted by “lifely” (dunya) matters. Over the years its meaning changed to be more of an identity marker, a political statement.”

Hijab for some is not just an identifier but a connection between them and God, Sara’s, “because I don’t define myself by my hijab” but many don’t feel they have the ability to remove the fact that they wear the hijab. People usually look at clothes during first impressions and that could easily influence perceptions. Alesha had a different experience with the hijab, which is what many non-Muslims believe inaccurately to be the case, that Muslim women are forced to wear hijab. She began wearing it and then chose to she said,
I started wearing it when I was about 12, because my parents required it of me. A few years later, I made a personal choice to continue wearing it, though I could have easily taken it off at that point. To me, it is an expression of my faith and submission to God’s commands. I also personally find the way the headscarf, and hijab at large, draws focus to the deeper aspects of men and women rather than publicly emphasizing their sexuality or appearances to be liberating.

There are girls who are forced to wear the hijab but then later in life they take it off. This is a choice in certain areas, whereas the news often focuses on countries where hijab is forced on the women and then becomes a cultural issue and problem. Happenings within these countries are usually where the idea that women need to be saved and liberated from their oppressors come from.

**Theme Two: Muslim women negotiate their identities in a Western context with or without the hijab**

All the participants had different answers to the research questions about their identities. Each woman had a different view of what her identity was. For example, in a pre-test interview Karina, a convert to Islam, explains that when she was eighteen she had a multifaceted view about her identity:

I don’t know how to ID myself. The first visible thing that ID’s myself I am Muslim I don't know if ID myself first as Muslim or American Macedonian or woman or have so many different parts of your identity sometimes the most visible one is what you say out loud, first that is what people see. I don't see myself as one particular box I don't put a label on myself I am this or that hyphenated something. Depending on where I am what I am speaking about parts of my identity comes out more I guess um... I am at the mosque I assert my gender more because I think it is underrepresented I am here as a women speaking. When at school I am there as a Muslim when I am speaking about Islam to law enforcement I am speaking there as an American Muslim. Depends on where I am and what I am trying to accomplish.

Identity is a very complex idea that can change throughout the course of a lifetime. It can change with each situation that the person deals with, as Karina mentioned above, but
every woman had agreed that any identity is secondary to that of being a Muslim. Being Muslim supersedes any other identity as Sara, a Sudanese American Muslim explains,

I ID myself as Muslim, Sudanese, Black American so you know being ID’ed as Muslim happens all the time at the airport, you know, when you get special screening pat downs. You know sometimes you notice when you are going through the security line everyone is going through the metal detector, and suddenly a couple people before you are switched to the body scanner, and you are, okay well why did we do that? Because I am the Muslim one who happens to be in line. Which is maybe me projecting a little bit you know I think it has happened enough times you know its not unusual so that’s when I am most keenly aware of that IDI guess.

Identity negotiation theory Ting-Toomey (2013) posits that “human beings in all cultures desire identity, respect and approval and that individuals have multiple images of self that are affected by cultural, social, and personal identity” (p.114). Within Islam, Muslim identity tends to supersede the other identifiers. The conflicts that then can arise about identity may come from the different cultural practices and identities in a certain region or country. Islam as a religion in the US tends to take on a minority status. Within the minority status, Islam is fighting to overcome the status quo.

Eliza focused on different aspects of identity, but mainly how Islam is in the center of her identity, especially when dealing with different values and the standards of Islam. “I go back to… I go back to Islamic way of doing things. I don’t really ask what would American do or what would Egyptians do. That’s not that’s how I would see myself.” Aliyah’s opinion about Islam echoed what Eliza has said about Islam, and being Muslim is center to her identity she said:

I definitely identify more with being a Muslim. Being Muslim is an identity that exists on top of all my other identifiers; before anything else, I am a Muslim. This is my most profound source of identity because it refers to my relationship with my creator; literally everything else in my life, no matter how important it is to me, is secondary. And everything else in my life is informed by my faith. I know how to be a good American (that is, a respectful and thoughtful citizen), a
good neighbor, a capable woman, a daughter, a sister, a friend, all because of the Islamic principles that I’ve been brought up believing in.

Hannah has a complex background because she has a Lebanese father and a Christian mother. She states: “I struggled with identity for a while. I felt American, but I always felt different than others.” She began to understand what her identity was in college the struggle that she had to go through:

I came to a reality of discovering my identity in college. I learned that I truly believe in Islam and what it stands for; and although I may not be the perfect Muslim, Islam is perfect. When I was younger, I felt left out from quite a few things, like sleepovers and a few school dances, which I was not allowed to participate in; but as I got older, I realized that I wasn’t missing anything, and understood the reasons why I couldn’t do some of the things that other kids my age could do. My parents never held me back from hanging out with my friends at football games, their houses, etc., but rather just didn’t want me to fall into certain things at a young age, like sex and drugs. The older I got, the more I realized why I had the certain rules I did, and I appreciate it more than ever, even though I gave my parents the hardest time growing up with “different” rules.

Many of those women who struggled were not focused entirely on their identities. They experienced conflicting emotions about different issues, such as culture, politics, education and clothes. Mary struggled to find clothes that worked with being modest.

Sara says: “I wouldn’t say that I have felt lost. I definitely felt probably more conflicted um than other people [I] felt lost about some of the foreign policy in this country.”

Aliyah’s conflict of identity happened because of her two ethnic backgrounds:

Honestly, I feel much more of a conflict/identity crisis between my American and Algerian identities as opposed to with my American and Muslim identities. There’s really no competition; being Muslim will win every time, but also being Muslim informs my understanding of what it is to be American the Algerian and American sides of me offer up different elements of culture, and these can sometimes clash and cause me some confusion. It sounds silly, but it typically involves questions like language, sense of humor, pop culture awareness, and whether the Algerian vs the American versions of these things have had more of an influence on who I am. But my faith is not just a set of cultural practices; it’s above culture, and it informs culture.
There are those who are very sure of their identities and don’t feel like they struggle. For example, Noha, Alesha and Maya they are very confident in who they are. Noha replied when answering the question about identity, “I am sorry to disappoint you but I don’t struggle with it, I don’t think about it really.” Or Alesha’s response, “I do not, alhamdullilah. I enjoy my multi-faceted life.” Maya stated, “No, I don’t struggle with my identity, I am pretty confident of who I am as a person.”

Some people go through a period of feeling like they don’t belong. The feeling was described as being an “outcast” and individuals said that at times could be considered “self-imposed.” It is a journey related to identity that Hannah and Aliyah have brought up and mentioned, whether it is a feeling that has become numb or as if they are still finding their place. The sense of belonging could also come with how they were raised. There are times where you could feel like you belong not just because of your faith, but because of certain situations you could find yourself into. Aliyah says,

Sometimes it’s self-imposed like when you feel like your values or lifestyle are so different from the people around you that you don’t belong. This can happen when I’m at parties, or when I’m around people who are drinking heavily or using drugs. Other times, I’m made to feel that I don’t belong by the people around me. I remember being in 8th grade and going to a friend’s birthday party. Her family members were conversing amongst themselves, and they were saying some pretty severely Islamophobic things (they weren’t aware that I was Muslim). I remember feeling uncomfortable and uneasy.

Hannah’s thoughts are as follows, “There have been many times where I felt that I don’t belong because I was Muslim, and I’m still questioning if finding my identity as an American Muslim has become easier as I got older, or if I just got numb to the “outcast” feeling.” There are many times where the feeling of not belonging can come even within a certain group of friends, whether or not you feel like you have anything in common with them. I had a class once that dealt with race, immigration and similar issues. By the
end of the class, I was on one side of the classroom while the others were on the opposite side. Opinions about politics and religion can separate people, and this instance could have been a feeling that was self-imposed. The sense of not belonging can also come from personal choices. For example, wearing the hijab can give that feeling to other people because of the difference in dress. The conflict can also come because of different cultural backgrounds, as both Noha and Sara mentioned. Noha said that she feels like she didn’t belong “all the time. Before it used to bother me and I would say, yeah, well I am not from here, I am Egyptian. Then I switched and started making it a point to claim that I am from America and they have no right to assume otherwise.” Sara has had the same experience with her patients assuming that she is not American because of the way that she looks. When this happens she said she begins to feel like she doesn’t belong because she doesn’t necessary conform to the image of those who live in the US.

Yea all the time, um I don’t think inherently that I feel its not something that its not my day to day thought that I don’t belong in the US like this isn’t my country. Um like I feel like anybody else day to day business I live a boring life. Um but in terms of being made to feel that I don’t belong like when patients ask me where you’re from um they are assuming that u don’t belong here it kind of rubs me the wrong way a little bit because it just assumes that if you are from the US you look a certain way, you know dress a certain way. And um when you don’t you are just made to feel like an outsider

It is a feeling that can happen during different situations and is not necessarily a feeling that is stable in their lives. They work hard to accomplish what they want in life. Sara is a doctor in the United States. She had to go through her whole life achieving her goals and not letting identity and the sense of belonging (or lack thereof) affect her life. Many of the women that have a mixture of backgrounds had opinions that may be a bit different than those from their ethnic backgrounds. Mary, an American convert, said she constantly had feelings about belonging, “all the time, all the time. I feel like there are
things that people don’t say because well there is a Muslim here... again my co-worker said I looked like Miss Cleo um I feel like I just like I don’t belong because I feel like nobody else covers like I do.”

Many of the women didn’t think that there was a shift in their identities, especially when it comes to being both Muslim and American. They didn’t feel like there was a problem that they had to deal with, because Islam encompassed their realities and took in being American as well. They didn’t see a conflict between that, but they did see a conflict and struggle with some politics and policies that had been implemented by the government. They understood that Americans have the ability to respect other cultures and identities since those are what America was founded on, such as freedom of religion and equal opportunities. There were also times where they looked at things that make them seem more American. They have a set way of doing things since Islam is a way of life. One of the major things that they struggled with were government policies that could influence their lives. They also struggled with choosing clothes and being modest in American context.

**Theme Three: Muslim women deal with misconceptions and stereotypes in the media about what it means to be a Muslim woman**

The women I interviewed believed that Islam gave women their rights. That it is cultures take away women’s rights, and introduce the power struggles between men and women’s roles. Hannah’s explains,

A majority of people get misconceptions of women in Islam, thinking that they are treated as if they are below men in status or oppressed. In fact, even way back in history, women in Islam took on leadership roles and held positions of power. For example, the Prophet Muhammad (SAS)’s wife, Khadejah. Was a business owner, and some women, like Khawla b. al-Azwar, even participated in battles and worked as nurses in the field.
Karina said, “I think that women have a lot of work to do. In our Muslim communities I don't know which point along the way Muslims have regressed to their cultural practices.” Muslim women’s voices have been silenced even over the history of Islam, when men decided to take over, and women began to remove themselves from the public sphere, to allow themselves to not be seen or heard. As Karina states that:

You have go back to the original roots of Islam. Muslim women, by the religion and prophet, have the rights and place in society. Equal to that though not the same to that of men. Where they are right now, I think there is a lot of work to do. Women themselves need to go back to literature and learn their rights, and where they belong get empowered that way. Get organized and demand those rights in the mosques. In situations you have men who are very opened to things like that, but I don't think it will happen that way. It will be men who make the space but the women also need to demand it make the space, because a lot of the time I am the only women on the board/ committee and so women voices are just not heard. You know I have been working really hard for the women to pray downstairs pray with the men in the main masala. That was how it was done however it has gone away for some reason but I have so many men say, go ahead, but then the women are not willing to make that transition so it is so interesting thing. Islam itself empowers us. to take ownership of our faith.

Her thoughts are very relevant, that women have to be able to deal and change to make sure that Islam doesn’t get sidelined with how they are believed to treat women. Equality is essential in the way that Islam was formed, both with how men and women are treated as well as equality between the races. One aya, a verse in the Qur’an, states “O mankind, indeed we have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes so that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you. Indeed, Allah is Knowing and Acquainted” (Al-Quran: Surah Al-Hujurat [49:13]).

There is no limitation to what the role of women in Islam is. A woman can be anything she is willing to fight for. Their mothers, their thoughts on religion, and their
support systems guide them through life. As Sara suggests, children are influenced by their mothers and have a special connection to them.

I think that Muslim women have roles to play in the religion. Um you know I think a lot of the next generation learns comes from their mothers more often than the fathers um.. or even with working women um I think that there is a certain bond that children have with their mothers. They learn from them they see what they do just your day to day practice of the religion. You know they are a huge influence on progress and continuation of the religion so I think that they have a big role within the religion um I don’t know if it refers to their what there “role” is in Islam and if that is the case um you know I don’t think there is a limitation on what their role is. The religion doesn’t sort of limit them um kind of define what they need to do like be a stay-at-home wife. Or that they need to be out being the bread winner.

Eliza says;

I feel like Islam kind of honors women, puts her on a different level than anything else or any other society or community, gives her a place. So at the time when Islam came women were not given a lot of voices heard or respected. So Islam honors the women so at the time people doesn’t care about them people thought they were just there to let their anger out on or cook or be housewives or whatever those things but I think Islam came it gave women a voice, a place, right to speak out and share their opinions.

Islam is a religion that requires faith, patience and the ability to believe in the creator. This usually lies within how every one of Allah’s creations worships Him.

Cultural practices, however, often have elements that can be oppressive and patriarchal towards women, and can confuse people about the practices of a religion.

Through the media and patriarchal societies, the misconceptions and stereotypes of Muslim women are what brings the status of women down. Mary commented “that women are second to men um but in a way that makes them like almost as if unequal humans.” She also believes that the media like to show the women as helpless. She told a story about a television program that had Muslim women who were wearing the niqab (the hijab and face covering) and they were given tea and cookies. She felt that it was a
subtle attack against the women, by suggesting that the *niqab* makes it unusually difficult to eat and drink the tea and cookies.

Karina believes that there is only one way Muslim women are being talked about in the American media and that they focus on the idea that women are oppressed. She felt that the media take away Muslim women’s voices, saying, “We are spoken about without being present. People talk about us without us. All these conversations are happening without us being on the panels.” It is known that Muslim women have been silenced in that they are not being asked about their views and opinions. Karina emphasizes that there aren't many public Muslim women in the American media.

[One of the] most public Muslim women like Linda Sarsour, the most outspoken and one that I respect a lot in the media, talks about many issues not exclusive to Muslim issues and that's why I respect her a lot. Islam teaches us when you see something wrong fight for good things for everyone...

However, another aspect is that women in the media have not been seen or thought about as much because, as Karina said, since media are more focused on the "Islamic terrorism and extremism thing, Muslim women thing doesn’t matter anymore. Muslim women, oppression, move on." They are portrayed as women who have no voices and that are limited in what they can do. They are either seen as oppressed and submissive, or sexualized or and like a “slave” to a man. Aliyah stated that:

I think the fact that the woman is “responsible” for the home results in a pretty common misconception that Muslim women must be homemakers and stay-at-home moms. They can be, but that’s not the only way of managing a household. It can be handled in different ways! More generally, people typically assume that Muslim women are forbidden from doing many things, and that these rules are imposed on them by the men in their life. But I don’t see it that way; I believe in a God-centric paradigm. If I refrain from doing something or act in a certain way, it’s because God has commanded me to do so. God’s directives are so much bigger than human constructs like the patriarchy. If God asks me to do x, I do it, because God is infinite and all-knowing and there simply must be a good reason. The rules come from a being much greater than any of us.
Hannah’s thoughts on aspects of Muslim women in Islam indicated that culture can interfere in the ways of practicing a religion. She talked about how certain things are practiced culturally different from Islamic practices, such as child marriages, forced marriages, and also when Saudi Arabia prevented women from driving.

People seem to also think that a lot of Muslim women are forced to get married at a young age, and while this may be true in some cases, it is false in more. In Islam, a girl is not allowed to be forced into any marriage that she doesn’t want to go into. However, it is CULTURAL for families to marry their daughters off young. A lot of people also have the misconception that Muslim women are abused by men (their husbands, fathers, brothers, etc.). In fact, this is far from true, even though, just like any other faith, there are going to be those who do partake in physical violence towards women; but when you put religion in it, physical violence has no place in Islam.

Aliyah’s thoughts on Muslim women were similar to many of the others when they see images of Muslim women in the American media:

The way they’re represented is pretty insulting. Western media seems to really enjoy presenting us pretty monolithically as a mass of downtrodden victims of patriarchal traditions. It’s more interesting to portray us that way to a Western audience, so I understand why they do it. It exploits all the assumptions non-Muslims have about us; that we’re different, that we’re exotic, that we live in a way that is shocking and completely incomprehensible to them, that we have alien customs that set us completely apart. I think Western media appeals to the lowest common denominator in order to capture the interest of its Western audience, even if that comes at the cost of alienating Muslim viewers. There’s also a pretty gross trend of fetishizing Muslim women as exotic veiled mysteries. It’s been happening ever since the first European painter traveled to “the Orient,” and it’s sad to see that the same old bag of tricks is being employed today.

There were also participants who thought that Muslim women were not portrayed at all. There has been a small shift in the media/ TV shows, where Muslim women are portrayed a bit better than they were in previous decades. For example, shows like Quantico have Muslim twins, characters who are part of the FBI. There are other programs that show Muslim women who are making a difference in different fields,
including Greys Anatomy where they have a Muslim woman intern-doctor, and female Muslim athletes who have competed in the Olympics. Recently young Muslim women are starting to show and talk about issues and being more active through Facebook.

Many non-Muslims believe that Islam oppresses women, but when you talk to Muslim women you hear that the religion does not oppress women. Rather, men and patriarchal cultures oppress women. Noha’s thoughts on this:

No. I think the religion as it came down, as in the Quran and Sunnah do not present evidence of oppression. However, men oppress women EVERYWHERE so naturally some Muslim men would oppress Muslim women. Whether or not they justify it as something within their religion or not is a different conversation. But the oppression of women is a world wide issue and isn’t a religious problem.

All the participants believed that Islam, when it came down at the time of the prophet, gave rights to women, such as education, inheritance laws, and the fact that they could pursue what they wanted, rather than having to focus exclusively on home life. Women are not oppressed in Islam but oppressed in cultures and patriarchal societies where men are seen as dominant. Women aren’t oppressed in Islam at all, as Hannah’s thoughts show “No, women are not oppressed in Islam at all. If Islam is followed the right way, women are “diamonds” in Islam. It is believed that heaven is at the feet of a mother. Yes, women are more protected in Islam.”

Islam is a religion that is very kind to women in the way that they are given rights. To understand what that means we have to look at the history of women who were around at the time of the prophet and after. That was when women had the most freedom to voice their opinions. There are a mix of thoughts about feminism and Islam, between the women, some do not see the point of being a feminist but Alesha said she “believes that feminism is actually prophetic,” and that equality is important in Islam. Islam as a
religion preaches equality for all. The simple idea that feminism is the equality between men and women is something that many believe, but have a tendency to switch it with how they are viewed. The women who think of themselves as feminist were Maya, Noha, Sara, Karina and Aliyah. Those who might need a little more convincing were Alesha, Hannah, Mary and Eliza, but they all believed that feminism has a place in the teachings of Islam.

Karina is a feminist at heart, believing that Islam is kind to women by giving them their rights and that this only started to change when patriarchal societies and culture affected the views of women. Karina believed that women have a right to bring back the rights that were given to women by Islam, to change the status quo back to how it should be,

Feminism is a radical notion that women are people too” that’s pretty much it. I think feminism is what it is that you give human rights and you recognize women as equal contributing partners in society and families that yea … I don't see it as a political movement. I know that it is a political movement, that there is extreme in it as well um… but I don't see it as a political issue but as a human issue too… so feminism to me is that you know you have rights, you know your rights, and then you assert yourself in places and you demand those rights.

The difference in opinion happened because not all Muslim women are feminists. Being feminist could improve the lives of those in countries that have regressed to cultural versus Islamic practices. These cultural practices are what make Islam and women unrecognized. When the fear and apprehension of Muslims arises and this is how Islamophobia occurs. Aliyah says,

for me, feminism is about the social, economic, and political equality of the sexes. It involves giving women enough independence to be able to choose how they want to live their lives, whether that means a more traditional lifestyle or not. It’s also a movement that strives to reveal all the ways that men have historically (and currently) used their physical power to exclude women from many aspects of life and to orient our understanding of the world from a male perspective.
Sara explains,

I think the more I have gotten older I’ve interacted within the professional setting the more I realized how skewed this world is towards men especially towards white men um non-minority men um and I think that for me feminism has more to do with um having an equal space to be heard, equal opportunity for your voice to be heard. Um you know I think its about sort of sharing and be able to contribute openly and being valued um equally as male counterparts. I think that is what feminism is for me.

Mary’s view went along with the idea of stopping the sexualization of women, by saying that they have a right to choose what they want to do in their lives. The fact is that they sometimes aren’t able to fight against societies’ deeply ingrained ideas that women do not have any power. Mary argued that some feminists have the idea that they can do whatever they want with their bodies, exposing themselves as they see fit.

There has been a slow change in which Muslim women have moved into the spotlight in positive ways. Hanna thought that Islam has a place for feminism, she explained,

Yes, Islam does have a place for feminism. Just because the religion does not allow a woman to be half-naked, does not mean it doesn’t allow her to pursue her goals and dreams in life. There are many Muslim women all over the world, who further their education, don’t get married till they are ready, dress how they want, etc. At the 2016 Rio Olympics, numerous great achievements were made by Muslim women, including those who wear the hijab. Some of these women include Ibtihaj Muhammad, who won at fencing, Sara Ahmed, who won at weightlifting, and Hedaya Wahba, who won at taekwondo. Just because some Muslim women may look “different,” doing the same thing as a non-Muslim woman, doesn’t make them any less of champions.

Theme Four: Muslim women live in a climate of Islamophobia

The fear of Muslims and Islam, Islamophobia, allows negative rhetoric and Muslim women to start to be more aware of their surroundings. The interviews with participants showed that they didn’t have a fear of Islamophobia until the current political
climate. We hear about instances where there are attacks against Muslims, and some of the participants gave examples of such attacks. They discussed instances of insults, verbal attacks, and having people in their faces and intimidated them. Recently in the news, there were incidents where people who disliked Muslims decided to attack them. One on June 18, 2017 a woman named Nabra Hasanan, who was walking at night after Ramadan prayer when she was attacked and killed. Another story on February 10, 2015 involved the three victims of the Chapel Hill shootings, (Deah, Yusoor and Razan). Eliza recounted an experience while playing outside the masjid with some other girls:

This woman she was driving this big car and she looked out the window and she was just driving, it was all of a sudden, we didn’t get a chance to interact with her she was just like “boom… bomb.” …threatened We have had to increase security around the masjid for Ramadan we have had to have like hire extra people.

The participants that wear the hijab reported the most harassment. Especially in airports, they tended to get the most screening pat downs. They talk about those who get their hijabs pulled off, punched in the face, insulted and others. One of the girls, Aliyah, told a story about how her brother was harassed in a gym because the owner believed that he was a terrorist operative implanted to hurt the owner. The owner seemed to have problems because she says

“The man was clearly unhinged; he even made veiled threats about the fact that he is always armed, and mentioned that many of the other men at the gym are off-duty police officers who wouldn’t hesitate to protect him at a moment’s notice. After a shocking volume of strange, insulting text messages, my brother grew deeply uncomfortable and unsure of his safety at that gym. He canceled his membership.”

All of the participants believed that Islamophobia is on the rise, especially with the recent political rhetoric. Aliyah says, “I believe that it’s rampant, and that it has been since 9/11. I also think that it’s on the rise; many Islamophobes have been emboldened by the Trump campaign and administration, which has made little secret of its position on
Muslims.” It can be seen in government policies like the travel ban against certain countries.

Noha thinks Islamophobia “is very dangerous, primarily to younger kids who are bullied because they are different.” Sara says:

The past election …I think opened the floodgates and more made it okay to display your thoughts and not educate yourself. Made it okay to say whatever you want and lot of people are doing that. Um I think that uh the media doesn’t help contribute. I mean it does contribute to the rise of Islamophobia um again what we talked about how they portray Muslims, show the bad things and not the good day to day neighbors, that I think we are in unfortunate state of affairs.

There have been attacks in the past against Muslims, but recently the numbers of those have risen. There are those who support the government on certain issues that are Islamophobic. Ignorance plays a huge role when dealing with people who fight against a religion they don’t fully understand, and the media contributes to this in many ways. As Hannah believed:

I’ll sum it up like this: The media is the “Most Effective Devil In America.” They portray different groups, situations, etc. in a way to keep the people divided, because after all, wouldn’t we be a lot stronger united? Hence “UNITED” States of America. Any government will feel threatened with a united people, so keeping us divided is really in their best interest. To do this, stories have to be “twisted” to conform to this frame of mind the way that is in the best interest of those behind the media and government. The media is a HUGE influence on a mind, but it’s how one consumes and interprets that information, while doing research of their own, that can make all the difference. People will always fear what they don’t know, and a lot of people that possess Islamophobia have never even personally met a Muslim in their life.

Each of the women felt that in some way the current climate of politics and the election of President Trump had caused a rise in negative rhetoric, as well as encouraged those who were secretly Islamophobes to come out into the open and say their thoughts on Islam. Their thoughts and opinions are usually based on ignorance. One major point,
which people do not understand about Islam, is that Islam is a peaceful religion. They believe that Islam promotes violence. When questioning these Muslim women about their thoughts on whether or not Islam is violent. There was a unanimous voice that stated that Islam does not promote violence. Eliza summarized that Islam,

Doesn’t support or promote violence. One hadith that resonates with me all the time if it is the end of the world and you have a seed in your hand and you plant it.. so I think that most of the foundation of Islam Aqida or Fikh that we have doesn’t promote violence. doesn’t in any way promote violence it is about how we should be living our life. Its about… most of Islam is about stuff like that you know …increasing the well being of you and those around you and being a better person to being more devoted to Allah. I think in certain aspects if you think about like jihadi or the jihad aspect of Islam but then like yea but jihad at the time is different than jihad now so like jihad at the time was fighting increasing or spreading the word of Islam but most of that did not happen by the sword but that kind of jihad is not the kind of jihad right now. Jihadists or people who go for jihad now are like protecting their countries or they have a purpose behind that and sometimes that purpose in not necessarily good or valid but yea I don’t think Islam promotes violence in any way.

Muslims are given the right to defend themselves, and this sometimes confuses people to think that Islam is violent, but Islam does not advocate that violence is not the answer. As Mary says “That is a really hard question because it does say in the Koran in certain situations where violence is permissible it also says that violence isn’t the answer.” The only times where violence may be okay is when you are defending yourself land and country. Even then, that violence is always a last resort, it is not used for fear and hatred but for self defense of yourself and others.

Theme Five: Muslim women clearly distinguish between culture and Islam, whether they are compatible or incompatible

With the idea of culture and religion there are a mixture of thoughts on whether Islam and culture can go hand in hand. Many of the women believed that culture is adaptable to religion, by taking the good of the culture and making it their own in a way
that is compatible with their religion. To enhance a certain culture Islam, as Eliza believed that:

Islam is translucent so its um …whatever it passes over it takes the image of that culture… um mosques in China, for example, they look like any other Chinese building so they don’t look like mosques you would see in Saudi Arabia or something so I think that Islam takes the good culture, good aspects of a culture, the good characteristics of a culture so um I always explain to people that I take the culture here of like volunteering, of increasing happiness to people.

The West and Islam are very similar in certain areas, to the extent that one of the participants said both “yes and no” about whether Islam and the West are compatible. Each woman had a different view of whether or not they agreed with the West and Islam being able to get along. Aliyah’s thoughts on compatibility were, “Yes, in the sense that a practicing Muslim with full and uncompromising commitment to their values and their worship could live comfortably in the West. Practicing Muslims can be contributive Western citizens who live without issue alongside non-Muslims, so long as the West permits Muslims to be different.” Most of the women believed that Westerners (non-Muslims) have the right values. They believed that if the US would become Muslim then it would be successful and strong. The reasoning behind this is that the values of equality, freedom, and democracy are all things that Islam values and understands. Still, some different structural differences would need to be negotiated such as the way Islam would do their banking. Aliyah thinks that the structural differences can “embody Muslim values in all aspects of its organization, would probably structure itself differently than a typically Western society. The finance industry, the banking sector, and state welfare would all look different, I would imagine.” Another view is Hannah’s who stated: “The West may not always agree with some religious aspects of Islam, just as Muslims may not always like or agree with some of the cultural aspects of the West, but that doesn’t
mean that they can’t thrive off their similarities.” One thing that can be seen as different is that women in Islam are told to be modest, but just because Muslims have a different faith doesn’t mean that they are any less American. In the end, Hannah says, “none of us are true Americans unless we are Native American. At the end of the day, we all bleed red.” Hannah felt that the differences were negligible, “The United States constitution was built on religious freedom in the Bill of Rights. Just like the average American, Muslims enjoy many activities as the average American, such as sports, going to the movies, etc”

Looking at the way Islam presents itself, the way that people would care for each other in an Islamic America. Eliza says:

We always say in our family it would be awesome if all the Americans were Muslim. Because Islam would be strong because they already do/ have the good values of Islam but they are just not Muslims. The only thing that is missing that belief. They already do good. They already care about each other they already like have that sense of value and care about other people.”

Mary’s thoughts on compatibility were different than both Aliyah’s and Eliza’s thoughts. She believed that Islam and the West aren’t compatible. Her thoughts about the culture and relationships in the West were as follows, “West is on a downward spiral as extreme as in a sense as Sodom and Gomorrah. Seriously it is bad. I just can’t believe how much people don’t care about each other here. It is incredibly unbelievable. It is sickening… I don’t think it is compatible because I think it will clash because you have the West going on a downward spiral and Islam coming in trying to correct everything and it is gonna be the same as a parent trying to correct the child.”
CHAPTER FIVE

Discussion and Conclusion

The research sought to answer two questions about the lives of Muslim women in America. RQ1: How do Muslim women in the US negotiate their identities? and RQ2: How do Muslim women in the US interrogate the way they are portrayed in US media? The answers from the interviews addressed and answered these questions. The following themes emerged from analysis of the interviews: Theme One: Muslim women submit to God when living life in any culture; Theme Two: Muslim women must negotiate their identities in a Western context with or without the hijab; Theme Three: Muslim women must deal with misconceptions and stereotypes in the media about what it means to be a Muslim woman; Theme Four: Muslim women live in a climate of Islamophobia; and Theme Five: Muslim women clearly distinguish between culture and Islam, whether they are compatible or incompatible.

The themes helped bridge a gap to better understand Muslim women’s lives in America. The first theme- Muslim women submit to God in any culture, showed us that Islam is a universal and peaceful religion. The media tends to misuse/ misinterpret the meanings of Islam harshly and through “clash of civilizations” and “orientalism” negative stereotypes have arisen. Each and every one of my participants stated that Islam is a peaceful religion. Women who wear the hijab (veil/headscarf) use it as a way to protect themselves, to separate themselves from society’s expectations. The hijab helps them focus on self and not on what they are wearing, as well as their relationship with
God. Two of the women who don’t wear the hijab see it as a weakness and they wished they were strong enough to wear it.

The second theme- Muslim women negotiate their identities in a western context with or without the hijab showed my participants had different responses about identity. Identity can differ within different situations, but the biggest part of a Muslim woman’s identity is that she is Muslim first and anything else takes place second. Bringing in identity negotiation theory helped to understand that identity can be affected by cultural, social and other personal beliefs. The women who have struggled the most with identity did so mainly because of their racial or ethnic backgrounds. Considering the sense of belonging alongside identity, the women consider it as self-imposed, a feeling that can occur when they are somewhere where people are talking negatively about Islam or are drinking alcohol. The women didn’t see a difference in being American or Muslim.

The third theme- Muslim women deal with misconceptions and stereotypes in the media about what it means to be a Muslim woman. That stereotypes and misconceptions in the media have shown a negative portrayal of Muslim women. The women all stated their belief that Islam gave rights to women, that Muslim women are not oppressed. In Islam women had leadership roles around the time of the prophet; women also fought and participated in battles. One of the participants’ stated goals is to bring women back to the roots of Islam, to bring back the rights of women, reaching equality for women both in Islam and across the world. Women are able to do what they want, no matter what it is. Breaking patriarchal societies will help with breaking misconceptions and stereotypes. Bringing in feminism as a guide to accomplishing the goals of granting women everywhere the rights that should be naturally given is something that most of the women
believe in. I found that Islam is a religion that supports feminism and that it could be considered as prophetic.

The fourth theme- Muslim women live in a climate of Islamophobia. Islamophobia has dangerous implications to the women and children. It shows how this fear of Muslims can impact their opinions. That Muslim children are fearful of their surroundings. There has been a rise in both attacks as well as negative rhetoric against Muslims in the US even though the participants themselves did not report directly experiencing any attacks. They have mainly heard about attacks that have happened and were reported in the media. Muslim women who wear the hijab get the most harassment in places like airports.

The last theme- Muslim women clearly distinguish between culture and Islam, whether they are compatible or incompatible. If culture and Islam are able to work well together. This raises the question about whether or not Islam and culture can coexist. Most of the women thought Islam is successful in adapting to cultures and that Muslims are able to contribute to Western societies as they share many of the same values and beliefs. Only one of the women had the complete opposite view on the compatibility of Islam and the West.

**Personal reflection**

Identity can change with different people and in different situations. Each component of a person is vast with more than one identity. With the creation of identities, we begin to understand that identities help us to achieve goals, but the identities make us aware of who we are. Being visibly Muslim by wearing hijab helps us focus on that as our main identity, though at the same time Muslim women who aren’t wearing the hijab
still identify mostly with their religion. For instance, I feel out of place at times both here and in Egypt when I go visit. I feel lost because I have more American ideas and thoughts that are different from those who live in Egypt. Also since I am also American I have the opposite sense of not belonging with certain things living in the US. The complexity of identity is a thing that can confuse a person. I am a Muslim Egyptian-American woman who has been living in the US. I believe that there are times that I wonder what I am doing here specifically around people who don’t understand me as I am. I have had conflicts with friends because they don’t understand certain things about me. I had a friend who was a Pakistani Muslim but was born and raised here, she did not understand why my family and I were a lot more conservative in the way that I was raised. It made me feel out of place. There was also another time where my friends misunderstood that smoking a hookah was acceptable because it was a cultural practice. They didn’t understand that it was not acceptable from a religious point of view, and also for health reasons. (Islamic beliefs seek to protect us from practices which are harmful to our health). There are also many other times where I have wondered if I should be in a certain place. Usually this happens around the times when my friends and classmates do things that I wouldn’t consider doing. An example of that would be at the end of a semester sometimes classmates want to go out and celebrate by going to a bar, where I would be automatically excluded because I don’t drink alcohol.

Stereotypes of Muslim women in the media are inaccurate. The negative portrayals can be challenging and demeaning towards Muslim women who are living in America by representing Muslim women as oppressed or backwards or Islamic extremists. Additionally, by not including Muslim women’s representations of
themselves in the media and even some of the literature, Muslim women’s voices have been taken from them. In the climate that we are in today we need to understand the full implications that can come with being visibly Muslim by wearing the hijab and modest clothing. Many Muslim women fear being visibly Muslim in the current state of Islamophobia in the US. By participating in this research, women have been helped to overcome the negativity that has always been shown by voicing their perspectives.

It is not widely known that women in Islam have achieved their rights from the religion and that it is because of culture and the nature of patriarchal societies that their rights have been shelved. The interviews show the women believe that Islam at its inception gave women a voice but it is taken from them when people like the Taliban interpret the Qur’an and Hadith wrongly. That is when women have lost rights and the negative implications have been given to them. Because this has happened feminism has taken root with certain people. The fight towards the basic understanding that women have a right to equality.

While going over the interviews I was surprised that I didn’t hear many stories or experiences that dealt with Islamophobia. Having read about instances of attacks in the media there was an article in the Huffington Post where they recorded a number of attacks against Muslims, reporting 400 cases within a few months during the time of the elections (Matthias, 2017). I made an assumption that many Muslim women in the US would have experienced some sort of negative attack against them. I wear the hijab but haven’t experienced any negativity but the recent attacks that I hear about made me think that there would be more to talk about. There were a couple of participants who don’t wear the hijab, and their opinions on hijab and covering are similar to those who do wear
the hijab. They believe that it is important to do so, but they are mostly afraid especially with Islamophobia. However, most of the participants said similar things in regards to how they feel about Islamophobia, that they are not being threatened but becoming more aware. I personally have become more aware of my surroundings when I go out since I am visibly Muslim.

The women didn’t seem to offer many differing opinions to the interview questions that were asked. They believed that the foundations of Islam through the life of the prophet Muhammed and his teaching show that feminism is an important aspect of Islam. I asked about feminism because in our day and age we need a way to get back what was shown in the past, not just that feminism is useful to understand but that Islam is peaceful, forgiving and open to women’s rights. The women have had consistency in their experiences throughout their lives and understanding about what it means to be a Muslim woman living in the US. Despite negotiating their identities and the struggles that they go through, they don’t have a huge sense of something wrong with who they are. The reason feminism was one of the questions asked was because I have seen that women are not presented as equal and I wanted to ask about their opinions. Most of the women see the imbalance between men and women that in itself is reason enough to be considered feminist.

**Implications**

With the questions being answered we understand a little bit more about the lives of Muslim women in America. We also begin to understand some more about Islam and how it deals with women. We learn that Muslim women had rights that were given to them by God. This is an idea that many people do not understand. They do not believe
that Islam is a progressive religion that has given women their rights. Being a Muslim woman in America helps to understand the different views that Muslim women have. That culture of patriarchal societies is a big reason behind the lack of women’s rights.

Feminism is a universal idea where women are able to fight for their rights. Though there are many versions and definitions and aspects of feminism. One aspect is to fight the image of women as an object and to fight against having women objectified, to have them viewed as those with their own rights. I consider myself as a feminist, because I see something wrong with how women are treated by society, I believe that it needs to change and this is why feminist movements have reached Muslim women.

**Limitations**

One limitation of this research is that we didn’t hear enough about Muslim women’s experiences with Islamophobia in the US. I made the assumption that Muslim women in America have experienced some form of attack but that was not true of the experience of the participants in this research. The sample size is very small so a larger sample or a sample from a different region of the country might have produced different experiences. A wider range of women to interview might lead to a better understanding about the perspectives and experiences of Muslim women. Another limitation might be that I am a visibly Muslim woman living in the US so my perspective may have limited my analysis in some ways because I am so close to the focus of this research. One way this showed up was in the limited age range of the participants (21-31). While I assumed this was stage of life when women would be negotiating their identities, it would be valuable to ask women of many different ages about these same issues and gain their perspectives.
Future Directions

For this research to expand I would like to involve a greater number of participants to see if there is a difference in opinions from the few that I have interviewed, in regards to Islamophobia and identity. Talking to more Muslim women of various ages and in different settings around America would help to better understand their experiences. Another possibility would be a comparative study of Muslim women’s experiences and perspectives around the world with more participants focusing on gender equality as well as how they negotiate the negative attacks women get. In another direction, the intersectionality of race, Islam and gender could be explored specifically. Also, since Muslim women join all women in the US in not being sought adequately as sources of their experiences by routine journalistic practice, and therefore being underrepresented and misrepresented, comparative research could be conducted about their mutual experiences.

Conclusion

This research has addressed both questions posed at the end of Chapter Two: How do Muslim women in the US negotiate their identities? and, How do Muslim women in the US interrogate the way they are portrayed in US media? The research found that the women in the US deal with their identities in different ways, whether they struggle or not, especially with stereotypes of Muslim women in US media. This has helped fill in the gap in knowledge about many aspects of being a Muslim woman in the US, including identity, Islamophobia, stereotypes in the media, feminism and their experiences as women in a male dominant society, and also explored the fact that the “oppression” of women is from cultural practices and not the Muslim religion.
REFERENCES


APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

Office of Research Administration
Akron, OH 44325-2102

NOTICE OF APPROVAL

Date: May 15, 2017
To: Mariam Khalil,  
School of Communication
From: Sharon McWhorter, SM
IRB Number: 20170501
Title: Muslim Women in America: Identity and Islamophobia

Approval Date: May 15, 2017

Thank you for submitting your IRB Application for review. Your protocol represents minimal risk to subjects and matches the following federal category for exemption:

☐ Exemption 1 – Research conducted in established or commonly accepted educational settings, involving normal educational practices.

☒ Exemption 2 – Research involving the use of educational tests, survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior.

☐ Exemption 3 – Research involving the use of educational tests, survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior not exempt under category 2, but subjects are elected or appointed public officials or candidates for public office.

☐ Exemption 4 – Research involving the collection or study of existing data, documents, records, pathological specimens, or diagnostic specimens.

☐ Exemption 5 – Research and demonstration projects conducted by or subject to the approval of department or agency heads, and which are designed to study, evaluate, or otherwise examine public programs or benefits.

☐ Exemption 6 – Taste and food quality evaluation and consumer acceptance studies.

Annual continuation applications are not required for exempt projects. If you make changes to the study’s design or procedures that increase the risk to subjects or include activities that do not fall within the approved exemption category, please contact the IRB to discuss whether or not a new application must be submitted. Any such changes or modifications must be reviewed and approved by the IRB prior to implementation.

Please retain this letter for your files. This Office will hold your exemption application for a period of three years from the approval date. If you wish to continue this protocol beyond this period, you will need to submit another Exemption Request. If the research is being conducted for a master’s thesis or doctoral dissertation, the student must file a copy of this letter with the thesis or dissertation.

☒ Approved consent form is enclosed
APPENDIX B

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

Being a Muslim woman in America

You are invited to take part in a research study conducted by Mariam Khalil, a graduate student in the School of Communication at the University of Akron. The objective of this study is to investigate the experience of Muslim women in America. You are being included in this study because you are a Muslim woman living in America.

Your involvement in this study will consist of in-depth interviews that will last between 30 minutes to an hour. With your permission, the interview will be recorded with a digital voice recorder to aid in the accuracy of the study. The interview questions will be related to your experiences as a Muslim woman in America and your perspectives on topics such as Islamophobia, stereotyping, and feminism. This study is completely voluntary and up to you (the participant) to choose if you would like to be interviewed. You have complete discretion over the questions you choose to answer. You may choose to stop the interview at any time, for any reason. In addition to the initial interview you may be contacted with follow-up questions and/or concerns that arise as the study progresses. These follow-up questions are also voluntary and you have the right to respond in any capacity you feel most comfortable. There should not be any risks to you.

If you have any questions, concerns, suggestions or complaints about the study you may contact Mariam Khalil at (440) 570-3580 or write her at mak76@zips.uakron.edu. You may also contact Dr. Kathleen D. Clark at (330) 972-7485, or write her at kclark@uakron.edu or the University of Akron, School of Communication, Kolbe Hall 108, Akron, OH 44325-1003. You may also contact the institutional review board, Office of Research Services at the University of Akron by calling (330) 972-7666, with questions that you have about your rights as a volunteer in this study.

Please sign below if you agree in being a participant in this study.

________________________________________________________________________
Signature of person agreeing to participate in the study

Date
APPENDIX C

Interview Guide

1. What is your race/ethnicity?

2. How old are you?

3. Were you born a Muslim? If not, please tell me about becoming a Muslim.

4. Have you always lived in the United States? If not where are you from originally?
   How long have you lived in the US?

5. Have your parents always lived in the United States? If not, where else have they lived?

6. What does Islam mean to you?

7. Do you wear the hijab? If so, how/when did you start wearing the hijab? What are your thoughts on wearing it?

8. Have you had any negative experiences after putting the hijab on? (if yes) Please describe something about what happened?

9. Have you ever felt like you doesn’t belong because you are a Muslim?

10. Have you ever felt like you doesn’t belong because you wear the hijab? (if yes) please describe how/why you felt like you doesn’t belong?

11. What are your thoughts on the role of women in Islam?

12. What are misconceptions non-Muslims hold about the role of women in Islam?

13. Are Islam and the West compatible? (yes/no) Please explain your views on whether you believe they are or not.

14. Do you think Muslim women are oppressed within Islam? If so, please explain how you believe they are oppressed.
15. What are your thoughts on the ways that Muslim women are portrayed in the media?

16. Are there stereotypes about Muslim women in the media? If so, please explain the stereotypes you’ve seen. What do you think or feel about those stereotypes?

17. Do you feel that you or someone you have known has been stereotyped because of the way the media portrays Muslim women?

18. What are your experiences of being a Muslim woman in the US post 9/11?

19. Do you think Islam promotes violence? If so, please say how Islam promotes violence. If not, please say how Islam does not promote violence.

20. Have you heard the term Islamophobia? If so, please explain what you think it means.

21. Have you ever felt threatened by people who seem influenced by Islamophobia? (If yes) What are your experiences with people who seem influenced by Islamophobia?

22. Have you ever heard any stories about other Muslims who have had to deal with Islamophobia? If so, please tell two or three of the stories.

23. What are your thoughts about Islamophobia in the US currently?

24. Do you consider yourself a feminist? If yes, how do you define feminism?

25. Based on your definition of feminism do you think Islam has a place for feminism?

26. What do you think about the role of culture and religion when it comes to Islam?

27. Do you think as yourself as American? Please explain your answer.

28. How do you identify yourself? Please provide an example of a time when you were aware of yourself having this identity. What happened?

29. Have you ever felt lost because of your dual reality of being American and Muslim?

30. Do you identify with one more than the other? If so, please explain why and give you
31. Do you struggle with your identity as a Muslim woman in the US? (If yes) Please describe how you struggle with your identity, and give one or two examples of times you’ve struggled with it recently.

32. Any additional questions do you think I should have added? If so, what are they and how would you answer them?

33. I will not disclose your name in this study to protect your identity, but instead will use a pseudonym to use with your answers. Would you like to pick your own pseudonym to be used in the study? If so, what name would you like to use?
### APPENDIX D

**Codebook**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behavior</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>way of life</td>
<td>That Islam is essential in everyday life it helps them decide how to deal with aspects in life that they work through.</td>
<td>“Islam is a way of life it is not just a practice it is not something you do on the side it is not something you just acknowledge um when it is required it is a way of life it is a lifestyle includes like submission to Allah submission to god”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hijab as Identifier</td>
<td>Modesty and a way to identify self as Muslim. Personal choice, Submission to GOD,</td>
<td>“so hijab allows people to identify me as Muslim it is a way for me to um obey the rules or orders that Allah has given to Muslim women by being modest by covering so uh its also part of the Sunnah”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hijab as modesty</td>
<td>Modesty as a way to to minimize the objectification of women</td>
<td>“For me, hijab is a really beautiful example of God's infinite wisdom…It's a commitment to modesty and strength of character, a way of opting out of the social pressure to place enormous value on what we look like rather than who we are. “</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative experiences</td>
<td>Stared at, insults, making jokes, racist comments</td>
<td>“Yup, all types of things from people giving me the finger, to making jokes, yelling things out of cars.. the worst to me though are two.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belonging in places</td>
<td>Self-imposed, all the time it differs among the girls. Even those who don’t wear the hijab</td>
<td>“Yes; sometimes it’s self-imposed (like when you feel like your values or lifestyle are so different from the people around you that you don’t belong”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of women</td>
<td>Many aspects/ what they do society history spirituality etc. Islam brought women’s rights, gave women a voice</td>
<td>“in Islam, the role of a woman is to worship God and to live piously and ethically”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misconceptions of women</td>
<td>Less than, oppressed They have no voice, oppressed, second to men. Unequal etc.</td>
<td>“a lot of non-Muslims portray women in Islam as oppressed.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compatibility of Islam</td>
<td>Islam Islam like a flowing river where they it is not limited to any culture. One person says no they aren’t culturally friendly</td>
<td>“Of course. Islam is a religion. It contains universal guiding principles for the expression of our faith. It is not limited to any culture. “</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Opinion/Quote</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oppression in Islam or not</td>
<td>Oppressed within countries that is predominately Muslim but not because of Islam. The religion does not oppress women as it came down they were given a voice and rights. Education, inheritance etc.</td>
<td>“I think that Muslim women are oppressed in countries that Islam is majority practiced. I don’t think that the religion oppress women.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media depictions</td>
<td>Not accurate representation. Helpless, no voice, housewives childrearing etc.</td>
<td>“I think you know first of all most of the portrayals in the media is not truly accurate and I think a lot of what the media portrays is stereotypes um you know two extremes either you have a women who is in a burqa in her house not allowed to leave shown as the norm”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stereotypes of women</td>
<td>What they think about Muslim women. They have to be saved forbidden to do things they want.</td>
<td>“Women are also seen as oppressed because many people get this misconception that women are forced to wear the hijab.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being stereotyped</td>
<td>Using what they describe to say if stereotyped.</td>
<td>English is so well, definitely, meek and silent not outspoken.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/11</td>
<td>If they have become more aware of being different. Defensive, being told they had to be careful some no major changes being forced to be a representative and spokesperson.</td>
<td>“for me personally I haven’t had a significant change in my day to day experience”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“All that comes to mind is that from a young age, I’ve been often put into the position (not always by choice) of being a representative or spokesperson for my faith.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violence/ Islam</td>
<td>If Islam is violent NO as a religion it doesn’t but it gives the right to defend self.</td>
<td>“No, violence is prohibited in most all situations.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islamophobia</td>
<td>Fear of Muslims/Islam.</td>
<td>They have all heard the term those being afraid of Islam and Muslims.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>threatened by Islamophobia</td>
<td>Those who fear Muslims/Islam who are violent towards Muslims.</td>
<td>Some have been lucky not to feel the fear of those who are Islamophobias, but many have a fear of their safety.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stories of Islamophobia</td>
<td>Negative stories that is caused by those who fear/dislike Muslims.</td>
<td>Punches, death and different violent stories towards different Muslims. Ex the chapel hill victims “death, Yusoor and Razan.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rise of hate</td>
<td>Their thoughts about Islamophobia in the US currently Dangerous because more people have been given them a place to act on their hate.</td>
<td>“That it saddens me. I hope that Muslims will take initiative to tell our stories and get to know others and continue to serve the nation. I hope that others will reach out and get to know Muslims and uplift and protect them.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feminism</td>
<td>Believing in feminism. There was a mix of ideas that belong to those who.</td>
<td>“Yes. Simply, it just means the belief in equality between men and women.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Islam and feminism</strong></td>
<td><strong>Culture and religion</strong></td>
<td><strong>American</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whether or not they believe Islam Yes because Islam gave women rights to education inheritance being a strong independent women and feminism coexist</td>
<td>Tranquil adaptative They have a tendency to be mixed up together for ex. When Saudi had women not be allowed to drive, child marriages etc.</td>
<td>If they thought of themselves as American. There is a mix of answers some say yes they consider themselves as American one is becoming Americanized but doesn’t have citizenship, one says unfortunately she is American but they could be a hyphenated American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Of course, I think it’s actually prophetic, as I see it in the society of Prophet Muhammad SWS.”</td>
<td>“I haven’t seen this in any other religion but Islam has ample examples of combining its religious teachings. Farouq Abdullah has a nice quote that says that Islam takes on the waves of different seas wherever it goes that is way it was able to reach all over the world. Because it is not try to totally remove culture, it changed cultural practices that was against the religion (like female infanticide for example was a practice a long time ago in Arabia, when Islam came it said this is forbidden).”</td>
<td>“Being born and raised in America, I don’t see myself as anything less than an American.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Culture and religion

Personally I think that culture generally has no place in Islam um because I think that a lot of times a lot of culture are against Islam and I think that a lot of people mistake the two as they go together

"Absolutely. I was born in the US, and I’m a US citizen. My family can trace our heritage back to before the revolutionary war"
aspects there are some struggles that they go through there also can be a conflict with their cultural identity that I am also fully American. The two aren’t mutually exclusive for me” “Growing up with a Muslim father, who was born in Lebanon, and a Christian mother, who is first generation in America, I struggled with identity for a while. I felt American, but I always felt different than others.”

Dual realities part 2

If they id with one more than the other More with being Muslim because their day to day life centers around the teachings of Islam “I can identify with being Muslim more than American, even though there is a fine line between the two. Islam guides me through my life in a moral and righteous way”

Identity and Islam

Muslim and woman in the us struggles Some struggle or have times of conflict but it would depend on the type of struggles whether it is with other peoples negative thoughts on Muslims can create a sense of not belonging but it doesn’t necessary stays.

Code book part B (axial coding)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Explanation/ description</th>
<th>Categories in the themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Muslim women submit to God in any culture</td>
<td>Islam teaches us that it is a way of life through what is acceptable with violence and the role of women</td>
<td>Way of life Hijab as an identifier Hijab as modesty Violence/ Islam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslim women must negotiate their identities in a western context with or without the hijab</td>
<td>Hijab and non-hijabi women have to be able to negotiate who they are through identities</td>
<td>Identity/belonging/American/dual realities 1 and 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslim women must deal with misconceptions and stereotypes in the media about what it means to be a Muslim women</td>
<td>Fighting stereotypes of Muslim women through feminism and understanding their rights</td>
<td>Role of women Misconceptions and stereotypes Oppression of women Feminism Feminism and Islam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslim women live in a climate of Islamophobia</td>
<td>Their experiences as Muslim women in an era where more attacks on Muslims are relevant</td>
<td>Islamophobia Threatened by islamophobia Stories of islamophobia Rise of hate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslim women clearly distinguish between culture and Islam whether it is compatible or incompatible</td>
<td>Culture and religion how they work with each other and their differences</td>
<td>Culture and religion Compatibility of Islam and the west</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>