MULTIMODAL EXPRESSIONS OF
YOUNG ARAB MUSLIM AMERICAN WOMEN

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Arab American Muslim women often struggle to maintain conflicting identities. They feel pressure to perform the traditional roles of being a mild-mannered daughter, obedient wife, and strict mother (in that order); however, they are also often trying to remain true to their newer, less traditional, American(ized) identities as individuals, as sexually liberated, and as women of the workforce.

In my dissertation, entitled, *Multimodal Expressions of Young Arab Muslim American Women,* and advised by Dr. Kristine Blair, I explore, through ethnographic and feminist methods, the personal struggles of Arab Muslim American women. Although they have many differences in age, academic interests, family backgrounds, and life experiences, they all struggle with barriers caused by binary oppositions that are imposed upon them by family members who uphold traditional, conservative Arab and/or Islamic cultural and religious values. Many use the Internet as a space to express these struggles.

This study discusses identity, discrimination, sexuality, and gender, while it seeks to answer these questions: how do Arab American Muslim women perform femininity? How do they disrupt the patriarchal expectations of Arab Muslim womanhood in order to express personal and political desire and dissent in America? How does technology provide Arab Muslim American women with sites for resistance and exploration, and what modes of delivery ultimately contribute to their expressions?

Drawing on my personal and academic experiences as an Arab American, a student, a teacher, a researcher, and a feminist, I give concrete examples that describe some of the specific cultural influences that hinder Arab American women in their development into/as responsible sexual beings, and I argue that Arab American women, especially those who have needs and desires beyond those expected of them in Arab and Islamic culture, are forced to choose between satisfying their individual desires and satisfying the expectations of their family and community. My dissertation explores the rhetorical choices Arab Muslim American women make to navigate this difficult space.
for my mom, Joan

toodaloo

I love you
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Family – Mom and Baba, my five brothers: Zein, Amir, Ibrahim, Habib and Hydar, my sister: Alia—and friends: Amena, Carla, Mona, Fatima, Christine, Laila- I cannot thank you enough for your love and support as I pursued my personal and professional goals. Thank you for many years of laughter and strength.

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CHAPTER I: THE RHETORICAL CHALLENGE OF BEING “ARAB” VS “AMERICAN”

In addition to historical and current feminist research about women’s rhetorical strategies for self expression, my experiences with Arab American womanhood, observations of my colleagues and students, and interactions with my peers, provoke me to explore identity creation among young Arab Muslim American women. Arab American women must uphold conflicting identities publicly and privately as they practice both Arab and American cultural ideals. Arab Muslim Americans are one of the most under-represented U.S. minority groups because even within discussions about disenfranchised groups, they are continuously marginalized or made invisible. There have been many published texts in feminist theory that examine the intersections of race, culture, religion, and sexuality; many have discussed African American, Asian American, Native American, and Latina struggles with cultural identities and values. However, there are very few published scholarly texts that discuss the struggles of young Arab Muslim American women and the negotiation of their cultural and religious identities with their personal desires; in fact, Arab American women are rarely, if ever, the topic of discussion in scholarly research about intersections of race, religion and culture with sexuality, technology, and literacy. They are certainly not agents of change in this rare research. When Arab Muslim American women are the topic of interest, researchers contributing to this body of work, especially post 9/11, must be careful not to portray Arab women solely as victims of men, Islam, and oppression. It is hard to find material both in mainstream media and in academic circles that allows the voices of Arab Muslim American women to be heard or taken seriously or that portrays anything Arab in a positive light; thus, researchers in Arab studies might make it a goal to depict the wonderful aspects of Arabness (and there are many). However, it is also important for Arab Muslim American women to pursue research within their own communities, even when
the implications presented in their research might be negative. The complexity of this situation is always in my mind; however, I cannot ignore that the Arab Muslim cultural experiences, in America and abroad, contribute to a less than enthusiastic viewpoint about women’s personal and professional freedoms, sexual liberation, and many other forms of expression; consequently, this is an important area of study for researchers, especially contemporary feminists and scholars in rhetoric and digital literacy who study identity formation and multicultural issues.

Arab Muslim American women often struggle with barriers caused by binary oppositions imposed upon them by family members who uphold traditional, conservative Arab and Islamic cultural and religious values. Arab communities both in America and in the Middle East severely limit sexual freedom, gender expression, and intimacy by conservative values and by social pressure from family, relatives, and other members of the community. This pressure to conform to conservative heterosexual ideals—to obey the head of household, to marry an approved suitor, and ultimately to have children who will do the same—is communicated directly and indirectly through both overt and subtle exchanges of desires within various relationships and interchanges in an Arab Muslim American family or community. Binary oppositions and antiquated cultural beliefs about worldliness imposed on young Arab Muslim American women severely limit their personal decisions to express any desires that counter the expectations of their immediate and nuclear families, and those of the Arab Muslim community at large. These limitations impact every aspect of these women’s lives from kindergarten through adulthood. Every decision, large or small, becomes a potential threat to a woman’s reputation as a “good girl” from choosing an outfit to choosing the right spaghetti sauce, from choosing a college to choosing a career path to choosing a mate. In contrast, Arab Muslim American men rarely face the same cultural pressure to obey others or to remain "pure" and "innocent" in their relationships with women; nonetheless,
they often encourage the women in their lives to conform to these cultural expectations, even if the men do not. Clearly, more research should be conducted to explore these issues among Arab Muslim Americans.

Drawing on my personal and academic experiences as an Arab American, a student, a teacher, and a feminist, I give concrete examples that describe some of the specific cultural influences that hinder Arab Muslim American women in their development into/as responsible sexual beings, and I argue that Arab Muslim American women, especially those who have needs and desires beyond those expected of them in Islamic Arab culture, feel forced to choose between satisfying their individual desires and satisfying the pressures and expectations of their family and community. In interviews, participants shared how they actively explore and pursue their desires. In this study, the word “desire” is defined loosely as “something that is wished for.” This could be as simple as an item at a store or a favorite food, but it could also be as complex and life altering as a professional aspiration, a certain marital status, a political change, or a sexual need. This project explores the ways Arab Muslim American women interpret their surroundings as new spaces that are not completely Arab or solely American but instead a combination of both.

As this difficult struggle ensues in the lives of young Arab Muslim American women, multimodal compositions often allow them to create and explore their new identities. Their struggle to negotiate conflicting aspects of their lives contributes to new spaces for identity construction and identity representation. These spaces allow them to explore their own agency and self-expression in multimodal ways. Learning is a multimodal process. For the purpose of this project, the word “multimodal” is being used to refer to “the ways we act, speak, or write—using text, images, symbols, and sound—that result in the acquisition or dissemination of
knowledge.” This may include behavioral practices, emotional responses, and communication through letters, visuals, actions, or any other medium. My goal was to gather data about the lenses through which they view themselves and others as personal, political, and professional agents of change. This is possible through exploring the multimodal literacy practices and rhetorical practices they use to express themselves.

In this chapter, I discuss the recent feminist works that uncover women's rhetorical moves and literate practices. Then, I explain how Arab Muslim American women learn what are acceptable desires and learn how to express themselves from their elders through direct and indirect methods of communication. Following this discussion, I explore some of the obstacles Arab women face in negotiating the binaries of “Arab” versus “American.” I discuss the pressure on these women within the Arab and Muslim communities and the way it is often misunderstood by many mainstream Americans who have misconceptions about Islam and Arab culture. This chapter shows that there is some foundational research to help us explore the conflicting nature of Arab Muslim American women’s identities. I also demonstrate how sexual freedom, gender expression, and public displays of intimacy are extremely limited in Arab and Muslim communities in America and in the Middle East. Further, I examine how young Arab Muslim American women negotiate the demands of social pressure from family, relatives, and other members of their community with the aspirations they have as individuals. Finally, I ask readers to see the juxtaposing expectations of women within the Arab Muslim community and outside it.

Feminist Context: The Struggle for a (Louder) Voice for Disenfranchised Women

According to Rosemarie Tong’s *Feminist Thought: A Comprehensive Introduction*, a commonly accepted definition of liberal feminism suggests that both genders should be treated equally inside and outside of the workplace, and that there is a continuing need for political,
social, economic, and legal reform as well as the removal of institutional biases in order to achieve this equity. This is the broad definition used for this study.

There is a long history of extrapolating feminist theories from what women do and how they do it. Feminist researchers, such as Patricia Hill Collins and Gloria Anzaldúa, ask us to allow women to tell their own stories in our research and scholarship. Similarly, standpoint theorists such as Nancy Hartsock, Donna Haraway, and Sandra Harding insist on including individual women's voices as a point of entry into knowledge and experience because this is the only way to challenge and change dominant ideologies. French feminists such as Luce Irigaray and Helene Cixous argue that women can and should combat masculinist thinking by using their bodies as rhetorical tools. Both note how women were historically limited to being the sexual objects of men as virgins and prostitutes, wives and mothers. As a result of playing these roles, women have been limited in expressing their sexuality as their own. If they can achieve this expression, Cixous and Irigaray declare that women can establish for themselves a standpoint through which masculinist thinking can first be seen and then taken apart in theory and in practice. Thus, self-expression and literate practices, the acts of knowing and representing one's own desires, can offer a woman ways to understand and transform a man's world.

Current concerns in feminist rhetorical theory continue to address the different relationships men and women have with language use and self-expression. Traditional theories on rhetoric, those existing before feminist theories on rhetoric, do not acknowledge these gender differences, thus leaving women underprivileged in their negotiations of public spaces. In articulating their public and professional self, women must often learn to express their personal identities and desires using the language of men. As an author focused on feminist theories of rhetoric, I feel that Krista Ratcliffe articulates this point perfectly in her book, *Anglo-American*
Feminist Challenges to the Rhetorical Traditions: Virginia Woolf, Mary Daly, and Adrienne Rich. She takes Bathsheba’s dilemma as her controlling metaphor: "I have the feelings of a woman," says Bathsheba Everdene in Hardy’s Far from the Madding Crowd, "but only the language of men." While this is true for all women to some degree, it is especially true for young Arab Muslim American women who wish to remain untarnished amidst the pressure of traditional Arab Muslim cultural values.

Michel Foucault, in “The Discourse on Language,” notes that “in every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organised and redistributed according to a certain number of procedures, whose role is to avert its power and its dangers, to cope with chance events, to evade its ponderous, awesome materiality" (216). So, according to Foucault, we should think of discourse as a conceptual framework that we use to make sense of the world through languages, images and signs, which he says, "evade [the] . . . awesome materiality" of life. It is clear from Foucault's argument, that discourse is controlled in three ways: through objects (what can be spoken of), ritual (where and how one may speak), and the privileged or exclusive right to speak of certain subjects (who may speak). This is similar to what Ratcliffe says about language-use in many ways.

Essentially, Ratcliffe argues that we need feminist theories on rhetoric to realize, legitimate, and address Bathsheba's dilemma. Further, she offers strategies for constructing feminist theories of rhetoric that include rediscovering lost and marginalized texts, rereading traditional works, extrapolating theories from non-rhetoric texts including letters, diaries, essays, cookbooks and more, and creating their own theories of rhetoric. In their attempts to do this, Ratcliffe explains, feminist researchers and scholars have found that traditional rhetorical theories ignore the reality that women and men occupy different cultural spaces (which are
further complicated by race and class). She continues to illustrate that issues such as who can
talk, where one can talk, and how one can talk emerge in daily life but are often disregarded in
rhetorical theories. Perhaps the best examples of this issue are in texts that highlight gender
differences in the rhetorical traditions of the nineteenth century. During 1800s, the study of
rhetoric and writing changed drastically. With passing time, women became more active in
rhetorical tradition. Though there is some evidence of the activism among women, the roles of
women in rhetorical action always remained limited by the men in the field. In other words:
women's voices and feelings were articulated mostly in the language of men.

In *Appropriate[ing] Dress: Women’s Rhetorical Style in Nineteenth-Century America*,
Carol Mattingly argues that female rhetoricians were historically at a disadvantage for two
reasons. First, they faced “strict notions of propriety that assigned women to the private and men
to the public” (13). With men dominating the public sphere, the place where successful rhetoric
prospered and made effective cultural and political changes, females were not able to enter the
conversation as easily as their male counterparts. Second, women in the nineteenth century were
faced with a series of social obligations that functioned simultaneously as diversions from
education and rhetoric, including, but not limited to: their dresses, social balls, and various
feminine ideals that restricted voice and movement. Mattingly argues “Rhetorical style had
historically been relegated masculine and feminine characteristics, with those attributes assigned
the feminine presented in negative terms” (13). Due to this, the perception of excellent rhetorical
form is presented as a “good man” (13). Similarly, in *Manly Writing: Gender, Rhetoric, and the
Rise of Composition*, Miriam Brody describes the standards in rhetoric that presumed that all
rhetoricians were masculine men. She examines gendered terminology in the rhetoric of the time
that likened high-quality rhetoric with masculine traits and low-quality rhetoric with feminine
traits. Brody’s stance shows that it was an immediate threat to a woman’s reputation (as a chaste, feminine, docile being) to be a strong orator by masculine standards. Although this is not the first time in history that this occurred—many writers made fun of Methodists, for example, and other Protestant sects that allowed women to preach. The issue of women preachers comes up even earlier than that with American colonial writer Anne Hutchinson—the threat to a woman’s reputation is evident in the typical response to Stanton’s masculine styles and sarcasm, which ultimately caused her to use more feminine rhetorical strategies. This dichotomy could easily cause women to shy away from typical manly standards of strong rhetoric. In fact, during the nineteenth century, women were expected and encouraged to do so.

LeeAnna Lawrence continues this research in her dissertation entitled, *The Teaching of Rhetoric and Composition in Nineteenth-Century Women’s Colleges*. She says that women were expected to remain silent, passive, and private, while men were expected to speak and orate in public in aggressive rhetorical fashion, complete with expansive gesturing. A woman who did not conform to the expected “womanly” essence (by carrying herself in a modest, feminine way, and having a soft, “womanly” voice, and a soft “womanly” look in her eyes) was considered immoral (4). Women who composed and read texts were expected to work with feminine kinds of rhetoric and feminine rhetorical strategies. They would often read or write sentimental pieces, pieces that described women’s limited abilities, pieces that described historical or biblical women who were admired, or pieces that highlighted the traditional roles of men and women in both the public and private spheres. From a very young age, girls and boys were socialized to believe that the differences between male and female roles in public speaking as they understood it, were natural and biological, rather than imposed, but the imposed manner of delivery for women was extremely different than the traditional rhetorical modes and methods for men.
Mattingly shows that traditional rhetoric has involved the study of the gestures and posture of the masculine body. She continues to say that, “rhetorical exercises focused much attention on bodily positioning and movement” (135) and contemporary studies of these rhetorics are not very useful for understanding women's rhetorical tools because women “could not or dared not make use” (135) of manly rhetorical suggestions. She also states that the traditional fashion for women restricted their movements so that they were physically unable to perform with large, sweeping, masculine gestures and posture. Mattingly states that “to be feminine, women moved fluidly, with small movements close to the body” (136). This firm construction of femininity “worked against oratorical authority” (136). Though women were capable of the posture and gestures required in traditional oratory, they were socially trained to act otherwise; therefore, they were socially trained not to be successful speakers.

Contrary to the cultural expectations that demanded that women be feminine, private, chaste beings, women still spoke in public, even if the audience was comprised of both men and women, and even if speaking to that audience was considered a vulgar act for that woman to be engaged in. Lillian O’Connor says, in Pioneer Women Orators, that women challenged the unfair restrictions of their time, by speaking to large audiences. She says, “With no historical precedent of their own to which to refer for their public speaking practices, the early women speakers followed the only possible precedent, that of the educated men of their day…” (116). Despite this fact, women were taught to “remain virtuously in their own sphere” (29). Women were barred from participation in the deliberations of assemblies and from the activities of lawyers and judges. They first began to give public speeches as “pulpit” appearances “for what must have been, to them, good and sufficient reasons” (115). Slowly, public speeches made by women took on more and more controversial topics. The presence of female bodies in public
spaces slowly became more common. Yet even today, the place of women’s bodies in the study of rhetoric is, as Mattingly states, “peripheral… primarily because rhetoric has been seen in terms of men, and masculine constructs of the body have been synonymous with oratory” (135). Feminist researchers, both inside and outside academic circles of Rhetoric and Writing, seek to empower women and strengthen the acceptance of more feminine styles of rhetoric. This movement has lead to more exploration and acceptance of multimodal rhetorical expressions.

In many ways, young women in the nineteenth century were limited by the rhetorical practices of men and the social constructions of acceptable behavior; similarly, young Arab Muslim American women today are at a rhetorical disadvantage when expressing themselves in mainstream American society and in their own communities: in the workplace, family sphere, social sphere, and the marketplace. Women with Arab heritage living in America, are molded socially in ways that non-Arab females are not. The rhetorical tools used to accomplish this and the rhetorical tools used by them later to express themselves can be studied through the methods used by feminist researchers of female rhetors of the nineteenth century. We can also identify similar practices of today that put women at a disadvantage when expressing themselves within and outside of their communities.

Arabs, Desire, and the Self

The ways in which Lebanese women and Lebanese Americans learn desire is complex and difficult to measure. Suad Joseph conducted a fascinating study of desire in one Lebanese community in Beirut. Although, it is only one study, it stretches over a span of 33 years and it is a valuable foundation for beginning this conversation. In “Learning Desire: Relational Pedagogies and the Desiring Female Subject in Lebanon,” Joseph explores “how local constructs of desire, configured within notions of relational selfhood were learned, taught, and practiced in
the context of intimate patriarchal, familial and communal relationships in the highly heterogeneous Arab community of Camp Trad in the Greater Beirut municipality of Borj Hammoud” (80). While this article only discusses one specific community in Lebanon during a specific time from 1971-2004, it does clearly articulate the complex social constructions that surround Arab life in that area, concluding that these social constructions and patterns exist in similar communities throughout the Middle East and the world. It is upon this foundation that my research is built. Though it may seem commonsensical, it is important to understand that multimodal expressions are inherent in all of us and that Joseph’s findings indicate that ways of learning in Arab communities are largely dependent on repetition of actions and pressures within the community. In her research, Joseph found that:

learning desire was a lifelong process, constantly relearned and retaught as women and men aged and changed relationships and statuses. Learning desire shifted in day to day practices, across multiple nexus of personalities that women and men occupied in relationship to each other. Learning and teaching desire were mutually constituted processes, incumbent upon and embraced by all residents in relationship to significant others. Relational pedagogies were as productive of relational desires, in the context of relational selfhood, as were relational desires productive of relational pedagogies. (80)

From her study, it is apparent that in Arab communities an individual's identity is dependent upon the surrounding relationships for knowledge. Evidently, what was “learned” by young women in this community influenced their desires just as much as their desires affected their chosen actions. Consequently, as relationships grow and change, knowledge is gained and changed. Then, based on this knowledge, future relationships are formed. Thus, it is clear that indirectness and indirect styles of communication within the family have a direct effect on how
Arab American women understand their roles and duties within the family. The indirect communication of parents’ desires for their children can cause young Arab women to ignore or stifle their personal desires (often out of a sense of guilt) for the sake of the overall good of the family. This approach to “solving the problem” of desiring sexual liberation or of homosexual desires is less problematic or not problematic at all to many older Arab parents (part of the earlier generations of immigrants who view the self as a connected extension of the family), but it is highly problematic for newer generations of Arabs and Arab Americans (generally the children of these parents) who view the self as an individual with well-defined boundaries and personal goals that can and often do exist outside of the familial understanding of the self.

While Joseph later says that in these communities, the “powerful had some responsibility to know the wishes of their subordinates or to learn of those desires from mediators” (91), she clearly indicates that socially constructed patriarchal influences would affect what women in Arab communities desire and how (and how often) they would express those desires (sexual and otherwise). She continues, “A person, especially a woman, was not to express a desire that would dishonor her/his family” (87). Also, she indicates that “female and male intimates spent considerable energy figuring out each other’s wishes, mutually constructing what each claimed as her or his desires; but excavating and acting upon the desires of others was disproportionately female labor” (87). Not only does this statement presuppose heterosexual relationships, but it also means that within those relationships, Arab women are less likely to express or fight for their desires because they are invested in discovering and participating in or executing the desires (sexual or otherwise) of their male mates. Hence, a woman's voice is much less her own than is a man's in any relationship. Significantly, not once does Joseph mention homosexual desire in her 33-year long, 31-page published study.
The two separate, conflicting understandings of the self that are Arab and American collide in young Arab Muslim American women’s lives, whether they are Arabs living in America or American citizens with strong ties to Arab Muslim culture. In contrast to Western ideals that valorize and glorify maturity and adulthood, marked by independence, uniqueness, difference, autonomy, self-influence, and pride in the “leader” versus the “follower,” Joseph claims that in Arab communities and families that she has studied, “connective selfhood indirection, relational responsibility, and mediation were valorized and highly supported” (86). She says that for Arab women in an Arab Lebanese community in Lebanon “to persist in a desire disconnected from relationships was shameful. Articulation and enactment of desire required social legitimation. These desires were viewed as ‘personal’ in the sense of being claimed by specific persons, but personal desires were identified, articulated, and affirmed through social relationships” (87). While Joseph is referring to general desire (which she defines earlier as “an emotion representing a yearning, a longing, or a wish for” something), the same can be said about Arab women’s educational, professional, or sexual desires when negotiating their personal identities inside this culture.

Arabs and Promiscuity

Arab women in the Arab world and in America are often frowned upon for nurturing public friendships with men. Men, however, often interact with women in public spaces where men dominate the workforce, especially in business in the Arab world. Arab men often justify these double standards with arguments such as: a woman who goes searching for companionship with men must be seriously unsatisfied at home. And: she must not be getting everything she needs from her husband. Oftentimes, when these men and women leave the high mountains for the big city, or leave their home country to come to America, they bring these cultural ideas with
In “Arab American Femininities: Beyond Arab Virgin/American(ized) Whore,” Nadine Naber, an Arab American woman, anthropologist, and feminist, discusses the hardships faced by Arab women living in America, especially those who are heavily influenced by their Arab parents' cultural and religious values about modesty and morality, and those who are heavily influenced by their parents' misconceptions about American women not being moral or modest. The women she discusses are first or second generation Arab Americans who struggle to negotiate feminist ideas about liberation and oppression with their understanding of what is valued in Islam and in Arab culture. Naber argues that some Arab immigrant families employed a “selective assimilation strategy in which the preservation of Arab cultural identity and assimilation to American norms of ‘whiteness’ were simultaneously desired” (88). She further asserts that this family strategy for assimilation led to “a cultural nationalistic logic that represented the categories ‘Arab’ and ‘American’ in oppositional terms, such as ‘good Arab girls’ and ‘bad American(ized) girls’” (88). She asserts that “in bicultural Arab American familial and communal context[s]” Americans are often “referred to in derogatory sexualized terms;” contrastingly, Arabs are “referred to positively” and “associated with Arab family values and hospitality” (87). Clearly, these oppositions cause conflicts for young women growing up in America. While assimilation into American culture is coveted in some Arab communities today, preservation and assimilation cannot exist harmoniously in the lives of unmarried women, with strong ties to Arab culture, living in America because (a.) the most prized status that these women can maintain in their Arab communities is that of an innocent, moral, virgin and (b.) within Arab communities, American women are often viewed as immoral and promiscuous; therefore, when a young Arab woman shows signs of effectively assimilating, she is immediately
viewed with suspicion by her Arab community members and may be ostracized for acting “too American.”

While Naber’s article does not explicitly blame conservative or Islamic values, it serves to articulate the cultural pressure of binaries that Arab women face, which exists for Arab women, whether they are American or Muslim or neither, and affects how they choose to live out their personal lives. In the Arab world, personal freedom for women is considered a very Western idea. It is especially considered foreign by generations of Arab elders and by Arabs of all ages living in secluded areas and small villages in Arab countries. Similarly, sexual activity is not considered liberating in any positive ways in Arab culture. Revealing one’s sexuality or sexual activity is directly associated with freedom, and American ideals stress adulthood, freedom, and independence at age 18. Sexual liberation is also one of the major issues for women in feminist circles. Certainly, the over-sexualization of female bodies in images projected by popular media also contributes to the demonization of Western freedoms in the Arab world. These concerns help to perpetuate a strongly held Arab cultural view of Americanization as demoralization, and Arab culture views sexual liberation as both unnecessary and overly liberating, especially for women. Naber’s article focuses on “the tense and often conflictual location of Arab American femininities at the intersections of two contradictory discourses: Arab cultural re-authenticity and hegemonic U.S. nationalism” (89). These two discourses contribute to the context from which Arab and Arab American women enter American society; therefore, in addition to their personal cultural and religious experiences, their social and economic class, and their previous education, these discourses highly affect their perceptions of personal freedom, desire, sexual satisfaction and successful relationships.

The effects of marginalization are ever more limiting and dangerous when Arab women
are often ignored, even in conversations about race and identity within feminist research. In her article entitled, “The ‘White’ Sheep of the Family: But Bleaching Is like Starvation,” Nada Elia says that even “those who write/speak out against invisibility… refuse to acknowledge [Arabs’] existence” and being “Arab-American… may be one of the very few instances where being hyphenated does not imply duality… but a lack of belonging on either side” of the hyphen (225). Elia, like Naber, continuously refers to the conflicting sides of Arab American identity. If Middle Easterners are to be considered white by the government and by people of color and they are to be treated as non-white by European whites, then they are categorically rendered invisible. Elia claims, “it seems as if the existence of Arabs can only be tolerated as an entity outside of the xenophobic United States, always and only as foreigners” (229). For Arab Muslim women, this perplexing status is far more intense: Arab and Arab American women are often viewed as victims of Islam, victims of abuse and victims of female genital mutilation. This identity is detrimental to their daily existence in America because to aspire to assimilate is to “deny” their culture (says the Arab community), and to preserve many Arab cultural values would mean to “deny” freedom (says the American mainstream). Additionally, this complex status contributes to the pressure to remain active within Arab circles without actively expressing dissent.

Being a Muslim in post 9/11 America further complicates this pressure because Muslim women, especially those who choose to be veiled in public, face the possibility of being confronted for choosing Islam. Since 9/11/2001, there have been many documented cases of Muslim women being harassed in public by strangers who wish to know their story, convert them to a different religion, or discuss terrorism—some calmly and some aggressively. Many are also confronted with questions and conversations about their bodies, their choices of dress, and “the rules” they have to follow. Whatever the conversation is, it is often based on assumptions
about Islam, and it is clear that without visual markers of Islam—on the body—many Muslim American women could avoid some of the conversations and harassment. Similarly, being more conservative in practice of Islam also adds to the struggle. The more conservative a Muslim American woman acts, the more acceptance she will gain within the Muslim community, while the more liberal and less Muslim she acts, the more acceptance she will gain within mainstream American communities. It is inside this difficult space that Arab Muslim American women must live, make friends, attend college, work, create a family, and try to find happiness.

Identifying a Gap

In the field of Women’s Studies, there is a significant amount of published work examining the relationships between racial/gender oppression and culture/religion in women’s lives; there is some examining the effects of language on the oppression of ethnic groups; and there is abundant material published about many ethnically and racially marginalized groups interacting in academe. However, there is very little or no work published that deals directly with juxtaposing the conflicting ethnic experiences of Arab American women within and outside American communities. How do they express themselves when they feel Arab community pressures and American socialization impacting their goals? The majority of the publications that have analyzed oppression of/within ethnic groups have often focused on African American and Latino cultural differences in American social groups. There is also quite a bit of research about self-expression in the following groups: Asian Americans, American Indians, European immigrant groups (predominantly from Italy, Greece, Poland, Hungary, and Russia), Hawaiians, and Jewish people. While scholars have researched the critical dialogues of race, ethnicity and cultural difference, most researchers and theorists in Women’s Studies and Rhetoric/Writing have focused primarily on ethnic and racial groups other than Arab-Americans: very few
scholars have researched the role that Arab cultural and Muslim religious traditions play in stifling self expression or desire among young Arab American Muslim women.

Presently, there is an incomplete understanding about the roles that Arab ethnicity and Islamic values play in creating the social constructions that limit Arab Muslim American women, who often struggle with barriers caused by binary oppositions imposed upon them by Arab and Islamic cultural and religious values. Sexual freedom, gender expression, and homosexuality are severely limited in Arab communities both in America and in the Middle East by conservative values and by social pressure from family, relatives, and other members of their communities. Even in areas highly populated by Arabs - such as parts of Michigan, New York, and California - research into the lives of Arab women is often limited to viewing them as oppressed victims of war and female genital mutilation. More feminist analyses of Arab culture would be insightful and beneficial to the discipline of Women’s Studies and Rhetoric and would be especially beneficial in areas where the student bodies of many universities include many students of Arab descent. Different degrees of Arab influence may have different effects on young Arab Muslim American women; consequently, the study of Arab identity and how it functions in real women’s lives is important to understanding the way they view themselves within their Arab community and within the spaces they occupy in American culture.

Newer generations of Arab Americans have the power to help change these binary oppositions both inside and outside of the Middle Eastern communities in the U.S.. Amir Marvasti and Karyn McKinney effectively emphasize this point when they write, “Nearly half of the Arab American and other Middle Eastern American populations are under the age of twenty-five. Given this fact, it will be these young Middle Eastern Americans, and their social choices, that will shape the culture of Middle Eastern America for decades to come” (16). Arab Muslim
American women should not be encouraged to hide their identities in any way; rather, they should be encouraged to investigate the intersections of their gender and their nationality with their racial, religious, and cultural experiences, and they should consider the impact of these social constructions on their individual pursuit of happiness. The outcome of this investigation will contribute to a better understanding of the social constructions that limit Arab women on a daily basis. Ultimately, the goal of this project is to bring more attention to the practices and struggles of young Arab Muslim American women and create dialogue about this group that is under-represented inside and outside academic circles.

The Project

Clearly, the rhetorical tools that women use to be heard are different than the traditional rhetorical strategies of men. This research seeks to discuss how Middle Eastern heritage and Islam complicate these strategies further. There is ultimately a pattern of behavior for Arab Muslim American women to be successful in the Arab and Muslim communities. Often, the community members determine a young woman's success based on her methods of self-expression. This pattern of behavior that she may adopt is often considered too “traditional and conservative” by members of American communities. The research for this project will help identify common patterns of expression among Arab Muslim American women as they age.

Through this research, I establish the ambiguous and complex nature of Arab ethnic identity. I show that within and outside her cultures, an Arab American woman is often misunderstood, distrusted, or ignored. I argue that within traditional Arab culture, American values are discouraged and underprivileged; additionally, within mainstream American culture, Arab values are often negatively connected with religious fanaticism, terrorism, and oppression. Further, I demonstrate how Arab American women struggle to achieve acceptance based on
the cultural ideals of traditional Arab members of their family and community, 2) the values
instilled in them through interaction in American society, and 3) their personal desires. The stress
of negotiating American independence with Arab tradition often leads Arab American women to
cope in various ways. Some may face long or short periods of confusion about their identity;
some may feel a collective sense of a new communal identity; and some may take on new
personas to ultimately form their own identity. Most women will experience all three of these
options simultaneously and at varying degrees of intensity throughout their lives. Finding the
balance between the two cultures is bewildering; nevertheless, the demanding nature of this
unique position can contribute to higher or lower self-esteem and increased or reduced
confidence. Dealing with such differing ideologies may contribute positively or negatively to
their own understandings of their identities. I argue that due to binary oppositions and cultural
pressures, many Arab American women have a difficult time achieving a solid sense of who they
are. To make this argument, I point to Arab American females as rhetors who continuously make
choices, choices that may change over time, about how to represent themselves in public and in
private, online, in politics, at work, and at home.

Between being forced to assimilate to American ideals and being forced to refrain from
assimilation, writing allows young Arab-American women to construct a third space for identity
construction and identity representation. My goal is to examine their personal views, beliefs, and
goals, their womanly literacy practices and rhetorical practices, and the lens through which they
view American society. My research questions include:

1. How do traditional Arab Muslim American women perform femininity?
2. How do contemporary American and feminist cultural expectations challenge tradition?
3. How do these women disrupt the patriarchal expectations of traditional Arab womanhood?
4. How do Arab Muslim American women express personal and political desire and dissent?
5. How do virtual spaces contribute to the continued development of Arab Muslim American identity?
6. How do these rhetorical tools help or hinder Arab Muslim American women in college classes?

These questions allow me to first situate the research by providing the context of traditional expectations in the Arab Muslim community and then exploring the ways that young Arab Muslim American women choose to accept or challenge these roles through various textual mediums and through various modes of self-expression. The implications of this research will show that each participant's experience is different, even though they share some similar desires and practices.

Methodology

Feminist theories of research have continuously guided my research process. To address my research questions, I use feminist methods for observation, interviews and textual analysis to research how women view themselves as members of their various communities. In *Feminism and Method: Ethnography, Discourse Analysis, and Activist Research*, Nancy Naples suggests that “if researchers fail to explore how their personal, professional and structural positions frame social scientific investigations, researchers inevitably reproduce dominant gender, race, and class biases” (3). Therefore, it is up to researchers to be aware of this threat and consciously reflect upon the position they have in conducting the research. To do this, Helen Roberts argues, in *Doing Feminist Research*, that feminist researchers must first recognize the gendered power relationships in the process of research. Feminist methodology includes a wide range of methods, approaches, and research strategies; however, in all these methods, feminist researchers should
constantly value the responsibilities, rights, and particular knowledges of the participants in this study, and researchers should enter the data collection process through gender analysis. As a feminist researcher, I realize that all knowledge and all ways of knowing have personal and political consequences. Therefore, I am committed to making women's experiences more visible and to the empowerment of women.

In her 1987 book, *Feminism and Methodology*, feminist philosopher Sandra Harding introduces the topic by writing that feminist methodology starts with the principles that there is no one feminism and no universal woman's experience. This concept is central to my research because there are many stereotypes about Arab Muslims in America. It is easy to say that all the members of an ethnic group or faith have the same practices or behaviors. It is easy to universalize their experience; however, it is not fair and it is not acceptable of feminist research to do so. As a researcher, I am conscious of these labels, and I seek to identify patterns rather than universalize the experiences of the participants in my research. Abigail Brooks also highlights the importance of acknowledging different women's experiences in her article, “An Invitation to Feminist Research.” She asserts that research conducted through a feminist lens is a kind of activism that challenges the power structures that oppress women by discussing the differences in women's lived experiences. In my research, I approach the interview process with the understanding that all the participants have experienced life, growth, desire, and self-expression differently. Several methods allow me to delve into the complexities of contemporary Arab Muslim American women's lives. It is my goal to combine my experiential observations with feedback from participants and analyses of Arab American women's texts in various mediums in a way that values equality and fair representation of differing and shared experiences. These data collection methods support a feminist methodology because they work
together to create a multifaceted understanding of young Arab Muslim American women's experiences.

Further, Katherine Borland states in her article, “That's Not What I Said: Interpretive Conflict in Oral Narrative Research,” that feminist methodology also allows researchers to interpret research differently based on their own personal background and social identities. As an Arab American myself, I believe I am in a position that allows me access to a kind of sharing of information that a non-Arab researcher may not be able to achieve. Additionally, my interpretations of this collected data will be different as a result of my existing knowledge of the community. Feminist methodology allows me to make my knowledge known to the participants and readers of this study in a non-confrontational way. Feminist methodologies also require that I question my role as a researcher to understand potential biases and limitations that may exist in my interactions with these participants. Feminist researchers know that they can never be completely objective. My biases only hinder the research if they remain hidden throughout the processes of collecting and sharing the data. Thus, feminist inquiry requires that a researcher always reflect on her actions and choices.

In the following chapters, I provide various thematic reports about the participants whose interviews were particularly relevant to the discussions about Arab Muslim American women's family lives, social lives, gender roles, religious identities, professional identities, educational experiences, and experiences with digital spaces. I asked them questions about their identities as they see them, as they think others see them, and as they try to represent them. I have included in this dissertation reports of four participants between the ages of 18 and 28 who have identified themselves as Arab Muslim American women. Much of the information presented is fairly straightforward because the research is the first of its kind. I present the data from the interviews
and give some analysis using feminist ethics of reciprocity, honesty, accountability, responsibility, and equality. It is clear that feminist inquiry can help us attempt to understand the experiences of others through their chosen modes of self-expression.

Looking Ahead

This chapter explained the need for more research and more published work on expressions of race and ethnic identity of Arab Muslim American women. While feminist scholars within rhetoric and writing studies have dealt at great length with women's rhetorical practices in the 19th century - Carol Mattingly and Nan Johnson have analyzed the rhetorical expression of identity through appearance and dress - there are very few sources that consider the impacts of traditional Islamic values, appearance, and dress on modes of expression for contemporary young women. Further research into feminist rhetorical practices of young Arab Muslim American women will allow us to get to know more about the similarities and differences of Arab American women’s modes of self expression, expressions of desires and expressions of frustrations.

In chapter two, I detail the data collection process, which included several interviews through email and in person. I explain how feminist research can help us understand the modes of expression used by young Arab Muslim American women. Additionally, I discuss my subjectivity, my experiences as an Arab American Muslim woman myself, and the point of entry I used into this research which may have impacted my findings in many ways. In acknowledging my position, I discuss the research methods that informed my data collection and analysis processes. The chapter concludes with some discussion about the connections between the research questions and the methods and methodologies used for triangulating the findings.

Chapter three discusses family life, social life, and gender roles in Arab Muslim families.
I argue that as members of a close community, Arabs are especially aware of their actions in public. In *The Arab Americans*, Randa A. Kayyali observes, “Arabs of all faiths share a similar moral code,” part of which requires Arabs to “respect the family and the authority of the elders… [And lead] a life of hard work, sobriety, and frugality…An individual is not considered an entity independent of his or her family…Members of a family usually take part in all aspects of an individual’s life…The welfare, honor, identity, and status of an individual are directly tied to the family’s name and reputation” (10). As members of large families, Arabs are also especially aware of their actions in private because extended family members are forever present as a “personal support group” during all the trials and tribulations of life: business endeavors, education decisions, births, deaths, marriages, sicknesses, and moving sales (10). This close-knit characteristic of Arab American families is both beneficial and detrimental to women of Arab heritage, especially at the college age. Deep-rooted patriarchal values affect the everyday lives of men and women in Arab culture through this “moral code.” Gendered roles appear in many ways in the typical Arab American family and these gendered roles contribute to the surveillance of young Arab women “for their protection.” Men are considered providers and women are considered nurturers in most Arab American homes. This chapter considers how such familial relations can seriously impact the ways an Arab American woman chooses to express herself.

In chapter four, I examine how Arab Muslim American women often lead a kind of double life, in which their identity in an American workplace, in their college classes, and in online spaces, differs greatly from their home identity. This chapter focuses on how the participants in this study use the Internet to change the ways the world sees them. The participants in this study—Maya, Rita, Rose, and Farah—detail how they carefully navigate their professional identities and public expressions of themselves as Arab Muslim American women.
and students. This chapter also discusses typical experiences with internet-use in the Arab world, experiences with racism in American schools, and uses of cyberspace for social activism, all of which impact the choices these women make about their public identities. Chapter three reveals that they are breaking away from patriarchal family pressures and social pressures by seeking financial independence, pursuing educational goals, and using technology to respond to power structures and analyze/change the perspectives of the people around them.

Chapter five considers how identifying with Islam causes a struggle for Arab American women that is unlike the racial or religious struggles of other minorities and unlike the struggles of Arab Muslim American men. Arab Americans are often lumped together despite tremendous diversity within and between groups of Arab Americans and Muslims. They are not legally recognized as a non-white race, despite being historically underrepresented. Islam, a faith that holds many principles and values in common with Christianity, is often demonized in media portrayals across genres, especially since the terrorist attacks of 9/11 drew widespread criticism to many Middle Eastern communities. While chapter four discusses many limitations Arab American Muslim women may have when it comes to their experiences with technology, chapter five continues and complicated the conversation about technology. Here I demonstrate that many Arab Muslim American women have responded to media misrepresentations of them by taking control of digital spaces to respond to stereotypes, to new legislation, to unfair court cases, and to other worthy causes for social and political activism. Finally, I argue that Arab Americans and Muslim Americans use digital spaces to affirm their identities as members of a new community, one that is neither fully Arab/Muslim in the traditional sense, nor fully American(ized) in the liberal sense, but is actually a new community formed from both. This identity has its own coded language, its own understanding of technology, and its own goals as a unified body. There are
many digital spaces where Arab Americans and Muslim Americans have shaped the American virtual communities in positive ways with political activism, social and personal expressions, and positive images of Arabs and Muslims in politics and fashion.

In the final chapter, I observe common themes across shared literate practices of Arab American Muslim women. I identify patterns in the lives of the four participants, the public Facebook profiles of a few Arab American women, and the words used in two poems of Suheir Hammad, a Palestinian (Jordanian-born) American Def Jam Poet whose work is available on YouTube, has appeared on HBO, and has been translated into at least 12 languages. All of these women explore many of their frustrations with life as Arab American women, especially in post-9/11 America. I summarize the findings drawn from the research in chapters three through five in order to address the research questions posed in chapter one. Next, I suggest specific implications for rhetoric and writing studies and for teachers in writing classrooms. Finally, chapter six provides suggestions for future research.

Concluding Remarks

Ultimately, there is danger in using one term to refer to many diverse people. We see the damage that can be caused by such erroneous action in the hate crimes committed in the aftermath of 9/11. The victims were often American Muslims who were perceived as a threat because of the actions of a few radical non-American extremists. We should not fear Arab Americans for being different than members of other American cultures. Perhaps these hate crimes could have been prevented if only the aggressors knew the diversity among Arabs and Muslims. If we see them as individuals, they can be separated from the hateful actions of others. Therefore, no one should ignore the differences within Arab communities, so it is with the knowledge that these differences exist and that there are consequences of these differences, that I
use the term “Arab.” My work aims at understanding and inclusion, not stereotyping. This project aims forward toward progress, toward new research, and toward new mainstream images of Arabs and Arab Americans as students, seen in a positive light, using their shared ethnic and religious experiences to achieve success in a classroom.

This study is focused on the lives of a small test group of college students in America. They are all young women; they are all Lebanese and Arab; and they all identify as “Muslim” or “raised in a Muslim family.” Three of the four women were born in Ohio to Lebanese Arab immigrants who hold American passports. It is clear that the data in this dissertation examines a small, particular group of women; however, their lives are so rich with unique and global multimodal activity that studying their patterns of expression is a fruitful beginning to exploring a new direction in rhetorical traditions.

As a final product, this dissertation discusses many broad elements of Arab American identity, feminism, immigrant experiences, discrimination, technology, education, and Internet use. It is nearly impossible to discuss all of these topics simultaneously in a unified book, without making some generalizations. The goal of this dissertation is the focused application of those broad conversations onto the everyday experiences of a small group of women. This is the unifying factor. As a result, the conversation may seem disjointed or the topics may seem unrelated in some sentences, paragraphs, or chapters. However, like the lives of these women, this dissertation is made up of many parts—some Arab, some American, and some neither—some personal, some academic, and some neither. Sometimes these parts are directly related; other times, they may even seem irrelevant, common, or unconnected. The unifying factor between all the parts is the women. They are the focus of the conversation and they are the reason for so many seemingly non-cohesive parts in one.
CHAPTER II: DATA COLLECTION, METHODS, AND METHODOLOGY

It is true that an African American will never completely understand what it is like to be Asian in America, but perhaps through case studies the Asian American experience can be dissected and analyzed by non-Asians. It is true that as long as a person is privileged, he or she will not know what it is like to be poor, but perhaps Barbara Erenrich’s *Nickel and Dimed* will help the privileged see some of the hardships faced by the poor in their daily lives. Similarly, it is difficult for able-bodied individuals to understand the complexities faced by mentally and physically handicapped persons, but case studies offer the opportunity to present information about handicapped individuals trying to lead a successful lifestyle. Auto-ethnography, feminist research, and grounded theory allow a researcher to be drawn into a community both personally and professionally through data collection, using a variety of methods. Observation and conversation are possibly the most valuable ethnographic research techniques for understanding the experiences of composition students.

Today, researchers studying any group of people must take into consideration the perspectives of the participants. This is a part of the research process that may have been ignored historically by traditional researchers. As feminist scholarship led women to pursue concerns about voice, participants have become a larger part of feminist research studies. In *Feminism and Method: Ethnography, Discourse Analysis, and Activist Research*, Nancy Naples asserts, “[f]eminist reconceptualizations of knowledge production processes have contributed to a shift in research practices in many disciplines, and require more diverse methodological and self-reflective skills than traditional methodology” (12). Therefore, in the interest of fairly representing the participants in this study, I relied upon a feminist approach as the primary mode of inquiry. Reflecting on the study, on the methods, and on my role as a researcher has posed
challenges, has caused me to make changes in my approach, and has led me to some important implications for social change in the lives of young Arab Muslim American women. Throughout it all, it has been important to remain “sensitive to the dynamics of power evident in social research” (12), which is primarily possible through a feminist approach and through intensive self-reflection. Feminist researchers who choose to use first person and who value women's experiences as a “basis for knowledge claims” have faced criticism from more traditional researchers (44). In response to this criticism, Naples asserts: “I believe that the process of critical reflection informed by the theoretical insights of feminist standpoint epistemologies can help uncover the complex dynamics involved in the production of everyday life” (44). As a researcher, I also believe that women's knowledges should not be discredited or ignored simply due to their narrative modes of expression. Firsthand knowledge of women's experiences should be documented and shared, especially in the context of disenfranchised or persecuted members of society. Generally, the best methodological stance to accomplish this goal is a feminist one, which allows for reflection, dialogue, and diverse methods.

In this chapter, I explain how feminist research can inform studies of disenfranchised groups. Then, I describe the research questions that I sought to answer through this study. I will explore my subjectivity, my experiences as an Arab American Muslim woman myself, and the point of entry into this research that informs my findings. Next, I give a detailed discussion about the connections between the research questions and the methods used. I explore the importance of active self-reflection and anticipate some critiques of my data collection and analysis processes. In conclusion, I also discuss the possible limitations of my ethnographic research.

Feminist Methodology

When studied from the stance of a feminist researcher, it is accepted that many social
constructions, pressures, contexts, and experiences influence the participants in any study. Similarly, the research process can be influenced and often hindered by an unlimited amount of variables including but not limited to: limitations of the data, biases of the researcher, withheld information from participants, time, participants’ fears, and access to technology. A feminist approach to research is an ideal way to address these concerns because it allows for open disclosure and discussion between the researcher and the participants. Using feminist methodology allows for flexibility in the research process. Researchers have many options to consider for choosing participants, for methods and practices when conducting research, and for different ways to discuss the implications of the research. In addition to these options, feminist methodology also poses many challenges to the researcher. Naples avers that our epistemological stance “influence[s] how we define our roles as researchers, what we consider ethical research practices, and how we interpret and implement informed consent or ensure the confidentiality of our research subjects” (3). Consequently, each researcher’s experiences, background, and methodological knowledges are understood to influence the results of the study and are openly discussed as consequential in the process, in the analysis of the research, and in understanding the results.

Whenever disenfranchised groups are subjects in a research study, feminist methodology is especially vital because (1) it supports research valuable to members of historically underrepresented groups, (2) it seeks to minimize harm while giving voice to unheard or invisible members of society, and (3) it leads to social changes and actions that are beneficial to members of minority groups. In *Feminism and Composition: A Critical Sourcebook*, Patricia A. Sullivan notes in her article “Feminism and Methodology in Composition Studies,” that “Feminist critiques of male bias... are usually leveled against... canons, theories, and discourses
Feminist researchers seek to answer questions that are often left unasked or unanswered by other researchers; therefore, they delve into issues that are relevant to both women and members of minority groups who have often been left out of the conversations taking place in academe. Naples asserts, “Dynamics of power influence how problems are defined, which knowers are identified and are given credibility, how interactions are interpreted, and how ethnographic narratives are constructed” (48). Feminist methodologies work to unravel these power structures.

In *Liberating Method*, Marjorie L. DeVault acknowledges that this is no small task. She writes it can be problematic because “Accomplishing change through feminist research and assessing whether it has occurred are, of course, quite difficult” (32). Perhaps giving Arab American women a chance to speak about their experiences will create an opportunity for learning and positive changes. A large part of making this project possible depends upon speaking to women in a comfortable setting away from the people, and outside of the power structures, that limit them. The goal of this study is to allow Arab Muslim American women, whose voices are often unheard, a unique and safe venue to speak up about the literacy practices they use and the rhetorical moves they make to express themselves. As a whole, this study provides an opportunity for more understanding about the rhetorical practices of young Arab Muslim American women, who may be active participants in Academe or who may one day have children who attend college. This opportunity for acceptance can feasibly lead to the kinds of changes feminist researchers advocate.

**Research Questions**

The questions that guided this research are:

1. How do traditional Arab Muslim American women perform femininity?
2. How do contemporary American and feminist cultural expectations challenge tradition?
3. How do these women disrupt the patriarchal expectations of traditional Arab womanhood?
4. How do Arab Muslim American women express personal and political desire and dissent?
5. How do virtual spaces contribute to the continued development of Arab Muslim American identity?
6. How do these rhetorical tools help or hinder Arab Muslim American women in college classes?

The first two questions are designed to try to understand some of the struggles young Arab Muslim women face in negotiating gender roles in the home, school, and workplace. To answer these questions, participants were asked about their childhood experiences, family practices, workplace, and education issues. Most of the questions asked during this part of the interviews were open-ended and allowed the participants to share whatever came to mind (See Appendix A).

The next three questions are designed to identify methods of communication used by the participants to express themselves in various situations. It is clear that individuals respond differently to each situation they face; however, the Arab and Muslim experiences in America can lead to common practices within the community that may appear in college students. Some of these practices may help or hinder these women throughout their college experiences. To answer these questions, participants were asked specific questions about their methods of communicating desire and dissent, about their relationships, and about their use of the social networking site Facebook. A careful analysis of the participants' responses and of their use of language contributes to more awareness of the strengths and limitations that young female Arab Muslim American students bring to the classroom.
In Feminist Methodology: Challenges and Choices, Caroline Ramazanoglu and Janet Holland argue that the main purpose of feminist research is to make diverse women's voices and experiences heard through any method available, and they later identify five key characteristics of a feminist researcher's standpoint (15). First, they establish that a feminist standpoint “explores relations between knowledge and power” (65). It is clear that by using gender as a starting point for inquiry, a researcher cannot ignore the struggles women have faced to have their voices heard in a man's world. Second, “a feminist standpoint deconstructs the 'knowing feminist’” (65). This characteristic of feminist research requires that a feminist reflect upon her own role in the research as a person in a position of power while questioning authoritative discourses. Part of the researcher's role in feminist inquiry then is to continuously question all sources of power, including her own. This begs the question: do feminist researchers have more knowledge than the women who are participants in the study? Given this problematic space, feminist researchers must be extra careful when articulating the results of their research or when making conclusive statements. Feminist researchers should not speak for the participants, but should instead allow the participants to have their own voices in the study.

Further, Ramazanoglu and Holland assert that a feminist standpoint is “...grounded in women's experience, including emotions and embodiment” (65). It is clear here that without asking women to speak up about their personal lives, research from a feminist standpoint cannot take place. Similarly, a successful researcher must share some aspects of her own personal life and personal goals for the study to make her standpoint clear. As a member of the Arab American community myself, there are several important parts of my life that may contribute to my knowledge base, which in turn informs this study. Similarly, the life experiences I have in the
Arab Muslim community may limit my findings because the study began as a quest based on personal questions from reflections about observations in my life.

I was born and raised in the Toledo area, where this research takes place. My father became an American citizen in 1981 and married my mother, a native Toledoan, in 1983. For six years, as a young adult, I worked at a local halal meat market, where most of the customers were Arab or Muslim or had some familiarity with both. I attended the University of Toledo for undergraduate and graduate school, afterwards attending Bowling Green State University. Both schools have large Arab student populations. I am very familiar with several intersecting communities of Arabs and Muslims in the Greater Toledo Area. There are several Mosques in the area, one at which I taught English for one year. I left my career as a schoolteacher at the Islamic school due to the pressures from parents and community members, which caused me to view them as less accepting of others than I had anticipated. All of these experiences impact my understanding of the Arab and Muslim communities in the area. Similarly, each of these experiences has the potential to strengthen or limit my understanding of the experiences of the participants in this study.

There are many Arabs who identify with national and regional communities. I have witnessed local disagreements about political and religious differences. I have also been influenced by previous research and readings about Arab femininity. Additionally, I am also invested in feminist goals, which informs my standpoint. Ramazanoglu and Holland assert, “A feminist standpoint has to take account of diversity in women's experiences and the interconnecting power relations between women” (65). In this study, I try to incorporate this idea into my feminist understanding of research by allowing room for differences among the participants and myself. I try to acknowledge the many facets of identity and the many ways
women may choose to express themselves despite whatever similarities they may have. As a researcher, I agree with Ramazanoglu and Holland when they say: “Knowledge from a feminist standpoint is always partial knowledge” (66). Therefore, my knowledge base is openly and honestly partial—informed by my life, my experiences, and my previous research interests as well as my educational experiences. Ultimately, I believe this research, though only a small piece of a much larger area of study, can help us understand the modes of expression used by young Arab Muslim American women as they try to negotiate their surroundings at home, at school, and at work.

Methods

In her book, Naples declares that “the specific methods we choose and how we employ these methods are profoundly shaped by our epistemological stance... (3). She delves critically into issues of social justice to provide researchers with methods for conducting research that do not contradict feminist principles. She makes a strong case for using ethnographic research methods, case study research methods, and discourse analysis methods, though she believes that part of feminist methods is the freedom to incorporate other methods as much or as little as necessary to reach the goals of the project. The techniques and procedures used for exploring this topic are primarily qualitative methods. Qualitative research is more suitable for this project than quantitative research methods because rhetorical expressions are continuously evolving within any population and within the lives of individuals as they grow and change. While qualitative research methods have some limitations (to be discussed in a later section of this chapter), they are by far the most revealing methods to use to discover the shared experiences of a small group of participants who identify as Arab Muslim American women.

Utilizing qualitative research methods allows researchers to take into account the
participants' backgrounds, education, lifestyles, experiences, and opinions when analyzing the data collected. Additionally, qualitative research does not require a predetermined hypothesis for the study. Ethnographic methods of interviewing allow the participants to shape the results of the study rather than trying to quantify their experiences into predetermined or anticipated roles, often based on the background and experiences of the researcher.

Participants

I sought participants from the Toledo area who identified themselves as Arab Muslim American women. I began the recruitment process by sending out an email (approved by the Human Subjects Review Board and Bowling Green State University, See Appendix A) through the listservs at BG and at UT, of which I am a part. I received several email responses from students at BG and UT who were interested in participating. Some were traveling abroad during the interview times and were unable to participate. Others who were emailed were interested in the study through friends and family members' conversations about the project.

I determined their eligibility based on the following criteria: they were between the ages of 18 and 28 and unmarried, self-identified as “Arab Muslim woman,” lived in America for at least 5 years at the time of data collection, and considered themselves actively participating in Arab, Muslim and American community groups. In the end, all the participants in this study were college students, though they attend various institutions of higher education in the Toledo area and they are at different levels of their educational careers.

Data Collection and Goals

First, I asked participants to answer several questions, through email, about language, dress, school, entertainment, marriage, friends, gender, and other pressures. Participants had the freedom to make their responses as long or as short as they wished, though I encouraged them to
be as detailed as possible. They were also allowed to skip any questions that they did not want to answer.

Then, I asked participants to tell some personal stories relating to identity, discrimination, social pressure and methods of expressing anger and happiness. I asked questions about their identities as they see them, as they think others see them, and as they consciously try to represent them. To conclude the interviewing stage of this project, I asked more sensitive questions about 9/11, politics, and terrorism. Participants were allowed the option to discontinue their participation in the study at any time, for any reason, if they chose. Following the interviews, several participants' public Facebook profiles were analyzed for textual references to identity and other cultural or religious references.

The interviews (approved by the Human Subjects Review Board at BGSU, see Appendix A) were recorded with a voice recorder and later transcribed for analysis. I have incorporated some quotes from the interviews and from social networking into my dissertation in order to give examples of participants' responses and expressions. This inclusion also functions in line with the feminist methodological strategy of giving the participants voices rather than speaking on their behalf. In the following chapters, I provide various interview reports about Arab Muslim American women, whose interviews are particularly relevant to illustrating the struggles they face and the choices they made to negotiate these difficulties.

Some of the questions asked during interviews involved sensitive issues such as sex and sexuality; however, participants were not required to contribute any personal information that they were uncomfortable sharing. As an Arab American woman myself, and as a member of the Arab Muslim community, I tried to help the students who participated in this study feel more comfortable talking about their frustrations and desires for themselves and their families by
sharing my own experiences and discussing practices common in my family. I found that after sharing my knowledge, they would often share a memory or remember details to add.

Given the association of negative connotations with Arab identity, and given the social tendency to polarize issues, Arabs are often stereotyped as the epitome of anti-American, so some students may be taught or may feel compelled to mask traces of Arab-heritage in their university classes and writing assignments. Through the interviewing process, I attempted to add insight into this matter as it affects Arab Muslim students at the individual level. The responses and experiences I received from students are included in the thematic reports.

Interviewing was a beneficial research practice for this project because it allowed for detailed, in-depth discussion of the topics at hand. It also allowed me to expand on fruitful topics or move on when a topic was causing the participant discomfort. Interviews allowed for a variety of perspectives, and the responses created a detailed context in which to understand the religious and cultural values of Arab Muslim American women.

Ethnicity and rhetorical expressions tied to ethnic groups are not easily measurable entities in any research. I do recognize that some people’s life experiences are more affected by their ethnicity than others and some people discuss their ethnicity more often— and in more ways— than others; but for the purpose of this project, these “levels” of ethnic experience are not quantifiable so they are discussed in terms of each student individually and often from the student's perspective. Predominately, what I sought in the interviews was any references to practices tied to Arab or Muslim communities and the most relevant examples of common rhetorical expressions and cultural practices are reproduced in the individual sections of each chapter. While some students continuously discussed their identities, others did not. Finally, I provide a careful textual analysis of some identity markers that young Muslim Arab American
women have used to express themselves in their public statuses while social networking on Facebook.

Data Analysis

After the transcription process was complete, the transcripts were viewed by the participants to ensure that they had the opportunity to see if they were represented accurately. Then, I used the qualitative method of interpretive description to analyze the data. Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss developed this method, which is also sometimes called the constant comparative method.

The purpose of using this method in this project was to create a description of the practices of young Arab Muslim American college students. This method is often used when researchers do not seek to build theory from the research they have conducted, and thus, is relevant to this project, the goal of which is to start a conversation about Arab Muslim American college students. Further research, including observations and textual analysis of Facebook profiles, was conducted later to present further implications, quantitative data, or more conclusive results; however, the purpose of this study is not to provide conclusions. Rather, the aim of this project is to provide a narrative recreation of some practices and experiences of young women who identify as Arab Muslim American college students.

I chose open-ended interview questions and allowed participants the freedom to say as much or as little as they wanted. Participants had the freedom to tell their own stories throughout the interview process. I divided the data into four categories: family/social life and gender roles, media, Islam, and workplace/school. Then, I organized the data into interpreted themes such as: anger, hate, racism, dissent, desire, and happiness. Although not every response could be categorized into one of these groups, these themes helped to organize the data into smaller pools
for analysis. Similar responses were also grouped together; for example, positive responses to 
family rules were grouped together and negative responses to a specific News broadcast were 
grouped together.

Within each category, responses are further divided into subcategories. In the category of 
school, subcategories include different levels of education such as: grade school, middle school, 
high school, college, and graduate school. Other subcategories include interactions at school 
with different people such as: peers, teachers, counselors, and parents. These responses are also 
divided into positive experiences, negative experiences, and neutral experiences. All responses 
are also divided into religious or cultural experiences. This is a matter of opinion to some degree, 
but, for the purpose of this study, any practice that can be connected to scripture from the Koran 
is considered religious. Any practice that cannot be connected to scripture from the Koran is 
considered cultural. Any response in which the participant identified an experience as a religious 
or cultural experience is discussed in terms of how they identified it, even if the researcher 
identified it differently. This categorization process allows a complex but rewarding discussion 
of the overlapping of religious and cultural values.

Limitations

Though they are valuable and detailed, case studies depict a limited part of the 
population. Focusing on only four participants in the study could skew the results of the study. 
There are millions of American Muslims and billions of Muslims in the world. The population of 
Arabs living in America is difficult to measure because the federal government does not 
recognize Arabs as an ethnic or racial group. Regardless of this difficulty, it is clear that many 
Arab Americans may have experiences that differ from the experiences of the participants in this 
study. Even if it is difficult to get a broad view of the Arab Muslim American experience, it is
valuable to learn about a variety of experiences of some Arab Muslims living in America. And having a limited number of participants allows the research to be more detailed. Analyzing the responses from participants for common patterns allows other researchers to develop further research.

There are also limitations to analyzing the personal responses of participants as representations of the role of culture and religion in their lives. It is clear that what they say in response to interview questions may be different than what is actually happening in their lives. But for the purpose of this project, it is fruitful to analyze how a participant perceives religious and cultural values to impact his or her life.

Some of the questions asked involved sensitive issues such as sex and sexuality, and some women resisted contributing such personal information to this research. This may have limited the overall findings of the study in terms of discussing sex and sexuality because they may have chosen not to completely share their frustrations and desires for themselves or for their families. There are also limitations when participants opt out of answering one or more questions. Others may choose to provide a shallow response without fully discussing all the potential responses they may have to a question.

Additionally, the questionnaire and interview questions did not examine every possible cultural or religious experience in a participant's life. Similarly, the study could not follow these participants over the course of their entire college education. Rather, discussions mostly included experiences they had leading up to their college years and during the college years they had already attended (however many that included).

Strategies for Reflection

My position as an insider in some of the Arab and Muslim communities in the Toledo
area created many possibilities and limitations for this study. In order to maximize the potential scholarly implications of this study, I adopted a self-reflective approach. As an Arab American female college student myself, I had many experiences similar to those discussed by the participants in the study. My position allowed participants to clarify their perceptions of the same events and practices I experienced. Ultimately, this reflective method helped me build on the scholarship about Arab and Muslim American female college students.

A large part of my reflection process involved thinking about language use for the participants in this project. Arabic and English are the first or second languages for all of the participants in this study. According to the recollections of the participants during interviews, a large amount of code switching took place in their homes growing up. Some of this is evident in the words chosen by participants during responses. Other examples of code switching became evident during textual analysis of Facebook profiles, especially in status updates. For example, many participants used one or more Arabic words in the middle of a sentence written in English. The Arabic word(s) mostly appeared using English letters. In one case, a participant had Arabic words written with Arabic letters throughout her profile both by her and by others communicating with her. As a person who is fluent in the Arabic language, I was privileged as a researcher throughout this project. A researcher who was not fluent in the Arabic language would have been unable to provide a fruitful analysis of the data collected if it included cultural or religious references in Arabic (language or letters). My knowledge of Arabic also gained me access and respect as a researcher. Without it, I may have been unable to achieve beneficial results.

Additionally, in a project that takes a feminist approach, it is important for the researcher to reflect often on the power structures that may be inherent throughout the research process.
This is a complex topic for reflection, but the challenge allows the researcher to be more conscientiously aware of her role in the interviews. To make this project a success, I was continuously aware of my standpoint and incorporate it into my findings. I considered opposing viewpoints and similarities/differences between my experiences and the experiences/responses from participants. Throughout the process, I attempted to question my decisions as a researcher.

I used the in-person interviews to confirm the results I gathered from the email questionnaires. I did my best to identify patterns without making generalizations by continuously reflecting on the conclusions drawn. In the following chapters, thematic discussions of case studies detail the ethnic experiences of four of the students who participated and include some analysis of the experiences and ideas they shared. All the quoted material is reproduced verbatim from interviews and questionnaires (including sentence run-ons, fragments, grammatical missteps, spelling errors, etc.). Additionally, participants’s names were changed to protect their privacy.

The overall goal of this chapter was to provide context for the research and data collection process used for this study. Clearly, this research was informed by feminist theory and methods. As a feminist researcher, I made community and self-reflection an important part of my process. In the following chapter, I will begin to discuss the patterns I found through the interview process. Chapter three focuses on the social and family lives of the participants.
CHAPTER III: FAMILY LIFE, SOCIAL CONCERNS, AND GENDER ROLES

In 1998, Catherine Prendergast began an important conversation in the field of Composition and Rhetoric in her article “Race: The Absent Presence in Composition Studies” when she argued that composition should participate deliberately against racialized education, developing theories about race that "do not reinscribe people of color as either foreign or invisible, nor leave whiteness uninvestigated" (51). Despite having well-known composition scholars such as Victor Villanueva, Jacqueline Royster, and Keith Gilyard echo her calls for such research in composition studies, Arab and Muslim American students have often continued to be excluded from research in these areas. In their essay entitled, “Front Lines and Borders: Identity Thresholds for Latinas and Arab American Women,” Laura Lopez and Frances Hasso assert, “these women’s experiences have for the most part been excluded by a black/white dichotomy that is especially dominant in the sociological literatures on race and gender” but “dominance and resistance are not black/white issues” (20). Similarly, in her article “Reading and Writing Differences: The Problematic of Experience,” Min-Zhan Lu argues, “academic feminist readers need to reflect on their privileged social location and be vigilant toward the tendency to invoke experience as an inherent right that erases differences along lines of race, class, gender, or sexual identity” (239). Realistically, the first step toward imagining ways to experience critically is to hear the stories of difference; therefore, the racialized experiences of Arab and Muslim American women need to be discussed in detail in academic circles. Furthermore, the best way to start to conduct this research is simply to ask these women to speak about their experiences. By giving Arab Muslim American women a space for voicing their experiences, we can reach a better understanding of their needs in classrooms and on campus. This is the goal of my research.

As members of a close community, Arab American women are especially aware of their
actions in public and private circles, which translates into abundant potential avenues for research. Certainly, many aspects of family life, social life, and gender roles in Arab Muslim American families affect the identity formation of the young college students we have in our courses; therefore, it is important for teachers to be familiar with some of the patterns that may have led them to who and where they are when they reach our classrooms. To this end, I sought to engage the participants in this study in conversations about gender performance, traditional cultural experiences, personal desire, political dissent, virtual spaces, and other rhetorical tools. This chapter reveals that the closeness found in many Arab American families is both beneficial and detrimental to women with Arab heritage, especially at the college age. Patriarchal values affect the everyday lives of men and women in Arab culture through moral expectations. Gendered roles appear in many ways in the typical Arab American family and these gendered roles also contribute to the surveillance of young Arab women, supposedly, for their protection. Men are considered providers and women are considered nurturers in most Arab American homes. This arrangement can seriously impact the ways an Arab American woman chooses to express herself. This is an important area of scholarship in Rhetoric and Composition because identity formation is a central theme in a writing class, ethnic and racial differences often contribute to learning patterns that differ from mainstream American students, and feminist scholars have been studying the multimodal tools women have used to express themselves since the nineteenth century.

Introduction to the Participants

Farah was born in Toledo to Lebanese parents. She has been to Lebanon three times to visit her extended family. She began attending the University of Toledo as a high school student and at the time of this study she was in her third year. She has changed her major four times and
is currently majoring in Health Care Administration.

Maya was born and raised in Toledo. Her mother and father are Lebanese-Americans who came to Toledo in the 70s and never left. She has been to Lebanon with her family four times for summer vacations. She has many relatives who still live “back home.” She also has members of her extended family living in Canada. Maya is majoring in Exercise Science at the University of Toledo, where she is in her third year. After graduating with her BS, she hopes to continue to become a physician’s assistant.

Rose was also born in Toledo to Lebanese parents. She attended Lourdes College and graduated with her BS in Biology. She has been to Lebanon several times as a child and teenager. She is currently attending the University of Toledo, pursuing a Master’s of Science degree in Epidemiology. At the time of the study, she was planning to graduate in May of 2014 and continue on to medical school. She is also engaged.

Rita was born in Lebanon and has visited Syria, Jordan and the United Arab Emirates. She came to America to pursue her MA in English at the University of Toledo and lived in the Mid-West for seven years. After completing her PhD at Purdue, Rita accepted a full time English professor position in Lebanon and now lives about one hour from the area of Beirut where she grew up.

Immigration and Freedom

Arab and Muslim men immigrate to America for a few different reasons; they are attracted to the financial opportunities, educational opportunities, and to the adventure of going to a new land. In Arab Americans in Michigan, Rosina Hassoun writes they have come, “like so many immigrants before them, to the United States, to make new lives for themselves, to contribute to the United States, and to become Americans”, bringing with them “their diverse
and unique cultural and linguistic backgrounds” (4). They are also hoping to escape the drudgery of village life or the strife of civil war in a developing country such as Lebanon. Therefore, for men, historically and at present, emigrating from the Arab world means new freedoms, wealth, and education. While some women may have the same independent goals for immigration as the men, immigration is not as straightforward and beneficial for women because they are often emigrating from their homeland as part of a family— the daughter of immigrants or the wife of an immigrant. The freedoms men are able to access by assimilation in the new land are much harder for women to achieve while remaining active, reputable, members of the Arab and/or Muslim communities. In these two communities, binary oppositions and antiquated cultural beliefs about worldliness are often disguised as “just” traditions and values, then imposed upon Arab American women. These cultural “values” severely limit their access to technology, to rhetoric, and to education. Arab men, Arab American men, and Muslim men rarely face the same cultural pressures (as Arab women, Arab American women, and Muslim women) to remain “modest,” “pure,” and “innocent” in their relationships with people, with knowledge, and with technology. For example, Rose said that traditional behavior for an Arab Muslim woman living in America is “to be a stay at home mom, raise the children, cook, clean and tend to her husband’s needs.” While she recognizes this as a reputable role for female immigrants and the female children of male immigrants, she also said, “I do not consider myself traditional in this way because I am 22 and still not married, which is not very typical in the Arab culture… I had the opportunity to attend school and college here in America, which I would not have had if I had been living in Lebanon…” On the one hand, it is clear that Rose feels limited as a female: what she feels is prized in her community is a very regimented and old-fashioned role for women; on the other hand, she has not fulfilled this expectation, or at least not yet. She has found a way to be
comfortable as a non-traditional Lebanese-American young woman pursuing her dream of being a doctor someday.

Farah sees herself as an Arab Muslim American because she was “born and raised in America but [her] parents were born and raised in Lebanon and taught her a traditional Lebanese lifestyle.” However, like Rose, she does not consider herself traditional. She said traditional behavior is when, “the woman is a stay at home mother who takes care of household duties and cooks for her family. She typically listens to her husband and is forced to agree with what he believes… I consider myself nontraditional. I was born and raised in America, and I am accustomed to the American way of life. I am getting an education, and I want to continue to work.” While she claims the label “Arab Muslim American,” Farah directly identifies herself as nontraditional because she is getting an education and wants to work outside of the home. Although this may be a simple definition of traditional, it is significant that both of these participants identified work and school as nontraditional behaviors in this community.

Family Life

As members of a close community, Arab Americans are especially aware of their actions in public. In *The Arab Americans*, Randa A. Kayyali explains, “Arabs of all faiths share a similar moral code,” part of which requires Arabs to “respect the family and the authority of the elders…[and lead] a life of hard work, sobriety, and frugality… An individual is not considered an entity independent of his or her family… Members of a family usually take part in all aspects of an individual’s life… The welfare, honor, identity, and status of an individual are directly tied to the family’s name and reputation” (10). Kayyali continues to note that “While Arab Americans have assimilated linguistically in a significant way, the Arabic language is being maintained in Middle Eastern homes…” (15). She points to this and many other cultural
commonalities between Arabs in America as evidence that while assimilation exists on some levels, traditions are important in other areas. She said:

A particular way in which it seems many Middle Eastern Americans have chosen to remain relatively unassimilated is in their family arrangements [...] the typical Arab American family is larger than the average American family [...] Many Middle Easterners, it seems, marry within their own ethnic group [...] 85 percent stated that they would rather that their children remain in their community when grown [...] Some Middle Eastern young people born and raised in the United States even return to their country of origin to find a mate. (16)

These traditions that have remained in tact in Arab communities show that Arab American men and women can be selective in their assimilation practices. Kayyali asserts, “As with other immigrants, usually the first generation is more eager to retain the Old World traditions, and subsequent generations tend to become more Americanized” (68). Rita discussed some of the differences she sees in her community when she said, “I don’t think there is one typical Arab family and one typical American family, but there are patterns of difference. Generally speaking, it is believed that American families are more liberal than Arab families. The former raise their children to be independent and rely on themselves from an early age, while the latter raise their children in a more protective extended family environment.” What Rita describes as “protective” and “less liberal” about Arab families is considered by many young Muslim Arab women to be stifling. Maya described some of the hardships she has seen when Arab American children try to go against the expectations of their family members. She describes the importance of “respect” and added that when “someone disobeyed his father, and his father started yelling at him,” this could even turn into physical violence sometimes “in the name of respect.”
As members of large families, Arab Americans are especially aware of their actions in public and in private because in some cases, extended family members are present as a “personal support group” (10) or as social pressure during business endeavors, education decisions, births, deaths, marriages, sicknesses, and even moving sales. Kayyali details this trend further:

As children become teenagers, girls are closely watched and often not allowed to date, whereas boys are usually allowed to have non-Arab girlfriends. A researcher of the Shia community in Dearborn concluded that the polarization created by their families treating boys and girls differently has caused boys to “take on more of the social characteristics of the dominant American society, whereas anti-assimilationist pressure is exerted on the girls through careful monitoring of social activities.” Especially in areas with high Arab concentrations (and therefore gossip networks), parents worry about “what people will say” about their daughters’ behavior, in the same way that they did in the Middle East […] the girls find out that as puberty approaches, their freedom is curtailed…immigrant parents can be ultra sensitive to the activities of their unwed daughters…They fear for their daughters’ reputations and place restrictions on their movements. (73)

This close-knit attribute of Arab American families is both beneficial and detrimental to college students with Arab heritage, especially females. At one point during her interview, Maya said she likes having lots of family: “I came from a family of eight so I have always had movement and many people around me and I like that. I want to have a soccer team of children someday.” However, she also acknowledged the family as a constant “watchdog” when she discussed more limiting experiences with internal racism later. She said, “My black friends came to my graduation ceremony, but I didn’t tell my parents that they were my friends. When they greeted me, my parents threw a big fit and asked me who invited them and why. They were not happy
with me even though it was a happy day for me.” She also said that she was very careful about
her actions because someone “is always watching.” She added, “I love having guy friends. They
make less drama…but of course if my mother were to see me hug a guy, that would be wrong in
her eyes.” It is clear that Maya feels her family is both valuable and troublesome to her at times.
She said, “[my family] is always in the back of my mind when I make decisions. Sometimes I do
what they want and sometimes I do what I want, but I always think of them.” Perhaps
maintaining relationships of which her parents would not approve indicates her willingness to
make her own decisions despite the family pressure. She even alludes to this being unheard of
for some Arab Muslim women when she said, “some of my friends will never have friends from
other ethnic groups because of what their parents might do.” She certainly suggests that the
parents are a threat to the children’s freedoms of choice (even if they are no longer young
children). Lopez and Hasso also found evidence of these limitations in their research in
“Frontlines and Borders.” They explain that the Arab American women they interviewed
“remained ‘Arab’ within their homes…[and] assimilated in public contexts as much as they were
allowed to…avoiding ‘role conflict’ by becoming ‘Americans by day and Arabs by night’” (25).
Additionally, the authors argue that even though the Arab American women interviewed “needed
‘home’ for comfort, security, and sustenance,” the women also “problematized these locations as
sites of restrictive sexual norms and essentialized definitions of the ‘authentic’... Arab woman”
(26). This is precisely the situation the participants in my research seemed to be describing.

Rita identifies as Arab because she was born in an Arab country and lived there for 21
years before coming to study in America. Her entire family is Lebanese. Perhaps a testament to
the typically strong Arab familial relationships, Rita said that a strong factor in her decision to
attend the University of Toledo was the fact that her sister and her brother-in-law lived in Toledo
and attended UT at that time. Rita said the way they lived as a family in Toledo reflects Arab traditions, which include making Lebanese food and celebrating “national and religious holidays.” Rita said, “A common distinction [between Arab and American families] is that American children are raised to believe that they can do whatever they want and that even when they fail, they get rewarded for effort. Arab children, on the other hand, are often scolded if they get something wrong and are not rewarded for effort if they fail. They have to get things right; otherwise, there will be no reward.” While this concept could easily refer to a student’s grade in Math class, it may also be indicative of a larger cultural attitude from parents towards children. If they must “get things right” to be rewarded, misbehaving is never rewarded. All of the participants in this study discussed cultural expectations for female behavior. In the end, Rita asserts what is most important is “unity, helping each other, and doing what’s right.” This concept of “what is right” for women, a recurring theme in the interviews and the examples given by the participants, was nearly never about freedom of choice, independent decision-making, or liberation from the family.

Gendered Behaviors: Limitations for Young Women

Deep-rooted patriarchal values affect the everyday lives of men and women in Arab culture through the Arab “moral code.” Gendered roles appear in many ways in the typical Arab American family as well, and these gendered roles contribute to the surveillance of young Arab women “for their protection.” As mentioned earlier, men are considered providers and women are considered nurturers in most Arab American homes. Brothers protect their sisters’ reputations by acting as chaperones (Kayyali 71). Typical Arab families assign household roles to males and females very early in the lives of the children. Rose shares one example when she discusses how her ideas about gender differ from her father’s. She says: “We are different. I feel
that men and women should be treated equally everywhere, and my dad is the opposite. It shows every day. Once my dad saw my brother doing the dishes to help my mom out and he told him, ‘that is not your job. Go get one of your sisters.’ He could have just let him help out.” In her book, Hassoun writes, “The process of acculturation for most immigrant groups is a time of increased intergenerational conflict. This is particularly true for Arab Americans. The children of the new immigrants are exposed to television and peer pressures at school and ... [d]ebates over issues like dating can be quite intense in some families” (53). Rose’s comment above about what her dad could have done differently seems in line with Hassoun’s observations about generational differences. To Rose, it seems like a small move and a simple act to let a boy help his mother with the dishes; however, to her father, it is a direct contradiction to the traditional gendered roles from his own past and thus much harder for him to accept.

Although all of the participants in this study are different ages and have different goals, families, and experiences, they all discussed the limitations they have felt or witnessed as female members of the Toledo Arab and Muslim communities. For example, Maya describes being limited in sports as a young Arab American girl. She said, “I love softball and my parents would not let me play and it is the only thing I loved [at that age].” When asked if she expressed her desires to play softball, she said, “yes!” However, she claims, she never was able to play for a team, no matter what she said. She explains, “I can never express my ideas to anyone. Arabs think differently, and when I have something to say about something that is against the Arab or Muslim community and I say it, it spreads like gossip and gets all over the community and may ruin my reputation as marriageable.” It may seem odd to non-Arabs that something like playing on a softball team could contribute to a discussion about marriageability. Like Maya, in Torn Between Two Cultures, Maryam Aseel notes, “All social activities outside of school were banned
for me and for the other [Arab] girls I knew, as were all clothes that were not uniformly conservative” (35). Each of the participants made some similar observations about feeling limited by the culture in some way.

When discussing her family rules about dress, Farah explains, “women are supposed to dress modestly by covering most parts of the body. Sleeves had to be a certain length and the shortest pant or capri had to be below the knee. We never had much difficulty even though the boys never had to worry about it. I guess we were just used to it.” It is pretty common in any family for the parents to have expectations about the way their children dress. However, Farah’s observations indicate several issues that limit young ladies in Arab American families. First, there are differences between what is expected from young boys and young girls in the same family. Second, “modesty” in this family is measured in lengths of sleeves and pant legs. Third, even though she states that the women “were used to it,” she also refers to these concerns as a worry that the boys in the family never had. Thus, it is implied that it is a hassle and a limitation that she would rather be without. In a later interview, she also mentions, “I always feel pressured [by Arab or Muslim cultural values in my family]. I am the type or person that likes to have fun, but when I am in public, I have to act ladylike. I like to scream and talk to random people but just so people do not talk bad about me, I act like a lady and don’t do anything that draws attention to me.” Here, Farah equates ladylike behavior with behavior that doesn’t draw attention to her and with behavior that is not “fun.” In her statement, screaming and talking to random people are not to be considered “ladylike” behaviors. This definition is interesting to consider in comparison to mainstream American culture that often idealizes autonomy, independence, and young, beautiful, women being the center of attention.

Rita said she felt most limited as a woman in an Arab, Muslim family when it came to
talking about sex. She said, “I learned about safe sex from a friend. This is where I got most of my information, and then I read articles online. I have never discussed this issue with my mother or grandmother. I think it is considered a taboo subject for women in the same family.” When asked if it is the same for men, she said, “my brothers always made comments and jokes freely, so I think they probably got all of their questions answered verbally. Maybe it is because they are less shy.” Perhaps, Rita’s brothers were just less bashful individuals; however, the more likely scenario is that young ladies in Arab Muslim families are conditioned to be more timid when it comes to discussions about sex.

When asked to describe “typical” American family life compared to “typical” Arab family life, Rose began a heated speech in which she said:

Life is very different, especially for women. Women cannot be home alone, even at my age [23], cannot stay out late without a brother. Decisions are made for women. The whole thinking that at eighteen, you are a free person and you can make your own decisions did not happen at [my address]! To an outsider looking in, American families have more freedoms, expressing their opinions…man or woman, they are heard and acknowledged versus in Arab families where the man thinks he is always right and we [women] get shushed or told “just go do whatever you are good at” meaning the dishes and cleaning the house and stuff…

Rose shows that she feels mistreated in many ways when compared to her American counterparts and when compared to the men in her life. She mentions rules in her family that involve some double standards also commonly held by many non-Arabs, such as earlier curfew rules for girls than boys. However, she also mentions some rules that are not as common, such as grown women being unpermitted to stay home alone and even having chaperones as adults. She said
that she is unable to express her opinions as much as she would like and she feels silenced by the man who “thinks he is always right.” She even mentions being told by men that women are good at cleaning and dishes. This is often the subject of sexist jokes in America and is generally considered misogynistic and unacceptable. Although she may have been making an exaggerated comment in anger, it is clear that this attitude is one she has experienced. Such comments, spoken jokingly or seriously, suggest larger cultural gender issues.

Nadine Naber discusses her feelings about growing up as an Arab American woman in her article entitled, “Resisting the Shore.” She articulates many observations similar to the limitations discussed above by the participants in this study. She writes:

At home, ‘al Amerikan’ (the American) was always referred to negatively. It was the trash culture, and anything associated with it was degenerate, morally bankrupt and not worth investing in, while ‘Al Arab,’ (the Arab) was always referred to positively, with references to Arab family values and hospitality... In our home, it was black and white, good and bad, Al Arab vs. Al Amerikan, as if there were a boundary, or a box, created around everything associated with being Arab. The assumption was that is if you do ‘these things’ you will be in the circle, and if you don’t, then you’re out. And ‘these things’ only applied to daughters. And so it was that controlling my sexuality became the means toward maintaining our Arabness, and my virginity became the shield that would protect Mama from losing me to the ‘Amerikan’ (302-3).

Clearly, some Arab families encourage their daughters to resist assimilation and resist American ideals by labeling them as immoral, degenerate, and unworthy. It must be hard to value anything American when the home-life is anti-American in so many ways. Given this good/evil dichotomy, it is easy to see why Arab American women often choose to refrain from expressing
dissent in the home. This constant comparison of Arab versus American ways can make it seem necessary for a young Arab American woman to maintain two conflicting identities: one identity in line with the expectations of the parents in the home, and one identity in line with her own personality or with American freedoms of choice outside of the home.

Appearance and Apparel: Ties to Rhetoric and Sexuality

Choosing how to dress each day can be a source of joy and self-expression. For many women, clothing is a rhetorical tool. For Arab Muslim women, many of the choices regarding apparel that should be their own are already decided by the men in their lives. Kayyali explains that men restrict the mobility and dress of Arab women because “in many cultures in the Arab region, family honor rests on the sexuality of all the women in the family,” whether they are Muslim or not (12). However, Islamic doctrine complicates the accepted definitions of appropriate clothing. The Quran supports modesty of dress in these lines: “And say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty; that they should not display their beauty and ornaments except what (must ordinarily) appear thereof; that they should draw their veils over their bosoms and not display their beauty.” (Quran 24:31) These parts of Arab and/or Muslim moral code contribute greatly to hierarchal power structures within the family, contribute to the surveillance of young Arab and Muslim women, and contribute to the restrictions that Arab/Muslim women in American colleges endure until they are married. All of the participants in this study assert that they are rewarded in their families for being more timid, covered, or mild-mannered.

Rose said, “Getting dressed is one of the hardest things to decide when I am not in my work scrubs.” When asked to elaborate, she stated, “Women have to stay looking modest and innocent, which means the only skin that can show is your face, your arms from the elbows
down and, in some families, the parents let the girls wear capris and skirts below the knee.”
Clearly, even a 23-year-old working woman in the Arab community, who makes her own money and is legally an adult, has to worry about how she dresses. Rose plans to live at home until she gets married, and she claims she has no choice in that matter, either. Meanwhile, of her brothers, she said, “Boys! They can wear whatever they desire and walk around naked if they want to.” Although this statement is exaggerated, she said her dad and brother often walk around shirtless, wear any Western clothing they want, and do not have to worry about their reputations being reflected by the clothing they choose. Rose continued, “young Arab women care for their appearance because they have a reputation to keep.” This reputation is not only connected to how they choose to dress, but behaviors also highly impact how they appear to others. Rose shows that appearance is more than a dress code when she said, “[Girls] learn to care because it is pounded into their heads to sit straight, not to use bad language, and to act like a lady.”

At the same time, many Arab American Muslim women feel pressure to be thin and beautiful, perfectly groomed and polished. On this topic, Maya said, “Honestly, to every event…Arab women… overdress. It is like a competition to see who can be the best. At every event, I wear heels and do my hair. We wear a lot of jewelry. Older women, like my mom, always wear lots of gold. And the desired effect is to stand out, and it is hard to stand out when everyone is overdressed.” She chuckled about this and continued, “When my sister got married, she did not have a real wedding but we went to a restaurant in Dearborn and we all wore formal dresses even though it was only a dinner.” The importance of modesty will not be outdone by the importance of beauty. One need only visit a Dearborn salon run by Arab Americans and frequented by Arab Americans from all over to see how important physical beauty is in this community. Farah said:
Being fat or overweight is unacceptable…I tend to exercise a lot or dance. Burning off calories makes me feel good about myself because women in the Arab world are always worried about their appearance and the way they look and dress. Fashion and makeup and hair is a big thing in the Middle East. This carries over into our lives here…When I go to a wedding, I completely change the way I look. I dress up and wear heels. I put makeup on, and I wear colored contacts instead of my everyday contacts. My friends even get their eyelashes extended at the salon in Dearborn where we go to do our hair.

Farah and Maya both said it is typical for them to go spend a whole day at the salon in Dearborn before a wedding, even if the event is held in Toledo. Maya said, “The salon ladies in Dearborn are different than in Toledo. They know how to deal with Arab clients and Arab hair and styles and everything.” This statement shows that Maya thinks “Arab hair and styles” are different than non-Arab hair and styles. This may be a concept that furthers the pressure in the lives of Arab American women to live their culture through spaces aligned with that culture, such as salons that cater specifically to Arab women.

Rita believes that both men and women should dress decently and modestly. She said, “I do not dress like a number of American women typically dress with shorts, tank tops, or strapless shirts, but at the same time, I don’t feel the need to dress like they dress. I wear skirts a lot in summer. I’m content with the way I dress, and I don’t really have any struggles. But that might be different for a woman with a veil or with different family pressure.” She acknowledges that there is pressure to maintain a certain appearance. On this topic she said, “Dressing up when going to a casual event is standard. In addition, I think waxing the entire body is a beauty practice unique to Arab women or at least when compared to American women who prefer to shave.” Removing hair is a common concern for many women. For Arab American women, trips
to the salon often include waxing many parts of the body on a regular basis. Hairiness is common for women with Arab ancestry, but it is also often considered unhygienic. Women often feel pressure to remove or hide their hair. Similarly, Muslim women feel pressure to dress a certain way.

Hijab and Islam

The Islamic dress code for men does not prohibit them from fitting right in with Western fashion trends. Islam asks males to cover their bodies from the waist to the knees. Though there are more traditional styles of doing this, such as abayas and head wraps for men, most American styles also accomplish male modesty for Muslim men. For women, it is more complicated to be both modest and fashionable in Islamic dress. Though there are culturally-determined guidelines for modesty that change depending on time and place and there is some controversy about veiling for Muslims in America, traditional Islamic modesty in the context of the time of the prophet required that women “cover their bosoms” and all but “what must ordinarily appear” (Quran 24:31). Today, Muslims interpret these verses differently across the US and around the world, resulting in many styles of hijab/veils and many women who choose to “be modest” in ways other than veiling.

Simultaneously, there is a huge emphasis on fashion and body image in American culture today. We are constantly bombarded with images of ideal beauty and fashion. Music and pop culture icons influence what Americans choose to wear and how they wear it. Since the 1700s, men and women have read fashion magazines and imitated the standards set by the fashion world. A person's fashion choices can reveal a lot about them. Their style may be used to tell a story or to identify with others. Muslim Americans are continuously negotiating a difficult space, especially after 9/11, and this space is further complicated for women by the hijab. Choosing to
wear a veil is an open and visual declaration of identification with Islam. It often results in both positive and negative conversations about Islam with non-Muslims. In *Torn Between Two Cultures: An Afghan-American Woman Speaks Out*, Maryam Qudrat Aseel discusses some of these negative responses. She explains, “When I wore the Muslim woman’s dress, people automatically assumed that I was some sort of fundamentalist, a terrorist, or a zealot preaching the religion” (Aseel). There are several contributing factors to this dangerous stereotype; however, it is largely the result of a significant lack of knowledge about Islam as a peaceful religion. For mainstream Americans, the main sources for knowledge about Islam are American news stories covering terrorist acts committed at home and abroad by organizations that identify themselves as Islamic. Because Islam is rarely mentioned in a positive news story, comments such as those heard by Aseel have continued to plague veiled Muslim American women, and they have responded to this stereotypical perspective of Islam in many ways. Most notably, veiled women have a tremendous web presence that counters the common media image of oppressed veiled women. This issue will be discussed further in chapter four. While most of these blogs target Muslim female audiences, their existence and the exposure to veiled women's self-expression, voice, and fashion sense has many positive effects inside and outside of the Muslim American community.

Although none of the participants in this study wear hijab, they all talked about it in their interviews. Rose said, “I respect the hijab because my mother wears it. I would not say it is not important. It is something mandatory to women in [Islam], but my parents have made it an option to us.” According to Maya, “My mother began wearing the hijab completely when she was 26. Before that, she wore it only half way [this means she would allow her neck, ears, and bangs to show, much like American women wear bandanas]. I do believe that someday I will
wear it and learn more about my religion.” She believes she is only a beginner when it comes to Islam, and she claims that many Arab American women get more religious when they get married or have children. She explained, “My good friend started to wear hijab when she got engaged and for her wedding, she wore a bedazzled white hijab with her white dress.” Maya further noted that many young Arab women choose to wear hijab before their wedding so that they can continue to display their wedding photos in their home as they age. If they choose to wear the hijab after the wedding, then the photos showing hair must be hidden. Farah also mentioned her mother and hijab, saying, “I wish more girls that wear the hijab would respect it. My mother wears the veil. It is important to her but she never forced us upon it [sic]. She expects us to eventually wear it when we believe we are ready for such a commitment.” It is obvious that Farah believes hijab is not for anyone. According to her, it is a big deal to wear the veil, and girls that wear it when they are too young or too immature may not understand the full weight of what it means in Islam.

Despite some positive discussions about hijab in digital spaces and in these interviews, it is clear that Islamic dress is not the only factor in limiting the clothing choices of young Arab Muslim women in America. The participants in this study feel the pressure to dress a certain way due to several overlapping factors, including but not limited to, Islam, Arab heritage, age, family moral codes, and other social pressures. The limited dress code has far reaching impacts on the lives of these young ladies. Rose noted that sometimes, in Toledo, she struggles to find clothes that are deemed appropriate. “The worse time is when I am trying to find clothing, and I go to JCPenney and everything they have is shorts that resemble underwear and tank tops and halters where so much skin is showing.” Similarly, she mentions how difficult it is to swim in public with such a limited wardrobe. She said, “You know you are Arab when you go to the lake to
swim on Memorial Day weekend, and your family is the family swimming in T-shirts and shorts past the knee with shorts underneath just in case any skin were to show.” Evidently, layers of longer clothes are also necessary when getting wet. She said she feels better when she is not the only one swimming with clothes on but admits it is still “weird” and everyone else is “staring at us.” Here she touched on an important point: whenever they can, young Arab American women would prefer to be seen socially in groups or pairs. She added, “I feel safer when I am surrounded by friends or family, because if a rumor surfaces about me, the more witnesses to my [good] actions, the better for my defense.”

Philosophies on Love, Dating, Marriage, and Sex

The courtship process for young women may differ in certain Arab families, but one thing remains constant: Arab women are expected to remain chaste until wed before God. When discussing this aspect in their article, Lopez and Hasso affirm that Arab American women received a lot of strong “explicit and implicit messages that they should remain virgins until they married. ‘Nice Arab girls’ were not supposed to lose their virginity before marriage. In order to control the sexuality of unmarried daughters, unchaperoned dating is generally strongly discouraged in Arab cultures, and Arab American girls are punished for violating these cultural norms. The virginity narrative was an especially strong source of internal conflict” for the Arab American women who participated in their research (30).

All of the participants in this study discussed this theme of chastity as well. However, in some cases, there was very little to discuss because the participants had very few family experiences that had to do with talking about sex. For example, Farah said, “We are not even allowed to talk about sex in my family - no sex before marriage – that’s it. Safe sex: I learned all about that at school only.” She didn’t have much to discuss when asked about sex, although she
added, “I am just slightly different than my mother and grandmother. I still believe there should be no sex before marriage, but I am not as modest or religious as they are.” Even though Farah said this here, during other parts of the interview (above), she stressed the importance of modesty. In another interview, she said, “We don’t talk about sex openly. We don’t talk about the menstrual cycle. We don’t say dirty words in front of others. We just kind of pretend we are angels.” Although she did not elaborate on the meaning of this statement, it is clear that there is a difference between what she is and what she feels she must be when it comes to sex.

When it comes to finding a partner, Maya admitted, “This sounds bad, but if I am honest, I would have to say that Arab men look for a skinny, shy, never-been-touched, pretty girl to marry. And they may have other types of girlfriends in the mean time, while they are looking for her. Arabs also look at weight a lot.” In a different interview she said, “we did not learn about sex in our household. We learned about it through school and movies. Our mother just always told us ‘be careful for your actions’ [sic] so we can be ‘pure’ when we are married.” When asked if there are any taboo subjects, again, she mentions sex saying, “Usually, I will only tell my most trustworthy sister everything about me. Sex and boys are topics I never discuss with my mother or father. I certainly am not allowed to have a boyfriend even though I am eighteen.” Maya’s responses shed light on the restrictions young Arab Americans face. Even though Maya considers herself to be untraditional, she is still limited in many ways for a legal American adult. While Maya is free to do as she pleases as an American citizen, the potential repercussions for going against the familial expectations are linked to the disappointment of members of the family. When asked what could happen, she said pointedly, “I would be the shame of the family. I can’t disappoint my father,” as if this is clearly the worst punishment for all those involved.

In the case of Rose, she said, “Marriage is important to me and my family,” but when
asked about sex, she immediately sat back, gave me a broad grin and said, “My parents skipped this lecture. We do not talk about sex at all. It is ‘ayb!’” According to Nader Al Jallad in his article entitled, “The Concept of ‘Shame’ in Arabic: Bilingual dictionaries and the Challenge of Defining Culture-Based Emotions,” the definition of the word ‘ayb varies in different emotional contexts. He says, “the word ‘ayb roughly denotes ‘shame,’ ‘disgrace’ and ‘dishonor’. Its meaning does not [literally] cover ‘embarrassment’ or ‘shyness’ … [but, it] can be used to refer to the ‘genitals’...[especially] with young children.” Al Jallad continues to say that the word ‘ayb is also commonly used with the prepositional compliment “‘alayk” to say “shame on you” when someone misbehaves (41). In this case, Rose appears to be using the term to show that discussing sex in any way is shameful, disgraceful, or dishonorable. Al Jallad notes that a person is “expected to feel ‘ayb, if he/she violates any social or religious rules. More specifically, it is typically associated with breaking rules of ...proper behavior” and “one does not feel ‘ayb for something that he/she is not responsible for or to blame for” (42). Al Jallad’s discussion of this Arabic word demonstrates that discussing sex is a breach of social protocols. It is a shame for a young, Arab American Muslim woman to want to talk about sex, to have knowledge about sex, or to have a reason to need to bring up this topic.

Girls and teenagers in communities with Arab roots are not typically allowed to date at all. Some young American girls often show interest in boys in elementary school, and their parents might think it is “cute” and innocent. The same response cannot be seen in the communities with ties to Arab culture. They do not think it is “cute” for a little girl to show interest in a boy, flirt, or say she is “dating.” They actually think it is ‘ayb or disgraceful. Whether or not she is actually going on dates is irrelevant. These words and these behaviors are frowned upon either way. Rita noted this does not change much as a young girl ages. She said,
“Women are not even supposed to date in Arab culture. So the traditional behavior is to get engaged to someone that you want to date – just to get to know them. Of course, this should only happen with the parents’ consent. Engagement [in cultures with Arab heritage] is like dating [in mainstream American cultures] in many ways.” Although Rita explained that her parents expect her to get engaged in order to get to know someone, she added that she is not traditional in this way: “I do not feel the need to get engaged to date someone. But of course, if I am dating someone, I don’t go around and advertise it because it is not acceptable in our culture. I don’t really hide it, but I know I can’t be open about it at all.” While many women in many ethnic groups in America may face similar pressures to keep their relationship status a secret, there are usually certain groups in which they can find comfort sharing. When asked about this potential option, Rita said, “No way. I will only tell one of my sisters. That’s it - not even my friends. I don’t want anyone to know. It is just too dangerous to be open without a formal engagement.”

Sometimes, the immediate or extended family of an Arab American will determine that he or she has reached an age appropriate for marriage and begin a public or private search for suitable potential partners, with or without his or her knowledge or permission. Hassoun asserts, “Some families, both Christian and Muslim, practice semi-arranged marriages. Mothers play a role in helping to arrange marriages, and, at least in the ideal form, the prospective bride and groom have the right to refuse the marriage arrangements. In practice, degrees of family and peer pressure exist.” (53). She goes on to say, however, that is not always the case because many are also free to chose a partner on their own.

The concept of “getting engaged” is unique for Muslim women. Rita said that engagement is similar to dating in that it is the only opportunity for a woman to get to know her suitors. This is true, but it may be more accurate to say that engagement in Arab cultures is
similar to marriage in mainstream American culture because, for most women, they only get engaged one time and because, in Islam, there is one official marriage ceremony, which typically takes place with a religious cleric at the so called “engagement” party. Even though the couple is already married in Islam, this party is usually followed by a period of courtship, in which the man visits the woman at her parents’ home, takes her out on dates, and eventually begins to build, buy, and/or rent a house, furnish it together, and plan the wedding party. What they call the “wedding” is actually just the reception by American standards. This party, which is on a date at least one month (but sometimes years) later, and is referred to as the “marriage,” is actually the date that the marriage will be consummated and the newly married couple will begin living together.

These marriage traditions make the consummation of a marriage, which is typically the first time a woman has sex, into the public business of the Arab Muslim community; consequently, many other traditions have been established to celebrate what many mothers call “the coming into womanhood” of their daughters. While in both Arab and American cultures, it is common for a bride to wear white to symbolize her chaste status, it is far more acceptable for an American woman to have sex before marriage and maintain her privacy about this matter. In some communities in Lebanon, it is still common for the mother of the groom to visit the new couple the day after the marriage consummation party to “bring them breakfast,” in hopes that the bride will show her the wedding bed and evidence of the bride’s virtue. While it is no longer typical for a mother-in-law to demand to see the bed sheets, it is common for the bride to believe it dignified and deeply tied to her and her families honor to “offer” to show her soiled bed sheets to her mother-in-law.

It is not typical for anyone to get engaged without his or her parents’ approval; however,
men can get away with it far more often than women. Farah shared a story about her friend, who did not have her parents’ approval:

My friend wanted to date, but she wasn’t allowed. Her parents tracked her actions when she went to UT and checked her cell phone calls. She still met someone. Then she wanted to get engaged when she was twenty, but her parents thought she was too young. They wouldn’t agree to her idea of a long engagement while she kept going to school so she packed her bags one night when they were sleeping, on vacation, in Lebanon and stole her passport from them and ran away with her secret love and got married. Now she is back in America with her husband, she has a two-year-old daughter, and she is completing her degree. She sees her mother and siblings in secret, but her father still will not talk to her at all because she shamed him in his eyes. And he won’t talk to anyone who talks to her so it is all a big secret that she sees her mom and siblings. I think it is really sad that she had to do it like that…

Farah then began a new story. Farah’s father, Ali, never spoke to his sister again after she chose to marry a man that was unapproved by him. (His father was deceased, so Ali believed it was up to him to give his sisters the permission they needed to wed). She was over thirty years old at the time and they remain unable to communicate with her. Farah ended this conversation by saying, “This is a terrible part of my culture, but I will never be able to change my father. He is so stubborn. He would do the same to me.” Most listeners would agree that this is a terrible part of the culture and that a father shouldn’t disown his daughter over her choice to marry a man she loves.

In most traditional Arab families, brides leave their families to become members of their grooms’ families upon marriage and hierarchies of power favor the elderly and the men in
families over the women (Kayyali 11). The combination of the power men exert and the expectation they have for chastity creates a family structure that limits the movement and actions of the females from childhood until marriage when the power shifts to a new patriarch. Maya said that “so many times” her mother would make decisions without consulting her father, and he would show dominance. She gave an example: “my mother gave my brother permission to go to his friend’s house and when he got in a car accident, my dad, of course, blamed her for not asking his permission. I am so sick of hearing that phrase!” In this case, even a grown woman (Maya’s mother) who is married with 6 children feels pressure to obey her husband and faces his wrath when she doesn’t.

This theme of “permission” showed up later in the interview when she said, “I was also very mad at my father for not letting me get a phone when he ‘withdrew’ his permission. Basically, he can do whatever he wants. Because he is a man, he doesn’t even have to be consistent. When someone disobeys him, he yells at them.” Maya’s frustration is as a daughter in this case; however, what she said here indicates patriarchal control over both wife and daughter. Farah mentioned physical abuse in connection with fatherly control: “I have witnessed violence or abuse in the Arab American community many times, mostly just the man of the house hitting a child or his wife because they did not listen to him.” None of the participants told detailed stories of abuse, but physical violence seemed to be an undercurrent in the conversations, indicated by tone and body language. The coming of age of Arab American women seemed to be a source of hope. Marriage is a method that has been used historically by many young girls to change their lives.

Marriage is a central part of every woman’s life in the Arab Muslim American community. It is typically an occasion for celebration and extravagance. There are many customs
and events held during a couple’s period of engagement and early in the marriage to celebrate the match. This celebratory hype is desired and coveted by many young Arab and Arab American women. Women who choose not to get married often face a lot of angry relatives. Rita spoke of her own experiences: “being single at the age of 28 is a huge source of pressure for me from my extended family even though it has not been a big deal for me… Getting married and having children are definitely important to my family, but if it doesn’t happen, it is not the end of the world to me.” Although, she does feel that there is pressure to marry and have children, she said this is not the most important part of her life right now, even if it is most important to others.

Immediately following a marriage, family pressures often turn towards childbearing. Farah said, “because I am a girl, it is very important for me to get married at a young age and have as many kids as possible.” Maya said something similar about marriage, but differed on the importance of children: “Marriage is important if you have one child or 12 children; marriage is essential” in her community and in her family.

Arabs and Homosexual Desire

Khalida Saed writes about conflicting personal and communal identities in her article, “On the Edge of Belonging,” where she states:

As long as I can remember I have teetered on the edge of something. I have not always been an American. Sometimes I wasn’t a Muslim. I never wanted to be a lesbian. But I have never had any doubt that I didn’t belong fully to any of these identities. I teetered on the edge of belonging to the lesbian community and being invincible within it, on the edges of being American and Iranian, and on the edge of Islam. (86)

This quote clearly depicts the complexity of cross-communal, hyphenated identities in America. To be Arab, Muslim and lesbian in America is to struggle with conflicting values from various
communities. While Arab and Muslim values are not always stifling, the process most homosexual Arab Muslims must endure to achieve tolerance from their immediate family members is never simple. Some American values allow individuals space to negotiate multiple identities and perhaps they grant individuals a bit more space for confusion. At the very least, people living in America can find support and distance away from family who attempt to control them. To negotiate these many identities, and to reach some definitive conclusion, people questioning their sexuality need time to seek understanding of their inner selves. This understanding rarely exists in the socially constructed manners and values of members of the Arab Muslim communities.

After attending a conference for the Al-Fatiha LGBTQ organization, Saed details her fears. She writes, “I was not scared of other people in the LGBTQ community; I was terrified of other Muslims” (92). While this statement indicates some level of fear of violence, it is not nearly as indicative of the seriousness of this fear as her statement later: that if she chooses to marry her partner in a public ceremony to which she invites her two hundred family members, she will “risk her safety on [her] wedding day, and the safety of [her] partner and her family as well” (93). This fear indicates the hostility of immediate acquaintances, friends, and family within the Arab/Muslim communities. It is a shame that family can turn so swiftly. Saed sums the pain up best when she also says: “…I am not sure how joyous that day will be without any of my family” (93). Being able to openly write these thoughts and publish them is an expressive step that Saed took that is rare in the Muslim community. Based on her article, she faced/will face consequences for these literate practices. These possible reprisals have caused many Arab Muslim Americans who are questioning sexual and gender norms to use pseudonyms when publishing personal information about their lives. Again, this precaution clearly indicates the
severity of the situation. Saed's situation is a clear example of the conflicted spaces that some Muslim American women occupy. While her American identity allows room to explore her lesbian identity, her involvement in a Muslim community causes fear of violence against her because lesbians are rarely accepted in most Muslim communities. Intolerance is difficult for anyone to deal with; however, it is especially damaging when one's own family members are unable to be accepting of her identity. The increasing amount of “honor killings” committed by immediate family members around the world are especially shocking due to the intimacy of the relationships prior to the crimes.

In *The Arab Americans*, Kayyali, a Ph.D candidate at George Mason University, writes extensively on Arab American issues. She discusses the geography, history, people, languages, and cultures of the Arab World. She writes about Arab religions, emigration, social constructions, family issues, laws, women’s issues, food, media, demographics, economic profiles, holidays, music, literature, politics and 9/11. In a 177-page book, homosexuality in the Arab and Muslim communities in America is discussed in passing for one paragraph. After discussing women’s issues, she states:

However controversial the topic or identity of feminism is, homosexuality is even more so. Like other Arab Americans, homosexual Arab Americans have to combat the immediate assumption that Arabs are anti-Semitic or fall into one of the many U.S. media stereotypes of Arabs, and in addition, they have to combat possible rejection of their sexual identity by Arab Americans. Arab American lesbians and gays have expressed that they feel marginalized on two accounts: by the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender community and by the Arab American circles. Some families are accepting of their child’s sexual preference and embrace their partners as members of the family but
homosexuality is not widely tolerated in the Arab American community. Though homosexuality within the Arab American community is not the focus of her book, this short paragraph does not accurately portray the intense hardships with which gay and lesbian Arab Americans struggle when negotiating the traditions of conservative Arab and Islamic values with American freedoms. There are many gender and sexuality issues presented in passing by Kayyali that require further attention from feminist scholars. Scholars should dedicate time and resources to this significant population of unstudied Arab Americans with a focus on expressions of desire in this community. In contrast, there are several recently-published works that discuss in more depth the discrimination against gays and lesbians within Arab and Muslim American communities. Both Saed and Kayyalli indicate the devastating effects of culturally-learned behaviors within the Arab and Muslim communities that endorse open intolerance, hate and discrimination toward gays and lesbians inside and outside the community. Ultimately, the threat of violence is enough to scare some young Arab gays and lesbians into a traditional marriage (sometimes arranged), having children, and anything else that might make them appear heterosexual. Many of these people suffer silently for years for the sake of their familial identities and reputations before pursuing a life that corresponds more with their hidden desires. Some later regret having heterosexual partners, marrying, having children, or just putting their own needs last. This may cause them to act in ways that anger their immediate family, friends, or community members, which in turn can cause further isolation, damage, or emotional stress.

Michael S. Merry discusses the complexity of lumping Muslims into a collective group with a common view about homosexuality as part of his critique of Mark Halstead in his article entitled, “Should Educators Accommodate Intolerance? Mark Halstead, Homosexuality, and the Islamic Case.” Merry asserts that Halstead’s view that “there is no such thing from the Islamic
perspective as a homosexual orientation,” only homosexual acts/sins (Halstead 135) is unfair to
the many Muslims who have varying perspectives on sexuality. The fact of the matter is that
many gay and lesbian Muslims still consider themselves both gay and Muslim regardless of the
harsh stance this traditional Islamic perspective has about homosexuality. Merry also emphasizes
the personal impact of gays and lesbians “coming out” in the Muslim community. He writes,
“Islam has come to inhabit many cultural spaces wherein homosexuality is commonly
practiced…” (24). So, it is essential that we “address the needs of gay and lesbian Muslim youth
who may find themselves ‘trapped’ by highly intolerant attitudes towards homosexuality within
their own communities” (25). We should “consider the experiences of gay and lesbian people
and consider why it is that his or her religion would appear to condemn a sexual identity so many
people possess, including many within the Muslim world” (25). The detrimental effects of this
condemnation are clear when he adds, “Because of the austere prohibitions against
homosexuality in Islamic teaching, gay and lesbian Muslims must choose to live an
irreconcilable double identity, repress or deny their homosexual feelings, or turn their back on
Islam in order to be true to themselves” (24). It is a pity that mutual respect and empathy are not
common between the gay and lesbian Muslim community and their heterosexual Muslim Arab
counterparts. Hence, it is not surprising then that non-Muslims and non-Arabs are dually
intolerant of Muslim Arab gays and lesbians: partly for being Arab Muslims and partly for being
homosexual.

In 1997, Faisal Alam, a Pakistani-American Muslim founded an organization, called Al-
Fatiha, to support LGBTQ Muslims “in reconciling their sexual or gender identity with
Islam.” The mission statement of the organization indicates its main goal of encouraging readers
and members to accept that Islamic values include tolerance and peace, even to those ostracized
by cultural constructions that confine identity and sexuality. It reads: “Al-Fatiha promotes the
Islamic notions of social justice, peace, and tolerance through its work, to bring all closer to a
world that is free from injustice, prejudice, and discrimination” (Arondekar 241). The existence
of this organization as a liberal Islamic organization is both refreshing and problematic. It is
refreshing to see this liberal, unconventional version of Islam represented openly in America in
contrast to the typical media image of fundamental extremism and violence because it
encourages tolerance and some forms of assimilation while still maintaining some traditions.
However, it is also problematic because the organization seems to depict itself as a “better” kind
of Islam, thus positioning itself as “truth” in opposition to traditional Islam. By doing so, this
organization gains Western acceptance because they are contributing in small parts to the
demonization of the Muslim community at large. This conflict is detrimental to the exchanges
made between Arab Muslim gays/lesbians and others in their own communities; heterosexual
Muslims resent the implication that traditional Islam is not good enough. The resentment then
causes a rift between the very communities that should be working together for the betterment of
their members, and this situation may cause members of the Arab Muslim community (on both
sides) to alter how they represent themselves in general and in different situations or in different
company.

Ultimately, the cases of violence against women in the Arab Muslim world far outnumber
those against men, gay or straight. Lesbianism is often considered a direct rejection of men, or a
specific man or husband, which, to the man, is typically more personally insulting than just
claiming homosexual orientation. Lesbians are subject to violence when their dedication to men
comes into question. In his article entitled “Gender boundaries and Sexual Categories in the Arab
World,” As’ad AbuKhalil asserts “violence against homosexuals, which is still common in
Western societies, is quite rare among the Arabs, while violence against women remains a universal phenomenon.” Additionally, he claims, “Contemporary Islamic attitudes recognize the sexual desires of men while women’s sexuality is now ignored, assumed to be nonexistent” (10). This attitude is also evident in the research available today. The bulk of articles dealing with homosexuality in the Arab World or in Arab communities focus on gay men and the interactions of men as sexual beings in Arab public spaces. This is clearly related to the freedoms men have in patriarchal Arab societies and in Arab nations where men also have more secular and legal power within the countries’ hierarchies. Research into the lives of Arab women is necessary to shed light on their struggles to achieve quality existence in the home. Violence against young Arab women who resist traditional identities is unacceptable though it is common, and Arab American women's sexuality should not be ignored within or outside of their communities. Surely, Arab women who have open lesbian relationships face more social discrimination than Arab heterosexual women who resist in other ways. Regardless of the level of social discrimination, we need more research on violence against all Arab women, including Arab lesbians.

Conclusion: Patterns and Changes in the Making

It is clear that as members of a close community, Arabs are very conscious of their familial identity. Unlike the autonomy and independence valued in a typical American upbringing, Arab families place more emphasis on the group identity. Therefore, each member of a typical Arab Muslim family, even in America, has a pre-determined role to fill. These roles are believed to strengthen the collective whole. Any woman, who chooses to create her own path, without receiving the blessing of her father or brothers, is taking a huge risk. Thus, young women in this community are especially aware of their actions both in public and private
settings. All of the participants in this research share a similar moral code and similar burdens. They view these restrictions as an obligation to family life. Despite expressing discomfort in some of their situations, they do not contradict the way of life that their parents have established for them, at least not in a public forum. All four of the participants mentioned not wanting to disappoint their parents or extended family. All four of the participants mentioned that they hid some of their thoughts, actions, and desires from the people around them. The fact that they hide parts of who they are could be viewed as a kind of deceit or as a survival method. Laughter also seems to be a coping method. All of the participants made jokes or laughed about their circumstances. Three out of four of the participants prefaced some of their stories with a statement similar to these: “I know this is bad, but...” or “I don’t like this, but...” The potential of appearing to be a “bad girl” is worse, in many cases, than actually hiding or changing parts of who they are. The participants in this study would rather be unhappy than risk making others unhappy with them. They would rather face the consequences of leaving the group than stay and face the consequences of a family or community that is unhappy with them.

In their discussions about their family lives, social lives, and gender roles in Arab Muslim families, all of the participants documented in this study used the word “respect” in some way. It is clear that they are all consciously trying to please their family and the elders around them, sometimes even more than themselves. Hard work and education are not just important to these young women, they are important for the sake of the family. Similarly, modesty, beauty, sobriety, religion, honor, marriage are important to the women mostly because they are important to the family as a whole. All of the participants in this study stated that this closeness is detrimental at times. Patriarchal values affect the everyday lives of men and women in Arab culture. As mentioned earlier, gendered roles can seriously impact the ways an Arab American
woman chooses to express herself. Gender roles in the typical Arab American family contribute to the unfair surveillance of young Arab women “for their protection.” Men are considered providers and women are considered nurturers, which can limit the young ladies in many ways. Yet, all of the participants in this study seem to think it is worth the pain in order to have so much support.

Even so, all of the participants have noticed small gradual changes in the general patterns discussed above. Maya said, “An Arab Muslim woman should dress modestly. That is the best word to describe it, but throughout the generations and years, Muslim Americans have dressed less and less Muslim. They are becoming more Americanized.” Some of the participants want to create some gradual changes themselves. Rita said, “If I have children, I would raise them exactly how my parents raised me. I think they did a good job. But I would encourage them to be more open. I would try to be their friend while maintaining the parent role.” Surely, the fact that she said, “If I have children” reflects a shift in the attitude towards this “duty.” Additionally, the second part of her statement suggests that she has noticed some flaws in the parenting around her, and she wants to make alterations to help her children feel more secure. Some of the participants want some serious changes to occur in their households. Farah expressed hope for the future, saying, “I honestly don’t know what I will do differently when I have children. I just hope that my [future] husband will be more open minded than my father is at the moment.” Similarly, Maya declared, “When I have children, my first rule will be ‘no yelling in the house’ and my children will be allowed to go to prom – not just the boys!” Though it may seem like a trivial wish for her children, going to prom is a major shift in the attitude about freedom for young ladies in this culture. Additionally, it is a major shift for gender equality in the household just to allow similar activities for both genders of children. Farah summed it up well when she
said that overall, “there are a lot of things expected [of women] in this culture. It is expected that a female should dress decently, talk appropriately, respect herself and her family and follow the teachings of Islam. This is a lot.” She is right. This is a loaded list of duties for a “docile” young woman to fulfill. The next chapter will discuss how some of these social concerns and gender issues overlap into Arab American women’s experiences in school, in technological spaces, and in the workplace.
CHAPTER IV: DIGITAL & PUBLIC EXPRESSIONS OF THE ARAB AMERICAN SELF

Introduction

In many ways, the restrictions that young Arab Muslim American women experience today are similar to those of female rhetoricians in the nineteenth century. In *Appropriate[ding] Dress: Women’s Rhetorical Style in Nineteenth-Century America*, Carol Mattingly argues that female rhetoricians were historically at a disadvantage for two reasons. First, they faced “strict notions of propriety that assigned women to the private and men to the public” (13). With men dominating the public sphere, women were not able to express themselves as easily as their male counterparts. Second, women in the nineteenth century were faced with a series of social obligations that functioned simultaneously as diversions from education and rhetoric, including, but not limited to: their dresses, social balls, and various feminine ideals that restricted voice and movement. Similarly, as discussed in detail in chapter three, young Arab Muslim women face these same two obstacles. First, they are encouraged to remain passive members of their families. They have strict gender roles to follow, and when they seem to be acting against what is deemed to be appropriate behavior, they face negative consequences. Second, they have strict social obligations that may also distract them from their educations. They feel daily pressure to remain chaste, dress modestly, lower their voices and their gaze, clean the house, get married, and have children. Like female rhetoricians in the nineteenth century, however, many Arab Muslim American women are finding ways to break away from patriarchy and social or familial pressures through American communities in the workplace and on college campuses.

Gloria Anzaldúa, in *Borderlands/ la Frontera*, and Helene Cixous, in “The Laugh of the Medusa,” argue that language can be used to change the self, the world, and the way each have been perceived historically, in social, cultural, and political traditions. They demand that
scholars, especially women, write about, rewrite, and resist the oppressive structures of patriarchy and white privilege by changing common perceptions about women, feminism, linguistics, culture, sexuality, privilege, superiority and identity. Both Anzaldúa and Cixous use their personal experiences as knowledge and endorse the idea that real dialogue is missing in the traditions of academe before them. They suggest that writing is a persuasive and creative power that can enable marginalized groups and empower them through the use of language and communication. Language can cause change in individuals, communities, cultures, and nations by giving a voice to the marginalized (who remain unheard or barely heard) both inside and outside of academe. Clearly, oral history and life history narratives have been successful tools for feminist scholars.

In fact, part of Anzaldúa’s academic success involves her ability to put into action the theories proposed by Cixous: Anzaldúa negotiates boundaries and participates both inside and outside of academic traditions. She also analyzes language and analyzes how people in power use it to construct the world and its norms, and how marginalized people can use language to reverse the negative effects of that power that limits them. Students who can discover the complexities of their identity and achieve some level of understanding about language-use, awareness of the body, the negotiation of spaces, and the switching, mixing, and re-use of various parts of their identity throughout their lives can be empowered to enforce and encourage changes in American society. This should be a common goal for teachers of writing.

Additionally, in “The Laugh of the Medusa,” Cixous argues "writing is precisely the very possibility of change, the space that can serve as a springboard for subversive thought, the precursory movement of a transformation of social and cultural structures" (1526). This
possibility is precisely why writing courses are the ideal place for discussions about identity and how it shapes our successes and hardships as members of specific ethnic groups.

In Cynthia Selfe and Gail Hawisher’s *Literate Lives in the Information Age*, the authors discuss how various technologies impact the literacy practices of twenty participants. They explain: “because students from different cultures, races, and backgrounds bring different literacies and different experiences with literacy to the classroom, focusing so single-mindedly on only one privileged form of literacy encourages a continuation of the literate/illiterate divide that perpetuates violence and functions in a conservative, reproductive fashion to favor existing class-based systems” (232). Although their experiences are not discussed directly by Anzaldúa, Cixous, Selfe, Hawisher, or many other scholars, Arab Muslim American women, such as the participants in this project, have experiences that negotiate complex boundaries, that respond to power structures, that use language to empower, that analyze or change others, that bring different literacies to the classroom, and that can enhance the current conversations about these issues in both Feminist studies and Composition studies.

In this chapter, I discuss how Arab Muslim American women often lead a kind of double life in which their identity at work or at school differs greatly from the home identity that was discussed in chapter three. Often, Arab Muslim American women maintain strong, independent, public, digital identities as well. These levels of expression often overlap with both positive and negative repercussions. This chapter focuses on how Arab American women use the Internet to change the ways the world sees them. The participants in this study, Maya, Rita, Rose, and Farah, detail how they carefully navigate their professional identities and public expressions of themselves as Arab Muslim American women and students. This chapter also discusses typical experiences with internet-use in the Arab world, experiences with racism in American schools,
and use of cyberspace for social activism, all of which impact the choices these women make about their public identities. This discussion connects to five out of six of my original research questions because it evokes thoughts about: challenging traditional roles for Arab women, disrupting the patriarchal expectations of Arab womanhood, expressing personal and political desire in America, using virtual spaces to create an identity that is simultaneously Arab, Muslim, and American, and honing rhetorical tools for future use.

Technology

In her introduction to “Making Online Spaces More Native to American Indians: A Digital Diversity Recommendation,” Angela Haas argues that “Although popular opinion and news report writing dictates that the digital divide is narrowing, this claim is difficult to substantiate when some groups of people (and their access to the Internet) are rarely studied—and the studies that do exist are outdated.” While she is referring directly to the lack of research on Native American groups, there is a comparable lack of research on Arab Americans. She continues to illustrate how some surveys of online pursuits are inconclusive due to the absence of significant populations in their discussions. Other reports, she says, “exclude mention of American Indians altogether.” She cites the Bush administration’s first study of American Internet use, *A Nation Online: How Americans Are Expanding Their Use of the Internet*, conducted by the National Telecommunications and Information Administrations (NTIA) as a source that should include American Indians. Interestingly, Arab Americans are also never mentioned in the study, though it is unclear if they are included in the data as “Whites.” Haas concludes, “this data exclusion results in a failure to provide a current measurement of information technology deployment progress among American Indian communities, one of America’s most underserved demographic groups.” The results are the same for Arab
It is typical in the context of education for technology to be understood as varieties of hardware, software, and internet connections, even if there are many other varieties of communication technology that contribute greatly to students’ knowledge, including the printing press, mobile phones, the radio, and satellite television to name a few. In a similar construction, perhaps one that is misleading, the term “digital divide” traditionally refers to the gap between those with efficient, reliable access to the Internet and those without it. After 1990, this term was used by many people (such as President Clinton and Vice President Gore) in the context of education, usually referring to the need to help poor, rural, and/or minority students, who did not own a computer, gain “access.” In *Technology and Literacy in the Twenty-First Century: The Importance of Paying Attention*, Cynthia Selfe argues that educators invested in literacy have a responsibility to be aware of the gap between students with technological access and students without it and, she argues, they have a responsibility to work toward more equal access to technology and education. She asserts, “Indeed, in the American school system as a whole, and in the culture that this system reflects, computers continue to be distributed differently along the related axes of race and socioeconomic status, and this distribution contributes to ongoing patterns of racism and to the continuation of poverty” (6). Her book makes it clear that many political and ideological forces such as the government and capitalism shape literacy. Today, some composition teachers argue that there are no college students in America who lack access to technology. This façade is true when we define technology as “computers and internet” and when we define access as “the ability to sit in front of a computer.” Yes, no college student in America need search further than his or her local public library to find a free computer to sit at; however, when we consider the many forms of “access” that actually allow students to use
equipment, such as the computer, to their educational advantage, such conviction is premature. Selfe argues that it is dangerous to define “technology” as a tool and “technological literacy” as just familiarity with that tool. The “digital divide” is also not that easy to define because of complex relationships between race, class, gender, education, and privilege.

There have been some published texts in the field of Composition that examine the intersections of race, class, and technology, especially those suggesting ways to help African American, Asian American, Native American, and Latino/Latina students achieve additional access and improved access to various technologies. For example, Haas’s works discuss Native Americans. Adam Banks discusses the unique experiences of African Americans’ “cut break mix scratch bootleg” (9) style in his book *Digital Griots: African American Rhetoric in a Multimedia Age*, where he discusses how contemporary DJs function as traditional Griots, storytelling, interpreting, relaying oral histories, mediating problems, and shaping the community identity (25). In “Bridging the Racial Divide on the Internet,” published in *Science*, Donna Hoffman and Thomas Novak discussed many differences between the technological experiences of African American students and their white counterparts. In *Generaciones’ Narratives*, John Scenter-Zapico helps show readers “the rise of technological literacies across generations and within the marginalized population on the U.S.-Mexico border,” by allowing the participants in the study to “argue their own cases for the validity and value inherent in [their] paths through story-based responses and video interviews.” Gail Hawisher, Cynthia Selfe, and Patrick Berry take this discussion of digital literacy across national borders when they study the “lifeworlds of students who inhabit transnational educational contexts” in *Transnational Literate Lives in Digital Times*. This work focuses on the lives of non-U.S. citizens who reside in the U.S. and travel globally and frequently for school, conferences, or other educational opportunities. The digital
communication technologies such as instant messaging, text messaging, Skype, enhance and enable them to maintain a transnational network of family and friends. Their transnational identity is the subject of this book and the authors write, “When we met with students in the study, we asked them to tell us stories about their lives; about the ways in which, and the circumstances under which, they learned to use digital communication technologies, especially computers; about their digital literacy experiences; and about their uses of digital communication technologies.” In addition to providing a deep cultural understanding of the circumstances of these participants’ lives, this work is also presented as a multimodal digital text, with audio files, moving images, still images, links, video clips of literacy narratives, writing process presentations, and interviews. Ultimately, Hawisher, Selfe and Berry say that “human agents both shape and are shaped by the cultural, educational, economic, and social contexts they inhabit,” and this digital work is a rich and fruitful project for Composition studies with coauthors from Bosnia, South Korea, Nigeria, Australia, China and more; however, there are no voices from the Arab world.

In fact, I have been unable to find any published academic texts that treat the access issues of Arab Americans in secondary or post-secondary education; Arab Americans are rarely, if ever, even mentioned in composition texts that discuss issues of technological access, issues of the “digital divide,” and issues of race in virtual worlds. In yet another important academic conversation, the Arab and Arab American population of this country is an invisible minority, when in reality, the Arab and Muslim cultural experiences, in America and abroad, contribute harsh criticisms about using certain digital communication technologies as educational and/or social networking tools. The freedoms men are easily able to access by assimilation in the new land are much harder for women to achieve while remaining active, reputable, members of the
Arab and/or Muslim communities because they are often hesitant to develop their understandings of online tools for the sake of maintaining an untarnished reputation; however, due to their cultural experiences with technology in developing Arab countries such as Lebanon, even the men still often cannot grasp the use of certain technologies as educational tools, often hindering their success in a technology-rich environment as well. Consequently, this issue of access is an important area of study for teachers of English who often incorporate these tools into their courses.

The following two sections of this chapter will outline the kinds of experiences with technology that are typical in the Arab World. Times are certainly changing here and abroad. Each day, technological advancements change the digital and physical Internet spaces that we are discussing. However, it is clear that Arab American and Muslim American women use technology to express their thoughts far more freely than women in the Arab world.

Arabs and Their Access to Technology

In Stuart Selber’s *Multiliteracies in the Digital Age*, he argues that computer literacy is more than hardware and tools, workshops and manuals. To do this, he establishes three areas of digital literacy: functional, critical, and rhetorical literacy. Selber defines functional literacy as the tools students need to use technology effectively (36). Students and teachers can both practice critical literacy, according to Selber, by questioning the political and social uses and abuses of technologies. Selber says students should be asking why and how digital tools such as websites and computer labs have been set up to control them and to affect who they become. He then discusses how the digital divide has grown, though he is “not suggesting that this troubling state of affairs has been brought about solely by the politics of design cultures, only that these politics are implicated with crucial issues of access, a fact that can help students focus their
critical analyses of computing infrastructures” (108). Selber asks faculty members to help students realize rhetorical literacy by engaging students in social and cultural changes. When students are asked to blog, vlog, or create a wiki about social issues, they are realizing different multimodal types of writing.

In *Race, Rhetoric, and Technology: Searching for Higher Ground*, Adam Banks identifies the ways in which African Americans face limitations that restrict meaningful access to seemingly beneficial technological systems. Furthermore, Banks argues that the “digital divide” is a “rhetorical problem” (66), in which “material access,” for African Americans, is only the beginning (41). Even if this “material access” were to magically appear, Banks says “meaningful access” would still be difficult to achieve, especially for African Americans. Banks demonstrates that for African Americans to achieve meaningful uses of technology, they must additionally achieve “functional, experiential, critical, [and] transformative access” to technology (40-5). Banks asserts we must ask of our technologies the same questions that we have been asking about race and racism for years. Mainly, he promotes considering how African Americans, who are systematically excluded in many areas of education, can use technology, historical examples, and meaningful access to help themselves and their communities achieve positive changes today. In doing so, Banks outlines the many different ways to view access, which is also rather helpful when examining the limitations faced by Arabs and Arab-Americans in the classroom. According to Banks, ultimately technology should be used to create a theoretically and rhetorically transformative space for causing positive social and political changes. To achieve this outcome, Banks offers some new definitions of “access” to technology and he outlines these definitions in Chapter two, “Oakland, the Word, and the Divide: How We All Missed the Moment,” when he states that the “instruments people use to extend their power
and comfort” are not the only kinds of technology. He says that technology also includes “the systems of knowledge [that] we must acquire [in order] to use any particular tool and [technology also includes] the networks of information, [and the] economic and power relations that enable that tool’s use” (40). Thus, technological access is much more than accessing goods for systematic use in a classroom; access is complicated and multifaceted and highly based on the students’ life experiences, including their culture and religion.

Banks defines “material” access as simply being near typical instruments of technology and having the physical ability to use them. He says “functional” access is having the skills to use them. “Experiential” access is the actual need to use these tools in the real world. “Critical” access is about understanding and questioning the benefits and limitations of technology in a classroom/ in life and being able to question and critique its uses and misuses. And finally, Banks defines “transformative” access as when students use these tools to create an environment of inclusion for marginalized groups and dialogue with each other as equals. Very few Arab American students are familiar with these different forms of access and very few would ever be rewarded by their parents or elder community members for achieving any or all of these types of technological access.

A Man’s World: Getting the Grade “Back Home”

In *Color Conscious*, K. Anthony Appiah argues that ethnic identities (which include religious identities, history, geography, and language) are primarily transmitted as culture in mass media, in school and in college; as such, the schools and universities in Arab countries are partly responsible for the outlook their students have about education and technology. Similarly, the lifestyle in Arab countries contributes to the lack of material, functional, and experiential access to computers and other technologies. According to Appu Kuttan and Laurence Peters in
their book, *From Digital Divide to Digital Opportunity*:

The Middle East is one of the most unwired parts of the world. There are only 1.9 million Internet users in the Arab world, which translates into a 0.7 percent Internet penetration rate (internet users divided by the total population of the country). In contrast, Israel has 1 million Internet users, which translates to a 15.9 percent Internet penetration rate. Moreover, there are only 4.8 computers for every 100 people in the Arab world as opposed to 47 computers for every 100 Israelis […]

Within Arab nations, the tried-and-true digital divide factors of education, age, and gender determine who has Internet access and who does not.

- More than 58.5 percent of Arab Internet users have an undergraduate university degree and 14.5 percent have a graduate degree.
- Seventy percent of Arab Internet users are between the ages of twenty-one and thirty-five, compared to only 4.5 percent over the age of forty.
- Only 6 percent of Arab Internet users are female. (117-119)

These statistics confirm what any traveler to Beirut can observe. In Lebanon, using the internet for homework is not nearly as common as it is in America. There is absolutely no place for Facebook, Second Life, Google groups, blogging, vlogging, or even Blackboard, in a university classroom in Lebanon. Most Lebanese, even those in Beirut (where there are over 30 universities), do not know what “blogging” is. Almost anyone who has an email address uses Hotmail or Yahoo. It is unheard of to be required to set up an email account at your university. College students cannot access their schedules online: not to make them, not to view them, or to change them; in fact, one would be lucky to find a complete and updated directory listing for all the faculty members at some Lebanese universities. University websites are often created and
abandoned as “unused and unneeded” and specific departments rarely have their own websites. In Lebanon, the average citizen does not communicate through email on a daily basis at work or school. Huge, extended families often live together in one building, which makes it unnecessary to post pictures on Instagram and Facebook. In fact, Facebook is a place for meeting people; and to many Lebanese, girls who want to meet people can only have immoral intentions. There are 4.64 computers available for every 100 people in Lebanon and the internet penetration rate is 6.3%, which is very low compared to America’s internet penetration rate of 44.4% (Kuttan 118). In this climate, it is hard for both men and women to consider the World Wide Web a useful educational tool.

Often times a double standard exists between Arab men and women when it comes to technology. The world of technology is a man's world, and women who venture to "that side" are viewed as "bad girls" at best. In Lebanon, where internet is scarce and hardly present in the homes of the majority (typically lower class) population, female college students are forced to visit small "internet cafes" where they can hurriedly type their paper, print their research, or chat with a distant relative, and then go back home before their reputation is too tarnished. Perhaps this sounds extreme; in some Arab countries, there are people who view technological access positively for both men and women. As technology becomes more accessible to the new generations in the big cities, such as Beirut, more and more women are able to bring the internet into their homes. The Internet cafes, however, remain a place solely for men, especially after eight o’clock in the evening. Those men, who stay up into the wee hours of the morning, are hardly researching or typing homework, and so they perpetuate stereotypes that what is online is bad and that women can’t possibly have a good reason to be using a computer.

Lebanese men often justify their double standards with arguments such as: a woman who
goes searching for companionship online could only have serious relationship problems in "the real world." And: “she must not be getting everything she needs from her husband.” Often times, when these men and women leave the high mountains for the big city, or leave Lebanon to come to America, they bring these cultural ideas with them. When they, or their children, attend a university in America, they often have severely limited access in many ways. First, they may not have material access at home: no computer and no Internet. Second, they may not be familiar with technology. They are less likely than their American counterparts to have grown up with a computer in their home, so they are disadvantaged at an early stage in their careers. Oftentimes, when they first arrive in America, they may need to learn how to drive, how to use a laptop, and how to use other common American technologies such as automatic washers and dryers, automated answering machines, and automated customer service systems. Third, their experiential access is limited. They have rarely seen the internet being used in the real world, hardly see their parents or siblings using it, and often do not think it is necessary for success in life, in their education, or in their career. They may not have ever had to type a homework assignment, may not have a resume, and may have never had to use a debit card or write a check. To them, Internet technology is mainly a mode of communication and entertainment and not even a necessary one. Fourth, if students do not see the benefits of technology and the limitations that it imposes on learning, they have not achieved critical access as Bank defines it. And lastly, Arabs and Arab Americans, who desperately need to work toward positively changing the way they are viewed in America in a post 9/11 world, cannot achieve transformative access if they are hiding behind ancient binary oppositions that make technology into an immoral foreign entity. Without embracing technology and understanding its many uses, Arabs and Arab Americans cannot and do not achieve great positive social change.
Responding to this Atmosphere

As immigrants become more “Americanized,” as they have children in America, and as they develop new attitudes about the Internet, more and more Arab Americans get closer to achieving “transformative access” as Banks describes it. This is clear, even in the micro-test-group of four women interviewed for this study. Rita spent more time communicating with people outside of the U.S. using Facebook but didn’t recognize it as a productive method for expression because of its non-traditional mode of delivery. She also had a harder time recognizing Facebook as an educational tool because of her history of learning in Lebanon and probably because of her exposure to the traditional Arab dislike for the Internet and for Facebook as a communication tool. All of their discussions indicate that they don’t even realize just how different their relationships with technology are from their counterparts in the Arab World. Some of these ladies don’t realize how much Facebook helps them voice their thoughts and cope with their daily hardships. In fact, they act like they don’t need technology or use it much on a daily basis. For example, Rita said in an interview, “I haven’t been very active on the internet to express myself. I did publish some notes on Facebook long time ago, but I stopped using it. Now, I mostly use it to communicate with others, especially family who are far away.” Clearly, the definition of “expression” varies for different people. Here, Rita recognizes some “notes” she wrote long ago as a type of self-expression, but she says she stopped using this feature of Facebook in favor of others, such as private messaging and sharing pictures with family. Although she says she hasn’t “been very active,” communicating with family using Facebook is an important method of expression. Overall, this nonchalant attitude toward technology is one they have developed as a direct response to the people around them who frown upon Internet usage by women or who don’t understand technology as a productive tool for learning. After
much discussion, Rita finally allowed that dealing with a misunderstanding could be done in an online space. She said, “Usually, when I am upset, I am unable to express myself in a healthy way. That is why I usually wait until I calm down and the other person has calmed down and then address the issue. Many times misunderstandings happen between people and you just have to explain yourself and hope that the other person would put themselves in your shoes and try to understand...maybe this kind of conversation could happen online, but it hasn’t for me so far.” Even in this allowance, she seems resistant to the idea.

Contrastingly, Maya said she often used Facebook as a place to express herself because “I can never express my ideas to anyone.” Interestingly, she identified the same features of Facebook as Rita for her sharing practices. She said, “Facebook is the only way I can express myself and talk with all of my friends that I am not allowed to talk with in person. I love Facebook but I still have to be careful about what I put up there because of the Arab friends I have.” It is very possible that these two women, as individuals, just have different ideas about how Facebook can function as a tool for self expression; however, it is more likely that Maya’s openness to using Facebook is related to her life experiences as an Arab American who was born and raised in the U.S. Rita’s resistance to using Facebook as an acceptable place for self expression is related to her upbringing in Lebanon, in an Arab Muslim community, and in Lebanese secondary schools.

Women in the Workplace

A webpage for the PBS documentary entitled Caught in the Crossfire gives many useful statistics about Arab Americans. Here are some of the useful statistics on the “factsheet”:

Approximately 65 percent of Arab American adults are in the labor force; 5.9 percent are unemployed, which is about the same rate of unemployment in the rest of the country.
Though Arab Americans work in all occupations, nearly 73 percent of these working adults are employed in managerial, professional, technical, sales or administrative fields. At the local level, Arab Americans are most likely to be executives in Washington, D.C. and Anaheim, California; salespeople in Cleveland and manufacturing workers in Detroit. Arab American incomes are 22 percent higher than the U.S. national average.

Interestingly, none of the statistics even measure the active female members of the workforce. This is probably because of what Rania Zabaneh discusses in her article entitled, “Stretching Boundaries: Arab Women Head to Work in the U.S.” in *The New York Pulse*. She explains, “The notion of women working is still not widely supported in many Arab communities because of religious, cultural and societal customs and beliefs, among other factors.” However, she continues, “some Arab women with higher levels of education view work as a way to adapt to a different culture [and] others see it as a response to financial necessity.” Undoubtedly, the participants in this research supported both of these statements when discussing the reasons the women in their families work.

Rita said, “I think working outside the home is beneficial. After 18 should be fine. Working before that could also be good, but of course it depends on the job. Working helps in building one’s personality and it teaches responsibility. How long? I don’t have restrictions. As long as she thinks it is necessary. Many young ladies in Lebanon are even working now to help out their families financially. It is a group effort.” Farah supported this statement when she said, “My whole life my mom was at home with us. Her working was out of the question until my family struggled and she had to.” Maya said how much or how early a woman works outside of the home has everything to do with the parents and mostly the husband/father. She observed, “Personally, my father does not care if his daughters work, but usually men in the Muslim
environment do not allow their wives to work outside of the home. A personal experience is my mother. She has been offered many job opportunities, but my father made her turn down every opportunity. But she used to work at our family restaurant. That was okay for him so he could have a break.” According to Rose, “Working is not considered important for women. It is more like... if the man says the lady can work then she will work, if he says ‘no’ and she wants to keep a peaceful home then she will nod her head and stay home.” It seems that the attitudes about women in the workforce differ in each family. The only common theme is financial need. As the young ladies got older (and presumably more expensive), their parents allowed them to work in order to afford things like cell phones and cars.

Rita also said that both genders should “definitely” be treated equally inside and outside of the workplace. She acknowledged that this is a problem for women everywhere; however, she did not illustrate this issue with details from her life. The other three women were more resistant to feminist ideas about equality. Farah even said, “I want to believe in equality, but I just don’t see it much in my life, so what good is it for me to think about it?” She explained that many Arab American women, even those who hold a college degree, often end up working in unskilled positions as housekeepers, cashiers, or babysitters. “These jobs don’t pay wages equal to men. This is why I need my education,” she said. On the one hand, these jobs are not what most women dream of doing when they graduate from university. On the other hand, the fact that women can work at all, even doing these jobs, is a freedom that they wouldn’t have in the Arab world. In her article, Zabaneh further notes, “Women who do not acquire university degrees often do not work in Egypt,” for example. It is considered a disgrace for a woman to be a cashier. Farah’s attitude about not being a cashier is an American one when compared to non-working women in the Arab world. Clearly, progress has been made, even if the wages are unequal. This
is precisely why it does do us “good to think about equality...” and talk about it... and blog about it... and fight with our fathers about it.

School Experiences

The education system in America has played a significant role in assimilating immigrants and refugees. At times, historically and recently, we have implemented adult education courses titled “Americanization” or something similar, in which immigrants were taught to read, to write, and to be “Americanized.” Children from foreign countries are often tutored so they can “catch up” to their grade level. However, while we realize that education changes the lives of immigrants, we may not address the fact that immigrants change the face of education as well. Far too few scholarly projects can be found that analyze the role that immigrants have had on the American education system, on pedagogies employed by teachers of writing, and on ways that immigrants have affected our college curricula. Even fewer address themes of ethnicity at the collegiate level or analyze the role of sensitivities to ethnic difference in the educational careers of members of the Arab American population.

In *The Arab Americans*, Kayyali argues that “education is seen as a means of upward mobility and precursor for professional achievement that is highly valued in the Arab American community” (70); therefore, many Arab American families are strict about grades, schoolwork, and student success. Because Rita studied in Lebanon since the age of 3, her experiences abroad shaped the student she is today in many ways. Her study habits and class performance in an American college are the direct result of her secondary education in Lebanon. She describes the education system in Lebanon as far more difficult and competitive than her experience in America has been so far. She said:

The experience was really good…I was always the first in my class… I had to move to a
school that was strictly for girls, not because of religious reasons, but because it was the only available school in our neighborhood that had [more challenging] classes. It was hard for us to go to distant schools because of the war. I didn't like that school in the beginning… then I became the head of the Cultural Committee… the first thing that you learn at schools in the Arab countries (not all schools, only those that are respectable) is that the teacher is to be revered and respected. The relation with professors is not like the one here. So, here, I'm a little bit inhibited in openly talking with professors about things that are not related to the course we are taking, for example. Another thing, you cannot leave the classroom any time you want in the Arab countries. You cannot eat in the classroom. You cannot sleep in the classroom. You cannot sit with your legs loose or with your feet facing the professor. This is rude. Here, there are no such restrictions. I was shocked to see students behave in that way and to see that professors do not mind. I consider it rude and impolite. In the Lebanese Uni, you cannot take a passing grade unless you are really really skilled in what you write. The professor will not tell you: ‘You are doing a good job!’ just to encourage you, as professors here do. Here, it is very easy to have things, most of the times.

It is clear that Rita holds strong views about the differences in the education systems in America and in Lebanon and that her experiences abroad have affected her opinions in classes in America. Her experiences seem to validate the argument made by Kayyali that Arab Americans highly value education as a means for social advancement. This could be why the participants in this study discussed having many behavioral restrictions lifted in the name of education. For example, Rose said she was never allowed to be out at night alone until college courses required her to study late into the night and at the library or in groups for collaborative projects. She also
said she quickly started to use this reason to get even more freedoms when she started driving at age 18. She said, “I would tell my parents I was going to the library to study for Organic Chemistry and I would go shopping or out to lunch with friends before or after I went to the library. It just gave me so much freedom without having to make my parents worry needlessly about my actions. I guess I told white lies.”

Maya said education is one of the biggest differences between the old world Arabs and the new world Arabs. She said that males in Arab/Muslim culture “had to be the head of the house and it seems like whoever owns the most stuff is the best, I believe. It’s different for Arab Americans because for us it is all about education if we were born here.” She was quick to name many benefits of an American public school education. She noted, “One of the best parts for me is having teachers and people that I can talk to about parts I am unhappy with in life. I never talked with other students or friends because if me talking to them resulted in negativity towards me I would not want that, but teachers always seemed to be safe and understanding.”

Farah said, “being part of an Arab family is completely different than being in an American family. And sometimes walking into an American household, I don’t feel comfortable... At school, it’s different. I feel comfortable to be myself more than [at] my own house even. I feel most American and free at school where no one is looking.” Several important observations can be made from these statements. First, Farah considers herself Arab American when identifying herself in the first interviews conducted for this study, but when discussing differences between households, she only identifies those that are ‘Arab’ homes and those that are ‘American’ homes. Second, she identifies herself as living in an ‘Arab’ household. This binary is discussed by most of the participants in this study and all of them speak of themselves as members of the ‘Arab’ side of this dichotomy even though they could identify themselves as a
third and all together different group that is both ‘Arab’ and ‘American.’ Third, whenever the
collection is shifted to school, college, or work, all of the participants in this study discuss
freedom, equality, and comfortable “American” spaces. Lasly, Farah states that she feels more
comfortable to be herself when no one is looking. She feels watched at home, but not at school.
This is an important point that I return to later in this chapter.

Contrary to the freedoms she felt at the university, Farah said she had no choices about
the college she would attend. She said, “I always knew, since I was 10, I was going to attend the
University of Toledo. I never had any other option. If I attended a college or university away
from home, people would look at me as bad – I am a Muslim girl after all. But once I got there, it
wasn’t so bad because so many other Muslim girls in Toledo had the same rule, so we found
each other.” She threw her head back and chuckled as if to imply mischief. Clearly, Farah’s
family would not risk her reputation as a Muslim girl in order to move away for college. In her
family, education is important enough to send their daughters to the local university, but not
enough to allow their daughters to leave their homes at age eighteen to pursue a degree
somewhere else in America. In Rita’s family, the experience of studying in America was worth
the risk, and in the name of an American education, she left her family to pursue her graduate
education in the Midwest. There are many potential reasons for this difference between the two
families. First, at the time that she moved away from home, Rita was older than all three of the
other participants when they went off to college at the University of Toledo. Second, Rita’s
family may have trusted her more. Third, acquiring an American education instead of a Lebanese
diploma may have been the determining factor. No matter what the reason, ultimately, Rita said
her parents’ minds were eased by the fact that she would not be alone. She would be joining her
sister and brother-in-law in Toledo. This seemed to prevent her family from being completely
opposed to her desires. She said, “coming to the US was the biggest change for me. My goal was to study and to do something with my life. I accomplished the goal by working hard to do what I came here to do. Hard work can get a person through so many obstacles.”

Language Acquisition

In *Middle Eastern Lives in America*, Amir Marvasti and Karyn D. McKinney discuss the changes in the lives of the children of immigrants, who are more involved in American culture than their parents; they are generally more familiar with the English language, and they are more likely to pick up American dialects and accents of English than their older parents. Perhaps this difference is due to the way Arab parents stress to their children the importance of education, even those parents who may not have completed high school themselves. Regardless of this, most Arab American parents also stress the importance of speaking Arabic in the home. Kayyali contends that “While Arab Americans have assimilated linguistically in a significant way, the Arabic language is being maintained in Middle Eastern homes…” (15). She points to this and many other cultural commonalities between Arabs in America as evidence that while assimilation continues on some levels, teaching the Arabic language to newer generations is a tradition that is important to many new immigrants and to established Arab Americans. Perhaps a direct indication of their importance, the acts of teaching and learning the Arabic language were discussed by all of the participants in this study.

Rita is a native speaker of Arabic, but she has formally learned English since the age of three. Her parents did not speak English at home, but her older brother and sister did. She also understands French, but she does not speak it. She also studied Italian and Spanish for one year each. Rita’s language exposure before she came to the United States greatly influenced her education at the University of Toledo because it helped her to adapt quickly to such a new place,
and it facilitated her learning process. After twenty years of taking classes in multiple languages, she had to quickly adjust to having all her classes in English. In her interview, she affirmed, “My education in English has really helped me to be the person I am today. I am a responsible woman who is conscientious, reliable, and hard working and I think others see me this way.” She said more people should learn other languages. When asked in a later interview what she would change about Arab or Muslim Americans, she mentioned language again, saying, “Maybe try to teach them [Arabic]. I’ve noticed that many are unfamiliar with the language and many end up losing their connection with their original home country.” This statement seems to contradict her earlier description of her English language learning experiences as a largely positive part of her life. To this she replied, “We shouldn’t have to lose who we are to become better. We can learn a new language and still remember our old language and use it. In fact, bilingual students even do better academically. We need to exist in both worlds so the old is not forgotten.”

Maya said, “While I was growing up, in our household, my father would always yell at us when we spoke English in the house. It was always English at school and Arabic at home.” Farah had a similar experience. She said, “Growing up, my dad forced us to speak Arabic because he thought we spoke English all day at school. I actually had an Arabic friend at school and we thought it was cool to talk to each other in Arabic, but I still had to get yelled at sometimes when I used English with my sisters.” Rose had a very similar experience. She said, “when my dad is home, the language is Arabic; when he is not there, it is whatever we feel like speaking. I liked that my dad forced me to speak Arabic at home because that is why I am fluent today. I will do the same for my children. But it seemed drastic at the time. Now I understand.”

Religious Identities in the Classroom

Scholars in Composition and Rhetoric Studies have engaged in research and dialogue
with one another about issues of gender, race, sexuality, ethnicity, class, ability…etc; we care about these issues as a field, because they influence who we are, and what we do, say, think, and feel. Each of these aspects of identity influences how we react to social, political, and academic situations and is, therefore, “worthy” of research. However, religious identities further complicate student activity and writing, and there has been very little research in Composition and Rhetoric that discusses how students’ religious identities might be stifled in the writing classroom. Although religious practices may seem obviously cultural, in America, religious identities are rarely viewed as accepted forms of diversity that enhance student success. Rather, as a general rule, religious identities are for private conversations, which usually take place outside of class or not at all between teachers and students. The reality is that religious cultures can greatly influence student identity and can influence individuals in positive or negative ways in a classroom and in a larger social community. For Arab Muslim American women, the way they choose to negotiate the complexities of their multiple marginalized identities into interaction with other diverse students in a writing classroom can greatly affect their success and comfort level; yet there is no published research about this complex space in the composition classroom. In addition to further research on the complex multi-marginalized identity of Arab Muslim students, instructors of writing should maintain a broadened vision of both who they represent and who they serve in the classroom.

While Arab Americans do deal with many of the same prejudices that other ethnic and racial minorities face, Arab Muslims must also deal with unique difficulties in America because (1) Arabs are racially categorized by the American government as “Caucasian” even though they face discrimination based on a Semitic phenotype/appearance and based on a shared historical experience; (2) Americans of similar religious affiliations can find unity and commonality
despite differences in race, gender, class, ethnicity, or sexuality, but a huge portion of Arabs are alienated due to their affiliation with Islam which may or may not be overtly visible and which is rarely recognized as a “minority group” in America; and (3) Arab Muslims are the only marginalized group in America who are continuously forced to defend or mask their identity because they hold ties to Arab countries that are believed to be fundamentally wrong, ideologically evil, and undemocratic and less civilized because of religious differences. On the one hand, Arabs are almost completely ignored because they remain unrecognized racially as a historically underrepresented group; but on the other hand, religion and appearance are obvious differences that cause Arab Muslims to be discriminated against.

The issues concerning Muslim Arab Americans in America are unique and overlooked because Arabs are a smaller marginalized group than African Americans, Mexican Americans, or Asian Americans when considered a racial minority (which they are not considered legally). However, religiously, Muslims make up a much larger marginalized group than Arabs (when identified by race) in America. Muslims are the largest religious minority in America, but are not viewed as a collective cultural “minority” that are at a disadvantage when compared to the Judeo-Christian religious mainstream. Arab Muslims have been ostracized for years, but in post-9/11 America, Arab Muslims have been placed in an awkward position by the rhetorical strategies of U.S. politicians and of U.S. news broadcasts and American feature films.

The participants in this study had a lot to say about their treatment at school after 9/11. Farah explained, “when I was in grade school, after 9/11, everyone started calling me a terrorist and accusing ‘my people’ of killing all of the innocent victims. I was confused mostly. I was always seen as ‘the A-rab’ after that. I got judged by all the students. It was a rough time. We are terrorists. How am I a terrorist? I was born and raised here along with all my fellow classmates.”
She went on to say, “Americans became distant with Arab Muslims after 9/11.” Maya made some statements to support this when she discussed responses to her mother, who wears a veil. She said, “It was sad that people’s discrimination was so hard on women with a scarf. I saw it so many times in public with my mother.” Farah echoed similar sentiments: “I don’t really know much about foreign policy, but sometimes I talk to my dad about it. I would never talk to anyone outside of the family. I have never defended myself politically. I am scared to do that, but personally I try to defend myself always, just not in class.”

Careful attention to these issues in discussion about binary oppositions, stereotyping, media, cultural narratives, or many other typical discussion-provoking topics in a college writing class, can seriously reduce the effects of media images and the stereotypes that they cause and can seriously affect the way Americans act as citizens when their rights are threatened. Religion plays a role in many ethnic identities, and religious considerations should be incorporated into understanding the student life of students of Arab heritage. In the Arab American Encyclopedia, it is estimated that 50% of Arabs living in America are Muslim (Ameri 3) and in Covering Islam, Edward Said estimates “the world of Islam” to include “more than 800,000,000 people…millions of square miles of territory…dozens of societies, states, histories, geographies, [and] cultures,” mostly located in the Middle East (1). Hence, for generation after generation, Islam has played a major role in creating the cultures of Muslim and non-Muslim Arabs and Arab Americans, and it is worthy of some understanding by teachers of writing. Arabs who are Muslims are marginalized on two or more fronts in America and are rarely viewed in a positive light, which has caused great damage to our social structure as is exhibited by the hate crimes in Arab American and Muslim American communities that took place immediately following 9/11. While the terrorist attacks also incited some constructive conversation about the unfair actions of
specific American communities against other Americans and immigrants who appeared to fit in the newly consolidated racial category of Arab/Middle Eastern/Muslim, there has not been enough conversation to counter the deeply rooted impacts of news broadcasts, TV dramas, and American newspapers that continuously enforce a negative image of Arabs and of Islam.

*The Impact of Race and Identity on Education*

On all applications, Rita marks “Other” because she believes that race is not important on such forms and should not be considered or even known to a person who is evaluating applicants. She doesn’t believe that it is there for “statistical reasons” only because people often face repercussions when they make their race known. She thinks there is no reason that a student should be asked about race, religion, or ethnicity at the doctor’s office or anywhere on a university campus. In Lebanon (a country well-known for its sectarian political system), Rita has often faced discrimination due to her religious affiliation, so she is reluctant to discuss her identity on applications now. She believes it to be an invasion of her privacy.

While Rita does not believe her religious affiliation significantly influences her student life, she said that her ethnic identity does. Rita identified herself as an Arab Lebanese Muslim woman and had this to say about the influences and experiences that lend to her identity:

...being an Arab comes first to me. Many of the things related to the Arab history relate to me directly as a person. I am proud of the things that the Arabs have achieved in various fields...science, art, music, humanities...at certain periods in their history. I am a Lebanese woman. I was born in that beautiful country where I always yearn to be...I am part of that land. I worked in that land. Finally, having the Islamic beliefs engrained in me, with its humanitarian and ethical components, I cannot help but to identify myself with this philosophical, spiritual and religious ideology.
Rita’s personal understanding of her identity clearly plays an important role in her life. While she doesn’t believe her religion is a big part of her student life directly, she said:

Every single thing [about] me, all the experiences that I’ve had, all helped me succeed in my life and [in] the classroom. The fact that I don’t easily give up is the main thing I guess. The fact that I was born during war made me who I am today and helped me appreciate things and work for the things that I want. The fact that my parents are always encouraging me helps a lot. The kind of education that I have [from Lebanon] is another one of the reasons why I am here right now.

Rita is clearly proud of her ethnic identity and believes her success is directly related to that identity.

Maya said that her experience in an American high school was both good and bad, but most of the difficulties were due to racism. She said, “There are some advantages and disadvantages of being an Arab Muslim in high school and college here.” However, when asked to explain how so, she only described the disadvantages. She said, “Well, we look...let’s say, different [she makes quote marks with her fingers when she says the word “different”]. On 9/11, students told me ‘well, aren’t you going to celebrate?’ Many Americans are very stereotypical. No, I mean, they stereotype us. The more educated people are, the less the chances they will call me a terrorist.” She said in grade school, the stereotypes seemed like they didn’t end. She said: “When 9/11 happened, I was in grade school and ooooh how I got harassed. They said, ‘Hey, Osama is your uncle, isn’t he?’ and ‘Don’t blow me up, Maya’ They told me ‘go back to your own country’ but yet the Native Americans were the only original people on this land.”

Ultimately, all of the participants discussed various stresses they face in educational settings upon being identified as an Arab or Arab American.
At one point, Farah said, “I am a typical Arab girl: I am working on a degree, and keeping my house and reputation clean.” What Farah considers a “typical Arab girl” may actually be more typical for “Arab American girls” like her, instead of “Arab” girls. It is interesting to notice that Farah almost never makes this distinction when referring to herself in any of the interviews, even though she clearly referred to herself as “Arab Muslim American” when asked about her identity at the beginning of the first interview. Perhaps this means that she feels more Arab when she is interacting in American communities. This is a concept recognized by many people who have a hyphenated cultural or racial identity. Rose observed, “the hardest thing about my college education was the late night studying. It was frowned upon for an Arab girl and I was the oldest child so my parents didn’t know how to deal with it for a long time. They said they were worried about me, but I think they were worried about not being able to watch me closer while I was there.” Here, again, we see a young woman born and raised in America by Arab immigrants referring to herself as an “Arab girl” instead of an “Arab American.” This seems to be a pattern.

Most Middle Eastern immigrants come to America to escape difficult lives in their home country; due to this, some common cultural values for Middle Eastern immigrants included “motivation to succeed, industriousness, and independence” (Marvasti 7)—values which are still perpetuated in Arab American communities today. While Arabs do try to assimilate into American culture in many ways, “for some Middle Eastern Americans, it remains very important to pass on cultural traditions and language across generations […] Even though [Arab] families or social groups might not live close to one another, through social interactions, they maintain a sense of community…” (Marvasti 15). The participants in this study offered some evidence of
these social interactions. Farah said, “we all have a Facebook account! We say that we just keep in touch with our families overseas—which we do—but we use it for many other things too.” On the one hand, Farah explained, “my family always tells me that I ‘act too American.’ I believe that we should be more modern. I am not old fashioned.” However, she also said she tries not to get involved with American matters. She said:

I don’t ever write any of my political views in an online setting because I know it will grow into a larger issue and I do not want to cause problems. Arabs should not talk about politics or religion with their neighbors because Americans get offended because they say this is their country and they fight for their country. Mostly, Arabs talk to other Arabs or Muslims when they are unhappy. We all seem to stick together.

Maya agreed with this when she said, “I have never written online about politics, but Muslim Americans should be more involved in the community, be heard, create more organizations to make changes.”

One strong example of this move to be heard is the Facebook page entitled Arab Girl Keepin It Real. Figure 1 is a screen shot of the title page.
Although, she uses the term “Arab girls,” it is clear from the pictures, the text, and the comments on the site that the bulk of the ladies interacting on the site are Arab American women. This page provides extensive evidence of women with Arab heritage coming together to express anger, humor, happiness, resentment, or just to make cultural observations, mostly to create a discussion about issues important to them and to laugh. This page was created in 2013 and has already grown to have more than 17,500 “likes.” In the “About” section, the creator of this page declares: “I keep it real, I don't sugar coat, I don't lie, and I don't hold back what I need to say. No offense intended ~Just keepin it Real” (sic). By browsing through the timeline of the page, it is easy to see that the creator of this page is fueling discussions about political and social issues while poking fun at traditional Arab behaviors and immigrants who are “FOBs,” (fresh off the
boat). Many members of the site can often be seen discussing “how much they have to learn” when they just get to America from over seas. Figure 2 is an example.

Figure 2: FOB Arabs

This meme translates as: “FOB Arabs be like.. Baby be the meat to my hummus.” This is meant to show that newer immigrants flirt in a funny way when they speak to girls in English. This meme unites Arab Americans through laughter and common experiences as Americanized youth. She also draws attention to double standards and unfair advantages men have over women in her community. Figure 3 is a screen shot of a meme about a common double standard in which Arab American men party hard, but expect “good girls” not to do the same. The first scene shows him dancing with a woman. The second scene shows him drinking with friends, and the third shows him smoking and saying, “I’m gonna marry a good girl who never smoked or partied.”
Figure 3: Arab Guys

Figure 4 shows a man surrounded by four women touching him. The text on the image reads “Arab men be like.... Wallah I’m faithful.” This image is meant to show that Arab American men can be surrounded by single women, some of whom are actually physically touching them in a sexual way, and they can still maintain their innocence. Meanwhile, Arab American women often cannot be seen in public in the company of a man without arousing suspicion. Figure 5 illustrates the unachievable beauty ideal Arab women are expected to attain.
She also illustrates the struggles Arab and Arab American girls face when trying to grow up with
conflicting messages about what is appropriate and inappropriate behavior, about what they have to do to make their own decisions, and about what is valuable to them. Figure 6 portrays an Arab girl dressed in a formal gown to go to a backyard barbeque. The meme is meant to poke fun at Arab women who over dress to show off or impress others.

Figure 6: Arab Girls 1

Figure 7 shows the scarcely clad bodies of two young ladies dancing in what appears to be a public place and the text reads “Arab girls be like Sleeping over Fatima’s house” (sic). This meme is joking about Arab girls lying to their families about staying the night at a friend’s house so that they can go to bars, stay out late, dress provocatively, and dance (at least). It also implies that they help each other to achieve this colossal lie.
Figure 7: Arab Girls 2

Figure 8 is an image of a woman with her eyes closed, tears on her face and her hand on her head accompanied by the text, “My parents said we’re going back home for summer vacation.. Now everyone there will see me as a walking green card” (sic). This meme portrays the frustrations Arab American women face when they are young, single, and visiting family back home. Many Arab American women are often concerned with the intentions of the suitors who come to call on them because of the citizenship they stand to gain from the marriage. This is a concern for many parents of young Arab women of marriageable age as well.
Figure 8: My Parents Said

Figure 9 mocks the expectations and the reality of the suitors in an Arab girl’s life.

Figure 9: Arab Girls 3
These memes show many of the patterns discussed in the social interviews of chapter three, such as when participants discussed Arab American women who overdressed because of pressure they felt to look their best. Some of the participants also mentioned lying to their family in order to have fun or make their own decisions. In addition, some mentioned the pressure to hide their relationships with boys, their crushes in high school, and their desire to date from their parents until they were ready to be married. To enhance the comic value of the social and political jokes and discussions, the memes on *Arab Girl Keepin It Real* (sic) often code-switch between Arabic and English by using Arabic words, sentences, or grammar in memes. This is especially interesting given that the memes are usually created using the English alphabet. Figure 10 is an example of this.

Figure 10: Allo Yusif

The text in figure 10 translates as: “Allo [Hello] Yusif [Joseph], my son? Did you put the money
in my shicken accaunt [checking account]?!” It is a playful joke about older women using English words in Arabic sentences when they speak to their children on the phone. While there certainly must be a word for “checking account” in Arabic, many Arab immigrants learn the English words for less common Arabic words and integrate them into their existing knowledge. While this meme may see like a divisive move, it actually helps young Arab Americans unite though laughter as well as common experiences and language speakers. Additionally, the Arabic alphabet has 32 letters so in order to represent the sounds that do not typically have a letter or combination of letters in the English alphabet, Arab American faceboookers and English typers across the globe have developed a code that uses numbers to represent the missing sounds on the English keyboard. Figure 11 is a sample.

Figure 11: Arab Mothers

![Arab Mothers Meme](image)

The text in Figure 11 can be translated as: “Arab mothers be like: Isn’t it that if you had married your cousin, the lawyer, it would have been better for you. You would now be living like a queen...
– Arab Girl KIR” (sic). In this example, a three is used to represent the throaty ‘aa sound and a seven is used to represent the throaty hh sound.

Some memes use both Arabic and English words in the same sentence. See figure 12.

Figure 12: Daloo3at

This meme can be translated as: “Spoiled girls be like: I swear sweetheart I don’t have anything to wear” (sic). This combination of language is unique to the Arab American population and allows Arab immigrants of many nationalities, backgrounds and religious differences, to find a similar coded language in “Arabish” and to find common cultural jokes about which to laugh as they are dealing with Americanization. Although it was difficult for me to relay this in my findings, this “Arabish” code-switching was typical in the interview process of this research as well. Because they knew I was fluent in Arabic, at least once during the interviews all four
participants reverted to using one or more Arabic words in telling me a story.

Cyber Identities of Muslims in America

Arab American women and men have struggled with misrepresentations of their identities by whites for centuries. Edward W. Said, the world-renowned founder of post-colonial theory, began documenting the ethnocentric viewpoints directed at Eastern cultures by Europeans in his 1979 book *Orientalism*. He claimed that men and women of “the East” (and he defines this term broadly because during colonization, “the East” referred to anyone outside of Europe) were considered unable to represent themselves and were therefore misrepresented in many ways by Europeans, especially those who traveled to “foreign” lands. He asserts that Arabs are continuously seen as exempt from history. While Said encountered some criticism for his claims, he continued his analyses of the techniques used to misrepresent Mediterranean cultures in his 1981 book *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World* and in his 1993 book *Culture and Imperialism*. Using concrete examples from news broadcasts and newspapers, Said argues that for so long, the media has offered mainstream viewers in Judeo-Christian America a demonized version of Islam represented by terrorists, domestic abusers, suicide bombers, veiled women and oppressed children. This misrepresentation, in which the majority of Muslims are lumped in a homogenous category with terrorists, is often left uncriticized and unchallenged by mainstream American culture, thus creating an atmosphere in which Americans familiar with Judeo-Christian values might comfortably be able to disregard the Muslim American experience. In this atmosphere, some students might think it is appropriate to categorize others or to mark Muslim Americans as racially inferior. For example, when we think of symbols of American popular culture, veiled Muslim American women rarely come to mind for most Americans. The term “American
woman” might bring to mind images of Marilyn Monroe, Ellen Degeneres, Michelle Obama, or Miley Cyrus. This seems to be a harmless observation; however, it implies that veiled women are part of some “other” group that is less known or less American.

With advances in technology and the limitless possibilities of the World Wide Web, information is far easier to access than ever before. Global symbols of American culture such as the golden arches of McDonald’s and images of Time Square have become easy to recognize internationally. World news is but a click away. Yet, ignorance about diversity within neighboring American communities is rampant. Unawareness and intolerance of the lives of Muslim Americans became especially apparent in the aftermath of 9/11, when hostility toward Muslims peeked in neighborhoods across the country. Mosques were burned and vandalized. Passengers refused to board planes with Muslims. Muslim Americans responded by asserting their identities as loyal Americans and by explaining that their Islam is peaceful and does not include harm toward others. We can still see various representations of these assertions in the Muslim blogosphere where Muslims living in America continue to respond to ill treatment from others in many ways. Digital spaces on the world wide web provide the most visible and accessible forums for discussions about the American Muslim experience. Careful analysis of these spaces indicates that complex and important discussions are taking place in the simplest visual and written ways. This exposure to Islam through the eyes of American Muslims has altered the ways Americans view Muslims at home and abroad.

Of all the Muslims in the world, American Muslims are the most active online in blog spaces in English. Some bloggers show that there is a huge difference between being Arab and being Muslim. Some discuss being forced into a combined identity, which, they say, is an identity forced (by authoritative discourses) into Caucasian racial categories. Some bloggers take
a stand against this categorization by openly discussing racial slurs and treatment in an effort to show that they are not treated as Caucasians on a daily basis. Some bloggers say that in post-9/11 America, Muslims and Arabs are forced into the “evil” side of the good/evil dichotomy set up and perpetuated by images of Arabs and Muslims in the media that create tension between two polarized religious groups in America: those who are more familiar with or identify as Judeo-Christian, and those who are more familiar with or identify as Muslim. Some bloggers argue that these groups have more in common religiously than mainstream films and news outlets would have us believe. Some focus on how the image perpetuated by the media is not an accurate portrait of Islam as most Muslims practice it. Some bloggers also discuss the lack of conversation about religious identities in college classrooms, workplaces, high schools, news broadcasts, and so on. Many choose to discuss political and controversial issues and exhibit critical thinking about oppressive rhetorical techniques used by media, especially about those used to disenfranchise some members of American society by surveilling and demeaning them in the name of national security. Some bloggers use their space to encourage activism within and outside the Muslim community. Clearly, blogging itself can be seen as a kind of activism for disenfranchised groups such as Muslim Americans. While there is certainly an equal amount of cyber-bullying of Muslims, when used appropriately, the internet serves as one place for positive enforcement of images of Arab and Muslim culture. Oftentimes, the voice we see in the Muslim American blogosphere is one with first hand knowledge about the Muslim American experience, which creates a space that can easily be used for diversity enhancement.

Non-Arab citizens, artists, actors, and authors often misrepresent Muslims and Arabs in American media. In her article entitled, “Terrorists, Madmen, and Religious Fanatics?: Revisiting Orientalism and Racist Rhetoric,” Anissa Janine Wardi thoroughly discusses the racist
discourse that is employed in America from the common portrayal of the “Middle East as a land of mystery, danger, and illicit sexuality” to the “demonization of Arabs and Islam.” She confirms, “the proliferation of denigrating Arab stereotypes in the West is so ingrained that the body of an Arab man is reduced to the symbolic embodiment of evil: the bloodthirsty madman/terrorist” (32) or “polygamists, patriarchal oppressors, and cruel fathers” (33). Arab and Muslim women are stereotyped as “passive, subservient, and dominated” in addition to “covered” and “subjugated” (33). Like Edward Said, Wardi believes that language is the vehicle through which domination is fully realized. Wardi also cites extensive examples of these stereotypes that exist in common culture in America that Americans are continuously exposed to through the language in films and in newspapers depicting people of Arab and Muslim heritage in an inferior way. While Wardi's statements are absolutely true in many cases, I argue that in a similar fashion, language can be the vehicle through which liberation is fully realized. In many digital spaces, Muslims have been able to foster growth and development in race relations by taking over the conversation. The fluidity and flexibility of the Internet create a space where marginalized members of American culture are given the opportunity to control what is said about them. However small this type of individual activism is, digital spaces allow mainstream Americans a peek into the Muslim American experience; thus, they are able to see that the Muslim community is not one large conglomerate mass of “bad guys.” These spaces allow Muslims to disrupt mainstream American ideologies. Perhaps the most illustrative websites are those that discuss Hijab fashion and those that express some form of political activism. In chapter five, I discuss several examples of digital spaces and show how they contribute to the collecting and sharing of knowledge both inside and outside of the Muslim American community.
Conclusion

Although feminists like Anzaldúa and Cixous have helped make some real changes in the way we perceive others, there is no doubt that race, gender, age, class, cultural values, historical circumstances, religion, and life experiences continue to impact the students we teach and the knowledge they bring to our courses. Many privileges are built into American systems of power and governing institutions. Anzaldúa says it best herself in the Preface to *This Bridge We Call Home: Radical Visions for Transformation*:

> I feel that we who struggle for social change are the waves cutting holes in the rock and erecting new bridges. We’re loosening the grip of outmoded methods and ideas in order to allow new ways of being and acting to emerge, but we’re not totally abandoning the old—we’re building on it. We’re reinforcing the foundations and support beams of the old puentes, not just giving them new paint jobs. While trying to hold fast to the rights feminists, progressives and activists have carved out for us with their fingernails, we also battle those who are trying to topple both old and new bridges (2).

She also says that what tradition has reached its “zenith,” will decline unless we “attach it to new growth,” “rethink old ideas, and germinate new theories” (2). Consequently, Anzaldúa’s and Cixous’s texts are still of great importance in the continuing efforts of feminists. It is clear that even though they may not identify themselves as feminists, the young Arab Muslim American women in America and in this study are doing exactly what Anzaldúa exhorts feminists to do: build new identities out of old ones. Arab Muslim American women inhabit a new and intriguing space. They are exposed to their Arab heritage. They are impacted by limitations of patriarchy, gender roles, and family pressure. But they are also exposed to feminism, liberalism, political activism, and eye-opening digital spaces. They seek success at home, at work, and at school in
very different ways. Many of these women are questioning their surroundings, identifying the
good and the bad, reinforcing the foundations of the old, and battling for new ground. And like
“the waves cutting holes in the rock” (2), these young women tread slowly and carefully,
struggling to remain true to themselves without disappointing their elders, but still finding ways
to break away from patriarchy and social or familial traditions by pursuing a higher degree and
by finding work to help the family.

Admittedly, many Arab Muslim American women often lead a kind of double life in
order to accomplish their goals with as little resistance as possible from the people they care
about. Often, their identity at work, in college classes, or online differs greatly from the home
identity that was discussed in chapter three. In this chapter, we saw that all of the participants
considered working outside of the home to be a successful step forward in their lives; yet, none
of their mothers worked outside the home or did not work outside of the home until absolutely
financially necessary. We saw that if they want to attend an institution of higher learning away
from home, young Arab Muslim American women often have to fight for that privilege or
submit to commuting to a nearby school. We saw that the participants valued school and
extracurricular activities as productive spaces for expression, socializing, and learning, even
when their parents tried to keep them sheltered. The participants even lied at times to achieve
their freedom as adults.

Additionally, this chapter demonstrates that unlike the men and women of the Arab
world, Arab Muslim American women maintain strong, independent, digital identities where
they seem to express themselves more often and much louder than they do in the home. These
levels of expression often overlap with both positive and negative repercussions. Digital
expressions allow Arab Muslim American women to establish their positions as subjects in
multiple communities, to explore their cultural experiences, to find others with whom they can relate, to tell their stories, to determine what is valuable to them and to others around them. Digital spaces allow these women to narrate their lives, to identify global trends, and to find their place among them. The Internet allows these women to establish digital networks of social relations whenever their mobility is limited. It allows them to practice writing for a specific audience and purpose, to gain access to literacy of others, especially women who are like them. It also allows them to explore boundaries in order to learn what they deem appropriate and what they do not, which may or may not be the same for others around them. It is clear that the participants in this study value their professional identities, their digital practices, and their public expressions of themselves as Arab and Muslim women, as American women, and as some mixed combination of the three, despite the constant battle that it is for them to be all three. As teachers of writing, we must be aware of the constant historical, political, economic, and ideological battles that Arab Muslim American women face. We must consider the global context of access issues they may be dealing with when it comes to establishing a digital identity and a relationship with technology. Similarly, we must be aware of the potentially limited mobility of these young women as users of technology. Lastly, we must remember that every person’s literacy practices are connected to his or her values and social practices; therefore, it is imperative that we be aware of our own and our students’ experiences in these areas.

Media also plays an important role in the values and social practices of students and teachers. Mainstream American television and movies are very different from the Arabic channels that are broadcast by satellite into the homes of most Arab Americans. Chapter five will discuss some of the American media representations of racism and Islamophobia in greater detail and in juxtaposition to the ways Arab Muslim American women use the Internet to position
themselves as peaceful citizens. In the next chapter, I will also show how technology is used by many Arab Muslim Americans to explore the race question and complicate existing mainstream media representations of Arabs and Arab Americans. When Arab Americans collect and share knowledge in digital spaces, they are able to disrupt mainstream American stereotypes about them. This is the kind of “transformative access” we want our students to have when we use technology in the classroom.
CHAPTER V: RESPONSES TO MEDIA IMAGES OF ARAB MUSLIMS

For Arab Muslim American women, the way that they choose to negotiate the complexities of their multiple marginalized identities with other diverse students in a writing classroom can greatly affect their success and comfort level; yet, there is much about this complex space that is unknown. In addition to further research on the complex multi-marginalized identity of Arab Muslim students, instructors of writing should maintain a broadened vision of whom they represent and whom they serve in the classroom.

Overwhelmingly, media unfairly represents Muslims, Arabs and Arab Americans by ignoring the diversity within and between these groups and lumping them into one composite identity that is often deemed a threat to the nation. Additionally, we often see American discourses legitimize a binary of evil Arabs vs. democratic free Americans. In a culture where we value and often discuss the inherent differences among humans, the media frequently represents Arabs as something other than civilized people, which further distances them from approachable, peaceful beings. To illustrate this vilification, in this chapter, I discuss examples from television, films, and newspapers. Contrastingly, when Middle Easterners are not forced into the role of “terrorist,” they are often forced to identify as white, despite being treated as members of minority groups in many instances. All three of these methods of portraying Arabs/Arab Americans/Muslims/Middle Easterners have adverse effects on student life for college students with Arab heritage.

Careful attention to these issues in discussions about binary oppositions, stereotyping, media analyses, cultural narratives, multimodal discourse analysis, digital spaces, or many other typical discussion-provoking topics in a college writing class can seriously reduce the effects of media images and the stereotypes that they perpetuate. This careful attention can also seriously
affect the way Americans act as citizens when their rights are threatened. Identifying with Islam causes a struggle for Arab Muslim American women that is unlike the racial or religious struggles of other minorities and that is unlike the struggles of Arab Muslim American men. While Arab Americans do deal with many of the same prejudices that other ethnic and racial minorities face, Arab Americans who are Muslims must also deal with unique difficulties in America because of the normalization of violence against fundamentalist terrorists who claim to be Muslim. This is further complicated for women who identify as Arab American Muslims because it is harder for them to hide their Islamic identity if they choose to wear a veil. We can often see the complex world that Arab Muslim American women inhabit in the Muslim blogosphere, through Facebook, and in other digital spaces where they choose to express themselves.

First, this chapter discusses the tremendous diversity in Arab communities and the importance of recognizing Arabs as a historically underrepresented group, despite not being recognized legally as a non-white race. Second, I discuss how Islam—a faith that is more similar to Christianity than different—is often portrayed negatively in media, especially since the terrorist attacks of 9/11. To do this, I detail examples from television, films, and newspapers. Third, this chapter continues and complicates the conversation about technology that began in the last chapter. While chapter four discussed many limitations Arab American Muslim women may have when it comes to their experiences with technology, this chapter shows that many Arab Muslim American women have seen the media misrepresenting them and have taken action to create positive social changes by taking control of digital spaces to respond to stereotypes, to new legislation, to unfair court cases, and to other worthy causes for social and political activism. Finally, I argue that Arab Americans and Muslim Americans use digital spaces to affirm their
identities as members of a new community, one that is neither fully Arab/Muslim in the traditional sense, nor fully American(ized) in the liberal sense, but is actually a new community formed from both, which has its own coded language, its own understanding of technology, and its own goals as a unified body. To illustrate this new identity, I show how some young Arab American Muslim women use their digital presence to express themselves using public statements about their identities, their feelings, and their life circumstances. For the purpose of this research, only their public Facebook and Twitter “footprint” is used to illustrate this digital presence. Additionally, this chapter discusses other digital spaces where Arab Americans and Muslim Americans have shaped the American virtual communities in positive ways with political activism, social and personal expressions, and positive images of Arabs and Muslims in fashion.

Ambiguity, Race, and Religion

If you were to ask an Arab: “How do you identify yourself?”, he or she might self-identify as an Arabic language speaker, a nationality, or an ethnic group, each group with its own cultural values and practices, political alliances, and religious beliefs, and with its own ties to Arab heritage. Responses might include one or several of the following: Syrian, Lebanese, Egyptian, Moroccan, Jordanian, Palestinian, Iraqi, Iranian, Yemeni, Algerian, Tunisian, American, British, Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Maronite, Chaldean, Druze, Sufi, Sunni, Shia’a, Ibadi, one of various village and hometown identities… and many more. In addition to these Arab identities, some non-Arabs—such as Turks, Persians, and Kurds—are often mistakenly classified by some other Americans as Arabs. Additionally, there is some conflation of the terms “Arab,” “Muslim,” and “Middle Eastern.” Some might incorporate people of South Asian and South African nationalities into the category of “Arab.” South Asian culture and Middle Eastern
or Arab culture get conflated because of similar restrictions on women, wearing of the head scarf, shared religions, etc. An Arab might identify with one or various political organizations as well. Additionally, many members of certain nations or religions in the Middle East refuse to be called “Arab,” even though most Americans and many non-Americans would actually consider them Arab. For example, many Egyptians of the Coptic faith consider themselves descendants of the Ancient Egyptians before Arabs (think Cleopatra and King Tut) and thus, do not identify as Arabs and actually take offense when misidentified as such. Clearly, the term “Arab” is complex and does not refer to one specific identity. People who identify as “Arab” might be members of any religion, of any one sect of a religion, or of any nationality, and might hold multiple passports. An Arab may or may not speak Arabic, or might be bilingual or multilingual. Different Arabs celebrate different ethnic/religious rituals, practice differing customs and manners, and negotiate different social and political systems. Figure 13 shows the complexity of this situation and illustrates the identities of the participants.
The participants in this study were Lebanese, Arab American Muslim women (who spoke Arabic) so they were part of all of these communities, among others.

**Arab: an ethnicity/race.**
A person could be Lebanese, Syrian, Jordanian, Iraqi, Chaldean, Palestinian, Christian, Jewish in faith, Buddhist, Sikh, Hindu, Israeli or other identities to be considered Arab and may or may not speak Arabic.

**American: a nationality.**
A person also could be Indian, Turkish, Kurdish, Pakistani, German, French, Spanish, Black, White, Hispanic, Asian, Jewish, Iranian, Christian, Hindu, Sikh, Native American, Buddhist, or other identities to be considered American and may or may not speak Arabic.

**Islam: a religion.**
A person could be Turkish, Black, White, Asian, Native American, Latino, French, German, Spanish, Hispanic, Lebanese, Syrian, Jordanian, Iraqi, Persian, Pakistani, Indian, Palestinian, Israeli, Iranian, or other identities to be considered Muslim and may or may not speak Arabic.

Figure 13: Venn Diagram. Note: There are many possible combinations of the above groups that could be any two of the three.
In *Critical Ethnicity: Countering the Waves of Identity Politics*, Robert H. Tai and Mary L. Kenyatta discuss the relationship between race and ethnicity. To them, ethnicity and race are both social constructions, but ethnicity is a matter of culture and race is a “matter of systems of white supremacy” (7). According to this difference, Arabs should be viewed as a race, rather than solely as an ethnic group because they were/are often treated as an inferior group to whites: “Various studies show that even prior to their decision to remain permanently in the United States, Arab immigrants faced prejudice and discrimination [...] because many] viewed Arabs as inassimilable and inferior to whites” (Marvasti 9). Possibly because of the extreme similarities between ethnicity and race, the two areas of research have been continuously linked in composition studies. Perhaps this trend is best exemplified by bibliographies that unite these concepts, such as Rebecca Moore Howard’s bibliography *Race and Ethnicity: Some Sources for Composition and Rhetoric*. Furthermore, in the past fifteen years, interest in race and ethnicity in the composition classroom has continuously grown; recent publications in the field illustrate this rise. Keith Gilyard has published multiple articles about the role of race in the composition classroom. In the Preface to *Race, Rhetoric, and Composition*, he writes, “this ‘race thing’ is ever shifting, ever changing, and becoming increasingly complex in the way it marks intellectual and sociopolitical communities”; thus, he sought “to publish essays…that explore various dimensions of race as related to rhetoric and/or composition and at least attempted to render visible the implicit yet dominant discourses on race, racism, and identity” (ix). Clearly, racial issues are as relevant to the teaching of English as cultural differences. Hidalgo, McDowell, and Siddle also attempt to “facilitate change and public discussion” about race in their collection of essays entitled, *Facing Racism in Education*. They seek to present “the voices of those who historically have been the targets of racism in the United States: Asian Americans, Blacks,
Latinos, and Native Americans” (vii). Most texts that discuss racism and multiculturalism in the context of education, teaching writing, and technology use, do not, however, mention the current or historical racial targeting of Arabs and Arab Americans and do not discuss the possible struggles that students of Arab heritage may face in addition to the typical struggles of American college students and students of other minority groups. On this topic, Rita said, “I am a graduate student finishing my PhD in English soon, and I have never read an article or a book about the specific experiences of Arab American student writers. It would be nice to read about us when I read about different groups.” Undoubtedly, both teachers and students will benefit from further research into Arab culture resulting in heightened awareness about the cultural, racial, and religious sensitivities of Arabs, Arab Americans, and Muslim Americans.

In *Middle Eastern Lives in America*, Marvasti and McKinney estimate that there are two to three million Arab Americans in the United States today. They believe the actual number is unknown “largely because of the U.S. Census, which ironically classifies Middle Eastern Americans as ‘white,’ [and] does not include a category for Arab or Middle Eastern Americans” (Marvasti 3). A population this large is surely worth researching and discussing; however, this research is made difficult by the various jumbled categories attached to this large group of people. The term “Middle Eastern” can refer to Arabs but also to non-Arabs such as Iranians, Pakistanis, and Turks. The term “Arab” is often misused to refer to all Middle Easterners, including those mentioned above, especially when the user of the term is unfamiliar with the ethnicities of these groups; for example, the ethnicity of an Iranian person is Persian, not Arab. The term “Arabic” can be used to refer to anyone who speaks the language of Arabs—Arabic, and thus cannot refer to some Middle Easterners. (Iranians, Pakistanis, and Turks have their own unique languages—Farsi, Urdu, and Turkish, respectively.) “Muslims” are often confused with
“Arabs” and vice versa because many Americans do not differentiate between Islam as a religion and Arab heritage as a culture. Similarly, racial or ethnic identity markers are often confused with nationalities such as: Iraqi, Syrian, Jordanian, Palestinian, Egyptian, and Lebanese.

“According to 2003 demographics gathered by the Arab American Institute (AAI), 47 percent of all Arab Americans are from Lebanon,” so Lebanese-Americans form the largest group of Arab-Americans from a common country, but are not necessarily similar in many other ways: they may be of different faiths, different ancestry, or different familiarity with the Arabic language. Each of these aspects can contribute greatly to the experiences of the Lebanese in Lebanon and in America. The same logic applies to the remaining Arab Americans, who are from the following countries: “in descending order of population: Syria (15 percent), Egypt (9 percent), Palestine (6 percent), Iraq (3 Percent), and Jordan (2 percent). The other 18 percent are from a variety of Middle Eastern nations” (Marvasti 13). The diverse backgrounds of Arab Americans contribute greatly to Arab culture, but they complicate attempts made by non-Arabs to understand Arabs and Arab Americans in and out of the classroom.

Perhaps the most complicating part of all this is that Arabs in America are expected to legally identify themselves (racially) with Euro-whites and Jews as Caucasians, despite any experiences during which they are not treated as mainstream whites. This is not a new phenomenon. The definition of whiteness has changed many times at different points during the waves of immigration in the 19th & 20th centuries. Irish and Italians were also considered “non-white,” but gradually were “whitened”—perhaps because of waves of non-European immigrants. According to Marvasti and McKinney, “Several policies had forced Arab Americans into varying racial and ethnic classifications, irrespective of their own attempts at self-definition. The U.S. Census identified them as ‘Turks’ or ‘Other Asians’ until 1920, and Arab immigrants
objected to this classification, as it connected them with the Ottoman Empire, which most had immigrated to escape” (9). Historically, Arabs and Jews have also checked “Other” when asked to identify racially. Although both Arabs and Jews are often considered Semitic in academic circles, there is controversy about what constitutes a “Semitic” person as well, and this option is not available on most forms today, including the U.S. Census forms. In “The ‘White’ Sheep of the Family: But Bleaching Is like Starvation,” Nada Elia notes that “the inclusion of Middle Eastern peoples into the ‘white’ category was indeed an achievement in the crusades against anti-Semitism, as it merged Jews and Christians in one category, thus ending the official designation of ‘Jews’ as ‘Others,’ a designation and scapegoating that, in Europe, culminated in the traumatic Holocaust”(225). Conversely, most Arabs are thought to be Muslim (whether rightly or not), so they were (and are) still targeted as “others,” even after they “became” white, and especially after 9/11.

Arab Americans are not recognized as a unique race of people by the American government; however, they do face discrimination and daily prejudices on many levels because of the stereotypes that are ascribed onto them as (a race of) people with similar physical appearances. Rose described her father’s experiences as an Arab immigrant in America. She said, “He has to write that he is white on paperwork, but he is at least brown skinned and people think he is biracial or mixed. He gets called racial names all the time even though he has been an American citizen since 1984.” Culturally, Arab Caucasians are unable to assimilate as quickly or as thoroughly as European Caucasians, or even as quickly as other Semitic peoples, such as Jews who phenotypically resemble European whites more than Arabs do—perhaps due to generations of emigrating. In addition to this fact, the terrorist attacks of 9/11 marked a turning point in the way Arabs and Muslims are viewed as a non-white group. In the Introduction to Race and Arab
Americans Before and After 9/11, Nadine Naber asserts that “Alongside the proliferation of hate crimes against persons perceived to be Arab, Muslim or South Asian after the attacks of September 11, 2001, educational institutions, government officials and nonprofit organizations fervently reached out to Arab, Muslim, and South Asian communities with a series of diversity initiatives.” Naber argues that an individual or community must be seen as a victim of racism in order to be the subject of a program for diversity enhancement or diversity initiatives (2). As such, Arabs, Muslims and South Asians have been and continue to be racialized in post 9/11 America.

Furthermore, many Arabs and Arab-Americans choose to mark a category other than “Caucasian” on all paperwork or choose not to identify themselves racially at all—perhaps to avoid the ambiguity inherent in these forms or perhaps to avoid misrepresenting themselves. Hassoun suggests that on a national level we cannot know exactly how many people in America are of Arab descent because “the U.S. census figures for Arab Americans have dramatically under-reported the group, due to the fact that Arab Americans are not an official minority” (8). She also indicates, “Michigan is one of the few states that has officially recognized Arab Americans as an ethnic and underserved population... Arab Americans are currently not classified as an official minority, [but] the Michigan Department of Health Office of Minority Health does include Arabs… in their official statistics (5). This marks a change in the racial and ethnic understanding of Arabs in America and exposes the complexity of using one term to describe an ethnic group that is rarely researched.

There has been a shift in the way we view Arabs and Muslims in America since 9/11. Naber calls it the “racialization” and consolidation of the category “Arab/Middle Eastern/Muslim” (1). That a religious affiliation can be “racialized” requires us to adjust our
understanding of how we define race. Naber also notes that Arabs, who were once invisible and unrecognized, have become “hyper-visible” (2). Farah said, “Many Americans don’t understand that being a Muslim is a religion. Some of my friends even think it is a bad word to call someone a Muslim or an Arab. They are not the same thing. No. How can college students really know so little about us?” She is almost shouting at me, and her frustration is evident. As scholars, we must explore the dominant discourses that enable or restrict our students. In this case, Arab students are part of a huge shift in dominant discourses on race and religious acceptance.

Ultimately, there is danger in using one term to refer to many diverse people. We see the damage that can be caused by such erroneous action in the hate crimes committed in the aftermath of 9/11. The victims were often American Muslims who were believed to be a threat because of the actions of a few radical non-American extremists. Perhaps these hate crimes could have been prevented if the aggressors knew of the diversity among Arabs and Muslims. Therefore, no one should ignore the differences within Arab communities, so it is with the knowledge that these differences exist and that there are consequences of these differences that I use the term “Arab.” My work aims at understanding and inclusion, not stereotyping. My work also aims forward toward progress, new research, and new mainstream images of Arab Americans and Muslim Americans as students, seen in a positive light, using their shared ethnic and religious experiences to achieve success in a writing classroom.

The issues concerning Muslim Arab Americans are unique and often overlooked because Arab Americans are a smaller marginalized group than African Americans, Mexican Americans, or Asian Americans, and they are not even legally recognized by the federal government as a racial minority in America. Additionally, the U.S. census does not collect data about Arabs, Arab-Americans, or religions; meanwhile, since the terrorist attacks of 9/11, American media
sources have heightened awareness of Muslims in America, and not in a positive way. Estimates on the number of Muslims in the United States range from fewer than two million people to as many as seven million. At the highest estimates, the percentage of Muslims in the United States would represent about 2 percent of the population. According to “Quick Facts about Arab Americans,” a publication of the Arab American Institute Foundation, “At least 3.5 million Americans are of Arab descent.” Most other estimates are lower for many reasons such as the limitations of ancestry questions, misunderstanding of government surveys by some participants, and exclusion of some Arabic-speaking countries such as Sudan or Somalia. As a religious entity, Muslims make up a much larger marginalized group than Americans with Arab ancestry. Muslims are often mistreated in America, especially since the terrorist attacks of 9/11. Additionally, Muslims have been a minority group within the Arab American community because, for years, Christians were far more favored for immigration to America. Arab Muslims have been ostracized for years, but in post-9/11 America, Arab Muslims have been placed in an awkward position by the rhetorical strategies of U.S. politicians, of U.S. news broadcasts, and of American feature films. Despite all of the differences outlined above, many mainstream Americans and students believe the terms “Arab” and “Muslim” are synonyms. The truth is that the experiences of Arab Muslim Americans are different than the experiences of other Arab Americans and other Muslim Americans. Non-Arab Muslim Americans and non-Muslim Arab Americans have their own separate community identities. The demonization of Arabs as an ethnic group and the demonization of Islam are different, but they have become so synonymous in mainstream media, that it is very difficult to discuss them as separate entities.

Religion plays a role in many ethnic identities, and religious considerations should be incorporated into understanding the student life of students of Arab Muslim heritage.
The media has offered mainstream teachers and students in Judeo-Christian America a
demonized version of Islam represented by terrorists and domestic abusers, suicide bombers,
veiled women and oppressed children. Meanwhile, the demonized version of Arabs that we have
been offered includes, oil sheiks with many wives, fancy cars, belly dancers, harems, and camel
races. These misrepresentations, in which the majority of Muslims are lumped in a homogenous
category with terrorists, and the majority of Arabs are thought to be wealthy oil owners, is often
left uncriticized and unchallenged by mainstream American culture. Consequently, students and
teachers familiar with Judeo-Christian values might comfortably be able to disregard the Arab
Muslim American experience, which is quite different than the stereotypes above.

Media as a Normalizing National Discourse on Islam and Terrorism

Michel Foucault makes many observations about power, control, and surveillance in
*Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, a 1977 text about the history of penal systems.
His book began many conversations about the criminalization of bodies, the power of other
bodies, and changes in systems of torture and surveillance. According to Foucault, “The
Panopticon…arranges power…to make it more economic and more effective, [but]…not for
power itself, nor for the immediate salvation of a threatened society” (304). While Foucault
argues that Panopticism is not about “the immediate salvation of a threatened society,” that is
exactly what mainstream media would have us believe about the surveillance of Americans
occurring against their constitutional rights (or by amending those rights to restrict freedoms).
Media may, in fact, be the largest normalizing discourse of all, functioning across institutions in
a carceral system and imposing the ideals of those who control it, thus turning us into the docile
agents who make it possible for a panoptic society to exist. Because of the media, “the judges of
normality are present everywhere” (304). Foucault also looks at public torture as the outcome “of
a certain mechanism of power” that views crime in a military schema. Crime and rebellion are similar to a declaration of war. Thus, he argues, the government seems more justified in whatever methods are used in response. In many ways, the global media today has made terrorism, then war and torture and military decisions public. Therefore, we continue to see the theatric use of this common narrative of: first, terrorists strike, then American government and military power seem justified to do as they wish to overcome the bad guys. This narrative may then impact the rights of innocent civilians in the (so-called) battle of good versus evil. Power is then used as a tool of persuasion as in the infamous words of George W. Bush, after 9/11, when he said “if you are not with us, you are against us.” These words are meant to silence critical thinkers and arouse suspicion in response to anyone who attempts to question the actions of those in power. The impact of these words and this grand narrative were seen nationally as Arab and Muslim men, women, and children faced discrimination from their peers.

The participants in this study discussed their 9/11 experiences with hesitation; however, unanimously, the participants felt anger and resentment toward their peers for having racist responses to the tragedy. Maya said, “I was in grade school, and it was hard for me to deal with the kids in my school. They thought I was related to Osama or made bombs in my house.” Farah said, “People thought I was a terrorist because that is all they knew about Arabs, what they saw on the news.” Rita recalled, “I remember being sad and teary, but then I was angry very soon after that because of the hatred I saw.” And according to Rose, “My colleagues at work still make jokes about terrorism and bomb construction in my basement. I don’t even have a basement. It’s a terrible joke.” When grade school aged children, high school aged children, and grown adults in college and in the workplace are all making similar racist jokes about Arabs and terrorism in connection with 9/11, it is safe to say that Arab Americans are targeted as a danger
to Americans. Not surprisingly, these racial slurs have not stopped. Maya said her friend’s 16-year-old brother was recently attacked at school. He was called “a terrorist, a muck muck and a sand nigger” before he was punched in the face. Interestingly, this young man’s mother is non-Arab and white, and he has blond hair and blue eyes. Apparently, he was identified as an Arab American by his name and his own proud declaration of his heritage rather than his appearance. These examples place Arab Americans in an ostracized racialized position as “other.” Further analyses implicate mainstream media outlets as the main cause for perpetuating these stereotypes.

By taking Foucault’s argument toward the modern media, we can see that the media functions in three major ways. First, the media acts as a normalizing discourse. Similar to the way that writing is a technology of observation and discipline of bodies in prison systems, the media functions as a technology of surveillance, observation and discipline on the ground, outside of prisons, among innocent, non-criminal, civilian populations in society. Second, it spreads panic by pointing out a threat to our society, that is, Islamic ideologies that brainwash young men into suicide bombings to kill non-believers (of Islam) and thus help spread their version of Islam to conquer the world. Third, media creates an image for us of who should be blamed: Muslim men of Arab countries, with darker hair, olive skin, facial hair, a hooked nose, head wrappings and a thick accent; veiled women also become targets. By demonizing a certain stereotypical image of Arab or Muslim men and women, laws that legalize racial profiling, such as the Patriot Act, are passed right under the noses of “docile” American citizens, many of whom have been desensitized to the dangers of this situation. Thus, with the help of news broadcasts, and political arguments that restrict freedom, all Americans, but especially those who fit a certain stereotype, can be continuously observed, recorded, and controlled, a characteristic that Foucault
says is necessary for authoritative discourses to have power.

Non-Arab citizens, artists, actors, and authors often misrepresent Muslims and Arabs in American media. In her article entitled, “Terrorists, Madmen, and Religious Fanatics?: Revisiting Orientalism and Racist Rhetoric,” Anissa Janine Wardi argues:

Anti-Arab racism, like all forms of racism, is never aimed solely at one group, but rather is fueled by a hatred for all those who are seen as different. There are numerous racist narratives that are operating in our social discourse regarding the nature of the “other.” While a number of these narratives have been challenged, revised, and altered over the years, at this particular historical moment the salient narrative of violence and terrorism attached to the Arab people is highly visible and largely uncontested. (Wardi 36)

Wardi goes on to illustrate that even among people of color, Arabs are remarginalized. She refers to Joanna Kadi who calls Arabs “The Most Invisible of the Invisibles” (40) because even in multi-cultural anthologies of scholarship and in diverse areas of education, in which people pride themselves upon actively representing marginalized groups, Arabs and Muslims are often overlooked. It is hard to believe that Arabs face so much discrimination based on their appearance (phenotype and religious dress).

In an article entitled, “Prime-time Plight of the Arab Muslim American,” Evelyn Alsultany sums up the role of the media in normalizing the mainstream American outlook on Muslims and Arabs after 9/11. She observes:

…the right to be racist and suspicious of Arab and Muslim Americans is affirmed, and government practices to profile racially, detain, deport, and terrorize Arabs and Muslims are accepted…the government’s discourse about the continued Arab and Muslim threat to national security is narrated, and viewers are interpellated as citizens virtually
participating in these national debates…Mass media is an essential means through which
meaning is produced and exchanged between citizens of a nation…(225)

One participant in this study recounted the situation of her friend whose last name matched the
last name of a suspected terrorist who appeared on the local news channel. She said, “After the
man and woman were arrested, they were on channel 13 and then everyone thought they were
guilty until proven innocent instead of the other way around.” Thus, the media contributes
greatly to the ideas that Americans have about Muslims and Arabs. She continued to say,
“Everyone would come up to us on campus and ask us how we were related to the terrorists.
That’s like asking John Smith if he is related to Will Smith. Come on people.” Alsultany goes on
to explain that non-news outlets of American media also contribute greatly to the images of
Arabs. She asserts:

TV dramas interpret, represent, and explain racial dynamics post-9/11 and in doing so,
redefine U.S. borders, U.S. citizenship, and forms of patriotism. They offer a way to
think about the current crisis and support the actions of the government…the media is a
powerful tool…[for] internalizing that the U.S. is a democratic government and that the
suspension of due process, civil rights, and democratic principles is justifiable because of
the exceptional state of crisis…[TV dramas] convey a message that U.S. residents are at
risk and must give up some things now for the greater good later. The United States is
figured as a good democratic country trying to spread peace in the world and therefore
that the ends will justify the means. (226)

In these ways, news media and TV dramas contribute to a national normalizing discourse that
narrates Arabs and Muslims into evil characters in contrasting relation to mainstream patriotic
“good” American characters. The same can be seen in American newspapers, such as the New
In an article entitled, “Arab Americans and Muslim Americans in the New York Times, Before and After 9/11”, Suad Joseph, Benjamin D’Harlingue, and Alvin Ka Hin Wong argue that “while rhetorical maneuvers we discovered in NYT are at times explicitly racial in grammar, their organization or racial investments through other categories, such as religion, ethnicity, and nation, have the effect of racializing religion, ethnicity, and nation.” They believe that the NYT can be seen as a “representational apparatus [that] has contributed significantly to the project of racializing Arab Americans and Muslim Americans” (231). Additionally, the NYT articles essentialize “Arab Americans and Muslim Americans as culturally distinct from the ‘rest’ of America,” make “direct and indirect assertions of impenetrable difference,” and imply that “the ‘culture’ of Arab Americans and Muslim Americans is not only incongruent with ‘American’ culture, but also suspect” (Joseph, D’harlingue and Wong 233). With the widespread popularity of the NYT, it is easy to understand how the lens through which major news journalists discuss Muslim Americans post-9/11 can have a normalizing effect that causes less tolerance of Muslims living in America.

Several of the participants in this study have dealt with the negative media in an interesting way. Rita noted, “I often watch Arabic shows online even though I am in the USA. I also listen to Arabic music on a regular basis – almost daily. This helps me get away from what I don’t like.” Similarly, Farah said, “The Arabic TV is always on throughout the day at my house. We watch a lot of Arabic dramas and Turkish soap operas and my dad watches the news. Every night we watch an Arabic singing contest or game show too. My mom always watched them and we grew up with it. Now, we watch them too.” Rose expressed similar sentiments, “I watch both American and Arab TV. We have a satellite so we can get all the channels from Lebanon.” It is
interesting to see that three of the four young women interviewed for this research mentioned watching Arabic media rather than mainstream American channels.

Americans can never escape the practices of normalizing that occur in American society in many forums and institutions; however, the awareness of normalizing discourses in our society and the interrogation of constructed ideas and of authoritative forums and institutions can lead to great achievements in mainstream American cultural acceptance of Arabs and Muslims as democratic and patriotic American citizens. Those who choose not to blindly follow the norms set up by our authoritative government and news media outlets, and those who choose to question the removal of American rights and liberties can be considered democratic and patriotic Americans, true to the original intent of America to allow, without repercussions, complete freedoms including those of speech and religion.

Dismantling Discrimination Digitally

Terrorists are selfish and cruel, thus it is no surprise that news media places them on the evil side of the good/evil dichotomy. This binary opposition is damaging for peaceful Muslims who are living in America, however, especially when terrorists claim to be violent in the name of Islam or in the name of God. Seeing terrorism in the name of Allah in the news often causes mainstream Americans to misjudge others with ties to Islam. For many Americans, anyone remotely associated with a potential threat is also viewed as part of that “evil” group with little or no evidence against them and certainly with no conviction or guilty plea or confession. For example, “at least seventy Muslim men have been arrested” under the material witness law, “a law the U.S. Department of Justice has deliberately used to secure the incarceration of persons it planned to interrogate as potential terrorist suspects without probable cause after September 11” (Naber 39). The evidence used to arrest them was little more than evidence of their attendance at
“the same mosque as a September 11 hijacker or owning a box-cutter” (Naber 39). News media and political necessity dictate the double mode of stereotypes about good and evil; then, laws that normalize us further (and legalize racial profiling) are passed; consequently, officers of authority execute events that would have otherwise been considered a breach of American rights. There are many examples of American Muslims writing about these issues and writing in protest of these events in blog spaces online.

In “Thinking Outside the Box: Arabs and Race in the United States,” Louise Cainkar discusses the many forms of discrimination that affect Arabs and Arab Americans living and working in America. She shows that Arab racial status has fluctuated in America from “marginal white status to a more subordinate status that shares many features common to the experiences of people of color” (46). This new status is assigned to Arabs and Arab Americans indiscriminately based on a new collective racial identity assigned to individuals with so-called “Arab” names and appearance. In *Arab Americans in Michigan*, Rosina J. Hassoun reveals that this is a significant misconception:

Contrary to the stereotypes of Arabs, there are a variety of lifestyles, clothing styles, and degrees of freedom for women, and also a great diversity, in the Arab world. That diversity is also present in Arab American communities in the United States. It translates to differences in lifestyles, family practices, and acceptance of or resistance to acculturation or assimilation [in America]. (52)

It is important to know that differences exist within Arab communities and Muslim communities both inside and outside of the Arab world and that it is problematic and damaging to categorize diverse people (of different geographic regions, religious faiths and cultural experiences) into one large category, whether it is called “Arab” or “Middle Eastern” or “Muslim,” without
acknowledging their distinctions. Many Arab Americans and Muslim Americans have made moves to showcase their diversity online. Once we realize and accept the diversity of Arab and Muslim Americans, it is easier to view terrorists as a separate group of fundamentalist radical Islamists.

With the help of news broadcasts, movies, television shows, and political arguments that restrict freedom, all Americans, but especially those who fit a certain stereotype, can be continuously observed and recorded and controlled. Muslim Americans have responded to this vilification and surveillance on their social media sites and in their political blogs. A quick search of TheAmericanMuslim.org reveals several forums, articles, and many discussion posts that discuss the harm caused by stereotypes. Following is a list of titles of articles and discussions about the stereotyping of Muslims: “Muslim Women's Law Firm – Amal Law Group – Breaks Down Stereotypes, Film Review: 'Kite Runner' Defies Film Stereotypes of Muslims, 'Aliens in America' TV Series attacks Muslim Stereotypes, Muslims at ISNA Convention Call for Abandoning Stereotypes, Book Review: Shattering Stereotypes: Muslim Women Speak Out, Looking Beyond Stereotypes for Understanding (Cartoons), Las Vegas Mosque Shelter Shatter Stereotypes, Challenging Stereotypes, Spurning the Stereotypes: India's Largest English Islamic Magazine's Woman Editor.” It is clear that this online space is being used to dismantle prejudices.

Media coverage often creates a normalized space. In articulating a terrorist attack and by covering it as a phenomenon that is taking place on live television, the media teaches viewers how to react to certain atrocities and to certain social circumstances. When a news station goes through a tedious list of potential signs of terrorism, they teach mainstream Americans to search for signs of “abnormality/evil,” which is defined in contrast to “normality/good.” By conjuring
up images of terrorism and simulating the 9/11 disaster night after night (even many years after the atrocious events), news broadcasts contribute to the normalizing and ostracizing of Muslim Americans. Obviously, visuals are central to the way we view the world. In digital spaces, Muslim Americans are able to combat these normalizing discourses by portraying Islam and Muslims in positive ways through visual rhetoric. Muslim American bloggers can control the images uploaded in their blog spaces. They can choose to depict mosques, veiled women, and Islamic symbols in a celebratory or normalized way. This approach directly contradicts the ways these images are typically used in other media. In digital spaces, Muslim Americans can be agents of change. First-hand knowledge is presented in their own voice and and their own ways of representing themselves through text and images. When Muslim Americans are free to express themselves in their own digital space, the images from their lives contribute to a deeper tolerance and acceptance from non-Muslim Americans. The most common images in digital spaces include images of American Muslim men and women, images of mosques in contemporary landscapes all across America, and images of Islamic architecture around the world. These images help maintain and encourage exposure to Islamic visuals in digital spaces, which may be necessary to achieve true acceptance.

For instance, on March 12, 2014, referees of a high school soccer game in Denver told a young Muslim woman named Samah Aidah that she had to sit out of the game because her hijab was “dangerous.” Although this situation has little to do with national security, considering the hijab “dangerous” and ostracizing the wearer from everyday activities as a result encourages crowds to view her as “other” or “abnormal.” Shortly after that game, Overland High School’s entire varsity soccer team and all the coaches wore headscarves to a game as a “sign of solidarity,” and she was allowed to play again. The Overland Trailblazers thought the referees
were being unfair and they chose to take the issue to Twitter. They took a photo, and the story went viral almost immediately. By the next day, the image was retweeted more than 23,600 times. Figure 14 includes the image and the original tweet. Figure 15 shows some responses from supporters.

Figure 14: Divine Davis Tweet
Figure 15: Responses to Tweet

The players even got some attention from the rival team.

Awareness of normalizing discourses in our society and the interrogation of constructed ideas and of authoritative forums and institutions can lead to great achievements in mainstream American cultural acceptance of Muslims as democratic and patriotic American citizens. Those who choose not to blindly follow the norms set up by our authoritative government and news media outlets and those who choose to question the removal of American rights and liberties can
be considered democratic and patriotic Americans, true to the original intent of American laws: to allow, without repercussions, complete freedoms including those of speech and religion. It is clear that Muslim Americans have re-appropriated digital spaces to express their personal and political views as members of American communities. The exposure to Muslim Americans provided by these websites and by social media activism allows non-Muslim Americans a glimpse into a world that is typically misrepresented in common media platforms.

Making Political Moves

Mahmood Mamdani argues that within official U.S. discourse after 9/11, “‘bad Muslims’ were clearly responsible for terrorism…’good Muslims’ were anxious to clear their names and consciences of this horrible crime…and unless proven to be ‘good,’ every Muslim was presumed to be ‘bad’” (qtd. in Naber 3). This idea that Muslims want/need to clear their names reveals that many Americans immediately attached a stigma to being Muslim and/or Arab after 9/11. In her article, “Civil Liberties and the Otherization of Arab and Muslim Americans,” Amaney Jamal writes:

The loyalties of the Arab and Muslim communities have consistently been questioned since the attacks…Muslims and Arabs across the United States are consistently asked to apologize for 9/11, as if they were behind the attacks. And yet, ironically, the numerous and countless condemnations emanating from mosques and organizations in the United States that emphatically denounce the attacks have received little media attention… Not only are Arabs and Muslims different, they are also a threat treated with great suspicion because they are assumed to originate from the Middle East. They are presumed to be operating “against us.” (120)

In response to this suspicion, one Arab American woman posted the following status to her
public Facebook account during the week of September 11th in 2014: “Of course we should remember those who died, but we should also remember those who were wrongly blamed and those who faced hate crimes. Stop the stereotypes!” Although she does not mention Arabs or Muslims directly in her status, the context of the media conversations at the time clearly indicates that she is discussing the backlash against Arabs and Muslims immediately following 9/11. Interestingly, this status received 312 “likes” and led to over fifty-seven comments in support of Arab Americans and Muslim Americans. One example read, “so true. I know many wonderful and peaceful Muslim families who are facing the same American struggles as everyone else. Stay strong, Honey.” Three comments expressed anger over the situation such as this one: “You know I am not even Muslim or Arab and I got stereotyped because of my accent? WTF.” Clearly, Facebook is a digital space that allows members of underrepresented groups to build a local community to resist the negativity they feel around them.

Jamal continues to say that the mentality of non-Arab Americans (which dictates constructed ideas of Muslims as a threat) stems directly from media outlets. She argues:

Cultural representations of Muslims and Arabs derive from an American media regime that has vilified this population for decades, and from a social structure that adopts and resorts to the rhetoric of moral superiority to justify its intervention in the Middle East and discrimination against Arab and Muslim Americans. Racialization is not static but is produced, reproduced, and solidified in a variety of forums: family networks, religious institutions, government offices, and even schools. (121)

This quote illustrates how, in today’s American society, the racialization of Muslims is a normalized discourse and a product of widespread hypersensitivity to Muslims in American news media. The vilification of Muslims in the media allows other non-Muslim American
individuals to comfortably engage in discrimination without facing immediate repercussions of their actions. Muslim Americans have responded to this denigration in many digital spaces where they express their political views. One such example is TheAmericanMuslim.net, a site created by Robert Salaam, who was a devout Christian until the events of 9/11 sent him on a journey to study the “enemy” religion set on destroying America. Salaam believes that “when the debate is centered on commonalities, Americans will be more receptive to the diversity of traditions and values that make America great. [Salaam] uses his Internet presence to highlight the Muslim experience in America and to present the Islam 'ordinary' Muslims actually live and practice” (Salaam). It is clear that one of his goals is to counter the demonization of Islam, in which even he once participated.

Another site, TheAmericanMuslim.org (TAM) began as a print journal, published quarterly from 1989 to 1995. After 9/11, the founding editor Sheila Musaji believed that there were “many moderate Muslims 'somewhere, out there' who were... feeling isolated, and... ready... to re-connect with each other, to share ideas and information, to inform each other about their Islamic work or projects, to offer consultation, support and encouragement to each other to re-animate the dialogue within the community and between communities.” The result of her efforts is a site where members of many faiths and many sects of Abrahamic faiths come together to share knowledge. Musaji espouses the idea that, as Americans, “if we discarded the idea of being a melting pot in favor of a mosaic we might be able to begin making connections. A mosaic not only accepts the fact of difference, it requires difference, it rejoices in difference, it uses difference. The different colors, textures and shapes together create something more beautiful and powerful than any single element could.” This metaphor is pivotal in understanding the importance of our differences and the acceptance we must have of one another. It is clear from
this blog that there are many Muslim American bloggers using digital spaces for positive encouragement of moderate Islamic views, diversity acceptance, communication, and unity. The composition classroom would also benefit from being considered a “mosaic” of different perspectives and differences.

While there are many personal blogs written and maintained by Muslims, the Muslim blogosphere is dominated by blogs about political and current affairs. Websites such as Ijtema.net and MuslimMatters.org aim to promote “the best of the Muslim blogosphere” by organizing links to Muslim-authored blogs, vlogs, and other multimedia websites. These directories often illustrate the extensive web presence of politically active Muslim American bloggers. Especially since 9/11, Muslim Americans have expressed concerns about political moves made by presidents and lawmakers. Perhaps the most memorable example concerns the Patriot Acts I and II, which “grant the government significant powers to monitor Americans, even allowing them the indefinite detention of 'noncitizens,' and these new powers have been selectively applied—most noticeably to Muslims” (Jamal 114). In the interest of national security and keeping terrorists away (a threat that Americans are reminded about through news media on a daily basis), many, though not all, Americans are willing to give up their constitutional rights to privacy and free speech with a passing wave and a phrase such as “I have nothing to hide anyways.” Muslims who do not adopt this philosophy often become viewed as a threat. We see this in digital spaces where Muslim Americans struggle to negotiate the complexities of being free Americans and simultaneously being seen as a threat. For example, in an open letter to President Obama, posted on a discussion forum on TheAmericanMuslim.org, Jello Biafra said the following: “The USA PATRIOT Act is just about the worst mistake our government has made since FDR threw over 100,000 Japanese-American citizens into
concentration camps during World War II. Even you panicked and voted to make the PATRIOT Act permanent. It should be repealed and flushed down the toilet immediately—all of it.” It is clear from this quote that the Patriot Acts are a controversial political issue. The questions about invading privacy and violating personal freedoms in the name of stopping terrorism are important to many, including American Muslim bloggers. In addition to important discussions about the Patriot Acts, many petitions against the laws were started, circulated and compiled by Muslim Americans through email and blogs. Links to information about the Patriot Acts were often posted to blogs to help circulate knowledge about the anticipated changes. A recent petition that is easy to spot in the Muslim blogosphere is titled “ 'To Bigotry No Sanction, to Persecution No Assistance' Interfaith Petition.” This petition relates bigotry against Muslims today to the bigotry towards American Indians, so-called witches, Quakers, Baptists, Jews, Roman Catholics, and others who bore “the brunt of fears that bear no connection to reality.” The petition asks its signers to take a stand against an attack on American Muslims and an attack on basic American principles. The petition quotes President George Washington and Thomas Jefferson. And, in summation, the petition asks of Americans to declare, in “An Interfaith Pledge,” the following:

WE CONDEMN all terrorists and all terrorist acts, whether committed in the name of Islam, Judaism, Christianity, or any other religion or creed;

WE KNOW that the terrorists who committed the heinous crimes of 9/11 were extremists who called themselves Muslim; in no way did they represent the vast majority of Muslims in this country or in the world [...] 

WE PLEDGE to confront instances of bigotry against any religious or ethnic group whenever and wherever we find them, and call upon all those who disparage entire groups on account of the acts of a few to look deeply within themselves, and to stop; and
WE PLEDGE to work actively to break down barriers amongst the various communities of belief in our city—and beyond—and to replace those barriers with mutual respect, understanding, and an outstretched hand.

(For the full text of the petition, see Appendix C or visit http://www.ipetitions.com/petition/tobigotrynosanction).

It is clear from the pledge that Muslim American bloggers have been able to both publicize their views and mobilize others to join in their activism. While this petition is posted in a Muslim American blogging space, it is also clear that this petition is asking non-Muslims to stand up for American rights to practice religious freedoms, even Islamic ones, in American communities.

The events of 9/11 mark a turning point in the way Muslim Americans represent themselves and their families. Those who were once just members of another faith coexisting peacefully in America began to face continuous discrimination and hardships. Blogs and other websites continue to help Muslim Americans to express their views. It is clear that Muslim Americans have taken extra precautions to distinguish American Muslims from the Islamic radicals that shattered American lives that day. In mainstream media, we often see images or people who symbolize American freedom such as Uncle Sam and President Obama. We see people who interrupt that freedom such as Osama Bin Laden. And we see symbols of Islam, such as the Hijab, come to represent victimization and oppression. Clearly, digital spaces have allowed Muslim Americans to make an impact on the ways we view Islamic identity in America. Blogs and websites authored by Muslim Americans help establish a peaceful Islamic identity separate from fundamentalism, radical terrorism, and violence. Digital spaces helped Muslim Americans respond to 9/11 and to the backlash against them after 9/11. In digital spaces, Muslim Americans are able to express their beliefs about American civil liberties and express their loyalties to
America. They can discuss the differences between terrorism and resistance fighting as they see it. They can discuss anti-Semitism and human rights for Palestine, Afghanistan, and Iraq if they wish. It is important that Muslim Americans can create visual representations of Muslims sympathetic to their struggles as opposed to the continuous demonization of them in movies and TV. Muslim Americans have used the Internet to share news, knowledge of justice and injustice, of important court cases, about lobbying, voting, campaigning and many other types of political activism. We must try to see Muslim Americans as they identify themselves, as an identity that is both similar to and different than other religious identities in America. By browsing websites authored by Muslim Americans, we can start to see the complexities of being Muslim in America today, and we can begin to view Muslim Americans as accessible and understandable members of our communities. Perhaps, we can even view their hardships as American issues that should be addressed in an earnest effort to help them. Accessibility is complicated by certain practices mentioned earlier that are unusual in most American families, such as not allowing women over age 18 to stay at home alone, to go out with male friends, or to go swimming in swimsuits. While some of these practices may be found in Orthodox Jewish families or devout evangelical Christian families, they are certainly not the “mainstream” depiction of (white) American life. Many of the women quoted in this study are unhappy with the “traditions” which limit women’s rights or harm women’s bodies. It is difficult to be “understandable” members of the community in light of these issues. This disparity is also an issue for women Muslim and Arab bloggers who deal with political issues online.

Tradition vs. Stereotype: We Are Neither

Even within the Arab families and communities, there are stereotypes that limit women. Sometimes online activity can draw attention to these limiting agents in the home. Often, it is
because of knowledges gained outside of their communities that young women can identify problems they have with their surroundings. To Rita, to be “traditional” means following certain established principles that are set by family and society that are “considered the right thing to do.” Rita says traditional principles are “mainly moral and humane in nature.” She believes herself to be traditional “in the sense of following these principles.” Rita believes that being traditional is a good thing but acknowledges that often “traditional,” for Arab women, is associated with suppression and weakness. She said, “if by traditional it is meant [to remain] unchanged in the way you live your life, then no, I am not traditional. I don’t know why being a traditional Arab woman is always taken in a negative sense.” Rita thinks learning and changing is important to every person. Perhaps because of this attitude, she also added that she often discusses her ethnicity with others, but she usually does not initiate the conversation. She says, “It comes naturally in a conversation or somebody asks me about it. But I do talk about politics for sure and when you talk about politics you have to talk, though indirectly, about your ethnicity.” She says being a traditional man is different: “He’s expected to be the bearer of the family name. To be a responsible man who takes care of the family and the parents when they are old.” She said it is common for Americanized Arabs to take some of traditional behaviors and leave the rest. She noted, “as a woman, I can also work to take care of my family in this day and age. In that way, I am not traditional because I work and often give my opinions in social spaces, such as at work. I contribute equally with everyone there.”

When Rita goes back home to Lebanon, she is often viewed as “acting too American.” She said, “I have lived in this country for many years and I have definitely acquired certain habits that can be referred to as ‘American.’” She stops and makes quotation marks in the air with her fingers. “I get that a lot when I go back to Lebanon. When I wear flip flops, when I yell
at people for cutting in line, when I express impatience for stupidity or illogical ideas, when I expect people to be on time and so on. Even people who have known me since childhood, say I am different now.” She admits that she is different in some ways when she says, “practicing religion is not as important to me as others around me in Lebanon, but religion is important to me in terms of doing what’s right. I care about ethics and morality. I think this is a less traditional way to look at Islam and it was influenced by my experiences in America and my readings.”

She went to say, “Many Arabs in Lebanon think American women are loose and out of control. That’s not me.” At another point in the interviews, she said, “Many Americans think Arab Muslims are closed-minded and beat their women and force them to wear veils. This is also wrong. I am not that Arab Muslim.” Later, she expressed, “I think many Arab Muslim women may share some characteristics related to being minorities in the USA with Black, Latina, or Asian women.” Ultimately, Rita is treated differently by Lebanese women when they identify her as “acting too American,” and she is treated differently by Americans when they find out about her Lebanese Ancestry. This theme is common among young Muslim Arab American women who participated in this research. They often voiced concerns about being treated as an outsider in several communities.

Rose said, “I came to identify as an Arab Muslim American because I was raised as a Muslim, practicing the traditions of Islam.” There is an interconnected identity between religion and immigrant identity that is worth some discussion. Jewishness in America, for example, is no longer equated with being foreign, mostly because there has been a significant Jewish population here since at least the 1880s with a huge wave of Jews coming to America between 1900-1920—almost 100 years ago. The same is not true of most Muslims in America, many of whom are 1st
or 2\textsuperscript{nd} generation Americans, thus complicating their position as “Americans” in America. Later Rose said, “I also see myself as an Arab. I see myself doing ‘Arab’ things that I never thought I would do. This is because of the way that I was brought up as Arab.” She also recognized that she now does things that her mother never did. She is very clear about her feelings when she says:

I work outside of the home and I don’t think I will ever fully be a stay at home mom like my mom’s generation. I also don’t think I will have many children. I am part of a new generation of Arab women and we are more Americanized. I won’t have children until I am financially stable, if ever at all. This is not traditional. Also, I want to marry an Arab American boy so he understands me, but my older sister wants to marry an Arab boy from back home. We are different that way. I think she will have a hard time. Many of my friends who do that end up divorced. We are just too different.

Rose draws many distinctions between herself and her mother, but she also observes that her older sister is more like her mother in her taste of men and in her desires for herself in the future. Rose definitely sees herself as neither fully Arab nor fully American but recognizes herself as “different” than both.

Rose also discusses her Arab American identity in a different way during a separate interview when she mentions language use. She said, “we speak a mixture of English words with Arabic words in the same sentence in my family all the time. If you don’t speak both languages, it is very hard to understand the whole sentence. My mom has even started doing it. When she can’t think of the word in Arabic, she just inserts the English word and keeps going back to Arabic.” This new mixed language has a name in Arabic. It is called ‘\textit{arabizi}, which is half of the Arabic word for Arabic: ‘\textit{arabi} and half of the Arabic word for English: \textit{englizi}, combined in a
way similar to “Spanglish.” Rita also recognized this language use. She says, “I speak Lebanese Arabic with my parents and I sometimes code switch (Arabic/English) with my siblings. This is very common in Lebanon with people who speak both languages.”

My own father (who is a Lebanese immigrant who has been in America since 1976) has been known to use English words in a sentence with mostly Arabic words and with grammatical structures, which, interestingly, add Arabic prefixes and suffixes to the English words. The most obvious conclusion to draw from Rose’s observations is that Arab American men and women inhabit a third space, where they have created and maintained a new identity as neither fully Arab nor fully American and part of that third space includes having an understanding and use for the common language of “Arabish,” a language that may include words or grammar from both English and Arabic in the same sentence. This is a wonderful direction for future research, especially in online spaces where Arab and Muslim Americans also often use English letters and sometimes numbers to write Arabic words and sounds.

Maya also recognizes her Arab American identity as different from the traditional Arab women’s identity. She explained, “I believe being Arab Muslim is much different than any other group like African Americans or Asians. And not all Arab Muslim Americans are the same, but traditional behavior for an Arab Muslim woman is the whole package, which includes the hijab, praying five times a day, knowing our religion, and not behaving the way... well... the way that I do—I hang out with the guys, don’t wear the hijab, and don’t know much about Islam so I am not traditional.” Later, in another interview, she said, “I am a fake Arab Muslim. I say that I am Muslim but I do not follow through with anything that I am supposed to do and I do not have knowledge of half the things that go on in my religion. But from the outside, Americans see me as an Arab Muslim.” When asked about how others see her, she relayed this story: “One day, I
was telling my mom that I wanted grilled hotdogs for dinner and my mom’s friend was there describing me as being too American for wanting to eat hotdogs for dinner. I just didn’t think it was a big deal.” Maya’s observations portray that she does not consider herself a traditional Arab Muslim and others have reinforced this idea about her.

Obviously, there are many types of expressions researchers and participants are able to identify as multimodal rhetorical tools, which are not easy to reproduce in a digital space. Sometimes the best method for learning about new cultures, religions, and immigrant experiences, is to meet and befriend others from those cultures, a tactic that many Americans have embraced, while others have resisted wholeheartedly. However, expressions of resistance toward discrimination and expressions of political identification on the Web can impact the attitudes of Arabs and Americans, with or without contacts inside an Arab community.

Summing It All Up

This chapter serves to show that religious identities do indeed impact student life. The culture of Islam impacts even non-Muslim students, both Americans and Arab Americans, because of the dominant media discourses that regularly portray Muslims in negative ways and the digital presence Muslims use to counter that representation. Both of these media forces impact college students and their understanding of Arabs, Muslims, Arab Americans, Muslim Americans, and Middle Easterners. The complex, multi-marginalized identity of Arab Muslim American women in our classrooms is unique and unlike the racial or religious struggles of members of other minority groups. By giving students a chance to express themselves in online spaces, especially in a writing course, we can learn more about their knowledges and expose them to a wide virtual world of activism.

Despite the dominant narratives in mainstream films, television shows, and newspapers,
there is certainly no reason to fear Arab and Muslim Americans. Maya shows that long term friendships between Arabs and non-Arabs can result in benefits for both families when she said, “Arab Americans can talk about politics and religion with their American neighbors when they are mutually comfortable. We have had the same neighbor for fifteen years and she is so amazing. She treats us like we are family. She was with us while we were growing up and always helping my mom and looking out for us. I stay away from politics but I would not be scared to talk to her about anything.”

Irrefutably, Rita added, “there will always be people who are closed minded in the West and who will believe whatever they want to believe about Islam and Muslims. And many Muslim Americans (and Muslims everywhere) will help in promoting many of the stereotypes. But we can take advantage of media and social gatherings to be good role models and do what we preach people should do.” This chapter shows that Arab and Muslim Americans have positively impacted many digital American spaces with social and personal expressions, political activism, and positive images of Arabs and Muslims in America and around the world.
CHAPTER VI: IMPLICATIONS, FINDINGS, AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Introduction

This project grew from my interests in the history of rhetorical expression of women in the 19th century. As an Arab American woman born and raised in Toledo, Ohio’s diverse Arab American and Muslim American communities, I was able to draw some parallels between the observations of such scholars as Nan Johnson and Carol Mattingly and the struggles with gender inequality, language-use, and higher education in my life. While many scholars of writing (Villanueva, Prendergast, Gilyard) have studied the rhetorical patterns of students of historically underrepresented groups, I was unable to find much published writing about students like me, who surrounded me, and who certainly made up a large population of the student bodies of institutions of higher learning in my area. Therefore, this dissertation sought to answer several research questions, which fall under the overarching question: how do Arab Muslim American women use and adjust rhetorical tools to negotiate oppressive situations? In order to answer this question, this project explored six specific research questions:

1. How do traditional Arab Muslim American women perform femininity?
2. How do contemporary American and feminist cultural expectations challenge tradition?
3. How do these women disrupt the patriarchal expectations of traditional Arab womanhood?
4. How do Arab Muslim American women express personal and political desire and dissent?
5. How do virtual spaces contribute to the continued development of Arab Muslim American identity?
6. How do these rhetorical tools help or hinder Arab Muslim American women in college classes?

These questions allowed me to provide the context of traditional expectations in the Arab
Muslim community and then explore the ways that young Arab Muslim American women chose to accept or challenge those roles through various textual mediums and through various modes of self-expression. In conducting the research for this project, I took steps to keep the participants at the forefront of the feminist methodology I outlined in chapter two. Each participant's experiences were different, even though they shared many similar desires and practices. I was able to observe many patterns through ethnographic and case study research informed by a feminist approach. Additionally, through interviews, observations, and textual analysis, I created a rich narrative of the lives of Arab Muslim American women of college age.

This dissertation has featured life-history interviews of four Arab Muslim American women who struggle to negotiate conflicting identities as college students. Their literacy practices, college experiences, and digital footprints illustrate the important role that Arab ethnicity and the culture of Islam play in student life on a college campus in Northwest Ohio. This final chapter brings together common themes and observations shared across the literate practices of the participants by noticing the patterns in Arab Muslim American women’s lives as they inhabit spaces typically considered non-traditional. It also features analyses of two poems entitled, “First Writing Since, Revised” and “Mike Check,” written and performed by Suheir Hammad, a Palestinian (Jordanian-born) American Def Jam Poet, whose work is available on YouTube, appeared on HBO, and has been translated into at least 12 languages. I begin with the work of Hammad because, in many ways, she was an inspiration for this entire project. Hammad helps to publically describe the same difficulties discussed in chapters three through five by Rita, Rose, Maya, and Farah. She explores many of her frustrations with life as an Arab American woman, especially in post-9/11 America. Next, with potential limitations of the research in mind, I summarize the findings drawn from the research in the previous chapters in order to address the
research questions posed in chapter one. Then, I suggest specific implications for rhetoric and writing studies and for teachers in writing classrooms. Finally, the chapter provides suggestions for future research.

Representing and Interpreting Arab American Identity

In his article “Growing Up Arab in America,” Mojahid Daoud writes, “the term ‘Arab American’ itself really does not fit its implied meaning. Ideally, the term should connote some blending of the two identities so that they form one assimilated identity. For many Arabs growing up in the United States, this is not the case. For them there is usually only one choice: either you identify yourself as being Arab or as American” (173). Daoud goes on to say that the powerful political ideologies of Zionism caused a stigma against Arab Americans in the past; consequently, Arab American immigrants had to choose to assimilate completely into American life or reject it completely. In contrast, Marvasti and McKinney point to the permanence of Arabs in America as evidence of full or partial assimilation. They relate, “As of 2000, various studies report that between 63 and 80 percent of Arab Americans were born in the United States. Nearly 82 percent are citizens” (14). These statistics indicate that Arab Americans are immigrating permanently and seeking citizenship in the U.S., which contributes to their likelihood to assimilate into American culture, in part or in full. Marvasti and McKinney go on to say, “Middle Eastern Americans apparently have found a way to strike a balance between full assimilation and maintenance of tradition and community. Many Middle Eastern communities seem to practice a sort of selective assimilation” (15). They give the following examples of this: in a 2000 study of ethnic groups (Asian, Hispanic, Jewish, Italian, Arab, and African Americans), Arabs and Italians reported living in the most diverse neighborhoods and Arab Americans claimed the most friendships with people of a different ethnic background. Arabs also
“do not seem to take the racial composition of a neighborhood into account as a factor in their choice of whether to live in a particular area” (15).

The debate about assimilation in the work of Daoud and the text of Marvasti and McKinney begs the question: must Arab immigrants choose complete assimilation to, or complete rejection of, Americanization? Exploration of answers to this question allowed me to address my first three research questions. For centuries, traditional Arab Muslim women have performed femininity in very conservative ways. An Arab woman was expected to meet certain ideals set by men in her family and in her community. First, an Arab woman was expected to be a mild-mannered, chaste, and respectful daughter. Then, she was expected to want to get married, to want to be an obedient wife, and to want to have children. Then, she was expected to be a strict mother who passed on the Arab traditions to her children. Contemporary American and feminist cultural expectations challenge traditional roles for Arab Muslim American women by allowing women to see outside of these limited identities as defined by men in Arab culture. In America, we are surrounded by strong women who choose to pursue educational goals, to remain un-veiled, to use curse words, to move away from home, to be career-centered, to remain single, to be sexually active outside of marriage, to come out as a lesbian, to adopt children, or to live life without having children. Young Arab Muslim American women have been able to disrupt the patriarchal expectations of traditional Arab womanhood by voicing their concerns about the limitations of cultural expectations and by exploring non-traditional options for their futures together and individually.

For instance, as an Arab American woman with a disability, I found that life with my disability was in direct conflict with the cultural expectations of my Arab community. When I publically chose to adopt a service dog, I was resisting traditional expectations of Arab culture
and Islamic rules. First, a woman with a service dog is publicly announcing her disability to the community. She is drawing attention to herself as a disabled woman, which in the Arab world is considered a shame. Disabilities are to remain a secret. Second, she is choosing to live with a dog, which in the Arab world would characterize her as a dirty outcast. Traditional Islamic laws say that a dog must remain outside as a guard, rather than inside as a pet. While it may be difficult to convince every member of the Arab and Muslim communities that the dog is helpful, clean, and gentle, it is clearly a newfound freedom for a woman of Arab heritage to have a service dog and remain an active member of both resistant communities.

The strength to make a decision to resist traditional expectations often comes through knowledge of shared struggles. The participants in this project showed that they felt better able to resist traditional gender limitations when they felt that they were not alone in the struggle. Several participants indicated shared feelings of hopelessness at times but found solace in discussing their struggles with a sibling or a friend who had been in a similar situation. Similarly, unveiled women were able to discuss the advantages in American communities and the disadvantages in Muslim communities of this choice, while veiled women were able to discuss the opposites. Finding women with similar stories through Facebook and blogs allowed them to find reassurance in their choices or alter their decisions as desired.

All of the participants observed that more freedom came when they pursued higher education. On university campuses, Arab American and Muslim American women found each other and found access to resources that allowed them to thrive. Rose and Rita said that as they furthered their educations, they were able to form a healthy distance from the stifling parts of family life and begin working outside of the home as well. Farah and Maya affirmed that they gained financial independence, which allowed them to become more independent in other ways.
Making decisions about money often led to making larger decisions about life choices without feeling guilty for ignoring or disregarding the family ideals.

The participants of this research have shown that they often felt as if they were forced to choose, as Daoud argues, between assimilating completely or rejecting American life completely. However, the research presented in this dissertation proves the stance of Marvasti and McKinney because it shows that there were many cases in which the participants indicated negotiations and compromise between tradition and Americanization. Even when they feel the pressure to choose, Arab Muslim American women are able to create a third space in which they make a series of choices that allow them to feel comfortable as neither fully Arab/Muslim nor completely American, but some combination of both. For example, a lesbian Arab Muslim American woman may choose a career or a new home away from her family unit so that she can be true to herself without fighting about her sexuality, which is culturally and religiously unaccepted. While the decision to move away, live, and work elsewhere is a difficult battle to choose, it does not cause nearly as much social damage to the family as the fight to be openly gay in the community would cause. Thus, she is able to be true to her Americanized identity as sexually liberated, while still maintaining the traditional Arab family honor. The acceptance of a career-oriented woman—especially unmarried—that follows her profession away from her family unit is new to traditional Arab families. This compromise between seemingly conflicting cultures occurs because Arab Muslim American women have found new strength in a “third space,” a space that allows them to voice their dissent and to choose which causes are worthy of struggle.

Suheir Hammad: The Case of a Calm Angry Arab

In an interview with Riz Khan for *Riz Khan’s One on One* on March 28th 2009, Suheir
Hammad stated that her work has often represented her political views and her need to work on social justice. It has been influenced by American hip-hop and the angst of Arab dispossession. She said her fame for the poem “First Writing Since” came because directly after 9/11, people around the world “needed to hear from America something that wasn’t vengeful.” I agree and further assert that the world needed to hear something from an Arab that wasn’t stereotypical. As an Arab American woman from Brooklyn, she offered a realistic statement to fill both of these needs through her poems and performances on HBO. Her poem “First Writing Since: Revised” perfectly illustrates the complexities of Arab American existence after 9/11. In it, she says, “God, please, don’t let it be anyone who looks like my brothers,” illustrating the injustice associated with being brown in America. The discrimination based on appearance faced by Arab Americans became a common story in the immediate aftermath of 9/11, but few told the story with such feeling. Here is a sample from the lengthy poem:

One more person ask me if I knew the hijackers,
One more mother fucker ask me what navy my brother is in.
One more person assume no Arabs or Muslims were killed,
Assume they know me,
Or that I represent a people,
Or that a people represent an evil,
Or that evil is as simple as a flag and words on a page.

This stanza emphasizes how many Americans made unfair assumptions about what it meant to be Arab or Arab American or Muslim after 9/11. Hammad shows that to be Arab did not make her friends with the hijackers or loyal to other countries. She mentions an unsubstantiated rumor that no Arabs or Muslims were killed in the attacks. Likewise, she asserts that one Arab cannot represent all Arabs, Arabs do not represent evil, and evil is complicated.

We did not vilify all white men when McVeigh bombed Oklahoma,
Give out his family’s address or church or blame the Bible or Pat fucking Robertson,
Networks air footage of Palestinians dancing in the street,
No apology that hungry children are bribed with sweets that turn their teeth brown,
Correspondents edit images, archives facilitate lazy journalism,
And when we talk about holy books, hooded men and death,
WHY never mention the KKK?

This part of the poem clearly depicts the hypocritical nature of placing blame. By drawing a parallel between 9/11 and the Oklahoma City Bombing, Hammad shows how ridiculous it is to vilify all Arabs for the acts of a few. She also shows how religions cannot be blamed for the acts of radicals by mentioning the Ku Klux Klan.

If there are any people on Earth who understand how New York is feeling right now,
They are in the West Bank and the Ghaza strip.
Bush has waged war on a man once openly funded by the CIA.
I’ve read too many books to believe what I’m told.
I don’t give a fuck about bin Laden.
His vision of the world don’t represent me or those I love.
I’ve signed petitions for years to out the U.S.-sponsored Taliban.
Shit is complicated...

These words illustrate the political aspect of Hammad’s poetry. She was born in a Palestinian refugee camp and often brings her memories and knowledge of Palestinian struggles into her work. Here, she mentions the U.S. sponsorship of terrorism and the controversy of war. She mentions key players, such as Bush and bin Laden, by name, and she argues that this is not what Arabs like her want. She is clearly taking a stand against war when she says:

and I don’t know what to think,
But I know who will pay:
Women
Mostly colored and poor,
Will have to bury children, support themselves through grief...

(For the full text of “First Writing Since, Revised,” or to watch a performance by Suheir Hammad, please visit: http://www.rivervision.com/upwp/?p=1406 or See Appendix D).
Hammad says she uses poetry to make her voice heard about many issues. “One thing that poetry does is signify and recognize your ancestors, the bloodlines and the land lines that you are a part of and the places you have traveled to,” the poet says. “My parents are devout Muslims. I grew up believing the Koran was poetry … so I always felt there was power in being able to use language.” She continues, “It was the economy of the language, the validation and the self-affirmation. That kind of bravado that it took to say, ‘I’m poor and I’m colored and I come from this different place.’ ” (qtd. in Hopkinson). Hammad highlights the difference between herself and a white man named “Mike” in another poem entitled, “Mike Check.” Here is the full text:

Mike check one two one two can you hear me? mic check one two
mike checked
my bags at the air
port in a random routine check
i understand mike i do
you too were altered that day and most days
most folks operate on fear often hate this
is mic check your job and i am
always random
i understand it was folks who looked, smelled, maybe prayed, like me
can you hear me, mike, ruddy blonde buzz
cut with corn flower
eyes and a cross round your neck?

mike check
folks who looked like
you stank so bad the Indians smelled them,
mic check, before they landed
they murdered one two
one two as they prayed, spread small pox as alms
mic check, yes i packed my own bags can you hear me? no they have not been out of my possession
thanks, mike, you have a good day too one two mike check mike check mike
a-yo mike who’s gonna check you?

(To view her performance of this work, please visit: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ryQzmI5iLLI).
In this poem, Hammad portrays her frustrations with racial profiling in airport security after the terrorist attacks of 9/11. She shows that in America “folks operate on fear” and hatred towards Arabs, and it shows in policies of airport security. She explains that she knows that it is his job, and she is “always random.” This is an oxymoron because the very definition of random means that this treatment should not be so constant. The fact that it is indicates that it is unfair profiling. In the end, Hammad calls out to Mike: “Who’s gonna check you?” This statement is meant to show that the profiling of Arab Americans establishes a hierarchy of power. Even though people who looked like Mike had committed many atrocities historically, the “ruddy blonde buzz/ cut with corn flower/ eyes and a cross/ round [his] neck” would not be randomly chosen to undergo extra security checks in a typical American airport. He is on the privileged side of the good/evil dichotomy, and even though she is just as American as he is, she is not as privileged.

As a rhetorical practice, writing poetry or prose is often an outlet for Arab American women. However, the participants in this study did not identify themselves as writers when it came to political or social concerns as Arab Americans. Ironically, they still found ways to express their personal and political desires using words. In order to answer my final three research questions, I explored these modes of expression. I found that Arab Muslim American women often used virtual spaces to develop and announce their new, less traditional identities. They often developed rhetorical tools similar to those used by women in the 19th century to resist patriarchy. Additionally, many Arab Muslim American women gained momentum through higher education, financial independence, and camaraderie with women in similar situations.

Naber’s “Virgin/Whore” article focuses on “the tense and often conflictual location of Arab American femininities at the intersections of two contradictory discourses: Arab cultural re-authenticity and hegemonic U.S. nationalism” (89). These two discourses contribute to the
context from which Arab and Arab American women and men enter the composition classroom in America; therefore, in addition to their personal cultural and religious experiences, their social and economic class, and their previous education, these discourses highly affect their perception of writing, learning, and technology.

Implications for Teachers and Researchers

By methods of textual analysis, interviews, and observations, I found that the participants, who identify themselves as Arab and Muslim American, often use their ethnic and religious identities as justification for their actions. Of the students who participated, only one said she tried to hide her identity, change it, or cover it up. Most claimed that being of Arab descent helps them in most areas of their education because it adds insight and personal experiences to conversations and to their writing. As teachers and researchers, we should be more sensitive to the diversity of Arab and Muslim American students, whose culture may function as a lens through which they see themselves and the world. The study of Arab American identity and how it functions in higher education is important to understanding the abilities of Arab and Muslim American students, whose second language may be English, Arabic, or “Arabish,” and to understanding the development of the writing of students of Arab descent as it relates to their culture, politics, and their understanding of their experiences, discrimination, access to technology, etc.

Interviewing students gives insight about the household in which they grew up and the influence it has had on their language and writing skills. In interviews, all of the participants in this project discussed the high level of importance their parents placed on education. Students also established whether or not they were consciously aware of their use of ethnic references in their schoolwork. Similarly, many students used verbal markers that indicated their ethnic
identification and their comfort level in referencing life experiences that could be linked to ethnicity. A teacher cannot expect to accurately identify Arab students based on appearance, but teachers might hear students begin a sentence with a phrase that introduces their ethnic experience into the conversation. Such phrases include: “Back home…”, “In Lebanon…”, “In the Arab world…” and “In Arabic, we say…” Sometimes students mention an ethnic tradition while telling another story. This can be considered an invitation to discuss identity. When a student refers to his or her ethnic, religious, or political identity, we should consider what this means to her as an individual.

It is important to grant students agency, no matter their race, ethnic heritage, immigrant experiences, language skills, religious affiliation(s), or writing proficiency. While it is difficult and problematic to consider Arabs a homogenous group of students or writers, it is even more detrimental to ignore the existence of Arab students and the issues they face, as a group, especially after the terrorist attacks of 9/11. No matter who was responsible for the attacks, Arabs, Arab Americans, Muslims, and others who are seen as parts of those communities face the additional stress of negotiating this identity in the classroom. This is something that no other ethnic or religious group currently faces. Different students react in different ways: some are proud of and anxious to discuss their identities in their writings and in class discussions while others are quick to mask their identity (if they are able to) or choose to discuss issues non-related to ethnic or religious identity.

For decades, Arabs in America have believed their success to be dependent on their assimilation and on their ability to appear as American as possible, but the students involved in this study have shown that students of Arab descent can be successful in a writing classroom and elsewhere without actively ignoring their heritage and without reaching complete assimilation.
Ultimately, each student’s situation is different: some were born or traveled overseas; some studied in an Arab country; some only hear about their “home” country from relatives. Some are encouraged to embrace their Arabness, and others are taught to mask it, forget about it, or change their inherently Arab ways to become what they believe is an ideal, patriotic, American. In the end, their success in education is based on their ability to integrate their heritage and identity with their educational and professional career. This alone makes them neither completely Arab nor completely Americanized, but instead, a new identity balancing ideals for women from both worlds, occupying a new space in our understanding of self.

**Findings About Technology Use**

In the last chapter of *Race, Rhetoric, and Technology: Searching for Higher Ground*, “The Digital Jeremiad in Search of Higher Ground: Transforming Technologies, Transforming a Nation,” Adam Banks puts forward the notion of “soul,” which he describes as “the ability to recognize complexity and still pursue unity… [ultimately, for] a larger job of transformation… [of] old racist exclusions” (134). He asks that we have “hope for the future,” and he calls for teachers to incorporate this “soul” into the classroom, to not “be scared of recreational uses of technolog[y,]” and to no longer “produce customers” (140). Banks is right. Teachers and students should look to technology for help in transforming their communities and each other’s communities. Technology can ease the struggle, change the views of the mainstream and just help Arab Americans gain positive exposure to Americanness and help Americans gain positive exposure to Arabness. As Samantha Blackmon says in her article, “But I’m Just ‘White’ or How ‘Other’ Pedagogies Can Benefit All Students,” all students can benefit from incorporating the interrogation of various racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, regional, and religious discourse communities. In *Cybertypes: Race, Ethnicity, and Identity on the Internet*, Lisa Nakamura writes,
“increasing numbers of racial minorities and women are acquiring access (9) […] and] there is no doubt that the Internet is a “socially transformative” force (xiii). On the one hand, the more historically underrepresented people who gain access, the better. On the other hand, students, researchers, and professionals should realize that “access” to technology, especially for Arab Americans and members of other historically under-represented groups, is much more than just sitting at a computer with Internet access. In order to make that “access” into a “socially transformative” force, users and non-users must realize that technology itself is not the goal; we cannot just give Arabs and Arab-Americans computers and expect “access.” Teachers, staff, administration, parents and students must understand and appreciate the advantages and limitations of technology in a learning environment. Newer generations of Arab Americans have the power to help with these changes both inside and outside of the Middle Eastern Communities in the U.S.. Marvasti and McKinney effectively emphasize this point when they affirm, “Nearly half of the Arab American and other Middle Eastern American populations are under the age of twenty-five. Given this fact, it will be these young Middle Eastern Americans, and their social choices, that will shape the culture of Middle Eastern America for decades to come” (16). Teachers will also play a major role in these changes. We can already see digital spaces granting young Arab Americans a louder voice.

Participants in this study indicated that they learned most of the knowledge they have about technology on their own or from friends. None of the participants recalled educational circumstances in which they learned how to use social networking tools or computer skills other than keyboarding. Meanwhile, all of the participants also claimed that their parents had very little or no knowledge of digital technologies for communication or learning. This may be a result of the participant selection process for this project. They are younger and mostly first-generation
college students. Yet, the implications are clear: most social networking technologies are self-taught or learned with friends.

Websites in the Arab and Muslim American Blogosphere may have different webmasters, purposes and audiences, but they each foster personal and community growth through collecting and sharing knowledge from inside and outside of the Muslim American community. Each web environment establishes different personal identities for Muslim American women in relation to surrounding environments and communities. These web spaces also strengthen confidence for these women through self-expression of an Islamic identity that is typically frowned upon. The spaces provide a safe place for these women and other Muslim American women to post images of themselves that clearly indicate their Islamic identities as veiled women. Other women can visit the site and view the images and comment about styles they like or ways they have imitated or initiated a style they desired without the fear of negative preconceived notions about Islam. While it is possible for the space to be used for negative responses and bullying, those outcomes are highly unlikely. In fact, while browsing these sites, it is difficult to find many/any negative comments about Islam.

One of the most clear positive effects of these spaces is that Muslim American women are given the power to choose what they portray to others and how they express themselves. Contrary to the kinds of images of Islam discussed by Said and Wardi, digital spaces created by Muslim American women for Muslim American women allow them to control their voice. No image, positive or negative, is forcibly used to represent anyone of them. And no image, positive or negative, is applied to every single Muslim American woman across the country. It is clear to any layperson who browses through these spaces that there are differences among Muslim American women. We see varying ways to wear the veil such as the princess veil, the hijabicap,
and the shayma style. We see various fabrics and colors used for different climates and different occasions. We see that some women wear various styles of hats, clips, or glasses to accessorize their veils. We see that some women may leave their mouth, nose, parts of their hair, neck, ears, or chin exposed, while others do not. Some women choose to wear bright colors, others wear darker colors only, and still others wear only black. Faith, style, and modesty are all clearly important to these women; however, the ways they choose to practice and share their expressions of faith, style and modesty are clearly very different.

It is evident that some veiled Muslim American women have made a voice for themselves using digital spaces. They have countered many historical and current misrepresentations of veiled women as oppressed, without voice, or fundamentalist. They have chosen hijab and they have chosen to adapt their personal stylistic choices through the sharing of knowledge with other Muslim American women. Clearly, they are agents of their own expression through the ways they choose to dress. Their persuasive purpose is clear. These multimodal blogs and websites allow them to show others that the veil is not a symbol of oppression and victimization; rather it is a stylistic, fashionable and peaceful way of being complex, yet understandable.

Planning a Class with this Research in Mind

In order to discuss pedagogical methods for effectively using technology to teach writing to many students of multiple ethnicities, including Arab Americans, one must first be aware of the cultural tendencies of the students in question. James Berlin and Michael Vivion define the term “culture” in their collection of essays entitled *Cultural Studies in the English Classroom* as a combination of the “signifying practices that represent experience in language, myth, and literature and as the relatively autonomous responses of human agents to concrete historical conditions.” Berlin and Vivion maintain that the very “shaping of consciousness…is seen to be
mediated by language and situated in concrete historical conditions” (ix). Clearly, Berlin and Vivion believe language and culture to be closely related; the values and perceptions that a person has about the world are a direct result of their historical and linguistic experiences. Additionally, the ideals for which people strive influence their writing and their understanding of education. People of a common ethnicity, religion, race, or nationality often share the same language and similar historical experiences. Individuals of a shared culture will not have identical experiences, but they will undoubtedly face more similar conditions than individuals of different cultures; therefore, the study of culture is extremely important to discussions about effective teaching. Teachers cannot presume to understand how students of differing backgrounds comprehend technology and its uses in the classroom without first being aware of the cultural implications of technology use for those students.

Naturally, culture impacts students in other ways in the classroom. Rita believes her ethnic background greatly influences her performance in class. Perhaps she best explained the role of her ethnicity in her texts when she said:

…good writing makes you ponder something. It adds an experience, an idea, or a thought. I especially like writings with special identities [and] my ethnic background is the biggest part of who I am. This is why it is always there in my writings directly or indirectly. I’m definitely a stronger person [as a result of my heritage]. The more dumb questions and the more accusations [about Arab Americans] I hear from people, the stronger I am and the greater I feel that it is my duty to show the beauty of my heritage…it makes me feel more proud that I am who I am. Every Arab should help perpetuate a better image in America if they can. During classroom discussion, most of the time, I start my sentence “In Lebanon…” or “As an Arab American…” It is a whole
different experience to some, and I believe that people are curious [about] how other nations deal with the same issues that they are dealing with.

All the participants in this project had their own experiences with their heritage, which depended largely on their age, family life, education level, and other factors. These differences were small in comparison to the pride they felt as Arab Americans. They each had complaints about life struggles they experienced as young Arab American Muslim women, but they each also had methods to deal with their troubles, which also stemmed largely from their heritage and background.

It is important to understand that differences exist within Arab communities both inside and outside of the Arab world and that it is problematic and, in some cases, damaging to categorize diverse people (of different geographic regions, religious faiths and cultural experiences) into one large category called “Arab” without acknowledging their distinctions. Classrooms are an ideal place to read about ethnicity and identity formation in order to discuss these distinctions. In “Professing Multiculturalism: The Politics of Style in the Contact Zone,” Min-Zhan Lu argues that “more and more English courses are now informed by a view of language as a site of struggle among conflicting discourses with unequal socio-political power” (489). She suggests that teachers reach beyond the conventions of academic discourse to help students approach “real” writers, such as Bhabha, Said, Stein, hooks, and Anzaldúa. She suggests that reading texts from diverse writers from the “borderlands” encourages students to acknowledge the writer’s rights and ability to experiment with writing; and thus, broadens a student’s sense of the options and choices facing a writer (502).

In “Diversity, Ideology, and Teaching Writing,” Maxine Hairston asserts that first-year composition classes that incorporate discussions about multiculturalism give “students the
opportunity to develop their critical and creative abilities and do it in an intellectually and ethically responsible context that preserves the heart of what we have learned about teaching writing,” but she expresses her reservations about making composition classes focused on multicultural issues. She says these issues can be too complex and diverse “to be dealt with fully and responsibly in a English course, much less a course in which the focus should be on writing, not reading. Too often attempts to focus on such issues encourage stereotyping and superficial thinking” (709). Instead of trying to cover “Asian culture” or “the black experience,” Hairston advocates creating a culturally inclusive curriculum by “focusing on the experiences of our students. They are our greatest multicultural resource, one that is authentic, rich and truly diverse.” She says teachers should focus on helping students “articulate and understand” their own experiences (710). In order to accomplish what Lu and Hairston discuss, a teacher must be sensitive to the cultural experiences of the students in his or her class. Some people have greater racial, cultural, and ethnic experiences than others, and some people draw on their ethnicity more often, and in more ways, than others. Teachers cannot assume that their students are or are not members of a certain ethnic or racial group in a classroom, but teachers can ask students to write about topics (such as 9/11, sex trafficking, and racial profiling) that encourage the exploration of students’ identities as well as personal and community issues that affect them socially, politically, or culturally. Such practices will benefit both student members of minority communities and students of mainstream American culture. Arab and Arab American students should not be encouraged to hide their identities in any way; rather, they should be encouraged to investigate the intersections of their gender and their nationality with their racial, religious, and cultural experiences. Additionally, non-Arab college students are in an ideal place to promote tolerance and understanding by appreciating the cultural sensitivity of these issues just as much
as the instructor. Teachers can facilitate a conversation in the classroom that will help make more members of American society aware of the various struggles of Arab and Arab American men and women, especially with regard to assimilation, education, and technological access. However, teachers must first be aware of these issues themselves.

In post-9/11 America, Muslims and Arabs are forced into the “evil” side of the good/evil dichotomy set up and perpetuated by images of Arabs and Muslims in the media that create tension between two polarized religious groups in America: those who are more familiar with or identify as Judeo-Christian and those who are more familiar with or identify as Muslim. In chapter five, I argued that these groups have more in common religiously than mainstream films and news outlets would have us believe. The images perpetuated by the media are not accurately portraying Islam as most Muslims practice it. The lack of conversation about religious identities in writing classrooms is troubling because classrooms provide a structured environment where docile beings might successfully learn to become aware of and think critically about oppressive rhetorical techniques used by media, especially, those used to disenfranchise some members of American society through surveillance and through demeaning them in the name of national security. The composition classroom can potentially serve as one place for positive enforcement of images of Arab and Muslim culture. There are more areas in American culture where mainstream Americans can gain access to positive cultural images of Arabs and Muslims as well, but I advocate the use of college writing classrooms as spaces for diversity enhancement and acceptance of others.

Further Research

In rhetoric and writing, there is a significant amount of published work examining the relationship between language and ethnicity; there is some examining language maintenance
among ethnicities; and there is abundant material published about many ethnically and racially marginalized groups. However, there is very little or no work published that deals directly with the ethnic experiences of Arabs and Arab Americans in American college writing classrooms.

The few publications that have analyzed the immergence of culture and ethnicity in student and scholarly understandings of technology have often focused on African American and Latino cultural differences in the classroom and in writing. Adam Banks began an intensive conversation that reconstructed traditional African American uses of rhetoric as a use of technology for positive transformation of people and society, and he effectively demonstrated how this conversation could help African Americans today envision a better future and take an active role in creating that future. Many communities of color that differ racially from mainstream privileged white Americans are not discussed in *Race, Rhetoric, and Technology: Searching for Higher Ground*, and these communities could benefit greatly from a similar study. Arab Americans, who have often been neglected in essays and books about the role of technology, would benefit greatly from further scholarship. They should research; they should be researched; and they should read the research.

This study is by no means conclusive, but it attempts to depict the lack of attention given to the experiences of students of Arab heritage. Through this research, it is clear that ethnicity and religion play significant roles in student life. At times, ethnicity appears directly in a student’s writing; otherwise, it is a part of the process. Sometimes, ethnicity inhibits the success of students. Other times, it is only important to the student personally, and so it only affects class work indirectly. Students with Arab background can be found in universities and colleges across the country. Presently, there is an incomplete understanding about the role that Arab ethnicity plays in the writing of composition students, even in areas highly populated by Arabs, such as
parts of Michigan, New York, DC, and California. Even universities that heavily recruit Middle Eastern international students focus very little energy on researching effective ways to understand their learning patterns. Further research into the literate lives of students whose writing is influenced by Arab culture would be insightful and beneficial to the discipline of rhetoric and writing and would be especially beneficial in regions densely populated by Arabs, Arab Americans, and Muslims, and where the student body of most institutions includes many students of Arab descent. Different degrees of Arab influence may have different effects on students; however, the study of Arab identity and how it functions in writing is important to understanding the abilities of Arab American students, whose first language may not be English, and to understanding the development of the writing of students of Arab descent as it relates to their culture, politics, and their understanding of the writing process, their experiences, discrimination, etc.

In discussing the complexities of Arab/Muslim identity, I showed that it is an identity forced by authoritative discourses into Caucasian racial categories. Despite being officially identified as whites, Arab Americans are often mistreated as a direct result of their appearance and phenotype; therefore, they would benefit greatly from more research into illegal profiling of Arabs and Arab Americans and further discussions about the complexities of Whiteness with regard to Middle Easterners.

In my discussion of social networking profiles on Facebook, I uncovered an interesting area for future research in language use. I outlined a form of code switching at the end of chapter four that I called “Arabish.” In chapter five, I defined this term as: “a language that may include words or grammar from both English and Arabic in the same sentence.” This definition is very simple, and I would like to revisit this concept in a later project. This way of speaking is unique
to the Arab American population and allows Arab immigrants of many nationalities, backgrounds and religious differences, to find a similar coded language in “Arabish” and to find common cultural jokes about which to laugh as they are dealing with Americanization. This “Arabish” code-switching was typical in the interview process of this research as well. Because the participants knew that I was fluent in spoken Arabic, they would often enhance their stories by adding a word or two in Arabic for emphasis. However, it was difficult for me to relay this phenomenon in my findings in this project. Because of constraints of time and space, these discussions must be left for future study.

Conclusion

This project was largely informed by the research question: “how do Arab Muslim American women use and adjust rhetorical tools to negotiate oppressive situations?” From the very beginning of my interest in the literate practices of Arab Muslim American women, this study attempted to shed additional light on the ways cultural values, access to technology, family and social patterns, and personal goals of the participants involved shaped their modes of learning. It is extremely important to view each participant as an individual, not as an Arab Muslim American who speaks for all Arab Muslim Americans. Nonetheless, it is also valuable to observe patterns in underrepresented groups so as to try to understand and acknowledge differences, especially in learning spaces. We must never ignore differences. The identities of these students are intrinsically shaped and transformed by the cultural and digital landscapes they have experienced and composed. The participants share a complicated, unique, and culturally situated understanding of writing, technology, and education. The observations, interviews, and analyses included in this dissertation form a small fragment of glass in the larger mosaic of Arab experiences with Americanization; nevertheless, it is an important shard of our history, and it is a
narrative that is often misrepresented or made invisible, even in tales of similar American immigrants. Though there are many potential limitations in this project and there are many additional lines of inquiry to pursue, I worked hard to fairly represent the participants in this study. The narratives of the study’s participants revealed a rich set of rhetorical resources, including unique language use, which helped them succeed in social spaces, online and off.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A. HSRB DOCUMENTS

Recruitment Emails

Dear Participants,
It has been one week since I emailed you about scheduling an appointment and I have still not heard back from you. I hope you are still interested in participating. Please take some time to fill out your responses and email it back to me at your earliest convenience. If you know other young Arab Muslim American women who may like to participate, please forward this email on. Thank you very much,
Amira

Here is the original email:

Hello,

Thank you for your interest in participating in this research about Arab and Muslim American women. The project will involve several interviews. Please know that you can discontinue your participation in this project at any time if you wish and there will be no ramifications or consequences to you. I will try to make your participation as effortless as possible.

Attached is a questionnaire. Please take your time responding to the questions. The more detailed your responses, the better. When you have completed the questionnaire, email it back to me and at that time, we will set up another interview. Please feel free to call or email if you have any questions.

Thank you again for agreeing to participate.

Amira A. Akl
BGSU Ph.D Candidate
English Department
Bowling Green State University
Bowling Green, OH 43402
amira.a.akl@gmail.com
419-320-0580

Confidentiality disclaimer statement: An email response could be intercepted by a third party, and I recommend completing the questionnaire on a personal computer since some employers have tracking software.
March 31, 2011

TO: Amira Akl
ENG

FROM: Hillary Harms, Ph.D.
HSRB Administrator

RE: HSRB Project No.: H11D097GE7

TITLE: Multimodal Expressions of Desire Among Young Arab Muslim American Women

You have met the conditions for approval for your project involving human subjects. As of March 31, 2011, your project has been granted final approval by the Human Subjects Review Board (HSRB). This approval expires on December 5, 2011. You may proceed with subject recruitment and data collection.

The final approved version of the consent document(s) is attached. Consistent with federal OHRP guidance to IRBs, the consent document(s) bearing the HSRB approval/expiration date stamp is the only valid version and you must use copies of the date-stamped document(s) in obtaining consent from research subjects.

You are responsible to conduct the study as approved by the HSRB and to use only approved forms. If you seek to make any changes in your project activities or procedures, send a request for modifications to the HSRB via this office. Those changes must be approved by the HSRB prior to their implementation.

You have been approved to enroll 6-10 participants. If you want to enroll additional participants you must seek approval from the HSRB.

Good luck with your work. Let me know if this office or the HSRB can be of assistance as your project proceeds.

Comments/ Modifications:

c: Dr. Kristine Blair

Research Category: EXPEDITED #7
Amira A. Akl  
BGSU Ph.D Candidate  
English Department  
Bowling Green State University  
Bowling Green, OH 43402  
aa641@bgsu.edu  
419-320-0580

Informed Consent Form  
Multimodal Expressions of Young Arab Muslim American Women

Introduction  
You are invited to participate in a research study being conducted by Amira Akl, an Arab American PhD Candidate in Rhetoric and Writing and Women's Studies at Bowling Green State University. You may participate as much or as little as you wish beginning in April 2011 and ending in May 2011. Your participation is voluntary.

Purpose  
The purpose of this research project is to study and identify what role Middle Eastern heritage plays in the expressions of desire, dissent, and difference among young Arab Muslim American women in local communities in Northwest Ohio and Southeast Michigan.

Procedures  
In this study, you will be asked to participate by completing an emailed questionnaire and by participating in one or more face to face interviews. Each part of the process should take 20-30 minutes of your time. You may at anytime ask to be removed from this study. The researcher will be asking questions related to participants' personal and professional expression of identity including some of the following topics: discrimination, gender roles, politics, religion, and sexuality. You may opt out of any questions you wish or opt out of the entire study at any time.

Potential Risks  
There are no foreseeable risks associated with this study. However, I will ask questions that may potentially cause distress, such as questions about your responses to discrimination and the 9/11 attacks.

Potential Benefits  
The possible benefits of this study include a better understanding of the role of Islam and Arab ethnicity in identity expression. This study may help to identify rhetorical tools used by Arab Muslim American women. This study may contribute to historical and current feminist research about women's rhetorical strategies for self expression. This study may draw more positive attention to Arab Americans, who are currently one of the most under-represented U.S. minority groups because even within discussions about minority groups, they are continuously marginalized or made invisible. This study may expose unfair traditional expectations for Arab Muslim women. It may publicize ways that women have challenged traditional roles and disrupted patriarchal expectations. It may uncover sites of culture and expression that have been ignored or overlooked. It may focus
more attention on Arab Muslim women in digital spaces. It may cause others to start/continue research in a similar direction. Whatever information is gathered in this project may be helpful to others.

Confidentiality
Although absolute confidentiality cannot be guaranteed, confidentiality will be protected as much as possible. Pseudonyms will be used for all notes, scripts, and drafts. If the data collected for this study is published, the identities of all participants will not be revealed. If participants wish to choose their own pseudonym, they may. All collected documents will be stored in a locked file cabinet. Only members of the research team will have access to the information you provide, and identities will not be revealed in any published results unless the participant specifically requests identification.

Confidentiality disclaimer statement: An email response could be intercepted by a third party, and for more privacy, I recommend completing the questionnaire on a personal computer since some employers have tracking software.

Voluntary Participation
Participation in this research study is voluntary and all participants are free to withdraw their consent at any time without penalty. If you are a student, your participation or lack of participation in this study will have no impact on your grades, class standing, or relationship to the institution in any way.

Contact Person
If you have any questions about the study, please contact Amira Akl at 419-320-0580 or at aaki@bgsu.edu. You can also contact Dr. Kristine Blair, my project advisor, at kblair@bgsu.edu. Additionally, you may contact the HSRB at 419-372-7716, hsrb@bgsu.edu, with questions about your rights as a participant.

Research Subject’s Rights and Consent
As a participant in this research project about Arab Muslim American women, I acknowledge that all my present questions have been answered. I have been informed about my participation in the study above and I hereby consent to voluntarily participate in this study about self-expression. I have been given a copy of this consent form and I know I can ask questions at any time.

Please check one:

_____ I would like to choose my pseudonym and the name I have chosen to represent me in this study is: ________________________________.

_____ I would not like to choose my own pseudonym. The researcher can choose one for me.

Printed name: ________________________________
Signature: ________________________________
Date: ________________________________
APPENDIX B. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

The following questions are the verbatim notes that I prepared to ask the participants. These questions were asked through a series of at least four interviews, depending on the time available with each participant.

1. Explain how you came to identify yourself as “Arab Muslim American.”

2. Describe “traditional” behavior for an Arab Muslim American woman. Do you consider yourself “traditional”? Why or why not?

3. How important is the Islamic veil or Hijab to you and your family?

4. Explain how being part of an Arab family is different than an American family.

5. Describe your experiences with language in the home. (Do you primarily speak English, Arabic, or some other language? Do you listen to Arabic music or watch Arabic TV or movies? How often?)

6. How should a woman dress? Describe any struggles Arab Muslim women have with how to dress in America. How do they negotiate these difficulties?

7. How are school/college experiences different for young Arab Muslim women?

8. How important is it for a woman to work outside of the home? At what age and for how long?

9. How would you describe your image of yourself?

10. How do you think others would describe you?

11. How do young Arab Muslim women learn to care for their appearance? What beauty practices or patterns are specific to Arab Muslim women?

12. Describe how important marriage and/or having children is to you and your family.

13. How did you learn about safe sex?
14. How are your ideas about sexuality similar and different than your mother's or grandmother's ideas?

15. Describe a time when you were discouraged (openly or subtly) from interacting with someone who was a member of a different race or religion such as Jewish Americans or African Americans.

16. How do you think the Arab Muslim woman's experience is similar to the experiences of women of other disenfranchised groups such as Black, Latina, or Asian women?

17. How do you express anger about American foreign policy? Who do you talk to about presidents and laws and injustice?

18. How do you “dress to impress”? Describe a time when you altered your everyday style for a specific reason (a wedding, funeral, job interview...etc.). How and why did you change your image? Did you accomplish the desired effect?

19. Describe a time when you felt pressured by Arab/Muslim cultural values in your family.

20. Describe a time when you felt discrimination. Where did it happen? What happened? Why do you think you were targeted? How did you feel?

21. Do you think that both genders should be treated equally inside and outside of the workplace, and that there is a continuing need for political, social, economic, and legal reform as well as the removal of institutional bias in order to achieve this equity?

22. Describe a time when you witnessed violence or abuse in the Arab or Muslim community. What happened?

23. Explain “family values” in your family. What is most important to you, your mom, or your dad?

24. How important is religion in your family? Describe a time when your family's religious
beliefs got in the way of some personal goal you had.

25. Describe a time when you felt that you could not express your ideas to someone. Who was it? Why couldn't you say what was on your mind?

26. Describe a time when you were rewarded for defending yourself and what you believed in or describe a time when you were personally or politically active for a cause you believed in.

27. Explain what is expected of a female in Arab/Muslim culture. How is this different for Arab/Muslim Americans?

28. Describe a time when you expressed yourself in a healthy way. Were you upset? What did you do? How did it work out? Did it help?

29. Describe how you, your family members, or your friends use online sites for expressing identity.

30. Think about “the way things are” in your family. If you have children, what do/will you do differently in raising them?

31. Describe what is expected of a male in Arab/Muslim culture. How is this different for Arab Americans?

32. Describe topics that are taboo in your family—that you would not discuss with each other or in public. What topics are off limits and for who?

33. If you could change any one thing about Arab/Muslim Americans, what would it be?

34. Describe a time when someone in the Arab/Muslim community described you or someone you know as “acting too American.” Why? What did you do/say?

35. Describe a time when you desired change in your life. What did you want to do differently? How did you accomplish this goal?

36. Describe a time when your mother or father did something without consulting the other
spouse. Did this cause a disagreement? How did they negotiate their differences?

37. Do you remember where you were on 9/11/2001? Tell me about that day and the days right after.

38. How did Americans treat Arab Muslims in your area before 9/11?

39. How do you feel about the discrimination against veiled women after 9/11? Did you see it anywhere first hand?

40. What do you think is the biggest misconception in America about Arab Muslims?

41. What do you think Muslim Americans can do to help combat the negative image caused by terrorism?

42. Have you ever written any of your political views in an online setting? How did that go?

43. When should Arab Americans talk about politics and religion with their American neighbors?

44. When an Arab or Muslim is unhappy with some aspect of American life, when and with whom should he or she talk about it?
APPENDIX C. AN INTERFAITH PLEDGE

To Bigotry No Sanction, to Persecution No Assistance

“To Bigotry No Sanction, to Persecution No Assistance”

A Call to Citizens, Elected Officials, Journalists and Religious Communities to End the Current Wave of Fear and Bigotry Against Islam

– Massachusetts Interfaith Leaders (September 7, 2010)

Massachusetts knows too well the painful and dangerous effects of religious bigotry, persecution, and intolerance. American Indians, so-called witches, Quakers, Baptists, Jews, Roman Catholics, and others have borne the brunt of fears that bear no connection to reality. Such a danger looms again. We must not succumb.

Standing on the Statehouse grounds at the statue of Mary Dyer – Quaker, heroine of religious freedom, and martyr to religious intolerance – we call upon citizens, elected officials, journalists, and religious communities to pause, take stock, search our collective heart and soul, and here and now to resolve to end the surge of hatred and fear against Islam and Muslim Americans.

Addressing the matter of religious liberty, President George Washington in 1790 wrote to the Hebrew Congregation of Newport, Rhode Island, confirming that ours is “a Government which to bigotry gives no sanction, to persecution no assistance.”

Thomas Jefferson said of religious freedom that it was “among the most inestimable of our blessings;” (Virginia’s Statute for Religious Freedom).

Katherine Lee Bates called upon the Author of the Universe to confirm this nation’s soul “in self-control,” and our “liberty in law” (America The Beautiful).

The current anti-Islamic climate is an attack not only on Muslim Americans, but also on one of this nation’s most basic principles. There is no small irony in that we are being urged to sacrifice these principles in the name of “patriotism” and “national identity.”
If today’s controversy were focused solely on the proposed Islamic center and mosque in Manhattan, that would be distressing enough. It is not. There are some ten or twelve proposed Islamic centers and mosques across the nation, and all have met with vitriol and resistance.

As people of faith and principle we cannot remain silent in the midst of the fear-filled suspicion and vilification of the Islamic community that is sweeping the nation. Whether in the Jewish, Muslim, Christian or other traditions, we share a sacred calling: to welcome strangers rather than fear them; to seek to recognize the presence of the divine in all whom we meet, and to be instruments of love and reconciliation for all with whom we interact.

Thus, with deep compassion for the families of the victims of 9/11 and for the enduring pain of all Americans, and with urgency and deep concern for this nation and for its people, we the undersigned declare the following:

AN INTERFAITH PLEDGE

WE CONDEMN all terrorists and all terrorist acts, whether committed in the name of Islam, Judaism, Christianity, or any other religion or creed;

WE KNOW that the terrorists who committed the heinous crimes of 9/11 were extremists who called themselves Muslim; in no way did they represent the vast majority of Muslims in this country or in the world;

WE AFFIRM that Islam, present in America even before the official establishment of this nation, is an integral and vital part of the American interfaith mosaic, and that Muslims contribute great value to both our interfaith endeavors and our civil society;

WE ARE PAINED that enmity against Muslim Americans is disfiguring our national soul, is life-threatening to Muslims, and bears the potential of turning good-hearted people against their neighbors;

WE RESPECT the Constitutional and human rights of members of all religious groups to practice their faith, including the equal right to build places of worship and gather together unimpaired by the influence of favoritism, bigotry, or discrimination; and
WE CONDEMN—both in general and in the particular context of attacks on the Park 51 Project—the cynical use of misinformation and fear-mongering by various politicians, commentators, and media outlets to stir up anti-Muslim prejudice for political or other ends;

WE APPLAUD all efforts to build meaningful, honest, and enduring inter-religious and inter-cultural relationships; and

WE DENOUNCE the use of innuendo, stereotype, or misinformation that promotes fear, distrust, or hatred of Muslims, Jews, Christians, or any other religious or ethnic group;

WE CALL upon this great nation whose soul is tempered by law, to reaffirm the deeply held values of diversity and pluralism as intrinsic to our national character and to stand firm upon the First Amendment and its beautiful, unequivocal guarantee of civil liberties and freedom of religion.

THEREFORE, we the undersigned pledge the following:

WE PLEDGE to confront instances of bigotry against any religious or ethnic group whenever and wherever we find them, and call upon all those who disparage entire groups on account of the acts of a few to look deeply within themselves, and to stop; and

WE PLEDGE to work actively to break down barriers amongst the various communities of belief in our city—and beyond—and to replace those barriers with mutual respect, understanding, and an outstretched hand.
“First Writing Since” revised
There have been no words,
No poetry in ashes south of Canal,
No prose in trucks driving debris and DNA.

Evident out my window an abstract reality:
Sky where once was steel;
Smoke where once was flesh.
Please, God, let it be a mistake
The pilot’s heart,
The plane’s engine…
God, please, don’t let it be anyone who looks like my brothers.

I don’t know how bad a life has to break in order to kill.
I’ve never been so hungry that I willed hunger,
Never so angry as to want a gun over a pen.
Not really.
Even as a woman, a Palestinian,
Never this broken.

Ricardo on radio said in his accent thick as yuca,
“I will feel so much better
when the first bombs drop over there.”

A woman crying in a car parked and stranded
And hurt, I offered comfort, a hand she did not see before she said,
“We’re gonna burn them so – bad.”
My hand went to my head and my head to the dead Iraqi children,
The dead in Nicaragua, in Rwanda,
Who vied with fake sport wrestling for America’s attention.

People saying, “This was bound to happen, let us not forget
U.S. transgressions”—
Hold up. I live here.
These are my friends
And fam,
Me in those buildings, and we’re not bad people,
Do not support America’s bullying,
Can I just have half
A second
To feel bad?
Thank you, woman, who saw me brinking my cool and blinking tears,
Opened her arms
Before she asked, “Do you want a hug?”
Big white woman and her embrace only
People with flesh can offer.
My brothers in the navy, I said, and we’re Arabs.
Wow, you got double-trouble.
Word.

One more person ask me if I knew the hijackers.
One more mother fucker ask me what navy my brother is in.
One more person assume no Arabs or Muslims were killed,
Assume they know me,
Or that I represent a people,
Or that a people represent an evil,
Or that evil is as simple as a flag and words on a page.

We did not vilify all white men when McVeigh bombed Oklahoma,
Give out his family’s address or church or blame the Bible or Pat fucking Robertson,
Networks air footage of Palestinians dancing in the street,
No apology that hungry children are bribed with sweets that turn their teeth brown,
Correspondents edit images, archives facilitate lazy journalism,

And when we talk about holy books, hooded men and death,
WHY never mention the KKK?

If there are any people on Earth who understand how New York is feeling right now,
They are in the West Bank and the Ghaza strip.

Bush has waged war on a man once openly funded by the CIA.
I’ve read too many books to believe what I’m told.
I don’t give a fuck about bin Laden.
His vision of the world don’t represent me or those I love.
I’ve signed petitions for years to out the U.S.-sponsored Taliban.
Shit is complicated, and I don’t know what to think,
But I know who will pay:

Women
Mostly colored and poor,
Will have to bury children, support themselves through grief.
In America, it will be those amongst us who refuse
Blanket attacks on the shivering, who work towards social justice
And opposing hateful policies.

“Either you are with us
Or with the terrorists,”
Meaning
“Keep your people under control
And resistance-censored,”
Meaning
“We go the loot
And the nukes.”

Never felt less American
And more Brooklyn
Than these days.

These stars and stripes
Represent the dead as citizens first,
Not family, not lovers.

My skin is real thin,
My eyes are darker,
The future holds little light,
My baby brother is a man now
On alert
Praying five times a day the orders he will take are righteous
And not weigh his soul down
From the afterlife.
Both my brothers—
My heart stops—
Not a beat disturbs my fear—
Muslim, gentle men
Born in Brooklyn and their faces are of the Arab man,
All eyelashes and nose and beautiful color and stubborn hair.
What will their lives be like now?
Over there
Is over here.

Across the river: burning rubber and limbs,
Rescuers traumatized, skyline brought back to human-size,
No longer taunting gods.
I cried when I saw those buildings collapse on themselves
Like a broken heart.
I have never owned pain
That needs to spread like that.
There is no poetry in this.
Causes and effects,
Symbols and ideologies;
Mad conspiracy here.
Information we’ll never know.
There is death here,
And promises of more:
There is life here.
Anyone hearing this is breathing—
Maybe hurting,
But breathing for sure.
If there is any light to come,
It will shine from the eyes of those
Who will look for peace AND justice,
After the rubble and rhetoric are cleared,
And the phoenix has risen.
Affirm life.
Affirm life.
We got to carry each other now.
You’re either with life
Or against it.
Affirm life.

–Suheir Hammad