

PARADOXES OF PIETY  
IN YOUNG MUSLIM AMERICAN WOMEN:  
PUBLIC PERCEPTION AND INDIVIDUAL REALITIES

by

EMILY H. MAHON

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Sociology in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York.

2013

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Sociology in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Mehdi Bozorgmehr

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Chair of Examining Committee

John Torpey

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Executive Officer

Juan Battle

William Helmreich

Philip Kasinitz  
Supervisory Committee

THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

## ABSTRACT

### PARADOXES OF PIETY IN YOUNG MUSLIM AMERICAN WOMEN: PUBLIC PERCEPTION AND INDIVIDUAL REALITIES

by

Emily H. Mahon

Advisor: Mehdi Bozorgmehr

Drawing on both the Pew Research Center's Muslim American Survey of 2007 and a series of original in-depth interviews with young Muslim American women in northern New Jersey, this dissertation seeks to learn more about these women and their motivations for covering and its meaning to them.

The theoretical framework for this study begins with Weber's commitment the interplay of religion and society and his perspective of *Verstehen*, which privileges the perceptions of the subjects. It uses the lenses offered by Goffman and Göle for understanding the strategic uses of stigma; theories of assimilation building from Gordan and Gans to Kasinitz, Mollenkopf, and Waters to Dixon; and the insights of Giddens about the nature of institutional change.

The study found that covered women are more likely to attend mosques frequently, to identify as Muslim, to be single, and to be conservative in their religious views (separation of sexes, women cannot lead prayers, scarf is required). The survey finding that most coverers think that Islam does not favor men is echoed in interviewees' argument that "equal" treatment does not mean "same;" they view themselves as feminists who affirm the role of woman at the center of the Muslim family. While not embracing American identity, the interviewees turned away from ancestral culture as either outmoded or oppressive. The Muslim-denseness of their environments gives comfort that dissipates as they bridge to wider spheres. And finally, covering was described repeatedly as a "completion" of self and a reminder of piety to both the outside world and to themselves.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am days away from being 65 years old as I write this acknowledgement and I could obviously spread a good deal of ink recapping my path and thanking teams of people. I hope I have personally thanked all of those – my colleagues, my friends, my stepsons and stepdaughter, my grandchildren, my relatives– for their support has meant the world to me. Special thanks go to Juan Battle, who worked me like a drill sergeant to get me out of the program, and to Mehdi Bozorgmehr, who urged me at every juncture to get on with it! They and the other members of my committee, William Helmreich and Philip Kasinitz, were patient and encouraging and always available. CUNY Graduate Center offers an environment for scholarship that is unlike any I have ever run across.

There is, however, one person who deserves acknowledgement above all others: Jim Mahon, my husband, colleague, and friend. His support was the *sine qua non*. His curiosity, analytical rigor and intellectual integrity know no match. I am so lucky to have him as a role model.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Chapter 1: Introduction and Background</b>	<b>1</b>
Introduction	1
Islam in Paterson, NJ	2
Framework for Exploration	7
Research Approach	9
<b>Chapter 2: Literature Review</b>	<b>11</b>
Introduction	11
Global Context	13
American Context	18
Theoretical Framework	24
<b>Chapter 3: Methods</b>	<b>31</b>
Introduction	31
Secondary Data Analysis (Pew Muslim American Survey 2007)	31
In-depth Interviews	41
<b>Chapter 4: Results – Secondary Data Analysis</b>	<b>47</b>
Introduction	47
Univariate Analysis	49
Bivariate Analysis	53
Multivariate Analysis	61

<b>Chapter 5: Results – In-depth Interviews</b>	<b>71</b>
Introduction and Overview	71
Demographics and Environment	80
Religious Beliefs and Practice	85
Identity and Gender	90
Muslim Experience	96
<b>Chapter 6: Discussion</b>	<b>100</b>
Introduction	100
Demographic Backdrop	100
Religious Observance	101
Theology and Gender	104
Assimilation	110
Meaning of the Scarf	117
Environmental Impact – Neighborhoods and Comfort	124
<b>Chapter 7: Conclusion</b>	<b>133</b>
Introduction	133
Summary of Findings	133
Limitations	138
Contributions	142
Future Research	144

<b>APPENDIX</b>	<b>148</b>
A. Views on Assimilation and Age – Elaboration	148
<b>REFERENCES</b>	<b>150</b>

## LIST OF TABLES

<b>Table 4.1</b> Weighted Means, Standard Deviations, and Ranges of Variables for Female Respondents	52
<b>Table 4.2</b> Weighted Comparison of Means on “Respondents Wear Headscarf Never/Ever” by Independent Variable	53
<b>Table 4.3</b> Cross Tabulations of Independent Variables by “Respondents Wear Headscarf Never/Ever”	58
<b>Table 4.4</b> Weighted Logistic Regression Coefficients (Odds Ratios in parentheses) Predicting “Respondents Wear Headscarf”	63
<b>Table 5.1</b> Summary of Interviewees by Demographic and Cover Variables	80

## LIST OF FIGURES

<b>Figure 2.1</b> Theoretical Framework	29
<b>Figure 4.1</b> Logic Model for Binary Logistic Regression	48

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

#### **Introduction**

In February of 2002 one of my brightest students, socially and politically active, appeared in my Western Civilization class with a floor-length skirt and a large grey scarf covering all but her face. Just the class before, the very same young woman sat in her normal spot dressed in her normal blue jeans with her hair in its normal free state. In the post-9/11 environment, why would she suddenly go “public” with her religion? Why would she take on a symbol (by most Western standards) of male oppression? How could she be one minute so American, and the next so “other?” How could she be an assertive “Jersey Girl” and a submissive Muslim?

This superficial whirlpool of thoughts was given more substantial shape when two years later I sat as a sociology student in a colloquium and heard a feminist scholar assert that the wearing of the scarf could be seen only as “oppression.” That seemed too simple a diagnosis – and one that denied an agency that seemed present in the practices I was observing. How do the Muslim American practitioners themselves describe the convention? How to explain the paradoxes of American feminism and Muslim piety? Is the phenomenon these women embody indeed anti-modern, anti-assimilationist, anti-feminist? Can they really be piously Muslim and truly American? And how are the aspects of Islam that seem “problematic” from a Western perspective negotiated in the identity of its followers? How are they shaped by global forces? How are they particularized by local habits?

The conflict between 21st century Western feminism and the conservative Islamic view of women seems obvious. How then do young, fully-engaged, second- and third- generation

Muslims negotiate the resolution of this conflict for themselves? I suspected that the answer could be neither simple nor uniform.

### **Islam in Paterson, NJ**

Islam is a growing religious and political global force, strong not only in the Middle East and North Africa, but also in Southeast Asia, Africa, Europe and the United States. Worldwide the number of Muslims is estimated to exceed one billion, making Islam the second most populous religion after Christianity. In the United States, estimates range from about 5.8 million Muslims to 6.7 million. Of these, an estimated 20% are in California, 16% in New York, 8% in Illinois, 4% in New Jersey, 4% in Indiana, and about 3% each in Michigan, Virginia, Texas and Ohio – most concentrated in the major cities. About two-thirds of the Muslims in the US are immigrants according to some sources; other sources report that 42% of the total US Muslim population are African-Americans, 24% are South Asian and 12% of Arab origin (Mujahid 2002).

The New York-New Jersey area is believed to have one of the highest concentrations of Muslims in the country. The area of my study – Paterson, New Jersey, has a particularly high and high-profile Muslim population (Carroll 2002). It is the area where three of the 9/11 terrorists made their home and the locus of the Holy Land Foundation, an illegal source of financing for the World Trade Center attack (Kocieniewski 2001). Main Street in Paterson is dotted with Middle Eastern restaurants (mostly Arab and Turkish), bakeries, social clubs, and coffee shops. On the streets of Paterson and neighboring Haledon and Prospect Park women in headscarves are so common that, given a calmer world, they would not be remarkable. Mosques, prayer centers, *masjids*, are plentiful in this area, but the Islamic Center of Passaic County stands out in terms of its size and fame. My exploration into Islam in New Jersey began with some stops there as a visitor.

My acquaintance with this center started just after 9/11. My husband and I both teach at a local university that draws heavily on the surrounding population for its students. Tensions in the area were generally high – Muslims were worried by the hostile spotlight upon them, others worried that we harbored terrorists in our midst. The Islamic Center of Passaic County (hereafter ICPC) offered an open house to calm the waters. The ICPC, although located in Paterson, is not surrounded by rustbelt leavings or project housing; it is in a neighborhood of beautiful large homes with BMWs or Land Cruisers in the driveways. Alarm company signs are prominently displayed. The Center's across-the-street neighbor is a Catholic Chancery. Ironically, the Center itself used to be a Synagogue.

Located on Derrom Avenue, ICPC is a contemporary building constructed of brick and designed by Percival Goodman, Dean of the School of Architecture at Columbia University. After the temple congregation moved to Franklin Lakes (a more pastoral suburb), the building was sold in 1990 to the ICPC. Only a metal dome was added to the construction and a crescent affixed to a side wall. Inside, room was made for male and female prayer areas and a bookstore – and lined carpet was installed to orient the worshippers to the East – something not considered in the original construction (James 1999). The Center is primarily Sunni and draws a large portion of its 2000 regular members from Palestinian-American Muslims, although I encountered people from Iraq, Syria, and the African-American community of Paterson in my visits.

As I entered the Center, I walked in under a portico into a main lobby with a bookstore off of it. The floor was marble and around the edges of the room were wooden cubbyholes up to about waist level to hold one's shoes while one was inside. I went to the office and introduced myself. I was greeted warmly, outfitted with a headset, and handed off to a woman who spoke

fine English. We entered into the main area of the mosque through a door on the left – men were going in through the door on the right.

The room was divided into two unequal parts – together approximately the size of about four basketball courts laid side-by-side. The front two thirds of the room was for the men; the back third was cordoned off by the stanchions one finds in movie theatres and banks. It is located under the overhang of a balcony and is for the women and children. The space had a light green rug with dark green stripes running clear across it at about 30” intervals and was basically devoid of furniture, save for a few folding chairs at the front of both sections. At the front was a fairly large podium with a stair running up to it. At the top of the stair was a big and ornate wooden chair that reminded me of a Bishop’s chair in my own Episcopal Church. It is here that the Imam sits as he takes questions and answers or as he gives the lecture of the day. On the wall at the front and to the left of the stage was a wall plaque marking the direction of Mecca and the green stripes on the rug are aligned at a slight diagonal to face that.

The service I visited is the one most commonly attended by the weekly faithful. There are those who attend not only every day but several times a day and there are those who attend once or twice a month – and there are those, just as in Judaism and Christianity, who attend only for the high holidays. The actual prayer begins at 1:15 PM; prior to that the Imam talks with the community answering questions of faith, morals and daily life.

At 12:30 PM there were only a handful milling about – the men upfront by the stage grouped near the Imam; the women in clusters in the back either studying the Koran in small groups or greeting and chatting in threes or fours. The Imam was responding to questions – with the aid of my earphone translation I gathered that he was giving advice on how to distinguish trustworthy travel agents for a Haj; confirming that one must not go into debt for a Haj; speaking

of the appropriate way to divide one's night between sleeping, eating and meditating during Ramadan. While all with whom I talked spoke reverentially of the Imam and his wisdom (he is a learned scholar with multiple degrees including a PhD – and has subsequently been the focus of a Homeland Security deportation effort), it seems that only a handful really listen to his advice. The individual pockets of religious study and social conversation continued throughout this.

During this pre-prayer period, I was adopted by several women who were interested in my being at the Center and in making me welcome. The first woman to whom I was handed off spoke with me rather reservedly until she discovered I was from a local college. Her children went there. When I spoke to her about prayer during the course of the day when one is not at the mosque, she talked earnestly about the required ablutions and keeping a clean rug on hand. She added, however, that it was in fact quite easy and only took a moment. It was part of her day even at work. To make sure that I understood what it meant that Ramadan was coming up and what it meant in the life of the Center and its members, she managed to procure for me one of the scarce glossy sheets that detailed the program for Ramadan.

One woman, a statuesque African-American twenty-five year old, was particularly interested in getting me fully covered. She helped me with my scarf (I brought one, but did not know how to affix it correctly); she also pulled a long white cotton skirt out of one of the cubbies holding such garments and suggested I put it on. I had thought that my skirt, which went to my ankles, was long enough – but I had forgotten it had a “kick” slit in the back. My turtleneck shirt was judged appropriate. All of the women wore long slacks, skirts or floor-length tunics and all wore headcovering. Some were dressed so that their scarves were part of their outfits; some obviously were covered just for the prayer. She confessed to me that she had only recently “been embraced” by Islam and hoped that I would be as well. More and more people had straggled in

during the Q&A session, so the room was about a quarter filled in the front (maybe 100 men) and there were about 50 women in the back with me – a few more with their young children were in the balcony.

As the call for prayer sounded at 1:15 PM, the whole tenor of the rooms changed. Conversations muted and I was shuffled with the rest toward the front and center of our section. Older women less able to meet the physical rigors of prayer were seating in the folding chairs at the front. The rest of us lined up on the dark green stripes, shoulder to shoulder in tight phalanx formation. Obviously position was important; there are clear requirements for the ritual of prayer and those requirements are conscientiously adhered to. As the call rang out (from a person, not a recording), I was further aligned by a woman grasping me from the rear at either side of my hips to get me “just so.” All of the “looseness” in the room was gone. This was obviously what they were all there for. We went through a series of rhythmic bowing movements (twice to the hip, then down on our knees and twice with our heads to the floor – then a repeat) to the song-like chant of the prayer. Some of the women around me chanted under their breaths as they went through the ritual, others were silent. The prayer, like the Koran, cannot be translated to be “true” so no interpreting headphones were in play.

At the completion of the prayer, people remained kneeling or sitting on the floor and the Imam began a lecture or “sermon” that lasted until about 1:50PM. He spoke of Ramadan as a season for fasting that serves as a reminder that the “needs of the mouth and the needs of the privates” open us up for evil to come in. What followed underscored that in the post-9/11 environment, politics appear never to be far from Islam. A speaker was introduced, a Republican running for the Assembly who expressed concern about the Patriot Act and assured the congregants that he would fight against such legislation in New Jersey. This gives witness to

both the worries of the times and the growing power of Muslims in this area as a voting bloc. Few paid attention to him. I took this opportunity to speak with the woman next to me who was a teacher in the local schools. She said how pleased she was to be able to come to the service today (a school holiday) and how she felt calmed and renewed by the prayer. All of her birth family was in Iraq, and she said, "The past year has been most stressful." She did not know from day to day if they were all right – her father had died this past year and she could not travel to the funeral – it was far too dangerous. She said that many in the Center were experiencing similar stresses – whether Iraqis, Iranians, or Palestinians.

The men were flowing out of their end of the room in a very orderly way – the women lingered more, chatting and kissing as they greeted one another. As I left, I picked up my shoes and headed to the car. My initial reaction was that the whole flow and tenor of the meeting was strange to me, but that I had not been overly uncomfortable. What was perhaps most surprising was the fact that it did not seem hostilely segregated – it seemed comfortable and embracing to be surrounded by the women, which is not what I had expected. And thus was renewed my effort to better understand, in a Weberian "Verstehen" sort of way the meaning of all of this to the young women I encountered at school, on the street, and now, in the mosque.

### **Framework for Exploration**

These personal experiences when combined with the "sociological imagination" have led to multiple avenues of inquiry to explore the motivation and meaning for wearing the hijab. The women of interest in this study are those who came here as young children through second-generation Muslim Americans in the northern New Jersey area. Their points of origin range from the Caucasus to Pakistan, back through to Turkey and down to Egypt, including Palestine, Syria, and Macedonia along the way. Their families are firmly middle class, ranging from

shopkeepers to physicians. For the most part they share attributes of youth, modern education and professional career aspirations. And those at the focus of the study share their efforts to be pious observant Muslims.

The work of Philip Kasinitz and his collaborators (2002, 2004) in looking at the children of immigrants and the nature of their assimilation as New Yorkers suggested that there may be ways of being differently "assimilated." That these young women who clearly look to outsiders as "others" might be moving away from the culture of their families into an American culture that is being shaped by its increasing diversity.

The works of Nilüfer Göle, the Turkish sociologist who has pursued the study of this subject in both French and Turkish settings, suggested that the taking on of the scarf, a voluntary "stigma" using Goffman's term, could be seen as a marker of defiance and feminist strength (2003, 2006). At the same time, and of great interest here, are the questions she raised about the nature of that feminism given the propensity for highly educated women to turn away from the professional use of their skills to a homebound life of family nurturing.

Robert Putnam's keen analysis and John Dixon's reinterpretation of Contact and Conflict theories raise questions about affiliation and neighborhood that certainly pertain in the environment of this study. How do the functions of "bonding" (keeping within one's own defined circle) and "bridging" (taking on roles that push one out to intersect with new circles) apply to the cadre of young Muslim American women in their college experiences with the Muslim Student Association and through the comfort or hostility of their home neighborhoods? Does the level of assimilation increase or decrease with the density of minority populations? Does the nature of the neighborhood play a key role in one's comfort with outward expressions of faith?

Writings on the nature of the religious experience also give focus to this inquiry. The more quantitative questions dealing with the experience and practice of the beliefs of young Muslim women were explored by Jen'nan Read et al. (2000, 2003) who looked not only at attitudes toward overt piety covering but also at religiosity and its correlation with perceptions of female roles. Questions dealing more with spiritual and theological meaning are raised through the work of Emmanuel Sivan who described the "enclave" (in this case a virtual one) as a way of marking ethical difference with the "outside" world; and the work of Juliane Hammer, one of the few writing on feminist Islamic theology, whose writings point to the rare and difficult work of grappling with Muslim teachings. The theoretical and practical hard work of such theology in a male-controlled canon must be sharply contrasted with the "easier" narratives of found history dealing with the strong role of females at the time of the Prophet that have been called to attention by both Leila Ahmed and Nilüfer Göle.

And finally, the questions of the shifting shape of institutions implicit in Anthony Giddens' theory of structuration cause one to look for clues to the way in which the practices and understandings of these young women, who *are* in fact Islam, may be changing in subtle ways – the meanings and understandings of the role and practice for young Muslim American females – both in society and in the religion.

### **Research Approach**

To explore these questions and the world of these young women, a two-pronged method was used. While described in reverse sequence in the material that follows, observations and in-depth interviews were initiated beginning in 2003 and were completed in 2008. Although quantitative studies are often seen as more reliable and useful, it was impossible to imagine at that stage in my knowledge creating a survey study that would measure with any validity the

motivations and meanings of overt piety to these young women in whom I was interested. How could a valid set of response categories be formulated given that the vocabulary of Muslim piety was at the outset so foreign to me? With visits to the local Islamic Center and attendance at a local Muslim Student Association's meetings as a backdrop, interviews were conducted with more than 20 women who self-identified as practicing Muslims. The sample was convenient and purposive in order to maximize the number of covered young women while including some variation in age and covering practice for contrast.

To provide a larger backdrop, the Pew Muslim American Study (2007) presented as a useful dataset. Touted as the first ever representative survey of Muslim Americans, the survey asked a variety of demographic, political, experiential and religious questions of over 1000 respondents. While the purpose of the survey was different from the focus of this study, the sample of about 500 Muslim American women served to create a frame of the whole into which could be slotted the small specific sample in northern New Jersey that formed the heart of this study.

The findings that emerged from this approach are evocative more than conclusive. They bring to the growing body of literature about young Muslim American women new interview data that adds depth to previous studies that dealt more with religiosity than with motive and meaning. The insights culled from the interview data permit a more nuanced look at previous research on religiosity and assimilation and suggest that what appears to be old and unchanging may in fact be new and evolving.

CHAPTER 2  
LITERATURE REVIEW

**Introduction**

The conflict between 21<sup>st</sup> century Western feminist beliefs and the conservative Islamic view of the role and comportment of women seems obvious. How then do young, fully engaged, second and third generation non-indigenous Muslims who cover negotiate the resolution of this conflict for themselves? Although the subjects of this research are American, the phenomenon of “the veil” has a wider context that helps inform an understanding of both the public reaction these women face and their individual motivation to cover. A conversation on “covering” cannot go on too long anywhere without reference to the “headscarf debate” in France or the oscillating tensions between secularization and expressions of Islamic piety in Turkey. The very “otherness” of covering is what requires that there be two frames for the review of the literature that follows: the *global context* and the *American context*. Much attention has been paid in the press to the "headscarf controversy" in France where, to protect institutionalized secularism, the wearing of the veil has been prohibited in public spaces. The scarf, however, has also been used as a public statement of agency in both Turkey and in the shah's Iran -- and as a Taliban-enforced marker of female subjugation in Afghanistan. In the United State the scarf has no doubt always demarked an "other" but received little attention until 9/11 when the most prevalent reaction became "why would a woman do that?" As has been asked in so many writings on religion, is there indeed an “American exceptionalism?” in the way in which the scarf is both being worn and received? Once context has been

established, the *theoretical framework* for this work will be discussed, as will also be the contribution to the discourse that this research seeks to make.

The complexities surrounding these questions can be seen in two much-discussed articles in the general press. On November 16, 2004, *The New York Times* reported on the formation of the Progressive Muslim Union of North America, a group of Muslims dedicated to “the universal and egalitarian values of the faith.” (Haberman 2004) The reporter noted, by way of emphasizing their non-radicalness that “Not a head scarf or beard was in sight.” The executive director, Ahmed Nassef, stated “We will not be intimidated into silence as narrow and authoritarian interpretations of our faith are presented.” (Haberman 2004) Mona Eltahawy, a board member, added “I know there are millions of Muslim women out there who want to hear someone say, ‘You are fine just the way you are. No man with a robe down to here and a huge beard is going to tell you how to live your life.’” (Haberman 2004) This view certainly fits comfortably with the American feminist perspective – but how then to explain the *voluntary* move of young educated Muslim women toward such overt signs of traditionalism as the hijab?

*The New Yorker’s* November 22, 2004, “Letter from Europe” devoted 12 pages to “Taking the Veil: How France’s public schools became the battleground in a culture war.” While the circumstances are peculiarly French, the “poster child” used to set up the article is far more representative. Djamila’s dream is to leave Paris for Brooklyn, “where she has heard, Muslim girls go veiled and nobody minds.” (Kramer 2004: 59) In response to a poor childhood marriage to a “not with God” Muslim boy, Djamila began reading the Koran<sup>1</sup>. And kept reading it.

When she came to one of the passages about veils – which many Muslim feminists maintain do not so much prescribe veils as record that the wives of the

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<sup>1</sup> Except where used in quoted material, “Koran” is the spelling used throughout for consistency vs. the modern Arabic transliteration “Qur’an.” It was the choice of the Pew Center Muslim American Survey (2007),

Prophet went veiled and in this way were able to recognize one another and to be honored by other women for their distinction – she prayed and fasted and decided to wear one, too. Her mother, who comes from Algeria and had never been veiled, was horrified by her new clothes (Kramer 2004: 59).

What are the possible explanations for this “turning back” to a new conservatism? And what are the implications for perceptions of the role of women in society and religion?

### **Global Context**

In the West, the sight of a woman with head covering often conjures up a vision of a religious system that looks away from modernity, away from democracy, away from gender equality (Hirschmann 2000). Indeed prominent writers on fundamentalism (Hadden 1991, Hunter 1993, Lazarus-Yafeh 1993) concur that a separate and subjugated role for women is often a feature of fundamentalist sects. A literal reading of the Islamic texts purportedly supports the position that a modern role for women is counter to the haddith, the teachings of the Prophet (Read and Bartkowski 2000). The place for women is, at a minimum, in the home with family (Lazarus-Yafeh 1993).

Studies of the meanings and functions of the veil in Europe, Africa, and the Middle East provide a good baseline for outlining the range of possibilities that might be in play in the United States. Nancy Hirschmann (1998) in her effort to use veiling as a pathway to understanding Eastern vs. Western constructions of female identity provided an initial foundation for examining this range of meaning. In general, she asserted, the veil is viewed by the West as a sign of “backwardness” and “oppression”, a perspective that has its source in 19th century imperialism when the British viewed the veil as a symbol of the Orient’s cultural lag (Hirschmann 1998); however, Muslim women in different political and geographical spaces view it differently. For some, the veil has actually been a sign of political protest in favor of female agency – e.g., when the Shah outlawed veiling in Iran or when de-veiling was enforced in Algeria after the revolution

in the 1950's. For others, veiling is claimed to be a reaction to the West, a marker of difference from its *jayiliyyad* (ignorance) and the alleged debauchery of Western women (Hirschmann 1998). According to many feminist scholars, the veil has been used for control, keeping women linked to home and constricted in their public interactions (Hirschmann 1998). The veil is also claimed as a symbol of devotion to Islam to show a woman's piety, a symbol enforced by men to show theirs. The veil, argued Hirschmann (1998), has different meanings in different contexts; however, the "choice" of wearing or not wearing may be deceptive. She cautioned that for there to be a "choice," not only must women first of all be able to choose, but they must also have the ability to formulate the choices and therefore the ability to participate in the construction of the contexts.

France's very public confrontation with Islam over the wearing of headscarves is the most obvious indicator of its difference from the US context. As mentioned at the outset, *The New Yorker's* "Taking the Veil: How France's public schools became the battleground in a culture war" provides an anecdotal overview of the issue. Recall that Djamila's dream was to leave Paris for Brooklyn, "where she has heard, Muslim girls go veiled and nobody minds" (Kramer 2004: 59).

While the ambient attitude toward headscarves is different in France, Djamila's experience of piety – and generational clash – is very reminiscent of the tales told in Passaic, New Jersey. In France, however, the demographic context is different than in the US. Muslim immigrants are for the most part uni-sourced – from the Maghreb/Northwest Africa, which is not the case in the U.S. In the United States, the Muslim immigrant population is above the US norm in earnings and education; in Europe, the reverse is true. And class does matter. Among the urban middle class, the stories may seem more similar – in the poorer agrarian areas;

however, French Muslim girls are often the “proof” of the power and adulthood of the young Muslim men (Kramer 2004). Hirschmann’s question of agency and choice needs to be kept in mind regardless the setting.

In framing the differences in France, the work of Rogers Brubaker re: the cultural definition of French citizenship (2002) and Ari Zolberg’s observations about “Why Islam is Like Spanish” (1999) are useful. As Brubaker noted, in France citizenship is based upon the soil, *where* you are born, not upon blood or to *whom* you are born (2002). An unanticipated consequence of imperialism has thus been an influx of Muslim French citizens from Algeria and Morocco, seeking employment but ill-equipped in education and skills. And while they are indeed by law French, their culture is very much not. And just as Zolberg noted that the proliferation of “Spanish Spoken Here” geographies in the US has become the rallying marker for English-Only anti-immigration politics, in France, the scarf has become a public litmus test re: *laïcité* and assimilation. He also pointed out that, if left alone, assimilation would likely take place over time.

On the Turkish front, Nilüfer Göle explored the changing attitudes among Turkey’s wealthier urban female “Islamists” within the historical context of a previously “modernized” and secularized Turkey. Where once veil-less heads were viewed as the shining symbol of a modern Kemalist Turkey, today veiled heads similarly proclaim the role of Islamism in Muslim Turkey’s presentation of self. Göle observed that “...new religious actors turn their ‘Muslimness’ (similar to ‘blackness’) into an overt protest called Islamism” (Göle 2003:812). In my interviews, I have not sensed a militant Islamism among these pious young American female Muslims – but there are so many parallels with Göle’s study population that the comparison might be quite illuminating.

There are two specific strains in Göle's work that are worth pursuing in my context. First is her notion of the "looking back" to an chimeral Utopia – grounding current views of female roles in a golden time that arguably never was. Without drawing any conclusions about the veracity of the claim, there is a common thread of calling out heroines of the early times. Secondly, in her interviews with young upper class university-educated women, Göle has noticed an interesting point/counterpoint that should be pursued in studying a similar population in the US. These women, aggressive Islamists, are at the spearhead of the movement in their country. They are pursuing the credentials to be doctors, educators, professionals and they argue that such pursuits are clearly in line with the Koran and Haddith – but interestingly enough, in interview after interview, Göle encountered women who did not plan to practice their skills outside of their family – the locus of female strength and influence in Islam. There are hints of similar patterns here and this feminist contradiction is well worth investigating.

Göle also argued that it has been reaction to the Western view of Muslim "backwardness" that has made the veil a central symbol of Islamist revolution against Western modernity. Quoting the Iranian philosopher D. Shayegan, Göle posited that Islamic culture in the midst of Western modernity has had its "consciousness wounded" (Göle 1996:51). Seeking to escape uncomfortable reminders of the present "backwardness" they either seek to return to a mystified Golden Age of the past or to find the path of progress in a utopian future. Many Muslim women take much this same approach in redefining the role of women within Islam – looking back to a mythical golden age of female leadership at the time of the Prophet (Ahmed 1992) or to a future "reformation" (Haberman 2004).

In surveying the literature on veiling and Muslim women, it would be difficult to ignore Saba Mahmood's *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (2005) which

explored the feminist implications of the women's mosque movement in Egypt. As an aspiring methodologist, I find compelling her open struggle to contain her profound (and Western) feminist beliefs in order to privilege, or at least not dismiss the assertions of independence from the women who accept an Islamist society. She did a masterful job in highlighting the interiority vs. the exteriority of overt piety using Hilmi and Mona. "For Hilmi, it seems, the goal of creating modern autonomous citizens remains independent of the means she proposed (Islamic rituals) ... In contrast, for women like Mona, ritual acts of worship are the sole and ineluctable means of forming pious dispositions" (Mahmood 2005:133). Critical in understanding the need to participate in ritual prayer is that "it serves as both a *means* to pious conduct and an *end*. [emphasis in the original]" (Mahmood 2005:133). While Mahmood's focus is on the *salāt*, her investigations into the meaning of this act of piety provides insights into the motives and meanings for wearing the scarf.

Mahmood turned the Aristotelian use of *habitus*, which is "understood to be an acquired excellence at either a moral or practical craft, learned through repeated practice until that practice leaves a permanent mark on the character of the person" (2005:136). She later added that bodily acts performed by the women she observed are not "manipulable masks in a game of public presentation, detachable from an essential interiorized self. Rather they are the *critical markers* of piety as well as the *ineluctable means* by which one trains oneself to be pious." (Mahmood 2005:158) It is interesting that these observations made under such radically different circumstances are echoed in my field study.

## **American Context**

The grounding offered by Hirschmann, Göle, Mahmood and others provides a jumping off point as we move to the U.S. present. Muslim women in the United States, at least at the legal/political level, have a far greater role in creating their contexts than do women in Iran or Pakistan. Here they can not only make choices, but participate to a greater extent in determining what is to be chosen from. Jen'nan Ghazal Read and John Bartkowski spent several years looking at a population similar to the population in this current study – urban, middle class, educated young non-indigenous Muslim Americans. Read and Bartkowski have found many of the same meanings in play that Hirschmann found in her survey of the attitudes of Middle Eastern Muslim women, but the intensities of the sentiments are somewhat different. In their initial study of young Muslim women in Austin, Texas (2000), Read and Bartkowski argued that the positions, pro and anti-veiling, put forward at the elite religious and intellectual level mask a complexity of motivations. Just as the stringent pro-veiling forces work at the authoritarian level of literal orthodoxy enjoyed primarily by imams, the anti-veiling forces work at the theological and ideological level where feminist scholars argue for new interpretations of the Koran. Equally forceful, however, are those arguing at the strategic level that veiling underscores the differences of gender, obedience to Islam, and disdain for the profane. At a more worldly level, there are those who argue that veiling not only allows them access to public spaces they would otherwise be forbidden to enter (including the workspace), but also allows them to function at an intellectual level, free of sexual baggage, that non-veiled women cannot enjoy. Of interest also in the Read and Bartkowski study is the finding that subjects on both sides of the argument, pro and anti-veiling, showed respect for the practices of the other (Read and Bartkowski 2000). Any vitriol that was present seems reserved for the male oppressors, not the female veilers, which

suggests, rather than a theological dispute, that there is an underlying feminist ideology in play here that denies a woman might voluntarily take up the hijab.

The recent work by Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, Jane Smith and Kathleen Moore, *Muslim Women in America: The Challenge of Islamic Identity Today* (2006) also focused on overtly pious Muslim women (those “actively affirming Islam”) – veiled and unveiled. A work grounded more in description than explanation, it seeks to debunk the image of Muslim women as duped pawns. Interestingly, it noted a trend post-9/11 of Muslim women moving away from “self-ghettoizing” and into public expressions of identity and active religious proselytizing; hints of this trend appeared among only a few of the women in my fieldwork. Most helpful, the authors included converted ex-Christians in their study, painting portraits of women looking for structure, community, and teachings that buffer against the cacophony of an untamed consumerist society – motivations I have heard cited by my “born-Muslim” young women as well. Of particular interest in this work is the material on activist female Muslims who are working to change interpretations and practices – these efforts are presented as a dominant new wave – with little attention to those women who stand in opposition to these efforts. Juliane Hammer added considerably to this discussion with her work "Identity, Authority, and Activism: American Muslim Women Approach the Qur'an" (2008) which examined the work of Amina Wadud, Asma Barlas, and Nimat Barazangi, all of whom have sought new understanding from the Koran based on their gendered reading. The struggle for legitimated new interpretations is compounded by the closed circle of recognized Islamic scholars, the key entry to which is training at centers where women are religiously excluded. Wadud, an African American, is the only American-born of the three. A convert, her academic credentials include Arabic language

study in Egypt. She was a member of the Islamic Studies faculty at Virginia Commonwealth University from 1992-2007. She wrote that her work

...is a lifelong battle with my own identity as a Muslim seeking to reflect the beauty of Allah's vast dominion in all its wonder and glory while admitting the many ways that I and other Muslims have failed to establish a believing community that mirrors that beauty without constant trials of insufficiency and trails of frailty. Thus Islam is no longer a goal, but a process (As quoted in Hammer 2008:447).

A controversial Muslim service in Morningside Heights illustrates the clash of views among American female Muslims. On March 18, 2005, after several changes of venue, a bomb threat, and much public debate, Dr. Wadud led a Muslim service after another woman, uncovered, gave the call to prayer. Contrary to practice in most mosques in the United States, women and men prayed in the same room in adjacent rows with no curtain or partition between them. "The voices of women have been silenced by centuries of man-made traditions, and we're saying 'No more!' We're going to move from the back of the mosque to the front of the mosque," stated Asra Nomani, an organizer of the event (Elliott 2003 B). While it was not surprising to anyone that criticism rained down on the service from clerics abroad, it is noteworthy that the event was held not at any mosque but rather at the Synod House of the Cathedral of St. John the Divine – and while many of the women on the MSA listserv I monitor wanted to protect the woman from condemnation as a heretic (called for by several males on the list), not even one of the most outspoken female "MSA-ers" thought that such a prayer service was theologically defensible.

Several scholars have looked beyond religion in determining the links between conservative Islamic practice and feminist views. They have tested for the effects of such variables as religiosity, ethnicity, generation, and political identity. (The role of class [closely linked to the "choices" alluded to by Hirschmann] has been less well examined and will, because

of the uniformly middle class nature of my study population, be bracketed for this undertaking.) In 2003, Read delved further into the question, this time looking at both Christian and Muslim Arab-Americans to explore whether it was religion (Christian vs. Muslim) or religiosity (intensity of adherence) and ethnicity that might determine a woman's attitude toward the role of women. Drawing on data collected from a nation-wide sample of 501 Arab-American women, Read tested Muslim affiliation, Arab ethnicity, and religiosity as predictors of attitudes toward gender roles. She found that it was not whether one was Christian or Muslim that seemed to determine conservative attitudes toward gender roles but rather religiosity. While Muslims do tend to be more gender traditional than their non-Muslim peers, levels of ethnicity (endogamy, membership in ethnic groups) and religiosity (attendance, belief in scriptural inerrancy, high religiosity over life cycle) had far higher significance than Muslim affiliation when they were added to the model. Those with less time in the United States also tended more toward the conservative. While I find this study problematic on a number of scores, the results are interesting and not inconsistent with other findings in the literature (Moruzzi 1994; Hirschmann 1998; Swanson 1996). But the conclusions leave the phenomenon of the highly observant second- and third- generation Muslim women unexplained.

Susan Marshall joined Read in another study in 2003 that used the same national data from the Arab American Institute to examine whether political, ethnic and religious identities undermine or support a feminist orientation in Arab-American women. Given the speculation that for some young hijab-converts, ethnic and political solidarity might be a motivation post 9/11 (Peek 2003), their investigation seems germane. In the study of identity politics, proponents focus on issues of cultural identity (religion, ethnicity, gender, sexuality) not issues of economics or class. In light of the stark conflict in gender/ethnicity/religion aspects of

identity that might be experienced by many young American Muslims, one could posit that a culture war, like the Prophet's jihad, might be most profound when waged internally. The authors note that "Although the process of identity formation may be intensely personal, the activities of identity politics occur in the public sphere where groups seek recognition, legitimacy and power (Calhoun 1994)" (Marshall and Read 2003:876). The wearing of the hijab takes religion to the public square.

To test the interplay of identity(ies), Marshall and Read (2003) used an index of feminist orientation compatible with common American views as the dependent variable (this was a measure of politicization of attitudes; it was not about gender roles). Two theories of identity were being tested. The first, competition, suggests that one identity becomes dominant and suppresses others, with gender usually falling in at the bottom of the identity chain. The second theory, contagion, suggests that rather than sacrificing incompatible identities, one militant stance might in fact beget others (those with ethnic ills to cure might pull in feminist causes as well, seeing injustice as a whole) (Marshall et al 2003). Measures of cultural and religious identity were then correlated with the measure of feminist political orientation to see if they acted in conflicting or complementary fashion.

In the end, the study found that that high Arab (political) identity could coexist with high religious identity and high feminism, but in terms of intensity, feminism comes in a bit behind ethnic issues. When a regression was run testing the effects of ethnic and religious identity on feminist orientation, the authors found positive effects from Arab political identity; however, homogamy as a measure of cultural identity yielded a significant negative effect and high religiosity (not Muslim affiliation) had a slight negative effect on the feminist score as well. As with the 2003 Read study, I find the measures to be flawed because of the differing requirements

for and implications of religiosity for Muslims v Christians, but the results do indicate how highly complex the issue is. Their population scored high on all indices (perhaps a measure of their source for the sampling frame: the Arab-American Institute and voter registration rolls), with foreign-born respondents rating as no less feminist than the native-born. And finally, class and education patterns and their interaction with feminist orientation were consistent with general American patterns. The most interesting nuance offered by this study was that, while ethnicity appears to be tied to conservative attitudes toward gender roles, ethnic identity can be compatible with a feminist orientation.

At the end of the day, we are left with a variety of speculations about relationships of Muslim affiliation, religiosity, time in the US, ethnicity and political identity and the perception of the female role. And while these studies might indirectly address the issue of the highly religious young Muslim woman, they do not seem to capture the confidence with which so many young women express both their religious convictions and their female independence. They also do not address the trend (reported anecdotally, to be sure [Peek 2003; Leonard 2003:97]) of young Muslim women raised in high-culture, low-religiosity households who “return” to a conservatism they had never experienced – a conservatism that coexists comfortably with views of female independence and political activism. It was my hypothesis that there are matters of belief, of religious commitment at play here that cannot be easily explained away in terms of political or ethnic identity. I also expected to find that ethnic identity played less of a role for them than religious identity and that their view of Islam was shaped as much by their cohort as by theology. While these are the expectations I had in mind, I fully expected to encounter wide variations in motivations and familial/ethnic context.

## Theoretical Framework

The religiously conservative behavior of pious young Muslim women is of interest because it both reaffirms and runs counter to American expectations. Piety in America is quite acceptable – in fact, preferred. As Weber (1946) noted, religious participation in America acts as “pre-qualifier” for a person’s integrity, an entry card to the community, a marker of respectability. But assimilation is expected – forms of piety that call attention to “otherness” are less rewarded. What assimilation comprises, however, has been a moving target as the makeup of the population has changed. The classic “take” on assimilation can be found in the Chicago School in the 1930's when Park and Burgess defined it as the “process of interpenetration and fusion in which persons and groups acquire the memories, sentiments, and attitudes of other persons and groups and, by sharing their experience and history, are incorporated with them in a common cultural life.” This was softened a bit in Park's entry for the *Encyclopedia of Social Science* (1930) where he described assimilation as the “process or processes by which peoples of diverse racial origins and different cultural heritages, occupying a common territory, achieve a cultural solidarity sufficient at least to sustain a national existence” (in Alba et al 1997:828). Decades later in the 1960's Milton Gordon offered a more complex and nuanced definition using seven dimensions. The critical threshold in Gordon's scheme, however, is the line between acculturation and “structural assimilation,” the point where ethnic minority members enter into primary group relations with the majority group. The stage of acculturation could occur without assimilation, but once structural assimilation is achieved (entry into cliques, clubs, etc. at the primary level, with intermarriage being a hallmark), all other forms of assimilation “will naturally follow” (Alba et al 1997:830). It is notable that the Gordon model is a two-group one with a minority group and a majority group; further, it is a one-way process with the “core

culture" of the host remaining virtually intact. Alba and Nee in "Rethinking Assimilation Theory for a New Era of Immigration" define assimilation as "the decline, and at its endpoint the disappearance, of an ethnic racial distinction and the cultural and social differences that express it" (1997:863). Interestingly, they suggest that their definition is "agnostic" about the direction or mutuality of the change. Who changes and how is dependent on the groups, the context, and the aspect of the change – a concept that is made manifest in schools in Paterson NJ where Muslim holidays are part of the school calendar and headscarves are a fashion "must." Alba and Nee leave open the question of whether or not assimilation will be the logical end for the "new" immigrants in an era of transnationalism and globalization. Gans and Sandberg, they argue, viewed the assimilation process as an inevitable series of generational changes, with each generation coming closer to the "disappearance" of difference Alba and Nee take as the endgame. Gans later modified his straight-line view to a "bumpy" one that allowed for a periodic resurgence of ethnic content that occurs thanks to the intervention of events and actions of the host – but over time would regress to the generationally-driven mean of assimilation (Gans 1979). Given the efforts of the parents of the group under study to assimilate, to not stand out, the decision of these young Muslims to "cover" seems a notable "bump" (Gans 1979) in the path of assimilation. But perhaps cultural and social differences are becoming what make one NOT different?

The literature on second and third generation immigrants also offers some insight into the behavior of these young Muslim women. In "Transnationalism and the Children of Immigrants in Contemporary New York," Kasinitz et al. (2002) looked at transnationalism and assimilation patterns and noted that "Few of the people we spoke to envisioned living in the parent's homeland for any sustained length of time" (115). In fact, they "see themselves as here to stay;"

however, “they do not always consider themselves ‘Americans’ – indeed most often they use the term ‘American’ to mean the white native born, not obviously ethnic Americans” (Kasinitz et al. 2002:117). The authors further observe: “They generally do see themselves as New Yorkers, at home in the increasingly diverse city” (Kasinitz et al. 2002:117). Kasinitz et al. had as their sample mostly Chinese, Latino and West Indian youth with little attention to Middle Eastern, North African or Eastern European Muslims; however some of their insights seem to hold for this population sample as well. None of the women interviewed for this dissertation included plans for anywhere other than the US as a homeland; however, nor have they presented the cosmopolitan leanings that the authors’ New Yorkers evidenced. But there is something American-based in the Muslim identity that is espoused that needs to be understood further.

Additional dimensions to the assimilation discussion center around "perceived comfort" or the "comfort zone" which I will argue is the emotional safe space resulting from social capital (Coleman 1988; Tilly 2006), breaching and bonding (Putnam 2000 ) and group threat/conflict theory (as amended by Dixon 2006). All of these look at the impact of social interaction within and among communities – and the effect on the sense of "belonging" vs. being "other."

One could argue that the breadth of that “comfort zone” depends on one’s social capital. Social capital is an elusive and ever-morphing term whose definers include Jane Jacobs (1961), Pierre Bourdieu (1988), James Coleman (1988), and Robert Putnam (200) – all of whom share the notion of social capital as networks from which advantages are drawn and by which individuals are differently advantaged. One of the more useful tools Putnam provides is the distinction between bonding (exclusive) and bridging (inclusive) social capital (Putnam 2000). While the terms are apparently not original with Putnam, he argues that the distinction between

the two types provides the strongest dimension of difference in the forms of social capital. He writes:

Some forms of social capital are, by choice or necessity, inward looking and tend to reinforce exclusive identities and homogeneous groups... Other networks are outward looking and encompass people across diverse social cleavages... Bonding social capital is good for undergirding specific reciprocity and mobilizing solidarity... Bridging networks, by contrast, are better for linkage to external assets and for information diffusion. ...Moreover, bridging social capital can generate broader identities and reciprocity, whereas bonding social capital bolsters our narrower selves (Putnam 2000:22-23).

In my study in looking at the Muslim-American community, the interplay between my subjects and neighborhoods, communities, campuses and MSAs (Muslim Student Associations) can be productively viewed using this lens – understanding the affiliations that tighten the comfort zone and those that create a wider swathe.

While I think the nature of the networks surrounding young Muslim Americans is essential to understand, there is a “looking glass self” (Cooley 1902) aspect to the way in which those networks are formed and maintained – the way in which comfort is achieved or not achieved. How are the women perceived by the communities they are in? How do they perceive that they are perceived? Jeffrey Dixon did a masterful job in examining contexts for prejudice in “The Ties that Bind and Those that Don’t: Toward Reconciling Group Threat and Contact Theories of Prejudice”(Dixon 2006). While his work focuses on race and ethnicity rather than religion, I think his analysis and the conclusions he draws offer additional lenses for examining the "comfort zone" within young Muslim-American women function. The two major theories that examine the impact of minority population density/proximity on prejudice come at it from seeming opposing corners. Group Threat or conflict theory (Bobo, Blalock, Fox) suggests that there is a threshold level or more popularly a “tipping point” for the size of a minority population to begin to be viewed as problematic because, it is argued, they begin to pose a threat – and that

threat is most commonly defined as an economic and/or political threat. Contact Theory on the other hand hypothesizes that the more sizable the minority, the more opportunity to interact, the more the potential for understanding, the less the dominant group prejudice (Dixon 2006:2182). In reconciling these two theories, Dixon focuses not only on proportion and context, but also on distinctions between minority populations. Keeping in mind that in the United States, unlike in Europe, the non-indigenous Muslim population is in general better-educated and of equal or better socio-economic status than the average American, the opportunity for equal-status interaction increases in the case of both urban and suburban Muslim Americans and their non-Muslim counterparts. Following this assimilation theory thread, Dixon notes that while ethnic minorities may take on attitudes and values of the dominant group with increased contact (acknowledging Milton 1964), the hyper visibility of blacks and Puerto Ricans might make reduced prejudice more difficult to attain (acknowledging Moynihan and Glazer 1963) (Dixon 2007:2184). Certainly in the wake of 9/11 hyper visibility might be an issue for covered Muslim American women as well.

As important as assimilation and integration is in understanding choices of young Muslim American women, the common conclusion that those who cover are "oppressed" requires we click on the lenses of feminism, identity and agency. In her work on veiling Nilüfer Göle used Goffman in arguing that Islamist women in Turkey with the act of donning the headscarf have turned "the 'undesired differentness' of being a Muslim into a voluntary adoption of a stigma that is overtly claimed and offensively communicated in public..." (2003:810) As previously noted, she argued that they in effect, turned "Muslimness" into "blackness." This aggressive taking-on of an identity seems quite in keeping with a very American trend among hyphenated

second and third generation youth. A quick scan of the student clubs on any large campus will attest to this.

Attributes of “anti-modern” and “anti-feminist” are far too complex to easily deconstruct. Giddens defines modernity as the “institutionalization of doubt” (Giddens 1990: 176) – a thought to keep in mind as we listen to these young women in their struggles for moral standards and boundaries. To the degree that modernity and secularism are made coterminous, certainly Islam as practiced by these young women can be argued to be anti-modern. To the degree that they are highly educated, the children of professionals and entrepreneurs, and fully dependent upon the technology and economic realities of the here and now, one can argue that they are fully modern. And to the degree that they claim agency underscored with acts of individual courage, one might question the anti-feminist label as well. One might also look at Giddens’ concept of Structuration (Giddens 1984) to question whether through their habits, stories, actions they are in effect re-shaping both what is Islamic and what is modern as they negotiate the paradoxes.

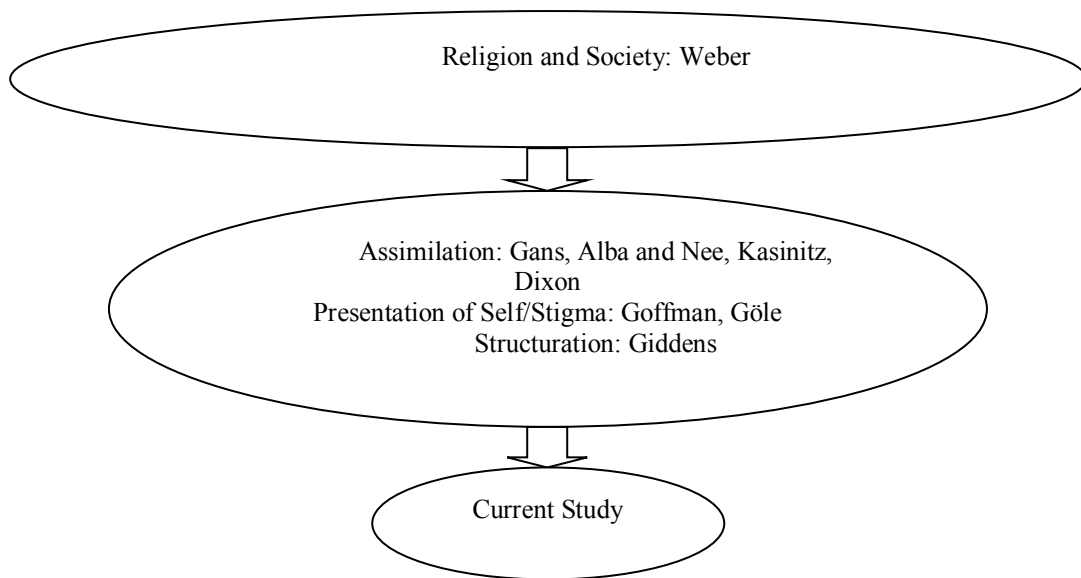


Figure 2.1

### **Contribution of Current Study**

Taking past studies as a backdrop, this study seeks to use secondary data from the Pew Muslim American Study (2007) and original in-depth interviews to provide what I believe to be the first in-depth look both the influences on and the meaning of wearing the headscarf for young Muslim American women. Informed by the literature and theory described above, this study adds *in vivo* accounts of the experience and meaning exterior and public pious expression that contribute to both data and theory and ultimately to our understanding of a seemingly "other" American phenomenon.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODS

#### **Introduction**

The preceding chapters examined the social forces that surround a Muslim woman's decision to wear a headscarf and the theoretical lenses that might be used in understanding the interplay of those forces. This dissertation seeks to better understand the meaning and experience of that decision for young Muslim American women and whether or not there might be a particular circumstances that make the choice to "cover" more likely.

This study uses mixed methods (secondary data analysis and qualitative interviews) to explore these questions; therefore this chapter is presented in two parts: 1) Pew Muslim-American Survey and 2) In-Depth Interviews. For each of these methods the research design, participant selection, and measures will be described and for the survey analysis, the approach taken regarding weights and missing data will also be discussed.

#### **Secondary Data Analysis**

##### **(Pew Muslim American Survey 2007)**

#### Research Design

The data set analyzed in this dissertation comes from the *Pew Research Center Survey of American Muslims* which was conducted from January through April 2007. This survey was conducted to fill a gaping research void. Reliable quantitative research on American Muslims has been almost non-existent for several major reasons. First, in America our most reliable "counting" agency, the U. S. Census Bureau, by law must not count by religion; therefore we

have no government statistics on religious populations at the state or national level. In general for such numbers researchers rely on censuses conducted by the religions themselves, and Islam, unlike most major Christian and Jewish denominations in the United States, is neither traditionally “churched” nor hierarchically organized. Second, because Muslims form such a small percentage of the U.S. Population (estimates range from 1.6 million to 6 million out of 305 million in 2008), national opinion surveys like the General Social Survey (GSS) have so few in their sample that no significant analysis can be undertaken. Third, even were a government agency to be counting for purely demographic purposes, Muslims, like illegal immigrants, might think twice about self-identifying in post-9/11 world of the Patriot Act. The Pew Research Center therefore claims that this is “the first ever nationwide survey to attempt to measure rigorously the demographics, attitudes and experiences of Muslim Americans” (Pew Research Center 2007).

This survey of American Muslims builds on Pew’s 2006 Global Attitudes Project examining Muslim minority populations in Great Britain, France, Germany and Spain and its global surveys from 2002 to 2006 of over 30,000 Muslims in 22 countries. In many of those countries, counting by religion is more common than counting by race, so the American problem of determining who is Muslim and how to get a representative sampling thereof is unique.

### Survey Sample

A comprehensive three-pronged approach that screened nearly 60,000 respondents was used to gather the first-ever representative sample of Muslim Americans. Previous random digit dial (RDD) surveys of the U.S. population have netted approximately one-half of one percent of respondents who self-identify as Muslims. Additionally, the Muslim population is very diverse, ethnically, racially, and geographically, so surveys targeted at a few large enclaves would not be

effective. The Pew design addressed these difficulties by using two separate sample frames: 1) an RDD frame based on estimated population density in each county (using Pew data bases and the U.S. Census electing on ethnicity and language) and a disproportionate approach was used to maximize the yield and 2) a list of Muslim households previously identified in Pew's interview database and other RDD studies focused on Muslims in recent years. To ensure that the sample did reflect an equal probability of selection for the population, statistical adjustments were applied to the final sample based on recent government data to account for the oversampling in high-density areas. The resulting sample included 1,050 Muslim American adults 18 years of age or older (PewResearchCenter 2007: 57-58). Respondents included immigrants and native-born Americans and the interviews for the survey took place in English, Arabic, Urdu or Farsi to help ensure validity of the responses.

For this study, the dataset's weighted sample was used; however to ensure both representativeness (a probabilistic sampling) and levels of significance commensurate with the sample size, the weighting used in SPSS was normalized by dividing the original weight in the database by the mean of the weights. The sample of 1,050 yielded 505 Muslim American women of whom 499 responded to the question on whether or not they wore the hijab and serve as the sample for this study.

### Measures

Following is the list of variables used to conduct the survey portion of this study. Where the variables have been re-coded, the recoding and its purpose are described. The Independent Variables are grouped according to the three categories of analysis: Muslim Practice/Religious Views, Muslim Experience, and Demographics.

### *Dependent Variable*

'HijabNeverEver' is a variable with dichotomous (0, 1) coding that was created from Q.G4 'When you are out in public, how often do you wear the headcover or *hijab*?' Original response values 1='All the time'; 2='Most of the time'; and 3='Only some of the time' were recoded into the new value 1='Sometimes to Always' and the original value 4='Never' was recoded in to a new value 0='Never.' The assumption is that the strongest difference would be expressed in those who do not wear the scarf at all vs. those who consider it an appropriate enough expression of their faith to wear it in public at all. The phrasing “when you are out in public” would not preclude from the Never category those who wear it when they attend Mosque prayers.

### *Independent Variables*

#### ➤ Muslim Practice/Religious Views

Q.E1R 'Mosque attendance recoded' reverses the coding on the responses to the original Q.E1 'On average, how often do you attend the mosque or Islamic center for salah and Jum'ah prayer?': 1='More than once a week'; 2='Once a week for Jum'ah prayer'; 3='Once or twice a month'; 4='A few times a year, especially for the Eid'; 5='Seldom'; 6='Never'. The recoding flipped the scale so that going from 1 up to 6 increases the level of attendance in the same increments that the original decreased it.

Q.E4 'Which comes closest to your view [on inerrancy of Koran]?: 1='The Koran is the word of God'; 2='The Koran is a book written by men and not the word of God'; 3='Other'. This variable tests for one of the core beliefs of Islam, that the Koran is literally the word of Allah dictated to Mohammed.

‘One Interpretation’ is a dichotomous variable (0, 1) which is a recoding of Q.E9 'Which statement [about interpretation of the faith] comes closest to your view?': 1= 'There is only ONE true way to interpret the teachings of Islam'; 2= 'There is more than one true way to interpret the teachings of Islam' was recoded as 0. Answers for 3= 'Other' were coded as missing because their meaning is impossible to interpret. This questions probes receptiveness to changes in Islamic practices and interpretations. Answer 0 would be representative of the thinking of reform or progressive Muslims.

‘GenderTreatment’ recoded Q.G2 'Do you think that the Islamic religion treats men and women equally well, or does it treat one better than the other?' into a dichotomous variable with 1= ‘Islam treats men better’ and 0= ‘Women Equal or Women Better’. Originally the responses were coded 1= 'The Islamic religion treats men and women equally well'; 2= 'Treats men better than women'; 3= 'Treats women better than men'.

‘Women Pray Separate’ is a dichotomous variable with 1= ‘Women separate space’ and 0= ‘Beside or behind, no curtain.’ It is a recoding of Q.G3 'When men and women pray in a mosque do you think that': 1= 'Women should be separate from men, in another area of the mosque'; 2= 'Women should pray behind men, with no curtain'; 3= 'Women should pray in an area alongside men, with no curtain.' In the United States, most major mosques and Islamic centers follow answer 2; answer 1 is more conservative, answer 3 is more liberal.

#### ➤ Muslim Experience

‘Islam Conflict with Modernity’ is a recoding of Q.D4 'Do you think there is a natural conflict between being a devout Muslim and living in a modern society, or don't you think so?': 1= 'Yes, there is a conflict'; 2= 'No, don't think so.' The recoded new values are 1= ‘Yes, there is a conflict and 0 = “No, don’t think so.’

'Not assimilate' is a recoding of Q.D5 'What comes closest to your view [on assimilation]' with original values of 1= 'Muslims coming to the U.S. today should mostly adopt American culture'; 2= 'Muslims coming to the U.S. today should mostly try to remain distinct from the larger American society'; 3= '(VOL) Both!'; 4= '(VOL) Neither.' The answers were recoded so that 'Adopt American culture' = 0; 'Keep both cultures' and 'Keep original culture' were both recoded as = 1 'Keep Muslim, Keep both cultures.'

'Exogamy not okay' tests for disapproval of marrying outside the Muslim culture. It is a dichotomous recoding of the original variable Q.D7 'Do you personally think that it is okay or not okay for a Muslim to marry someone who is not a Muslim?' with responses coded as 1= 'Okay for a Muslim to marry someone who is not a Muslim'; 2= 'Not okay for a Muslim to marry someone who is not a Muslim'; 3='(VOL) Depends.' The new variable has values of 1 = 'Not okay' and 0 = 'Depends, Is okay'.

Q.D2R is an ordinal variable that reverses the order of the coding for 'Q.D2' regarding Muslim friends. The original response categories were 1= 'All of them', 2 = 'Most of them', 3 = 'Some of them', 2= 'Hardly any of them', and 5 = 'None of them'. The new values now range from 1 = 'None of them' to 5 = 'All of them'.

'Identity' is a dichotomous variable with 1 = 'Muslim or Muslim and American' and 0 = 'American'. It is a recoding of Q.E12 'Do you think of yourself first as an American or first as a Muslim?'. The original codes were 1= 'American'; 2= 'Muslim'; 3= 'Both equally', 4= 'Neither'; 5= 'Other.' Because the meaning is obscure and the respondents are not available to comment, both 'Neither' and 'Other' were coded as missing.

Q.1R is an ordinal variable that reverses the direction of the coding of Q.1 'Overall how would you rate your community as a place to live?' which was originally coded 1= 'Excellent'; 2=

'Good'; 3= 'Only fair'; 4= 'Poor.' Q.1R measures level of comfort with the with new coding ranging from a low of 1= 'Poor' to a high of 4= 'Excellent.'

'MusExpIndex' is a scale that is created Q.11\_1 and Q.11\_3 through Q.11\_6, variables that deal with adverse experiences as Muslims in the everyday world. The original questions are listed below and in each case the answers were coded 1= 'Yes, has happened' and 2= 'No, has not happened.' The series of questions were preceded by 'Next I am going to read a list of things that some Muslims in the U.S have experienced. As I read each one, please tell me whether or not it has happened to you in the past twelve months.'

Q.D11\_1 'Have people acted as if they are suspicious of you?'

Q.D11\_3 'Have you been called offensive names?'

Q.D11\_4 'Have you been singled out by airport security?'

Q.D11\_5 'Have you been singled out by (other) law enforcement officers?'

Q.D11\_6 'Have you been physically threatened or attacked?'

Q.D11\_2 'Has someone expressed support for you?' was omitted from this sequence because it was a different indicator altogether. The variables listed above were each recoded so that 0= 'Has not happened' and 1='Has happened.' The answers to the five questions were then summed as a rough scale of anti-Muslim experiences ranging from 0 to 5.

➤ Demographic factors.

'Age' is a scale variable ranging from 18 to 96 (which stood for both 96 and all above 96).

'Education' is an ordinal variable measuring the last level of schooling completed.

Answers were coded as 1= 'None, or grade 1-8'; 2= 'High school incomplete (grades 9-11)'; 3= 'High school graduate (Grade 12 or GED certificate)'; 4= Technical, trade, or vocational school AFTER high school'; 5= 'Some college, no 4-year degree (including associate degree); 6=

College graduate (B.S., B.A., or other 4-year degree); 7= 'Post-graduate training or professional schooling after college (e.g., toward a Master's Degree or Ph.D., law or medical school).

'Region – Not South' is a dichotomous recoding of 'Region' which is a nominal variable capturing in which area of the country each respondent resides. 'Northeast' =1; 'Midwest' =2; 'South' =3; 'West' =4. The new variable has values of 1= "Northeast, Midwest, or West and 0 = 'South'. The regions included under response 1 are those with larger pockets of Muslim population and are there for expected to provide a more comfortable setting for external markers of Muslim observance.

'Married' recodes 'Marital ': 'Are you married, divorced, separated, widowed, or never been married?'. Originally the values were 1= 'Married'; 2 = 'Divorced'; 3= 'Separated', 4= 'Widowed'; 5= 'Never been married.' The recoding into the dichotomous variable 'Married' combines 'Divorced' and 'Separated' 'Widowed' and 'Never been married' into value 0 and codes 'Married' = 1. The expectation is that those who are married are more likely to cover while those who are 'on their own' might choose not to if male pressure is indeed a factor.

'Employed' recodes 'Employ': 'Are you now employed full-time, part-time or not employed?' into 1= 'Not employed or 'Part time'; 0= 'Full time' from 1 = 'Full time'; 2= 'Part time' and 3= 'Not employed.' Again, the expectation is that those who remain at home or work only part time may be taking on the more traditional female roles said to be espoused by Islam.

'Incomesum' is part of the original dataset and summarizes a series of questions about household income. It is an ordinal variable with values of 1= 'Less than \$10,000'; 2= '10 to under \$20,000'; 3= '20 to under \$30,000'; 4= '30 to under \$40,000'; 5= '40 to under \$50,000'; 6='50 to under \$75,000'; 7= '75 to under \$100,000'; 8= '100 to under \$150,000'; 9= '\$150,000 or more.'

'Race' asks 'What is your race? Are you white, black, Asian or some other?' with responses coded as 1= 'White'; 2= 'Black'; 3= 'Asian'; 4= 'Other or mixed.' It has been recoded into dummy variables with White as the reference variable, Black, and Other (include Asian and Other).

'Birth – Not US' is a recoding of 'Birth' that asks 'In what country were you born?' with the response values 1= U.S.; 2= 'Other.' It was recoded as a dichotomous variable with 1 = Not US and 0 = U.S. testing the expectation that foreign birth might better support the practice of covering.

### Analytic Strategy

The Pew Muslim American Survey of 2007 provides a wealth of data the characteristics and attitudes of American Muslims across a variety of categories and topics; research to date, however, has focused mostly on politics, terrorism, and demographic description. This dissertation focuses on the relationship between wearing the hijab and opinions on the teachings of Islam, experiences as a Muslim woman, and a few key demographic characteristics. Preliminary analysis for this study indicate that of the 505 women who responded to the survey, 499 responded to the question of whether or not they wore the hijab and of those, 240 never wear the scarf when going out in public and 259 wear it sometimes, most of the time, or all of the time. While not a large number, it is the largest representative sample available to date and is robust enough to support exploration of the differences between to two categories of women using binary logistic regression. Coding the dependent variable as 0 and 1, with one representing wearing of the headscarf, logistic regression allows the effects of the independent variables to be examined in terms of how they increase or decrease the odds of a woman's decision to wear the hijab. This exploration is conducted using three models.

Model 1 consists of the variables associated with views on and the practice of the teachings of Islam. Religiosity is examined in terms of mosque attendance, a measure that is more validly applied in the U.S. than elsewhere. While for Muslim women globally, mosque attendance is not considered mandatory and is in fact prohibited in some cultures (e.g. Pakistani, Egyptian), here in the United States Islam has become far more "churched" for both men and women and mosque attendance at least for holy days is more the norm. Adherence to orthodoxy is also examined using the variables on the Koran as the word of God and possibility of multiple interpretations of the teaching of the faith. The impact of opinions on gender equality in Islam are examined looking at whether or not respondents think women are treated equal to, better than, or worse than men..... and whether/how men and women should pray together in the mosque.

Model 2 brings in the experience of these women as Muslims in the modern American society. The impact of opinions on the compatibility of Islam and modernity, the degree to which Muslims should assimilate into American culture and whether or not Muslims should marry outside the religion is also examined. Respondents' level of comfort in their home neighborhood and the number of Muslim friends they have are used to examine the relationship of wearing the scarf to the nature of their immediate surroundings. This model also includes the self-declared identity of the respondent as Muslim or American, indicating a sense of inclusion or "otherness" in their surroundings. And as a last variable, an index measuring the number of negative encounters the respondents have had as Muslims in the last 12 months is included.

Model 3 brings in key demographic variables to measure their effect on the likelihood of a Muslim woman wearing the headscarf. Age, education, region of residence, marital and

employment status, household income, race, and whether or not they were born in the United States are all taken into account in this final model.

To supplement the regression model, several comparisons of means using 'HijabNeverEver' as the grouping variable are also undertaken, looking at the relationship with several ordinal and scale variables including age, education, mosque attendance, Muslim Experiences and neighborhood comfort. Cross tabulations of 'HijabNeverEver' with several nominal variables including Birthplace, race, and Islam and gender equality are also examined. These bivariate analyses are singled out based on expectations raised in the literature – that those wearing the hijab will have higher education, be born in the US, not identify as American but rather as American and Muslim, be younger, attend mosque prayers more often, and not view the genders to be differentially valued in Islam.

### **In-Depth Interviews**

#### Research Design

From 2002 to 2008, research was conducted to explore the meaning of wearing the hijab or headscarf for young Muslim women in Northern New Jersey, a geographical area with several of the densest pockets of Muslim population in the United States. The study was undertaken as qualitative exploratory research informed by Weber's concept of Verstehen, or understanding actions from the actor's standpoint. To that end, the researcher spent time at the Islamic Center of Passaic County, a multi-ethnic mosque and cultural center located in Paterson, NJ, and at meetings of the Muslim Student Association (MSA) at a nearby university in order to gain sufficient vocabulary and cultural framework to conduct in-depth interviews with young Muslim women. Using the MSA List Serve and word-of-mouth, volunteers were solicited to sit for semi-structured interviews intended to elicit their views and experiences on practicing Islam as

young females. From 2007 to 2008 a total of 21 interviews were conducted, 19 of which were analyzed for this dissertation. Two interviewees were converts born into Christian families and their experiences, while interesting, followed far different paths from the other 19.

### Subjects

Of the 19 women interviewed, 11 “covered” and another four were seriously thinking about it. Of the remaining eight, all but two had sisters or mothers who do wear the scarf. Two of the interviews were with mothers of girls who were also in the study sample – in one case the daughter covered and the mother did not; in the other case, the mother covered and the daughters did not. These two sets of paired interviews were conducted to explore intergenerational attitudes. Both mothers were in their early 40’s and both were not born in the United States but came here at the age of 16 and 11 respectively. The young women were for the most part born in the United States; however, two were brought here as young children and one immigrated at the age of 15. Ethnicities included Turkish, Circassian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Egyptian, Palestinian, Macedonian, and Kuwaiti. Only one subject was African American. While the intent was not to include African Americans because of the significant differences in both the experience and practice of Islam, this interviewee was a Sunni Muslim from birth, spoke Arabic, and spent time in Syria to further both her language skills and her understanding of Islam and was in fact indistinguishable from the rest of the sample in all significant ways.

### Interview Protocol

The purpose of the interviews was to explore their perspectives on meaning and experience of being covered Muslim women in Northern New Jersey. Of particular interest was whether or not they perceived or experienced any conflict between the secular world of the “Jersey girl” in which they function and their “Muslimness” (a word used advisedly to capture

not just their own identity but also the identity that may be perceived by others). Are these women who came forward as practicing Muslims “American” or “Other”, “Feminist” or “Oppressed”, “Liberated” or “Anti-Modern”? Who and what are they to themselves? The protocol of questions follows, but this inquiry outline was used only as a guide with each interview lasting anywhere from one to two hours and following paths uniquely shaped by interviewer and interviewee.

### Interview Protocol

- Do you consider yourself to be an observant Muslim?
- What do you think that means?
- Is it easy to be observant and live an “everyday” Jersey life?
- Do you think it is important that Muslim women wear headcovering?
- Are you familiar with the headscarf controversy in France?
- Do you think things are different here? Why?
- If covered, when did you begin to wear headcovering?
- If covered, what does the scarf mean to you?
- Is it common within your family/community?
- What is the reaction of your family/friends/acquaintances?
- How do you think Islam views the role of women?
- Do you think that view is changing?
- Do you consider yourself a feminist?
- Do you think equality for women in the home and in the workplace is important?
- Is the woman’s role in Islam compatible with the role in modern American society?

- When you describe yourself, how do you do it?
- Are you active in campus activities or in the community?
- What are your plans after college?

The purpose of most of these questions is self-evident. While the questions about gender equality are straightforward, the questions about campus activity and plans after college are a type of external validator suggested by the work of Nilüfer Göle. In her study of young Muslim women in Turkey, Göle observed women aggressively preparing for professional lives in the workplace but never actually practicing their skills in the secular world. Motherhood, Muslim motherhood at that, became the ultimate profession.

Most of these interviews took place in an office on campus, but where an interviewee seemed more comfortable meeting elsewhere, that was arranged. In four cases we met in coffee shops, and in two cases (the mothers) the interviews were conducted at their homes. In all cases, the subject was given a \$20 gift card to Barnes and Noble to thank them for their considerable time.

### Analysis

Each of the interviews was transcribed and face sheets were attached identifying the subject and noting any observations about dress, demeanor, and facial expressions. A two-stage coding procedure was then used to analyze the material. This process helps ensure that appropriate weight and attention is given to all of the material in all of the interviews; a process based solely on audio review and interviewer memory can result in skewed hearing. Each interview was first read and labels and notations for the responses were entered reactively. This process began after the second interview and threads that emerged from the subjects words helped identify adjustments to be made in the tone and follow up questions identified in the

initial protocol. After all the interviews were processed using this open coding technique, a few significant categories emerged that both addressed the research question and seemed common to at least several of the subject. Those categories included straightforward demographic attributes like age, birthplace, parents' birthplace, and so on, as well as categories dealing with their views and practices on wearing a headscarf, gender inequality in Islam, and Mosque attendance.

Themes centering around their experience as Muslim women included the type of neighborhood they lived or grew up in (in terms of density of Muslim population and their comfort living there), whether and how they had as Muslims experienced being singled out as "other", how diverse their circle of friends was. And finally, how they describe their own identity and what they plan to be or do in the future. The total list of attributes and themes that were tracked:

- Age
- Where born?
- When came to United States if not born here?
- Where parents born?
- Whether they cover
- Whether their mother covers
- Whether their sisters cover
- Attend prayers at the Mosque?
- Belong to Muslim Student Association (MSA)?
- Observations about their parents' influence on their beliefs
- Neighborhood – Muslim population density
- Neighborhood – Comfort level for them
- Is covering required by Islam?

- The scarf's meaning to them internally – what it says to them personally
- The scarf's meaning externally – what it says to the outside world
- What was reaction when they started covering?
- What identity do they associate with (Muslim, American, Ethnic, combination)?
- Views on Islam and gender equality
- Ideas on theology – do they think things are or can change re: women's role in the religion?
- Thoughts on marriage, future career choices
- Experiences as a Muslim in post 9/11 U.S.

These attributes and themes were then examined for patterns both within and across categories to seek out commonalities and explore the source of differences. This is a very small sample and qualitative research is by its very nature not statistically reliable, but the hope was to uncover findings that affirm or run contrary to public expectations or the received wisdom of this post-9/11 world.

CHAPTER 4  
RESULTS  
SECONDARY DATA ANALYSIS

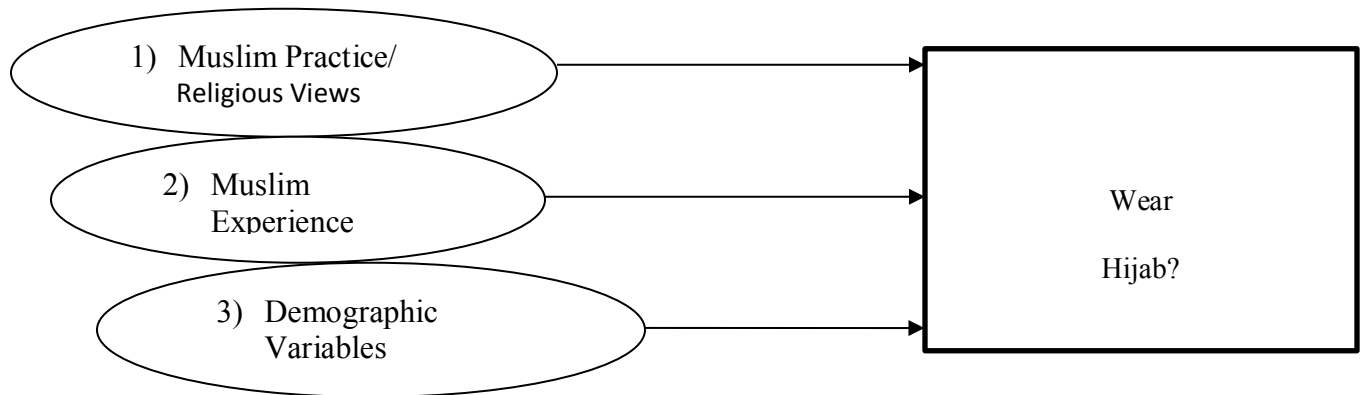
**Introduction**

This chapter explores the impact of the social forces that surround young Muslim women on their decision to wear a headscarf. As described in Chapter 3, a mixed methods approach was applied and the results will be discussed in two parts. This chapter explores the findings from the secondary data analysis of the Pew Muslim American Survey (2007). The results from the analysis of the in-depth interviews will be discussed in the following chapter.

From a comprehensive three-pronged approach that screened nearly 60,000 respondents, the researchers achieved a sample of 1,050 Muslim American adults, 18 years and older. To ensure a representative sample, statistical adjustments to that sample were made based on recent government data to account for the oversampling in high-density areas (PewResearchCenter 2007). For this dissertation, that weighted sample was used but to ensure both representativeness and levels of significance commensurate with the sample size, the weighting used in SPSS was normalized by dividing the original weight by the mean of the weights. This yielded a final sample of 1055 with 505 of them Muslim American women. Of these women, 499 responded to the question of whether or not they wore the hijab and serve as the sample of this study.

Who are these women and what are their characteristics? Table 4.1 presents the univariate statistics that describe these women across the full range of dependent and independent variables used in this dissertation. To search for statistically significant differences between the answers of those who wear the hijab and those who do not, a series of Independent Sample T-Tests were run for the scale variables that could support such analysis (Table 4.2).

Cross Tabulations and their resulting Chi Square statistics were examined for the categorical variables. Because the most comprehensive statistical tool used in this analysis is a binary logistic regression (with Hijab Never vs. Ever as the outcome variable), all of the variables with categorical responses were recoded into dichotomous variables with the exception of race which was recoded into a dummy variables with White as the reference category; these are the variables that were used in the cross-tabs tables (Table 4.3). Table 4.4 presents the findings of the binary logistic regression which has as its logical construction:



Dependent Variable: Wearing of the Hijab			
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Muslim Belief Variables	✓	✓	✓
Muslim Experience Variables		✓	✓
Demographic Variables			✓

**Figure 4.1**

## Univariate Analysis

Table 4.1 present descriptive statistics about the sample using weighted means, standard deviations and ranges. The individual variable (dependent and independent) are described where there is room for misinterpretation. Taken as a whole, Table 4.1 provides an overview of the 505 women in this Muslim American Survey sample along the points of analysis key to this dissertation.

### Dependent Variable

Of the 505 women in the sample, 499 answered the question regarding the hijab, indicating whether they wore it "Never", "Only some of the time", "Most of the Time", or "Always". For purposed of this analysis, those answers were recoded into "Never" = 0 and "Ever"= 1. The mean, or the proportion wearing the scarf, was .52.

### Independent Variables

#### *Muslim Practice/Religious Views*

- Mosque Attendance ranged from 1 = "Never" to 6 = "More than once a week". The average response was 3.15 which puts it a just a bit above "A few times a year, especially for the Eid." The standard deviation was 1.74.
- Thirty-seven percent agreed that "There is just one true interpretation" of the Koran.
- Only 24% thought that Islam treat men better than women.
- Fifty percent thought that "Women should be separate from men, in another area of the mosque." The rest thought women should pray alongside of men or behind them, but separated by at least a curtain.

#### *Muslim Experience*

- Only 33% thought that "There is a natural conflict between being a devout Muslim and living in a modern society."

- In responding to a question about assimilation, 46% thought that Muslims coming to America should "adapt to American culture." The remaining 54% thought that they should either "try to remain distinct from the larger society" or volunteered the answer "keep both."
- Thirty-one percent of respondents did not agree that it was "Ok to marry a non-Muslim"
- The question "How many of your close friends are Muslims?" had responses ranging from 1= "None" to 5 = "All". The average response of 3.6 indicates that on average "some" to "most" of the respondents' friends are also Muslims, with a fairly small standard deviation of 0.904.
- Only 25% of the sample thought of themselves as "American." Seventy-five percent saw themselves as Muslim or Muslim/American.
- When asked about the quality of their neighborhoods as a place to live on a scale from 1 to 4 coded as "poor" to "excellent", the average response was 3 – "Good." With a standard deviation of 0.831.
- The Muslim Experience Index summed a series of questions about negative experiences as a Muslim, such as being searched at airports; possible scores ranged from 0 to 5. The mean score was 0.55 with a standard deviation of 0.977, indicating fairly low reported incidence of experienced discrimination over the past 12-month period.

### *Demographics*

- The mean age of respondents was 38.54 with a standard deviation of 14.129 years and a range of responses from 18 to 87 years old at the last birthday.
- The average response regarding education was 4.03 with a standard deviation of 1.789. The scale ranged from 1= "None or grade 1-8" to 7 = "Post-graduate training or professional schooling after college" with the middle response 5 = "Some college... no 4-year degree".

- Sixty-seven percent of the respondents lived in a region not in the South (Northeast, Midwest, and West). South was chosen as the reference variable because it has the fewest pockets of high density Muslim communities.
- Two-thirds of the respondents were married.
- Over two-thirds (70%) of the respondents were not employed full time.
- The average household income approximated "\$40,000 to under \$50,000." The variable had a response range from 1-9 with 1 = "Less than \$10,000" and 9 = \$150,000 or more...
- Race was recoded into a dummy variable for purposes of the regression analysis. White respondents made up 45% of the sample, black 16% and Asian/Other 39%.
- Sixty-seven percent of the respondents were not born in the U.S.

Variables	N	Mean	St.Dev	Range	Description: Pew Muslim American Survey 2007
<u>Dependent Variable</u>					
Hijab: Ever	499	0.52	0.50	0 - 1	0-1 variable recoded from Q.G4 "When you are out in public how often do you wear the heacover or <i>hijab</i> ? Includes those who wear hijab from "Only some of the time" to "All the time"
<u>Muslim Practice/Reliqious Views Variable</u>					
Mosque attendance	503	3.15	1.74	1-6	Recode of Q.E1 to reorder: "On average how often do you attend the mosque or Islamic center for <i>salah</i> and <i>Jum'a</i> h prayer?" 1 = Never to 6= More than once a week"
One Interpretation	468	0.37	0.485	0-1	"There is only one True Interpretation" (QE9); More than one =0
Gender Treatment	483	0.24	0.427	0-1	"Islam treats men better than women" QG2; Women better, Equal = 0
Women Pray Separate	461	0.50	0.501	0-1	"Women should be separate from men - another place" (QG3); Along side or behind with curtain = 0
<u>Muslim Experience Variables</u>					
Islam Conflict with Modernity	474	0.33	0.470	0-1	"There is a natural conflict between bing observant Muslim and modern society" (QD4)
Not assimilate	417	0.54	0.499	0-1	"Should mostly adopt American Culture" (QD5) = 0; Keep Muslim, Keep both cultures = 1
Exogamy no way	493	0.31	0.463	0-1	"Is OK to marry non-Muslim" of "Depends" (QD7) =0; Is not OK = 1
Muslim Friends	495	3.63	0.904	1-5	"How many of your close friends are Muslims?" (QD2), 1="None" to 5="All"
Muslim Identity	469	0.75	0.434	1-0	"Think of yourself as Muslim/Both" (QE12); "American"=0
Neighborhood Desirable	505	3.01	0.831	1-4	"How rate your neighborhood as place to live?" (Q1), 1="poor" through 4="Excellent"
Muslim Experience Index	504	0.55	0.977	0 - 5	Index summing responses re 5 different interactions over past 12 months because of being Muslim
<u>Demographic Variables</u>					
Age	489	38.54	14.129	18 - 87	Age last birthday
Education	490	4.03	1.789	1 - 7	"What is the last grade or class that you completed in school?" Range 1-7 from none/8th grade to graduate study
Region Not South	505	0.67	0.471	0-1	Region NorthEast, MidWest, West = 1; Region South = 0
Married	484	0.67	0.472	0-1	"Married" = 1; Not, Separated, Divorced, Widowed = 0
Not Full Employment	479	0.70	0.458	0-1	"Employment" "Part", "Not" = 1; "Full Time" = 0
Household Income	331	4.87	2.295	1 - 9	Totals the responses to "INC1-INC-8" into 1-9 from under \$10k to over \$150k
Race-white	494	0.45	0.498	0-1	Race recoded White =1, Other =0- White as reference
Race-Black	194	0.16	0.367	0-1	Race recoded Black =1, Other =0
Race-Other	494	0.39	0.488	0-1	Race recoded Asian/Other =1, Other =0
Not Born U.S.	478	0.67	0.469	0-1	"Where Born?" "Not in U.S. = 1"; In U.S. = 0

## Bivariate Analysis

### Comparison of Means

Table 4.2 presents weighted comparison of means to explore the differences between those who cover and those who do not. A series of T-tests were performed on scale and ordinal variables using the groups "Never" and "Ever" for the practice of head covering. Except for "Neighborhood Comfort", all of the differences were significant at the  $p < .001$  level.

Independent Variables	Respondent Wears Headscarf	
	Never	Ever
Mosque attendance (0-7 never through more than once a week)	2.46 *** (239)	3.81 (258)
Muslim Friends (1-5 none through all)	3.42 *** (235)	3.81 (256)
Neighborhood Comfort (1-4 poor to excellent)	3.08 (240)	2.96 (259)
Muslim Experience Index summing 5 different sorts of negative interaction because of being Muslim (past 12 months)	0.45 *** (229)	0.66 (250)
What is your age	40.46 *** (234)	36.35 (249)
What is the last grade or class that you completed in school? (1-7 no high school through post-grad work)	4.28 *** (235)	3.82 (249)
Household income (1-9 from under \$10k to over \$150k)	5.39 *** (165)	4.37 (166)
*** $p \leq .001$		
Superscript indicates that the difference between the two mean scores is statistically significant.		

### *Muslim Practice/Religious Views*

- **Mosque Attendance:** The average response on mosque attendance for those who wear the hijab is significantly higher than for those who do not. Those who answered "never" scored between "Seldom" and "A few times a year" while those who do cover scored on average closer to "Once or twice a month."

### *Muslim Experience*

- **Muslim Friends:** On average, those who covered had a slightly higher score on this variable measuring how many close friends are Muslim (1= "None" to 5= "All"). At 3.8051 Covering respondents nudged closer to "Most" while those who never covered averaged 3.42, closer to the "Many" response.
- **Neighborhood Comfort:** On average, those who did not cover rated their neighborhoods a little higher than those who covered (3.08 vs. 2.86 on a scale from 1 "poor" to 4 "excellent"). The difference was statistically insignificant.
- **Muslim Experience Index:** The index sums answers 0 = "No", 1 = "Yes" to five scenarios of negative experience in past 12 months as a Muslim (e.g. being searched at airport). The average experience level is low for both covered and uncovered; however those who cover average 0.66 vs. 0.45 for those who do not cover. Possible scores range from 0 to 5.

### *Demographics*

- **Age:** Those who never wear the hijab had an average age of 40.5 years while those who practice covering had an average age of 36.4 years.
- **Education:** Those who never cover had on average higher educational attainment than those who do cover. Both averaged high school completion, but the average for those who never cover come closer to some level of college education than do the non-coverers.

- **Household Income:** On the variable with responses from 1 to 9, "Never" had a mean score of 5.39 and "Ever" had a lower score of 4.37. A score of 4 = \$30,000 to under \$40,000; 5 = \$40,000 to under \$50,000 and a score of 6 = \$50,000 to under \$75,000. Those who never cover therefore appear to have incomes in excess of \$10,000 greater than those who do cover.

### Chi Square Analysis

To assess the bivariate relationship between the dependent variable and the categorical independent variables, a series of cross-tabulations and chi-square tests were performed. They are presented in Table 4.3. The analyses produced the following findings:

#### *Muslim Practice/Religious Views*

- **One True Interpretation:** There was no statistically significant difference in views of those who Never cover versus those who Ever cover.
- **Gender Equality:** Only 22% of those who thought that men were treated better than women in Islam were those who covered. ( $P < .001$ )
- **Separation at Prayer:** Also significant at the  $p < .001$  level, views on the co-location and degree of separation of men and women at prayers were contrasted covered vs. uncovered with 64% of those who felt women should be totally separated from men being women who covered. Those who did not cover made up 58% of those who felt women should either be alongside the men or behind the men with a curtain for separation.

#### *Muslim Experience*

- **Natural Conflict:** There was no statistical difference between those who cover and those who do not in their beliefs about a clash between being a conservative Muslim and living in a

modern society. While the majority felt that there was no conflict, responses both positive and negative were fairly evenly split for both those who cover and those who never do.

- **Assimilation:** Sixty-two percent of those who think that those immigrating should adopt American culture are women who Never wear the hijab. In contrast, 66% of those who think one should keep the Muslim culture are women who do cover. The difference is significant at the  $p < .001$  level.
- **Exogamy:** While a majority of all respondents thought that it was "OK" or "Depends" on circumstances regarding marrying a non-Muslim, of those 150 who did not sanction exogamy, 79% were those who cover. ( $P < .000$ )
- **Identity:** Only 118 of the 465 women who answered the question on identity responded that they thought of themselves first as Americans. Of those, however, 74% were women who did not cover. Of the women who responded that they thought of themselves first as Muslims – and maybe then as Americans if at all – 63% were women who wear the hijab. The  $p$  value for the chi square test was less than .001.

### *Demographics*

- **Region:** Region was made a dichotomous variable contrasting residence in the South with residence in the Northeast, Midwest, or West, where pockets of high Muslim density are found and broader diversity is more accepted. As expected, 62% of those who live in the South do not cover and 62% of those who live in the "Not South" region do cover. This finding is significant at the  $p < .001$  level,
- **Married:** Over two-thirds of the respondents are married and covered and non-covered are fairly equally represented. For those who are NOT married, 56% are women who cover. The relationship is significant at the  $p < .01$  level.

- **Race:** Tested as dummy variables in regression, a cross-tabulation shows that the majority of the respondents who are white and of those, 59% never cover. Of the 79 black respondents, nearly 84% cover. Those who identify as Asian or Other were fairly evenly divided between coverers and noncoverers. These differences are statistically significant at the  $p < .001$  level.
- **Where born?:** Over two thirds of the women surveyed were born outside of the United States but that seems to have no relationship with covering or not covering.
- **Where born – expanded.** While the dichotomous variable was used for regression analysis, further examination showed that the actual country/region of birth did make a difference for those not born in the U.S. Those from Pakistan, the Arab region and Africa have a significantly greater tendency to cover. Those from Iran and Europe show a similarly tendency NOT to cover.

**Table 4.3 Cross Tabulations of Independent variables by Respondents Wear Headscarf Never/Ever**

Independent Variables - <i>Muslim Practice/Religious Views</i>	Respondent Wears Headscarf		Total
	Never	Ever	
<b>One true Interpretation?</b>			
One interpretation	44.30%	55.70%	<b>100%</b>
	77	97	174
More than one interpretation	48.80%	51.20%	<b>100%</b>
	139	146	285
Total	<b>47.10%</b>	<b>52.90%</b>	<b>100%</b>
	216	243	459
$\chi^2$			0.886
( <i>p=</i> value)			.347
<b>Islam treats men and women equally?</b>			
Treats equally/Women better	36.00%	64.00%	<b>100%</b>
	131	233	364
Treats men better than women	77.40%	22.60%	<b>100%</b>
	89	26	115
Total	<b>46.00%</b>	<b>54.00%</b>	<b>100%</b>
	220	259	478
$\chi^2$			60.320
( <i>p=</i> value)			.000
<b>Separation of men and women praying in mosque</b>			
Women should be separate area	36.00%	64.00%	<b>100%</b>
	82	146	228
Women behind/aside men; no curtain	57.50%	42.50%	<b>100%</b>
	131	97	228
Total	<b>46.70%</b>	<b>53.30%</b>	<b>100%</b>
	213	243	456
$\chi^2$			21.153
( <i>p=</i> value)			.000

<b>Table 4.3 (cont) Cross Tabulations of Independent variables by Respondents Wear Headscarf</b>				
<b>Never/Ever</b>				
<b>Independent Variables</b> <i>Muslim Experience</i>	<b>Respondent Wears Headscarf</b>			<b>Total</b>
	<b>Never</b>	<b>Ever</b>		
<b>Natural conflict: Islam and Modernity?</b>				
Yes there is conflict	50.60%	49.40%		<b>100%</b>
	78	76		154
No, don't think so	47.80%	52.20%		<b>100%</b>
	151	165		316
<b>Total</b>	<b>48.70%</b>	<b>51.30%</b>		<b>100%</b>
	229	241		470
$\chi^2$				0.340
(p=value)				.560
<b>Assimilation: Adopt American culture?</b>				
Adopt American Culture	62.70%	37.30%		<b>100%</b>
	121	72		193
Muslim/Muslim +Culture	34.10%	65.90%		<b>100%</b>
	83	138		221
<b>Total</b>	<b>49.20%</b>	<b>50.80%</b>		<b>100%</b>
	204	211		415
$\chi^2$				26.047
(p=value)				.000
<b>Exogamy No Way</b>				
OK or "depends" re marry non-Muslim	59.8%	40.2%		<b>100.0%</b>
	202	136		338
Not OK	20.7%	79.3%		<b>100.0%</b>
	31	119		150
<b>Total</b>	<b>47.7%</b>	<b>52.3%</b>		<b>100.0%</b>
	233	255		488
$\chi^2$				63.652
(p=value)				.000
<b>Identity</b>				
American identity	73.70%	26.30%		100.00%
	87	31		118
Musliim/Both identity	36.90%	63.10%		100.00%
	128	219		347
<b>Total</b>	<b>46.20%</b>	<b>53.80%</b>		<b>100.00%</b>
	215	250		465
$\chi^2$				48.079
(p=value)				.000

<b>Table 4.3 (cont) Cross Tabulations of Independent variables by Respondents Wear Headscarf Never/Ever</b>				
<b>Independent Variables - Demographics</b>	<b>Respondent Wears Headscarf</b>			<b>Total</b>
	<b>Never</b>	<b>Ever</b>		
<b>Region reside in?</b>				
South	62.30%	37.70%		<b>100.00%</b>
	104	63		167
NE, MW, West	37.60%	62.40%		<b>100.00%</b>
	38	63		101
<b>Total</b>	<b>48.20%</b>	<b>51.80%</b>		<b>100.00%</b>
	240	258		498
$\chi^2$				24.498
(p=value)				.000
<b>Married</b>				
Not married	43.80%	56.30%		<b>100.00%</b>
	70	90		160
Married	50.20%	49.80%		<b>100.00%</b>
	160	159		319
<b>Total</b>	<b>47.90%</b>	<b>52.10%</b>		<b>100.00%</b>
	230	250		480
$\chi^2$				11.900
(p=value)				.008
<b>Employment Status</b>				
Full time	63.60%	36.40%		<b>100.00%</b>
	91	52		143
Not or part time	41.80%	58.20%		<b>100.00%</b>
	138	192		330
<b>Total</b>	<b>48.40%</b>	<b>51.60%</b>		<b>100.00%</b>
	229	244		473
$\chi^2$				19.016
(p=value)				.000
<b>Race</b>				
White	59.20%	40.80%		<b>100.00%</b>
	129	89		218
Black	16.50%	83.50%		<b>100.00%</b>
	13	66		79
Asian/other	48.20%	51.80%		<b>100.00%</b>
	92	99		191
<b>Total</b>	<b>48.20%</b>	<b>51.80%</b>		<b>100.00%</b>
	234	254		488
$\chi^2$				42.405
(p=value)				.000

<b>Table 4.3 (cont) Cross Tabulations of Independent variables by Respondents Wear Headscarf</b>				
<b>Never/Ever</b>				
<b>Independent Variables - Demographics</b>	<b>Respondent Wears Headscarf</b>			<b>Total</b>
	<b>Never</b>		<b>Ever</b>	
<b>In what country were you born?</b>				
U.S	44.50%		55.50%	100.00%
	69		86	155
Other	47.80%		52.20%	100.00%
	151		165	316
Total	46.70%		53.30%	100.00%
	220		251	471
$\chi^2$ ( <i>p</i> =value)				0.446 .504
<b>In what country were you born?</b>				
U.S	44.50%		55.50%	100.00%
	69		86	155
Pakistan	34.90%		65.10%	100.00%
	15		28	43
Iran	85.40%		14.60%	100.00%
	41		7	48
Arab Region (excl Iran)	31.40%		68.60%	100.00%
	32		70	102
South Asia (excl Pakistan)	49.00%		51.00%	100.00%
	24		25	49
Europe	87.50%		12.50%	100.00%
	21		3	24
Africa (excl Egypt)	37.80%		62.20%	100.00%
	17		28	45
Other	42.90%		57.10%	100.00%
	3		4	7
Don't know/Refused	70.40%		29.60%	100.00%
	19		8	27
Total	48.20%		51.80%	100.00%
	241		259	500
$\chi^2$ ( <i>p</i> =value)				64.304 .000

### Multivariate Analysis

To understand better the meaning of wearing the headscarf and the interplay of the factors that might influence the decision to cover, a dichotomous variable "Hijab Never/Ever" was constructed that separated those who never wear head covering and those who do, whether

occasionally or all the time. The analysis so far has first looked at the characteristics of the survey sample of Muslim women as a whole from three perspectives: their religious practices and views, their experience as Muslim women, and their demographic characteristics. Those same variables were then used in comparative analysis to understand how they might differently present in the responses of women who do cover and those who don't. At a purely bivariate level, many significant relationships were found. Women who cover are likely to have more frequent mosque attendance, to *not* think that Islam treats men better than women, to think that women should pray totally separated from men. Covered women are more likely to think that Muslims should keep Muslim culture, that a Muslim should not marry a non-Muslim, and less likely to view themselves as purely "American". Demographically they are far less likely to live in the south than their uncovered counterparts and they are less likely to be married or to be employed fulltime. Black Muslim women are significantly more likely to cover and White are least likely to. There is no statistical difference between those who cover and those who do not in their view that there is only one true interpretation of the Koran, and both are equally divided on whether or not there is a natural conflict for devout Muslims in a modern society. And finally, being born in the US (vs. elsewhere) seems to have little statistical relationship with covering.

The next step in the analysis therefore is to explore the interplay of these variables. Which are the ones with the most impact? Might the pull of some of them disappear when controlling for other factors? Because the dependent variable, Hijab Never/Ever, is a dichotomous one, logistic regression was used to analyze the impact of the various factors in raising the likelihood (the odds) that a Muslim woman will be covered. Table 4.4 presents the results of this analysis, comparing the impacts of the variables in the three models.

**Table 4.4 Weighted Logistic Regression Coefficients (Odds Ratio in parentheses) Predicting Respondent wear Headscarf (N=263)**

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
<i>Muslim Practice/Religious Views</i>			
Mosque Attendance (seldom to often)	.465*** (1.592)	.369*** (1.446)	.503*** (1.654)
Only one true interpretation	.0990 (1.104)	-.169 (.845)	-.336 (.714)
Islam treats men better (vs equal, women better)	-1.717*** (0.180)	-1.277*** (.279)	-1.920** (.147)
Women separated (vs behind or beside with curtain)	.987 2.682	.736** (2.092)	.900* (2.459)
<i>Muslim Experience Variables</i>			
Natural conflict Muslim vs modernity	---	-.188 (.828)	-.627 (.534)
Not assimilate to America	---	.528* (1.818)	0.447 (1.564)
Not ok to marry non-Muslim	---	1.160*** (3.190)	1.689*** (5.412)
How many friends Muslim? (none to all)	---	0.209 -1.232	0.149 (1.161)
Not identify as "American" (vs as Muslim or Muslim American)	---	.443 (1.557)	-.053 (.948)
Neighborhood comfort (poor to excellent)	---	-0.134 -0.874	-0.198 (.820)
Muslim Experience Index	---	0.092 -1.097	.431* (1.540)
<i>Demographic Variables</i>			
Age	---	---	-.009 (.991)
Education	---	---	.043 (1.044)
Region - Not South	---	---	1.033* (2.811)
Married vs Not	---	---	-1.082* (.339)
Not Full Employment (Not/part-time vs Full time)	---	---	0.132 (1.141)
Household income	---	---	0.039 -1.04
Race - Black	---	---	3.386*** (29.553)
Race - Asian/Other	---	---	-.473 (.623)
Birth - Not U.S.	---	---	.558 (1.747)
Constant	-1.349 (.259)	-2.356 (.095)	-2.922 (.054)
$\chi^2$	123.581***	117.101***	134.845***
df	4	11	20
-2 Log likelihood	448.002	316.324	192.085
Nagelkerke R <sup>2</sup>	.344	0.415	0.581
† p < .1 * p < .05 ** p < .01 *** p < .001			

### *Model 1 – Muslim Practice/Religious Views*

The overall model is significant at the  $p < .001$  level and has a Nagelkerke  $R^2$  statistic of .334 suggesting it goes about a third of the way in explaining the outcome of Ever vs. Never. As for the specific variables in this model:

- **Mosque attendance** has a coefficient of .465 and with each one-step move up the scale from "Never" to "More than once a week" the odds of the respondents' covering increases by a factor of 1.6 when controlling for the other variables in the model. This is significant at  $p < .001$ .
- Affirming that there is only **one true interpretation** of the Koran continues to have no statistically significant impact.
- Controlling for the other variables in this model, perceiving that **Islam treats men better than women** decreases the odds of covering to about one-fifth of the odds of those who think that Islam treats sexes equally or women better. This is significant at  $p < .001$ .
- Expressing support of the idea that **women should pray totally separated** from men has no significant impact when controlling for the other variables in this model.

### *Model 2 – Muslim Experience*

The overall model, which adds the variables dealing with the respondents' experience as a Muslim to the variables addressing their religious beliefs and practices, is significant at the  $p < .001$  level and has a Nagelkerke  $R^2$  statistic of .415, improving modestly from Model 1.

- Controlling for the other variables in this model, **Mosque attendance** retains its significance and its impact on the odds decreases minimally to a factor of 1.4.
- Believing in only **one true interpretation** of the Koran remains statistically insignificant.

- Controlling for the other variables in this model, perceiving that **Islam treats men better than women** decreases the odds of covering to .279 times those of women who think that Islam treats sexes equally or women better. It remains significant at the highest level.
- Interestingly, with the addition of the Muslim Experience variables, expressing support of the idea that **women should pray totally separated** from men now has a significant impact at the  $p < .01$  level when controlling for the variables in this model. The odds are double (2.092) those of the women who hold the reference belief that women should be alongside of or behind men, separated by a curtain.
- The first of the *Muslim Experience* variables, the view that **there is a natural conflict** for devout Muslims functioning in a modern society has no significant impact when controlling for the other variables in this model.
- The idea that one should **not assimilate into American culture** but instead retain Muslim culture or Muslim/American culture increases the odds of wearing a headscarf – about 1.8 times the odds of those who believe American culture should be adopted. When controlling for the other variables in this model, this impact is significant at the .05 level.
- Those who believe that it is not **ok to marry non-Muslims** have a little over three times the odds of covering than do those who believe it is ok – or might be under some circumstance. When controlling for the other variables in this model, this impact is significant at the .001 level.
- When controlling for the other variable in the model, the **number of Muslim friends** a respondent has does not have a statistically significant impact.
- Similarly, when controlling for the other variables, whether a respondent embraces "**American**" vs. "**Muslim/Muslim-American**" identity is not statistically significant.

- How comfortable one views one's **neighborhood** to be also has no impact when controlling for the other variables in the model.
- And controlling for the other variables in the model, the respondent's score on the **Muslim Experience Index** has no statistical impact.

### *Model 3 – Demographics*

The overall model, which adds the variables dealing with the respondents' demographic characteristics to their experience as a Muslim and to the variables addressing their religious beliefs and practices, is significant at the  $p < .001$  level and has a Nagelkerke  $R^2$  statistic of .581, improving modestly from Model 2.

- Controlling for the other variables in this model, **Mosque attendance** retains its significance and its impact on the odds increases. For each step increase in mosques attendance, the odds of wearing a headscarf increase by a factor of 1.65.
- Believing in only **one true interpretation** of the Koran remains statistically insignificant.
- Controlling for the other variables in this model, perceiving that **Islam treats men better than women** further decreases the odds of covering to only about 15% of those of women who think that Islam treats sexes equally or women better. This is the strongest impact of this variable across the three models. It remains significant at the highest level.
- Expressing support of the idea that **women should pray totally separated** from men now has a significant impact at the  $p < .05$  level when controlling for the other variables in this model. The odds, however, are increased to almost two and a half times those of women who hold the more moderate reference belief that women should be alongside of or behind men, separated by a curtain.

- The view that **there is a natural conflict** for devout Muslims functioning in a modern society still has no significant impact when controlling for the other variables in this model.
- The idea that one should **not assimilate into American culture** but instead retain Muslim culture or Muslim/American culture decreases in impact and becomes insignificant when controlling for these other variables. When age is removed again, the relationship returns.
- When controlling for the variables in this model, those who believe that it is **not ok to marry non-Muslims** have almost 5.25 times the odds of covering than do those who believe it is ok – or might be under some circumstance. It is still significant at the .001 level.
- When controlling for the other variable in the model, the impact of the **number of Muslim friends** a respondent has is still statistically insignificant.
- When controlling for the other variables, whether a respondent embraces "**American**" vs. "**Muslim/Muslim-American**" identity remains statistically insignificant.
- How comfortable one views one's **neighborhood** to be still has no impact when controlling for the other variables in the model.
- When controlling for the other variables in this model, now including demographics, the respondent's score on the **Muslim Experience Index** now has a statistically significant impact. For each point increase on the experience index (for each additional category of experience discrimination that the respondent checks) the odds of covering increase by 1.5 times. Significance is at the .05 level.( If the newly added variable Black is removed, significance disappears.)
- The first of the *demographic* variables, **age**, is not significant when controlling for the other variables in this model.

- Likewise, increases in the level of **education** have no impact on the outcome variable when controlling for the other variables in the model.
- The respondent's **region of residence** does make a difference... When controlling for the other variables in this model, those who reside in places other than in the South have over 2.8 times the odds of covering than those who live in the South have. This is significant at the .05 level.
- When controlling for the other variables, those who are **married** have about one-third of the odds of covering, with significance at the .05 level.
- Whether or no one is **fully employed** has no statistically significant impact when controlling for the other variables in this model.
- Similarly, **household income** is not a statistically significant factor.
- Being **Black** gives one nearly 30 times the odds that a non-black Muslim woman has of wearing the headscarf when controlling for the other variables in this model. When controlling for the other variables in the model, this is significant at the  $p < .001$  level.
- Being of **Asian/Other** race has no statistically significant impact on the odds.
- Where one is **born**, U.S. vs. Not in the U.S. similarly has no impact on the odds in this model.

Looking at Model 3 in its entirety, the equation for computing the log of the odds of wearing a headscarf would be:

$$Z = .503 (\text{Mosque Attendance}) - 1.920 (\text{Men Better}) + .900 (\text{Women Separate}) + 1.689 (\text{Not Marry Non-Muslim}) + .431 (\text{Muslim Experience Index}) + 1.033 (\text{Region Not South}) - 1.082 (\text{Married}) + 3.386 (\text{Black}).$$

If a respondent attended Mosque once a week (5) and thought Islam treated men better (1) and that women should be separated at prayer (1) and thought it was NOT

ok to marry a non-Muslim (1) and scored a 4 on the Muslim Experience Index (4) and was not from the South (1) and was married (1) and was Black (1):

$$Z = .503(5) - 1.920(1) + .900(1) + 1.689(1) + .431(4) + 1.033(1) + 1.082(1) + 3.386(1)$$

$$Z = 11.64 \text{ (log of the odds)}$$

This would mean that such a woman would have about 100,000 times the odds of being covered that would the woman having the 0-coded values in all of these response categories. Her probability of covering is quite close to 100%. If we remove the Black variable, the log of the odds becomes 8.254 and the probability still exceeds 99%

Far more important than manipulating a formula, the full model tells us a few interesting things, some of which support the thinking going in, some of which require a bit more thought.

The significant variables in the final model are

- **Mosque Attendance** (Higher the attendance, the greater the odds)
- **Preferential Treatment of Men in Islam** (A strong negative impact. Believing that Islam favors men is in fact a robust predictor of those who do not cover.)
- **Women should be separated from men at prayer** (A strong positive impact. Women who believe women should be totally separated from men during prayer have about twice the odds of covering than those who think women can be in the same space but separated.)
- **Endogamy/Exogamy** (Those who think it is NOT ok to marry a non-Muslim had over 5 times the odds of covering than those who could tolerate the idea. )
- **Muslim Experience Index** (Higher the index number, the greater the odds of covering. This only became significant in the final model when demographic variables were brought in to play. It is likely that race plays a strong role in moderating experience)

- **Region – Not South** (An expected result, particularly given the bivariate relationship. Those who live in the South are far more isolated from large pockets of Muslims and are in a generally hostile environment for immigrants.)
- **Married** (Unexpectedly, being married gave one only about a third of the odds of covering that others had. But this draws one's eye to the behaviors of the younger Muslim American women who are the subject of the interview portion of this study).
- **Black** (A HUGE positive effect; not surprising, however given the severe dress code of Black Muslims, or members of the Nation of Islam. About 70% of the black respondents came from the U.S. and most of the rest from Africa. One could well argue that the behaviors of American black followers of Islam are so markedly different that they should be studied separately (a similar argument is made in studying fundamentalist Christians). I did include the measure because one of my subjects was black, but her religious background tracked traditional Sunni practices rather than American Black Muslim.)

A full discussion of the implications of all of these findings will be presented in the Chapter 6.

## CHAPTER 5

### RESULTS – IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

#### **Introduction**

This chapter explores further the impact of the social forces that surround young Muslim women on their decision to wear a headscarf. In keeping with the mixed methods approach outlined in Chapter 3, the results are discussed in two parts. The results from the analysis of the findings from the secondary data analysis of the Pew Muslim American Survey (2007) were summarized in the previous chapter; the material gained from the in-depth interviews is discussed below.

#### **Overview**

Interviews with 19 women over the course of 2006-2008 yielded insights into both the motivations for and the meanings of donning the hijab. The women were solicited using a broadcast appeal on a northern New Jersey Muslim Student Association list serve. Other participants volunteered when they heard about the project, and two mothers were offered as subjects by their daughters. All of the participants seemed eager to talk about their experiences. In the discussions below, the phonetic renderings of Arabic alphabet letters were sequentially assigned as identifiers as the interviews were coded. A brief description of the participants follows.

*Alif* was a graduate student from Turkey in her early twenties. She was in the US on a fellowship and was an instructor in the Language and Culture department of a northern New Jersey college. She did not cover, nor did her mother. Her level of observance was traditional within the secular context of Turkey.

*Ba* was one of a set of twins who were upper-level college students. She did not cover and was born in Florida in a very non-Muslim neighborhood. She was moved up north after high school by her mother who was seeking a more comfortable Muslim base. *Ba* described herself as observant but it is a non-traditional progressive practice that meets her spiritual needs. She was a self-proclaimed feminist and quite critical of her father – and most Muslim men in general. She tolerated her mother's covering but was not happy with how conservative she had become.

*Kha* was *Ba*'s twin sister. She also did not cover and shared many of the same feminist views with *Ba*. She was less religious than her sister, however, and her strongest memory from visiting Mecca on a Haj was her relief that they had CNN. Her boyfriend is Irish-Italian/American; she was the only one interviewed with totally exogamous tendencies.

*Shin* was the mother of *Ba* and *Kha* and in her early 40's. She was born in Palestine and fled Jerusalem during the 1967 war when she was in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade. Her family came directly to the U.S. and for years after she flinched when fireworks were set off around her. She was a professional woman who ran her own business in Florida. Her ex-husband, the father of *Ba* and *Kha*, was her cousin (*Ba* observed, "Never marry a relative because you can't get rid of them after the divorce"). When *Shin* started covering, her husband objected and had her stop after 9/11 (she began again in fairly short order). While not comfortable with her external Muslimness in the US, he insisted that she and the girls covered when visiting in the Middle East. She was happy with family and a supportive Muslim environment in New Jersey and wished her daughters were more

observant. She was planning to move to Texas or Jordan (interesting coupling of choices) with her new husband shortly after this interview took place.

*Tha* was a college student at a northern NJ college and lived in a neighborhood with lots of other Muslims. She was born in the U.S. of parents who were both Turkish from Macedonia. She was not covered, but was thinking about it. She liked attending mosque prayers and while her mother did not cover, both her parents were devoutly practicing Muslims. She had a very close relationship with her father to whom she often would go for advice. She was a member of the MSA and running for office and was reading about how to prepare for marriage in a "proper Muslim way."

*Dal* was also a native New Jerseyite, born of Pakistani parents who were seriously observant. She covered as did one of her sisters. Her father was a PhD and a researcher in pharmaceuticals and her mother was a non-practicing OB-GYN trained in Pakistan. She and her siblings were homeschooled out of a program in Michigan. She was a member of MSA and an officer. She attended an Islamic center as her mosque and rues the no-woman policy in Pakistani mosques.

*Ayn* was another northern New Jersey college student who was a native of the state. Her parents were from Bangladesh. Her father was not religious but she had a grandfather who was. Her mother did not cover but would have liked her to do so. She did not go to mosque prayers because the ones around her did not allow women. She did not cover but was an active member of MSA and was thinking about the hijab. Her neighborhood was

highly Muslim, but she hated the various cliques at her high school – judgments based on whether or not one covers, etc. She thought it was somewhat of a "manmade" religion, referring to male dominance; saw culture more than religion at the source of the inequality.

*Qaf* was a married woman in her later twenties who was enlisted by a friend on the list serve. Born in Pakistan, she came here at age 6 months to an area just outside of the District of Columbia which had few Muslims at that time (it now had a moderate density). She began covering in 2002 while at school in Virginia and had become increasingly conservative. She was the only one who wore an *abaya*, a fully-covering cloak dress, and for a time wore the *niqab*, a small veil covering nose and mouth. She was a business major in college and worked in business until she married but now taught at an Islamic school in Paterson. Her husband drove her everywhere and accompanied her when she went into public. She found the level of religiosity among Muslims in Paterson a bit too casual for her taste.

*Ghayn* was another MSA officer; she was one of the high officers for the term. Born in the U.S., she lived in a suburb near Paterson. She covered, as did her mother and her sister, who was a financial analyst. Ghayn was a top scholar and she was one of the few who had campus activities other than MSA. Her parents were Circassian, a very strong community in this area, and had come to the U.S. from Syria. After graduation, where she was a featured speaker in an orange hijab, she headed off to the Middle East on a post-graduate scholarship.

*Lam* was born in Pakistan and came here at the age of 15. She was in college at the time of the interview and had found the transition a challenge. She had adjusted, but found how people dressed and the way they treated teachers to be a shock. Like the rest of her family, she wanted to be in medicine. She wore a headscarf; the one she wore for the interview was brightly patterned. She had not been planning on covering but found so many in her high school did that it was easy to do. She was an active member of MSA but did nothing else on campus because she is not "a friendly person."

*Mim* was also a college student at the same northern New Jersey university. She was born in New Jersey of Palestinian parents whose religiosity played almost no role in her comments. She was covered, as was her mother, but neither of her two sisters wore a scarf. She thought it a challenge to be a Muslim in America, but perhaps a little easier in New Jersey where there are so many. *Mim* felt that Western women who dress so scantily are more oppressed than Muslim women who cover. She thought covering was "the best decision I ever made" and found people to be far more accepting than she expected.

*Nun* was also a student at the northern New Jersey university. She was born in Egypt and came here in second grade and lives on the edge of Paterson. While her mother covered, *Nun* reported that they were not very religious at home. *Nun* started covering at Ramadan the previous year; she was reluctant to start in high school because she was really "into" hairstyles. She was looking forward to visiting Egypt to learn more

covering styles and get more scarves. Her boyfriend (also Egyptian and Muslim) was glad she started. Her mom cautioned her not to cover to please him.

*Ha*, a student at a central New Jersey university, was the only African American included in the study. She and her mother both covered. Her father was an imam, she spoke Arabic, and they identify themselves as Sunni Muslims. Raised in Trenton, her father's work took them to Michigan (not Muslim-dense Dearborn). She noted "It's easier in the east!" She did not feel limited by race or religion, but did not feel that an African American Muslim female was going to chair IBM "any time soon." She was very active in mosque activities and the MSA. To gain perspective, she spent 9 months in Syria learning Arabic and seeing the American culture at a distance.

*Waw* was just out of college where she was a top MSA officer and a participant in the other campus activities. She began covering after 9/11; her mother did not cover. The family background is Circassian relocated through Syria; Waw was born in the US. She was seriously observant and viewed the scarf to be a reminder to herself and a statement to the outside world. Her husband was reportedly less assertive than she in his Muslimness. He was also of Circassian background; something Waw said was totally accidental.

*Ya* was in her forties and was Waw's mother. She came here at 16. She admired her daughter's piety and courage in covering. She was more of a "Ramadan" Muslim; she did not cover and used the Circassian Islamic Center in her area as much for social as

religious purposes, although the two may not be separable. She was a small business owner whose appearance and actions were very mainstream. She was part of a generation that worked hard to assimilate successfully. She feared greatly for her daughter when she began covering. Ya was delighted by her son-in-law. She thought some things may change with time and culture in Islam, but the core values, including covering, will and should not change.

*Ra* was another college student at the northern New Jersey university and planned to be a psychologist. She was born in Egypt and was brought here as a baby; her parents, both well educated, came for economic and educational opportunity. *Ra* covered, as did her mother. She went to the Islamic Center where she studied the Koran but admitted to "thinking like an American" for the most part. She was a member of the MSA and believed covering is mandatory. She lived in a non-Muslim exurb and could not bring herself to cover until she got to college where there were others who did so. She wanted to be educated and give back to the community after her family.

*Sin*, another northern New Jersey college student, was born in Kuwait (her mother's birthplace), but came here at age three. Her family identified with her father's Palestinian culture, which is heavily represented around Paterson and is the base of the Islamic Center. She and her mother both covered. A member of MSA, she began covering freshman year and like Nun she was really "into hair" in high school and would not have covered. Another factor may have been that they moved as she began high school from a Muslim-dense edge of Paterson to an exurban location after being robbed

and Sin became totally uncomfortable. MSA restored her comfort level and helped her understand the reasons for covering. She felt American in most things, but not at the comfort level of her younger brother who grew up in the new neighborhood.

*Za* was college-age and attends the common university. She was born in the US of Turkish parents from Macedonia. Mosque attendance in the household was not stringent and women do not attend the Turkish mosques in her neighborhood. She did not cover nor did her mother. She was a psychology major and wanted to go on to specialize in communication disorders. Her high school had a high Muslim population (just outside of Paterson) but not many covered. Many Circassians and many cliques at the school, but she experienced no sense of segregation. She was not a member of MSA but had friends who were. She thought covering was not required, but if you decided to do it, you should be totally committed and not turn back. She identified first as a Muslim then as American.

*Ta* was interviewed along with her friend *Za*. Like *Za*, she was a local college student with Turkish/Macedonian parents. She, however, was born in Macedonia and came here as a toddler. Her family was not strongly religious but they did practice and neither she nor her mother covered. The high school she attended did not have many Muslim's like *Za*'s did. *Ta* had friends in the MSA but did not belong ("not a joiner" she added). *Ta* also shared *Za*'s sense of identity as a Muslim and was delighted to answer questions about her religion to any who ask. While she stated that covering was a personal choice, she expressed disgust with the girls who cover and then go and "party" on the weekend.

As discussed in the previous chapter, a process of two-level coding was used to analyze the gathered information and the following categories were used to summarize the findings:

- Age
- Where born?
- When came to United States if not born here?
- Where parents born?
- Whether they cover
- Whether their mother covers
- Whether their sisters cover
- Attend prayers at the Mosque?
- Belong to Muslim Student Association (MSA)?
- Observations about their parents' influence on their beliefs
- Neighborhood – Muslim population density
- Neighborhood – Comfort level for them
- Is covering required by Islam?
- The scarf's meaning to them internally – what it says to them personally
- The scarf's meaning externally – what it says to the outside world
- What was reaction when they started covering?
- What identity do they associate with (Muslim, American, Ethnic, combination)?
- Views on Islam and gender equality
- Ideas on theology – do they think things are or can change re: women's role in the religion?
- Thoughts on marriage, future career choices
- Experiences as a Muslim in post 9/11 U.S.

## Demographics and Environment

To provide an easy guide to the interviewees as their responses to these questions are analyzed, below is a summary Table 5.1

ID	AGE	BORN	TO U.S.?	PARENTS BORN	Parents	Mosque	COVERED	Mom covered	Siblings Covered	MSA
Alif	20's early	Turkey	20's	Turkey	traditional	feasts	no	no	no	NA
Ba	college	FL		Palestine	observant	when forced	no	yes	no	no
Kha	college	FL		Palestine	observant	when forced	no	yes	no	no
Shin	40's	Jerusalem	6th grade	Palestine	not strict	yes	yes	later	no	NA
Tha	college	NJ		Turkey/Macedonia	practicing	yes	no, but	no	no	yes
Dal	college	NJ		Pakistan	serious, observant	yes	yes	yes	1 of 2	yes
Ayn	college	NJ		Bangladesh	dad not; gparent	no women	no, but	no	2 of 3	yes
Qaf	20's late	Pakistan	6 months	Pakistan	not very	no (car issue)	yes	recent	NA	yes
Ghayn	college	US		Syria - Circassian		yes	yes	yes	1 of 1	yes*
Lam	college	Pakistan	15	Pakistan	observant	no - (brother)	yes	yes - fatah	6 of 6	yes
Mim	college	NJ		Palestine		yes	yes	yes	no	yes
Nun	college	Egypt	2nd grade	Egypt	Not overly	no time - far	yes	yes	NA	no
Ha	college	PA		US	very	yes	yes	yes	1 of 2	yes
Waw	20's early	NJ		Syria - Circassian	moderately obs	yes	yes	no	no	yes*
Ya	40's	Golan Hgts	16	Circassian	observant	feasts	no	yes - fatah	yes - fatah	NA
Ra	college	Egypt	toddler	Egypt	observant	yes	yes	yes	too young	yes
Sin	college	Kuwait	toddler	Kuwait/Palestine		casual	yes	yes	1 of 3	yes*
Za	college	US		Turkey/Macedonia	observant	casual - women	no	no	no	no but
Ta	college	Macedonia	toddler	Turkey/Macedonia	observant	casual - women	no	no	3 of 4	no but

Fourteen of the women interviewed were in college and under 21 years old; three were out of college but still in their twenties; and two were in their forties (mothers of other interviewees).

Nine of the interviewees were not born in the US. Both of the mothers interviewed came in their teens and the graduate student from Turkey came as an adult. Five of the six younger interviewees who were not born here immigrated when quite young (one at second grade, the rest at six months to three years of age). The other ten subjects, all of college age, were born in the United States.

Eleven of the 19 covered; two more were leaning towards it. Eight of the college students wore the headscarf and another two were either thinking about it currently or planning to wear it sometime in the future. All of the Pakistanis and Egyptians interviewed covered; none of those

with Turkish background covered; those of Palestinian heritage were split in their choice. Both younger women who identified as Circassian covered, but the Circassian woman in her forties did not.

Of the women who covered, only one had a mother who did not cover, but five had sisters of appropriate "covering age" who did not cover. Interestingly, one of the mothers began covering after her college-age daughter did – and all of the young women had mothers who expressed pride in their daughters' decisions to wear the hijab.

Another attribute that can be easily summarized is whether or not they have been associated with the Muslim Students Association on their campus. The Muslim Student Association played a large role in the religious and cultural identity of many of the college-age interviewees. Both of the young post-college women in their twenties who went to college in the U.S. (the graduate student was not in the U.S. for college) were members of the MSA as were 7 out of the 8 college-age women who covered and of those 3 held positions on their college's MSA executive board. Only two of the eight who do not cover were also members of the MSA and two other college-aged "non-coverers" are close friends with members of an executive board member.

The role played by the MSA is less easily quantified than tallying membership. A recurrent theme among those that covered was that the MSA made it "easier" (Tha) and offered "sanctuary" (Mim). Dal reported that she prayed in the grass before happening upon the MSA. Many reported that the MSA was supportive in their decision to cover. Ra reported that "I would say this MSA helped me to wear it, because it made me feel more comfortable and to understand it really more." Several reported enthusiastically about the "Hijab Experiment" carried out annually by many MSAs during which non-Muslim women are encouraged to wear a scarf for

the day and share the experience. Qaf reported that she did indeed feel welcome at MSA just after 9/11 even though she did not wear a scarf at the time; however, the weight of the MSA stories comes from those who do cover and the role that MSA played in making them comfortable with that decision. Ha's experience with the MSA at a large public university suggests that in some MSA's covering might be a litmus test – that "true" female Muslims are expected to cover. Lam, a member of a smaller MSA, reported that while the majority covered, those who did not were not hassled; however when one young woman UNcovered, that "really stirred things up." On the topic of religious study, several students who attended the same MSA commented that they learned a lot about Islam from their association and found it to be a place where serious discussion about philosophy and scripture took place (Mim, Tha, Ayn, Ra, Sin); however, others did not mention religious study at all and Lam commented that while she found it valuable, the focus was primarily on "social issues."

The interviewees' observations about their parents' religious attitudes and practices were for the most part fairly consistent. Most, both covered and uncovered, had observant parents and spoke with love and respect about their parents' influence on them. The twins (Kha and Ba) who were born in Florida to Palestinian parents were harshest. Their mother began covering when they were in high school and tried to bring her (quite secularized) daughters along into her rediscovered piety – an effort that was greeted with both strong and not terribly polite resistance. Their father wanted "traditional" behavior from them, e.g. waiting on male guests, arranged marriages, return to the Middle East when educated. Both daughters had essentially turned their backs on the father and viewed their mother as a nice woman but less than a role model. At the other end of the spectrum, Tha, whose father was a plumber, saw her father as her "harbor" – her source for sound reasoning in hard decisions and her guide in religious learning. She was one of

the young women who was strongly considering covering and was an active member of MSA. She would "like to be as good as my mother."

In rounding out observations about environmental influences, interviewees' comments about the nature of their neighborhoods are instructive. Most of the subjects both grew up in and currently live in areas with high concentrations of Muslim residents. Paterson, NJ, has the largest Turkish-American population in the U.S., the second largest Arab-American population (after Dearborn, MI), and the largest population from the Caucasian regions (particularly Circassia) and Paterson's Bengali population is one of its fastest growing segments. The city and its immediate environs are estimated to have one of the highest population densities of Muslims in the U.S. (Carroll 2002; Cruz and Brittingham 2003). It is not surprising, therefore, that 12 of the 19 reported living in neighborhoods with a high density of Muslims..... And most of those who were themselves in less Muslim-intense areas were just outside of Paterson. Only one, who grew up around Paterson, was currently in a semi-rural district with little interaction with other Muslim families. In two cases, the lack of Muslim population seemed to make a significant difference. The twins who were raised in a very non-Muslim area in Florida were perhaps the most "American" in their outlook. They had no friends who were Muslim and were viewed almost as "show and tell" bonanzas for their school diversity day picnics! In the other case (the twins most fairly count as one in this instance), Sin was moved in her first year of high school from a high density area to one where Muslims are essentially a rarity. Her high school years were very difficult – she waited until afterwards to begin covering. Her younger sister and brother, who had grown up in the new place, were far more comfortable and in fact her younger sister covered in the same high school where Sin felt so isolated. Ghayn was used to a middle class suburb of Paterson where they "see Muslims around and it's not like 'Oh my God'" -- an

attribute that was highlighted when she spent a family vacation in Lake George being stared at. The impact of the large Muslim population in northern New Jersey is underscored by the twins' mother, Shin, who found the density very helpful. Right after 9/11, Shin had to fly to Newark from her home in Florida where she had suspended her wearing of the hijab. She wore a hat, not a hijab, and immediately upon arrival she ducked into a restroom and changed to into the scarf: "You know as soon as you come to NJ you're accepted more." Waw, a young covered working woman who moved from the Paterson area to New York City because of her husband's work, missed the large embracing circle of the Muslim community that she grew up in: "Thank God I did it [started covering] when I was in college ... there were so many Muslim people that went to it, in Paterson, that was wonderful. But you know it's a different world living out here. It's very very difficult."

The comfort level associated with the neighborhood is clearly influenced by the density of the Muslim population, but other factors weigh in as well. One of the most significant factors is the *types* of Muslims making up the density. Ba, one of the non-covering twins, was uncomfortable because she did not cover and felt she was being punished for being up front about her life style: "There is a lot of lying. Jersey Muslim girls say one thing at home then fall into American ways away from home." Ayn felt discomfort at both ends of the spectrum. She "worries when going into other neighborhoods, about "will they accept me if the neighborhood is not Muslim – and ditto if it is very Muslim. There are a lot of cliques in Paterson!" Most particularly she liked to be in a Muslim neighborhood where they don't know her because in her own they say "Oh she's so and so's daughter" and they judge how she should act. Qaf, who considered herself a conservative Muslim, was also often not comfortable among the Muslims of Paterson. While she liked "the access to amenities" it is "too loose." She sensed she was stared

at because she wore the *abaya* (fully covering cloak dress). Lam, on the other hand, was a covered Pakistani college student who did not want to live in a Pakistani neighborhood because it would "constrain" what she did.

### **Religious Beliefs and Practice**

Turning more to faith, practice and theology, most of the women who covered were associated with a Mosque – the exceptions in this group were both Pakistanis, a culture that does encourage female mosque attendance, and a young woman of Egyptian background (also not an encouraging culture for female attendance) who did not live near any mosques. Most of the women attended prayers and were quite active in their mosques.

Interviewees talked about whether or not they thought that the Koran mandates the wearing of the scarf. Predictably, all those who did not cover felt it did not – although several non-coverers did think wearing a hijab to be a strong statement of piety. As Ba put it, "Not wearing it does not mean you are not a good Muslim." Her sister Kha put it in more blunt terms: "I believe in God. I just don't see what the big huff is about the little things." Their mother, however, stated "Yes it is there. It applies to me and this is how I would like to be." Waw averred that "if you are representing self to public as a practicing Muslim, you must be covered." Ra, whose family was from Egypt, believed that the scarf was required: "The reason is from the Koran. About modesty and basically women in society are very valuable. For us to grow as individuals in society, we don't want to be judged by our beauty. I do think it's mandatory. Yes I definitely do. Even in all the religions that come down, God still wants the woman to cover. If you look at Mary..." Qaf, the most conservative of the subjects, said "I think your actions have to be inward and outward. You can't talk a different talk." She observed that she would feel like a "hypocrite" if she did not wear it. Several subjects mentioned the role of culture in beliefs

about covering. Mim, who covered and was of Pakistani background, said that the Koran calls for "modesty altogether. That's definitely a staple of the culture." She added, however, "How is it defined? Whether it's defined by a headscarf or not is really from family to family, person to person, even village to village." She also pointed out that the style of scarf varies from culture to culture (that *fatah*, or filmy flowing scarf that does not cover completely is common in Pakistan). Nun, who covered, also said that the answer varies by culture. She said that her family "wears whatever we want as long as we're covered" but notes that "... it's much worse to start wearing the scarf and then stop than to never wear it at all." Ha, the African American daughter of an imam, covered herself but commented "I used to think it was required. I used to like link external appearance with level of like piety or whatever.... I no longer believe that in any way." Sin, however, came at things from the other direction: "I always felt like in high school that there was an inconsistency as to like women wear it and men don't really have to cover... in college I kind of like started getting a lot better understanding of why women wear it and people explained it to me." Sin had been covering since her first college Ramadan.

Those who cover were asked about its meaning, both in terms of the impact of the headscarf on their own feelings and what they thought the hijab said to others. A common thread was "peace" and "completion." Shin, the twins' mom, said about donning the scarf "It was a very peaceful feeling... It completes you." Qaf noted "I just felt more complete." Also frequent were comments about protection from the secular world. Ayn said that it offered protection, "shielding yourself." Dal noted that the scarf "affects how I treat others. It makes me feel safer. It is an essential part of me." Lam saw it as a "personal barrier from the outside. I am not like them. I'm a different person." From Ra: "When you wear the scarf, you feel it. You feel like you're protected. It brings tears to my face." The idea of "freeing" was also expressed by several

subjects. "The scarf really puts you like front and center.... It was just freeing because then I didn't really think about what people were thinking," said Sin. According to Ra, "Because like when I wore it, I felt so liberated. I felt like I didn't have to worry about how I looked. No after that I had my own personality." Most often, the description of its impact included the check it provides on one's own actions. Qaf commented that the hijab kept in her mind that God can see her every move and "that's what keeps me on track without deviating or doing something I'm not supposed to do. Because it's very hard. Life is full of temptation." "I am always conscious about having the scarf on" observed Mim. She added, "Not that it bothers me in any way but I am definitely much more careful about how I act.... I definitely have the weight of that on my shoulders. It's very helpful because it keeps me in check." Ha said "It's like a reminder for me more so than anything; what is it I believe in and that I'm supposed to be trying to put into effect." Waw mused, "Every morning when you look in the mirror and you see the hijab, it's a reminder of who you are. Yes I'm more conservative than a young woman of my age in many different things." She further observed that she did not party like others, but did not mind giving it up. "This is reinforcement for me and I'm glad that it's so. It's good." Waw's mother commented on its behavior-modeling powers: "Believe me, America should wish everybody covered you know. To think this way, the positive influence. Because when you cover, you finished doing all the 'good' stuff [expressed with quoting fingers]; you need to be respectful and modest and spiritual in order to take on the scarf." Much of this sentiment was captured in a different way by one of the non-covering twins. She said "I am more worried about being a good person, and my beliefs come second. But my mom's the opposite. Like she wants the belief to come first and then being a good person comes with believing." And finally Tha noted "When

you have it on your head, it's an awareness, a remembrance of God. Then you remember what you're wearing it for.... It's kind of like a constant reminder about God."

Many of the conversations focused on the message given to the outside world by the hijab – some in fact talked only about that and not about any inward messages. Almost universally, the word "respect" was used; the outward message both sent and received was that the woman wearing the hijab was to be treated in a special way. Shin told her daughters "we cover so men will respect us for our minds." She adds, "Because men are pigs." Qaf was surprised at how many respected her. "Like men would get out of the way, open the door for me where as when I didn't wear it, people wouldn't even care." Ghayn noted that "people, including my parents, give me more respect." "Like I feel like I get more respect, which is weird. I wasn't expecting that. Even from professors." Ra observed that so many of the non-Muslim girls at the "hijab-a-thon" noticed increased respect – particularly that men opened doors for them.

Almost all also mentioned the responsibility of being a symbol of Islam in the world. Some viewed it as an opportunity; people would say "Oh, these people aren't crazy, mad people" (Tha). Dal said, "What I do, people will ascribe to Islam." Ha knew that she was readily identifiable as a Muslim and "I don't want to portray the wrong image." Waw, who did not feel that one needs the scarf to be personally pious, did feel that if you are calling attention to yourself as a Muslim in the "outside" world "you must wear the scarf... You need to be a true Muslim woman and be the way Muslim women are supposed to be which for me meant wearing the hijab." "I am representing Islam and must behave accordingly," Ra stated. Sin observed "I have to think about what kind of image I'm carrying because I'm wearing something on my head that represents women in Islam. I don't want to hurt that or put that image in jeopardy. It's like a really big responsibility."

Others commented on the "teachable moment." Sin's little sister wore the scarf in a high school with almost no Muslims, and according to Sin she "likes the attention. They ask her questions and she likes that." Mim found that the scarf "triggers folks to get her to talk about the religion and the Muslim experience." At the commencement ceremony at the college attended by most of these students the symbolic impact was underscored. Ghayn, a former MSA officer, top scholar, and student activist, was one of the students chosen to speak. She stepped unhesitatingly to the microphone wearing a hijab in the brightest of school colors. A rumble went through the crowd. Za, one of the uncovered subjects of this study, was in the audience and said "it kind of gave you like this proud feeling." The roar of applause that greeted Ghayn was an indicator that the pride in the moment was shared.

In an effort to understand more about the "hijab experience," the reactions that greeted interviewees' decision to cover were discussed. Shin, who began covering in Florida in her thirties, did not notice the reactions of others. Her daughters pointed out "Oh yeah, a lot of people stare, Mom." As she became aware of the stares, she found that if she spoke to the people they "relaxed and talked back. Many think you don't speak English!" Qaf, the conservative young woman, "...lost a lot of friends; they wanted to keep their distance." She gained others, however, and observed "it's good to keep company with good people." Almost all had parents who were supportive. And where reservations were expressed, they centered on the potential for their daughters' becoming targets in a post 9/11 environment. Waw's mother cried when Waw came home one day covered. She was very proud of Waw but "very worried it would bring on bad treatment." Most had friends who were supportive (many from the MSA), with the majority of the remembered comments centering on appearance ("You look great!" "Oh you look so good" "I like your scarf today"). One of the funniest reaction stories came from someone not

part of the study. She was a Muslim convert of Irish heritage and when she attended her first family party wearing a hijab a cousin wailed "Oh my God you have become an Arab!"

### **Identity and Gender**

Given the tensions all of the Muslim women in this study experienced between their family's world and the "Jersey girl" environment they functioned in, the question of identity wove its way naturally into conversations. For only a few was identity clear-cut. Nun, a covered college student who came to the U.S. in second grade from Egypt, presented as totally American. Ra, with a similar demographic profile, also identified as American: "Culture-wise I think American. Their [her parents'] culture is, of course, Egyptian." Za and Ta, non-covering college students of Macedonian background, both identify unhesitatingly as "Muslim" as did Ghayn: "I'm Muslim, it's my identity" All of the others who expressed feelings of identity either indicated a lost feeling of no clear identity or identified as both Muslim and/or ethnicity and American. The conflicted feelings seem particularly profound for those not born here, even if they immigrated at an early age. Sin, who was born in Kuwait of Palestinian parents said "I'm kind of like in this like cultural limbo...I feel like me practicing my religion freely and in choosing and going and getting an education it's kind of like American essentially. I guess that makes me American. People may be like 'Go back to your country' but if I go back to Palestine, I wouldn't be considered a Palestinian. Here I'm not really considered an American, like the cookie-cutter kind of American. I don't really have ancestry here." She noted however that her younger siblings who were born here have "a 100% like Wonder Bread white kind of life in the suburbs." Shin, the twins' mother, came here in 6<sup>th</sup> grade having fled Jerusalem during the 1967 war. She observed "It's hard enough that you grow up here. You're not really an American; you're not really an Arab. You're kind of lost anyway." Lam, born in Pakistan, said "I consider

myself a Muslim; I do not consider myself an American. I don't know what an American is culturally. I guess to take the scarf off? When I am thinking politically though, I am thinking the way Americans are thinking, so I guess I am both ways." Mim, born in Paterson, noted that "being Muslim and being American is not antithetical, but a challenge." She thought it is probably easier to face that challenge in New Jersey because of the community, but she knew she was "happy with the rights I have now in America." Political rights are given the nod by several interviewees. "Because there is freedom of religion, it's in the Constitution," observed Qaf as she concluded that the scarf would not be banned in the U.S, as it has been in France. Ha, the only African American subject, identified as "American but Muslim." When she studied in Syria she "regained focus and enjoyed complete absence of things American" Waw found herself in minor conflict with her husband over the identity displayed in her resume. She put in prominently that she held a top office in the MSA – he thought she should not mention it and in fact said at the time that he wanted to give their children names that were not readily identifiable as Muslim (they have two children now, both with Middle Eastern names). Waw said it was important that they know she was Muslim and better to surface issues up front. She noted that she "identifies as Muslim more than American – but also American." Her mother, on the other hand, identified totally by ethnicity. She was Circassian by birth, identity, and affiliation. One other observation: Mim, who identifies as Muslim and American, immediately described her spot in the birth order: "I am Jan Brady!"

The issue of sexual hierarchy in Islam commonly arises in discussions of women's covering, a practice sometimes dismissed as male-imposed and oppressive. Among the uncovered women who brought up the topic, the message was mixed. Ba, who did not cover, railed against a Muslim double standard that allowed her brother complete freedom and

constrained her actions. Once she was changing a tire and her mother said, "Girls don't do that" and Ba replied "Mom please don't ever say that to me again." Her sister Kha in commenting on the meaning of covering reported "In Jordan I saw a girl about 3 or 4 years old with a scarf... and I just wanted to kill her father because I knew it was her father who was doing that." Ayn, who did not cover but was thinking about it, said "I'm not going to say that Islam's a manmade religion, but it kind of feels like that. Women have to cover and not show shape; no rules for guys. I understand better from the MSA why some things are, but still I do not agree with some of it." Tha, who also did not cover, said "Dad reasons with me – leaves me to make the decision. He is not oppressive or dominant." Tha learned at home that "woman is to be nurturer and man the breadwinner but the roles are not in stone. Dad washes and vacuums and treats me the same as my brother... dirt biking, fishing..."

Most of the interviewees who covered brought up the topic of oppression – in order to firmly dismiss it. In describing their experience with covering, the women chose words like "liberating" (Ra), "empowering" (Tha), "stronger" (Shin), "confidence" (Sin) which resonate with feminist messages. Shin, the forty-year-old mom who began covering in Florida said "The first thing is everybody thought my husband made me do it. It was like totally the opposite."

Mim commented:

If you think Muslim women are so oppressed, then why would all these Muslim women be practicing? We have a brain; it's not like people are forcing us to do anything. I definitely think that it empowers me as a woman. Someone said 'In a society which is shamelessly publicly exposed a woman's body, where nudity represents like the freedom and where men can just like gawk at that, that's considered liberation.... But for me and for a Muslim woman, that's oppression and being liberated is being able to be an individual who is more than just a body.

Many pointed out that shared responsibilities in the home are the norm and not necessarily gender- determined. "My husband is probably more open-minded and more like not

traditional about these things that I am. Whoever gets home first cooks," commented Waw. She also observed that where women are treated subordinately, "their ethnic culture is like that and it's not their religion that's like that." Ghayn echoed this view saying "Bad treatment of women is not Islamic. And it's not because of like the Muslim religion but it is more because of like people who are just culturally messed up." Several of the women who covered pointed out that being equal does not necessarily mean being the same. "Different treatment doesn't necessarily mean that they're unequal," stated Sin. In commenting on the woman who led prayer at an Islamic service at Riverside Church in New York City, Sin further said "It's not that women can't lead; there's a time for it. I don't think those prayers would be accepted; I wouldn't want to play around with it. I think feminists would probably be offended by [this view] but at the same time, I feel like I have feminist tendencies and I am not offended by it. And I feel no barriers." The role of mother and family leader is talked about by several – and seen to be the most important role for women by many. As Ra put it: "Because I feel the foundation of society is built based on the woman. If I want my society to be good, my family, you have to start from within. But my husband better help me!" Qaf shared that she did think "that women have a role and that is to stay at home and be with your husband; take care of your husband; take care of your children. Yes you can work, but not the priority." It should be added that Qaf alone seemed functionally dependent upon her male partner... she did not drive and her husband accompanied her in public. Several women cited stories from the life of Mohammad about women soldiers showing that the Prophet respected and honored women. Waw and her mother Ya both spoke of Massaba, a woman who took up the sword and protected the Prophet. Shin spoke of the role of the Prophet's wife who was a successful and powerful business woman.

In talking about the role of women in Islam, particularly in religious practices, views on the changing (or not changing) nature of Islamic theology and liturgical roles were examined. Again not surprisingly, more of the non-covering women saw room for deep change. Alif, the graduate student from Turkey, observed "You have to be a bit open-minded. Everything changes, you know, so I think religion can change too." Ba (who reported her favorite saying to be "curb your God not your dog") stated that the current youth programs at the Islamic Center "change nothing." She loved the idea about Wadud leading prayer at Riverside, "I wanted to go. I consider myself a Progressive Muslim but Mom did not think the service was right." Waw's mother Ya said "Things change... cultures change over time." Among the covered, Ghayn said "I feel like the more religious people get in terms of understanding Islam and really understanding what traditional Islam is and Sunni Islam is, the more they're going to get rid of all that cultural garbage and really look at fairness and equality and things like that." Ghayn cited the *Hijab Monologues* and its commentary about Amina Wadud's prayer service: "If the first time a woman knocks on the door and you don't answer it... the second time she knocks on the door and you don't answer it... one of the times she's going to bust down the door and she's going to be angry and she's going to do things that you might not agree with but that's what's going to happen and you did it to yourself." Ghayn did not necessarily agree with the tactics but would not shun them [Progressive Muslims]. Ghayn's point about knowing what Islam is really about is reflected in the comments of others. Lam pointed out that in Pakistan one learns to read the Koran in Arabic, but not necessarily to understand Arabic "...and we don't learn the meaning at all. People forget the actual meaning [of the Koran] that's why terrorists and all those are emerging from Pakistan now. Because they do not read what's actually there." Waw, who was raised in what she describes as a "cafeteria" setting where one can choose what one wants to

practice, said that the average "Ramadan Muslim" is more about ethnicity and culture. She thought "the bad stuff is culture, but there are strong requirements of the religion that don't change." Ya noted that the people and times change, not the religion. "It is written, it's there, it doesn't change, you know? We change. The core message is the same but circumstances cause interpretations to shift. The core of how to be with people and each other is learned at home." Five of the young women were actively involved in Islamic study groups at mosques or Islamic centers. Ra said "God set down a guide, the Koran. Knowledge is important; you can't be ignorant. Just to get an A is not going to make me a better person. Scholarship is a tradition in Islam."

Taking a cue from Nilüfer Göle, this study also looked at the kinds of role choices the subjects either had made or were expecting to make. Göle noted that many of the highly-educated covered women in the Turkish university movement did not end up in the professions they trained for. Of interest also is whether their choices are or are likely to be exogamous or endogamous. Of the uncovered, Ba and Kha, the twins, did not plan on moving back to Jordan with their mother or father. Ba was moving back down south: "people are happier there" and Kha had an Irish/Italian boyfriend and was contemplating kids. "We Arabs love to have kids." Ya, Waw's mother, was an independent businesswoman who had struggled to be accepted and was proud that she had been. She also took pride in Waw, her covered daughter, but did not cover herself. She was VERY happy that her daughter married a Circassian. Za and Ta (Macedonian/Turkish) were happily social but also serious about career choices. One was interested in finance/banking and the other in communication disorders. Both plan graduate school. Za first, however, was planning a big wedding to a Circassian (parents had wanted a Turk but all are happy he was Muslim). Ayn and Tha, who did not cover but were thinking

about it, differed in their approaches. Tha was studying about marriage in Islam and "wants to do things the right way." Ayn was focused on her goal of becoming a therapist and gave no hints about male involvements.

Of the covered women, Dal expected to marry a Pakistani like herself, but one from here; she was too "Americanized" to marry one from Pakistan directly. She would immediately stop her education if she had kids; they would be her first priority. Qaf, the conservative, was married. She taught in Islamic school and had been a business major with business experience prior to that. She put her husband first and would focus on home as soon as she had kids. Ghayn was heading abroad for further study and wanted to work in radio when she "knows more" and had "legitimate ideas and content to share." No word about marriage. Nun (Egyptian) had an Egyptian fiancé from Pennsylvania – her parents knew his. They were to be married and live in New Jersey. Nun was studying to become a physical therapist; no word about marriage or family interest. It is interesting that many of the women decry ethnic culture as both limiting and, to some, benighted, and yet most seem to be or plan on marrying within (or quite near) their cultural "homes."

### **Muslim Experience**

As a final topic addressed by the interviewees, experiences, both good and bad, as Muslims in a non-Muslim society revealed themselves. Most of the experiences were fairly mild and dealt with matter-of-factly. Among the uncovered, very few had negative experiences... although Ba and Kha's no-Muslim friends in Florida surrounded them for protection the one time some students harassed them about 9/11. Za and Ta both reported that people were "shocked" when they find out, but that they "seem to change their overall perception of Muslims once they find out"(Za). Ta noted that people at the bank where she worked knew she was a Muslim and

seemed more curious than negative "because they are really interested in learning." Ayn reported no notable experiences and Tha said that "There were bad vibes around 9/11 but it was good because there was a lot of media education on Islam afterwards" She took the opportunity to speak out: "Guys this is not my religion. Like what you see on the news, it's not what we do" She felt it pushed her to "get the word out." The harshest experiences were reported by Waw and Qaf. Qaf worked in a crafts store and when she came back from a trip to Mecca for the Haj she was wearing the *niqab*, or small face veil:

I was with my cart. I had my face shield on and this old white lady came in ...She had white hair. She took it very like-- One of the classic women. They're like real proper. She had on a little dress. "What a nice old lady." Then she walked in. She looked at me and she put her hand on her chest and started breathing really hard walking backwards. She almost tripped and fell over something in the aisle. And I was like, "Oh, my God." She must think I was some terrorist. This is silly. Like what would I be doing in a Michael's? Am I really going to blow you up?"

Qaf worried about the woman and was sorry for scaring her, but also felt threatened by being reacted to "as a terrorist." A born sociologist, Qaf did play around with different colors rather than black and noticed there was less reaction the cheerier the color. She also reported the positive note that "women at [the store] went out of their way to talk to me after the incident; they sympathized and wanted me to know that Americans did not hate Muslims." Waw went into the city about a year after 9/11 to collect for Save the Children and a man yelled "You terrorist! You're just raising money for Palestinian children who are going to go blow themselves up." Again, there was a positive: "A woman came over to see if I was ok and to tell me all American Christians were not like him" The everyday stares and distancing were a part of most of their lives, but most said that "when I talked" people thaw. Lam got stared at, but she also admitted "I look unfriendly." Ra articulated a common attitude among the young covered women: "I don't pay any attention. I try to give people the benefit of the doubt. It's out of ignorance and they

don't know. I can't really get mad at them for it. They don't know. So I wish they would come and ask me. I would tell them."

In reviewing these results, three themes emerge that will be explored more in chapters to follow: Population Density/Neighborhood Comfort; Feminism and Identity; The two-fold message of the scarf. Each of the subjects touched upon their feelings when they were either in a stark minority or surrounded by others like them. This is not particularly surprising, but the "like them" shifts depending upon how dense the Muslim population in the situation in question. For example, when few, "like them" becomes all Muslims and "the others" become all non-Muslims. When there are many Muslims, "like them" can be ethnically defined (Circassian or Bengali or Pakistani) with "the others" becoming all other ethnicities and religions. It can also be defined by levels of orthodoxy where "like them" is covered or even fully covered and "the others" are those who do not cover, or in the case of those who wear the niqab and abaya, those who only wear a head scarf and modest modern clothes.

Nearly all of the women interviewed considered themselves to be "not oppressed" (Ba and Kha were the outliers – and they qualified their judgments). In fact, many of them considered themselves to be feminists even if feminists might not accept their membership. Many used feminist words like "freeing" and "liberating" in describing the joys of donning a headscarf. And many pointed out that covering meant not being judged by men based on appearance. Those who spoke out about inequality of treatment or privilege within Islam for the most part felt that things not only should but could change. And many thought that what the world perceives to be the worst aspects of Islam are aspects of culture, not religion. And almost all embraced a "Muslim" identity.

And finally, the topic of the meaning of the hijab brought out some common themes that illuminate the experience of these women. For so many, the internal meaning of donning the scarf is not just piety but a *reminder to be pious*. Several commented that when they wore the scarf they were mindful that they should "behave as good Muslims" or "please God". Many also commented that putting on the scarf gave them peace and was personally "freeing." Externally, the scarf makes the statement "I am a Muslim". Again, there were common motifs around that statement. Women felt the burden of showing that Muslims "are not terrorists" and are regular people; they also felt the obligation (and excitement) of spreading the word when people ask about their religion. Waw felt so strongly that while women did not have to be covered to be pious, they did have to be covered if they intended to represent themselves as Muslims to the public world. It is interesting, however, that several of the mothers worried that their daughters might be pressured into covering by their fiancés or boyfriends and many denied the role of males in their decision to cover. The very presence of the denial suggests that the pressure, though avoidable, is real.

## CHAPTER 6

### DISCUSSION

#### **Introduction**

The preceding two chapters discussed the results gained from two methodological approaches: 1) Secondary Data Analysis of the Pew Research Center Muslim American Survey (2007) and 2) In-depth interviews conducted primarily during 2007 and the first quarter of 2008 in Northern New Jersey. While myriad findings were called out in the previous pages, certain themes emerge which when viewed through the lenses of previous research and theory presented in Chapter 2 offer some key insights into the questions of the motive for and meaning of covering to young Muslim American women. Those themes included level of religious observance; understandings of theology and doctrine; feminist beliefs and practice; attitudes toward and indicators of assimilation; the impact of ethnic culture; the meanings both internal and external of wearing the scarf; and lastly a concept of comfort which is tied to a sense of support vs. isolation in one's surroundings. These topics are collected under four major headings: Religious Observance; Theology and Gender; Assimilation; The Meaning of the Scarf; and Neighborhoods and Comfort.

#### **Demographic Backdrop**

Just to re-paint the background demographically, about 52% of the 505 women in the Pew Muslim American Survey covered – either all of the time or part of the time when in public. They were on average younger than those who never covered. Although much has been made about middle-class college-educated Muslim women, in the survey those who covered came from households with slightly lower incomes (\$30,000 to under \$40,000 vs. \$40,000 to under \$50,000) and were slightly less educated (high school degree vs. some post-HS education).

Those surveyed were 45% white, 16% black, 22% Asian by self-identification; thirty-three percent were born in the U.S. , 22% were born in the Arab region (excluding Iran) and over 19% were born in southeast Asia (including Pakistan). Only in the cases of Iran and Europe was there a statistically significant tendency NOT to cover. The greatest propensity to cover among survey respondents was in the Arab region and in Pakistan.

In the interview sample, over 55% (11) covered. Coincidentally about 55% of the interviewees were born in the U.S. and another 27% came to the U.S. prior to the 2nd grade. Subjects with Egyptian, Pakistani and Syrian/Circassian backgrounds were most likely to cover (Pakistanis and Egyptians the most colorfully); those from Turkey least likely. In neither the Muslim American Survey nor in the interviews did being born in the U.S. seem to have a significant impact. All of those interviewed had at least some college and most were soundly middle-class, but not at the upper level. In general, then, the demographic shape of the Pew study sample and the interview sample were in agreement.

### **Religious Observance**

#### Mosque Attendance

Analysis of the Pew Muslim American Survey (2007) reveals a significant relationship between level of mosque attendance and covering, but less impact in terms of core beliefs. In a bivariate analysis of mosque attendance vs. covering, those who covered attended on average "Once or twice a month" while those who did not cover tended toward "Seldom" or "A few times a year." In looking at the binary logistic regression, increased mosque attendance significantly increased the odds of covering. In the final model which controlled for demographics and life experiences, each step up in response category for mosque attendance (e.g. from "a few times a year" to "once or twice a month") increased the odds of covering by 1.6 times. Of those

interviewed, only 4 of those who covered or were seriously contemplating covering *did not* attend mosque (either because of accessibility or gender traditions within their local mosque). *None* of those who were uncovered attended other than on feast days, casually, or not at all.

In the literature, mosque attendance by young Muslim women is noted (Read and Bartkowski 2000, Read 2003, Marshall and Read 2003) but its meaning to the attendees is not well illuminated. These scholars note the correlation of attendance with other measures of interest like gender conservatism and Muslim identity, but do not explore the meanings of attending in the same way writers observing Muslim practices in societies other than ours have done (e.g. Nilüfer Göle in Turkey and Saba Mahmood in Egypt). One should note that mosque attendance, particularly for women, is not viewed to be mandatory in Islam in the same way church attendance is in Christianity; therefore one could argue that high levels of attendance are an even stronger indicator of religiosity for young Muslim women than for young Christian or Jewish women. It is also notable that as Asma Gull Hasan and many of the participants in the Lily Foundation-funded Gateway Cities Project on Religion and the New Immigrants (scholars in the sociology of religion like Jose Casanova, Steven Warner, and Helen Ebaugh) have observed, the "churched" nature of American society has shaped the roles of both mosques and mosque-goers. Institutions of religion have played a central socializing role in America, as sources of community and community outreach, as well as religious support. Mosque-going is far more common in the U.S. than in most Muslim countries (Hasan 2004), a trend that is even sharper for women than for men since women have been traditionally barred from mosque worship in many countries like Egypt and Pakistan. Given the "normalcy" of "church-going" in the U.S., one could argue that the strong attendance at Friday prayers and "Sunday school" is a counterintuitive indication of assimilation.

Many of the interviewees talked about the mosque or Islamic center sessions they attended, not only on the words of the Koran but also on the role of women in Islam. Ghayn, a young woman who was a leader on campus both in the Muslim community and in general, said "I can speak to the imam any time I want and I can address any issues that are bothering me ... There's women's classes. Women's everything." American-born Dal brought an American perspective to the mosque rules back in Pakistan where her parents were born: "That's not even religion. That's just some guys came up with the idea that women shouldn't. That should be changed." Lam, who came here at 15 from Pakistan, however, noted that only her brother went to mosque. "We are not allowed to go to mosques." She and her mother prayed at home. From the Circassian community, Waw noted that she went to the Circassian Center as child more for social reasons; that she went to the local Islamic Center beginning in college; and that now she was in New York City, she went to a mosque for both classes and worship. It was "very important," Waw, stated. In the NYC environment it kept "my spirituality up." The classes in the mosque also play a role in helping these young women find a comfortable niche for women in the theology and traditions of Islam – something that will be discussed more when we come to the section on Theology/Doctrine.

### Core Beliefs

While attendance certainly had a direct effect, survey respondents' views about "Only one true interpretation" and "Inerrancy of the Koran" had no statistical impact on the decision to cover. Nearly all (93%) of respondents believe in the inerrancy, making it essentially non-variable, and while 62% of the respondents believed that there can be varied interpretations of the Koran vs. 38% who think there is only one true interpretation, there was no significant difference between the responses of those who covered vs. those who did not no matter the

statistical measure. This is certainly true of the interviewees as well. They also were adamant to a woman at the inerrancy of the Koran but most felt that varied interpretations were possible.

Read (2003) and Marshall and Read (2003) used a 2000 national survey of Arab-American women to contrast attitudes of Christian vs. Muslim women. In both cases they found that the level of religiosity, not the religion, determined the level of conservatism in their attitudes toward religion and gender roles. In testing for religiosity, they asked all the respondents questions about both attendance at religious services and beliefs about sacred writings. The findings like those relating to mosque attendance may be a bit flawed however, given the nature of beliefs in Christianity vs. Islam. It is a *given* in Islam that the Koran is a book dictated to Mohammad straight from the *Kitab* in heaven. Such is not the nature of the Bible and views on inerrancy in Christianity provide significant markers of theological difference between and among Christian denominations and sects. The issue of "one true interpretation" which showed a majority believing that multiple interpretations are possible also seemed to have no impact in either the survey or the reports of the interviewees. A majority of those surveyed and almost all of the women interviewed believe multiple interpretations are possible, which I would argue is almost necessary to resolve the cognitive dissonance of being both a modern woman and a covered Muslim.

### **Theology and Gender**

The theology of Islam is particularly difficult to capture. Truth is irrefutably within the Koran, which must be known in Arabic (the language of the *Kitab* from which it was dictated). Interpretation is another issue altogether. There is no central source of orthodoxy like the Vatican. There two major branches, Sunni and Shi'ite, with multiple and competing movements, scholars, and leaders. One thing is certain: women are not allowed into their major schools of

theology and are therefore not recognized as theologians. Several women, of particular note Amina Wadud, Asma Barlas, and Nimat Barazangi, have made a space for themselves at the table, studying outside of the traditional madrassas and challenging the rigid interpretations that, to their minds, marginalize women. While rejected by most recognized (male) theologians in Islam, these women have a following and are viewed to be at the religiously- serious forefront of change. Unlike many best-selling female authors on the topic of Islam (e.g. Ayann Hirshi Ali, *The Caged Virgin: An Emancipation Proclamation for Women and Islam* (2006); Asra Q. Nomani, *Standing Alone in Mecca: An American Woman's Struggle for the Soul of Islam* (2005); Irshad Manji, *The Trouble with Islam: A Muslim's Call for Reform in Her Faith* (2003)), these women are grappling with reinterpreting core of the faith in a world that is both politically and theologically hostile. And these are *not* the women who inspire the young Muslim American women I have known. There is little to be gleaned from the Pew Muslim American survey on this topic. The simple questions about inerrancy of the book and true interpretations shed little light on more complex issues of religious belief and practice. The in-depth interviews, however, are instructive about *what* these young women believe about their role in Islam and the narratives they use to explain and support those beliefs.

It is interesting that only two of those interviewed, the irrepressible non-covering twins, were enthusiastic about Progressive Muslims and the service led by Amina Wadud at Riverside Church in New York City. Recall that Ba wished that she could have been there, but her mother did not want her to go: "You can't pray when a woman is speaking. The intent is to pray for God -- not holding hands, no touching. They [men and women] shouldn't be looking at each other." Ba, on the other hand, "fully backs" the idea of praying together with a woman leader. While many of the subjects had respect for Wadud, no one else spoke of it as a welcome and

legitimate action. Remember Sin, who covered and was of Palestinian background, observed, “ I don't think those prayers would be accepted...I wouldn't want to like play around with it!”

I was a member of the MSA listserv as this event unfolded and not one young woman suggested that a woman leading Islamic prayers was welcome. Many of the males called for her condemnation or worse and a few women came to her defense but quickly added that they themselves did not think it right. Ghayn used words from the *Hijab Monologues* about an angry woman knocking at the door and being ignored over and over --- and then finally bashing the door down. Ghayn said she understood what Wadud was trying to do..... but she never expressed personal support for it. There seems to be a collective holding back among the young women I interviewed – more of an interest in recasting what is there rather than wrestling with it. All of the women I interviewed thought Islam to be misinterpreted and misread by ignorant people or misguided cultures and all but Kha seemed to have no vested interest in sources of new interpretations.

While none of the women talked about new theological interpretations, several young women countered the idea of a theology of male dominance with references to the powers of women at the time of the prophet. Nilüfer Göle's work raises the notion of the “looking back” to a chimeral Utopia – grounding current views of female roles in a golden time that arguably never was (1996). In explaining how she viewed a woman's role in Islam, Waw recounted the story of Massaba, a woman who was a member of the original group surrounding the Prophet. The tale goes that once, when Muhammad was wounded, “she rushed over to him. She grabbed a sword on the floor and she started fighting anybody that was in her way. And the Prophet said, while he was lying on the floor, ‘I looked left, I saw Massaba. I looked right, I saw Massaba. I

looked up in the air, I saw Massaba.” And, according to Waw's retelling, as time went on people came to Massaba for advice and she and her children were looked to as leaders.

Waw was not the only one who mentioned Massaba. Her mother, who had obviously heard it from Waw, referred to the story in refuting the idea that the Muslim gender ideal includes only a submissive woman; two others referred to such female exploits at the time of the Prophet and one referred to the Prophet's wife, a successful entrepreneur. While I am not completely familiar with the saints and heroes of Islam, this seems to me like an evolving foundation myth that, without grappling with the tenets of the religion head-on, allows one to solve part of the cognitive dissonance between viewing oneself as a woman with power and the view that women in Islam must submit both to man and Allah.

Women in my interview sample clearly gave life to the finding from the survey data that those who think Islam treats men better than women are not likely to be among those who cover. To a person, those who cover or are contemplating covering deny that gender inequality is intrinsic to the religion. Only uncovered Ba and Kha speak out on this topic. According to Kha, "I always thought that was just really crappy how women had to hide themselves. And I didn't like how women have to be at the back of the mosque or how like the guy had to lead the prayer. It's a guy's society. It's ridiculous." Several of the covered women commented on mosque practices: their brothers could attend the neighborhood mosques, but they could not (Turkish and Pakistani backgrounds) --- they would have to go to an Islamic Center which was hard to get to. Reflecting the feelings of several other women, Ayn said

I'm not going to say that Islam's a manmade religion, but it kind of feels like that. Women have to cover and not show shape -- no rules for guys... I now understand better from MSA why some things are [the way they are] but still do not agree with some of it. There are 3 mosques in the neighborhood that do not allow women - women supposed to pray at home. I'd rather have a lot of women around praying at the same time.

But while there are such complaints, the idea that women are lesser in Islam is firmly rejected. In addition to the recurrent theme that abuses in Islam are a result of ethnic abuse of pure Islam, there is a constant narrative of "different but equal." Sin: "I think it's [Islam] perfectly compatible [with feminism]. Different treatment doesn't necessarily mean that they're unequal. I think feminists would probably be offended by it and not agree with it. At the same time, I feel like I have feminist tendencies. I don't feel offended by it." Mim hotly responded to the suggestion of Islamic oppression: "I just feel like that's kind of basing what is a woman's rights and what's equality for women? You're basing it against what the Western definition of that is. So I don't necessarily think that was any real progress for women. What I think of the Islamic belief is that men and women are equal but not the same. And I consider myself a feminist."

Related to this discussion of gender equality is the idea that a woman's role as a nurturer is one of the most important in Islam, which returns us to the observations of Nilüfer Göle. In her interviews with young upper class university-educated women in Turkey, Göle observed that these women, aggressive Islamists, are pursuing the credentials to be doctors, educators, professionals and they argue that such pursuits are clearly consonant with the teachings of the Koran and Haddith. But in interview after interview, Göle encountered women who did not plan to practice their skills outside of their home, asserting that the locus of female strength and influence in Islam is the family. The same tendencies were evident in some of my interviews, all of which were with women either in or training for future professional lives. Ra said, "... I feel the foundation of society is built based on the woman." Qaf was even stronger on the subject: "I do think that women have a role and that is to stay at home and be with your husband. Take care of your husband; take care of children ... Family unit, I think that's the most sacred thing in this world." Waw, a social science major and activist, was now a stay-at-home mom;

Ra, Sin, and Ha were all contemplating graduate studies, but would become fulltime moms when they had children, which all of them wanted. Each expressed these plans as evidence of the strength of women, as a counter to the idea of a lesser role. But these young women were not tone deaf to the signifiers of modernity – or the demands of social desirability. Most, as soon as they described domestic roles, quickly added in evidence of chore equality. Tha observed that woman should be the "nurturer and man the breadwinner" but roles were not in stone. She pointed out that "Dad washes and vacuums." Waw said of her husband that he "...is probably like more open-minded and more like not traditional about these things than I am.... Whoever gets home first cooks."

It is a confusing pattern to sort out. Almost all of the young women who cover or are thinking of covering are indeed serious about their religion. They attend mosque, or if they can't, they belong to study groups or sit in sessions in the MSA club room on campus. They think of themselves both as observant Muslims, but also as modern feminists. Yet they attend services (if they are allowed to) under sexually segregated conditions, they cannot participate in the delivery of the service, and most feel they must cover in public. It is indeed a circle to be squared.

### **Assimilation**

"Why can't they assimilate?" "They don't want to be Americans." "Why do they want to stand out? It just makes it so obvious that they want to be different." These are just a few of the comments one might overhear when a clutch of young covered Muslim women is seen in stores, malls, on the streets. The post 9/11 anti-Muslim sentiment makes the chatter just that much

harsher, the "otherness" both more terrifying and legitimately marginalized. What are the feelings about assimilation within this community and how does that measure up against past "melding" experiences in America? In this context, assimilation takes on a tricky meaning. We usually think of race and ethnicity when on this topic, both of which are usually "non-discreditable" in Goffman's words – in other words, you know 'em when you see 'em. Religion is not so readily discerned. The most reliable outward signifiers of religion are voluntarily taken on by the observant – Amish bonnets, Hasidic ear locks, Muslim hijabs. And as so adroitly pointed out by Ari Zolberg, the hijab can be as strong a marker of "otherness" as Spanish. In the discussion of assimilation as it relates to young Muslim American women, ethnicity and religion often intertwine. Society seems to have reified "Muslim" as a racial or ethnic category – embraced within the Pew survey and by the interviewees themselves. I will do my best to distinguish between them in what follows, but the theories of assimilation illuminate the forces operating for both aspects.

### Culture and Identity

Looking first at the survey results, recall that 54% of the 505 females sampled thought that Muslims should either keep the Muslim culture alone or retain it alongside the American culture. (The Pew Survey makes no attempt to distinguish between religion and ethnicity in its questions on culture and identity.) Flipping the statistic, this also means that over 45% of those surveyed chose the response option "Should mostly adopt American culture". When asked about identity, a whopping 75% indicated that they thought of themselves as Muslims or as both Muslim and American, with only 25% choosing "American" as the identifier.

When looking at the relationship of these sentiments with covering, regarding assimilation over 65% of those who were for retaining only the Muslim culture or keeping it

alongside American culture were women who covered. As for identity, nearly 74% of those who thought of themselves primarily as "American" were non-coverers. In the regression analysis, views on identity had no significant impact in either of the models where it was included. Views on assimilation, on the other hand, were significant at the  $p > .05$  level in Model 2, which considered both religious and secular effects associated with being Muslim. Women who did not support assimilating fully to American culture had almost twice the odds (1.862) of covering than women who would allow for some level of assimilation. In Model 3, however, where demographic variables were introduced, the effect of believing one should not solely assimilate to American culture became statistically insignificant.

Interview data might shed some light on the nature of this "disappearing." First, there is a significant difference in how the young women who were interviewed responded to ideas of "identity" vs. ideas of assimilation. Only one, Nun (who covered) presented as totally American. All of the others, covered or not, considered themselves Muslim or Muslim-American. This identity was revealed for the most part as a statement of political (religious) alignment, sort of an "I am Spartacus" stance ready to take on the wrongful persecution of Muslims; not as a statement of ethnic or cultural alignment. When the topic of culture came up, most would compare themselves to the ethnic behaviors and attitudes of their parents and come out on the American side. Ra who covers said "Culture-wise I think American. Their [her parents'] culture is of course Egyptian."

In going back to the survey data, an additional run without Age in Model 3 and a fast look at a layered crosstabs indicate that the reason for the disappearance of the significant impact of the "not assimilate" variable in Model 3 is due not only to the variable "age" but specifically to the category "18-25" (Appendix A). In all other trivariate relationships between assimilation,

covering, and the variables in the demographic Model 3, the original relationship (that the choice of not adopting the American culture or keeping both American and Muslim culture increases the odds of covering) remained significant. One could therefore argue that it is the introduction of the "age" variable in the regression model that pulls out the effects from the younger respondents and underscores the "American-ness" of what others perceive to be their non-assimilation. As one would expect from the work of Kasinitz et al on second generation New Yorkers (2004), these young first and second generation Muslim American women (whether covered or not) do *not* have a strong identity as Americans, a label they view to connote whitebreadness; but neither do they identify with their parents' culture. They are, in fact, American in their aggressive stance against American discrimination against Muslims. (Bakalian and Bozorgmehr [2009] concluded in fact that the adversities of 9/11 may have served to increase overall the choice of Muslim identity.) This odd and often poignant mix of identity is captured in the words of Sin, the young ethnically Palestinian woman who was born in Kuwait and came here as a toddler. Recall her observation about a "cultural limbo" where she was American in the rights and privileges she enjoyed, but she was not the "cookie-cutter kind"; if she went to Palestine, she was definitely not Palestinian. Lam, born in Pakistan, said "When I am thinking politically.... I am thinking the way Americans are thinking."

Waw felt it important to include clear markers about her Muslim belief in her resume, highlighting her leadership roles among her accomplishments despite her husband's misgivings; and yet she saw herself as American. She contrasted herself with her mother, whom she described as Circassian by "birth, identity, and affiliation." At first look, her mother appears more "assimilated" than Waw. She did not cover; she was a small Main Street business owner in a white middle-class town; she displayed the seemingly-requisite post-9/11 signs of American

support in her shop. And when her daughter decided to cover after 9/11 her reaction was worry, fear; she did not want Waw to stand out as a Muslim. Waw, on the other hand, felt she not only could, but that she had to -- to exercise her right of religious freedom and to be a model to the world of what Islam really is.

### Structural Assimilation

According to Milton Gordon (1964), the critical threshold in assimilation is the line between acculturation (behavioral assimilation) and "structural assimilation", when primary group relations outside the ethnic circle become common. Clearly, the most important of these is marriage. Gordon argued that once structural assimilation is achieved, full assimilation is achieved. He noted that structural assimilation was retarded in America by religious and racial lines and concluded at that time that America had structural pluralism, not structural assimilation. In his straight line model of assimilation, Herbert Gans (1979) argued a generational model that moved inexorably toward assimilation with a vestigial food-and-holiday-based ethnicity in the out-generations. While Gans expected religion to be less important, eroded by acculturation, he did, however, caution that "it is always possible that future economic and political conditions in American society will create a demand for new scapegoats, and if ethnics are forced into this role, present tendencies will be interrupted" (1979:14). Taking Gordon's framework and keeping Gans' cautionary note in mind, an analysis of primary group relationships might be helpful, particularly the nature of close friendships and attitudes toward marriage.

Turning first to the survey, the average response for all respondents was 3.6 on "Muslim Friends", somewhere between "Many" and "Most." When looking at a comparison of means between those covering and those not, the difference was statistically significant, but not very

large. Those who covered averaged roughly 3.8 on a scale of 1 to 5 (close to the response of "Most") while those not covering scored an average 3.4, closer to "Many." In the logistic regression, the number of close Muslim friends seemed to slightly improve the odds of covering, but the impact was not statistically significant in any of the models.

Among those interviewed, the impact seemed greater. Most of the covered young women who either covered or contemplated covering "hung out with" mostly Muslim classmates or family. The non-covering twins, who clearly stated they identified as Muslim, had almost no Muslim friends; all but two of the women who covered had mostly if not all Muslim friends. A clear exception was Ghayn, the former MSA officer and campus activist. She said that her best friend is a Catholic and another close friend is a Christian, but added "We go out for coffee and such, we just don't party." On the other hand, Waw, the other former MSA high officer, does have almost exclusively Muslim friends. She said that she needed "to be with people who act like good people." All of the others who had mostly Muslim friends seem a little less purposive in their selection. Most had to think, and when they did conclude that they were mostly Muslim they noted that it was because of the MSA, family and neighborhood – everyone they were surrounded by (rather, surrounded themselves with) were Muslim.

More on this in the next sections, but this appears to be a strong example of what Robert Putnam refers to as "bonding." Their affiliations are formed along a Muslim axis, a bonding which strengthens that aspect of their identity. Ghayn, who looked to a broader stage, engaged in Putnam's "bridging" behavior that took her into different spheres..... but her goal was always to represent Islam. She said to a friend one time that she wished she could "just not be identified as Muslim because it got a little bit tiring after a while about people constantly asking me

questions." Having grown in her Muslim identity and confidence, she added "But now I so welcome questions!"

On the topic of exogamy, messages and actions may be in conflict. In the survey, only 31% of all female respondents were unequivocally against marrying a non-Muslim. The rest felt that it was "OK" or at least acceptable under some circumstances. When examining the responses through the lens of covering, only about 20% of those who felt that it was "Not OK" to marry a non-Muslim were non-coverers, vs. roughly 80% of those with the "Not OK" opinion who were coverers. It should of course be kept in mind that those who thought it "Not OK" to marry outside the religion only made up about 47% of the women who covered, so it is not a majority opinion among those who cover, but it far more prevalent than among those who do not cover where only 13% hold such an opinion. Even with such caveats, this is a finding that, when coupled with Gordon's views on structural assimilation, seems to support the person-on-the-street wisdom that "they" are not "assimilated" nor do they want to be. When included in the logistic regression, the impact of indicating "Not ok to marry non-Muslim" was significant at the  $p < .001$  in both Model 2 and Model 3. In Model 2, choice of this response more than tripled the odds of covering; in Model 3, when controlling for demographic effects, the impact rose to greater than five times the odds.

Among my interview subjects, marriage and children were fairly universal goals, often paired with current paths toward professions. Although none professed the view that one had to marry within their ethnic culture (even though most were in relationships that did not bridge out of their ethnic circle), almost all thought that marrying within the religion was a given. One subject, Tha, who was thinking about covering, reported that she was studying to learn the "right way" to go about marriage in Islam. The exception to this pattern was one of the non-covering

twins of Palestinian background who did NOT date Muslims (her current beau was Irish/Italian). She noted, however, that her older sister, a young woman who covered whom I did not interview, was getting "all sorts of flack" because she was dating a Persian, not an Arab.

Waw, of Circassian background, was a wonderful example of the way in which assimilation is embraced in giving "socially desirable" responses, but is serendipitously avoided due to the intervention of the fates. She was one who distanced herself from the ethnic attitudes of her mother, whom she deeply loved but found too linked to the closed (but very large) circle of immigrant Circassians in northern New Jersey. They have a dedicated mosque and social center, which is the core magnet to the community. Weddings regularly have attendees nearing 1000 and matches are made at the occasions held there. Although according to Waw she had no intention of it, she ended up with a Circassian husband, a young professional. Her mother of course, was thrilled, but Waw stated that she and her husband both agreed that their children will not marry within the ethnic community: "We need to widen the gene pool!" she asserted. Given the likelihood that her new family will not be in this area, that may be true. But the ethnic enclaves within this region make it difficult to break out and just knowing that it is more cosmopolitan to be less ethnic does not necessarily reset the internal compass.

## Meaning of the Scarf

At the heart of this study is the scarf, a symbol of belief, submission, otherness. In the survey, of the 505 Muslim American women who responded, 52% wore a headcovering of some kind at least part of the time, most whenever in public. Why? Max Weber would urge us to understand the meaning from the wearer's standpoint (*Verstehen*) and to seek out both its cultural impetus and its social implications.

Returning to the topic of scripture and theology, the verses of the Koran that deal most directly with the wearing of the headscarf are two: 24:30-31 and 33:58-59. The first of these deals with modesty, particularly the covering of their bosoms:

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 khimār over their bosoms and not display their beauty except to their husband, their fathers, their husband's fathers, their sons, their husbands' sons, their brothers or their brothers' sons, or their sisters' sons, or their women, or the slaves whom their right hands possess, or male servants free of physical needs, or small children who have no sense of the shame of sex; and that they should not strike their feet in order to draw attention to their hidden ornaments (Quran 24:31).

The second deals with the Prophet's wives:

Those who harass believing men and believing women undeservedly, bear (on themselves) a calumny and a grievous sin. O Prophet! Enjoin your wives, your daughters, and the wives of true believers that they should cast their outer garments over their persons (when abroad): That is most convenient, that they may be distinguished and not be harassed. [...] (Quran 33:58–59)

While most who cover believe that it is indeed mandated, many scholars (e.g. Karen Armstrong, Leila Ahmed) argue that the second passage deals explicitly with the wives and court females of the Prophet who lived in the same space in which he carried out the business of governance. They were to be separated and protected as the women of the Prophet. Others

combine the surah about modesty with the call for seclusion and determine that all women of the faith are to be so protected.

There were no questions about either the requirement for or meaning of covering in the Pew survey; therefore the interviews alone will be used to explore this topic. Despite the relatively small number of subjects, saturation was hit fairly early on in the process. The same phrases came up time after time and could not be written off to shared circles of interaction. Women with different affiliations, different ethnic backgrounds, and even seemingly different levels of religious commitment expressed similar motives, emotions, and reactions.

In discussing covering it is important to understand that there are degrees of "veiling" that range from the a simple loose scarf that only partially covers the hair (like the dupatta worn in Pakistan) to a full covering with niqab (veil from nose down) to a burqua which obscures every feature and looks rather like a mobile fortress. The word *hijab* is sometimes used to refer to all of these types, since it can be translated as "veil" or "partition"; in the United States hijab is most commonly used to refer to a simple headcovering that hides all of one's hair and ends at one's shoulder. Of the interview subjects who covered, almost all wore this type of covering. Only one, Qaf, wore both headcovering and the abaya (full dress coat) – and at one point wore the niqab.

In this part of northern New Jersey where Muslims are plentiful, scarves are common and in some cases, fashion statements. Main Street in Paterson is dotted with shops where appropriate clothing for Muslim women can be found. Viewed to be a bit "dowdy" by the younger set, these stores are often bypassed for online shopping at sites like The Hijab Shop or the Hijab Store or ummahcouture.com or boutiques at the mall. In schools in both Paterson and Prospect Park many who are not Muslim also wear the scarf as a fashionable accessory. Nun,

who was "into hair", did not cover in high school; she replaced hairstyles with hijab styles when she began to cover in college. She said she interacted with an Egyptian friend via webcam to learn different styles. Anticipating an upcoming trip to Cairo, she added "I can't wait to go so people who cover themselves could show me...." Both Mim and Waw preceded their adoption of the scarf with a shopping spree with a friend. And several commented that the supportive comments from friends and fellow MSA-ers about how good they looked and how pretty their scarves were helped ease them over the hurdle of donning the hijab.

Putting fashion to one side, there are several topics to explore using the interview data. First is belief about whether or not it is indeed required for all Muslim women. The reaction of others when they began covering, what they think the scarf signals to the outside world and, most importantly, what it means internally to the one wearing it will all be discussed in the following.

As stated at the beginning of this section, there is a continuing discussion on the nature of the requirement for covering. Only five of those interviewed felt that wearing the scarf was optional; that included three who did not cover and two who covered. Several felt personally that it was required but also added that it did not make you a bad Muslim if you do not. Tha quoted her father, "When you have something beautiful, you cover it. Women are precious." Shin, the twins' mother, said "Yes it is there. It applies to me and this is how I would like to be." Qaf acknowledged that some people say that as long as it is in your heart it is ok, but "I think your actions have to be inward and outward. You can't talk a different talk." Waw stated that "If you are representing yourself to the public as a practicing Muslim you must be covered." Two consistent caveats cropped up in their views on this: several thought that it became more required the older you got and almost all thought that to put on the hijab and then stop wearing it was worse than never wearing it to begin with.

"Representing Islam" is a public aspect of taking on the hijab. Waw said that you don't need it necessarily to be personally pious, but if you are stating you are Muslim in a public forum (as in the Progressive Muslim service at Riverside Church) "you need to be a true Muslim woman and be the way Muslim women are supposed to be which for me meant wearing the hijab." Mim said that she felt like she was "not wearing anything" if she went out without covering and that when she wore it "what I do people will ascribe to Islam." Mim described herself as a "walking symbol." Lam said "It is kind of a fashion accessory... but it also makes a statement. You are different. Like different from other people; that you're a Muslim and you are proud of it." Nun noted "When you wear the hijab people think you are more into the religion than if you did not. People expect me to know everything..." Talking about the possible impact in public, Ra said that if she were "interviewed and turned down because I'm a Muslim, at least the person met a Muslim and saw that they were good. Because I am representing Islam and need to behave accordingly." Tha added the thought that when people see you they understand "Oh, these people aren't crazy mad people!" Sin said "I have to think about what kind of image I'm carrying because I'm wearing something on my head that represents women in Islam. I don't want to hurt that image.... It's like a really big responsibility." And one yet-to-cover young woman captured that burden this way: "I don't think I'm ready to be that devoted yet. Because there's a lot that comes with that also."

Another almost universal theme is that wearing the hijab brings respect, a respect you don't get as an uncovered young woman. "Like I feel that I get more respect, which is weird. I wasn't expecting that. Even from professors," observed Mim. Ghayn noted that "people, including my parents, give me more respect." Qaf was "surprised how many respected me...."like men would get out of the way, open the door for me where when I didn't wear it,

people didn't even care. It gets a lot of benefits. The worldly and for God." In this modern age when door-opening is eschewed, it is interesting how often that was cited as a measure of respect. Dal reported that "Guys apologize for profanity, open doors..." Several reported on the "Hijab for a Day" exercise that the MSA a local college stages annually. Women, especially non-Muslim women, are urged to try covering for a day and the most common response is that they feel more respected..... That "men even open doors" for them.

It is interesting that "representing Islam" was expressed mostly in positive terms, sometimes as a joy, sometimes as an offering, sometimes as a responsibility. A few however reported negative reactions in circumstances. Recall Waw who had the experience after 9/11 of being threatened on the street when she was collecting for Save the Children by a man who accused her of raising money for terrorists. And recall Qaf, who scared the bejeepers out of an older woman when she wore a niqab at work. But these tales are in the minority and seem to occur under special circumstances which will be discussed in more length in the next section. And they seem to have the impact of strengthening rather than weakening resolve to cover. The feedback from the outside world for most of these women, however, seems positive both in how they are treated and how they think they are being perceived. They are, as Göle points out, taking on a clear signifier of otherness, something Erving Goffman describes as discreditable stigma. They call attention to their Muslimness, reinforcing their own espoused identity and proudly positioning themselves much as armbands and buttons and shaved heads signal a unity of thought and purpose.

The internal meaning, how the scarf shapes the thoughts and actions of the wearer, was almost reverently discussed by several of the interview subjects. Refer back to Mahmood's comments on the nature overt signs of piety: that they are "critical markers of piety as well as the

ineluctable means by which one trains oneself to be pious." (2005:158) The remarks of interviewees give further life to that observation. Keeping in mind that one of the definitions for hijab is "partition" according to *The New Encyclopedia of Islam* (Glassé 2008: 206), it is interesting to note that several see it as a barrier against not only the non-Muslim outside world but also against their own impure thoughts and actions. "I believe that I am doing this for God. When you wear the scarf, you feel it. You feel like you're protected. It brings tears to my face," said Ra. "When you have it on your head, it's an awareness... a remembrance of God. Then you remember what you're wearing it for. Because our main reason is that God said so. There is also something very empowering." Shin said when she started wearing it that it "was a very peaceful feeling, almost like a protection from the outside world or something. You just have to uphold certain... It completes you. It really completes you." Dal reported that it "affects how I treat others. And it makes me feel safer." Ayn: "It is protection, shielding yourself... a reminder not be flirty." Qaf said "I just felt more complete. Keeps in my mind God can see my every move. And that's what keeps me on track without deviating or doing something I'm not supposed to do. Because it's very hard; life is full of temptation." Ghayn: "My self is nicer, happy more comfortable since the scarf." Lam stressed the barrier: "A personal barrier from the outside. I think that's what it means to me, comfort. I am not like them." Mim: "I am definitely much more careful about how I act. It's very helpful because it keeps me in check." Waw talked about looking at her scarved self in the mirror in the morning and being reminded of what was expected of her, noted "There really is, despite western misconception, so much wisdom and beauty behind the concept of it.... It should kind of tell about who the person is inside, in terms of their spirituality and their faith. You have to be respectful; you have to keep up with your prayers..."

These women described the meaning of the veil as a barrier – from the temptations and frivolity of the outside world and from their own weakness. That idea of a barrier is discussed in a slightly more orthodox context by Emmanuel Sivan who tried to capture the nature of fundamentalist Jewish communities. His “The Enclave Culture” (1995) provides some insight into the social contribution provided by fundamentalist or ultra conservative practices to its adherents, insights that have applicability here. By separating themselves from society, through separate neighborhoods, separate observances, and distinct postures and dress codes, followers of fundamentalist religions create an enclave that protects and rewards its inhabitants. Sivan develops the concept of a “wall of virtue” erected by the enclave whose geographical outer boundaries are at best “leaky.” The enclave (whether real or virtual) is defined and enclosed *by its moral superiority*. “Virtually the only thing the beleaguered enclave can offer from its own authority is moral rewards.” (Sivan 1995:17) The veil might therefore be “taken” to provide its own “wall of virtue,” a mobile rampart that surrounds the wearer as she ventures out from the enclave; not only protecting her, but also signaling, as Lam put it, that “I am not like them” .

The young women in this study are in no way fundamentalist, Islamist, or even (for the most part) moderately conservative. But they are observant and they do choose to make clear to the outside world their beliefs. They make life-style choices about drinking and "partying" and not being "flirty." Many of them live in ethnic neighborhoods or within easy access of culturally-defined gathering places (Islamic Centers, the MSA, Cultural Centers) and while some have non-Muslim friends, all spend most of their free time and thought among like-minded Muslims. And yet, it needs to be said again, American-ness seeps its way through the "leaky" ramparts.

### **Environmental Impact – Neighborhoods and Comfort**

One of the most notable threads in the results from this study, particularly those of the in-depth interviews, is the role that associative comfort seems to play. For the young women interviewed, the kinds of neighborhoods they are from, the college support system offered through the MSA and the general density of the Muslim population in this area all seem to play a role in the decision to cover and the reaction they get to their covering. At the general survey level, the results are a little less clear. Taking things from the general to the specific, in the survey responses, only 33% of the female sample felt that there is a natural conflict between Islam and modernity. When looked at in terms of those who cover and those who do not, the response was split almost 50-50; the minority who saw a conflict were evenly divided between covered and not, as was the majority who saw no conflict. There was no statistically significant impact in either models of the binary logistic regression that incorporated this variable.

There was, however, a statistically significant impact from the region of the country the in which the respondents resided. Choices included South, Northeast, Midwest, and West. Because of the presence of significantly larger Muslim communities in the Northeast, Midwest and West, for purposes of this study the variable was recoded into South and Not South, with the assumption that covering would be more prevalent where numbers were larger resulting in a more supportive environment. This difference bore out with over 62% of those who lived in the South identifying as non-coverers and a like percentage of those in the other regions identifying as covered. This relationship held in the multivariate analysis as well where, controlling for all other variables, living in regions *other than the South* was significant at the  $p < .05$  level and resulted in an increase in the odds of covering by almost 3 times over those who lived in the South.

Views about the desirability of one's neighborhood as a place to live did not have a significant impact. The average response on a 1 to 4 index rating respondents' neighborhoods from "poor" to "excellent" was a 3 ("good" ) with no statistical impact in either the bivariate analysis or in the multivariate regression analysis. One might surmise that there is a "pull" into communities with similar demographics and decent experiences.

Taking it down to the personal level, the survey also looked at anti-Muslim experiences reported by the respondents. A "Muslim Experience Index" was made by summing 0 or 1 responses to the questions pertaining to the last 12 months: 'Have people acted as if they are suspicious of you?', 'Have you been called offensive names?', 'Have you been singled out by airport security?', 'Have you been singled out by (other) law enforcement officers?', 'Have you been physically threatened or attacked?'. On the resulting scale from 0 to 5, the mean answer for the full female sample was a remarkably low 0.55. There was a significant difference in means when grouped by covered and not covered: those who did not cover had a mean score of .45 while those who did cover had an average score of .66, significant at the  $p < .001$  level. When introduced in Model 2 of the binary logistic regression, there was no statistically significant impact; however in Model 3, where demographic variables like Race and Region were introduced, there was an impact. The odds of being covered increased 1.6 times with each one point increase in mean response on the scale. Even though the overall level of negative experiences was low, it does appear that when all else is factored in, those who cover experienced them more. One could argue that it is a clear marker ("stigma") taken on that calls attention to Muslim-ness with some (small) effect.

The experiences of the interview sample breathe some life into these statistics. Like the survey sample, they did not for the most part feel an intrinsic conflict between Islam and

modernity – or at least not an unmanageable one. While the world outside is filled with parties and sexy clothing and "flirtyness", they did not feel that 1) they needed to participate and 2) that they were somehow punished for not participating. Part of the problem is the socially desirable notion of "modern." As with their reactions to the idea of male oppression, most were sensitive to the public perception of covered women as somehow culturally backward. While the world may be full of temptations and immodesty, they viewed themselves as thoroughly modern, professional, and for many, "feminist". As for region, all of the interviewees lived in a Muslim-dense environment in the Northeast. The area around Paterson NJ ranks at or near the top in Muslim population density in the United States. Neighborhoods are not just "Muslim"; they are further carved up by ethnicity so that many of the young women interviewed ended up talking about what is "acceptable" and not in their own particular neighborhood. The comfort level of these young women was shaped by the communities in which they live, study, work, and function.

The nature of this comfort, one can argue, relates both to the social capital ideas expressed in Robert Putnam's (2000) discussion of "bridging" and "bonding" and in John Dixon's (2006) thoughtful extrapolation and reconciliation of Group Threat Theory and Contact Theory. Dixon argues that on the one hand that if noticeable minorities grow too plentiful, the majority views them as increasingly problematic while on the other hand where there are greater numbers that means more contact which could result in less dominant group prejudice. Dixon focuses not only on proportion and context, but also on the nature of the minority group. He argues that the hyper visibility of the minority, like African Americans (or in this case, covered Muslims) may make reduced prejudice harder to attain (Dixon 2007:2184). This notion of "hyper visibility" is also useful in deconstructing the sudden statistical significance in the Muslim

Experience Index when demographics are added. It turns out that there is no statistical difference in means for that index when grouped by Region, but Blacks have do a significantly higher average score than Non-Blacks – and particularly covered vs. un-covered Blacks.

Using this modified “Dixon” lens for looking at the perceived hostility or tolerance of the contexts in which these young women operate, it is useful to turn first to the social networks available to them, the networks that serve to create comfort zones in which they can carry out their religion. Given the definitions of “bonding” vs. “bridging” social capital that were discussed earlier, it would seem logical that those with access to bridging experiences would have a wider zone of comfort. Not to further complicate things, it is essential here to note that there are two levels of bridging that seem necessary for expanded spheres of comfort for these young women. At the Muslim level, there is bridging across sects (Sunni vs. Shi’a), levels of conservatism (uncovered, hijab, fully covered) and across ethnic divides that usually mark their home community center (Palestinian, Iraqi, Egyptian, Lebanese, Syrian, Pakistani, Malawi, Arab, Persian, Asian, African, African ...). At the wider levels of community, bridging takes on the additional burden of bridging religions. In both of these cases, I think forms of “hyper visibility” play a role in the comfort extracted and the breadth of the zone.

Looking at the concentric circles of networks and community zones, the impact of bonding and bridging can be seen working up from the insular MSA club level to the wider arena of schools, to neighborhoods, and finally to the unfamiliar territories of the world at large. All of the young women who considered themselves to be observant (whether covered or not) were members or friends of members of an MSA. In discussing the community of MSA’s all of those who wore hijabs expressed their gratitude for the support structure. At least three of the women began covering when they came to college and met other women who covered – and became

active in the MSA. Two who did not cover said that they felt welcome in MSA despite not covering – and were using it as a way to learn more about their religion. The MSA I am familiar with in North Jersey is of moderate size – probably 50 or so members, with about 10 as core participants with others dropping in and out depending on the event. At a larger NJ university, the membership has actually separated into two organizations with level of conservatism as the dividing measure. Thinking back to bonding and bridging, one could argue that the population context determines the focus of bonding. In the smaller MSA, the bond is Muslim identity – a mini-bridging, as it were, of ethnicity and religious practice. In the larger group, a tipping point is reached where the “other” can actually be from within the Muslim community.

At the high school level of community, experiences also varied by context and perceived piety levels. Qaf, a conservative woman grew up in a neighborhood without a high concentration of Muslims – and her greatest desire was to go to an Islamic school because of what she experienced as forced intermingling with boys in her public school. On the other hand Ayn attended public school in a highly Muslim district and reported “I don’t think I ever felt comfortable at school. When I first started I had a few friends and I left with a few friends. But the Muslims --- what it is, is that everybody was like in their own cliques and groups. The covered Muslims hang out with each other and they wouldn’t look at the girls that don’t cover.”

Even those who were uncomfortable at the high school level reported being comfortable at the college level – both uncovered and covered. “See, like this [scarf], it makes me feel safer,” Mim reported. “You know? I’m comfortable. Nobody looks at me extra, or like stares at me or says anything about me.” Waw: “Like when I was in college, I had a lot of Muslim friends ... that also made it very easy. We used to look out for each other ... that feels really good, to be

able to have that. You know, and when you go to a place where you don't know anybody, even though it's like 45 minutes away, it is still a little difficult..."

Moving from school groups to the neighborhoods themselves it seems that for the uncovered who did not live in a Muslim-dense area (e.g. one of the suburbs ringing Paterson), the neighborhood was comfortable. For a young uncovered respondent who lived in a high density Muslim area, things were iffy. Ayn, who was Bengali and did not cover, said "I think I feel more comfortable when I'm going somewhere where there's Palestinians or somewhere there's a lot of people." She was uncomfortable close to home where she was known to be Muslim – people talked about her, she reported. Her concern was "Are they going to accept certain things about me if I'm not a good Muslim or whatever."

For those wearing hijabs, particularly in mixed and enclave neighborhoods, it seems things are pretty well taken for granted. On the non-Muslim borders, a little more work is required. One covered girl who was homeschooled in a non-Muslim neighborhood spent a lot of time in the local library. "So the librarians... knew that as soon as we came in, they had to start stamping cards because we'd probably make them run out. In the beginning, ... [I]ike they had stereotypes, I would say. They wouldn't talk to my mom... but they'd talk to me more, because I'm less covered. She covers her face as well." (They assumed that her mother spoke no English and spoke loudly at her!). Then this young woman, as part of the required community volunteer component of homeschooling, began working in the library (a bridging experience, to be sure). She was a crackerjack volunteer. "I wanted to be there, I would do my job really fast. And [when] they found [out that] our mom's a doctor, they were flabbergasted. It was just amazing to them that my mom was educated... So after that, and now they're so nice to us... People... it takes a while, I think. People have to know. If they know Muslim people, it's much easier for

them. Then they realize that it's okay." This is a perfect encapsulation of the special nature and quality of interaction required in contact theory for hypervisible populations – that it be normal, continuing and at the level of socio-economic equals. One other anecdote – this from a woman of Pakistani background who was the most conservative of all with whom I have spoken. She was always covered – in addition to the hijab, she wore abayas (full dress-coat covering) rather than the modest but “American” clothing worn by others who wear the hijab. She was uncomfortable in her neighborhood (she lived in a neighborhood just next to Paterson). “When I go to Paterson, sometimes, I even get stares from Muslims, because they think I’m like, I don’t know, an extremist maybe. I feel comfortable in the fact that there’s like the meat shops and the clothing stores and the halal restaurants.” This was the same woman wore a niqab for a while after she returned from the Haj and was greeted as a terrorist by a customer where she worked. She stopped wearing the niqab shortly after that because she did not want to scare people and what had seemed graceful and natural in Mecca suddenly wreaked havoc.

Finally, as we move out even farther from the neighborhood, discomfort edges in for all, but particularly for those who cover. New York elicits mixed reactions. Some (including my conservative sociologist) found it comfortable. Two different women reported going into stores and asking for prayer space when the time came for prayers – both were accommodated. Ghayn, the would-be radio commentator who covered, reported difficulties going on the train to Hoboken for a summer job – this was right after the London subway bombings. “Standing at the train waiting for the train, I just felt really uncomfortable. Because I didn’t know what people thought. ...When I go in the city [New York City, for those who don’t speak “Jersey”] or when I was going to Hoboken, I was super-aware of my hijab. Like super-aware. Not like when I’m on campus”

And finally for some, moving out of the area is almost unimaginable. Speaking of the possibility of having to move to Texas, or Chicago, or Ohio with her husband, a medical resident, Waw said “Thank God, he got accepted in New York, you know? But I was so scared. I was so, so scared that we’d end up moving to, you, know, God knows where, where it’s like, you know, all these rightwing Christian Evangelicals that would like – I was afraid I was going to get like lynched in the street or something.” And although she said this with exaggeration and a humorous shrug, she added “Because it really is like that out there.” Out there – but not so much in here.

Context does make a difference – population density, population diversity do play into the level of comfort and safety felt in carrying out Islam. A critical mass or tipping point of Muslim/non-Muslim population mix shifts experiences from bonding to bridging – or in the other direction. And visibility and cultural threat clearly contribute to the way in which contact theory can play out. While discomfort outside of the neighborhood is clearly influenced by the current terror threat climate, on a daily basis, personal discomfort seems greatest for those without headcovering in Muslim neighborhoods and in almost any neighborhood, Muslim-dense or not, for those with more extreme forms of covering. For those with "normal" hijabs, in an area like northern New Jersey, the path is not so difficult.

So in sum, we see that women who cover, both survey subjects and interviewees, were more likely to be mosque-goers and they were less likely to identify as pure American, but, at least for the interviewees, they were among the first to turn their back on the “evils” of ethnicity, to which they ascribed most of the bad things that people associate with Islam. They were for the most part comfortable in their Muslim-dense neighborhoods and they were supported and cheered in their move toward orthodoxy and covering by their associations, particularly the

MSA. They viewed themselves to be "symbols" of Islam, taking on the hijab as a visible stigma that draws attention to their Muslim-ness. And those who were black seemed to be twice-visible and twice-stigmatized. They all cared deeply about the religion, although they seemed better steeped in historical tales of feminine equality than in feminist Islamic theology. In fact, they were conservative in their views of the roles of women in society and in religion, but they maintained that this was just a non-western form of equality – without the sex-based trappings of modern American feminism. And finally, they viewed covering as something that they offered up to God but they also took comfort in the hijab as a barrier against both the degeneration of modern mores and against themselves becoming less than they want to be.

Attributes of “anti-modern” and “anti-feminist” are far too complex to easily deconstruct. Giddens defines modernity as the “institutionalization of doubt” (Giddens 1990: 176) – a thought to keep in mind as we listen to these young women in their struggles for moral standards and boundaries. To the degree that modernity and secularism are made coterminous, certainly Islam as practiced by these young women can be argued to be anti-modern. To the degree that these women are educated with career aspirations, the children of professionals and entrepreneurs, and fully dependent upon the technology and economic realities of the here and now, one can argue that they are fully modern. And to the degree that they claim agency underscored with acts of individual courage, one might question the anti-feminist label as well. One might also look at Giddens’ concept of Structuration (Giddens 1984) to question whether through their habits, stories, and actions they are in effect re-shaping the popular embodiment of both what is Islamic and what is modern as they negotiate these paradoxes.

## CHAPTER 7

### CONCLUSION

#### **Introduction**

Observant young Muslims in the United States seem to face some special challenges, particularly if they choose to wear the hijab or headcovering as a signal of their religious commitment. This study explores factors that might influence that choice and the meaning to those making that choice. This chapter seeks to review the findings of this study, discuss its limitations, and then explore the implications both for society and for young Muslim women in the United States. After that discussion, this dissertation will conclude with recommendations for future research.

#### **Summary of Findings**

While setting the framework first globally and then nationally, this study focuses most intensely on an area of northern New Jersey that is densely Muslim and very well known for that demographic characteristic in the wake of 9/11. This setting arguably imbues the presence of covered Muslim Americans with both a commonplace familiarity and threatening hyper visibility. In-depth interviews with young women who were self-identified Muslims in this area provide, therefore, a useful source for better understanding decisions about covering and the experience of being avowedly Muslim in what one might ironically call "interesting times."

Outside of the United States, the female Muslim experience has been explored by scholars like Nilüfer Göle, Leila Ahmed, Lila Abu-Lughod, and Saba Mahmood who have noted the symbolic nature of the veil, a symbol used both by the men who control them and by the women who seek to be in their own control. They have also noted the apparent internal conflicts best illustrated in Göle's work in which the assertions of free choice and feminism made

by well-educated young women seem to Western minds at least to be in conflict with the life choices these same women make.

As is fairly universally recognized, the dual freedoms of religion offered by the U.S. constitution -- freedom from imposed religion and freedom to practice one's choice of religion -- provide a unique setting for the decision to cover. Recall Djamila, the young French woman from *The New Yorker* who dreamt of leaving Paris for Brooklyn "where she has heard, Muslim girls go veiled and nobody minds." (Kramer 2004:59) Given these freedoms, even if they are in reality somewhat overstated, what shapes the decisions made by American Muslim women?

At the national level, this dissertation turned to the Pew Muslim American Survey (2007) to gain at least an overview of some of the characteristics of Muslim women who cover. The survey sample used both a Random Digit Dialing approach tailored to Muslim population density by national origin and a list of Muslim households in the U.S. previously identified from other studies and resulted in a final sample of 1050, of whom 505 were women. It was that final sample with a normalized weighting that was used in the secondary analysis reported here.

The survey revealed that about half of the sampled women wore headcovering at least some of the time and attended mosque on average at least a few times a year especially for Eid. Over three-quarters thought that the Koran is directly the word of God, but only 37% agreed that there is only "one true interpretation." From a gender perspective, only 24% thought that Islam treated men better than women (and most of those respondents did not cover). The sample was fairly evenly split, however, between those who thought that women should pray separately from men, in another area of the mosque altogether vs. those who thought women should pray alongside of or behind men but separated by a curtain. In moving to their life experiences as Muslim women, only 33% thought there to be a natural conflict between being Muslim and

living in a modern society. Only 25% thought of themselves first as "American;" most whether covered or not saw themselves as Muslims or Muslim Americans. On the other hand, 46% thought that Muslims coming to the U.S. should adapt to "American" culture. Most had "Many" or "Mostly" Muslim friends. Most had "good" communities to live in. And surprisingly few reported a high level of negative experiences as a Muslim during the 12 months preceding the survey. Demographically, over two-thirds of the sample were not employed full-time, the average household income exceeded \$40,000 and the average education was just a bit above high school. Forty-five percent of the respondents were white, 16% black and the rest Asian/other. Sixty-seven percent were not born in the United States.

When the impacts of these various religious, experience and demographic variables were analyzed using logistic regression, it was found that only a few of these, when taking into account all of the other variables, had a significant effect. The odds of being covered were increased by one's level of mosque attendance, by believing that men are not treated better than women in Islam, by thinking that it is not "ok" to marry a non-Muslim, by having more negative experiences because of being Muslim, by not being married, and by being black. None of these is really surprising and all are given voice in the interviews. <sup>2</sup>

The 19 in-depth interviews for this study were conducted about the same time as the survey (2006-2008). Most subjects were either of college age or recently graduated; two were mothers of interviewees who were chosen for points of comparison. Unlike the survey sample, only nine were born outside the U.S. and most of those came while still in elementary school or younger. Eight of the 14 college-age women covered and another two were seriously

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<sup>2</sup> The only exception is race, which was not explored in the interviews for reasons that will be explained in the limitations sections. Here suffice it to say that American Muslims who are black tend to attend African American mosques where women not only tend to cover more but also tend toward more extreme levels of covering like the niqab or burqa.

considering it. Their ethnic backgrounds included Turkish, Palestinian, Syrian, Egyptian, Bangladeshi, Pakistani, Circassian/Macedonian.

From speaking with these women, the barebones findings of the survey are made three-dimensional. They indeed attended mosque more than those who did not cover. They thought that women were not oppressed or treated less well than men by Islam – they thought men and women were rightly treated *differently* and that the role of woman in Islam is treasured since women hold the future of the religion in their motherly grasp (an argument not dissimilar from that used by the hierarchy in the Roman Catholic Church). For the most part, they viewed themselves not as Americans but as Muslim Americans. The difficulties presented by the post-9/11 environment seemed to make taking on that identity even more significant for them and perhaps helped make more commonplace the adoption of “Muslim” as an ethnic/religious identity.<sup>3</sup> Like those in the survey sample, the interviewees favored either assimilating to American or assimilating while retaining some Muslim culture. Several in fact contrasted their understanding of the world with the less assimilated old-world views of their parents. As for exogamy, most who covered (in fact the majority interviewed) were in relationships with Muslim fellows (by and large also of their own ethnic background) and one young woman was studying with her father to understand the “right” way of going about getting married. To finish out the comparison with the survey sample, of course most of these young covering women were, like those in the survey findings, not married but that is not surprising given their age.

What these interviews further brought to life was the theory explored in the literature review. While the young women did not think that only one interpretation of the Koran was viable, they did not talk much in terms of religious writings and did not seem familiar with

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<sup>3</sup> See *Backlash 9/11: Middle Eastern and Muslim Americans Respond* by Anny Bakalian and Mehdi Bozorgmehr (2009) for a more complete discussion of this impact.

women theologians. Those who knew of Amina Wadud knew of her only in the context of the Riverside prayer service, which to a person the covered interviewees could not endorse. They, like some of Göle's Turkish subjects (2006), grounded their understanding of Islam and gender in the recounting of heroic actions by women at the time of the Prophet. Massaba the rescuing warrior and Khadija, the Prophet's wealthy business-owning wife, were cited by several to show that Islam is not by its nature sexist. Many argued that whatever is oppressive that is attributed to Islam does not have its source in the Koran or Haddith but is rather due to ethnic misinterpretations or misuse – further buttressing their rejection of ethnic backgrounds. And although in an American rather than a Turkish setting, , these women like the women in Göle's study were in college or just out, prepared for professional careers, and like Göle's women either had already or planned to in the future leave the public space of work for the private place of home and motherhood. In their discussions of gender fairness in Islam, most talked about the treasured role of woman as the nurturing keeper of the religion.

While the view of one's neighborhood was not a significant factor in the survey – other than that most viewed theirs positively, it forms almost the core of the discussions from the young women in the interview sample. The surroundings for their covering seem to have had a huge impact. In living in a place where Muslims are common (where in fact in some local schools headscarves are a fashion statement and Muslim holidays are fully observed), only a few had experienced any significantly negative reaction to their Muslimness. Understanding the nature of their surroundings underscores John Dixon's view about contact theory and Putnam's thoughts about bonding and bridging. In their own neighborhoods, how they dress was accommodated – and watched. These are small islands of bonding where cultural standards are monitored by friends and family. In areas where the Muslim minority is far shy of Dixon's

critical mass, those who dressed radically differently than their neighbors felt uncomfortable. This discomfort was felt by those who covered who lived or functioned in non-covering areas; it was felt as deeply by those young Muslim women who did not cover who lived in covering neighborhoods. And for those who covered more dramatically than most, even areas with women who wore headscarves felt uncomfortable. Almost all – and indeed all who covered – found comfort in the strong bonding experience offered by the Muslim Student Association (MSA). That was where many found the encouragement and support to cover, the arguments to defend covering as "non-oppressive", and the bridging ties across ethnic practices and origins to unite as Muslims. In the larger MSA that was explored, the unity of Muslimness was fractured as increased numbers assured factional confidence – and also ensured splintering views of what "real" Muslims do.

And finally, in the interviews, the meaning of the scarf could be explored, not just whether or not one covered. In most cases, the expression of that meaning was poignant. Internally, the message was that the cover was "complete" and that she is and must be a better person for wearing it. To the outside world it is a message: "I am a Muslim and look at me;" "I am a good person, I am not crazy." But many of the women are also saying "I am different than you. I want to be different than you." It may in fact serve as the "mobile rampart" implied by Emmanuel Sivan. It allows them to be a part of the world that they are quite comfortable with – in a way that they feel gives them equality and gives them piety, and perhaps moral superiority.

### **Limitations**

The limitations to this study are many. They include the limitations to the Pew survey itself as well as the limitations resulting from the construction of my secondary analysis using that data. And of course there are obvious limitations in an interview study with only 19

participants. At the most general level, however, is the limitation imposed by the passage of time. Both the interviews and the Pew Muslim American survey were conducted over four years ago and much may have changed since then. While not as significant as would be a gap that spanned pre-and post-9/11, the intervening months and years may have resulted in a shifting in attitudes that this work would not capture.

The Pew Muslim American Survey of 2007 was a landmark effort. The Pew Research Center touted it as the first-ever representative sample of Muslim Americans (2007). While this survey is certainly more comprehensive than any effort made to date, getting a representative sample of Muslim Americans is indeed a difficult task. The U.S. Census Bureau counts by self-identified place of birth and ancestry; immigration data are by nation of origin; religious organizations, when they provide numbers, provide counts based in houses of worship and hierarchical districts defined by the religion. For Islam, a non-centralized, non-hierarchical, and basically non-"churched" (Starke) religion, the counts are hard to come by indeed. Even given those difficulties, the survey instrument is not particularly sensitive to sectarian variations in the practice of Islam. As part of a larger Global Attitudes Survey, the Muslim American Survey includes the question of Sunni/Shi'a identification as its only level of granularity in differentiating among religious practices. While that presents problems in almost any country where variations are shaped by culture and history, in the United States with its wide diversity of origins and practices, it results in almost 40% of those surveyed identifying as other than Sunni and Shi'a with no differentiation made below that broad cut. Given that about 20% of the survey sample was African American (which Ba-Yunis and Kone [2004] argue is an likely an under-representation given the storefront nature of many black masjids ), differences that might be ascribed to following the teachings of Nation of Islam are identifiable only if one makes broad

assumptions based on race and place of birth. Such differences might significantly impact the meanings and motivations for covering. We saw in the analysis of the Muslim Experience Index that there may well be experiential differences as well.

As is often the case, datasets used in secondary analysis may not directly address the concerns of the current study. The Pew study focused on a number of broad issues, many rooted in concerns about the post-9/11 environment in the United States. While there are questions that were designed to gauge religiosity (mosque attendance, prayer habits, beliefs about the Koran), such measures are tricky when attached to Islam, particularly when women are the focus. First of all, attending religious services is not a requirement of Islam as it is for many religions. The five pillars (creed, prayer, alms, fasting, Haj) can be carried out without setting foot in a mosque. Further, mosque attendance is even less *de rigueur* for women than for men and is even proscribed in some cultures. In the U.S., mosque attendance is more common than elsewhere for two reasons: first, that "housing" religions is the norm here and secondly, that mosques are used as loci of social and political support and thus serve extra-religious functions. Even given that, gauging levels of practice and belief eludes simple questions.

In addition to the problems surrounding measurement of religiosity, this survey was really focused less on issues about Islam and more about politically-sensitive issues faced by Muslims -- like beliefs about terrorism, anti-Muslim discrimination, voting patterns. There are questions as well about identity and assimilation, which were indeed useful to this dissertation, but the interest behind them seems to be civically, not socially, driven. Patterns of affiliation like clubs, ethnic organizations, and the MSA's are not addressed. And while the basic questions about covering and gender attitudes were included, as is generally the case in survey research, the "why" of covering was not probed.

An additional limitation to the secondary analysis using the Pew dataset was the sample size. While over 1000 respondents may seem robust, for the current analysis only half of that number was usable given the focus on women. With only about 500 respondents, the number of effects that could be used in the binary logistic regression was limited. Granularity had to be sacrificed to accommodate breadth; thus questions like marital state were reduced to a binary married/not, sacrificing a look at any intermediate impacts of separation or divorce. Judgments had to be made about the variables to include, leaving to the side some measures that might serendipitously have proven important.

As for the interviewees, their "age" has to be underscored again. There were fewer than twenty women in the sample, and those were chosen by convenience and snowball sampling. Given the small pool from which these women were drawn, similarities might be overstated. And while the ethnic/national origins were fairly diverse, there were no Iranians, no women from the Maghreb, no Indonesians, and no converts. Because the primary focus was on young college-aged women, the sample was not representative of all Muslim women in this area. However, because of interview threads that seemed interesting to follow, a few older women were included in a non-systematic way in the sample. Likewise race could be raised as an issue in the composition of the interview sample. Just as with the Pew Muslim American Survey, this study did not directly deal with the fissure in the practices of African American Muslims vs. those of immigrant Muslims. One African American woman was included in the study sample -- and she was included despite intentions at the outset that the study include only "half" through second-generation immigrants from the Middle East. Because her father was an Imam in the Sunni tradition and she studied in Syria, she was a match with the religious patterns and traditions represented by the rest of the young women.

As is often the case with an interview protocol, its utility improved over the course of the study. Had I known as much at the outset of this project about feminist movements within American Islam and about the struggles of feminist theologians in Islam, I might have probed more deeply into the interpretations of the religion by these young women. On the other hand, perhaps my theological education ran apace with that of the subjects given the near-complete absence of substantive discussion on the subject.

One other glaring omission: men. The decision was made to interview only women. All perceptions are from their perspective; all assessments about the beliefs, actions and intent of men were reported by women.

### **Contributions**

Given the limitations, why is this study important? It represents a melding of both quantitative and qualitative research into an area that had been understudied in any sort of systematic way. The Pew Muslim American Survey and the original in-depth interviews are contemporaneous and capture certain characteristics, attitudes, and experiences in place well after the events of 9/11. The impact from that time was still well-remembered, but some new level of "normalcy" had returned. And while the interview sample was not terribly large and arguably not highly diverse, "saturation" was reached in the research well before the last recording was turned off. Over and over the same phrases and experiences were brought up, the same motivations revisited. And even today in casual conversations, there has appeared nothing to signal to me that there have been major shifts in the patterns revealed at that time.

The stereotypes discussed at the outset: that young covered Muslim women were "oppressed", "unassimilated" or "anti-modern" seem so simplistic. Looking at the survey data, it is perhaps important to note that those who attend mosque the least, who think that Islam favors

men, who think that women should be allowed to pray alongside or behind men in the mosque (not be separated altogether), who identify as "American" are all less likely to be covered. On the other hand, women who attend mosque the most, who have the greatest proportion of Muslim friends, who think that marrying outside the religion is not ok and who identify first as Muslims or Muslim-Americans are most likely to be covered. But, it is also important to note that these same covered women are as likely to think that assimilation to American culture is appropriate as their uncovered counterparts and that Islam does NOT discriminate against women. The roles, they argue, are "equal" but "different," and nothing is more important than the role of mother.

The young women in the survey sample demonstrate most vividly the complexities of topics that intertwine religious beliefs and practices and socially desirable attitudes toward gender roles and postures. Some feminist sociologists have described as "false consciousness" the young women's assertion that the decision to "submit" to the gender definitions of Islam is their own, arrived at independently and with informed hearts and minds. But sociologists as diverse as Max Weber and Saba Mahmood would caution against such conclusions. The struggle is to hear their voices and accept their self-assessments – and then examine the consonance of their assertions with the ways in which their lives are carried out.

Most telling in the interviews is the contrast between Muslim and ethnic identity. The assimilation trajectory and milestones set out by Gordon and Gans and further modified by Kasinitz et al. lead one to conclude that there is today a different sort of assimilation going on – at least in the environs of Paterson, NJ, and New York, NY. For these young Muslim Americans parental ethnicity is nearly scorned and while the "white bread" label of "American" is fairly firmly rejected, the American ideals of freedom of speech, action and religion are embraced. The gender brutality (in addition to the terrorist bent) ascribed to Islam is firmly

denied by the women who were interviewed. Such wrong thinking is the result of ethnic and cultural mutation, they argue. One can read into this that they think that here in America, the proper interpretations can be carried out.

Also here in America, these young women who cover feel they have an aggressive role to play in the acceptance of this untainted Islam. The purity and goodness of the religion is signaled both internally and externally by covering. The hijab reminds the wearer how to behave, how to honor Allah. The hijab signals to the outside world modernity and moderateness of the religion through the actions of those who cover. The scarf does indeed offer the protection of a "mobile rampart" as suggested by Sivan, but it also is a signal to the outside world that "I am Islam. Not terrorists, not oppressors. Me."

At the same time that this courageous statement of donning the scarf is put forward (courageous because those who cover acknowledge that they overcame trepidation to do so), the level of confidence and the nature of the covering are influenced by the nature of the environment in which these women function. Just as the non-Muslim second generation New Yorkers studied by Kasinitz et al. function in an extremely diverse and metropolitan "neighborhood," these young women carry out their Muslimness in an area that is hallmarked by hijabs. Their comfort is moderated by the nature of the associations to which they attach. And the assimilation that takes place does so, as Alba and Nee have put it, in a "bi-directional" manner (1997). The Muslim students have become more comfortable; scarves have become a high school accessory.

The implications of these findings encourage optimism about the continuing, if winding, path of assimilation. In his theory of structuration, Anthony Giddens argued that institutions are carried on, refreshed and modified by the habits and actions of individuals. One could posit that

Islam for women in America is similarly changing – not through theological assertions but through day-to-day actions and attitudes. Its external shell, the scarf and gender submission, seem untouched, but the meanings within that shell are changing in ways that might eventually recast the shell.

### **Future Research**

The study of Islam in America is almost untouched by serious sociological research. Personal accounts about the Muslim experience and survey-based reports are many, but works like Saba Mahmood's study of the women's mosque movement in Egypt (2005) or Christian Joppke's sobering European study of the veil (2009) do not seem to have American counterparts. The opportunities abound and have only been alluded to here.

To understand women in America in orthodox religions, a comparative study with Jewish Orthodoxy should be undertaken. Modern Orthodox women likewise are religiously committed, take on stigmatic fashion, turn away from professional careers and focus on home and children. Are the religious, social and emotional meanings for these women a useful parallel to young covered Muslim women? What in their American surroundings supports them in this orthodoxy? What makes it difficult? Are the pressures and rewards similar? If so, the comparative conclusions could help illuminate meanings for both choices.

The understandings of Islam and its teaching put forward by the women in this current study are for the most part popularly and emotionally derived. While several of the women spent time in Koran study groups or in discussion sessions at the local mosque or MSA, none could be considered a serious scholar of Islam. Julianne Hammer (2008) has done wonderful seminal work in looking at the struggle to insinuate women's voices in to the male fortress of Muslim theological discussion; but it needs to be followed with systematic studies of praxis. What have

been the successes and failures of the Progressive Muslim movement or the Islamic Society of North America, for example? Have any of their teachings leached into the approaches of mainstream mosques and how have those inroads been effected? How and why (or why not) are the academic centers for Islamic theology being breached by female if not feminist thinking? A comparative look at the evolution of such thought in Germany, France and Great Britain would be helpful.

As for survey research, the efforts underway to sample Muslims in a representative way in the United States continue. Pew has made a strong first attempt but the complex thinking demonstrated by Ba-Yunus and Kone (2004) in their determination of how to count Muslims needs to be applied in developing a viable sample frame. Language, race, and national origin as identified in the census are truly imperfect markers, and the nature of worship in Islam makes any sort of "congregational" effort even feeble than it would be for a Protestant or Jewish count. Given an improved probability sample, a generalizable survey about the experience of Islam in the United States needs to be developed. Distinctions in ways of worship as well as accommodation for Muslim worship within the black community need to be incorporated<sup>4</sup>. Questions that target decisions about covering and its meaning should also be added.

Survey instruments can be easily modified to gather information from both males and females, but the interview scope needs to be dramatically widened as well. Even if one stayed with the geographic bounds of the current study, the sample should be broadened and refreshed reflecting ever-changing patterns of immigration and community clustering. Given a hypothesis

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<sup>4</sup> The nature of race in Islam has been only touched upon in this study and has been ill-addressed by the literature in general. Sherman A. Jackson in "Islam and the Black Experience in America" looked at the evolution of Islam in Black America. His essay, included in *Muslim's Place in the American Public Square: Hopes, Fears and Aspirations* (2004), explored the challenges and potential as immigrant Muslims shift the foundations of the religion for Black Americans. His work raised important questions about the "legitimatizing" of the Nation of Islam as it shifted to more mainstream Sunni beliefs, but it ignored altogether gender differences in the shaping and practice of the religion. New efforts need to be undertaken to understand first the progress of religious integration within the Black and immigrant Islamic communities and secondly the impact of that merging on gender roles.

that beliefs and practices are changing over time, a broader sampling that includes subjects ranging from high school through retirement age would capture the generational changes Gans would expect to find. A parallel sampling among practicing Muslim men would be most helpful. We have data on what the women in the current sample think are the beliefs and attitudes of their fathers, brothers and significant others; hearing directly from the male side would be illuminating and perhaps helpful in affirming or dispelling the notion of "false consciousness."

And finally, were one to have "world enough and time"<sup>5</sup>, a panel study would offer broad insights into the changes in perspective and beliefs over time and place. Such a study would begin early in high school among young Muslim women and follow them well into their maturity, tracking along the way their experiences as Muslims, their reactions to those experiences, the changes in the beliefs and practices as Muslim women, their attitudes toward assimilation and their choices in affiliations, friendships, and mates; and finally their life choices regarding careers and family. Being able to track those changes and take the measure of the subjects' attitudes and perceptions at multiple milestones would be illuminating.

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<sup>5</sup> From "To His Coy Mistress" by 17<sup>th</sup> c. English poet Andrew Marvel.

APPENDIX A – ASSIMILATION VIEWS AND AGE

Crosstab

AGE RECODED ORDINAL			Do not adopt US culture QD5R not assim to Am 1, assim 0		Total
			Adopt Amer culture	Muslim, Muslim-Amer	
18-25	Never and Sometimes to always	Never	7 24.1%	22 75.9%	29 100.0%
		Sometimes-Always	16 29.1%	39 70.9%	55 100.0%
	Total	23 27.4%	61 72.6%	84 100.0%	
26-35	Never and Sometimes to always	Never	34 57.6%	25 42.4%	59 100.0%
		Sometimes-Always	27 39.1%	42 60.9%	69 100.0%
	Total	61 47.7%	67 52.3%	128 100.0%	
36-45	Never and Sometimes to always	Never	38 80.9%	9 19.1%	47 100.0%
		Sometimes-Always	11 28.9%	27 71.1%	38 100.0%
	Total	49 57.6%	36 42.4%	85 100.0%	
46-55	Never and Sometimes to always	Never	22 61.1%	14 38.9%	36 100.0%
		Sometimes-Always	10 40.0%	15 60.0%	25 100.0%
	Total	32 52.5%	29 47.5%	61 100.0%	
56-65	Never and Sometimes to always	Never	9 69.2%	4 30.8%	13 100.0%
		Sometimes-Always	4 44.4%	5 55.6%	9 100.0%
	Total	13 59.1%	9 40.9%	22 100.0%	
66-75	Never and Sometimes to always	Never	1 11.1%	8 88.9%	9 100.0%
		Sometimes-Always	2 66.7%	1 33.3%	3 100.0%
	Total	3 25.0%	9 75.0%	12 100.0%	
76 AND UP	Never and Sometimes to always	Never	4 100.0%	0 .0%	4 100.0%
		Sometimes-Always	0 .0%	1 100.0%	1 100.0%
	Total	4 80.0%	1 20.0%	5 100.0%	
Total	Never and Sometimes to always	Never	115 58.4%	82 41.6%	197 100.0%
		Sometimes-Always	70 35.0%	130 65.0%	200 100.0%
	Total	185 46.6%	212 53.4%	397 100.0%	

**Chi-Square Tests**

AGE RECODED ORDINAL		Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
18-25	Pearson Chi-Square	.234 <sup>a</sup>	1	.628
	N of Valid Cases	84		
26-35	Pearson Chi-Square	4.362 <sup>c</sup>	1	.037
	N of Valid Cases	128		
36-45	Pearson Chi-Square	23.185 <sup>d</sup>	1	.000
	N of Valid Cases	85		
46-55	Pearson Chi-Square	2.637 <sup>e</sup>	1	.104
	N of Valid Cases	61		
56-65	Pearson Chi-Square	1.352 <sup>f</sup>	1	.245
	N of Valid Cases	22		
66-75	Pearson Chi-Square	3.704 <sup>g</sup>	1	.054
	N of Valid Cases	12		
76 AND UP	Pearson Chi-Square	5.000 <sup>h</sup>	1	.025
	N of Valid Cases	5		
Total	Pearson Chi-Square	21.792 <sup>i</sup>	1	.000
	N of Valid Cases	397		

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 7.94.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

c. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 28.12.

d. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 16.09.

e. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 11.89.

f. 1 cells (25.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 3.68.

g. 3 cells (75.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .75.

h. 4 cells (100.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .20.

i. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 91.80.

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