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American Islam, the Next Generation:
Young Adult Muslim Americans on Campus—
Faith, Identities, Citizenship, Gender, and Pluralism

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Religious Studies

by

Daniel Azim Pschaida

August 2015

Dissertation Committee:
Dr. Muhamad Ali, Chairperson
Dr. Sherine Hafez
Dr. Michael Alexander
Dr. Karen Leonard

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The Dissertation of Daniel Azim Pschaida is approved:

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Committee Chairperson

University of California, Riverside

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

American Islam, the Next Generation:
Young Adult Muslim Americans on Campus—
Faith, Identities, Citizenship, Gender, and Pluralism

by

Daniel Azim Pschaida

Doctor of Philosophy, Graduate Program in Religious Studies
University of California, Riverside, August 2015
Dr. Muhamad Ali, Chairperson

This dissertation highlights context and the contours of the religious discourse of young adult Muslim Americans on university campuses in the Pacific West of the United States. It focuses on the second generation children of Muslim immigrants and their leadership approaches to college Muslim Student Associations [MSA]. Based off data from eighty in-depth interviews with this population and some converts, extensive participant observation, and an online survey, this study also employs sociological analysis, phenomenology, hermeneutics, and comparative ethics to identify the ways this demographic draws on scriptural sources to articulate the significance of their faith in an American environment. Chapter One explores the social matrix in which heritage Muslims come to embrace and assert Islam as a central facet of their personal identity. In particular it identifies the importance of family upbringing, peer relationships, prejudice and stereotyping of Muslims, and multiculturalism. Chapter Two discloses many core features of a "Muslim" identity, and the ways it relates to their nationality "American"

and various other demarcations and activities of their personal identity. Chapter Three presents MSAs' institutional practices and individual interpretations related to envisioned binaries of male and female, analyzing how they believe women and men should relate to each other on campus, in families, and in their roles in public life. It also presents their perspectives of homosexuality. Chapter Four tackles the question of how young Muslims conceptualize and deal with religious, ethnic, and racial differences. This chapter discloses dynamics of inclusivity, prejudice, trans-ethnic friendship, marriage ideals with ethnic others, and young Muslims' sometimes embracing and sometimes censuring Islamic sectarian diversity. It also divulges their perspectives on soteriology of non-Muslims. This research counters previous simplifications of young American Muslims on campus as fundamentalist, exclusive, uncritical, and militant yet also complicates reifications of them as liberal, democratic, and inclusive, presenting their diverse interpretations to their faith and detailing the particular ways and for what purposes they perform conservative, exclusive, liberal, and inclusive approaches to Islam. This dissertation reveals young adult Muslim Americans on campus creatively negotiate what they learn about their Islamic tradition with American ideals, constituting diverse expositions of their Faith.

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INTRODUCTION

Young Adult Muslim Americans: Locating Research and Researcher, Methods and Theory of the Study

Locating Young Adult Muslim Americans

Episode 1: Tuesday night Muslim Student Association weekly meeting at University of California Riverside

As I enter room 265 of the Highlander Union Building at 4:50 pm on a Tuesday night, the Muslim Student Association president, Omar, is consulting with another officer, Yasmin, about announcements to make for the MSA meeting. Another young woman sits to the right and on her phone as she awaits the meeting to begin. Sister Yasmin writes down the day's announcements with a green marker on a large white board. Both young women are in clothing typical of the MSA participants: jeans or black pants along with a loose fitting long sweater that hang almost to their legs. One is covering her hair with a colorful headscarf, the other is not wearing one, which represents the typical 1 to 1 ratio among MSA women participants. Another woman comments that all the extra clothing on this warm afternoon that our friend a biology student is wearing appears uncomfortable, and I comment that her style would fit well in the movie *The Matrix*, "Oh! I know, because of the big black trench coat!" she replies. "Exactly!" as I pantomime Neo Anderson avoiding bullets. Other young men and women begin to arrive, taking seats, and greeting each other. Sabir, of Afghani descent, comes over to say hello to me, while he finishes saying something to someone else. Then he looks straight at me and says, "I need to finally give you a proper greeting, *salām alaykum*!" alluding to how he is often trying to organize other things when he says hello to me, multi-tasking in his role as an officer. More young men come in, greeting their friends and acquaintances, *salām alaykum*, and they begin chatting about classes, sports, or social and religious issues. They wear jeans and a sweater or tee-shirt; just a few of the men wear hats, a baseball cap or snow hat, as it is under sixty degrees, cold for Southern Californians. I say hello to a young man with two earrings who has a large book in his hand called *Modern Iran: Roots and Results of Revolution* and he tells me about a class he is taking for his history major. Danny sits down near us and asks him directly, "You're not Muslim are you?" He explains that he was raised Catholic, with Native American roots, and he likes Islam and many similarities he finds with some Native American traditions, such as prayer, the indefinable nature of the higher power, or treating women with great respect. Soon Omar announces that we will pray *'aṣr*, the late afternoon obligatory prayer. The "brothers" maneuver to the back of the room its eastward side. The "sisters" move to the opposite half of the room, some spreading out rectangular colorful silk or polyester floor scarfs to prostrate their hands down onto a clean surface. Omar recites verses of the Qur'an as a call to prayer, praising God and seeking refuge in Him from "the accursed Satan." Another student leader takes the lead as an imam to facilitate the steps of inner prayers and movements: standing with arms folded on chest, bending forward, and prostrating with the head to the ground. After about five minutes, they complete the prayer and students make their way back to the chairs: a set on the right for the women and a set on the left for the men with a common walkway in between them. Women and men return to saying hello to their friends for a minute before Omar begins making announcements, including the Islamic Awareness Week occurring the following week. Sister Yasmin explains about a blood drive event with the Red Cross at the local mosque that weekend which would include two free tickets for every donor to the professional soccer team the Los Angeles Galaxy. She reads the twitter account for it: #howkhafeefisyourdam meaning "how light is your blood?" Sister Sara explains about the Middle East Awareness week occurring concurrently.

Omar asks the attendees to offer *du'ā'* [prayer] for a Muslim friend whose infant son had suddenly died, for the MSA secretary who had just badly sprained her ankles, and for a brother of one of the women members who was having many difficulties. Most students have arrived, about twenty young men and seventeen young women. The guest speaker, a student of Islam named Nadeem Riaz, presents on the subject of the attitude, purposes, and characteristics of *du'ā'*, based on a lecture on the subject made by Nouman Ali Khan that he had studied. After about an hour, with some intermittent questions from the audience, Omar closes with a prayer and announces dinner. A little more than half of the thirty-seven attendees stay for dinner: a homemade, Middle Eastern casserole and baked cakes with coconut. They socialize as they eat, men mostly talking with men, and women with women, although some intermixing occurs. I too say hello to some of the 'sisters' I had gotten to know through my fieldwork and interviews over the past two years. The MSA leaders have become friendly with a young Latino custodian who customarily closes the room after the event and he partakes of a little of the dinner before returning to duties. Alone and in groups, the young Muslim Americans disperse.

Episode 2: The Meditation Room

On the second floor of Costo Hall, near the Native American Student Center, the Southeast Asian and Pacific Islander Student Center, and the Hillel (Jewish) Student Center, is the meditation room, open to members of the campus community of any faith, although in which Muslims principally occupy it as a place of prayer and fellowship. I walk through the glass door, whispering "*salām alaykūm*" to groups of young men seated on chairs to the right and left of the room. Hakeem and Baseem are chatting about a European soccer league and watch highlights of a recent match on a phone, commenting enthusiastically about a favorite player's dribbling moves. Najeeb and Husayn, sitting across from me, debate which NBA teams are likely to make the Finals from among the "loaded" Western Conference. Near the door, Na'il tells Ahmed about an entertaining Youtube video he just watched of the popular Indian Muslim preacher and apologist Zakir Naik in which he refutes a man in the audience claiming to be a great religious figure [the *mahdi*]. I hear two young ladies in the back talking about their classes, clothing, and headscarves. Another woman walks in, makes her way to the back of the room, and sets up a scarf rug to fulfill an afternoon *salah* prayer; taking notice, others lower their voices to not distract her. I sit silently listening to others, not comfortable to talk during someone else's prayer. Some students leave the room and new ones enter. Three young men enter in conversation about current events and Muslims. [Saif:] "So did you guys hear about that masjid that got burned down in Houston?" [Adil:] "Why are people shocked? I'm not surprised." [Saif:] "If we don't speak up against this and mobilize then (he paused) they already think they can go to our country and kill people and now here too." [Adil:] "We're not in a position to do anything." [Asad:] "In the Qur'an, Allah says that "he will not change the state of a nation unless they change it themselves" so unless we get the Muslims on the same page, doing the same thing and going back to representing the Prophet and the *Deen* [Islamic religion] properly, we're not gonna get anywhere." (I miss the next threads of conversation.) [Asad:] "No, but Allah *subḥānna-wa-ta'āla* [glorifed and exalted by He] does not prevent you from being nice to someone just because our beliefs do not coincide, it doesn't mean you have to be mean to them. You have to treat them properly. Let them do what they want, Allah *subḥānna-wa-ta'āla* will deal with them." [Adil:] "Yeah obviously, but if this was the Khilafah [Caliphate], we'd go by those rules, but here, we respect the rules, we live in this country so we have to live by its rules so long as they don't go against Islam, like if there was a law that said we have to drink alcohol, we don't have to follow that."[1]

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[1] This second episode is a hybrid account of goings on in the Meditation room, based on my own notes and memory of observations from various visits to the Meditation Room. The conversation of Saif, Adil, and Asad are added from field notes of Ms. Faezeh Fathizadeh, February 13, 2015, as part of her own academic research project at UC Riverside for a religious studies course.

Episode 3: Saturday night at Khadija's

Khadija is making dinner for her many friends, even though she proudly proclaims that she knew nothing about cooking before college and thought that regular milk came from white cows, chocolate milk came from brown cows, and cheese came from a special kind of cow. Maybe cooking is still new to her but her home made pizza of fresh bread, slices of tomato, whole pieces of basil, oregano, with mozzarella and cheddar cheese is among the best I have tasted. Her roommate Nadra join us as do Muslim friends and apartment neighbors Ayana, Jasmine, and Cristina arrive, along with her non-Muslim friends Garrett, Tonya, and my wife Tiara. We are not just a religiously diverse group, of three different religious traditions and both converts and heritage Muslims, but ethnically as well, of Somali American, Sri Lankan American, Mexican American, European American, and African American. Joyful, lively, with a quick mind and loquacious, Khadija is a natural hostess, establishing a warm and friendly atmosphere, even though a few of us had not previously met. Conversations move fluidly between topics of recent movies, music, books, and religion, only interrupted by spurts of laughter. Having eaten more than our daily nutritional necessities, my wife offers to lead everyone in a Zumba session—an exercise based on Latin, African, and Indian cultural dances—and after a twenty minutes workout in the living room, feeling invigorated, we say our thank you and depart.

These three episodes represent three distinct environments in which heritage Muslims and converts choose Islam as a central facet of selfhood and perform and construct their identity together. Episode 1 is a space fashioned and directed by Muslim Student Association [MSA] officers, who with other MSA participants, constitute and communicate their vision of the significance and essential practices of being Muslim, such as gender divisions, congregational *salah* prayer, and cultivating habits of *du'ā'* prayer in addition to the five daily requirements of *salah*. It is also a place where both heritage Muslims and those of other backgrounds (in this example, one raised Catholic and with Native American traditions) experiment with and learn more about Islam. Episode 2 takes place in a setting not formally under the purview of MSA leadership, yet informally it is the central location on campus for MSA leaders and participants to gather, pray, and socialize. It is thus engendered as an extension of MSA space in daily campus life. The conversation above offers a fascinating look at how three different students react when feeling threatened by an attack on a Houston, Texas mosque. Episode 3

demonstrates that Muslims also create spaces of friendship, support, and religious formation outside the purview of MSA leadership. Some of those students participate in MSA programs from time to time, most do not. This gathering is also distinct in that many individuals in the friendship group were not Muslim, yet in their interactions the delineation between who is Muslim and who is not is not pronounced.

A confluence of social, political, cultural, and religious factors has impelled an increasing number of heritage Muslims and Americans of other religious backgrounds to make Islam a core interest and shaper of their values and practices while at college, many carrying forward this identity after graduation. Although no two young adult Muslims articulate an Islamic identity that sounds exactly alike, this identity work is largely constructed, fashioned, contested, revised, and consolidated socially—in interaction with peers—to create coherent communities. This dissertation analyzes many of the environmental factors that encourage this Islamic identity, the different and common ways it is articulated and practiced in and apart from Muslim campus groups, the ways gender performances ground this identity, and how this identity is fashioned in engagement with (and contradistinction from) religious and ethnic others. This dissertation focuses on listening to and understanding the voices and discourse of young adult Muslim Americans as they communicate their beliefs, values, practices, and interpretive choices. My organization, discussion, and analysis of their voices identify patterns and make connections previously undisclosed, to further unravel the contexts in which this identity is being shaped, and to consider the ethical implications of the choices being made.

Although we must await the future to discern if a unified American Islamic ethos will be sparked out of the current clash of different opinions, in the views and practices of these young Americans of the Pacific west of the United States we find a recognizable number of possible trajectories, propounded side by side in varied degrees of tension and harmony. Any one or a combination of these trajectories may become preeminent in the coming decades. How these young people are envisioning Islam has momentous implications for Islam in America more generally. This is due to the following dynamics. First, the Muslim population in the United States is also generally young, with over 85% of Muslim American adults being less than fifty-five years old.[2] Second, of all American religious groups, Muslim have one of the highest percentages of youth becoming college educated, thereby gaining the confidence and financial leverage to be influential members or a "vanguard" of local Islamic centers and regional and national Islamic organizations.[3] Many officers of campus MSAs upon graduation continue to be active, through volunteering and sometimes full-time work, in local mosques and in regional and national organizations such as MSA West, Islamic Society of North America, Islamic Circle of North America, Muslim American Society, the Muslim Public Affairs Council, and the Council of American Islamic Relations. These young Muslims have abilities to navigate

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[2] In fact, just 12% of Muslim adults in American are 55 and older, see Pew Research Center *Muslim Americans: No Signs of Growth in Alienation or Support for Extremism*, (August 2011): 15, http://www.people-press.org/files/2011/08/muslim-american-report.pdf (accessed April 14, 2015).

[3] Geneive Abdo, *Mecca and Main Street* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 63-64. Bayoumi asserts that young Muslims of the second generation have a "sense of a vanguard position" and enthusiastically participate in what they see as a movement of a growing global revival of Islam, especially among those their age. See Moustafa Bayoumi, "Being Young, Muslim, and American in Brooklyn," *Being Young and Muslim: New Cultural Politics in the Gobal South and North*, eds. Linda Herrera and Asef Bayat (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 168.

institutions, locally and nationally, in the United States, and speaking "without an accent" they are likely to be listened to by fellow young Muslims and by non-Muslims in public forums, whether in political or interfaith activism.[4] Third, a small but steady number of MSA activists after college graduation go on to study of Islam full-time, either abroad or in North American Islamic institutes and colleges. Returning from these studies, they are generally seen as Islamic authorities by Islamic organizations.[5] Fourth, young Muslims who grow up in the United States are more likely than older Muslims to make Islam the core of their identity, and thus they are likely to be involved in local, regional, and national Islamic organizations of charitable work, public relations, legal defense, training and education, and activism.[6] In addition, how these young people are envisioning Islam has a notable impact on global visions of Islam. They interface with fellow young Muslims around the world through transnational networks and online discussion boards, as English becomes the international language for Muslims, not just in the "West" but

[4] Mucahit Bilici, *Finding Mecca in America: How Islam Is Becoming an American Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 157-160, 162.
[5] See Zareena Grewal, *Islam is a Foreign Country: American Muslims and the Global Crisis of Authority* (New York: New York University Press, 2014).
[6] About 60% of Muslims in the USA ages 18 to 29 answered that they consider themselves Muslims first before American, compared to about 47% of Muslims in the USA more generally. See Pew Research Center, *Muslim Americans: Middle Class and Mostly Mainstream* (May 2007), 31, http://www.pewresearch.org/files/old-assets/pdf/muslim-americans.pdf (accessed April 14, 2015). The more recent 2011 Pew survey did not release reveal the age correlations of this question but Muslim-first generally was at 49%. However, interestingly, they did further these questions of comparing levels of identity with citizenship versus religion with that of Christian Americans, finding that 46% identity as "American" first and also 46% as "Christian" first, Pew Research Center, *Muslim Americans* (August 2011): 34. These questions explicitly seek to address anxieties about whether our fellow citizens who are Muslim really are fellow patriotic, assimilated, and loyal Americans. Unfortunately, in reality, a very patriotic Christian American (à la Timothy McVeigh) can be inclined to violent means of revolution; on the other hand, an American Muslim who might see all kinds of patriotism as a form of idolatry may at the same time be what would be considered an upstanding citizen, peaceful, neighborly, treats the other gender(s) considerately, consultative in decision making, obedient to the laws of the land.

also in Africa and Asia.[7] The broader Muslim world continues to be quite young, with 60% of its global population under age thirty in 2010, and the American leaders will continue to communicate their visions of authentic Islam in discussion—online and through traveling students and scholars—with their Muslim contemporaries worldwide.[8]

Brief history of the Muslim Student Association movement

The Muslim Student Association movements arose in the 1960s, produced by identity politics and some immigrant Muslims' mission for global Islamic revivalism. There is a long history of students forming diverse associations at North American universities. Compensating for the limitations of official college curricula, students on campuses have joined together to form social, cultural, recreational, political, or religious associations from at least the 1700s. Greek-letter fraternities had been established in most of the colleges in New York and New England by 1850. The Morrill Act in 1862 initiated the building of government-funded state institutes, colleges, and universities, soon opening their doors to social and religious groups that hitherto did not normally have access to higher education.[9]

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[7] Garbi Schmidt, "The Transnational Umma — Myth or Reality? Examples from the Western Diasporas," *The Muslim World* 95 (October 2005): 577, 580-2; Jørgen S. Nielsen, "Transnational Islam and the Integration of Islam in Europe," Paper presented at the Second Mediterranean Social and Political Research Meeting. Florence, (March 21–25, 2000), 17. "English is becoming an Islamic *lingua franca*," Jørgen S. Nielsen, "Transnational Islam and the Integration of Islam in Europe," *Muslim Networks and Transnatinoal Communities in and Across Europe*, eds. Stefano Allievi and Jørgen S. Nielsen, (Leiden, Netherlands: Kominklijke Brill, 2003), 42.

[8] Pew Research Center: Forum on Religion & Public Life, *The Future of the Global Muslim Population: Projections for 2010-2013* (January 2011), 17. http://www.npdata.be/Data/Godsdienst/PEW/FutureGlobalMuslimPopulation-WebPDF.pdf (accessed April 15, 2015).

[9] Rodolph Leslie Schnell, *National Activist Student Organizations in American Higher Education, 1905-1944* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1976), 6-12.

These voluntary associations were not just based on mutual interest but responses to the discrimination of already-established student groups. Faced with exclusion from Protestant Christian college fraternities and newly emerging sororities, students of other religious identities began separate clubs from the early 1900s. Newman Centers in North America, established to support Catholic belief and practice on university campuses, began at the University of Wisconsin in 1883 and at the University of Pennsylvania in 1893, and by 1908 a national organization for United States Newman Centers began.[10] Barred from fraternity memberships, Catholic students at Brown University formed their own Greek society in 1889. Similarly, Jewish students at Yale, shut out on religious grounds from established student groups, founded a society in 1895 open to students of all races, religions, and colors.[11] In 1923, Jewish students founded the national Hillel organization on the campus of University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. By 1939 Hillel had established chapters on 30 other campuses.[12]

The 1960s, when the national organization of MSAs was formed, were years of rising consciousness of social justice and equity issues. Recognizing the energy and idealism of youth, political activists have long looked at university students to champion

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[10] J.D. Long-Gracia, "Newman Centers: a brief history," *US Catholic magazine*, http://www.uscatholic.org/life/2012/01/newman-centers-brief-history (accessed October 19, 2013). The website states these centers were initially established "to help Catholics live their faith on campus amid perceived anti-Catholicism."

[11] Sanua, Marianne Rachel, *Going Greek: Jewish College Fraternities in the United States, 1895–1945* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2003), 45-50.

[12] Taymiya R. Zaman, "Jewish and Muslim Immigrant Communities and American Campuses," *Muslims and Jews in America: Commonalities, Contentions, and Complexities*, eds. Reza Aslan and Aaron J. Hahn Tapper (New York: Palgrave Macmillan), 97.

of their causes, such as the Intercollegiate Socialist Society that formed in 1905.[13] The 1960s witnessed an intensification of students experimenting with activism and becoming confident in their abilities to effect change in their universities, in national politics, and American society. From 1960, black and white activists initiated off-campus sit-ins and demonstrations for desegregation and civil rights, for free speech, for student participation in university decision-making, and later against the Vietnam War and the invasion of Cambodia. By 1970, most colleges and universities had experienced various forms of student strikes, demonstrations, and protests.[14]

Given this background the student founders of the Muslim Student Association had many models of religious and political student associations for their local and national organizations. They also realized the unique opportunities that religious freedom allowed to bring forth their ideals of a global Islamic revival. Their activities toward this vision had been curbed for years in their home countries such as Egypt and the Jama'at-i-Islami where their leaders had been often imprisoned their organizations banned.[15]

The founders of the Muslim Student Association of the United States and Canada worked to link the established campus Muslim student groups and to expand them on new campuses. The year the first local campus Muslim organizations were founded is yet

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[13] Rodolph Leslie Schnell, *National Activist Student Organizations in American Higher Education, 1905-1944* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1976), 6-12.
[14] James L. Wood, *The Sources of American Student Activism* (Washington, DC: Lexington Books, 1974), 1-3
[15] Seyyed Vali Reza Nasr, *Mawdudi and the Making of Islamic Revivalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 43-44. Sayyid Qutb, a leader and the preeminent ideologue of the Muslim Brotherhood, the most popular Islamic revivalism movement in Egypt, had been in prison in Egypt since 1954 and would be executed for treason in 1965. In Pakistan, the military ruler from 1958 to 1964 had banned political parties and repressed Abul A'la Maududi's Jama'at-i-Islami religio-political party that had been working to Islamize the national government.

to be identified. From the newly organized Muslim Student Association's survey in 1963, which identified only 15 campus Muslim associations in North America then, we can guess that such organizations were fairly new and scarce. The 1968 *MSA Handbook* notes that the idea had been brewing from the "early fifties" for a continental Muslim student organization, but its advocates were afraid there were insufficient funds for such a project. The MSA leaders quickly began correspondence with hundreds of universities and assisted in the establishment of local chapters, so that by 1968 there were 105 Muslim groups on college campuses connected to the new national organization. Among these were Muslim unions at the University of California campuses of Los Angeles and Riverside. When MSA officers traveled long distances for a meeting or Islamic gathering, they often arranged stopped at various colleges and universities to help contacts form a campus MSA. They offered guidelines for constitutions and bylaws, emphasizing that the groups be run principally by and for students. In 1968 the national body counted over a thousand dues-paying individual members and a mailing list of five thousand names. Another forty-eight campus Muslim groups chose not to be formally affiliated with the national body.[16] Likewise, in 2014 of the many hundreds of Muslim Student Associations active on individual college and university campuses, less than half are formally associated with the national body. Meanwhile the current MSA-National functions more as a resource center for campus MSAs rather than an executive body;

[16] Muslim Students Association, *The MSA Handbook* (Ann Arbor, MI: Muslim Students' Association of the U.S. and Canada, 1968), 13, 27-34; Omer bin Abdullah, "Building a Community: a Student Action," *Islamic Horizons*, vol. 32, no. 4, (July/August 2003), 46, 51, http://issuu.com/isnacreative/docs/ih_jul-aug_03 (accessed December 10, 2013).

those MSAs that choose to be affiliated with the national organization can choose how much guidance to follow from the central body.

The nationally Muslim Student Association represents a movement that initially tried to imitate Islamic revivalist movements abroad, but over the next five decades it increasingly became an indigenous American organization. Constituted by young male Muslim graduate students, with the assistance of their wives and other young women, they were inspired by the transnational organizations of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and the Jama'at-i-Islami in Pakistan. The students advocated Islam as an all-encompassing "way of life" and the solution to all problems, directly quoting the Qur'an and Hadith of the Prophet Muhammad to justify their views. They successfully worked to replace the Federation of Islamic Associations of the United States and Canada, formed by World War II American Muslim veterans, which MSA leaders believed was polluted by its incorporation of American practices such as Sundays for congregational prayer or ballroom dancing. Many founding officers of the MSA had been members of the Muslim Brotherhood; inspired by its "utopian vision of Islamic life," they applied a similar ideology to the new organization.[17] The MSA official manual stated the objectives to be "creating a unified Islamic thought among the Muslim students, based directly on the Qur'an and Sunnah," "working for the propagation of the Islamic civilization and its

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[17] Individual interview with board member of the MSA of UC Riverside, author's UCR office, October 23, 2013; Kambiz GhaneaBassiri, *A History of Islam in America: From the New World to the New World Order* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 265-7.

characteristics and role in the modern Renaissance," and "the realization of Islam as a complete way of life."[18]

The idealistic leaders who envisioned a universal Islam taking precedence over any particular human constructs of nationality, race, ethnicity, political ideology, economics, or religion sometimes had difficulties working with individuals and already-established groups that did not share this vision of Islam. They ridiculed fellow immigrant students who were active in the Organization of Arab Student that aligned itself with the socialist-leanings and often secular identities and aims of Pan-Arabism, encouraging them to replace their "mistaken" loyalties with Pan-Islamism.[19] They quickly took a paternalistic attitude to the older American organization the Federation of Islamic Associations [FIA], which they believed practiced an aberrant Islam by including music and social and folk dancing at the FIA's annual convention and at affiliated individual Islamic centers.[20] Indonesian and Malaysian students did not deem their interests and identities sufficiently accounted for in the national MSA, so they formed their own ethnic-based national Muslim organizations.[21] Then in the early 1970s Pakistani immigrant students broke off from the MSA and formed the Islamic Circle of North America, holding its meetings in Urdu in its first years and concentrating funding and efforts on *da'wa*, i.e. propagation of

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[18] Muslim Students Association, *The MSA Handbook*, 97, 121

[19] Sally Howell, *Old Islam in Detroit: Rediscovering the Muslim American Past* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 202.

[20] Sally Howell, *Old Islam in Detroit*, 151-154, 201-204; Kambiz GhaneaBassiri, *A History of Islam in America: From the New World to the New World Order* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 239-241, 269.

[21] The Indonesian Muslim Society in America and Malaysian Islamic Study Group, "Request for conference rooms and accommodations proposal," http://www.iamchouston.org/docs/Hotel_Proposal_2011.pdf (accessed November 20, 2013); "Malaysian Islamic Study Group," http://misgonline.com/v2/index.php/about (accessed November 20, 2013).

Islam to the public.[22] In addition, Shia students who were aligned with the Islamic revolution of Iran in 1979 broke away to form the independent Muslim Student Association Persian Speaking Group.[23]

In the first decades of the Muslim Student Association of the United States and Canada, Muslim women were relegated to auxiliary positions to the all-male national leadership. Indeed, another of the areas in which the MSA male leaders believed the FIA had gone astray was in allowing women leaders in the national organization and affiliated mosques. Nonetheless, sharing deep enthusiasm for the vision of an Islamic renaissance, from the first years women worked in vital roles in the new organization. They cared for the homes and cooked while the male leaders met in all-day meetings on weekends. They often worked in the MSA's secretariat taking notes and facilitating the writing and copying of correspondence. Taking a particularly conservative stance of a domestic vision of womanhood, they drafted a Muslim Cook Book and focused on Islamic education of children. They also hosted families, organized a circulating library, fundraised, implemented a matchmaking committee, and provided marriage counseling. Some of the wives and female students did constitute a Women's Committee at the 1966 Annual Convention so that women would have "a common meeting ground" to address

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[22] Ghaneabassiri, (2010), 269; Herman Meredith Bowers, "A Phenomenological Study of the Islamic Society of North America," (Ph.D. diss., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1989), 192; http://www.discoverthenetworks.org/printgroupProfile.asp?grpid=6422 (accessed November 20, 2013), but should be used with caution as infrequently cites its sources and has a polemic underpinning; "Islamic Circle of North America," http://www.icna.org/about-icna/ (accessed November 20, 2013); Edward E. Curtis, IV, "Islamic Circle of North America," *Encyclopedia of Muslim-American History, vol. I*, (New York: Facts On File, 2010), 288-289.

[23] Herman Meredith Bowers, *A Phenomenological Study of the Islamic Society of North America*, (1989), 174-176, 190-191; Kambiz Ghaneabassiri, *Competing Visions of Islam in the United States* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1997), 29-32.

"problems and interests" and keep in contact, encouraging "each other towards a better understanding and practice of Islam." In the 1970s, they facilitated an Islamic Correspondence Course. As more and more youth became part of the North American Muslim community, these women organized, staffed, taught, and were counselors for camps and Islamic summer schools, making efforts to include whole families in the programs. They taught weekend classes in mosques and went on to found early Islamic schools in the country.[24] Over forty years later, early woman leader Shareefa Alkhateeb reflected: "[The male leadership] really saw women as just attachments to the men running things, [but] we didn't see ourselves as attachments. I saw my role as promoting the work of women." As the successfully accomplished goal after their goal, MSA men gradually looked to them to take on more responsibilities and take central positions in the North American MSA.[25] However, it was not until after beginning of the new millennium that women were elected or appointed to serve in the highest positions of the organization.[26]

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[24] The University of Islam or Sister Clara Muhammad schools of the Nation of Islam, although considered heterodox by many of Sunni Islam, actually preceded by over two decades the MSA-led establishment of Islam-based schools.

[25] Saba Ali, "Building a Movement: A Woman's Work," *Islamic Horizons*, http://issuu.com/isnacreative/docs/ih_may-jun_03 (accessed October 29, 2013); Muslim Students Association, *The MSA Handbook*, 51; "Letters to the Editor," *Al-Ittihad*, Summer 1974, vol. 11 no. 4, 19; Omer bin Abdullah, "Building a Community: a Student Action," *Islamic Horizons*, vol. 32, no. 4, (July/August 2003), 46, 51, http://issuu.com/isnacreative/docs/ih_jul-aug_03, (accessed December 10, 2013).

[26] Geneive Abdo, *Mecca and Main Street: Muslim Life in America after 9/11* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 137-142, 192-194. It was 2006 that the first woman, an Islamic Studies professor named Ingrid Mattson, was elected President of ISNA; she had served as Vice-President from 2001 to 2006. In 2004 Hadia Mubarak was appointed president of the then subsidiary (to ISNA) MSA-National. Samana Siddiqui, "Breaking Barriers: Young Muslim American women adapt to leading national organizations," *Islamic Horizons*, vol. 42, no. 6, (November/December 2013), 42-43, http://issuu.com/isnacreative/docs/ih_nov-dec_13 (accessed 1 December 2013).

Veteran MSA leaders and their fellow immigrant Muslims frequently found work and stayed in the United States after graduating, and so this initially student-oriented organization came to focus more and more on broader Muslim professional and community life. In the 1980s the leaders reincorporated the MSA to become the Islamic Society of North America [ISNA] with an explicit mandate to support Muslim mosques, families, professional organizations, and facilitate public relations with the greater country. The Muslim Student Association became a subsidiary of ISNA called MSA-National to focus on student activism on the national level and to providing guidance, support, resources, workshops, and conferences to newly established and veteran campus MSAs. By 2013, fifty years after its initiation as the MSA, this organization had fully consolidated itself as a peculiarly American organization, emphasizing spiritual transformation, celebrating diversity, and creating Muslim communities that are inclusive of men and women, people with disabilities, and those of diverse racial, ethnic, and religious backgrounds. ISNA has also looked toward developing relationships with non-Muslim communities, becoming active in interfaith dialogue and opening its conventions to non-Muslim speakers.[27] ISNA now is led by men and women, immigrants and their American-born children, African American Muslims, and convert Muslims of other ethnicities. However, with MSA-National centered in the Midwest and East coast, in the mid-1990s the MSAs of California initiated their own independent MSA West alliance to serve their regional needs, and MSAs in Texas also formed their own regional MSA

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[27] Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, *Not Quite American? The Shaping of Arab and Muslim Identity in the United States*, (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2004), 33.

around 2003.[28] Today, there are hundreds of campus MSAs across the country, led by converts to Islam and the children of converts, African Americans and other ethnicities, women and men together. However, in leadership and membership, the young adult children of immigrant Muslims usually dominate these organizations.

The main objective of MSAs has been to help fashion a proud Muslim identity for students, encouraging them to avoid "public invisibility."[29] This basic impetus of MSAs, in other words, is to works for the Islamic equivalent of "Black and beautiful." Resisting the internalization of ethnic prejudice against Muslims, they work to instill excitement and confidence to embrace Islam as a (or the) central facet of one's identity instead of trying to fit in a largely Christian and secular country that often still views Islam as foreign, dangerous, and the antithesis of American values. This "identity Islam" has diverse articulations, along a continuum from narrow and exclusive to broad-minded and inclusive, often existing in varying degrees of tension and harmony among the leaders of a single MSA.

Theoretical and Methodological Framework:

In this study, seeking to understand the religious identities of young Brief Overview adult Muslim Americans, I spent time with and talked to young Muslims

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[28] "MSA West: United Muslim Students," http://www.msawest.net/ (accessed December 21, 2013); "MSA Lone Star Council," <http://www.msa-texas.org/ (accessed April 21, 2015).

[29] Khalid Fattah Griggs, "Islamic Party in North America: A Quiet Storm of Political Activism," *Muslim Minorities in the West: Visible and Invisible*, (Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press, 2002), 82; Garbi Schmidt, "Dialectics of Authenticity: Examples of Ethnification of Islam among Young Muslims in Sweden and the United States". *The Muslim World* 92 (2002); Marcia Hermansen, "How to Put the Genie Back in the Bottle: 'Identity Islam' and Muslim Youth Cultures in America," *Progressive Muslims*, ed. Omid Safi (Oneworld Publications, Kindle Edition, 2011); Geneive Abdo, *Mecca and Main Street*, 187-191.

undergraduates and recent graduates. Instead of implementing my own normative standards about who is a Muslim, I took anyone who calls him or her self "Muslim" to be a Muslim and having something of value to say about what is "Islam" and how it should be understood and practiced in everyday social and private life.[30] However, the Muslims I talked to were of a certain demographic, being young adults aged roughly eighteen to twenty-five years old who attended or were recent graduates of colleges and universities in the Pacific West of the United States. Those who participated in the Muslim Student Association on their campus were my central focus, although I also found students who were on the periphery of MSAs participation or who did not participate at all. Furthermore, with my subject matter being the discourse of "young adult Muslim Americans," I looked to interview principally those young people who were born or who had grown up in the United States. This turned out to be mostly "heritage Muslims," raised in the United States, who were raised learning about the Islamic tradition from their families and who now dominate the MSAs.

This project is influenced by the sensibilities of "lived religion" in which, instead of exclusively taking religious institutions and their scholars as representatives of a faith tradition, the experiences, beliefs, and practices of everyday practitioners also are crucial to depicting a faith. Whereas studies of "popular religion" focus on the everyday practitioners, "lived religion" seeks to break down the distinctions between high and low,

[30] Thus, whether someone identified with the Nation of Islam, a Sufi order, Sunni, Shiite, or "Salafi," kept *ḥijāb* prescriptions or not, prayed regularly or not, or even held to a certain view about the existence of a deity, the station of Muhammad, or the status of the Qur'an, did not delimit their participation in this study; only that they call themselves "Muslim."

elite and popular, in which the private rituals and beliefs of laity are just as much a part of the living religion as the pronouncements, facilitation, and participation of ecclesiastical groups and official leaders.[31] Notably, the youthful individuals in this study occupy a unique space between the high/low, global/local, official/popular, or elite/folk dichotomous constructs. On the one hand, they certainly do not represent official theological or legal voices among Muslims internationally. They are young adults with rarely any recognized religious authority outside their campus communities. However, most of them are students in California's most prestigious university system. On campus many of these students and recent graduates are participants and leaders in a Muslim student association and through their interactions, student organization programming, and behaviors define for each other what is Islam. For non-Muslim students, except for a Google search or a deliberate mosque visit, they are the most likely contact with "Islam" they will have in their university years. If someone wants to learn more about this religion, the campus Muslim Student Association weekly meetings or its regular "*da'wa* table" (public proclamation of Islam) in free speech squares, are the most accessible places to go. Many of them also participate in other arenas, professionally and in

[31] David D. Hall, Lived Religion in America: Toward a History of Practice, ed. David D. Hall (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1997), viii-ix; Marion Bowman and Ülo Valk, "Introduction," *Vernacular Religion in Everyday Life: Expressions of Belief*, ed. Marion Bowman & Ülo Valk (Bristol, Connecticut: Equinox, 2012), 5; "The term "lived religion"" focuses on "the actual experience of religious persons… Although lived religion pertains to the individual, it is not merely subjective. Rather, people construct their religious worlds together" through "sharing vivid experiences of that intersubjective reality," group rituals, which constitute "social supports" to reinforce belief and create shared practices and "religious actions." Meredith B. McGuire, *Lived Religion: Faith and Practice in Everyday Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 12-13.

activism, including serving in leadership roles in local mosques and regional and national Islamic organizations.

For this study, therefore, the statements of the Qur'an and the Hadith, the examples of the first generations of Muslims, the writings of the most influential medieval/classical Islamic scholars, and the *fatwa*s of leading Islamic legal experts do not represent authentic Islam, while that of these young adults is comparatively vernacular or unofficial. All of the above are voices that together produce the significance of the symbol "Islam." Young adult Muslim Americans, just as much as they influence each other, are influenced by these other sources of Islamic definitions that they learn through their upbringing by their families and through participating in study groups at the college or local mosque. They also construct their ideas about Islamic teachings through their own reading and study of primary sources of their tradition, including Google searches and listening to popular Islamic teachers' lectures online and in-person. Since *the central question of this study is "what is Islam for young adult Muslim Americans?"* their voices take priority. Because these young adults often quote the Qur'an or refer to the body of Hadith as principle sources to explain themselves and justify their interpretations, I often quote in full their (often) abbreviated references to these sources. I also took note of the lectures of older teachers of the Islamic religion who were invited to Muslim Student Association weekly meetings and to their regional conferences, teachers who influence but do not exclusively define how the young adults understand and attempt to live their faith. I also incorporate some of the statements of popular American and international teachers of Islam, as the young adult Muslims would quote them and refer to them. Much

of this dissertation synthesizes these young people's "lived religion theologies," yet I would argue they are also simply "theologies of Islam," produced by particular parties in particular times and places, elucidating what he, she, or they understand to be Islam.[32]

I have tried to strike a balance between my own discussion and analysis of the vision of Islam of the participants in this study and the vision of Islam of the participants in their own words. Kambiz GhaneaBassiri critiques the tendency for scholarship on Islam in America is to re-present Muslim Americans' own self-representations. This approach is "indispensable for attaining an authentic understanding of how Muslims are self-identifying in the United States." However, he argues that it fails to provide "an analytical interpretation of the phenomenon of Islam in America," and "it leaves the burden of evaluating the context and categories of scholarly analysis on the shoulders of the scholar's subjects rather than the scholar himself."[33] Listening to the substantive thrusts of Ghaneabassiri's critique, my approach seeks to richly convey and contextualize young Muslims' identify discourses, utilize and modify categories created by previous scholarship to understand this demographic, and develop other frameworks and categories that have not yet been applied in depth to understand young adult Muslim Americans.

This dissertation focuses on contextualized Islamic discourse. It provides thick description to the dialectal ways young adult Muslim Americans articulate and practice

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[32] Hence, from my non-normative approach, the writings of Abu Hamid al-Ghazali or that of Ahmad Ibn Taymiyyah, although very influential for other Muslims in defining "orthodoxy," are no more "theologies of Islam" or less "vernacular theologies" than that of these young adult Muslim Americans.
[33] Kambiz GhaneaBassiri, *A History of Islam in America: From the New World to the New World Order* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 7.

an Islamic identity through the prisms of their multifaceted life circumstances. Abbas Barzegar argues that religious studies research on Muslim Americans should prioritize the discourse about Islam itself over preoccupation with differences and conflicts among various ethnicities, sects, social classes, and generations of Muslims. He claims taxonomies of American Islamic discourse cut across ethnicity, sect, and other differences.[34] His concern is to find out how different American Muslims ground their opinions in Islam itself. Yet, to date, very few studies have looked at the meaning of Islam and being Muslim and American for members of the young generation. As Barzegar notes, most published research usually prioritize questions of the ways the youth are dealing with college life, stereotyping and discrimination, race, gendered realities, or negotiating with parents for independence. Understanding how this generation actually interprets the Islamic religion is tangential to such questions.[35] Since I believe we cannot extract constructions of faith outside of the gendered, racial, and class realities of human lives, I include analysis of how these young people interpret Islam

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[34] Abbas Barzegar, "Discourse, Identity, and Community: Problems and Prospects in the Study of Islam in America," *The Muslim World* 101 (July 2011), 520-521, 524-525, 527, 530, 532, 534, 536.

[35] Nathaniel G. Mays, "Muslim Students at an American University: a Postmodern Ethnography in the New Millenium," (Dissertation, University of Connecticut, 2003) and Farouk Dey, "Islam on Campus: Identity Development of Muslim-American College Students," (Dissertation, University of Florida, 2012) analyze the unique and universal needs of Muslim indigenous and immigrant students on college campuses with an eye on how to welcome, accommodate, and support their needs of academic and personal development; Jenny L. Small, "College Religious Affiliation and Spiritual Identity: A Qualitative Study," (Dissertation, University of Michigan, 2008) investigates the trajectories of the faith development of Muslim students as experienced when they engage in inter-faith dialogues, comparing her findings with the theories of James Fowler and Sharon Parks; John O'Brien, "Growing Up Muslim in America: Managing Multiple Cultures in Everyday Life," (Dissertation, University of California at Los Angeles, 2012), nuances how young Muslim Americans in a hip hop group negotiate youth culture and their religious commitments via their musical/poetic arts; Shabana Mir, *Muslim American Women on Campus* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2014) and Pamela Aneesah Nadir, "An Act of Faith: Voices of Young Muslim Women in America," (Dissertation, Arizona State University, 2003) considers the diverse strategies of drawing on relationships and their faith to deal with stigmatization and experiences as cultural outsiders.

through the prism of race, ethnicity, family background, gender, and sect and also how they interpret these factors through the prism of Islam. Nonetheless, as shapers of Islamic discourse, the fact that they all share *identities as Muslims* is the core variable for their inclusion in this study and the chief one I focus upon. As we will see, they conscientiously draw on the scriptures and teachings of Islam to make sense of their particular life circumstances, and those life circumstances greatly inform what scriptures and teachings they draw on for interpretation.[36] This dissertation does fill in a void by asking about their understandings of their religion itself, although, in my review a void that Barzegar overstates, in discerning what is distinctively Islamic about young Muslim Americans' views.[37] The more notable intercession is this dissertation's disclosure of the diversity of voices and interpretations of Islam among these young Muslims who participate in overlapping, Islam-based circles.

I employed interviews and participant observation as direct ways to gain information about young adult Muslim Americans everyday religious practices and ideals. In these semi-structured, interactive interviews, usually ones of individuals, I was able to ask about a dozen interrelated topics and employ ethnographic follow-up methods to inquire further into the meanings of their answers. These questions included topics on who they see themselves as being and becoming, their national identity and ethnic heritage, how they defined Islam and being Muslim, and how they defined their life

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[36] In this regard, I build off the ethnographies of Garbi Schmidt, as well as Geneive Abdo's *Mecca and Main Street*, in Chicago and Dearborn, but performing my research ten years later, focusing on American Muslims of the Pacific American regions. Their in-depth research begins the conversation of how young Muslim American utilize their religious sources to interpret their lives. My work furthers this conversation, augmenting, updating, and interrogating some of the claims of Schmidt and Abdo.
[37] Abbas Barzegar, "Discourse, Identity, and Community," 520-521.

purpose. I asked the interviewees about their relationship to the Muslim Student Association and its importance to them. I also inquired about their ideas about gender and sexuality, and their approaches to ethnic, racial, ecological, and religious diversity.[38] Very few of the interview conversations were brief; most took at least an hour or two and covered many topics. Although I had predetermined topics to ask, I drew on ethnographic interview techniques of drawing on the interlocutor's own language and interests in my further questions. I also used paraphrasing techniques to confirm that I was correctly understanding the speaker. In more than half of the interviews, I quickly typed nearly verbatim notes of the words, language, and tone of the speaker. Except for a few technology failures, each interview was audio recorded with the permission of the interviewee. This allowed me to transcribe them later or fill in gaps in the earlier typed notes.

In posing the questions I tried to use language that would invite certain "good" answers, although I acknowledge that interviewees may be tempted to play up expectations of common ideal values and defend their particular religious ways and beliefs. In fact, because I attempted to set the tone of these interviews more like conversations in which I was getting to know them than as ways for me to collect information from these young people, I sometimes intentionally made clear my own ethical concerns as well as those of fellow scholars. This allowed interviewees to explicitly understand my own stance, which—perhaps counterintuitively—rarely seemed

[38] See Appendix for full list of questions asked individual interviewees as well as those uniquely asked of Muslim Student Association officers.

to impel them to change their views in significant ways but rather provided them opportunities to clarify their own stance.

The meaning-making discourses of these young Muslims, produced and performed both in their own gatherings and in interviews with me, I present as a kind of "lived" practice. Hockey and Forsey (2012) acknowledge a "Malinowskian myth" that relegates the interview to a secondary and inferior method of participatory fieldwork due to its production in settings outside the "natural" field. Against this myth, I affirm interview methodologies as fitting in "naturally" with what these young people are often already asked to do: explain the meaning of their religious beliefs and practices to a largely non-Muslim set of American peers. Like those peers, if we scholars want to know what this group's religious identity and behaviors mean to its members, we may simply ask them, instead of extrapolating and guessing based exclusively on our observations.

Taking a "critical realism" approach toward the interviews, I acknowledge that what is articulated in the interview is not always exactly how interviewees think and talk about these issues in the other settings. However, neither does what they say reflect only how they think about these issues in the interview setting. In the interviews, I strove to establish a level of comfort and confidentiality as we explored interviewees' beliefs, feelings, and approaches on these issues together. Instead of interpreting the interview setting as artificial or contrived, we might more accurately perceive it as one among the many sites these young people may pass through in the course of their college lives. Each site generates a somewhat distinct presentation of self, but in each these youth construct themselves in ways they believe will be acceptable and palatable to their "audience."

Hence, in each setting they "play up ideal values," even while their fashioning of those ideals will subtly change, based on what they expect to be the values and norms of each site of exchange.[39] However, due to the environment of surveillance described in chapter one, their interviewee "selves" are part and parcel of their general public selves in which they emphasize public virtues and other American values of rationalism and individualism. Meanwhile, this public Islam's stress on self-responsibility and forgiveness tolerates a certain amount of "stretching the boundaries" with practices in private that some of the more hardline Muslims may find questionable, such as dancing or music. This data gives access to what they understand and envision as best to communicate to me the interviewer to be "the beliefs and values driving their actions."[40] Conscious of the power dynamic of my position as a researcher representing these young Muslim friends, I attempt to let these youth speak for themselves in their own words; thus, a large portion of each chapter features quotes from interviewees.[41] However, the questions I choose to ask, the quotes I chose to use and omit, my organization of the data, and my own analyses bring my own voice into this narrative.[42]

To balance and enrich the discourses captured through the interviews, I also drew on participant observation to comprehend individuals' "lived religion" in "natural

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[39] Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, (New York: Doubleday, 1990 [1959]), 19-20, 33-35, 38, 48, 56,

[40] Charlotte Aull Davies, Reflexive Ethnography: a Guide to Researching Selves and Others, 2nd ed (London: Routledge, 2008), 109-110.

[41] These quotations include brief quotes, block quotes, and longer exchanges between me and the interviewee.

[42] Robert Thomas Rozehnal, Islamic Sufism Unbound: Politics and Piety in Twenty-First Century Pakistan (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 11-12.

environments."[43] This participant observation included many hours of attending official MSA general meetings, Qur'an classes, men's study groups, barbecues and recreation activities, meditation room hang outs, Friday prayers on campus, and Islamic conferences. It also included attending outside of direct MSA influence young Muslim parties, social and economic justice activities, and a wedding. Thus, what is spoken in the interview and in their gatherings is the principle source to identify their discourses and their observed behaviors or practices is the secondary but inextricably linked source to understand these discourses. However, there is an awkwardness in forming relationships as an ethnographic researcher. My attendance at MSA gatherings was not to form an Islamic identity as it was for most other attendees or purely for the value of the friendships themselves in those and other Muslim gatherings. Nonetheless, I have taken as an ideal the Kantian moral principle to make human relationships as ends in themselves rather than means to an end, showing genuine interest in and concern for these young Muslims as they opened their lives and gatherings to me. I am grateful for the high level of welcome and helpfulness I encountered among the many new friends I made in doing this project.

I also deployed a nineteen question online survey in June 2014 (See appendix), posting it, with permission of club administrators, on various Facebook pages for university MSAs and some student ethnic organizations' pages, gathering answers from 150 respondents. The questions closely reflected the themes of the dissertation: what has

[43] Jenny Hockey and Martin Forsey, "Ethnography is Not Participant Observation: Reflections on the Interview as Participatory Qualitative Research," The Interview: An Ethnographic Approach, ed. Jonathan Skinner (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), 70-71

influenced a Muslim identity, what they believe that identity to mean, how they view their national identity, how they understand various issues of gender, and how they understand ethnic and religious diversity. These survey respondents reported characteristics similar to those of the interviewees with 90% being heritage Muslims and 77% between the age of seventeen and twenty-three. However, just over 60% of respondents were women.[44]

I pursued this project with two primary goals. First, I wanted to bring greater understanding of this population's identity dynamics which I believe have been largely oversimplified. Second, I believe research in the humanities and social sciences is at its best when with it we pursue consultative collective transformation. I hold that the researcher is not in a position to merely evaluate others according to his or her own ethical and epistemological rubrics. Yet to re-present others' voices without critical evaluation and analysis is also ethically remiss. Rather, I hold that my position as a researcher is to create a critical encounter in which these Muslim Americans, I myself, and the reader may engage in a process of mutual consultation both to understand each other better and to think through together the values, practices, and identities that we would like to constitute our local, national, and global communities.[45] We are all

[44] See "Tables and Images" after "Table of Contents" to locate survey question response statistics.

[45] Socrates is believed to have said "an unexamined life is not worth living." A critical practice for individuals and communities is daily critical evaluation of what of our own value perspectives we should continue with or desist from and what of other groups to adopt in place is essential. When approached with due humility, coming face-to-face with other cultural ways can displace our own and set in a process of such critical evaluation. Otherwise, human beings are bound to commit logical fallacies of ego/cultural-centrism, or go with the merely fashionable, popular, or what is of the politically powerful or of the revolutionary attractions of subaltern resistance. Cultural ways of life are part of humanity's collective resource built up over thousands of years. They offer much to teach us and to teach each other. Part of this learning is to think through what should be continued upon, what practices should be replaced with better

enmeshed in a complex network of enacted and articulated assertions— religious, political, philosophical, and otherwise—about how to live our lives and deal with others I have attempted to show how these young Muslims are not just drawing on traditional Islam to make sense of their lives but on many other discourses as well. Likewise, we—I as researcher and you as reader—bring to this inquiry our own complex entanglements in premises, prejudices, and postulates about who we and others are, what is right, and what is valuable. My hope is that just as my young adult Muslim friends and I have each been (at least slightly) changed through our encounters, you the critical reader may suspend the impulse to assimilate the other into pre-formed categories but rather let your conceptual and ethical norms be vulnerable to transformation through this consultative encounter between you, me, and these young Muslim Americans.[46]

Since I am the mediator of this encounter, it may be helpful to know something more about my subjectivities that are driving this research. We understand that the idea of neutral and objective research is an artifact of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century European Enlightenment. All research projects reflect biases, socio-political interests, and ethical normativities, whether these are explicitly acknowledged or not. First, this project is motivated by the principle of "unity in diversity" introduced to me in the Bahá'í Writings. I believe that individually and collectively we are enriched by differences in which we must not only emphasize points of commonality but, instead of seeking to eliminate or hide differences, learn from and work with them as strengths. The first step

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ones, and what should be modified or refined. Arnold Toynbee, *A Study of History*, vol. 3, quoted in Ronald H. Nash, *Ideas of History*, vol. I (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., Inc., 1969), 202-3.

[46] Also see Robert Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth: The Religious Worlds People Make and the Scholars Who Study Them* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005), 198-199.

toward this goal is empathy and understanding, the second evaluation and appreciation, and the third solidarity and cooperation in common projects of human and ecological well-being. Relationships of empathy, critical appreciation, and cooperative solidarity between Muslims and non-Muslims are essential for the peace and welfare of local, national, and global society.

My background, physical traits, interests, interpretive prisms, and abilities shaped how I could connect with the young adult Muslim Americans I met. Being male, Euro-American, physically fit, and in my early thirties has meant proximity to some of these friends and distance from others. Having a stereotypical appearance of an FBI agent has made some young Muslims wary of me while limiting the kinds of questions I could ask with those who granted me interviews.[47] Being a fellow student, young adult, active sports participant and follower of professional leagues, and fan of popular movies helped me connect with some shared non-religious interests of this population. Studying Arabic and Islam for many years has facilitated connecting with young adult Muslims' integration of Arabic phrases in their speech and quoting of the Qur'an and Hadith when they talk to each other. Given a generally happy and sociable demeanor also assisted me to cultivate friendships with them.

Being of the Bahá'í Faith, I believe, has offered me a unique vantage point to be both sympathetic and balanced in my research and work with young adult Muslim Americans. Not really an insider to the tradition, this project has demanded to quickly learn the

[47] For example, if I had focused on questions of their opinions on violence and international organizations that the US government labels as terrorists, this project would have been paralyzed by distrust from the beginning.

special vocabulary, etiquette, and rituals practiced in youthful Muslim circles. Although I have surely made mistakes along the way, I am grateful for the patience and cordiality of the friends I have made. At the same time, common beliefs and similar practices have made me not fully an outsider either. Sharing sincere reverence for the revelation of the Qur'an, the prophethood of Muhammad, the importance of the practices of daily prayers and month-long fasting, practices of extra-marital sexual chastity, and not consuming alcohol has given me common ground to closely relate to my new Muslim friends. Meanwhile, the Bahá'ís' experience of systematic discrimination and violence—in Iran, Iraq, Egypt, and other lands—by those who sincerely profess themselves to be Muslim, on one hand, and the frequent witnessing of heartfelt manifestations of loving kindness of many Muslims I personally know, on the other, partly informs my opinions about the positive and negative potentials in the application of any religious tradition. My premise has been and continues to be that Muslims—like people of any other or no particular religious identity—have the full range of human possibilities. They too can tap their cultural resources to transcend selfish interests and care for the well-being of others, to attack or inoculate from what is different or seek to engage and understand it, to dominate or to cooperate, to destroy or nurture life, and to show violence or mercy.[48] Furthermore, my experiences have taught me that religious interpretation does not happen in a vacuum

[48] Thus, just as much as I reject the role of the religious studies scholar to be to just describe and analyze in the name of some sort of "neutral objectivity." Moral concerns are completely embedded in the projects we choose, the questions we ask, how we interpret and present our findings. Instead of obscuring this dimension of research, I assert responsibility of the researcher to be upfront about his or her own ethical purposes as well as candidly acknowledge when he or she believes formations of local religious belief and practice are helpful to general human flourishing and call them out when the beliefs and practices are destructive, unhelpful, or just could be improved upon.

but expresses complex interacting social, psychological, political, economic, and ideological forces at work and understanding these forces are crucial to understanding religious interpretation itself. This background and these premises have freed me from necessarily trying to write the common apologetic projects of the inherent goodness of "true" Muslims or, on the opposite end, the national security projects that paint most Muslim activists as guilty by religious association.

In addition, my own life history has convinced me that efforts to fit others into simple categories are complicated by the overlapping influences on individuals that twentieth- and twenty-first-century cosmopolitan life constitutes. I was born to and raised by first and second generation European American Bahá'í parents, themselves of Jewish and Catholic backgrounds. My stepfather, who has an African American Southern Baptist Christian ethnicity and grew up during the civil rights movement, came into my life from age ten. This, along with my many years of immersion in Latin American languages and culture (in college courses, as a volunteer in Chile, and later a bilingual educator) has deepened my concern for human rights, social justice, and equity. Iranian Bahá'ís in diaspora have been friends and extended family from my earliest childhood. Southern California schooling and activities in basketball and soccer brought close friendships with individuals of diverse ethnic backgrounds. From adolescence, having mystical experiences in my study and practice of the Bahá'í Faith conveyed to me conceptions of potentially powerful forces at work in the consciousness of religious practitioners. In the year 2000, living among Bahá'í communities in the Mapuche region of Chile, South America, brought me closer to many indigenous individuals of a rich cultural tradition

who warmly made me part of their extended families. Further immersion in Chinese and Arab cultures for my work and studies has made me believe that—even if my formative journey is not prototypical—with the demographics of so many regions of the United States representing a microcosm of global diversity, myself and my Muslim friends have been growing up in a context in which contact with people of many religions, ethnicities, and cultures is the rule, not the exception.

With this background, interests, and values as the impetus behind my research, I have nonetheless taken care to let my findings be driven by the data instead of my own hopes. My initial questions and project design proceeded from trying to address gaps, reifications, and omissions disclosed in previous books, dissertations, and articles about this population. Although basically a qualitative project, I have tried to make this study representative of young adults in the west coast of the United States who take on Islam as a central facet of identity during their college years. Thus, I found and interviewed eighty young adult Muslim Americans from a variety of ethnic, social, and religious backgrounds, and of different degrees of participation with the Muslim Student Association, at multiple colleges and universities. The themes I found are thus more likely to reflect young adult Muslims lives more generally, not just those of interesting but atypical outliers. Going into the project, I had some concerns that gender divisions would often restrict me from interviewing young Muslim women. However, a few young women I met early in the data gathering

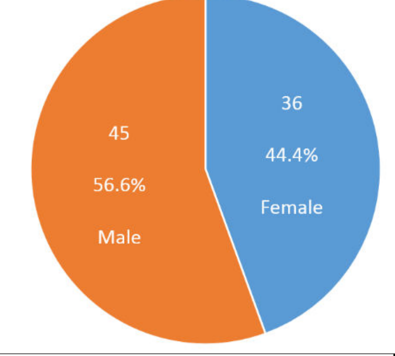

Table 1: Gender of Interviewees

stage, enthusiastic about this project, helped me to recruit their friends for interviews. 36 out of the 81 (or 44.4%) interviewees identified as Muslim women.

The grand majority of those interviewed grew up in the United States, were from Arab or South Asian ethnicities, were raised as Muslims, and were undergraduate students between the ages of 18 and 23. About 78% of interviewees were either born in the United States or came to this country before the age of five. An additional 15% arrived with their families between the ages of five and fourteen, and 7% arrived in high school or moved to the United States to begin university. Seventy-four interviewees or 91% were raised as Muslims by parents who practiced Islam to some extent, a population I hence call "heritage Muslims." Seven of the interviewees were raised or practiced another religious tradition before adopting, "reverting," or converting to Islam. Sixty-eight of the interviewees were undergraduate students at colleges or universities, nine were recent alumni (within one to four years) of undergraduate education, and four were graduate students. Sixty-eight of the interviewees were between the ages of 18 and 23, ten were between 24 and 29, and three more were in their thirties. About half of the

Born in the U.S. or came before age 5 years	Moved to the U.S. between age 5 and 14 years old	Moved to the US between 15 and 19 years old
78%	15%	7%

Table 2: Immigration Age of Interviewees[49]

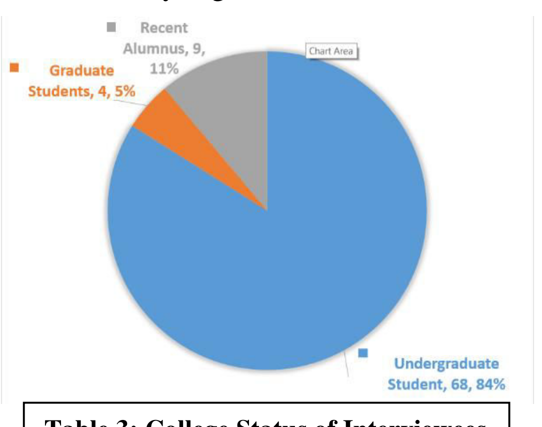

Table 3: College Status of Interviewees

[49] This is an estimate based on direct surveying of only two-thirds of participants on this question.

interviewees were of Arab descent, having families from regions Southwest Asia and North Africa. An additional seventeen were of South Asian descent, six Northeast African, six African American, two Iranians, two Afghanis, three Latinos, two Indonesians, one Taiwanese, and one Bosnian Eastern European.[50]

Participant observation, survey answers and statistical analysis, and eighty interviews with diverse participants of my target population were coded and compared to illuminate patterns and common themes. I read through my interviewee and observation notes multiple times to identify common themes and then used a coding system to bring together recorded statements and observations that addressed the topics of chapters, sections, and subsections. These findings, in turn, have been compared and contrasted with the work of other scholars who have published on topics related to the ethnic and religious minority identity formation of children of diasporic communities, on Islam in America, and on identities of young adult Muslim Americans.

Brief Overview of Subject and Findings

This project's principal question has been on how those young adults, for whom being "Muslim" is a central facet of selfhood, conceive of themselves, their group, and their relationships to others, drawing on ideas, values, teachings, ordinances, and

[50] These demographics do not add up to 80 because a portion of interviewees had mixed backgrounds and I chose to represent them in two different categories (e.g. both as "Latino" and as "Iranian"). In addition, I was not able to glean clear national heritage for all interviewees, sometimes just regional heritage, and many of their families were transnational or refugees in various countries before moving to the United States. This regional information corresponds to: "Arab" is any of the predominantly Arabic speaking countries in Southwest Asia and North Africa; South Asian is Indian, Pakistani, and/or Bangladeshi; Northeast African is Somali, Ethiopian, and Sudanese.

practices of their own religious tradition. I also analyze ways they incorporate other cultural resources from their environment in their religious identity work. Specifically, I look at how definitions of Islam and Muslim-ness, American citizenship and religious belonging, gender relations, and religious and ethnic diversity are essential to this identity work. The project builds off, incorporates, and challenges important research already conducted on this population. The distinctive contribution offered by this research is the intervention it makes in understanding young adult Muslim Americans' articulations of identity in their own words and how they interpret their faith to form and justify the content of this identity. Also significant is my analytical choice to allow diverse Muslims to be different from each other rather than reduce, into attempting to manage complexity, their identities into tropes that leave out more than they disclose.[51] Nonetheless, I also looked for discursive themes in the construction of Muslim-ness rather than just presenting every difference of each individual. There are many such overlapping themes of young Muslims in their college environment as during this period their friendship group is given high priority in trying to create cohesive identities.[52]

I argue that these young university Muslims creatively negotiate what they learn about their Islamic tradition with American ideals, constituting diverse expositions of

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[51] Like the discourse of the Gayo, Indonesian Muslims studied by John R. Bowen, there is no standardized, agreed upon, "American Islam" yet being articulated, just flows and confluences of discourses that "are *dispersive* in that they cannot be resolved into a single set of symbols or ideas." John R. Bowen, *Muslims through Discourse: Religion and Ritual in Gayo Society* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 10.

[52] Interviews and observations from my research revealed that after graduation many young Muslims become increasingly comfortable with individuality in interpretation, taking on a distinctly American approach of freedom of conscience that combines easily with Qur'anic injunctions to use one's individual intellectual faculties to reflect and understand.

their Faith. They also work to counter negative critiques of Islam and create a pious lifestyle as an alternative to perceived shortcomings of youth cultures. This American Islam is debated and represented through the meeting of heritage Muslims from varied ethnic backgrounds, through their study of Islamic scriptures and American Muslim scholars, and from family members, legitimated by their own personal reasoning. The seed of love for Islam is laid in their familial self, challenged by American ideals of the autonomous, and influenced by religio-national discourses of public virtue, development of human potentials, gender equity and empowerment, democratic governance, inclusiveness, and pluralism. Chapter One explores the social matrix in which heritage Muslims come to embrace and assert Islam as a central facet of their personal identity. In particular I explore the importance of family upbringing, peer relationships, prejudice and stereotyping of Muslims, and multiculturalism. Chapter Two discloses many core features of a "Muslim" identity, and how it relates to their nationality "American" and various other demarcations and activities of their personal identity. Chapter Three presents MSAs' institutional practices and individual interpretations related to envisioned binaries of male and female, analyzing how they believe women and men should relate to each other on campus, in families, and in their roles in public life. Chapter Four tackles the question of how young Muslims conceptualize and deal with religious, ethnic, and racial differences. This chapter discloses dynamics of inclusivity, prejudice, trans-ethnic friendship, whether to marry ethnic others, and young Muslims' sometimes embracing and sometimes censuring Islamic sectarian diversity.

This project, thus, is one with a pluralistic ethos at its very core, attempting to learn about, from, and with those who make Islam a principal source of their identity, a religion in many ways different from my own and that of most of their fellow Americans. Although I have worked for a strong degree of comprehensiveness in my coverage of issues important to this identity, there is certainly much more to be understood of this population than this two year project could investigate. This is a snapshot of how some eighty young adult Muslim students and recent graduates—of different genders and from diverse ethnic, national, and socio-economic backgrounds—talked about and practiced their common Islamic faith in the years 2013 to 2015 in the United States Pacific regions. Along with all of us, they are a work in progress; the ways they approach their faith are bound to change as they enter deeper into adulthood. Their successors as Muslim student leaders are likely to continue certain inherited genealogies of practice, improve or replace others, and invent new ways to relate to their faith and to others. There is nothing simple about the way these complex and diverse individuals constructed and lived their faith identities at this time. I invite you to go on this journey with me, becoming comfortable with complexity and difference, getting to know the diverse ways these young Americans articulate and enact what it means to be Muslim, so that we may be more sensitive to their challenges and triumphs in fashioning Islamic identities and relationships in diversity.[53]

[53] Such sensitivities can also further introspection and ethical practices in how we work with similar challenges.

CHAPTER 1

Individuation in Relationships: The Ecology of Islamic Identity Formation among young adult American heritage Muslims

Introduction

People from Asia, North Africa, and Eastern Europe who have identified to varying degrees with the Islamic religion have voluntarily immigrated[1] to the United States for over a hundred years, have forged local communities all across the United States, and have established cultural, political, and religious institutions and associations. However, only in the last thirty years or so, due to changes to immigration laws, that sufficient numbers of Muslims have arrived to become conspicuous elements of the religious mosaic of cities throughout the country. These immigrants have come from nations in which Islam is an assumed and pervasive facet of social life. Many of these immigrants have successfully played essential roles in socializing their children, raised in America, to "choose" Islam as young adults rather than them trying to fit in with the dominant religions of this nation or prevalent practices of college campus youth culture.

This second generation of Islamic heritage has become the subject of an increasing number of studies in the past fifteen years, but much is still unknown about the complex dynamics with which a large contingent of this demographic is carrying forward its faith heritage. In particular, we are just beginning to discern the prominent aspects of their local and general social environments that together encourage decisions to take on Islam

[1] In other words, tens of thousands of Muslims were brought to America in bondage, in the Transatlantic slave trade, but whose descendants—for the most part—lost all but faint signs of an Islamic heritage.

as a/the preeminent marker of self-hood. Peek (2003) details the defensive group solidarity initiated in the aftermath of 9/11 when Muslims (and Sikhs) were often projected by other Americans to be the enemy in our midst.[2] Likewise, Schmidt (2004) analyzes the political discourses post 9/11 in Sweden, Denmark, and the United States that portray citizens of Islamic heritage as a "fifth column," creating a context which pressures them to either renounce this religion or *prove* it helps them actually become more loyal citizens.[3] Naber (2005) explores how choosing an Islamic identity is a strategy utilized by young adults to draw on common ground with parents while at the same time negotiate norms and expectations by debating what is based in the sources of the religion versus that which is simply cultural heritage.[4] Peek (2005) argues that this population passes through a three stage process toward embracing Islam: 1) the child's family plants in them an 'ascribed' Islamic identity; 2) Muslim friendships and student groups at college facilitate learning more about the religion and identifying with it as an individual 'choice'; and 3) student activism generates enthusiasm to express the religion more publicly as a 'declared' identity.[5]

Rather than just focusing on one or a few variables that influence taking this religious marker for self-hood, two recent works have helped to delineate the complex social

[2] Lori Peek, "Community Isolation and Group Solidarity: Examining the Muslim Student Experience after September 11, 2001," *Beyond September 11: An Account of Post-Disaster Research,* ed. J. L. Monday (Boulder: Institute of Behavioral Science, University of Colorado, 2003), pp. 333-354.

[3] Garbi Schmidt, "Islamic identity formation among young Muslims: the case of Denmark, Sweden and the United States," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 41 (April 2004): 31-45.

[4] Nadine Naber, "Muslim First, Arab Second: a Strategic Politics of Race and Gender," *The Muslim World* 95 (2005): 479-495.

[5] Lori Peek, "Becoming Muslim: The Development of a Religious Identity," *Sociology of Religion* 66 (2005): 215-242.

environment of Islamic identity formation among members of this second generation. Hermansen and Mir (2006) trace the nurturing of an Islamic identity by immigrant families' religious practices and protectiveness, and simultaneously by Islamic schools and classes, and then by college campus Muslim Student Associations and cultural clubs, and sometimes by Sufi organizations. They also examine the ideological pressures to both 'fit in' and celebrate diversity, trends in liberalism and conservatism, and the struggles and strategies to maintain identity in the face of political and cultural marginalization.[6] Most recently Dey (2012) describes many of the social factors in nurturing and/or challenging the development of a Muslim identity: family, 9/11 backlash, Muslim-on-Muslim prejudice, peer support and the MSA, and university support and accommodations.[7]

Based on eighty in-depth interviews, an online survey in May and June of 2014 answered by 150 participants, and a substantial body of notes from participant observation gathered in 2013 through 2015, in this chapter I test, detail, and update these earlier studies, and fill in a number of crucial gaps to ascertain which factors of their social environments are most vital to heritage Muslims in forming an Islamic identity. I outline the various ways they negotiate those common factors, and show how these variables interact in dynamic ways to construct religious identities. I highlight previously underestimated factors like multiculturalism, religious diversity encountered in their

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[6] Marcia Hermansen and Shabana Mir, "Identity Jihads: The Multiple Strivings of American Muslim Youth," *Nurturing Child and Adolescent Spirituality: Perspectives from the World's Religious Traditions*, ed. Karen Marie Yust et al. (Lanham, Maryland: Rowland and Littlefield Publishers, 2006).

[7] Farouk Dey, *Islam on Campus: Identity Development of Muslim-American College Students* (PhD diss., University of Florida, 2012), 85-101.

schools and communities, and the Enlightenment ideal of independent reasoning instead of tradition. These elements, along with others identified in earlier scholarship, together synthesize unique ecologies for this population in the authorship of self.

I argue that we can understand the formation of Islamic identities among this population in four closely inter-related dynamics. First, these young people learn Islam from significant relationships with others—family members, peers, teachers, and community leaders—in which the religion's value and their personal relationships' value are deeply intertwined. The aesthetics of Islam for them inextricably enfolds a dialectical confluence of the religion's teachings, individual and communal practices, and these personal relationships. Second, by 'choosing' Islam, these young adults feel they are honoring, affirming, and strengthening the deep, family bonds they have with parents, siblings, aunts, uncles, and cousins, and simultaneously defining what Islam means on their own terms, emphasizing American ideals of individuation and a sense of independent ethical authority. This strategy allows them, in a single move, to both maintain significant relationships and secure a sense of adult self-authorship. Third, the activities of university Muslim Student Associations, and/or the friendships formed therein, are crucial in nurturing an Islamic identity for these newly independent college students. Fourth, with this religious choice being challenged by American stereotypes and practices against Muslims, on the one hand, but also empowered by American ideals about youth individuation and religious freedom, on the other, a multiculturalist ethos works closely with continued Islamophobic social experiences to stimulate upholding Islamic identities as a matter of social justice.

A Complex of Multidimensional Relationships and the Ecological Model

My research shows that no single social/ideological agent or factor predominantly predicts the affirmation of an Islamic identity for heritage Muslims. Rather, to begin to understand the phenomenon of 'choosing' Islam, instead of other American religious and cultural normativities, a multidimensional approach provides the most explanatory traction. Undertaking a systematic exploration of which facets are most prominent, how they interact with each other, and how the young person negotiates them, I draw on the pattern of Urie Bronfenbrenner's (1979) "Ecological Model" of human development that outlines many of the institutions, agencies, and cultural factors that interact with each other and influence a human being as he/she changes over time.[8]

Bronfenbrenner conceives his model as concentric circles or "nested structures, each inside the next…like Russian dolls" that enfold and interact with the individual at its center. The innermost or closest level to the individual is called the microsystem. It includes those institutions that he/she interacts with directly on a regular basis, such as the family, school, workplace, friendship group, and religious place of worship. Next, a mesosystem entails that the individual does not just interact with each of these agencies but they interact with each other as well, such as parents who ask their school for special accommodations for their child or parents who insist that the child's friends always come over to play. The exosystem enwraps those two inner systems, consisting of settings in which the developing person is not actually present—such as the board of one's school or

[8] Urie Bronfenbrenner, *The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), 3, 21.

one's mother's workplace—yet which closely affect, and are affected by, the other settings. The outermost circle is the macrosystem, the most subtle among the four, denoting those ideal 'blueprints'—such as attitudes, ideologies, customs, and laws of a nation—for the organization and content of each setting represented by the inner levels.[9] Bronfenbrenner eventually integrated into the model the relationships of environmental changes over a person's life course, called the chronosystem.[10] This model organizes well the multiple direct and indirect settings and agents that intermix and combine to influence an individual's development.

Appropriating the basic structure of the Ecological Model, I map on those particular factors that are significant to heritage Muslims as they make their religion a central marker of their self-hood. This model, shown below, helps us to conceptualize the multiplicity of crucial forces affecting Islamic identity formation while avoiding the pitfalls of over-focusing on the exegetical power of any single one. In this chapter, I discuss just the most prominent factors shown below, although most of the others also receive some attention due to their close inter-relationships.

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[9] Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979), 3-4, 7-8, 22, 25-26, 258; Robert S. Siegler et al., *How Children Develop* 3rd ed. (New York: Worth Publishers, 2006), 368.

[10] He integrated chronosystem in 1989, as cited by Glen H. Elder, Jr., "The Importance of Process," *Examining Lives in Context: Perspectives on the Ecology of Human Development*, ed. Phyllis Moen et al., (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 1995), 394.

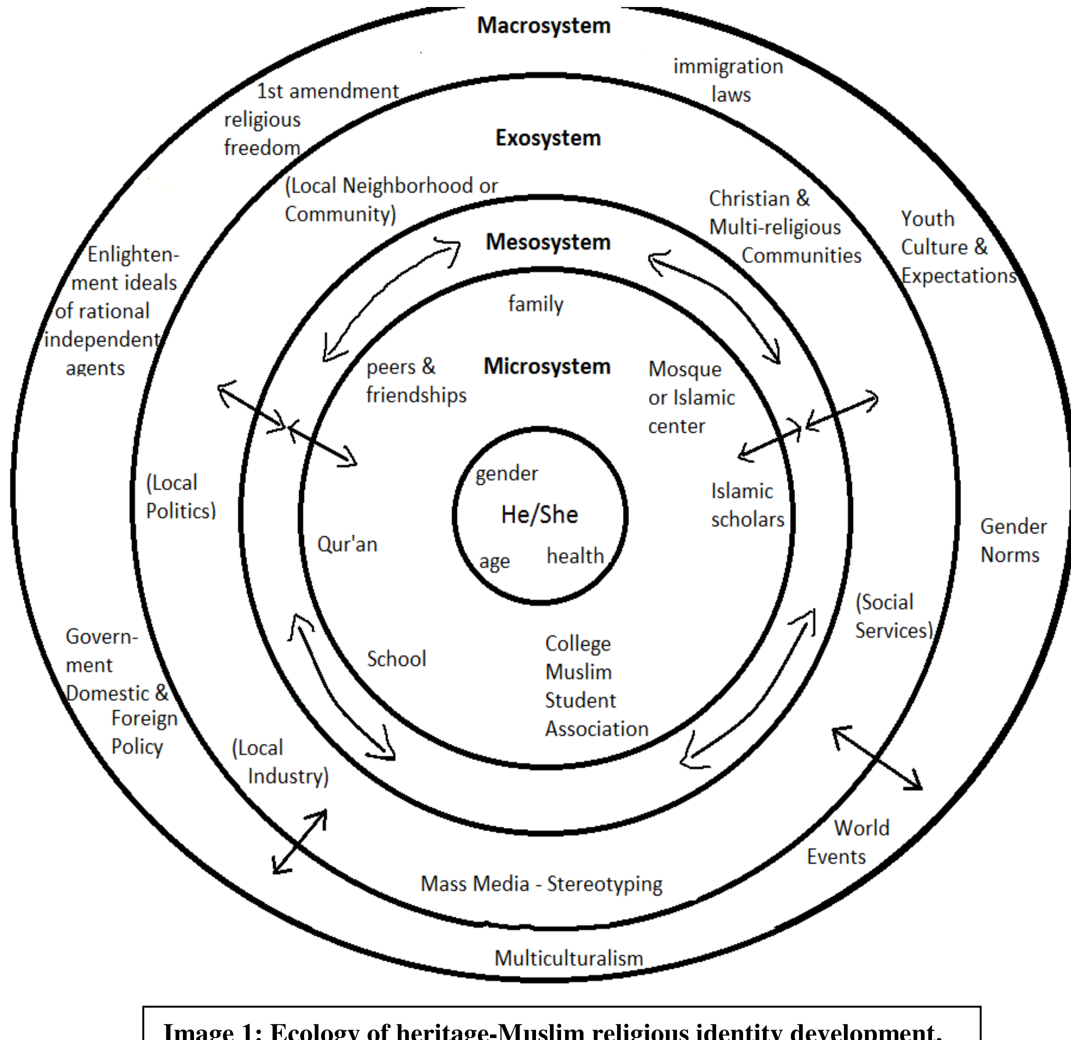

Image 1: Ecology of heritage-Muslim religious identity development, by Daniel Azim Pschaida

Microsystem 1: Family Relationships

My research uncovered that it is not just that their parents raised them in the religion that predicts these young adults to choose Islam but rather it is the close family relationships that are a defining feature of such an identity option. Family togetherness, collectivism, fellowship, close emotional relationships, loyalty, reciprocity and mutual responsibility are core value-practices for these young people's upbringing with parents from the Near East, North Africa, and South Asia, that are shared by other cultures of

East Asia and Latin America.[11] Transported to the American context, while the values of independence and autonomy may increase and fertility rates decrease as large families are no longer materially beneficial, close and emotionally interdependent relationships continue to be strong.[12] These cultural values are reinforced by statements in the Qur'an and Hadith that make marriage and family life equivalent to acts of piety.[13]

The survey of "Young Adult Muslim Americans" that I conducted in May and June 2014, received 150 responses, with 72% answering that family was one of the "most central THREE influences on choosing Islam to be a big part of my life." When looking at this exclusively from the perspective of those who indicated that they were heritage Muslims, this number climbed to 77.8%. When considering only young women heritage Muslims, this number climbed further to 85.4%. While acknowledging the limited confidence for generalities that this relatively small sample size can provide, this last statistic indicates that, while family influences are crucial to both genders, there may be more socio-cultural pressures on young men, than on young women, to define themselves in ways of individuation from their parents.

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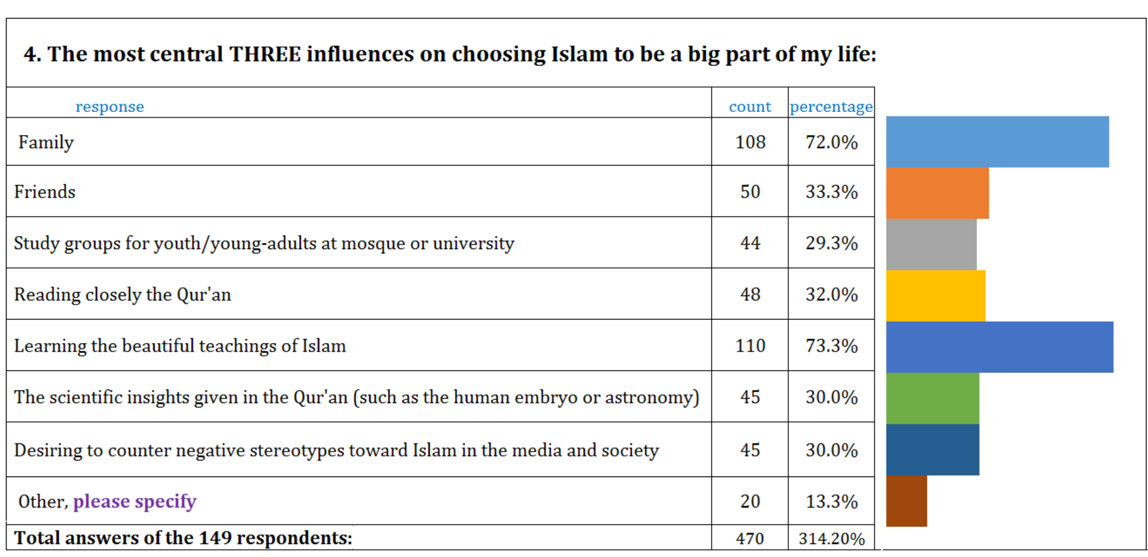
[11] Generally speaking, these qualities persist as values for non-recent-immigrant Americans but are often tempered or softened by the at-least equally emphasized values of independence, self-reliance, self-expression, and industriousness.

[12] Boris Mayer et al., "Family models of independence/interdependence and their intergenerationaI similarity in Germany, Turkey, and India," *Family Science* 3 (2012): 65-66, 69-70, 72. While the above study discusses these dynamics in Turkish and Indian families, the below study includes among its discussion individual chapters on Algerian, Indian, Indonesian, Iranian, Nigerian, Pakistani, and Saudi families, see *Families Across Cultures*, ed. James Georgas et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 250, 364, 376-7, 381, 426, 432-3, 441.

[13] Saleem Qureshi, "The Muslim Family: the Scriptural Framework," *Muslim Families in North America*, ed. Earle H. Waugh et al. (Edmonton, Alberta: University of Alberta Press, 1991), 34-35, 38-39, 53-54.



4. The most central THREE influences on choosing Islam to be a big part of my life:

response	count	percentage
Family	108	72.0%
Friends	50	33.3%
Study groups for youth/young-adults at mosque or university	44	29.3%
Reading closely the Qur'an	48	32.0%
Learning the beautiful teachings of Islam	110	73.3%
The scientific insights given in the Qur'an (such as the human embryo or astronomy)	45	30.0%
Desiring to counter negative stereotypes toward Islam in the media and society	45	30.0%
Other, please specify	20	13.3%
Total answers of the 149 respondents:	470	314.20%

Table 4: June 2014 survey, influences to identifying with Islam, by Daniel Azim Pschaida

The narratives students gave in interviews offer further insight into the significance of family relationships in Islamic identity formation. When I asked them what factors led them to make Islam an important facet of their adult identity, over forty of the seventy-eight highlighted their family experience, while for most others it was a more implicit part of their narratives. Many even referred frequently back to their family in answering other interview questions that did not ask about their upbringing.

In many of their families some elders were more religious than others, but most interviewees grew up in a milieu in which praying regularly, fasting during Ramadan, reading the Qur'an, telling stories of the prophets, and not dating or drinking alcohol were prominent family practices. The following six are fairly representative, three young men and three young women, of South Asian, Southwest Asian,[14] and North African heritages:

[14] I will often replace the more commonplace terms of Middle Eastern, Mid-Eastern, or Near Eastern with the more precise, and less Euro-centric, "Southwest Asian" to denote this Southwest region of Asia.

Bahaaj: "My Dad growing up, has been a pretty religious guy, he made sure we did the requirements, prayed five times a-day, fasted during Ramadan, kept the values of Islam – to be peaceful with one another, to care for one another and to make sure the person next to you is okay before you are…"
Farzam: "I was raised in a very traditional Muslim household; we pray regularly in the house, fast; my grandmother is very practicing and conservative. My Mom is on the board of [the] mosque; we had a Qur'an teacher through 11th grade who taught us how to recite it and to memorize it."
Nabeel: "…[I] pretty much have just experienced it as just there and it worked for me. I've always been around it and learned more about it and it makes sense for my life."
Layla: "I feel [me being Muslim] definitely has a lot to do with my parents; religion wasn't really passive in my family."
Shirin: "I was born into a Muslim family, and they taught us all the ideals of being a Muslim and the religious culture, and took us to classes and everything; but at the same time they taught us to explore more into our religion."
Qatara: "My older siblings have influenced me a lot and my Dad too…They influence me to go deeper into…my religion and understand more and always ask questions and don't always think that if someone tells you this is the way Islam is, to research it to see if they are telling the truth… My older siblings wore the hijab first and encouraged me to wear it too, so I started to in the third grade."

Many students mentioned praying and fasting with their family from when they were young, making such behavior a natural component of one's daily life. William, a pre-law major of mixed (African-American father and Indonesian mother) ethnic heritage, said:

> [I] started practicing since I was little; started fasting from age four or five, would fast half day. Mom was really strict with it and wanted me to understand the culture really well; then I started praying around the same time, learning the basic prayers, be able to stick with the solid foundation of praying, to the best of my ability, five times a day… Then we would do *Jumu'ah* prayer on Fridays…Since I've been raised in a Muslim family, it became more of a habit.

In this way, William's parents instilled in him the importance of prayer and fasting as practices of piety in and of themselves, while also essential facets of his family relationships, making it part of the pattern of individual and collective life. Now twenty-one years old, he does not often attend the Muslim Student Association, but nonetheless continues to fulfill his five prayers faithfully at the proper time, even when on campus.

Many interviewees' parents inculcated in them a close relationship with the Qur'an from a young age, teaching them to pronounce words correctly and to memorize short, then longer, chapters. Recitation of the Qur'an is among the paramount practices of

Islamic life, often compared to the centrality that veneration of Jesus holds for many evangelical Christians. Most interviewees had parents or grandparents who taught them how to correctly pronounce the Qur'anic chapters (*surah*s), recited to fulfill one's daily prayers. Some parents would bring into their homes accomplished Qur'an memorizers to teach their children, like Farzam quoted above. Likewise, Tana's grandparents hired an *imam* to come over each week to teach her the Qur'an and other books on Islam. Khadija also learned to memorize the Qur'an at home and at Sunday school, eventually mastering the entire holy book. Hamza's Dad would teach his children the Qur'an and Hamza competed with his younger brothers in memorizing chapters. Na'il's mother is a *ḥāfiẓ* [having memorized the entirety of the Qur'an] who taught him from his youngest years to recite and memorize the Qur'an. Now he studies the holy book weekly in a small group with a *shaykh* at an Islamic center and also helps teach it as part of MSA programming.

As children the interviewees may have heard bedtime stories about fairies, unicorns, or talking bears, yet it was stories about the doings of prophets—taken from diverse Islamic sources—that they breathed in as naturally as air in their upbringing. Reem, a global studies major whose parents are Palestinian, said: "I think it begins when you're a child, when your parents are teaching you, they tell you stories, they tell you about the book, they tell you about the prophet, they talk about how merciful God is, the connection to God and the beauty." It was through such stories that they learned of the intimate role God plays in the lives of His followers.[15] They also learned the morals their

[15] There are a growing number of resources produced by Islamic organizations and businesses to help families socialize their children in Islam, Yvonne Yabeck Haddad et. al, *Muslim Women in America: The Challenge of Islamic Identity Today* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 82.

parents wanted to sow in their children, such as the patience and forbearance of the prophet Muhammad when he was made fun of and attacked by his ill-wishers; or his special considerations for those who were sincere in reforming their lives or for someone who balanced prayer with perseverant hard work to provide for his family.

Through these stories parents cultivated their children in those morals and values that they most idealized. Bahaaj, quoted above, speaks of the peacefulness and caring for others that his father strove to always instill in him through stories and teachings of Islam. Sana, a media studies major and MSA officer, said, “My parents were not very strict, if I had a question they explained a lot, they allowed me to be myself but said you are Muslim so you know what is right and wrong, but trusted us to do that when we left home.” Likewise, their distinctiveness as a family and devotion to certain values was highlighted when their parents forbade many activities typical of their peers. Safi, a business marketing major whose parents are Palestinian, said: “our parents weren't that assertive with the religion, wouldn't force me to pray or go to the mosque; but can't eat pork, shouldn't drink alcohol, don't have a girl-friend.”

For some students it was also the great adversities their family had experienced that stimulated them to turn to religion and rely more on God. Just before entering university, two of my young interviewees’ fathers died unexpectedly. One of them, Husayn, in a very heartfelt account of his journey deeper into Islam, reported himself to be rather “lazy and just into video games” as a teenager. But when his father died, he sought comfort in

listening to Qur'anic verses that speak of the peacefulness of the afterlife.[16] He says that since then he has become much more focused on schoolwork and active service to his religious community. Likewise, Halala's mother was in a very serious car accident just before she entered college. A biology major who is active in student government, Halala said that her parents had always taught their children the religion in a very loving and caring way; however she feels she would not often make it a priority. But as soon as she learned what happened to her Mother, "I was just thinking, 'how am I going to get through this?' so I went back to needing God, felt can't do this on my own… [The] minute my Dad told me, I said, 'oh my God'; and was like, 'is she going to be okay?' and praying to God that she was going to be okay…" For each of these three, the precious relationships they have with their family and religion was viscerally heightened with the sudden realization of the transience of those parents presence in their lives.

However, some parents were hesitant and fearful of the backlash of living in an environment of Islamophobia, and so they encouraged Islam as a home practice but not something to be actively advertised in public spaces. Omeed of Indian heritage said:

> I had no identity mix up till like 9/11, stuff popped up about my religion perceived to be different by others; I live my life being low key about things; if someone asks, I'm willing to let them know about my religion; but other than that I keep things confidential; parents encourage me [to do that], seeing what happens to other people when they express their religious beliefs; they don't want to see pain or extreme interrogation; they're concerned about me, to not catch people off guard… My family is pretty laid back about these things…but we fast and pray five times a day, we try to eat *halal*, do our best to keep in close contact with our community, stay intertwined, have more Muslims friends, have a problem can aid them…

Likewise, when Rohana, who emigrated from Iraq with her family as a teenager, became more interested in Islam after attending a large conference called *Reviving the Islamic*

[16] Qur'an 36:57-58: "They will have all kinds of fruit and they will receive whatever they ask for; they will be greeted with a word from the Merciful Lord: '*Salaam* (Peace)'."

Spirit, her parents "were scared… [They] had this idea that practicing Islam in U.S. might be dangerous." It is such fears of a backlash from which some parents strongly oppose their daughters from wearing the headscarf. These concerns seem valid, as more than twelve years after 9/11, physical attacks on *ḥijābīs* sometimes still occur.[17]

Not all young adults grew up in homes where both parents were devoted practitioners of the faith's values and rituals. In more than a few cases, it was just the mother, while in others it was only one or both grandparents. A few others came from mixed religious households, with Catholic Christian mothers. Dawud, a biochemistry major who also enjoys acting in theater, told me that he followed in the footsteps of his father's lackluster practice of the faith until his sophomore year of college, when his involvement in the MSA led him to begin praying more regularly. Isra's father, a heritage Muslim himself but a fierce skeptic, actively challenges her interest in the faith of her grandmother, stepmother, and extended family. However, Isra now welcomes these challenges as solidifying her understanding of her chosen faith.[18]

In some families, acculturation in Islam worked both ways: parents training their children in the religion but also their youth's new-found passion for the religion enhancing the interest and practice of their parents.[19] Marjan, whose family is from Afghanistan, spoke about becoming serious about only eating *halal* meat three years ago.

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[17] Gail Paschall-Brown, "Florida girl attacked after wearing hijab to school," *Wesh.com Orlando*, February 4, 2014, http://www.wesh.com/news/central-florida/florida-girl-attacked-after-wearing-hijab-to-school/24271022#!8UQ6x (accessed July 5, 2014).
[18] These family anxieties and contentions are also noted in Nadine Naber, "Muslim First, Arab Second: A Strategic Politics of Race and Gender," *Muslim World* 95 (Oct. 2005): 486-487, 493.
[19] Denise Al-Johar, "Muslim Marriages in America: Reflecting New Identities," *The Muslim World* 95 (October 2005): 567; Lori Ann Peek, "The Identity of Crisis: Muslim Americans After September 11th" (Ph.D. diss., University of Colorado, 2005), 186.

She encouraged her mother to do the same, and now both of them are contemplating taking on the headscarf together in the future. Qatara's father encourages her to pray regularly and be involved in the MSA, while she encourages him to read the Qur'an with her younger brother.

Many interviewees asserted that despite being born into the faith, their parents encouraged them to explore the religion for themselves and ask questions. Many also believed their parents did not force a lot on them. Albeit, someone from a more liberal upbringing might regard being asked to pray and fast, not eat certain kinds of meat, or not being able to date or try alcohol, as being heavily disciplined. However, I did not trace any hints of dissimulation in these statements. They seemed to be honest assessments of their upbringing. At the same time, the fact that more than a few students made such comments suggests their expectation that other people might think they were brainwashed or forced by their parents to become Muslims; thus these students want to affirm that their religious identification is ultimately a matter of free choice.

An Islamic identity is organically developed for many of these youth that at one and the same time expresses and strengthens the family bond. This was eloquently enunciated by Zakir, a business major whose family is from Palestine and Jordan: "for me I would say my life revolves around my family, and as a family we revolve around pleasing God; so I work towards my family and as a family we work towards God; so if we accomplish it, I feel like we've achieved our purpose." However, this principle of the formation of the self as part and parcel to the family was most clearly explained by Farah, a psychology master degree student of South Asian heritage:

> I think I just knew [I am Muslim], as this is who my family was. There was no defining moment but a gradual understanding that we have our own culture and beliefs. When we are young we don't really make such distinctions. When little we don't see the self as anyone different as anyone else. Parents were my first teachers and taught us what it means to be Muslim…It was how they raised us, a gradual realization, that our family does things different. I think in many other families kids' own talents and interests are really encouraged to be pursued and developed. I didn't really see what mine was; we did things collectively, not about me developing a particular interest or skill, but rather we focused more on things as a family; we would camp as a family, not summer camp with my friends, we did things collectively. My identity formed within a family, we have an identity within the family, I am in relation to my family.

This dynamic of "I am in relation to my family" has been referred to as the "familial self" where close interactions with one's nuclear and extended family cultivates one's sense of personhood and spirituality. Hermansen and Mir (2006) argue that this emphasis on togetherness and "we" before "I" continues to play a major role for immigrant parents raising their children in this country. However, they also note that American cultural emphases on autonomy and individuality create tensions with these family ties and hence still impel youth towards identity struggles in early adulthood, which this chapter will further explore in the last three sections.[20]

Microsystem 2: Gathering of Muslims: mosques, Islamic schools, camps, and conferences

The parents who are part of this latest wave of immigration have a distinct advantage over earlier first generations because they do not have to rely completely on the home environment to cultivate Islamic values and practices in their children. Now they can actively summon the resources of Islamic institutions in their cities and regions of the

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[20] On "Familial self," see Alan Roland, *In Search of Self in India and Japan: Toward a Cross-Cultural Psychology* (Princeton University Press, 1988), 3-8; on its dynamics on heritage Muslim immigrant families, see Hermansen and Mir, "Identity Jihads": 424.

country to reinforce these ideals.[21] In Sunday schools at the mosque, Islamic private schools, summer and weekend camps, and regional or national conferences, these children and youth were able to learn more about their family's faith from scholars and teachers of Islam, while also forming close friendships with peers.

About a third of interviewees mentioned attending a mosque or Islamic center for religious classes on the weekend as important to their identity formation, and it sounded as though many more would have mentioned doing so if I had asked them directly about this. Halala, who is Palestinian-American and whose older brother was also very involved in Muslim communities, said, "I'm really involved in my *masjid*…I've been attending ever since I was a little kid, and went to the school there, then taught at the school for a while, and I've really been involved in the youth group at the *masjid*. I almost live [there]. I really enjoy being there and being in the community there." Hence, her experience growing up attending classes on Islam was so positive that once older she in turn took on the role of teacher of the younger generation.

Some students did not just attend a class once a week but attended an Islamic private school during their elementary years. These schools usually included a daily class on the Holy Book and Islamic teachings and stories:

> [Dawud:] I went to a religious school…[an] Islamic-school. I spent a big chunk of my life there. [Daniel:] do you feel like you got a strong religious education through this school? [Dawud:] I do believe they set a very strong foundation for me... They also gave me the freedom to explore my religion rather than hammering it into my brain, which is sometimes good and sometimes bad. [Daniel:] it wasn't shoved down your throat but they gave you a religious education? [Dawud:] the

[21] These families are considered part of a wave from 1968 to the present called "Differentiated Families," distinguished from the previous wave from Post World War II to 1967 called "Transitional Families," and those who came from the late 1800s to WWII called "Pioneer Families" or those African Muslims forced to the Americas by the Atlantic slave traders, see Sharon McIrvin Abu-Laban, "Family and Religion among Muslim Immigrants and Their Descendants," *Muslim Families in North America,* ed. Earle H. Waugh et al., (1991), 16, 25.

> fundamentals were shoved down my throat, but the extras weren't… They did show us how to pray, read the Quran, speak Arabic, how to act and things like that, but they didn't shove down, like for example, separating the room between boys and girls. [Daniel:] Would you have a daily religion class? [Dawud:] yes…and then basically we'd also have math, history, religion, science. [Daniel:] do you feel that's a big part that made you more connected to Islam? [Dawud:] It did actually because so my Mom is more religious and my Dad isn't. So if I just learned it from my family I don't think that I would have had an accurate description of it. My Dad didn't pray and my Mom prays religiously. So I believe that me being in this school environment helped me get a grasp on what it means to be a Muslim.

Thus, in Dawud's understanding of his life path, with only one parent practicing, having attended an Islamic school was a crucial extra factor in his socialization that has helped nudge him more towards his mother's example than his father's.

For others, it was in summer or weekend camps or youth development programs that they learned more about their faith in a systematic manner, while bonding with Muslim peers. Layla, who had finished her degree in creative writing and was then studying full-time at an Islamic institute in Texas, said, "I got to go to a lot of camps and conventions growing up, girls and guys who were my age; that really shaped my Islamic identity." Such summer camps sustained their importance during their teenage years and Na'il and Cantara, although from different ends of the state of California, both attended at different times the Muslim Youth Leadership Program, acknowledging its positive impact. This program, sponsored by the Council for American Islamic Relations (CAIR), takes youth and young adults to Sacramento, California to visit the state capital and learn how Californian Muslims can have an impact on informing public policy. Na'il said: "I was forced into it by mentors, but [it turned out to be] one of the best experiences I've ever had. I didn't find it important before this. There we could give our voices, voices as Muslims, but as Americans as well; don't be in a bubble because that's something

Muslims tend to do." He continued that it is important that we "hang out with non-Muslims as well" and "branch out to serve our communities."

At least ten students articulated that they had become interested as youth in attending conferences and study groups, outside of even those of the Muslim Student Association, by their own initiative or sometimes by invitation of a friend, instead of their families. Just before she entered UC Riverside, Indian-American Samira was pressured by her best friend to attend with her a late-night prayer session (called *qiyam* or *taraweeh*) at the mosque during Ramadan: "It was one of my favorite speakers, and—I don't know—something changed… It was a realization that maybe I should take this more seriously than I have been; just gain more knowledge on it… So I just kind of started learning more, reading more, gaining more Muslim friends, and relating on those aspects…" Samira's friend's encouragement and her attendance of this event gave her this feeling of *gravitas* that impelled a deeper engagement with the religion.

These narratives, cited above, also remind us of some of the complex ways that an Islamic identity formation occurs for these young people. While I isolate each crucial agent to explore its individual implications, these samples exemplify the constant close interactions between the diverse agents and factors within the ecology of socialization. Samira's friend brought her to a compelling talk on Islam sponsored by a local Muslim mosque. Rohana as a teenage immigrant to the United States was experiencing an identity crisis and feelings of dislocation when she learned a scholar from her country would be speaking at the *Reviving the Islamic Spirit* conference. Shirin's move toward Islam, reading the Qur'an and attending the mosque on her own, occurred when assaulted with

the realization, after a sudden betrayal of trust, that the peer-friendships that had been the center of her experience as a young adolescent were very precarious. Ikhlas's friends also disappointed her, as did her experiment with rebelliousness, and—feeling "like shit"—she decided to pursue a stronger relationship with God instead. Desiring to grow in her knowledge and faith, she negotiated with her parents to be able to attend a Muslim conference hosted by the Muslim American Society. This was part and parcel to a process of further individuation as she challenged her parents' wishes and their "cultural" practice of sheltering their daughters for the sake of family reputation.

At least four of the young men interviewed mentioned having committed to participating in a long-term study and discussion group called an *usra* that is part of a program of training and personal development of Muslims, founded and directed by the Muslim American Society (MAS). Hamza, a Somali-American who was preparing to study medicine, said:

> I also became involved in different Islamic organizations. And from what I hear in their lectures I feel more comfortable in my stance in the way I practice. Currently I'm in an *usra* once a week and read the Quran, talk about Hadith, or about today's Muslim community or different things. I feel like I'm part of it and part of the ideas that are in the community. So I feel affected and at the same time I'm learning a lot too.

The Muslim American Society, established in 1993, has been able to successfully replicate many of the elements of MSAs on college campuses. The *usra*s it forms have been able to engage participants and strengthen Islamic identity by regular study of Islam, meaningful contributions (service) to a community, and by providing a forum in which close bonds of friendship may be fused. Indeed, as further discussed below, numerous students called their MSA 'a family away from home' and this ideal is likewise purposely idealized in the very name of the MAS *usra*, which literally means "family" in Arabic.

One of the ways MAS upholds the integrity of a family bond is that the *usra* asks its participants to take the regular weekly attendance and homework very seriously, discouraging them from dropping-out, and not allowing individuals to enter a group after it has begun, needing to await a new *usra* instead. Just as individuals cannot easily drop in or out of a family, one is asked to have the same attitude of commitment to the *usra*.[22]

Microsystem 3: The Muslim Student Association

For most students interviewed, participation in the MSA is the single strongest factor that solidifies an Islamic identity during their college years, motivating them to 'choose Islam.'[23] At each University of California campus, thousands of students participate in clubs, associations, sororities, or fraternities. Although students sometimes experience rejection or become part of practices of exclusivity in these groups, research has shown campus student associations play crucial roles in addressing psycho-social needs of young people for meaning and self-identity, social bonding, self-empowerment, and socially significant action. Involvement in student organizations has salutary effects on academic achievement, clarifying values, improving critical thinking, enhancing self-esteem or self-concept, civic responsibility, and leadership skills, and it answers the need for belonging. Involvement connects students with others who share and affirm their

[22] "MAS Tarbiya: MAS Usra—A Program of Islamic Self-Development and Activism," Muslim American Society, http://www.mastarbiya.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=515:usra&catid=513:about-us&Itemid=820 (accessed 6 July 2014).
[23] Research has consistently shown "belonging to the MSA actually changed their view on Islam from a non-engaging part of their family heritage to a conscious, individual choice," see Garbi Schmidt, *Islam in Urban America: Sunni Muslims in Chicago* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004), 100.

values, interests, and commitments, and it also generates feelings that one matters and others depend on him/her.[24]

These student associations play important roles as support groups and as havens from experiences of racial, religious, or cultural marginalization or discrimination. This is especially important for the many African Americans, Latinos, Native Americans, East Asians and Pacific Islanders, Muslims, and Sikhs on college campuses. Cultural and religious groups, and the cultural centers on many campuses, provide places for celebrating their various histories and backgrounds. They are "counterspaces, a home away from home, and a haven in a hostile territory." They nurture engagement in social justice activism and form a bastion of political empowerment to voice their needs and secure representation in the social, cultural, and academic contexts of the campus. They are also hubs to receive and give academic mentorship and support as well as provide professional networking.[25] My interviews and participant observation shows that the MSA fulfills many of these functions for most participants and all of them for some, in ways that are in harmony with these young peoples' upbringing, and so the students are comfortable there. In this section, I will focus on the MSA's fulfillment of their psycho-social requirements to find belonging, to grow in the knowledge and practice of an

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[24] Terrell L. Strayhorn, *College Students' Sense of Belonging: A Key to Educational Success for All Students* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 106-107, 115.
[25] Jenny L. Small, "Engaging Religious and Faith Diversity in Multicultural Student Services," *Multicultural Student Services on Campus: Building Bridges, Re-visioning Community*, ed. Dafina Lazarus Stewart (Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing, 2011), 96-99, 102; *Cultural Centers in Higher Education: Perspectives on Identity; Theory; and Practice*, ed. Lori D. Patton (Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing, 2010), xiv, 11, 110-111.

emerging master identity, to develop leadership skills, and to contribute to or be a vital member of a community.

Students get involved in the Muslim Student Association to find friends of similar backgrounds and values. It is also a place where many hope to meet, or get introduced to, a potential marriage partner from similar cultures and the same religion—a partner of whom their parents might approve. As new students at the university they are excited by the new-freedom college-life offers them but at the same time they anxious about possibly becoming absorbed into facets of campus social culture that are contrary to the values with which they were raised. Ikhlas, a Lebanese-American, said, “I wanted to stay in connection with my faith.” Hakeem, who is Syrian-American, said that going to college he was looking for a close group of friends but didn’t “want the drinking and objectifying of women associated with a frat.” MSA is “good clean fun,” he said. “It keeps me away from the wrong things, and at the same time it gives me a sense of identity and joy and friendship, brotherhood.”

MSA leaders emphasize its role in protecting against and negotiating the many negative temptations of college life. A beginning of the year role-play video created by the UC Riverside MSA and an end-of-the-year banquet video created by the CSU San Bernardino MSA both depicted the dangers of college party culture, highlighting the centrality of alcohol. The latter MSA depicted that involvement in such a party culture also damages family relationships. Many students see the MSA in terms of a *halal* (kosher) fraternity or sorority that they can participate in comfortably, free from drug use and excessive promiscuity. A member of the Riverside City College MSA even said this

outright in a group interview: “We’re like a fraternity or sorority” and have a “safe” community environment in college.

Indeed, terms of “brotherhood” and “sisterhood” were among the first features voiced by almost every student I interviewed in answering what they appreciated about the Muslim Student Association. They experience the MSA as a surrogate “family,” many using that exact word in their descriptions. Marjan said that her first week at UC Riverside was the first time she had been away from home for a long period and she “cried [her] eyes out.” But then her good friend who was a senior “dragged” her to an MSA meeting: “Looking back I'm so grateful to her…for bringing me here, for meeting all these girls, honestly, yeah, it's like family now, sisters, I don't have sisters, I'm just like, I have all these sisters now.” She said she feels “[MSA is] like my home away from home,” and it seems to have truly filled this void of close family relationships that going away to college brought upon these young people.

The students described this family as having the characteristics of support, care, understanding, helpfulness, dependability, and fun. Qatara said, “They give me a lot of advice to take this class or not take this class... The MSA is a big support group.” Radi reported, “They’ve really helped me out and supported me when I went through tough times, such as with school.” Likewise, Nuri stated he appreciated that “MSA is like a family” and you “know that everybody’s got your back, you really feel that, you go through a tough time, everybody wants to make sure you’re doing okay.” Omeed said he found in the MSA “life-long friends” who, although of different ethnicities, had a “similar way of being brought up” and the “same kind of morals.” Indeed, a number of

students claimed, that unlike their parents' generation who often stick with people of their own nationalistic background, their friendships are across ethnic, racial, and sectarian lines and extend the values of their upbringing. Omeed said these friends both help you out when you need it and "call you out" if you say or do something wrong.

Also, finding that the Muslim Student Association has members of a variety of "levels" of faith comes as a breath of fresh air for many new members who feel ambivalent about their Islamic heritage or who have a liberal stance. On the other hand, numerous heritage Muslims seem to be like Tana who, although she was regularly tutored in Islam during her childhood in India, believing she would be seen as very ignorant compared to the others who are "more on top of things," never got involved in the MSA. Omeed, also Indian-American, was able to give MSA a chance to get past this stereotype: "I found that the MSA isn't as conservative as I imagined; thought of the MSA as a group of radical people to condemn other people for doing wrong things; but the more I get to know them, find they are accepting people." Nuri, an Egyptian-American psychology major, said that these stereotypes of MSA as zealous, conservative, and judgmental are the opposite of what the purpose of MSA is: to not be a private club for perfect Muslims but a place to support each other to keep strengthening one's faith.

With such presumptions hovering around MSA, Samira expressed appreciation that what she found was actually a diverse club, where she was able to find friends with a similar religious "level" and style or approach to her own:

> MSA is a very diverse club...different backgrounds, different religious levels; and it's very possible for each person to find a friend who is on their level. Because, personally, I'm not someone who will relate to a super extreme person; I'm a moderate, I think I'm a balanced (chuckle), individual; so I like dealing with people that are moderate and open-minded, as well,

> and MSA helped me find those people, where I can relate to them on multiple levels and I can also learn from them and vice versa…

Some students look for friends who can really challenge and mentor them to be better Muslims, while others, like Samira, look for supportive buddies who can empathetically relate what they are going through in their Islamic identity and work through the same kind of issues simultaneously.

Indeed, numerous students voiced getting involved in the MSA to grow in their faith by increasing their knowledge and practice of the religion. While most students appreciated the weekly talks and study groups led by Islamic scholars and knowledgeable peers on campus, for some students this was their principal interest. Ikhlas said:

> MSA became very important to me, I clung to it, because they brought Islamic speakers…I knew that when I went to MSA it was social [for so many of us], but I tried not to make it a social thing; I'd notice people on their phones during the lectures and get annoyed by that. They are spitting gold at you and you're not paying attention; I went just for Islamic knowledge. MSA was very important for me to have that as a base to stay in connection with faith.

Likewise, Hakeem said he went to college knowing just the basics of Islam; but now his parents are "really happy in terms of [his] progress in knowledge," such as his new abilities to quote *ḥadīth* or verses from the Qur'an" relevant to various issues. Not being someone inclined to spend a lot of time at the mosque or listening to lectures online, the campus talks have been his chief fountain of learning, and he says he has been "inspired" by friends' examples to continue enhancing his knowledge and practice.

Participation in the Muslim Student Association has endowed them with confidence in a public Islamic identity as a young adult. Having a group of peers who are also practicing Islam in the university setting has made them comfortable to do the same. For example, Cantara—an Egyptian-American who grew up in Northern California—said

that being one of the only Muslims she knew of in her high school, she “wouldn’t find a place to pray” on that campus; she was intimidated to put such atypical behaviors on display to her non-Muslim peers. Once on the campus of her university, “others are doing the same, other people who also want to pray…now I’m not the only one; [here’s a] patch of grass, guys, let’s go pray.” For Shirin, being able to stop for an hour between classes for MSA organized studies on the Qur’an or the Hadith helped make Islamic knowledge part of her general university study. For Hamza, getting to hear on-campus lectures made him “feel more comfortable in my stance in the way I practice.”

Besides the general MSA meeting, in most of the campuses where I engaged in participant observation, the Muslim students—mostly MSA members—had fashioned spaces of their own (usually within the campus student cultural center). These spaces were devoted to Muslim fellowship, study, and ritual practice, in other words, providing an Islamic *habitus*.[26] A number of students separately used the phrase “keep you in check” to talk about the impact such spaces had on others and themselves. One student explained that these spaces of friends “remind you of what you should be doing and what you should be aiming for.” Connecting with others on an Islamic and a friendship levels of mutual interests occurs almost simultaneously as students fluidly moved between talking about sports, classes, courting processes and marriage, Muslim community life dynamics, and Islamic teachings. In such conversations they organically infuse their language with Arabic expressions that reflect central religious concepts, a phenomenon

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[26] Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 72.

Garbi Schmidt calls Islamic American English.[27] Peppering their language with phrases such as *in sha' allah* [if God wills], *Alhamdulillah* [praised by God], or *jazak allah khayr* [May God give you a goodly reward] reinforces Islamic ideology that God's will, good-pleasure, and blessings are the only thing that really matter, and this encourages novices of those spaces (including me) to adopt the same expressions.

A former MSA officer, Bayan, explained to me, in different words, that creating spaces to acculturate novice members in their *habitus* was a deliberate strategy by campus Muslim leaders. If a participant in the MSA, or other Muslim spaces, was noticed to have what were deemed to be un-Islamic behaviors, the standard strategy was not to confront or correct him/her, but to target that person as a new close friend. MSA leaders invite him/her to spend time with them on and off campus, in formal meetings and informal "hang-out", thus progressively bringing the novices into harmony with the group's practices. This process is one of 'encapsulation' where the novice is immersed in a new religious form of life through building close emotional bonds and enacting together ritualistic practices. Through the rhetoric of the conversations the novice also begins to integrate the ideological perspective of the group as his/her own, and the leaders give the mentee special roles to fulfill for the MSA so as to endow him/her with a sense of a special, shared mission.[28]

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[27] Garbi Schmidt, *American Medina: A Study of the Sunni Muslim Immigrant Communities in Chicago* (Lund, Sweden: University of Lund, 1998), 252, and Schmidt, *Islam in Urban America: Sunni Muslims in Chicago* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004), 104; Karen Isaksen Leonard, *Muslims in the United States: The State of Research* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2003), 55.
[28] Lewis R. Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 107-8.

For example, Adam, an Indian-American political science major, recalls being invited to become roommates with some new friends who were leaders of MSA. Their apartment itself become a place where they could comfortably pray alone or together and talk with "Islamic English" often on topics of their shared faith. He said that learning more about Islam and having fun seemed seamlessly woven together. When seeing a movie together at the theaters, if prayer time came, they would quietly get up and fulfill their religious duty in a corner of the theater or lobby. He also mentioned praying in the parking lot outside a restaurant where they had dinner. These groups of friends, hence, transfer and inscribe an idealized Islamic habitus into new geographical spaces within and outside the college campus.

Described above by Bayan and Adam, these may also be regarded as "communities of practice," in which experts have grounded a common set of symbolic practices that guide interactions and activities. Novices gain capital as fellow leaders, moving from the periphery of the group toward the center the more that they legitimate themselves by adopting the habits of the experts.[29] Qatara said: "The MSA is a big support group here and just seeing my peers being so involved in our religion...just kind of motivates me to feel the same." While I have no reason to doubt the sincerity of students who have told me that becoming stronger in their faith or taking on religious symbols such as the headscarf was by their own "choice," in the following anecdote we can note how taking

[29] Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger, *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 29; Etienne Wenger, *Communities of Practice: learning, meaning, and identity* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 100-101; Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, 180-181; Terry Rey, *Bourdieu on Religion: Imposing Faith and Legitimacy* (London: Equinox, 2007), 42, 94-95.

on the modes and habits of the leaders of an Islamic community of practice is, nevertheless, not always fully intentional or carefully deliberated.

> I felt nervous that I wouldn't fit in or find a husband [if I adopted the headscarf]. After talking to girls in the MSA one night I was just like, I'll do it and put it on, even though I never do things like that, but I did… It was the day before and we were fasting the night before… Me and some of the girls, one of them had the scarf on and the other one didn't; and we were just talking and I said that I wanted to put it on, and [it was] me and another girl who hadn't put it on, and we decided to put it on. It happened on a whim, it wasn't like something I planned. It was literally on a whim.

This is a particularly apt example of the general thesis of this chapter, the inextricable connections between factors. Her father served as a leader of a nearby Islamic community and it was important that his daughter exemplify basic Islamic norms so as to not undermine his religious legitimacy. Hence donning it "on a whim" occurred as a combination of desiring to honor her father's wishes, solidifying important new relationships with young adult Muslim peers, and her perception of the practice itself as pious.

In identifying and socializing novice MSA members through friendships, the mentors do not just strive to cultivate stronger Muslims in general but also future MSA leaders in particular. Several MSA presidents I spoke with explained a process in which they were being groomed from their freshman or sophomore year as MSA leaders and then, once officers, he or she and other MSA board members targeted new members who seemed to have a lot of potential. In the words of one president:

> The leadership just tries to be as among the members as possible getting to know them, inviting them to their houses and having fun with them... Because it's important for the leadership to feel connected to the members and the members to feel certain closeness to them, because that's how I became more involved when I started hanging around the presidents. [In our MSA] all the presidents since five or six years ago or even seven are all best friends to this day.

Often invited to become roommates with these mature MSA members and having fellowship with them, they become collaborators in planning, organizing, and

implementing various Islamic events. In this way they gradually move toward being able to handle larger and larger roles within the MSA. MSA presidents or vice-presidents usually have served previously in other roles such as 'sister's chair', treasurer, or public relations.[30] Becoming leaders of the Muslim campus association and constructing a sense of self occurs hand-in-hand as many went from being 'on the periphery' of an Islamic identity to after graduating continuing to be very involved with local Muslim communities and institutions, including campus MSAs.

Whether holding official leadership positions or not, for many, MSA is also a forum in which they are able to develop an Islamic identity embedded in *service* to their Muslim campus community. Shirin said: "it was nice to be very active with the *da'wa* table" (providing information on Islam at a free speech area on campus). Sana really appreciated the camaraderie in service. She said: [MSA is] "my outlet to giving back to the community… I like working with others…have the same goals and trying to help out the members that are attending." Likewise, Nuri said: "I see stuff around me every day, I just want to help out, and I saw that MSA is like, it fosters itself around helping others." Cantara, an outgoing president of an MSA, said that a central purpose of MSA is to develop better Muslims, not just through lectures, studies, and staying ethically buttressed in an Islamic environment but "through community service for the sake of God."

[30] Most MSAs elect their leaders through a two-stage voting process of nominations for board roles, then elections. We should also note that does not mean that the next president is just a clone of oneself. As another out-going MSA president pointed out, although this "grooming" process exists to varying degrees and dynamics in each MSA, "you can kind-of tell who is really dedicated to the organization" and those people often happen to be close friends with other MSA leaders. Depending on the formality or informality of the president, their conservativeness or liberality, the MSA takes on a distinct feel each year that reflects that leader's persona, style, and posture towards Islam and authority, in many ways.

Microsystem 4: Friendships Elsewhere

Finding a close group of Muslim friends is crucial to the solidification of an Islamic identity during those college years. Such an "ideologically compatible social group" gives a feeling of belonging, "anchored in the strength of worthy and grounding meanings."[31] One-third of all students answering question four of the survey (above) marked "Friends" as an important influence in forming an Islamic identity. This was the third most frequently marked factor, after "learning the beautiful teachings of Islam" (73.3%) and "Family" (72%). However, not all students find Muslim friends through the MSA itself. We do not yet have precise demographic information but anecdotal observations claim that on average only five to ten percent of all students of Islamic heritage on a campus participate to some degree in the Muslim Student Association.[32] While a large amount of heritage-Muslims who do not participate in the MSA prioritize exploring other identities through their vocational pursuits and/or other clubs, many of these non-participants still find close friendships with heritage-Muslims through other networks on the college campus that are critical to Islamic identity maintenance and strengthening. Qatara, for example, found that when she lived with non-Muslims her first year at college, although they were kind and respectful of her religion, she found herself often not saying her prayers on time or that she was missing some of them altogether. As,

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[31] Sharon Parks, *The Critical Years: the Young Adult Search for a Faith to Live By* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1986), 90-91.
[32] Garbi Schmidt, "Dialectics of Authenticity: Examples of Ethnification of Islam Among Young Muslims in Sweden and the United States," *The Muslim World* 92 (Spring 2002): 2.

praying was important to her, she soon moved out to live with fellow Muslim young women she had met. She says, now "I pray on time."

Qatara started to live in an apartment with two other Muslim women and their neighbors downstairs were also Muslima students. Some of them had had a negative experience in the Muslim Student Association, and they formed an alternate small family in which they prayed together, fasted together during Ramadan, cooked *halal* foods together, freely talked and shared, supported each other, joked around and had fun together.[33] Halala said that such friendships help her to feel more "determined" in an Islamic identity and practice when one is faced with stereotypes against the religion or dirty looks from strangers for wearing the hijab. Rafeeq, an Indian-American computer science major who identified as a "geek," explained that with Islam being such "a communal religion", it was crucial to find a good group of brothers [or sisters] who are very welcoming and accepting, allowing oneself to be comfortable to just be oneself, and who encourage one to uphold the religion but without too much pressure.

An Exosystem: *Resisting* Media Stereotyping and Islamophobia

Although most of the young people of this study were just in elementary school during that fateful day of September Eleven, its long shadow has followed them through childhood and youth, forcing upon them an Islamic identity often years before they could process such a marker of selfhood as a "choice." With Arabic or common Muslim names, or even wearing explicit symbols of the religion such as the *ḥijāb* from a young

[33] This group in which Qatara often participates was highlighted in Episode 3 of the Introduction chapter.

age, peers and adults in their lives have assumed they are Muslim and treated them as such. In this dialogical authoring of self, a person could possibly negate that that is "me," but doing so ran the risk of showing shame for one's family and the religion. Hence, often the more viable option was to take on the vision of oneself of others.[34] While many reported that their classmates were quite respectful towards them and toward this religious marker, others narrated stories of a peer spitting on the headscarf, being called 'terrorist' or 'towel-head,' or being asked 'Is Osama bin Laden your uncle?'[35] Whether or not in their childhood and adolescent years they had yet formed a conscious passion for their religious heritage, they experienced such comments or acts as not just attacks on their religious heritage but on their family and their own persons. Hence, they actively take on and defend the identity ascribed to them that they experience as a three-fold entity (i.e. Islam, self, family) instead of shamefully trying to hide it. In other words, defending Islam becomes a cause of not just defending a religion that they find has unfairly received a bad-rap but a cause of defending oneself and one's family as well.

A number of students eloquently spoke of this environment of public scrutiny, which—as argued by Mir (2014)—the 2013 Boston Marathon bombing helped

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[34] Dorothy Holland et al., *Identity and Agency in Cultural Worlds* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 171-173; Shabana Mir, *Muslim American Women on Campus: Undergraduate Social Life and Identity* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 15.

[35] The heightening of an environment of negative sentiments toward Islam post-9/11 has been well-document, see Mohamed Nimer, "Islamophobia and Anti-Americanism: Measurements, Dynamics, and Consequences," *Islamophobia: the Challenge of Pluralism in the 21st Century*, ed. John L. Esposito and Ibrahim Kalin (Oxford: Oxford University Press [Nook version], 2011), 115-118; Islamophobia: Understanding Anti-Muslim Sentiment in the West," Gallup World, http://www.gallup.com/poll/157082/islamophobia-understanding-anti-muslim-sentiment-west.aspx#2 (accessed 3 August 2014); "Unfavorable views of Jews and Muslims on the rise in Europe," Pew Research Global Attitudes Project, September 17, 2008, http://www.pewglobal.org/2008/09/17/chapter-1-views-of-religious-groups/ (accessed 3 August 2014).

perpetuate.[36] Zakir said, "Discrimination has really shaped how we are, how we speak and how everything we do is under public eye, whereas other kids don't have to worry about that; so I think that plays a big role in the Muslim community where discrimination really puts us on the spot all the time." For those who do not try to hide their Islamic heritage and just try to 'fit in', it pushes them quickly into what Lori Peeks calls a 'declared identity' where, as Zakir says, "[I] try to show them I'm different than the news depicts us." Living under this panoptic public gaze impelled many of my study to counter Islamophobic stereotypes by striving to act the opposite.

In the interviews, youth told me how they struggled to resist this stereotyping and demonstrate a positive and ethical image of Muslims. This positive image is that of the model citizen, striving to act in ways that are "helpful to the community" and caring of neighbors. [37] "We like to have fun, we're peaceful, we're a normal religion," pleaded another student. Shirin said, "Whenever I saw people I would smile at them to show them that I'm not that kind of stereotype that people see." A number of women explained that the environment of stereotypes motivates them further to show that Muslim women are not oppressed but empowered, assertive, well-educated and career-driven. Many of them take on the headscarf, in part, to become "a banner" (of this counter image) of Islam.[38] However, others experienced this not just as an opportunity to serve and proclaim Islam,

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[36] The two brothers who were suspected and/or convicted to be responsible were young adults, who had grown up partially in the United States, but who may have become attracted to a violent version of Islamic ideology, Mir, *Muslim American Women on Campus*, 15.

[37] I further explore this theme in chapter 2, section 6. Also see Garbi Schmidt, "Islamic identity formation among young Muslims: the case of Denmark, Sweden and the United States," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 41 (April 2004): 39-40.

[38] Also see chapter 3,

to struggle to shine good light on their religion for the sake of self-growth and pleasing God, but as a huge, tiresome burden. Cala expressed: "this country does have a big influence just because…there are stereotypes that I'm trying to break that are exhausting."[39]

Macrosystem 1: Islamophobia and *the Contradictory Politics of* Multiculturalism

Out of the civil rights movement and second wave feminism emerged the ethos of multiculturalism that presented an alternative option to much previous normative expectations of 'Americanization' and 'assimilation' for the new immigrant. This new ideal had so pervaded the discourse of our public institutions by the 1990s, foremost among them educational, that sociologist Nathan Glazer authoritatively entitled his 1997 book *We are all Multiculturalists Now*.[40] Multiculturalism has so pushed against the still strong assimilationist expectations that the public performance of one's particular ethnicity is now "not only acceptable, it is often chic."[41] Multiculturalism is not just a socio-political ideal to recognize and treat other peoples' cultures, especially the minority ones, as of equal value and worth as the dominant ones, but it is an imperative call to identify with and practice one's own ethnic heritage.

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[39] For similar discussion, see Shabana Mir, *Muslim American Women on Campus*, 8.

[40] Nathan Glazer, *We are All Multiculturalists Now* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 7-8, 13-14, 90-91. However, we should note that Glazer is in many ways critical of multiculturalism. Also see, Maykel Verkuyten, "Social Psychology and Multiculturalism," *Social and Personality Psychology Compass* 1 (2012): 282.

[41] Syed Ali, "Why Here, Why Now? Young Muslim Women Wearing Hijab," *The Muslim World* 95 (Oct. 2005): 522.

The message of multiculturalism is: One of the best ways you can be American is to be proud of your ethnicity, learn about it and perform facets of your cultural heritage. Samira embodies this ethic well when she expresses her annoyance for those fellow South Asian Americans whom she feels sacrifice too much to 'fit in': "I don't relate too well with Indian Americans, because they seem to be very whitewashed… I don't like it when people try so hard to ignore what they are." Indeed, multiculturalism fashions and demands self-authenticity—being 'true to your self'—in terms of cultural-heritage maintenance. Even Euro-Americans have hastened to retrace their English, German, Swedish, or Czech family roots.[42] This is even truer for the Muslim heritage students with non-Anglo names and non-white appearances, who report regularly being asked by fellow Americans, "Where are you from?" They soon learn they are not being asked the city or region of the United States they grew up in but which ancestral country, reflecting an acknowledgement of 'difference' that the questioner finds intriguing.[43]

Multiculturalism implies that an important way to be an American individual is to practice one's family's own culture, and that it is exciting to celebrate and learn about each other's differences.[44] Heritage Muslims pursue personal understanding of their family's religion as an act of American emphasis on youth individuality where they find

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[42] Sharmila Rudrappa, *Ethnic Routes to Becoming American: Indian Immigrants and the Cultures of Citizenship* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2004), 139, 144.
[43] This acknowledgement of difference, however, sometimes stirs feelings in these Muslims that although legally they are American citizens, socially they are seen as foreigners.
[44] "Although turning to Hinduism and seeking to maintain Indian culture and values are ways of resisting Americanization, they are also particularly American ways of making the transition from immigrant sojourners to ethnic Americans for the first generation, and of expressing individualism and taking their place "at the multicultural table" for the second." Prema A. Kurien, *A Place at the Multicultural Table: The Development of an American Hinduism* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2006), 9, also see 54-56.

their uniqueness in cultural performance. They also contrast this individuality to the perceived religious conformity of Muslim-majority countries, as reflected in this statement by Sana:

> I'm American Muslim… I feel like in Muslim countries it would be completely different, being surrounded by Muslims it would be hard for me to create my own identity, growing up here I was discovering myself while discovering Islam, I had the freedom to discover it as I wanted it.

However, with unashamed irony multiculturalism's byproducts are both unity and segmentation, both individualism and collectivism. One must immerse in the traditions and customs of one's family, a cultural society, and/or community to really become competent and practiced in one's ethnic heritage. However, this encapsulation largely severs the person from other social bonds. This ethos reinforces the already collectivist tendencies of the families of these youth to learn closely their heritage at the hands of parents and extended family, as well as movies and news media. Then as youth at university, they further this learning and perform their particular ethnicities, through participating in cultural clubs, such as Lebanese, Palestinian, or Pakistani student associations.

While many engage meaningfully in nationalistic culture clubs, others sense that, save going away to live in the homelands of their parents for many years, they will never gain mastery of the languages, customs, habits, and arts to become 'truly' Egyptian or Indian. Many of the second generation, told me that they lack confidence and agility in the linguistic, historical, and praxis nuances of the homelands of their parents and

grandparents.[45] In place of ethnicity or ancestral nationality, they find clear avenues to learn about and gain expertise in practicing the religious aspect of their cultural heritage.

Thus, these students were receptive to an ideal emphasized in twentieth-century Islamic revivalist movements, that their religion transcends national borders; it can be practiced as well in the United States as in any Muslim majority country. Religion then becomes that facet of one's ethnic heritage that is easily accessible to learn and show forth, the lynchpin of their multiculturalist practice. Religious pluralism becomes multiculturalism in practice. Instead of pursuing the foods, clothing, and dances of one's ethnic ancestry, one has the option to demonstrate the core values of one's culture which is often conceived to be best embodied in one's religion. In other words, in this multicultural pursuit of authenticity, for these youth being true to one's culture becomes equivalent to being devoted to the fundamental ideals of Islam. The same phenomenon also occurs for some Indian Americans who come to believe performing Indian-ness means performing 'Hindu-ness.' However, demands for authenticity often promote an essentialized, conservative or fundamentalist, and reified version of one's heritage culture or religion: interpreters who are most concrete and literalist are frequently deemed most grounded in the tradition.[46] Many of these young people, find claims to such authentic Islam, backed by practices of prayer rituals and gender divisions that are distinctive from the larger campus community, in the Muslim Student Association.[47] Nonetheless, a large

[45] Also see Garbi Schmidt, "Dialectics of Authenticity: Examples of Ethnification of Islam among Young Muslims in Sweden and the United States," *Muslim World* 92 (Spring 2002): 12.
[46] Peter Van Der Veer, "Transnational Religion: Hindu and Muslim Movements," *Global Networks* 2:2 (Dec. 2002): 101-102; Rudrappa *Ethnic Routes to Becoming American*, 137-139.
[47] I will elaborate more on these essentialized and conservative turns in later chapters. Also see the above article by Van Der Veer (2002), 102; and Marcia Hermansen, "How to Put the Genie Back in the Bottle?

minority of those interviewed simultaneously participate in national heritage student associations, although for some engaging with Students for Justice in Palestine became their second club due as much to the Islamic-based sacred geography of Jerusalem/Al-Quds as to a Palestinian heritage of some the activists.

Crucial to the experiences of the North African and Southwest and South Asian youth of my study is an underlying White-Protestant/Secular ethnic-centrism, disguised as simply 'The American Way', that continues as the standard of what is acceptable and what is backward, or even anti-American. This American Way's new macro-value of multiculturalism is comfortable with these young people celebrating falafel and Arab dance, *sari*s and curry or Bollywood dances, expressions of the regions of their cultural heritage. In fact, such things are valued on campuses as part of showcasing "cool difference."[48] However, the transformation of the European/American tradition of Orientalism into a full fledged Islamophobia is apprehensive of these students devotion to their religious tradition of Islam.[49] While multiculturalism encourages the pride and practice of their ethnic heritage, Islamophobia insists—but not Islam. Thus, these young adults experience the tension between these two impulses: celebrate your culture but give up the foreign intrusion of Islam.

"Identity" Islam and Muslim Youth Cultures in America," *Progressive Muslims: On Justice, Gender, and Pluralism* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2003).

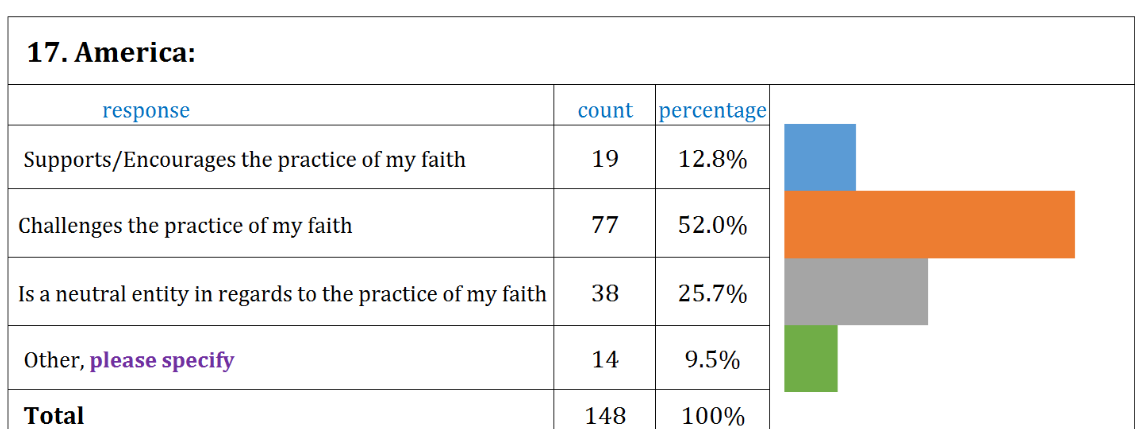
[48] Shabana Mir, *Muslim American Women on Campus*, 61.

[49] Mohamed Nimer says, "Fear is a natural emotional reaction whenever people feel danger" such as the terrorist acts of 9/11. "However, when such an emotion is expressed in a discriminatory action or in the form of rhetoric against a whole faith community or against persons because they are or appear to be Muslim, then natural fear will have morphed into Islamophobia." Mohamed Nimer, "Islamophobia and Anti-Americanism: Measurements, Dynamics, and Consequences," *Islamophobia* (2011), 118.

Yet, the Muslim young adults sense the contradiction and hypocrisy of these two opposing directives. They assert that Islam is at least just as worthy a multicultural choice as any other, and this becomes their predominant cause of social justice. Justifying Islam is made their preeminent mission of American civic activism. This is reflected in Shirin's statement:

> My family is from Palestine; but I was born here. No one can say then I'm not an American, 'cause I have citizenship, and I'm clearly an American. And also no one really is an American except for the Native Americans; but a lot of people don't know that, they think that if you're not white or if you're wearing the scarf then you're not an American. No! I have an American citizenship and I am an American and I will show that as an American I am a Muslim too and as a hijabi. People say that hijabis are walking *da'wa*s, because we're showing people that we're standing up for who we are, we're are also Americans.

In interviews, they cited that that which they appreciate most about America is the freedom to practice the religion of one's choice. However, in question seventeen of the June 2014 Survey 52% of respondents marked that America "challenges the practice of my faith." Among those who answered this question with "other", one said: "America is always trying to find ways to label all Muslims as terrorist rather than make the distinction between extremists and the rest of us who are just as "American" as the "Americans"." I posit that due to this intense experience of ostracizing that they do not want other non-Christian religious groups of this country to experience the same.



17. America:

response	count	percentage
Supports/Encourages the practice of my faith	19	12.8%
Challenges the practice of my faith	77	52.0%
Is a neutral entity in regards to the practice of my faith	38	25.7%
Other, **please specify**	14	9.5%
Total	148	100%

Table 5: June 2014 survey, America supports or challenges the practice of Islam, by Daniel Azim Pschaida

Therefore in question nineteen of the survey the majority answered they that they "envision America to be" a "multi-religious country" rather than just Christian, Abrahamic, or secular. Their jihad, or struggle, is for Islam to be accepted in this country, and by extension, other minority religions as well.[50]

Macrosystem 2: Individuation from Pop Youth Culture

'Becoming Muslim' is pursued as a legitimate alternative to the strategies utilized by popular youth culture for individuation. The participants of my study perceive themselves as nonconformist young adults, *rebelling* from the practices of many of their fellow American peers and partially from their parents' "cultural" norms (See end section). Thereby they individuate themselves as mature adults. While they perceive their contemporaries as striving to make themselves independent by disrespecting and/or doing 'their own thing' despite their parents' wishes, these second generation Muslim

[50] See chapter 4, page 316, for details of survey question 19.

Americans maintain and often even strengthen the relationships with their parents. In this context, many quoted the Islamic injunction to 'respect one's parents.'[51]

In the juxtaposition of Islamic ideals and perceived normativities of college campus culture, these young Muslims fuse an identity as holy people, set apart. While their peers affirm their maturity in part by pursuing new-found sexual freedoms in romantic relationships and/or 'hooking up,' many of the second generation Muslim Americans pride themselves on Islamic pieties of non-physical contact with the opposite sex. The Muslims consort with the other gender only for worthy purposes instead of flirtations, and they 'lower the gaze' instead of perceiving/objectifying the sexual attractiveness of others. While their peers perform adult status by consuming alcohol in parties and bars, young Muslim Americans affirm the dignity of having fun with their friends without mind-altering alcohol or drugs.

Individual Muslims on campuses, including those active within MSA, in actuality fulfill these expectations to varying degrees, along a continuum from those who strive to avoid completely even gazing at the opposite sex to those who do have a sexual relationship with a boyfriend or girlfriend, from those who will not join in any non-Muslim dominated social gathering to those who regularly drink and smoke marijuana with friends at parties. Maintaining such high standards is not easy in American colleges

[51] In fact, only one of the seventy-eight young adults interviewed recounted in their life narratives what might be considered a period of adolescent rebelliousness in the sense commonly seen among American peers. Otherwise, rebelliousness for this population, who generally had strong family relationships, meant some of the girls wanting to wear shorts or a few of the boys not wanting to pray. Goodness and kindness to parents is enjoined in man verses of the Qur'an [e.g. 17:23, 31:14, 46:15] and in a few *hadīth*s a harmonious relationships with parents is associated with attaining heaven or paradise, e.g. Kanzal 'Ummal vol. 46: "One who pleases his parents has verily pleased Allah."

where some friends may show sincere respect of their boundaries and distinctive mores, while others may feign cosmopolitan understanding while belittling conservative lifestyles as naïve, restrictive, and 'missing out.' Meanwhile, in both types of friends' circles dating, sex, stylish clothes, and alcohol, are normalized, natural, and central to campus life.[52] Music, television, and movies enhance the aura of these practices as being vital to a happy and fulfilled life. Some students worried that just insulating themselves from such off-campus activities would prevent them from developing important educational and professional relationships, and so they may choose to toe the line, striving to participate while still abstaining from the *harām* [forbidden]. Jai, a Bangladeshi-American majoring in business and accounting, said:

> If your social circle is just in MSA you get stuck in one bubble and lose other social circles. I was talking to a [fellow Muslim young] professional at a conference, and he said that even if you don't drink you still would want to go out and hang with your colleagues as these will be the people that will evaluate you. That can also be a floor for you to talk about your religion and influence somebody, and in Islam you're suppose to influence others for the better. On the Day of Judgment you will be asked, 'why didn't you tell your neighbor about Islam?' so it is an opportunity to spread the religion.

In this interview, his Muslim friend who accompanied him added that in making judgments about these dilemmas what is crucial is to be clear about one's own intentions as well as knowing what one can handle. A similar discussion arose in a UC Riverside MSA study circle about whether it is Islamically advisable to attend an upcoming campus music festival, most arguing that one should avoid altogether social contexts in which one would be tempted to compromise one's morals.

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[52] Shabana Mir, *Muslim American Women on Campus*, 47-48, 130-133.

Indeed, such challenges are central subjects of concern for these students. The abstinent and drug-free standard is idealized as the habitus of distinction and struggling to realize it is seen as among the preeminent *jihad*s of their college years. Distinctions between Muslims and the party-scene students are heavily emphasized in many videos produced by Muslim Student Associations that construct college as a time of crossroads between these two lifestyles. Their peers may interpret these young Muslims as prudish and "missing out" on adult freedoms that should be experienced as rites of passage into adulthood. The Muslim young adults pride themselves on the pieties of their distinctive practices which differentiate them from the popular American youth culture being practiced around them by many college classmates. Rather than seeing themselves as unfulfilled, they experience their Islamic-based nonconformity as affirming their status as independent, responsible, mature, and virtuous American adults.

An Exosystem meets a Macrosystem: A Multi-Religious America and Independent Thinking

These second generation Muslim American youth grow up in a multi-religious America, where peers are predominately Christian but also Hindu, Buddhist, Sikh, Jewish, or non-religious. They negotiate religiously plural social contexts, a phenomena heightened in California where much of Asian immigration has been concentrated over the last fifty years. Whereas in the United States as a whole about one in four individuals is not Christian, this ratio rises to about one in three individuals in California.[53]

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[53] Jeanne Batalova, "Asian Immigrants in the United States," Migration Information Source, http://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/asian-immigrants-united-states#6, last modified May 24, 2011; ""Nones" on the Rise," Pew Research: Religion and Public Life Project, last modified 9 October 9, 2012,

These youth also grow up under the influence of the European Enlightenment whose motto is to have the courage to use one's own powers of reason and understanding "without the guidance of another."[54] This Enlightenment genealogy manifests itself in American public schools where "critical thinking" instead of mere "rote memorization" is emphasized.[55] Within this context of independent thinking and religious plurality, students encounter peers of other religions and may be uncomfortable in presuming one's own religious heritage is superior. Rather, many Muslim American youth feel compelled to learn something about alternate religious paths, especially the ubiquitous Christianity, to justify their own religious upbringing.

Heritage Muslims interviewed, however, gave narratives of investigation into other religions that were mostly presented not as an existential drama but a quick and superficial glance at the others that helped confirm and give them more appreciation for Islam. Many of them were like Bahir who learned something about a form of Christianity through a friendship: "One of my friends is a Young Earth Creationist. He believes the earth is 6 thousand years old. I wanted to learn more about his views, but I found that his beliefs don't make any sense. It is just scientific fact that the fossils are

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http://www.pewforum.org/2012/10/09/nones-on-the-rise/; "Religious Landscape Survey," Pew Research: Religion and Public Life Project, http://religions.pewforum.org/maps (all accessed 15 July 2015)

[54] Immanuel Kant, "An Answer to the Question: "What is Enlightenment?"", Konigsburg, Prussia, 1784, unknown translator, https://web.cn.edu/kwheeler/documents/What_is_Enlightenment.pdf (accessed 15 July 2014).

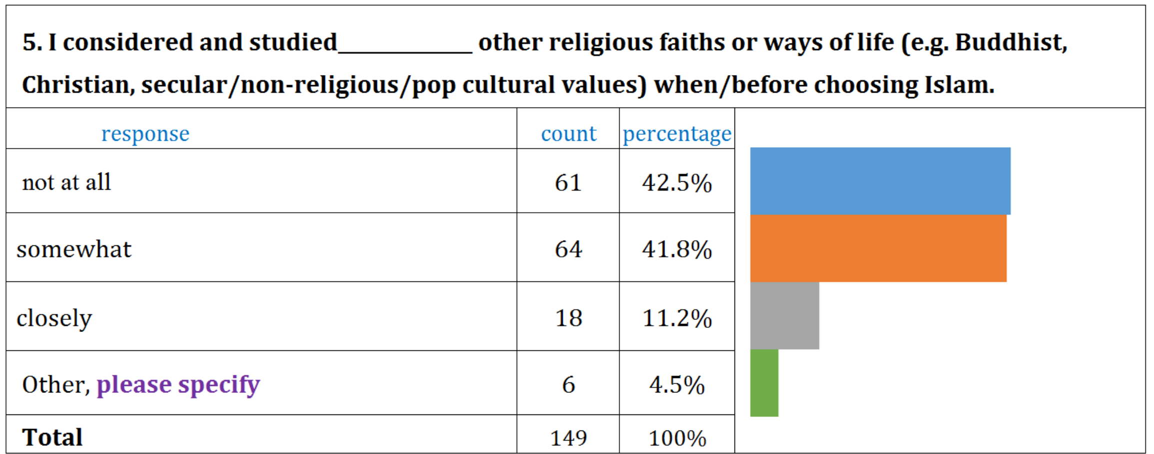
[55] However, in practice, critical thinking often gets secondary attention in the pressures of high-stakes standardized testing, "The National Council for Excellence in Critical Thinking," *The Critical Thinking Community*, https://www.criticalthinking.org/pages/the-national-council-for-excellence-in-critical-thinking/406/ (accessed July 15, 2014).

millions of years old." Identifying this contradiction, he was quickly able to dismiss his friend's [form of] Christianity.

About five students did describe a more intensive process of learning about other religions. They were proud of Islam's uncompromising monotheism from which they judged that Christians undermined the unity of God by the doctrine of the Trinity, Buddhists undermined it by venerating statues of the Buddha, and Hindus had multiple gods as well as statues. In addition, for some the popular Christian doctrine of Original Sin compromised the unity and perfection of God as it could mean that God had made a mistake in how He created human beings. A few students dismissed Judaism as being too closely tied to ethnicity. A student who studied Sikhism said it was an unhelpful burden and didn't make sense to have or carry all of their five articles of devotion: a bracelet, a dagger, special boxer-shorts, uncut hair, and a small wooden comb.

In all, it was only a minority of students who reported studying other religions beyond a brief familiarization with some facets of Christianity. They found Islam to be more "rational," and—while other religions had some truths—"Islam is most complete." In the survey report, when limited just to respondents who are heritage-Muslims, over 53% answered having "considered and studied…other religious faiths or ways of life" at least "somewhat." Nonetheless, my feeling is that, if interviewed, most of those who answered "somewhat" (41.8%) would give the typical very basic familiarity with just Christian doctrines of the Trinity or Original Sin, and would know very little of other religions. It

was more often those who were converts to Islam who narrated intense existential dramas of immersing themselves in multiple religions.



5. I considered and studied___________ other religious faiths or ways of life (e.g. Buddhist, Christian, secular/non-religious/pop cultural values) when/before choosing Islam.		
response	count	percentage
not at all	61	42.5%
somewhat	64	41.8%
closely	18	11.2%
Other, please specify	6	4.5%
Total	149	100%

Table 6: June 2014 survey, considering other religions, by Daniel Azim Pschaida

Despite having not yet undertaken an extensive independent investigation of religious alternatives, many students emphasized that their parents had encouraged them to "question" their religion to decide for his/her-self if Islam itself was his/her own choice. Previous scholarship has insightfully interpreted this language of Islam as their own "rational" "choice" to be a deliberate strategy to put themselves in line with Western ideals of autonomy and self-determination. They have been trained in the ideals of independent understanding and critical thinking, so "To state oneself by reference to aspects of tradition and collective lifestyles is mostly considered archaic, repressive and even undemocratic."[56] To call Islam their "choice" is to align themselves with a narrative of modernity and progress.[57] They admit that they were born into the faith but emphasize

[56] Garbi Schmidt, "Islamic identity formation among young Muslims" (April 2004), 34-35.
[57] Susanne Stadlbauer, "A Journey to a "Pure" Islam: Time, Space, and the Resignification of Ritual in post 9/11 faith testimonies of Muslim women," *Narrative Inquiry* 22:2 (2012), 349-350.

that they embarked on a journey to study Islam for themselves, crafting a narrative that justifies themselves as free, independent agents of their own lives and Islam as the ideal life-path of Enlightenment intelligence. Hence, while multiculturalism encourages them to celebrate their ethnic heritage, the Enlightenment ethos pushes them to clarify it was their own decision to embrace their ancestral religion.

Instead of Islam versus other religions, we can interpret the main choice as being between Islam and other aspects of college life. A large portion, perhaps the majority, of their heritage-Muslim counterparts focus their pursuits on non-Islamic-centered dynamics of college life. They may just prioritize their academic studies and career-paths. They may be very involved in service, cultural, or pre-professional clubs or associations, fraternities or sororities, music groups, sport or dance teams, and/or partying and dating; while not prioritizing time for regular prayer, attending the mosque, or reading the Qur'an. Many of those interviewed may also be involved in some of the aforementioned student groups and activities, yet Islamic ethics, rituals, and practices is one of their highest priorities or even their master identity status. In this respect we can affirm that Islam was indeed their choice.[58]

Islam vs. "culture": the multi-ethnic encounter

These young Muslims have developed a dichotomy between "Islam" and "culture" as a strategy to assert their own independent, authoritative, interpretations of the Islamic

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[58] Research still needs to be done on the particularities of the decision-making process for those who pursue other identity-paths during their college years than a focus on their Islamic heritage. Such studies will be important points of comparison with those who do make Islam important to their adult self.

faith.[59] Heritage Muslims encounter their own diverse national and ethnic backgrounds at summer camps, high school, and college clubs, and they realize differences in how they were raised and what each other's parents taught is 'Islam.' Lateefa, who grew up in an Arab country and moved to Southern California in her mid-teens, noted this: "I didn't really discover [this] until I came here and have mixed with Muslims from heritages from many different places and we each do things a little differently. It can throw things into confusion but it can also encourage you to look more into these things and see what the religion actually teaches about it." These young people further hear a range of teachers and scholars of the religion give lectures, citing Islamic textual sources to justify certain understandings of the religion. This has created a basic interpretive approach I heard in interviews, formal and informal gatherings alike, that if a practice is not justified in the Qur'an and Sunnah, then it should not be counted as Islamic; although if a cultural practice is not opposed to Islamic principles then it is permissible for Muslims.

Not infrequently, the speakers at Muslim Student Association events have an apologetic purpose, such as focusing on those teachings within the foundational texts that they see as empowering women and giving them rights. While relevant to both genders, giving them resources to counter Orientalist stereotypes of Islam, these lectures are

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[59] The employment of this dichotomy for interpretive independence has been discussed insightfully in the following works: Schmidt (April 2004), 37-38; Nadine Naber, "Muslim First, Arab Second" (2005): 479-495; R. Stephen Warner et al., "Islam is to Catholicism as Teflon Is to Velcro: Religion and Culture among Muslims and Latinas," *Sustaining Faith Traditions Race' Ethnicity' and Religion among the Latino and Asian American Second Generation*, ed. Carolyn Chen and Russell Jeung (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 46-68. For a highly critical analysis of the downside of this interpretive dichotomy when its fused with an exclusivist and fundamentalist orientation, see: Marcia Hermansen, "How to Put the Genie Back in the Bottle? "Identity" Islam and Muslim Youth Cultures in America," *Progressive Muslims* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2003).

particularly significant to the young women who accumulate discursive arsenal to negotiate spaces of autonomy and freedom from their parents. Many young women interviewed spoke of their parents giving their brothers a lot more independence to visit friends' homes, often late into the evenings, or to go further distances away to college, while the parents worried that a lack of regular supervision would put their daughters into compromising situations (i.e. her sexual chastity comes into question) that would embarrass the family reputation. Marjan said:

> …it's been a struggle but ever since college I've built trust with my parents and they trust me more, and I tell them I'm going to be with this person till so-and-so, and my brother has learned from me now, and he calls, 'we're here, we're there, we'll be home [at such a time], or we're spending the night here, and will that be okay?' And my parents like that now we're on the same level; which is way better than before because all my friends would come to me, never allowed to stay over, never allowed to go to someone else's house, always [my] place…

For young women like Marjan, learning more about Islam gives them the confidence to question the double-standard that they interpreted as a cultural practice.

Making this distinction between Islam and culture allows youth to individuate from their parents, making important choices about their own lives, on their own terms. Of the universities Reem found most desirable, she was only accepted into UC Riverside, which was far from home. Not wanting her to move out, they demanded she stay home, attend the local Cal State, and apply again the next year for the nearby UC. She argued:

> Islam doesn't define the man can go off to work or study and I can't; I have the right to pursue my education, education is called for in Islam, I have to pursue an education… there are certain verses in the Qur'an that talk about that, talks about women's rights and what we're allowed to do… They see it from a conservative point of view because they are very conservative Palestinians, culturally.

Likewise, when some parents limited their children's (sons included) marriage prospects to someone of the same nationality—or sometimes someone from the same village or

even a cousin—many of the second generation could argue that such parochial practices are counter to Islam's trans-ethnic spirit of brotherhood.

The young Muslims use this same trope of 'culture not Islam' to separate themselves from what they interpret as certain superstitious practices of their parental generation and thus affirm their own second-generation "rational" version of Islam. One young adult of South Asian heritage reported his parents writing out the Arabic word for the divine "Allah" in a special way with saffron and water to produce a talisman. Another reported her mother, upon coming from home from a trip out, ritually waving an egg around her head, breaking it, and throwing it away, meaning to counteract and purify from the negative energies or auras of others encountered in public. As a child, these practices were just accepted as what their families do, but then as young adults they challenge them as 'irrational' cultural practices that are not part of Islam. Warner et al. (2012) has calls this "Teflon Islam," where that which is perceived as unfair, restraining, unappealing, or contradictory is categorized as "culture" and can thus slide right off of "pure" Islam, easily purged of 'cultural' pollutions.[60]

The trope of "Islam vs. culture" gives this second generation a degree of interpretive independence that open spaces to negotiate with their parents on the choices they are making. At the same time the interpretive choices they are making are co-authored, bolstered, and restrained by the valuable new relationships they are making with fellow young adult Muslims at university, study groups, and Islamic-based organizations,

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[60] R. Stephen Warner et al. (2012), 46-68; also see Rhys H. Williams and Gira Vashi, "*Hijab* and American Muslim Women: Creating the Space for Autonomous Selves," *Sociology of Religion* 68:2 (2007): 280.

especially MSA. They judge that their meeting of various ethnicities itself is a purging mechanism, where those items that they share they deem as probably of the foundations of Islam while those that are different are likely old-country add-ons. They also pride themselves in the friendships they are making across ethnic heritages, as distinct from members of their parents' generation whom they perceive as moving in linguistic and ethnic cliques, even at mosque. This differentiation between Islam and culture gives these young people the confidence and freedom to investigate and interpret Islam in way that makes sense to them in their own social contexts, even while they do not meta-cognitively realize the time-space-experience (i.e. cultural) prisms of their own interpretations and conclusions.

Although this practice enables these youth to achieve a sense of adult status through differentiating themselves from their parents, despite 'choosing' the same religion they were socialized into, one of the downsides of the Islam-culture binary is it can make the young adults dismissive of the wisdom and persons of their forbearers. This negative implication was eloquently described in an interview with Zienab Abdelgany: a former president of an MSA who now works closely with youth and young adults among her duties as an employee of CAIR. She said:

> [The] dichotomy between culture and Islam creates a sense of disconnect with our own cultural background, as well as second generation folks born here and the generation of our parents and grandparents. It has a little bit of a hegemony aspect to it; it can be very condescending in many contexts, looking down on the ways our parents and grandparents practice Islam. It doesn't foster a healthy sense of identity. It's good for us to be clear on what Islam says on women, on what Islam says about how we should and can dress, that it is flexible in its context, and that it's okay to embrace many of the culture norms that we grow up around. But sometimes we take that dichotomy [to an extreme] and it alienates us from our own relatives and our own histories; we suffer a lot from discarding our own social histories.

Since, as claimed in this chapter, these youth embrace Islam partly to affirm central values of their family upbringing, it is ironic that this condescending dismissal of one's parents' version of Islam is also often part and parcel of such a hermeneutic posture. To reconcile this, we can understand 'Islam vs. culture' as a mediating ideology that affirms one's family and at the same time establishes one's autonomy from one's parents.

Partly to address the negative side-effects of this interpretive strategy, Ms. Abdelgany developed with others a program called Muslim Gamechangers Network for this young second generation. Among the central activities of Gamechangers is to interview one's parents and grandparents, finding out the "dreams our parents and grandparents had for us, draw inspiration from their generations, what we can learn from them, and the ways in which we can connect with each other instead of isolating ourselves." She said that finding out more about one's particular family histories and comparing that to other's family histories helps the youth discover their families have a lot in common as well, such as the social traumas so many of the older have experienced in their old countries and in the immigration process. While many immigrated seeking educational and employment opportunities, many others were seeking asylum from political persecution or were refugees of war-torn countries. Abdelgany has worked with the scholars in residence at the Islamic Center of Irvine, CA, among others, to assist members of this generation to recontextualize their faith.[61] Jamaal Diwan, one of these scholars, in an interview explain that he strives to help the youth understand that for each generation the

[61] Also see: "CAIR-LA launches Muslim Gamechangers Network for High School Students," Council on American-Islamic Relations, last modified January 9, 2014, https://sun.cair.com/press-center/press-releases/12315-cair-la-launches-muslim-gamechangers-network-for-high-school-students.html>; "Blog," Muslim Gamechangers Nework, http://www.muslimgamechangers.com/blog/ (accessed August 3, 2014).

challenge is to understand text, understand context, and to try to merge them. He also defined it as comprehending "the core issues of the faith" so they can be "done correctly to deal with the new context." [62] Indeed, the first-generation parents also are often in struggles to practice the religion correctly in their new context. Although not moving as naturally through American cultural spaces as their children, rather than a stagnant carbon-copy of the Islam they practiced in their former homelands, the first generation immigrants also modify and adapt their approaches to the religion in the new national context.[63]

Conclusions

While other scholarship has identified and insightfully discussed many facets of the sociological matrix in which members of the Muslim children of immigrants to the United States affirm and fashion their heritage religious identities, this chapter has strived to fill a void in understanding the many complex factors in these youth's environments and how these factors interact. I have adapted Brofenbrenner's Ecological Model to organize the concrete and ideological, the local and trans-local, agents that encourage and influence the formation of an Islamic identity. I have argued that this model allows us to

[62] Jamaal Diwan, phone interviewed by author, June 9, 2014.

[63] These questions of adaptations and appropriations of American space and discourses by the first and second generation is largely the theme of Mucahit Bilici, *Finding Mecca in America: How Islam is Becoming an American Religion* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2012); also see Muna Ali, "Muslim American/American Muslim Identity: Authoring Self in Post-9/11 America," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 31:3 (2011), 355-381; M. A. Muqtedar Khan, "Constructing the American Muslim Community," *Religion and Immigration: Christian, Jewish, and Muslim Experiences in the United States,* ed. by Yvonne Haddad et al. (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2003), 175-198; Kambiz GhaneaBassiri, "Religious Normativity and Praxis among American Muslims," *The Cambridge Companion to American Islam*, eds. Julianne Hammer and Omid Safi (New York: Cambridge University Press [Kindle edition], 2013), 208-227.

recognize the many prominent factors of their environment without giving undue importance to any *single* one as itself having 'caused' Islam to be the master identity status. Moreover, this model helps us to discern their identity development as one pivoted on close relationships over atomization: affirming and modifying the terms of family relationships while cultivating new friendships, professing American national ideals while challenging prejudices, and an attraction to the teachings and practices of Islam, each factor converging with the others in unique formations.

In their West Asian and North African cultures of heritage, habitus of interdependence and togetherness are usually enacted more intensely than commonly experienced by youth of Western European family heritages that emphasize individual self-expression, self-reliance, development of talents, and being "unique." We can say that the collectivist habitus is such a visceral fact of their upbringing that the terms of "I am of my family" comes first for their identity before thoughts of being a doctor-in-training, skateboarder, musician, or soccer player, although many are also these things. With Islam forming an integral part of their family life, these youth strive to make choices that maintain and reinforce the integrity of their family relations, and they choose their religion as one of the highest values that their parents strived to pass to them, a choice that simultaneously honors their parents and reinforces the family bond.

With America's emphasis on multiculturalism, they might just choose an uncontroversial hyphenation of their nationality: Jordanian-American, Libyan-American, or Pakistani-American. While many also often take on these hyphenated, nationalistic identities, they perceive the inherent hypocrisy of Islamophobic discourse given the

United States' value of religious freedom combined with multiculturalism's inherent demand that all cultures be treated with equal dignity and respect. They experience the negative stereotyping of Islam as an attack not just on the religion they learned to cherish, but on their very families, friends, and selves. Rising to defend Islam as sacrosanct and innocent, they are bolstered in their efforts by their encounter with fellow heritage Muslims of diverse ethnicities, catalyzing a trope of 'Islam vs. culture' that they use to justify their right to interpret the religion for themselves. This trope endows them with a measure of independence from their parents as adult, self-responsible decision-makers. This trope also enables them to defend Islam from stereotypes of violence, oppression of women, inhumane punishment of criminals, and superstitious rituals, interpreting these as "cultural" (or sometimes "political") practices rather than Islamic ones.

In the friendship groups they develop at college, often centered in the Muslim Student Association spaces and activities, this 'pure' Islam is studied, implemented, negotiated, and strengthened in fellowship, enabling them to actualize the American-value to self-differentiate from parents, within the close relationships of their new "family" of peers. In these circles, they also find friendships and fellowships that reflects many of the ethics their parents taught them: dignified language, freedom from drugs and alcohol, pork-less meals, and conservatism in gender relations. It is a naturally comfortable, college space because it, in part, replicates one's home-life.

While these are the most influential elements of their sociological environment that I identified, we must acknowledge that the way each individual of this second generation experienced, negotiated, and responded to this shared ecology is fairly distinct. When

some of their families are in chaos, or when one lives on campus rather than commuting, these circumstances give added urgency to finding a surrogate family of friends. Others do not find the Muslim Student Association very welcoming, or just never give it a chance, and they form other friendship groups. Sometimes these groups are principally Muslim, and other times they find friends of diverse religions through another student association or through a common hobby or major. Yet being the "Muslim" of the group and sharing what makes one unique is often welcomed as "cool" and "interesting."[64]

However, we should be careful not to relegate these youth's embrace of their heritage religion to exclusively sociological factors. Many spoke of being attracted to Islam for the religion's own intrinsic aesthetics and virtue. Indeed, people have converted to the religion for fourteen hundred years, across very different socio-historical contexts, due at least in part to the faith's inherent positive attributes. In the beginning chart of the "Ecology of heritage-Muslim religious identity development," among these young people's immediate microsystem, I included the "*Qur'an*" as shorthand to represent the Islamic holy book and the teachings and practices of the religion more generally. It was the most marked of options at 73% in question four of the survey on that which are "The most central THREE influences on choosing Islam to be a big part of my life," demonstrating that in their experience it is indeed one of the most significant forces that motivates them to take on a Muslim master identity. Interviewed participants mentioned

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[64] Such displays of distinctiveness are a double-edged sword in building communal bonds as it can at once make oneself "interesting" but also an exoticized peer, becoming like a rare animal in a zoo. Shabana Mir calls this "cool difference" as exhibiting one's "cultural wares" in a kind of "diversity showcase." She claims that such difference is welcomed as long as it is not too "loud" or "aggressive," i.e. not challenging the lifestyle approaches of the normative majority, see Mir, *Muslim Women on Campus*, 59, 61.

appreciating the message *la illaha ila Allah* [no god but God], the religion's emphasis on the mercy of God, that God is one's best Friend who could always be relied upon, and/or the teaching that Muhammad was sent to perfect human character. They found significance in the stories they had learned since childhood about the prophets as exemplary patterns for one's own life. Others found ennobling the pursuit of living the religion's injunctions of purity of mind (from sexual focuses) or the discipline of regularly connecting with God in *salah* prayer five times a day. At the same time, these narratives of being captured by the beauty of Islam were often wrapped up with family and friend relationships. For example, Husayn found consolation in listening to the melodic recitation of the Surah of Ya-Seen, and its account of the peacefulness and the delights of the afterlife, when his father was suddenly killed: "They will have all kinds of fruit and they will receive whatever they ask for; they will be greeted with a word from the Merciful Lord: '*Salaam* (Peace)'."[65] Nuri finds significance in Islam's ability to unite in common worship and brotherhood people of so many different ethnic backgrounds, exemplified for him in his participation with others in his campus MSA.

This research has built on a growing body of research centered on Muslim American college students and recent graduates. Yet to be adequately investigated is how identity formations change five to ten years removed from the college experience as young Muslim Americans often become immersed in non-Muslim working environments and as they marry (frequently) other second-generation Muslim Americans. Learning ways to support the deepening of Islamic identities and practice as the young adults move beyond

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[65] Qur'an 36:57-58

college has been important to some American Muslim organizations. A former president of MSA-West brought this matter to my attention a few years ago. Also for MSA officer Samira it is an issue central to her leadership objectives:

> I try to promote the idea that life is not MSA; like, we are blessed to be in an environment that is so kind and accepting with all our friends, we are in a bubble. It is not going to be like that later on; they're going to go to work, go to grad school, it's not going to be like [our] MSA. So whenever I have sessions with these girls, I try to prepare them for this future, because they could easily go to a med school that is in Utah, like in Mormon town, in the middle of nowhere. And they have to be accepting of those around them and they have to be ready for not being surrounded by Muslims twenty-four seven; because that's a big possibility, we are a big bunch but we are not that big, like America is bigger. …So I like to promote that you need to be secure with yourself and not simply depend on others to secure you; because I feel like that is the mistake that a lot of undergrad youth make: whatever group they are in, they try to make their friends to secure them, but then when once those friends leave, they are lost, completely. So you shouldn't do that, you shouldn't make MSA to be your security, you should be your [own] security.

Do many young Muslim Americans lose much of their Islamic identity by their late twenties, far removed from their MSA "bubble" and as distinct social settings become more prominent? Or is it instead modified as they form new friendship groups and build families of their own? This is also a vital area of research that needs pursuing. Meanwhile, we have noted the efforts of the Muslim American Society and the Council for American Islamic Relations, as well as diverse conferences and summer camps, to support and nurture Islamic-based identities, friendships, and family relationships beyond the aegises of mosques and campus MSAs. These organizations too have begun to recognize how inextricably linked these discussed factors are and that their confluences engender dynamics that promote and challenge in various ways young adult members of the second generation to take on Islam as their master identity marker.

CHAPTER 2

The Islam of the Young Generation—
Totally American, Totally Muslim

"…you can be one-hundred percent Muslim and one-hundred percent American too." –Munirah

Introduction

Muslims have lived in the United States from before this land became a country, yet only within the last twenty-five years have we been able to trace something of the emerging contours of an American Islamic discourse.[1] Scholars of the academy and Muslim religious communities have attempted to decipher or assert its characteristics, yet few have offered an up-close look at how the second generation Muslim American young adults, raised in this country by parents who grew up in other countries, define their faith. This chapter offers an updated and current (2013-2015) taking-of-the-pulse of American Islamic discourse among young Muslim college students and recent graduates in the Pacific West of the United States.

Much scholarship has been devoted to trying to identify the traits of this emergent American Islam. Abdullahi an-Naim's in *What is an American Muslim?* calls on those in

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[1] However, a distinctive discourse did emerge among African American nationalist movements in which Islam was conceived as the natural religion of African Americans, Arabic the natural language, and they must not rely upon Caucasians but work together as a single African/"Asiatic" people for collective empowerment. See Robert Dannin, *Black Pilgrimage to Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Richard Brent Turner, *Islam in the African-American Experience, 2nd ed.* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003); Sherman A. Jackson, *Islam and the Black American: Looking toward the Third Resurrection* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) ; Edward E. Curtis, *Islam in Black America: identity, liberation, and difference in African-American Islamic thought* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002); Eric C. Lincoln, *Black Muslims in America* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: W.B. Eerdmans, 1993)

this country who identify with Islam to remember that although they are religious minorities, they are part of the majority as fellow citizens of this country and must take advantage of their civil rights to fight for equality. He encourages them to learn from the examples of Jews, Mormons, and Catholics who were also once persecuted religious minorities yet deliberately and actively worked to shape their religion and nation, seeking full inclusion. However, he argues for what Islam in the United States should be, not for what it is currently according to sampling the discourse of many quotidian American Muslims.[2]

Feisal Abdul Rauf, imam of a mosque in New York City and spokesperson of the controversial Park51 Islamic Community Center near the site of the World Trade Center, takes on the question of what constitutes an American Islamic identity and ethos. He avers that Islamic and American ideals both recognize human equality before the one universal God. This human equality, from which he also derives the principles of liberty of conscience, fraternity, and social justice, opposes oppression on the basis of race, tribe, class, religion, or gender. This ideal, he argues, reflects the command of the "Abrahamic" religions to love God with all one's being and to love others as oneself. Proceeding with these ideals, he asserts that American Muslims are people who are committed to "democratic values, pluralism, and a free society" and that they have a special role to play as mediators between the United States and the Muslim world abroad. Among their role as mediators is to make efforts to introduce "democratic capitalism" to Muslim-

[2] Abdullahi an-Naim, *What is an American Muslim? Embracing Faith and Citizenship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

majority nations, which will allow for a better standard of living for everyone with its important practices of corporate business structures and "interest without usury." However, he does little to problematize the downsides of capitalism, such as its allowance of the concentration of wealth among the few or the close collusion of its practitioners with imperialism and exploitation. His book, like an-Naim's is his own personal manifesto rather than an interpretation of the way fellow American Muslims define their faith.[3]

Interpreting through personal observations and many conversations with fellow Muslims over the years, political scientist M. Muqtedar Khan has one of the most intriguing theses about the Muslim generation growing up in the United States. Khan argues that members of the Muslim second generation have embraced liberal ideals of freedom, human rights, pluralism, religious and cultural tolerance, and consultative government, finding Islamic sources to justify such principles. Furthermore, they are not ambivalent about their religious or national identity but are "proud to be Muslim and American." In addition to human rights they are concerned with animal rights and the natural environment. They believe in the rights of Americans of diverse religions to worship freely and the right of all peoples, ethnic as well as religious, to be treated equally. They are aware of and thankful to God for living in a country that allows economic opportunities and political rights. They feel that their ability to practice Islam by choice, without fear of political threat or manipulation by a dominant group, is ideal

[3] Feisal Abdul Rauf, *What's Right with Islam: A New Vision for Muslims in the West* (New York: HarperCollins, 2004), 1-4, 9, 13-14, 252

and they wish the same for their Muslim kindred in other lands. He asserts that the Muslim Americans who lead most American Muslim national organizations—whether immigrant, indigenous, or second generation—have similar values.[4]

Drawn from participant observation and interviews, this chapter looks closely at how young adult Muslims, students and recent graduates of colleges and universities constitute their identities as "Muslim" and "American." Since Islam has become central to the lives of these young people, I asked them to define Islam and being Muslim, their life-purpose, and the relation of their religion to their nationality. Due to the environment of surveillance described in the previous chapter, their interviewee "self" is part and parcel to their public selves that they inhabit in which they emphasize public virtues and other American values of rationalism and individualism. Meanwhile, this public Islam's stress on self-responsibility and forgiveness tolerates a certain amount of "stretching the boundaries" with practices in private that some of the more hardline Muslims may find questionable, such as dancing or doing music. Those who do gossip about others whom they see as engaging in suspect actions, often two people of opposite sex interacting, we may interpret as not only a strategy to demarcate Islamic conservative boundaries or solely a tactic to self-aggrandize through censure of others, but as a discursive quest to make sense of these challenging topics for oneself.

[4] M. A. Muqtedar Khan, "Constructing the American Muslim Community," *Religion and Immigration Christian, Jewish, and Muslim Experiences in the United States*, eds. Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, Jane I. Smith, and John L. Esposito (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2003), 191-193.

Most of the questions relevant to this chapter were open-ended and with a fairly low degree of bias inherent in the questioning or my status as the interviewer.[5] The questions I regularly asked most relevant to this chapter were:

1) How do you define Islam?
2) How do you define being Muslim?
3) (Asked less regularly but more bias inherent) Are there people who are not "Muslim" in name but who live Islamic ideals as well or better than many Muslims?
4) What is the purpose of life?

Among active participants of not just the same region of MSAs, but one and the same MSA, there are a multiplicity of approaches and answers to these basic existential questions about the meaning of their faith. Yet each approach we would have to characterize as non-aggressive and, while often enjoining high moral standards, their advocates are moderate in encouraging such norms upon others. Instead of being an agreed upon basis of a master-identity construction, these most foundational terms—"Islam" and "Muslim"—are contested and viewed in different ways, even by three close friends who participate in the same campus MSA. Thus, we will not, and cannot, force all answers into a single rubric or heading but allow them to keep their messiness and divergences as we explore their contours.

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[5] Charlotte Aull Davies, *Reflexive Ethnography: a Guide to Researching Selves and Others*, 2nd (London: Routledge, 2008), 105-107, 111-113.

We can and will, however, identify and categorize some frequent themes expressed, converging colors that appear in this rainbow of diversity, and the socio-historical contexts in which these themes are significant and negotiated. As they are drawing on similar sources—reading of the Qur'an and popular hadith, admired Muslim speakers, American experiences, second generation horizons, and web-networking—we can find patterns in their conclusions. Thus, a number of prominent trajectories of an emerging "American Islam" can be identified, fashioned with and continually renegotiated among the diverse approaches of its proponents. Although few are using the language of "American Muslim" or "Muslim American" regularly or deliberately, they readily identify with Islam as their religion and American as their nationality, these both being central markers of their self-identity. Indeed, although many say that the way they approach their faith is simply (universal/true) Islam, their approach to their faith is closely influenced by their American context and the ideals they find therein. Likewise, while they see themselves as simply Americans, similar to other ethnicities their views of what this means is colored by their religion (among other factors, such as class, culture, gender, race, and peer groups).

In discussing this close relationship between these two markers of identity, we must remember that "Islam," "Muslim," and "America" are not static, predetermined, entities but are constructs, symbols, or "imaginal" realities, the terms of which are continually debated.[6] Among the participants in this debate are Muslim Americans, along with

[6] That is, "Islam" and "America" have no concrete, physical existence. As symbols, they exist in the hearts and minds of those who talk about them, who negotiate their definitions, and deploy their significances for various ends. The term "imaginal"—or *mundus imaginalis*—was coined by French scholar of Islamic thought Henry Corbin, "Mundus Imaginalis: Or The Imaginary and The Imaginal," *Spring* (Dallas: Spring

Americans of other religious and philosophical stances, Muslims in other nations, and people around the globe of other nationalities and religious commitments. Hence, this chapter is not an argument about what is characteristically American or what is authentically Islamic, but a description and analysis of how these young people engage with values and rhetoric about genuine citizenship and Islamic piety. I use the terms "American Muslim" and "Muslim Americans" interchangeably to denote being a citizen of the United States and being Muslim. Indeed, although these young people usually employ these two identity markers separately, these markers are inextricably linked variables, reflecting how these young adults would like the greater United States populace to see them: as American citizens whose religion is Islam.

These young Muslim activists have been creating an "indigenous" or American Islam—an expression of faith that emerges in interactions with the concerns, values, social matrices, and hopes of this country. These young American Muslims are drawing on the Qur'an and Hadith in search of modes of practice, discourse, and identity that they see as "authentically" Islamic. Meanwhile, the act of interpreting these sources, consciously or not, is drawn through the prism of American evaluative sensibilities, yet—as Ghaneabassiri points out—the conclusions arrived at are conceived and presented as normative and universal Islam.[7]

Publications, 1972): 1-19. Hence, "imaginal" designates a notion that is similar to Robert Bellah's "symbolic realism" and to Benedict Anderson's "imagined communities."

[7] Kambiz Ghaneabassiri, "Religious normativity and praxis among American Muslims," *The Cambridge Companion to American Islam*, ed. Julianne Hammer and Omid Safi (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 219-220.

In studies of young Muslim activists on college campuses, a key characteristic of this dynamic has been identified and called the "ethnification of Islam" or "identity Islam" where being Muslim itself is the master-identity status over and above other competing identities, whether racial, nationalistic, familial, vocational, or socio-philosophical.[8] Geneive Abdo (2006) interprets this ethnification of Islam in a positive light, where young Muslims do not take on the cultural divisions of their grandparents but establish Islamic spaces where Muslims of all ethnic backgrounds are welcome. In contrast to this, in Marcia Hermansen's (2011) critical observations, all too often Muslim student groups are forums for enacting chauvinistic and arrogant pride, engendering a narrow interpretation of correct 'Islam' while censoring as *kāfir* (unbeliever/infidel) any Muslims or non-Muslims who approach their faith differently. These students often see their Christian and Jewish classmates, and sometimes even their own parents, as practicing 'cultural' aberrations of a 'pure' and 'original' Islam.[9]

This chapter and the following two complicate and provide nuance to the different claims of Schmidt, Abdo, and Hermansen. Many of the individual Muslims I interviewed were both critical and celebratory about different facets of their heritage culture while they also took pride and vigorously asserted their legitimacy as Americans. Publicly they were suspicious of some practices of their extended families that they interpreted to be in direct contradiction to Islamic standards. However, they may also celebrate their mother

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[8] Garbi Schmidt, "Dialectics of Authenticity: Examples of Ethnification of Islam among Young Muslims in Sweden and the United States". *The Muslim World* 92 (2002): 1.

[9] Marcia Hermansen, "How to Put the Genie Back in the Bottle: 'Identity Islam' and Muslim Youth Cultures in America," *Progressive Muslims*, ed. Omid Safi (Oneworld Publications, Kindle Edition, 2011), Kindle location 8056.

culture: participating in the Lebanese, Pakistani, or Iranian student associations, wear South Asian cultural dress, and in the privacy of their apartments with friends may sing and dance to Bollywood or Arab pop music.[10] While they idealize the cordial meeting of Muslims youth whose parents came from across the planet, as authentic Islamic knowledge is often perceived to be derived from overseas (although best interpreted in North America), and appropriating American and global genealogies of racial prejudice, converts are sometimes dealt with in paternalistic and/or racist manners.[11] Against Hermansen's claims, I found that while MSA leaders often sought to present a unified front to "Islam," this front only thinly veiled the diverse perspectives and approaches to their religion within the body of membership. The correct approach are an ongoing conversation among MSA leaders that existed together in ebbs and flows of relative harmony and dissonance about how to best "apply" the religion to their indigenous American context.

I argue that these young adults are matching the best of what they perceive to be Islamic and American values, inviting perceptions from fellow American citizens (and themselves) that they are among the best of United States citizens and from fellow Muslims—nationally and around the world—that they are among the best of Muslims. Imbibing American and global cultural discourses that frame "good religion" as promoting ethical humanism, actualizing human potentials, being logical and rational,

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[10] Also see: Jamillah Karim, *American Muslim Women: Negotiating Race, Class, and Gender within the Ummah*, (New York: New York University Press, Kindle edition, 2009), 129.

[11] Zareena Grewal, *Islam is a Foreign Country: American Muslims and the Global Crisis of Authority* (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 36, 53; Jamila Karim, *American Muslim Women*, 130. This phenomena will be dealt in more depth in the fourth chapter "Out of Many One."

and yet being individualized and eclectic in interpretive method, they couch Islam in these terms. They are doing this, in part, by finding and interpreting Islamic sources to assert that in God's view it is most important to practice ethics and cultivate a good character, and they are connecting this with concepts of American civic and private virtues. They speak of these interpretive choices as solely their attempts to be good and faithful Muslims; however, this emphasis on shared American virtues is also a strategy to become among the model minorities within their country. They are framing foundational Islamic practices, such as prayer and fasting, in modern self-help movement language of self-actualization and self-development. Meanwhile, as introduced in the previous chapter, their interpretive styles stress uniqueness and individuation.

Who are you?

Young people, raised in by Muslim immigrants, work through "spoiled identities," obliged to either take on conservative, essentialized characteristics to look like "real" Muslims (to both Muslim and non-Muslim peers) or to veil their Islamic background and do the utmost to just fit into broader campus youth cultures. In the politics of multiculturalism, *to be Muslim in the eyes of others* the person feels pressure to appropriate external signs of piety. This means, the headscarf and loose, covered clothing for women, a beard and sometimes traditional Arab clothing for men, praying regularly in public spaces, and not interacting with the opposite sex, practices deemed to justify authenticity. On the other hand, many of the campus non-religious social circles base their activities much on alcohol and promiscuity. Muslim who otherwise are friendly with

individuals of these groups may find such social circles to undermine his or her values and that also make him or her appear "assimilated and invisible." Mir (2014) assesses students as "sandwiched" between the two options of hyper-religious Muslim circles or non-religious off-campus activities, and so many struggle to create "third" spaces to be and become, in response to and in freedom from these dominant loci. [12] Yet she overstates her case about the limited possibilities beyond the two options. In my observations, in these California universities students encountered a rich variety of student associations and peers that facilitate fashioning friendships with like-minded individuals. There are many choices: to need to join ultra-conservative groups or campus party culture is a false dichotomy. Interviewee Layla, a UC Riverside alumnus who majored in creative writing, stated: Muslims in this country can be "relatively similar" to other Americans "without compromising your beliefs; you can't drink, date, or party…but feel like I still had the whole college experience; can make college what it is; can be an American kid; if you want to go surfing, play sports, can still do these things."

Nonetheless, these young people do acutely experience the stigma of their *othered* religious and/or ethnic identity. Goffman defines the implications of stigma or a "spoiled identity" as the following: "an individual who might have been received easily in ordinary social intercourse possesses a trait that can obtrude itself upon attention and turn those of us whom he meets away from him, breaking the claim that his other attributes have on us."[13] In other words, we miss the person and see the difference or deformity as

[12] Shabana Mir, *Muslim American Women on Campus: Undergraduate Social Life and Identity* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 39, 153.
[13] Erving Goffman, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* (London: Penguin Press, 1963), 14.

the defining feature. We miss the opportunity to meet, learn about, and fully see the other, distracted by the headscarf, the beard, or unusual name. We inflict symbolic violence on the other when we stigmatize and do not allow them to be other-than-that, to be other-than-expected, or to change, grow, and metamorphose.

In the scholarly pursuit of understanding, analyzing, and contextualizing the "young Muslim American," it is often difficult to see the person beyond these three markers (i.e. young, Muslim, America), or beyond others such as: Muslims and race, Muslims and gender, or Muslim immigrants and converts. Mir hopes that these young adults can have a "'healthy identity," one she defines as "constructed in relative freedom from the constraining effect of stereotyping."[14] At the same time she laments that Muslim American women must constantly respond to hegemonic Orientalist stereotypes in shaping and fashioning a self-identity. She writes:

> In a "healthy" campus culture hospitable to Muslim students' religious and American identities, Muslim women would possess the freedom, flexibility, and vocabulary to construct their American, Muslim, ethnic, gendered, and youthful identities, to "emphasize [their] multiple subject positions," and to decide how Muslim, mainstream American, or ethnic to be, how much to "mute or flaunt [their] identities"… This means that I must recognize myself (and be recognized) as a woman, a double immigrant from Pakistani as well as the United Kingdom and culturally both Western and Pakistani, a heterosexual, a Muslim feminist, a cancer survivor, an anthropologist, an academic, and a resident of the United States for much of my life now—rather than merely as "Muslim" or "Pakistani." To treat our identities as complex, simultaneous, and seamless not only opens up multiple possibilities of identity for us but also "rupture[s] the boundaries between groups" and connects us to multiple communities of interest…[15]

Since I share this ideal with Mir, I began each interview by letting each subject to define his or her self on his or her own terms, not constrained by those characteristics that made him or her suitable for the study. I started with questions such as: "Big Identity

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[14] Mir, *Muslim American Women on Campus*, 153; cf. 39.
[15] Mir, *Muslim American Women on Campus*, 177.

Question: Who are you? Who do you see yourself as? What do your close friends know about you and see you as? What are you passionate about? What do you stand for?" However, I often needed to follow up these questions with more specific inquiries into the various facets of their current life, doing my best to guess at aspects that might be important to these young women and men, some of whom I had only very recently met. I present here eight responses to these initial questions that, in part, demonstrate that these youth see themselves as having many other markers than just their religion, nationality, ethnic heritage, or gender.

In this first quote, we can see for Halala that being Muslim and being American are crucial facets to how she talks about herself, yet neither designation defines her life:

> I'm a fourth year bio major, but I'm going to take a year off at the end of the year, take that time to think about what to pursue; I'm thinking about teaching. In my third year I was pre-pharm, but then I realized it is not right for me. I'm not so much worried about the pay, as living a comfortable life… When I got to UCR I was a physics major for a year and then I realized, even though I loved it, the major wasn't for me; because if I wanted to do something different, it was too hard to get out of…I think our parents also taught that too, to like and enjoy what we're doing; there was no crazy pressure on us; but make sure there's some [financial] stability involved as well… I'm really involved in my masjid…been attending ever since I was a little kid, and went to the school there, then taught at the school for a while, and really involved in the youth group at the masjid, I almost live in the masjid, I enjoy being there and being in the community there. I clean the masjid a lot, me and my older brother… I ran to be a [college student government] senator for two years. I didn't make it the first time, but second time made it and served as senator during my junior year; instead of complaining had something I could do about that… I think another thing, is people see me as outspoken, that I always have an opinion on politics. I'm really interested in what's going on in the news, I keep up with Jon Stewart (Comedy Central's *The Daily Show*) and CNN. I feel I don't want to be that person that complains but doesn't really understand and really doesn't do anything about it. Many Americans, including Muslims, complain but don't take an active role to fix these things… I served as Vice-President of Students for Justice in Palestine last year, was Treasurer before that; didn't this year, as wanted to focus on my grades and think about where I'm going next...

Thus, Halala has naturally continued with her involvement in the mosque community that she grew up in, yet she has also been very involved in campus student life and activism, being an officer in a very active social justice club, as well as a senator in student govern-

ment. News media helps her feel connected to her country and to global society. She wants to be an American and Muslim of excellence, one who does not just complain about what is happening on her campus, in the country, and internationally, but one who actively helps make a positive change. She is also a student who has been searching to find a major that is a good fit for her present and future interests and hopes. She speaks of her close relationship with her parents, representing them as supportive of her individual pursuits rather than authoritarian.

In the following conversation, Safi emerges as someone who is culturally second-generation Arab American, a Californian, a Palestinian, a business marketing major and natural salesman, a soccer fanatic, an athlete and teammate, a foodie, a funny guy, a confidant to friends, and someone who is passionate about justice:

> First and foremost I'm an American of Palestinian origin, born to a Palestinian mother and father. I was born and raised in America, in California specifically; I'm very involved within my culture and my religion, most of my friends know that I am Muslim… Most my friends are Muslim and/or Arab, because we tend to understand each other, our cultural ideas are similar. As to what I stand for—everything that is morally just; when there is the good and the bad, I would take the good… What else do you want to know from there? [Daniel]: What did you say you are studying? [Safi:] I'm a business marketing major. [Daniel:] How'd you choose that? [Safi:] From a job I had in high school in sales; the ability to speak to people comfortably and approach them with ideas came naturally to me, so marketing and business—that seemed the most suitable to me. I don't want to sound cocky or anything, but most of the time, if I have something in my hand, I can sell you it, especially if I know specifications of it and have in mind what you like. [Daniel:] Are you a soccer player or general soccer fanatic? [Safi:] Well, I am both. I will watch soccer throughout the week, and then on weekends wake up early to watch, especially the European leagues… I played soccer throughout my whole life, till today; …any chance to play I will go play. I play in IM [campus intra-mural] soccer a game a week. Then I play in a league with co-workers on Saturday mornings. I also play basketball IM. [Daniel:] What are your characteristics according to friends? [Safi:] I'm kind of considered the funny guy of the group, we're always messing around, clowning with one another; also a lot of them confide in me, they find it easy to talk to me, about whatever they are going through; maybe it's because I'm the oldest one in the group… I'm the middle ground between fat and athletic… some will ask, 'wanna go eat here?' and others like 'wanna go hit the gym?' so I'm the in-between guy where anyone can ask me to do anything.

Another student, Badiya, identifies as "Pakistani American Muslim," as a student of sociology and business and administration, a future entrepreneur, a reader, a self-

educator, and someone who stands for "truth," someone who works to eliminate misconceptions about Pakistanis and Muslims:

> [Daniel:] How do you identity yourself? [Badiya:] My parents are from Pakistan, they came here thirty-ish years ago; I was raised in Fremont area, born and raised in the Bay area [of CA]; I came here [to Southern CA / UCR] for school; I identify as Pakistani Muslim American, but Pakistani American Muslim rolls off the tongue. I feel like there are different types of Muslims, so I'm a Pakistani American Muslim. [Daniel:] What are you studying? [Badiya:] I'm studying sociology and administrative studies, fourth year… [Daniel:] What do you see yourself doing later on? [Badiya:] I want to start my own company, working in market research, hope to do that in June. I did an internship, hopefully will become full time in June. [Daniel:] What are your hobbies, or what are you passionate about? [Badiya:] I love reading, I read a novel [she means "book"] a week, make myself to; I'm reading *Outliers*, I mostly read non-fiction, that teaches me more about human behavior and the human mind; I also read books about entrepreneurship, and how different companies go big and how different products do it. [Daniel:] What do you stand for? [Badiya:] I hope I stand for the truth, I'm part of PSA [Pakistani Student Association]. There are so many misconceptions about our community, Pakistanis; the media misrepresents it in horrible ways, with drone strikes and things, and with Islam too, so I just want the truth to be out there.

In the following interview, we see the difficulties in garnering an articulation of one's identity, even when it is asked in a very open-ended way. All students were asked to fill out a short survey, before beginning the interview, which asked about their family background, ethnic, national, and religious roots.[16] Ameen began defining himself in the interview with these same four subjects he began. Yet he also mentioned his educational and career goals, typical conversation topics of college students who are just meeting each other. Then I proceeded to ask him about skateboarding, music, and prayer, following guesses I had already made about him based on my observations and brief chat with him just before the interview. This allowed him to either affirm or negate my presumptions. I reproduce below only the first half of this piece of the conversation, but even with this we can see the dialogical nature of identity construction, that it is continually created and adapted in human social interactions.

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[16] See Appendix II

> My name is [Ameen]. I was born in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), but I was raised in the US, I guess my identity belongs in this country; I consider myself an American; but a lot of my roots belong in Bangladesh, that's where my family comes from. My ideals and practices originate from there, like integrity, or what not; or what I consider modesty. I guess different people consider modesty different things; I just consider modesty being humble, being proud of who you are, being a good Muslim, being a good person; don't lie to people, don't cheat them, be happy with the way God made you; being simple…not too flashy. I'm a business major right now, I don't want to become a millionaire, my goal is to improve upon myself, get a job, take care of myself, take care of my family, and just be happy; …I'd love to be rich, why not, but just more to be simple, take care of people, have friends, have close friends, not just acquaintances, who I can be there for and will be for me; those are my main goals in life. [Daniel:] (Noting that he carried a board, I ask) Are you a skateboarder? [Ameen:] I started skating around 13; actually this has a lot to do with my roots; …my uncle skated, I always looked up to him, whatever he did, as the cool guy; growing up in Fontana (Southern California) as one of the few brown people, had these feelings that I always wanted to fit in with everyone else, do what they are doing; …started just riding around on the skateboard, but didn't give it much thought, didn't have a passion for it; then flipping through channels, saw "Skate Arabia" on my TV, June 28, 2008, I remember the date, recorded it on TiVo, blown away; to see skateboarders in the Middle East, some Irish guys growing up in UAE, and skating there;[17] then I had a bond with it, as I'm from the UAE, now I see it as part of me. I think I will always have some special bond to skateboarding, even when I'm 30 and have kids… That is definitely part of my identity, for sure; just how I perceive things. Just when we were walking over here [to your office], that's why I stopped and took that picture, and then emailed it to my friends as a place to skate. Also, when coming to college, I made a lot of friends through skateboarding, even joined a skateboarding club my first day of school, made a lot of friends; they respect me and my religion, respect me for who I am, and I love skateboarding.

Ameen sees himself as someone for whom his religion, culture, and family is very important, who otherwise would be seen as a typical American-year-old-male, passionate about skateboarding. He went on to talk about pop music and spending time near the Meditation Room on campus, where Muslims conglomerate to fulfill their obligatory prayer as well as socialize. That has enabled him to make friends with those who share his religion, while skateboarding has connected him with friends from a variety of religious and cultural backgrounds. Interestingly, in addition to being an enjoyable activity in itself, skateboarding allowed him to strengthen his connections with his ethnic

[17] The documentary he watched, Paul Gonclaves, "Long Form—Skate Arabia," Vimeo, http://vimeo.com/67019196 (accessed September 9, 2014). While Ameen's family is from Bangladesh, he was born in the United Arab Emirates where his family had immigrated to work. He, like this film mentions, feels a solidarity with other "expatriates" in the United Arab Emirates where neither they nor their children are allowed citizenship. Also, see Yakhi, "Dubai Got Soul," SkateArabia, posted July 1, 2014 http://www.skatearabia.com/uae/dubai-got-soul/ (accessed September 9, 2014).

heritage ("to see skateboarders in the Middle East") and, at the same time, help him ("one of the brown people") fit in better with peers his age. Also of importance is the double-immigrant status of his family, coming from Bangladesh, then immigrating to the United Arab Emirates and then to the United States.

Last, I include the beginning of an interview with one of the convert participants in this study. She is someone who sees herself as a very independent minded, honest, and kind person, a humanitarian, a future educator, Central American, African American, and a Muslim who is passionate about prayer.[18]

> [Jasmine:] I am me, I do what I want, I try not to fit in with other people, do my own thing. [Daniel:] What values define you? [Jasmine:] I try to be honest with people, but sometimes I can come off a little harsh because I don't have a filter, blatantly honest, try to be kind to all people, not because I want anything in return but just because I think that's how people should treat people; I want to dedicate my life to humanitarian work, because I like helping people. [Daniel:] Any career in particular? [Jasmine:] Teaching, don't care what I teach but want to teach somewhere they don't have as many privileges as we do here; want to go to a less developed country…to teach. … My family's from [Central American country]. I was born in the States. In my family, my grandma teaches us to say we were born in [this Central American country], and be proud, I'm going to be great because I'm [this nationality]. But I mostly identify myself as Black; look at a lot of Black leaders and try to make them proud in a sense; that they didn't fight in vain; [Daniel:] Which Black leaders do you really look up to? [Jasmine:] Ida B. Wells, Du Bois, Langston Hughes… [Daniel:] What do you appreciate about Islam? [Jasmine:] I like prayer, when I first started praying *ṣalāt*, *fajr* was the most difficult, didn't want to wake up that early; but when I started to do that, when prayer time comes it is kind of a recuperating time, break, or rest, or just take my mind off the world and put my mind on God; don't really see prayer as an obligation but more like a gift.

Muslim and American, Independently and Together

Most interviewees held their Islamic identities in high esteem and readily stated their national citizenship as Americans, yet they found awkward the fusion of these two essential markers of self. 'Would one say "Christian American," "Jewish American," or

[18] The particular country in Central America that her family comes from has been edited out for confidentiality.

“Amish American”?’ some of them asked. For them Islam is their religion and American is their nationality, and they rarely experience any essential conflict between the two.[19] More common for them is to fuse with the hyphen their national or ethnic heritage with their citizenship: Egyptian-American or Pakistani-American.

Whether young Muslim Americans combine their religion with their citizenship as preeminent identifiers is relevant for scholars, intellectuals, and activists who have an agenda to resist or confirm generalizations about Muslims as foreign viruses on United States soil, people whose ways are radically distinct from American values and who threaten to reform this country in Islam’s image.[20] Ashraf, a graphic design university graduate who is involved in community service projects, addressed this concern of scholar-activist and media pundits when I asked him, “Is there is an American Islam?” He said, “I think ‘American Islam’ is a cool term but I don't see the purpose of that term…. It has become a slogan to say American Muslim and stuff like that; it's cool, but I don't think we need to prove ourselves in the sense that we are American and Muslim.” He explains that such language becomes significant in answer to fears that “we come here to destroy or to push certain propaganda on some people,” but “Islam is not a giant ship

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[19] While they are unhesitant about America as their citizenship and social-cultural background, they may be at the same time critical of some the economic, racial, and sexual practices of the country and domestic and international policies of the government. “The label *American* signifies multiple speaking positions, with different meanings depending on the speaker and the moment in which she or he speaks. It can signify place of birth, residence, citizenship, ethnicity, cultural outlook, and economic status,” says Jamillah Karim, *American Muslim Women* (2009), 130.

[20] Hence, when the Pew Research Center did their survey in 2007, they asked Muslims if they identify as Americans or Muslims first, and those from ages 18 to 29 more consistently identified as “Muslim” first at 60% versus 41% for those age 30 and up. See Pew Research Center, *Muslim Americans: Middle Class and Mostly Mainstream* (May 2007), 6. When they did the survey again in 2011, only showing all ages of adults, 26% replied “American,” 49% replied “Muslim,” and 18% “both.” See Pew Research Center *Muslim Americans: No Signs of Growth in Alienation or Support for Extremism*, (August 2011), 15, http://www.people-press.org/files/2011/08/muslim-american-report.pdf (accessed April 14, 2015).

that is just taking over and parking and wrecking everything in sight." He explained that the Prophet Muhammad wrote to a monk in Turkey (and the Qur'an also says this) that "protecting the rights for other people to worship also, Christians to worship, they should have their churches, their synagogues." He acknowledged that Muslim-majority countries, empires, and kingdoms, past and present, at different periods in their long histories either have done much to realize this ideal or have abjectly failed to do so. He asserted that the Muslims of America are like other religious groups in this country who have their "way of life" and modify slightly the domains of public life in which they participate. For Ashraf, the change he envisions Muslims making in this society is "providing…a high ethical standard in how we are doing things," a standard which Muslims themselves "have to reach." Thus, Muslims can collaborate with other groups for the improvement of the various sectors of American life, such as "the media, in medical science, politics." He added:

> The Prophet said that he came to perfect human characters, so it is just adding on to it, it is perfecting it a little bit, reinforcing what is already there… The media, there might be already a lot of ethics, but there might be some things that are missing, so as Muslims we might be reinforcing the ethics that are in there, basically, and taking it to a different level, and trying to implement it.

The language of "American Islam" also traces changes over time in how Muslim immigrants to this country articulate and practice Islam in ways that it reflects propounded core values of this country, and hence more amenable to the general public. However, the scholar, activist, or editorial news pundit immediately must face that this project is based off reductionist essentializations that are impossible to overcome. The project's premise is that there are characteristics that inherently make the United States and Islam of the "old country" quite different, or even opposite, in ideals. If we construct

America as democratic, egalitarian, human rights oriented, rational and inventive, religiously and politically tolerant, and supporting separation of church and state, we find that Muslims in other countries have often practiced these same ideals. On the other hand, if we were to suggest that Islam is fascist, hierarchical, arbitrary in legal practice, irrational and stagnant, intolerant, oppressive to women, collectivist, and combining religious and political authority, our history books make evident that Americans have also been guilty of some of these. To trace changes in how Muslims over time talk about and live their religion in America, we would have to identify this religion's precise previous characteristics: a well-nigh impossible task due to the grand diversity of Islamic interpretations and practices of the religious tradition's fourteen-hundred year history across three continents.

Essentializations of "America" and "Islam" are logical fallacies, yet this dichotomous thinking affects these young people's approach to their religion. They have to work through the fellow Americans' suspicions and stereotypes to prove that they are legitimate members of this country. At the same time, they must face the Occidentalisms of Muslims in Asia and Africa to justify themselves as legitimate Muslims and are not "too Americanized," as if there is something inherent in being American that pollutes or detracts from authentic Islamic practices. Munirah, a political science and environmental science major who was one of the few students who unhesitantly took on the "Muslim American" trope, said:

> I identify as Muslim American because many Muslims overseas see us as too Americanized if we are American Muslim; but I'm American but Muslim first, but really, I see them as together, not in conflict. I see the [American] Constitution goes along with my ideologies. They go hand in hand. I think it is a universal identity; I don't think that American is just one race; more like, since

> America wasn't based for one type of race but for all races, so was Islam meant for all races; you can be one-hundred percent Muslim and one-hundred percent American too.

In the face of "Muslims overseas" who see them "as too Americanized" and Americans who see them as too Muslim, she pushes against constructions of conflict between her nationality and religion. For her, both Islam and America entail a "universal identity" because both are meant "for all races." For her, being of Pakistani heritage and the Islamic faith does not make her any less American and being American does not make her any less Muslim or Pakistani.

Likewise, Lateefa opposes essentializations of "Muslim" versus "liberal" that sets them in opposition. She rejects constructs that assert a certain kind of conservatism as being the only true type of Islam and that assert liberalism as being Western, anti-Islamic, or heretical. She said that in Saudi Arabia, where she grew up attending an English-medium school, "You're seen as either religious or a liberal; I don't think this bifurcation applies to me, I think I base my life both on Islam and liberal values of human rights, freedom, democracy, and equality, without them being in conflict." As a reflection of egalitarian ideals expressed within the Qur'an, she is sympathetic with the movement to give women the right to drive without male chaperones in Saudi Arabia, and she personally knows women who have been involved in the recent demonstrations for this right. For her, this movement does not so much manifest Western values' incursion into a Muslim society but that shows a true interpretation of Islam's holy book.

For others it is the very absence of a homogenous, singular, essentialized, "American Islam" that actually makes Islam in America very American. Abia compares her

approach towards her religion when she was an undergraduate leader for MSA with her current understanding as she studies law in Washington D.C.:

> I see everyone as within the religious [Islamic] discourse. Before [for me, American Muslims] were a community that was outside of the average community in America; we had to work hard to fit in with everyone while maintaining our morals or values. Now I think a lot of Muslims have different morals and values and that's fine and not a problem and that makes us more American, more than anything else. We shouldn't need to try to fit in with a certain Muslim standard or American standard, but diversity within our beliefs is fine too; and I've become more okay with that idea. I was more about being one community, one *umma*, and now I'm more about people practicing their religion with their relationship with God [as they see fit].

As a leader in the Muslim Student Association, she had worked to create a singular, positive, representation of Islam to the American public. Now she prioritizes inclusivity, appreciation of diversity, and respect for individual agency over her previous preference for showing forth a kind of united strength by uniformity in morals and beliefs. She believes that accepting the diversity within the Muslim community actually "makes us more American." In other words, diversity and pluralism within American Islam mirror the diversity and religious pluralism within the United States itself.

Similarly, Rafeeq answered when I asked him if there is an American Islam:

> It wouldn't be very solidified or concrete; it's something still kind of in formation and means something different to each person, and it would be with the Western principles of individuality and kind of choosing your own path, taking that approach with Islam; which isn't necessarily a bad thing; but when taking such an approach not ignoring the basic foundations.

Rafeeq sees each Muslim in the United States making of Islam something a little different as a very American approach to the religion. However, he is also concerned that interpretations be grounded in the sources of the tradition, and not just whatever someone arbitrarily wants it to be according to his or her own desires.

While in practice, the Muslim Student Associations tolerate a range of approaches toward the religion, in discourse, as when Abia was an officer, many student leaders of

the MSA emphasize Islam’s singularity and unity of belief and practice. They want to give their religion a united front. They also fear that the religion will become compromised by individual whims. They see their religion as reliable and clear, rising above the influences of man-made cultures that skew the purity of the faith. When I asked him if there is an “American Islam,” MSA officer Nuri answered:

> …religion and culture should be separate… You tell me Egyptian Islam or Palestinian Islam, I would say that that doesn't exist; Islam is a way of life; Islam is faith, it should be uniform to everybody. Allah, glorified and exalted be He, sent the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him…to mankind; He sent not Chinese or Cambodian Islam, not specific way Islam molds to you but Islam has a core guidelines that you need to conform to. And you also have the *Sunna*, in the *Hadith* and *Sira* (biography of the Prophet), and that *Sunna* is to help perfect the character of mankind. You have the prophet Muhammad who was said to be a walking Qur'an and show how to live life as a Muslim and a Muslim is someone who submits to God and God alone; so culture and religion should be separated; Islam should be Islam and whether I'm Egyptian or not should be based on what kind of food I like or dress I wear. We often think we just do this in my culture and we proclaim it as Islam. Muhammad says what's right is clear and what's *ḥarām* [forbidden, sinful] is clear, and should be no ambiguity in that section; and so one tries to live their life in one way and another another way, and we're all brothers and sisters, and God will judge us all in the end, but we must care for each other.

Nuri speaks of this ideal that religion is for transforming human beings to improve themselves and it is not for individuals to make their faith conform to their own desires and preferences. He also asserts that in his religion “what's right is clear and what's *ḥarām* is clear.” Yet he forgets that religious sources are always revealed and interpreted through a cultural lens and context. One must strive to become aware of the gap between one’s own lens and context that determine what assumptions are being applied in interpreting the sources and the historical situation, context, and assumptions in which the sources were given, recorded, and transmitted. Recognizing a gap between one’s own present, situational need for understanding the Qur’an and those specific events that brought forth the Book’s revelations, scholars of Islam developed the field of *asbāb al-nuzūl* in which they strive to reconstruct “the situations/occasions/reasons of revelation”

of sections of Qur'anic verses.[21] The scholars of the Islamic sciences furthermore developed the principle of *qiyās* (analogy) that asks whether the situation for which a teaching in Qur'an or a *ḥadīth* was given is similar enough to a present situation on hand to also be applicable.[22] In vigilant interpretive dialogue, what is grasped is usually not exactly what the author intended, nor how its first audience understood it, nor merely what the reader *wants* it to say, but a truth that is sparked through this consultative 'fusion of horizons' that speaks to and is applicable to the reader's present situation.[23]

Nuri worries that such talk of "American Islam" implies individuals making the religion conform to their own whims, desires, and ideologies, whereas, for him, human beings should conform to Islam and in this process "perfect" one's "character." Likewise, Shariq—who is a Palestinian-American alumnus of UC Riverside's MSA who now works as an engineer—said: we "need to adapt the culture to the religion rather than the religion to the culture." In spite of Nuri's ideals of uniformity, he also acknowledges that Muslims will differ among themselves, and non-Muslims will also differ, about how to "live their life." He believes that judging the merits of each person is God's exclusive prerogative; while humans' roles are to "care for each other" and treat each other as "brothers and sisters." The challenge for him and like-minded leaders of MSAs is to uphold this ideal of brotherly caring in a way that sincere Muslims who do things a little

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[21] Ahmed Von Deffner, "Asbab al-Nuzul," *Ulūm al-Qur'ān: an introduction to the sciences of the Qur'ān* (Leicester, UK: Islamic Foundation, c1983), 93-94.
[22] Wael B. Hallaq, *An Introduction to Islamic Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 22-23.
[23] Hans-George Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2nd revised ed., trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (London: Continuum, 2004), 304-305, 365-366; Jeffrey Stout, "The Relativity of Interpretation," *The Monist* 69 (January 1986), 104-106, 114.

differently may not experience censure and rejection in their encounter with what MSA projects to be the "standard," "culture-less" Islam.[24]

Some young Muslim American leaders demonstrate awareness to many of the problematics of this "Islam, not culture" dichotomization and they are making efforts in workshop programming and activism to counteract this perspective and its effects. The stated mission of the MSA West's 2015 annual conference held at UCLA was:

> Our embodiment and interpretation of Islam does not occur in a vacuum; it is shaped by social, political, and historical forces that have and will continue to mold and construe our individual understanding of Islam. Instead of isolating these forces as mutually exclusive from our faith, we must trace their effects and connect them to Islam's essence and beauty. By sharing stories of our diverse pasts and highlighting commonalities while respecting differences, we understand that Islam is rooted in our identities that span various social, political, and historical realities. Rooting ourselves in each other's accounts can equip us with the proper solidarity needed to collectively rise for social justice and the pleasure of Allah as a community, both within and beyond our ummah.[25]

This statement not only acknowledges the situatedness of one's individual interpretations of Islam but it calls the Muslim to recognize the overlaps of his or her situatedness with other Muslims, young and elder, local and globally, through sharing of stories to unite with them in solidarity to fashion greater justice within and outside Muslim communities.

While they do not necessarily experience any clash between their religious and national identities as Muslims and Americans, for them United States culture is a "mixed bag" in its specific practices. Some things are in harmony with Islam and even allow opportunities to express Islam as it should be, while other practices of this country contradict the religion and may be hazardous to spiritual health. Shariq said that Islam's

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[24] See further exploration of this theme in chapter four in the section "The Muslim Student Association and Intra-Faith Diversity."
[25] "Annual MSA West Conference," MSA West: Uniting Muslim Students, http://www.msawest.net/index.php/events/2015-conference (accessed March 19, 2015).

goal has been to reinforce the good in local practices and reform the negative, giving the example that “Muhammad praised the generosity aspect of Arab culture but denounced the blood-for-blood [retaliation] and all the feuds aspect of it.” Husayn says he takes up those positive “Modern American” ideals of “liberalism, free thinking, openness,” and “empathy.” Meanwhile, he makes efforts to practice Islamic “restraints” to counteract a frequent American “over-emphasis on material things” that leads to imbalance and “excesses” and that results in “problems of gluttony, lust, and greed.”

Adeeb, meanwhile, likes the “hospitality and fair opportunities” that American culture emphasizes. An engineering alumnus of UCLA, he continues to be active in Islamic centers and MSAs. In a mosque youth group that he facilitates he warns the attendees about the entrapping pressures to conform: “just because you see people coloring their hair, you don’t have to; because they are dressing promiscuous or wearing earrings, you don't have to.” He also cautions them against excessive use of “social media and video games” replacing “good face-to-face conversation.” At the same time, he sees a lot in common between Islamic ideals and American ideals. He even asserted that very often “Americans have more Islamic ideals than the Muslims in the Middle East have” while in the Middle East “people get stuck” in parochial allegiances to “culture and ethnicity and tribe and blood.” This quote from him reflects threads I also heard from many other students:

> Hospitality is good [in the United States], people care about each other and each other's rights; even if one American gets his/her rights taken away so many other Americans stand up for it. There's a good justice system here; the values of Islam and America do fall in line with each other… You have the Republicans and Democrats; Democrats have the welfare and food stamps and giving back towards other people, giving some of your wealth to the unfortunate. …Republicans tend to be more socially conservative with family, regarding the gay people, and trying to maintain certain ethics in society. Muslims can relate to Republicans that way.

> Democrats have ideals about the environment and taking care of the planet; while family and abortion in Republicans are closer to Muslims. Muslims in America tend to follow the Democratic Party line as Democrats are more often against war, and Democrats tend to have more economic equality, Muslims like those ideals and fall in line with that, but Democrats are also less for family values and more for gay rights, and that can make some Muslims uncomfortable.

Likewise, Hakeem appreciates that Muslims, although a small portion of this country compared to Christians, do not need to struggle with these issues alone. Rather, Jews, Christians, and other religious people also often strive to stay away from drugs and to practice sexual purity, sharing of wealth, and to decrease poverty through charity and social programs.

Some interviewees criticized the American government's foreign policy, and some also criticized the domestic policy. Husayn believed the country "pays too much attention to flexing its muscles internationally to look like a superpower, killing others," spending "too much on the military and pop stars," and not putting "enough emphasis on valuing life or taking care of people, domestically, curing poverty or improving education." In college classes I teach, I have heard students who come from a variety of religious backgrounds express opinions in favor of and against practices of the United States government. Thus, I did not interpret these Muslim students' critiques as being qualitatively different from those of other American citizens, much less as being unpatriotic. Rather, critical analysis of domestic and international policy is a vital first step to civic involvement and constituting a healthy democracy.

Not infrequently, students stated that it is actually in the United States that Muslims are able to practice their religion better than abroad. They said that they and their peers are more likely to appreciate the religion because they do not take it for granted as just part of society and everyone's upbringing. Second, they believed that since Islam is not

inextricably wrapped up with the politics, traditional norms, and practices of the society, they were able to more easily distinguish “real” Islam from culture. Lastly, they asserted that, rather than just practicing it as a matter of social conformity, the religious diversity of the United States more fully opens up for them the possibility to “choose” Islam, thus reflecting the Islamic principle that “there shall be no compulsion in religion” [Qur’an 2:256].

Garbi Schmidt traces how these young Americans make claims that Muslims are model citizens, reinforcing the highest values of this country to strengthen the nation. She argues that young Muslims of the United States and Scandinavian countries represent Islam as providing the foundation for, and fulfilling even more successfully than other political covenants, the democratic ideals of Western nations. In other words, the stream flows both ways: not only does America help these youth to be better Muslims, but they help America be a better nation. She explains how they assert that human rights, equality between races and between genders, social class equity, ecology, democratic government, and even scientific research and reasoning are among the core principles of the religion. Being core principles of their faith, American Muslims thus claim to be able to exemplarily practice these ideals.[26]

We should note that this interpretive lens is not tortured or forced upon the Islamic tradition, unnaturally molding sources of the religion to these interests. Islamic authoritative scriptures, like other world religions, are rich and can be drawn upon to

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[26] Garbi Schmidt, “Islamic identity formation among young Muslims: the case of Denmark, Sweden and the United States,” *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 41 (April 2004): 37-40.

support and shape diverse concerns for their exegetes. Many statements in the Qur'an and Hadith can be and have been looked at as advocating human equality, human responsibilities toward one another, collective decision making, being helpful community members, promoting justice and order in society, and practicing ethics and good character. Religious sources are always read and made significant to particular socio-historical circumstances. These emphases exemplify the current ecology these particular Muslims find themselves, rather than reflecting any greater or lesser degree of Islamic authenticity than Muslims applying their tradition to their lives in other regions of the globe and/or in former times. That young Muslims are now interpreting their religion in this way reflects their absorption of values and forms of thinking highlighted in national and global discourses. These interpretations also creatively respond to their continued experience of 'outsider' status in their society-of-birth and their desire to be accepted as fellow and valuable citizens with other Americans.[27]

Democratization of Religion: the individualization of interpretation

A troop of scholars has argued that the locus of American religion has centered on individual experience and interpretation, over institutionalized construction. They assert that Americans seek out firsthand experiential appreciation of meaning, instead of simply dwelling in congregationally performed pieties; they eclectically pursue whatever would seem to bring more peace and insight, rather than an exclusive focus on a single religious

[27] Political citizenship is a fact of having legal rights as a member of the United States, social citizenship however only happens when fellow legal citizens consistently look upon American Muslim as a fellow member of American society.

agent. Hatch avows that the ideals of political equality were ardently absorbed into the ethos towards Christianity of the masses in those first decades after the American Revolution, establishing an egalitarian posture that values individual conscience and inspiration, as well as popular opinion, in determining truth over that of traditional hierarchy.[28] Wuthnow contends that despite these underlying currents of popular religion, in the first half of the twentieth century most Americans sought to satisfy their transcendental cravings through participation in a congregational religious community and adopt its teachings and rituals. In contrast, by the end of the century the undercurrent, identified by Hatch, again became the prevailing current as "most Americans say their spirituality is private—that it must develop without the guidance of religious institutions," and that faith is a largely individual "quest" that "Americans piece together" as "patchwork" from a plethora of resources.[29]

The youth in my study are a part of the Millennial Generation and reflect a certain perspectivism, rather than absolutism or relativism, in questions of truth. In other words, they believe truth or ethical living are universal realities, instead of being only what is distinctly true for each individual, yet it is fine that people will differ somewhat in their interpretations. In recent national Pew surveys, those eighteen to twenty-nine years old who are affiliated with a religion or congregation declare in similar percentages as their elders that there are absolute standards of right and wrong. Two-thirds of young adults and the 65-and-up believe "many religions can lead to eternal life." However, nearly

[28] Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1989), 6, 10, 14, 27.
[29] Robert Wuthnow, *After Heaven: Spirituality in America since the 1950s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 2.

three-quarters of the young, compared to 59% of the 65-and-up, say "there is more than one true way to interpret the teachings of their faith."[30] From this I infer that most of the young affirm there is absolute truth but respect the dignity of the individual's experiences in interpreting the subtleties of that truth. This honoring of subjectivities reflects to a deep commitment to the agency of the individual in one's spiritual journey, which young adult Muslims intimately absorb in their approach to their own faith.

The consolidation of religious authority in the individual appears to have occurred with the Baby Boomer generation (although data is not available to compare their views with those of their parents' or grandparents' generation). Sociological surveying and interviewing, as described above, has confirmed that the Baby Boomers', Generation X's, and the Millenials' approaches towards religion and spirituality is deeply personal, and recognizing it as such opens the way for respect for others' journeys. Wade Clark Roof's sociological analysis interprets a general shift in style from a straightforward adoption of "the meanings, values, and institutions…handed down by our parents' religion" to an ethos of "seeking" out and often combining "elements from various traditions to create

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[30] PewResearchCenter: A Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life Report, "Religion among the Millennials: Less Religiously Active Than Older Americans, but Fairly Traditional in Other Ways": 17, http://pewforum.org/docs/?DocID=510 (accessed January 2012). Presently Millennials, Generation X, and Baby Boomers say "many religions can lead to eternal life" in similar rates (65%), and over two-thirds of both Millennials and Generation X believe there is "more than one true way to interpret the teachings of their faith." In follow-ups on "many religions," researchers found that most people mean not just different denominations of their same religion but religions other than their own, such as Islam, Buddhism, or Hinduism (as most of those interviewed subscribed to some form of Christianity), or even just general faith in a Higher Power and living a strong moral life of integrity and kindness. Pew Research, "Many Americans Say Other Faiths Can Lead to Eternal Life," Religion and Public Life, http://www.pewforum.org/2008/12/18/many-americans-say-other-faiths-can-lead-to-eternal-life/ (accessed September 6, 2014),

their own personal, tailor-made meaning systems."[31] He does not think that contemporary Americans believe in religion and spiritual elements any less than did members of previous generations but that there has been "a qualitative shift from unquestioned belief to a more open, questing mood."[32] He believes American (with emphasis in the Pacific West) approaches toward religion and spirituality have been "shaped by a frontier heritage" that emphasizes individualism and free thinking.[33] While the leaders of the Muslim Student Associations I have encountered frequently push to present Islam as singular and uniform, the participants and non-participating Muslims on campus largely take on a perspectivistic posture towards their common religion and this personal, eclectic, seeking, and experience-oriented respect for individual interpretation.

Although this impulse to fresh interpretations of the religion began long before Muslims arrived in the United States in large numbers, through much of the nineteen century the right to interpret still largely rested in Islamic scholars, called *'ulama* (and for some the *murshid* or Sufi master). European colonial dominance in some Muslim-majority regions incited self-critical crises in which traditional forms and agents of Islamic knowledge became widely viewed as insufficient or ineffective to counter the militaristic, scientific, and ideological might of Western hegemonies. The traditional, direct oral transmission of knowledge at the feet of scholars of classical Islamic sciences

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[31] Wade Clark Roof, *A Generation of Seekers: The Spiritual Journeys of the Baby Boom Generation* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993), 5, 8, 245.
[32] Wade Clark Roof, *Spiritual Marketplace: Baby Boomers and the Remaking of American Religion* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1999), 9.
[33] Wade Clark Roof, "Conclusion—Faith and Spirituality in a Fluid Environment," *Religion and Public Life in the Pacific Region: Fluid Identities*, ed. Wade Clark Roof and Mark Silk (Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 2005), 169.

became replaced by mass printing of books written by classically-trained *'ulama* and self-educated lay Muslims. They supplied the demand for books on the religion born of the fast-growing general literacy in the twentieth century. The right of the individual Muslim to read and let his personal conscience interpret largely replaced the *'ulama* as the locus of Islamic authority.[34]

The democratization of religious authority also has been particularly prevalent for Muslims in the United States due to the socio-political context. First, only in the last two decades have centers of Islamic higher education begun to emerge in North America, none of which are close to attaining the level of prestige of Islamic seminaries in the old countries, has created a vacuum in traditional forms of religious leadership. Individuals otherwise well-educated—but in such fields as medicine, engineering, or the social or natural sciences—are often asked to fill in this gap as leaders and directors of mosques. Other mosques import scholars trained in the classical centers of Islamic scholarship. These latter *shaykh*s (teachers of Islam) often exemplify great erudition in quoting the sources of the faith, but they have difficulties communicating in ways grounded and relevant to the young people's everyday lives in this country. Not infrequently, they have difficulties even in speaking clear English—the language with which the youth are most comfortable and which is the *lingua franca* of predominantly multi-lingual American mosques. Relatively few mosques and Islamic centers are as yet led by American-born Muslims who have taken the time to complete a rigorous Islamic education, domestically

[34] Francis Robinson, "Crisis of Authority: Crisis of Islam?" *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 3 (July 2009): 340-341, 343, 346, 348, 350, 352-3.

or abroad. These factors create challenges to keeping youth and young adults actively engaged in local mosque communities. At the same time, these resourceful young people fill these gaps in local authority through their own research and peer networks.[35]

The Internet has also led to a democratization of religious authority within Islam, not just in the United States and Europe but in Muslim-majority lands as well. Today, anyone who can set up a web-page or present himself or herself as erudite in online forums, can claim to be a learned Muslim and put forward his or her own version of Islamic teachings, although some web surfers do try to verify the credentials of the authors.[36] While the students I talked to may look at various web-pages that come up from their through Google search, as they question about proper approaches to ablutions before *ṣalāt* or explanations on solving domestic disputes, more often they looked for the opinions of scholars they already knew about who had esteemed reputations. Hearing

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[35] Ihsan Bagby, *The American Mosque 2011: Basic Characteristics of the American Mosque; Attitudes of Mosque Leaders* (Council on American-Islamic Relations and Faith Communities Today [FACT], January 2012), 25. Bagby finds that 45% of Imams have the equivalent of a BA, MA, or PhD from an overseas university, and only 3% of Imams have a degree in Islamic Studies from an American university. Two-thirds were born outside of the United States and 47% only came to the United States after the year 2000, in part to fill roles in the influx of new mosques in the past fifteen years, Ihsan Bagby, *The American Mosque 2011: Activities, Administration, and Vitality of the American Mosque* (Islamic Society of North America and Faith Communities Today [FACT], May 2012) 12-15. Also see Karen Leonard, *Muslims in the United States: The State of Research* (2003), 20-21, 28, 121. Although young American Muslims have difficulties in turning to foreign scholars in making Islam relevant to their lives, many do still see the traditionally Muslim-majority regions of the globe as torch-carriers of authentic Islamic knowledge and so a small but steady number of US Muslim young adults travel and study Islam abroad for varying amounts of time. However, this authentic knowledge is not necessarily equivalent to the classical Islamic canons that were mostly written hundreds of years ago. “The contemporary sense of crisis,” writes Zareena Grewal, “among devout Muslims in the US and around the world emerges from the fear that the answer—that is, those bodies of traditional knowledge—is either an inaccessible or an inadequate answer to the challenges devout Muslims face today,” Zareena Grewal, *Islam is a Foreign Country: American Muslims and the Global Crisis of Authority* (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 39.

[36] Gary R. Bunt, *iMuslims: Rewiring the House of Islam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 113-116, 118; Gary R. Bunt, *Islam in the Digital Age: E-Jihad, Online Fatwas, and Cyber Islamic Environments* (London: Pluto Press, 2003), 124-5, 201-2; Francis Robinson, “Crisis of Authority” (July 2009): 339–354; Gary R. Bunt*, iMuslims. Rewiring the House of Islam* (London: Hurst & Co, 2009), 129.

them lecture at an Islamic conference or receiving many recommendations from friends, these students looked to such teachers as Hamza Yusuf, Siraj Wahhaj, Suhaib Webb, Nouman Khan, Azizah Al-Hibri, and Yasmin Mogahed. They freely and eclectically learned from whichever scholars resonated with them and their friends. The scholars represent various combinations of traditional Islamic higher-education with secular American degrees. Nathan Hatch asserts that the rise of democratic Christianity represented an irony as the egalitarian ideal made room for new authoritarian leaders who gained ardent popularity for their charisma and their dramatic and straight forward styles of preaching. He says that this democratization was expressed and occurred through the "triumph of vernacular preaching."[37] While Siraj Wahhaj incorporates Jeremiad censuring of immorality and different forms of structural racism and classism that is common to African American preaching and Suhaib Webb incorporates youthful lingo and neologisms that reflect a former career as a disk jockey (DJ), each of the above-named admired scholars employs a conversational style of delivery, speaking directly about the challenges and opportunities of everyday living as a Muslim in America.

While the young people of my interviews and participant observations drew closely on speakers they respected in forming their opinions, their own take on an issue was not simply regurgitation of a scholar's discourse.[38] They looked at the statements of various scholars, often through web-pages and Youtube videos, comparing them with their own reasoning to see what "worked" and was true for them personally. In the following quote

[37] Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (1989), 16.
[38] The young generation "badger their imams for information" and wish to dialogue and question about this knowledge, instead of just taking it for face-value, Syed Ali, "Why Here, Why Now? Young Muslim Women Wearing Hijab," *The Muslim World* 95 (Oct. 2005): 525.

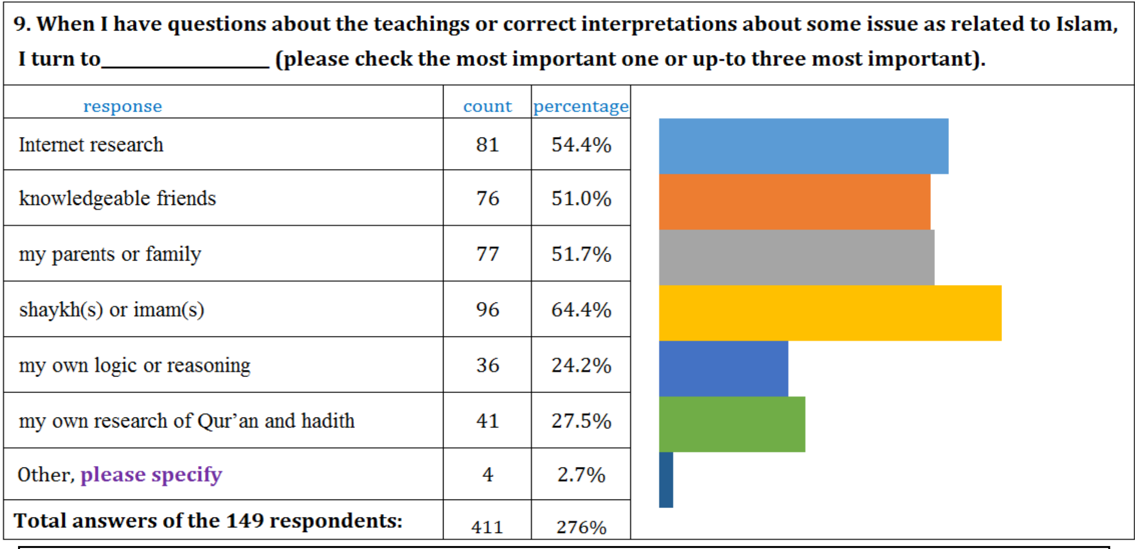
from Mujahida, a Bosnian-American sophomore who majors in global studies, we see an emphasis on an individual's capacity and right to reason rather than taking at face value the opinion of scholars of Islam or respected Muslim peers:

> Daniel: So, from where you're standing, would it be better for a Muslim to follow the interpretive guidance of a scholar from say 1000 CE who legislated on an equivalent issue, or because it's a different socio-cultural historical context to go directly to the Qur'an, Hadith, and *Sunna* and see how it applies to this context?
> Mujahida: …I believe in moderation, so if you're going to study and if you're going to follow the ancient legislation or the modern-day legislation, I would say use your common sense, have a basic understanding of what *shariah* is…understanding application…the reason why the legislation was, and apply your common sense, would you follow that? Is that applicable to modern day standards? Right, for example, *niqāb* [the face veil], modern-day, I mean back then a lot of people were wearing *niqāb* even before Islam, why, because of sand, so if you're trying to figure out if *niqāb* is mandatory or not use your common sense; or they say *niqāb*, back then, was to preserve your modesty…and also to not be showing off, but by today's standard, if you wear *niqāb*, in a society where nobody is wearing *niqāb*, like you have a lot of problems there, so I would say just use your common sense and *ijtihad*, right. There's a *fatwa* that if you're trying to get an answer to your problem and if you get it right you get two *hasanah*, or two good deeds, but if you did your homework and got it wrong you get one good deed, either way you win, so I would say read up and then use common sense…and interpret for yourself what you believe, what is most applicable to you, and use your *ijtihad* which everybody has the right to.

Mujahida here draws on Islamic sources (an unspecified *fatwa*/scholarly-legal-opinion) to argue that the very act of investigating and thinking through an issue for oneself is a good deed, even if the conclusion one arrives at is not necessarily what God would say. She emphasizes *reasons* over legal precedence, majority opinion, or taking religious injunctions at face value: understanding the wisdom and purpose behind a practice. Her approach cannot be categorized as *salafi* that desires casting aside legal history and returning to the precedents set by Muhammad and the early generations of his followers. Nor can she be characterized as neo-traditionalist, centering on genealogies of scholarly interpreters. She accepts as a given that both classical and modern-day Islamic scholars may have important ideas to teach her, while she affirms the agency of subjectivity in no uncertain terms ("and interpret for yourself what you believe, what is

most applicable to you"). In her discussion on the *niqāb* she asserts that the reasons certain practices may have made "sense" a thousand years before in a different geographic and cultural environment may not make the same sense for Muslim Americans own current contexts. She claims the right of fresh interpretations (*ijtihad*) and not just for present-day, prominent, Islamic scholars, but for each individual, conscientious Muslim.

In my survey deployed in May and June 2014, question nine I asked young Muslim Americans what sources of guidance they turn to when they have questions about the teachings or correct interpretation on some issue related to Islam. On this question they were permitted to choose multiple answers, and the majority reported turning to many different sources of guidance to help them answer their questions. Most reported turning to shaykhs or imams (64%), followed by Internet research (54%), their parents or family (52%), and knowledgeable friends (51%). Others also reported conducting their own research of the Islamic primary sources the Qur'an and Hadith (27.5%) and applying their



9. When I have questions about the teachings or correct interpretations about some issue as related to Islam, I turn to_______________ (please check the most important one or up-to three most important).

response	count	percentage
Internet research	81	54.4%
knowledgeable friends	76	51.0%
my parents or family	77	51.7%
shaykh(s) or imam(s)	96	64.4%
my own logic or reasoning	36	24.2%
my own research of Qur'an and hadith	41	27.5%
Other, please specify	4	2.7%
Total answers of the 149 respondents:	411	276%

Table 7: June 2014 Survey, sources for Islamic guidance, by Daniel Azim Pschaida

own logic and reasoning toward the question (24%). Three of the four students who chose “Other” named specific scholars of Islam that they turn to for guidance.

Like other Americans who have an eclectic approach, the students in my study also pragmatically attempt to garner further knowledge, understanding, and insight from many scholars and fellow Muslims that they may find. However, this is an eclecticism rooted in fellow Muslims, rather than the much broader eclecticism of those who seek spiritual insight from various religious traditions, self-help books, and New Age gurus. The young adult Muslim Americans seek diverse resources to strengthen their faith, their religious knowledge and practice, practicing *bricolage* within the heterogeneity of Islam itself. Na’il, an Egyptian-American freshman who helped teach a Qur’an class for UCR’s MSA, said: “I try to attend as many teachers as I can; one of my main teachers is also my Mom, she teaches me Qur'an; and they all help.” Similarly, Munirah said:

> I feel like the more diverse you are in your research and the different backgrounds you come from and then you find one of them, or one repetitive notion, then that is correct; you see it in many different sources; and your own nature agrees with it; not just in one book you read; you hear it in lectures, websites, different translations of the Qur’an, then you're confident in that.

She explains that through research in many sources (diverse background of Muslims, lectures, websites, various translations of the Qur’an) one can recognize the salient ideal while affirming individual subjectivity (“your own nature agrees with it”). In a more general way, these young Muslims—like individuals of other religions—demonstrate the limits of the socialization process. Rarely is there one single habitus that totally shapes a

person's views and practices. Rather in *lived religion* the individual takes from and combines in creative ways many elements from his or her environment.[39]

Most of these young Muslims, however, do not support unbridled subjectivity in interpretation but desire for the interpretation to be Islamically authentic, grounded in the Qur'an and Hadith. Personal conclusions must be tempered and guided by the sources of the Islamic tradition rather than whatever one would like his or her faith to be. Like Rafeeq and Nuri, quoted in the section above, these Americans Muslims respect a range of opinions among their peers, and the dignity of the individual to interpret for his or her-self, but they are cautious about Muslim perspectives merely arising from individual fancy or whim, yet calling it "Islam." In the following conversation Luqman, a Libyan-American mathematics major at UCR and MSA leader, supports an eclectic approach that fully utilizes one's intellectual faculties while being in harmony with the Qur'an:

> [Daniel:] What Islamic teachers do you actively try to learn from? [Luqman:] Pretty much anything, but still have to use common sense, and that it doesn't contradict Qur'an; as there are some scholars out there who don't exactly follow what the Qur'an says, so it's good to listen to a lot of scholars, get their opinion, but don't take anything that contradicts the Qur'an, and also good to use logic; God gave us a brain, might as well use it; also use what applies to your life.

Individually, students emphasized eclectic research of various sources and scholars that they deemed reliable and their own rational thinking and conclusions from this research, yet when together they felt pressure to affirm prominent opinions for the sake of group unity. They worked to create a united front that advertised to potential Muslim MSA new recruits and non-Muslims alike what the campus Muslims are really about.[40]

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[39] Meredith B. McGuire, *Lived Religion: Faith and Practice in Everyday Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 208.
[40] Shabana Mir, *Muslim American Women on Campus*, 159, 163-164.

This may be reinforced by MSA leaders, like Nuri quoted in the previous section, who stress that Islam is one thing and they reaffirm prevalent views, citing sources that support those conclusions. At a UC Riverside "brother's" *halaqa* (study group) of MSA that I attended, eight young Muslim men debated the merits of attending an upcoming pop music festival called Heat held at the university. All except two in the group said in different words that, due to the prevalence of promiscuity, physical intimacy, possible drug-use, and perhaps the music itself, it was best to avoid the festival. One member told a story about God intervening when the Prophet Muhammad was a young man, putting him to sleep so he was not able to make it to a social gathering that may have compromised his morals. Others asserted that when there are arguments for and against something they should go by a *hadīth* that says Muslims should "avoid the gray areas." One dissident believed he could enjoy the music and being with his friends while mostly avoiding negative influences. Another argued that Muslims may need to socialize in bars with potential business associates for professional advancement, even while not drinking alcohol. Na'il affirmed the majority view but strove to generate a tone of unity through empathizing with the minority opinions.

Cala articulated this pressure towards conformity within the spaces of the Muslim Student Association itself.

> [Daniel:] In your experience with the MSA is there is a diversity in how to approach the faith? And how did the MSA deal with it? [Cala:] Yeah I don't think there is room for interpretation in the MSA, if you have a different idea, they kind of shoot you down. If one person says something, everyone is like "yeah," like they know what they are talking about. But if you have a different opinion, people are scared to voice that. One of the reasons that I'm not more involved is that I'm very liberal minded and I've had a very different experience than other people. People don't think the same way that I do. Especially since I've taken many different classes, I've been exposed to many different cultures, I've been raised with different mentalities and I'm very open-minded. And that's not usually okay, in the MSA so you just sit there and are quiet, if you don't agree.

Others whom I asked about this said that one can disagree with a speaker but that there is a certain etiquette (*adab*) involved. Lateefa, who grew up most of her life in Saudi Arabia, said that in her home country, "It's kind of discouraged to ask questions as others see you as questioning the faith itself or you're not pious or strong in the faith; when you really just want to know why." She says that in the United States, meanwhile:

> People are free to ask questions and many do at the MSA meetings, at least in the groups in previous years people asked a lot of questions. There is a kind of etiquette to asking questions. You don't want to just dispute with the speaker or show logical fallacies to try to show off your own knowledge. If you have a legitimate concern that way, best to ask more privately; but seeking more Islamic knowledge, it is good to ask questions.

In my observations, many speakers actively encouraged the asking of questions at the MSA meetings from 2013 to 2015, and some students did ask them about various issues. However, I was surprised that even though MSA is a very important place that many of these students sought out to grow in knowledge of their religion, relatively few questions were voiced. Even while many students in the interviews emphasized that "questions are encouraged in Islam," many of these young people seemed to fear that asking questions would make others perceive them as impious or ignorant. Most often the ones I saw speaking up with inquiries were irregular, or one-time, attendees who did not have a reputation to cultivate. The few regulars who voiced their questions were very self-confident individuals.[41]

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[41] However, sometimes MSA leaders encouraged members to submit questions anonymously before a meeting.

Doing Righteous Deeds of Public Virtue

Young adult Muslim Americans have built an ideal of what it means to be a good American and a good Muslim from perceived overlap between the Islamic tradition and United States citizenship discourse that both emphasize virtue ethics. In a religiously and politically plural society, the question of what binds us as a nation is difficult to put in language of a particular religion, conservatism or liberalism, national rituals or ancestry and mythic history, for these limited identities exclude as many as they include. Arguably, what has and must increasingly bind Americans together as a national community is an ideal of virtues or ethics or character-traits. This conclusion can be witnessed in the work of sociologists, community activists, and public school programs.

Building off the sociological work of Alexander de Tocqueville and Emile Durkheim, much of Robert N. Bellah's lifework searched for that which can bind a pluralistic and secular political-state into a national community.[42] In such works as "Civil Religion" (1967) and *The Broken Covenant* (1975) Bellah identified Liberty and Equality to be among those ethical ideals of that unite this country's individuals into a society. Such parallel civil religion dimensions as the American flag itself, mythic histories of the nation's founding, and rituals of singing the National Anthem or reciting the Pledge of Allegiance are subservient to and serve to reinforce those ideals. In *Broken Covenant* and then again in *Habits of the Heart* and *The Good Society*, Bellah and his collaborators

[42] Even his last work in which he interpreted the Axial Age to be a search for the universal good for human beings, representing a pivotal turn from older religious emphases on sacrificial offerings to other-than-human-beings, I argue was the beginning of Bellah's final project to find in the cultural heritages of civilizations across the globe those symbolic resources that can unite humanity in common ethical ideals on the planetary scale, rather than his previous focus on the US. Robert N. Bellah, *Religion in Human Evolution: From the Paleolithic to the Axial Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 606

strive to identify the foundation and salvation of this country in "virtues." They deplore America's lack of application of practical wisdom (*phronesis*), resulting in the otherwise important virtues of personal initiative, industriousness, self-responsibility, and self-reliance constituting an atomistic nation of self-centered, narcissistic, and cold-hearted individuals. For Bellah and company, a proper application of practical wisdom would temper the above virtues with solidarity, reciprocity, and caring about and for one another. Only through this more balanced implementation of virtues can the members of this nation cooperate together to advance the "common good" as communities. Without these virtues the kindred ideals of Equality and "Justice for all" are destroyed at the altar of Liberty.[43]

In philosophy, the late twentieth century witnessed a revival of Aristotelian virtue discourse, more formally called the "aretaic turn," which attempted to address problems of political consensus building, societal fragmentation, epistemology, morality, and existential significance. A leading voice in this turn, Alasdair MacIntyre in *After Virtue* (1981), calls for re-grounding of the "practice" of communities in a robust "catalog" of Aristotelian virtues. These, he argues, will assist consensus-finding in otherwise incommensurable premises of moral arguments and will bring forth a holistic, integrative teleology to the various domains of individual lives. He offers this virtue foundation as being able to unite in common conversation the moral insights of classical Greek, medieval Christian European, Enlightenment, republican, and Marxist philosophy. Linda

[43] Robert N. Bellah et al., *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), viii-ix, xxx-xxxi, xxxiv-xxxv; Robert N. Bellah et al. *The Good Society* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992), 12; also see Richard Madsen et al. *Meaning and Modernity: Religion, Polity, and Self* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), xii-xiii, 10-11.

Zagzebski, a pioneer in virtue epistemology, in *Virtues of the Mind* (1996) also summons Aristotelian philosophy to create a common framework to justify both actions and beliefs in the light of virtue ethics. While MacIntyre desires to overcome the atomization of moral ideals into separate rhetoric through a re-adoption and development of "tradition," Zagzebski argues that it is *phronesis*, or wisdom, that can "mediate between and among the whole range of moral and intellectual virtues."[44]

This same impulse has driven other scholars to articulate an ethic that is globally applicable to which peoples of varying religions, cultures, and ideologies may agree. They have argued for a combination of moral principles and virtue ethics to offer such a universal norm, the specifics of which will continually be articulated and modified in consultation by many parties. In his Declaration of the Religions for a Global Ethic, Hans Küng writes of the possibility that a global ethic be reasonable and applicable to people across the world: "that the principles expressed in this Declaration can be affirmed by all humans with ethical convictions, religiously grounded or not." Later he says that "with freedom of consciousness and religion," it is not the implementation of a common religion that can bind people of a modern state but "convictions and norms which are valid for all humans regardless of their social origin, skin color, language or religion." Similarly, in his own Declaration of a Global Ethic, Catholic scholar of dialogue and ecumenism Leonard Swidler says, "We advocate movement toward a global order that reflects the best values found in our myriad traditions." He says such values are taken

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[44] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory, 3rd ed.* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007); Linda Trinkaus Zagzebski *Virtues of the Mind: An Inquiry into the Nature of Virtue and the Ethical Foundations of Knowledge* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996): *xiv-xv*.

from discovering “minimal consensus on ethics” that are convincing to women and men of goodwill from the diverse religions and non-religious ethos, values that will provide “a moral framework” for relating to ourselves, each other, and the world in a respectful and just manner. A new planetary culture, Küng avows, will be built upon such universally agreed upon moral principles as non-violence and respect for life, solidarity and just economics; tolerance and truthfulness, and a transformative consciousness that is socially beneficial and pluralist, partnership forming and peace fostering, nature-friendly and ecumenical. Swidler also details moral principles among which are respect for the dignity of each human life, loving the good for everyone, responsibility to help one another, and dialogue to learn from each other and broaden and deepen a developing consensus.[45]

Because values were assumed to be tied to particular religious traditions and there was a desire not push one’s beliefs on an increasingly diverse America, author and activist Don E. Eberly (1995) argues that the public spaces of businesses, schools, and politics de-emphasized values and virtues after the 1950s. Nonetheless, Americans abundantly agree, he claims, that character is important. Values or character traits unite people from opposite political spectrums and from different religions and cultures. For those who raise a skeptical “but whose values?” he draws on C. S. Lewis assertion that the core virtues of beneficence, duty to family, justice, faithfulness and veracity, mercy, and magnanimity are shared across ideologies and ethnicities. He adds evidence from a Gallup survey that said the grand majority of Americans believe in teaching the young

[45] “Hans Küng: Declaration of a Global Ethic” and “Leonard Swidler: Declaration of a Global Ethic,” Oct. 20, 2013, Center for Global Ethics, http://globalethic.org/ (accessed Aug. 28, 2014).

honesty, democracy, care for family and friends, moral courage, acceptance of people of different races and religions, and respect for the expression of unpopular political and social views.[46] In the same volume, Thomas Lickona presents his “Comprehensive Approach to Character Education” to address a breakdown in youth morality as manifested by trends in rising youth violence, peer cruelty, dishonesty, and declining work ethic and personal and civic responsibility.[47]

Indeed, while few of these students will have read Bellah, MacIntyre, Eberly, or Küng, this perspective on how to cultivate strong citizens of American and global society has increasingly entered this country’s schools and public life through concrete programs. In United States schools, in the absence of being able to teach a particular religious worldview to fashion ideal members of society, and striving to counteract negative youth culture trends of swearing, bullying, racism, perversity, and contumacy, many classrooms have adopted programs that emphasize traits of character or virtue ethics. Over forty school districts, plus the Boys and Girls Club and YMCA, have adopted the program of “Character Counts” (in which Eberly and Lickona, above, have been involved) that emphasizes the “six attributes of character”: Caring, Citizenship, Fairness, Respect, Responsibility, and Trustworthiness. Many other institutions that work with children and youth have incorporated such programs as “The Virtues Project,” “S.T.A.R.,” “Character First! Education,” “Character Education Partnership,” “Lessons in Character,” and “The National Character Education Center.” This last program emphasizes Respect,

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[46] Don E. Eberly, ed. “The Quest for America’s Character,” *The Content of America’s Character: Recovering Civic Virtue* (Lanham, Maryland: Madison Books, 1995), 16-21.
[47] Thomas Lickona, “A Comprehensive Approach to Character Education,” *The Content of America’s Character*, ed. Don E. Eberly (Lanham, Maryland: Madison Books, 1995), 141-142.

Compassion, Integrity, Perseverance, Cooperation, Initiative, and a Positive Mental Attitude.[48] These programs have worked with local communities across the country, such as Yakima, Washington, Owasso, Oklahoma, and Aiken, South Carolina, to adopt a character trait each month, making it ubiquitous by advertising it in such places as private businesses' reader boards, on city utility bills, in city council meetings, and in schools.[49]

Muslim young adults also use the language of the civil religion of standing responsible before God to lead public (and private) moral lives. Garbi Schmidt writes that young American Muslims she met in her fieldwork and interviews articulated striving to be exemplary citizens of their communities by going out of their ways to be considerate and help neighbors and strangers. They believed they held mutual "responsibility for your fellow human beings," whether Muslim or non-Muslims. One young person spoke of assisting an old lady with crutches down some stairs. Schmidt interprets their reasons for this ethical and communitarian emphasis as threefold. First, although they also stressed ritual piety, it was easier to practice ethics than five daily prayers in the structures and schedules of Western nations. Second, these emphases were a strategy to stress loyalty

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[48] "Character Education Programs," Association of American Educators, http://www.aaeteachers.org/index.php/character-education-programs; "Education," The Virtues Project, http://www.virtuesproject.org/; "The Six Pillars of Character," Josephson Institute: Center for Youth Ethics; "Core Ethical Values in VIA," National Character Education Center," http://ethicsusa.org/values-in-action/core-ethical-values-in-via/ (accessed August 15, 2014)

[49] "A city of character," Aiken Standard, posted January 17, 2011, http://www.aikenstandard.com/article/20110117/AIK0101/301179999; "Once Again Character Counts!" http://www.selah.k12.wa.us/ADM/Publ/News_Updates/Focus%20on%20Character%20Continues.pdf; "Owasso City Council Minutes of Regular Meeting: Tuesday, January 7, 2014," http://cityofowasso.com/AgendaCenter/ViewFile/Minutes/01072014-22; Craig Howard, "School District set community P.A.C.E. with character building," Spokane Valley News Herald, published September 9, 2010, http://www.spokanevalleyonline.com/articles_svnews/2010/092410_pace_program.html; "August 2012 Newsletter," Smithville Area Chamber of Commerce, http://www.franlan.com/chamberCMS/images/stories/PDF's/August2012_newsletter.pdf; "Background," Mission Viejo: Community of Character, Summer 2003 (accessed August 15, 2014).

and mutual belonging in a non-Muslim nation-state. Third, they carried forward the ethos of twentieth century Islamic revival movements, such as *Jama'at-i-Islami* and *Ikhwan al-Muslimun* that accentuated the importance of social activism and community service.[50]

These youth have appropriated the language of virtue ethics to portray themselves as among the best of Americans and likewise among the best of Muslims. In the present political climate in which horrifying acts of terror continue to be linked with the Islamic religion rather than one of many strands of global Islamic ideologies or to particular socio-political contexts, the loyalties of these United States citizens are still regularly questioned. In addition, these young adults' fellow believers in Muslim-majority regions may be suspicious that their youthful Muslim counterparts' have become excessively "Americanized," undermining their abilities to interpret and practice Islam. The language of public and private virtues is a deliberate strategy to perform civil and religious legitimacy. Young adult Muslim Americans have absorbed this language of character traits as the values that bind and distinguish Americans of different religious backgrounds. At the same time they argue that such virtues are also among those most fundamental to the Islam.

As part of the interviews, I asked the seventy-eight young adult Muslims such questions as "Who is a Muslim?" or "What are the characteristics of a true Muslim?" or "What is the purpose of life?" The following five quotes exemplify the most frequent kind of responses to these inquiries:

> Halala: A Muslim is someone who submits himself to Allah and embodies the religion itself and represents the religion; I think of someone who is of good character, someone who has good

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[50] Garbi Schmidt, "Islamic identity formation among young Muslims: the case of Denmark, Sweden and the United States," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 41 (April 2004): 37-40.

> character first and foremost; someone who treats his parents with the utmost respect; who always asks about their neighbors, that their neighbors and community is doing okay and doesn't need help; I imagine a Muslim as being generous and kind.
>
> Riya: I think the purpose of life is to do what is asked of you by the Creator, and while we are here to do what we can for the community around us, and to live in a righteous or upright life to pave the way for your afterlife… Do things like volunteer work, nothing in particular, but sometimes the homeless feeding, sometimes donating clothing, or Red-Cross kind-of things; help Muslims or non-Muslims alike, as God created us all; wherever I can help, try to give my service; or at least giving money, but I think that's the least, less than getting down and dirty which is what no one wants to do but is the most important
>
> Cala: The praying is the easy part, its five minutes, five times per day. The fasting is hard on your body, but people forget to eat all the time. Everyone around you is doing it too. It's not the hard part. Yes it's hard, but it's once in a lifetime opportunity. Giving to charity is hard, but the hardest still is upholding your character and the expectations that God has for you.
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> Yunus: A person who follows the pillars, prays and fasts; then follows the things that Islam asks for, looks at women in respectful manner, treats other in respectful manner, don't look at color; humanistic characteristics as well as Islamic ones; treats people as if they are all the same. …[who] follows Islam; like cleaning the street or helping the poor; help the homeless, expect Muslim to do that.
>
> Samira: To be a Muslim I think means you need to be a tolerant and compassionate individual. You have to have empathy. You have to not be elitist; I feel like our issue in our *umma*, in our Muslim society, is that we are getting arrogant… and we're not being respectful of other types of religion, other people's religions, and that is not what Islam is meant for, it is not our duty to damn someone to hell; it's not our duty to tell someone why are you wearing that that way. But in a lot of verses of the Qur'an, Allah will say that He is Most Just and He is Most Merciful; so who are we to say anything, because we are imperfect creatures; he created us imperfectly so that we can turn back and repent to him. …if we were perfect, then he doesn't have a job to do... I feel like to be a Muslim you have to have empathy; because who knows one day you might be in that person's situation. One day, I don't know, you might find yourself being attracted to the same-sex; you never know what's going to happen in your life, so I don't think it is right that we judge people so quickly. I think being Muslim is being empathetic and compassionate towards everyone's situation.

These young adults emphasized having a high moral character, caring for others, and doing small acts of kindness for others. While they said that recognizing the unity of God and the Prophet-hood of Muhammad was a basic qualification for being Muslim, they believed that what truly completed a person as a follower of Islam was being a productive, helpful and compassionate person of integrity. In other words, a Muslim should be an exemplary member of society. This theme was also consistently promoted in the talks sponsored by the Muslim Student Association. For example, in April 2014 in a Friday *jumʿah* at the meditation room of UC Riverside, an event organized by MSA, the

student speaker told a story about the first Muslim community in Medina in which a man prayed most of his day in the mosque. The Prophet Muhammad, always seeing this man there, one day asked him who provided for him and found out it was his brother. His brother daily worked vigorously to support him and his family and contributed to society through his profession, having time to only fulfill the basic prayers. The Prophet told this first man that his brother was the "better man." Likewise, when I asked Luqman about the spiritual state of being of non-Muslims, he said that there is a story of two women where one followed the Five Pillars of Islam but treated other people poorly and another mostly neglected the Five Pillars but "she acted proper towards people, had good morals and ethics. The Prophet said [that] this [latter way] is what the religion is [most importantly] supposed to produce."

Nuri, the student officer of MSA, in his interview, emphasized that prayer is only a small piece of one's life purpose to worship God. He said:

> God put you here in life for a purpose, and that purpose is to worship him; and some people think worship is, 'oh I gotta stay in the mosque and pray all day,' but yes, you have your prayers and obligations, but it is also treating your wife well and fairly, taking care of your family and your parents, making sure you always respect them even if you disagree; encompasses being fair in business, don't cheat anyone in any way; encompasses if you do something, do it with your full ability and attention and make it as perfect as you can, encompasses all these things, encompasses righteousness, are you righteous with everything you do? If you're righteous and do it for the sake of God, then that is worship.

For Nuri, the key-note of being a Muslim is really being ethical in the myriad facets of life. In his statement, while articulating Islam in a way that will be pleasing to many non-Muslim Americans, he molds his discourse with a distinctly religious and Islamic flavor that will be appealing and legitimate to fellow Muslims, domestic and abroad. He does this by expressing one's motivations for this ethos to be out of worship, to strive to love

and please God, rather than to make oneself look like an outstanding citizen or pious Muslim, even while both those things are implicit intended byproducts.

Similarly, Bahir linked being Muslim with generally acting as an outstanding citizen. When asked "what is the purpose of life?" he responded "to serve God and live the best life you can do…best in terms of forwarding the good of society" rather than to get to "level twelve in the World of War Craft (a video game)… We can forward the good" by showing "what Islam truly is…our true colors; help our communities, like recycling or volunteering, or clean up; being good to your neighbor; …to live a more humbled life; donate." He said that in this way "we can promote anti-Islamophobia," i.e. better the image of the religion. Hence, for him, and many of his Muslim friends, being accepted as a worthy American citizen also helps improve the reputation of his religion, and both can be attained through practicing virtue ethics as an act of devotion to God. In effect, the struggle to become recognized as a full citizen is sacralized as a religious cause, while working to have Islam welcomed as an American religion, for Bahir and his fellows, is an expression of civic activism.

These young people ground talk of public virtue in distinctly Islamic discourse. Rafeeq identifies himself as a "geeky, nerdy type" who likes video games, comic books, and fixing computers and "love(s) helping people" through which he sees himself as "worshipping Allah." He relates this to the important Islamic concept and practice of *ṣadaqa* which he translates to mean "optional charity." He told me, "even a smile…, even lending an ear" or "random acts of kindness" "can be considered a form of *ṣadaqa*." The word *ṣadaqa* in its etymology relates to be being trustworthy, reliable, sincere, and a

true or faithful friend.[51] He paraphrased a *hadīth* to say that it is good manners and character that truly completes someone as a Muslim: "Islam" is "not just the basic of doing your rituals and prayers; the prophet said that none of you is a true believer unless you have good manners and character—*adab* and *akhlāq*." Later in the interview, Rafeeq elaborated that "any act of kindness shouldn't be done for something in return…for people" or for "fame" but "for the sake of Allah." He described this as the meaning of the prominent Qur'anic virtue of *ikhlāṣ*, or sincerity. Cristina, who converted to Islam during her first year of college, also saw the purpose of life for a Muslim as remembering God through one's actions, such as "giving to charity, or helping an old lady cross the street." She said that even though one does these things to "get to heaven," the true motive must be to "remember Him" and "submit" to His will. These students, and others, even without citing the Arabic word, refer to the prominent Islamic concept of *nīya*, or purifying one's "intentions" when doing acts of worship. This is ritually practiced when beginning to read the Qur'an, completing a *ṣalāt* prayer, or beginning *hajj*/pilgrimage.[52] Thus, from their discourse, in this ideal of *ṣadaqa*, the virtues of trustworthiness, faithfulness, kindness, purity of intentions, and sincerity, are also enfolded.

Muslim Student Associations institutionalize the public virtue of *ṣadaqa* through their practice of preparing food for the destitute. At UC Riverside, each quarter, MSA members would spend an afternoon in the regular meetings making lunch bags of peanut-butter and jelly sandwiches, chips, a piece of fruit, and a bottle of water. Sometimes they

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[51] Hans Wehr, "ṣadaqa" and "ṣadīq," *Arabic-English Dictionary: The Hans Wehr Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic* 4th ed., ed. J. M. Cowan (Urbana, Illinois: Spoken Language Services, Inc. 1994), 594.
[52] Joseph Schlacht, *Introduction to Islamic Law* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), 116.

would later go through a nearby neighborhood in small teams, passing the bags out to people who seem to live on the street. More typically they would donate the care packages to a shelter or center that feeds the indigent. The national MSA organization has also encouraged, and I saw various local MSAs practice, the Ramadan Fast-a-thon. Started in 2001 at the University of Knoxville in Tennessee, hundreds of MSAs across the nation now participate, raising tens of thousands of dollars that they donate to local emergency food shelters. Some campus MSAs encourage members to donate money they would save when missing meals during Ramadan toward feeding the impoverished. Alternatively they have asked local businesses to donate a certain amount of money for each student who fasts, and participants have invited their non-Muslim friends to also fast to experience what it is like and help raise money.[53] In 2013, the University of Washington's MSA donated most of the money gathered to a soup kitchen and it also hosted a large *ifṭār* dinner, inviting fellow students and local community members.

In the same spirit, two young men volunteered for the MSA of UC Riverside in the 2013-2014 academic year, requesting that it form a food task force. Each Tuesday afternoon they spent hours chopping, cooking, and preparing enough food, including dessert, to feed the thirty to forty students in attendance. They told me that they did this to give more gastronomical diversity and nutrition to the weekly meeting (previously there was typically pizza), and to attract a consistently strong turnout. One said:

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[53] Hadia Mubarak, "How Muslim Students Negotiate their Religious Identity and Practices in an Undergraduate Setting," *Social Science Research Council* (May 2007): 5; "A Tale of Two Cities: Rebuilding in Faith," *MSA Link* (MSA National: Spring/Summer 2008): 8-9, tells the story of how the MSA of Loyola University in New Orleans worked together to raise funds, including $20,000 through Fast-a-Thon, and volunteered to help rebuild communities after Hurricane Katrina.

"anything can be an act of worship; try to feed your family in a healthy way, or earning money in an honest way, these are all acts of worship, six or seven hours of work is six or seven hours of worship, when we do it conscious of God; we can show Islam through character." He added that they began to do this act of worship to "try to encourage people to come to the meetings, as there are good speakers there" and attending MSA can be a "reminder of God" from which "the more unified we become." The other expressed how good food may help unify the group: "it creates more bonds of fellowship, eating and talking together, people stay and chat over the food." Both of these individuals in separate interviews stressed mindfulness in how they use their time, limiting their movie-viewing and avoiding video games. In my observations, they spent much time each week studying, interacting with friends, and volunteering for service opportunities.

Adeeb expressed *ṣadaqa* by finding ways to be of service to the various communities in which he participated. In a phone interview, asking him what he strives to stand for, he answered "giving victory to God's religion" and that the way to do this is "to spread good and stop evil." He said he attempts to do this "through good behavior; whoever I meet, [being] nice to each person, give my time to each person, help them out, show them I care about them, show concern for them, whatever religion, whatever race or ethnicity, rich or poor." He has acted on this ideal of universal beneficence in various ways throughout his youth and young adulthood. He grew up attending and volunteering at his local mosque, cleaning it with his sister, and facilitating a group for youth. While attending a University of California, he led the Muslim Student Association as president for a year. During his time there, he noticed that a lot of students were just struggling to have money to afford

eating lunch; so he organized a central refrigerator on campus where leftover food from banquets and university events would be brought and students had access to a free meal. Now as a young professional, he also connects wealthy Muslims to invest in students, home-buyers, and young entrepreneurs, encouraging them to give interest-free loans, according to Islamic legal rules. Previously, he was a tutor for Mentor Academic Peer Support (MAPS), regularly going to a high school in Watts, California to tutor and mentor youth. He also heads an organization that tutors incarcerated youth in juvenile hall, teaches the detainees math, helps them pass their testing, and guides them to make good decisions to improve their lives.

Young adult Muslims, often along with their elders, have also organized the institutionalization of *ṣadaqa* in various regions of the country with an eye on serving communities of lower socio-economic resources, by setting up after-school centers, medical clinics, and social service agencies. Zaid Adhami affirms in his 2010 report for the Institute of Social Policy and Understanding that such activities are typical, as he describes and evaluates the many current philanthropic activities facilitated by mosques in the Los Angeles area.[54] Four young friends attending college in the Riverside area established the Sahaba Initiative organization in 2011 in neighboring San Bernardino—a metropolitan area that ranks second only to Detroit as the poorest large city in the United

[54] The activities include canned food and clothes drives, collecting *zakāt* moneys and distributing them to community charitable organizations, mental health and drug counseling referrals, after-school tutoring, community garden plantings, and free tax services. Zaid Adham, "Los Angeles Mosques: Institutionalize Charity and Service" (Detroit: Institute for Social Policy and Understanding, 2010), 7-9. Published September 1, 2010, http://www.ispu.org/PublicationPortal/41/0/0/Enter%20Any%20Keyword/1/Search.aspx (accessed August 21, 2014).

States.[55] Audacious about feeding the hungry from their teenage years, on one occasion they passed out leftover food from an Islamic Conference in the middle of the night to people on the streets of Compton, California. Sahaba Initiative currently has a Food Pantry, Community Garden, and Resource Center.[56] They also regularly invite Muslim and non-Muslim friends to help them with put together food and care packages and distribute them in the San Bernardino and Riverside. At this writing, they were working with other Muslim professionals and social service organizations to initiate a drug counseling and mental health component of the center. At this time, three of the four also had other full-time jobs or attend university while just one staffs the center as his main, full-time job.

The founders of this organization frame the significance of this organization, and what they do, in five ways. First, they work to counteract the negative image Muslims often receive in the media. Mohammed Kuko, a Sudanese-American student who is one of the founders, asserted that what most Americans see comes from "the couple of bad apples," so he likes "people to see the Muslims that are helpful to the community" and "hard-working." Second, founders frame this organization as reflecting Islamic principles and practices that emphasize socio-economic justice. Mr. Kuko connected this to the principle of *zakāt*, the Islamic tax of 2.5% of excess wealth, saying he "read a study that if every

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[55] Rob McMillan, "Census: San Bernardino 2nd-Poorest Large City in US," *ABC 7 Eyewitness News*, November 17, 2011, http://abc7.com/archive/8436598/ (accessed August 23, 2014). San Bernardino and Riverside is part of the Inland Empire region of California that are also with the Detroit area among the poorest in the country, see Neil Nisperos and Ryan Hagen, "Census: Inland Empire has nation's highest poverty rate," *The Sun Censuses*, September 18, 2013, http://www.sbsun.com/social-affairs/20130919/census-inland-empire-has-nations-highest-poverty-rate (accessed August 23, 2014).
[56] Sahaba Initiative, https://www.sahabainitiative.org/ (accessed September 10, 2014).

Muslim did this, then we would almost end world hunger… Sahaba Initiative is trying to do this for San Bernardino, based partly on the *zakāt* from different masjids around the area."[57] Third, they work to make this organization have a spirit of solidarity with the poor, the meek, and disenfranchised. At a presentation to UCR's MSA in February 2014, Malek Bendelhoum, a Sahaba founder, said, "The first to come to Islam were of the lower socio-economic status…they're our roots, that's where we came from." Arbazz Mohammed, the other presenter, added that in Islam "poor people" should not be looked down upon as having a "kind of blemish," but rather some of the most honored individuals in the religion's history have been indigent and seeming without social status. He said, "*Zakāt* brings people of different social classes together in fellowship." Fourth, these Sahaba founders linked service with emotional/spiritual states of happiness and peace. Arbazz Mohammed talked about happiness not being tied to wealth or material well-being per se, but through service to others "you find contentment, and this is *janna* (the garden of heaven) on this earth, because inner peace comes from "peace with Allah." Peace with God in turn comes from fulfilling his *riḍa* (good-pleasure). He also rooted such a religious perspective in scientific evidence saying that a "Harvard study recently"

[57] A few MSA UCR students referred to a legendary period in one of the early Caliphates in which through the practice of *zakāt* tax, *ṣadaqa* charity, and *jizya* tax of non-Muslims, the public treasury (*bayt-ul-mal*) and its equitable distribution practically eliminated poverty from the Islamic empire. According to the story, the provisions of each person had been so taken care of that to continue to practice charity, the Caliph Omar ordered to take grain and to put it in the fields for the birds. While in fact today Muslim-majority countries struggle with inequitable extremes of wealth and poverty to similar degrees as other nations, some young Muslims cite this moment in their religion's history as a source of pride and esteem for the theoretic potentials of the faith's teachings to effect positive change. These comments are uniquely portentous for them at this moment in which many Americans protest of ever-rising income gaps between the richest and the poorest and the myth of "trickle-down" economic policies. "The World Distribution of Household Wealth," United Nations University, February 2008, http://www.wider.unu.edu/publications/working-papers/discussion-papers/2008/en_GB/dp2008-03/ (accessed September 2, 2014).

confirmed “the happiest people are those that dedicate their lives to service.” Fifth, caring for fellow human beings is a virtue in itself. Mohammed Kuko quoted the Prophet Muhammad proclaiming a version of the Golden Rule in the words: “No one of you is a true believer until you want for your brother what you want for yourself.” Mr. Kuko said: “if the whole world adopted this quality, the world would be a better place.” Mr. Mohammed and Mr. Bendelhoum explained in their presentation that the “Qur'an doesn't say to feed the Muslims… but says to feed and care for those in need.” Thus, they and others like them strive to serve Muslims and non-Muslims without distinction.

Prayer and Fasting in the Language of Humanism, Self-Help, Self-Actualization, Public Virtue, and Journeying towards God

A further sign that these young Muslims think about and articulate their faith in a way that reflects contemporary conceptual prisms prevalent in their American nation comes to light when we examine the ways they frequently talk about the significance of fasting and prayer. They speak about these practices less in terms of covenant, fealty, obedience and surrender to God, sacrifices, or giving of offerings that have been traditionally central ideals of the Abrahamic religions and more in terms of self-help, self-actualization, compassionate humanism, and public virtue. God’s wisdom and authoritative command remains in the background as the ultimate *raison d'être* of these religious laws and their language also depicts life as a journey towards the Divine. However, the significances these young adult Muslim Americans emphasize to make sense of these two pillars of Islam strongly reveal concepts of a contemporary humanistic worldview.

I repeatedly heard students explain the religious practices of prayer and fasting in terms of human development. They compared these rituals to exercising and strengthening one's body at a gym: praying and fasting being weightlifting and an aerobic workout for the soul. Sana said:

> It's like going to the gym and lifting weights, strengthening your muscles, the five pillars and what not in Islam, those are my weights to strengthen my soul …With prayer, you always have to try, you always need to give effort; with breathing, it's more natural, my belief in God is more like breathing, it comes naturally to me; praying is more like exercising, a thing you do to make you strong.

For her, the very naturalness of her belief in God is not enough for spiritual fulfillment: one must also develop oneself with religious practices like praying and fasting.

Likewise, Rohana speaks of the importance of prayer in terms similar to the necessities of electronic technologies:

> Prayer, five times a day… it is not a burden but a time management skill; it is there for a reason, for your connection with God, *giving energy* to your soul, and throughout the day you make those full stops and *recharge* yourself. Fasting is the same thing, you realize you are not an animal, you're more than just someone who eats and drinks, more to you than that; I would definitely say that reading the Qur'an was, is, one of the biggest lights in my life, to say why do I have to go here, do this, do that; I don't just see it as a religious or holy book but as *a self-improving book*.

Hence, Rohana has mapped the idea of the self-help manual onto the central Scripture of Islam. To give it this perspective is not torturously stretched, however. The Qur'an describes itself as a "guidance (*hudā*)," "a discernment and a criterion between truth and falsehood (*furqān*)," and "wisdom (*ḥikmah*)." The Qur'an also speaks of itself as an agent for developing the human soul/self (*nafs*), analogous to water and sunlight growing flora, such as in 71:17: "And God has cultivated you from the earth growing (gradually)." Likewise the Qur'an 48:29 gives a "parable," comparing the true believer to "a seed which sends forth its shoot, then makes it strong; it then becomes thick, and it stands on its own stem, (filling) the sowers with wonder and delight." Hence, the ideas in the

Qur'an invite organic deepening of one's faith and growing in spiritual qualities rather than suggesting a stagnant dichotomy between a believer and an infidel.[58]

Many students emphasized that "Muslim" was not "just being a label" but a way for continual self-improvement and growth. Husayn said that you can "never feel satisfied with the state you're in, always trying to improve; someone who wants to exercise and lift weights, once they feel satisfied they don't have new challenges to go further, and when you're a better Muslim you can handle better what life throws at you; lift weights, can carry more weights." Thus, he says that being Muslim is a matter of building up capacities: the greater the growth, the large the challenges one can tackle effectively.

Many students also spoke of prayer in the more traditional terms of becoming closer to God, attaining the presence of God, and preparing oneself for heaven. Mujahida said, "The point of religion, in my eyes, is not to make your religion difficult but the point is to improve yourself and build yourself a closer bond with God." Nadra defined prayer as "a cleansing and it brings you closer to God and you are supposed to purify yourself, get closer to and please God, and strive to get into heaven." In this trope life is expressed as a journey full of opportunities and obstacles one must pass through to attain God's presence.[59] This trope is also rooted in Islamic imagery that depicts journeys through

[58] Daniel Azim Pschaida, "The Purpose of Life and the Development of the Human Personality: The Process- and Growth-Orientation of the Qur'an," (University of California at Riverside: unpublished paper, November, 22, 2010).

[59] This trope maps closely to scholars of American religion who characterize this country's religiosity as a "nation of seekers." Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Restless Souls: The Making of American Spirituality* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2005), 7; Wade Clark Roof, *A Generation of Seekers* (1993) and *Spiritual Marketplace* (1999); Robert Wuthnow, *After Heaven* (1998); Robert C. Fuller, *Spiritual but not Religious: Understanding Unchurched America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001). However, as discussed in the section above "Democratization of Religion," these "Muslim seekers" do not try out and draw from diverse religions and 'alternative' spiritualties but diverse resources from within Islam itself. The exception to this are the convert Muslims I interviewed, over fifty percent of whom expressed intensely studying and

(usually) seven stages in one's approach to God; descriptions of heaven itself feature seven garden levels of paradise; and in Muhammad's legendary Night Journey (*laylat-u'l-mi'rāj*) he ascends the seven levels of heaven to his meeting with God. Sufi writings present the journey of the spiritual wayfarer as passing through valleys or gardens toward the presence of God. The Qur'an itself also uses the language of drawing near to the Divine (often denoted by the root qaf ra ba [ق ر ب] such as 34:37; 39:3; & 96:19). [60]

Other students spoke of their religion in terms of a growing relationship with God, an interpretation that was reinforced by the Muslim Student Association lead officers. Marjan confessed that she had taken to talking to God throughout the day, particularly when she is driving alone in her car to "just have a conversation with God, to ask for help for this person or that, or just express feelings to God" as a way to build her relationship and a regular consciousness of the Divine in her life. In a 2014 MSA meeting at UCR that studied the first Surah of the Qur'an, the organization's president encouraged members to meditate and call on the various "ninety-nine names of God" to cultivate *taqwa* (or God-consciousness). At a follow-up meeting a few weeks later, the vice president of the MSA discussed ten of those ninety-nine names, explaining some of the significances of each attribute and how understanding the divine names deeply can help one draw closer to God. The leaders closed that gathering by asking each participant to write a letter to God, putting it in an envelope so that MSA could re-send it to them in a few months during

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experimenting with various other religions before coming to Islam. These converts generally continued to actively appreciate learning about other religions to enrich their own spiritual life.

[60] Students also enact this language of ascent and altitude when they speak of going to Islamic conferences and talks to get an "*iman* (faith) high," used in the way of "spiritual high," perhaps being seen as a healthy alternative to "getting high" off non-prescription drugs.

Ramadan. Such recommended practices continue Islamic traditional practices of unscheduled and voluntary *du'a* (supplication).[61] However, they reformulate *du'a* as a constant communicative relationship and practice in a way that is even more informal than traditional *du'a* (which has often used memorized parts of the Qur'an and prayers of the Prophet and eminent Muslim poets).

Ashraf extended the situations where one can work on drawing closer to God, saying that it is not just in prayer and fasting or chatting with God in one's car. He said:

> The heart of Islam is the heart (chuckle), that's what it is, it is your connection with God; whatever you're doing if you're in that deep state of being connected to your Lord, that is the heart of it; if you are picking up trash but you're in that connection with your Lord, that is more important than whatever you do as long as you have that connection.

Indeed, in young adult Muslim Americans' interpretation of the significance of Ramadan itself in terms of charity and public virtue we can see the influence of their national environment. Repeatedly I heard that fasting during Ramadan's significance to be to empathize with those who are very poor and who go hungry and also to help to feed the indigent. Tana, an Indian-American pre-medical student, said:

> In Ramadan, fasting teaches you to sympathize with people that don't have as much, to step in their shoes, at least from the morning till sunset, to see how it feels to be hungry, to be starving. A lot of people in this world feel that way every single day for the rest of their lives, and they die; it teaches you things like that and also charity work and all that.

In a *khutbah* (sermon given during the Friday prayer gathering), fellow student Bahir challenged this significance typically given for Ramadan, saying that although it is not incorrect, it is not the essential implication of the Fast. He said that Ramadan fasting is a command of God for the sake of developing our God-consciousness (*taqwa*), in the difficulty of being hungry, thirsty, and tired; and that for this purpose it is not proper to

[61] *Du'a* being distinct from the more formal and ritualized five *ṣalāt* at set times.

lie around on Ramadan but best to stay active and remember God. He added that fasting is done for the sake of renewing one's relationship with God and for cleansing one's minds and lives. He also linked the significance to the Qur'an's first revelation in its entirety to the angel Gabriel during the Night of Power, traditionally understood to have occurred in the final third of the Ramadan month.

Islamic sources, nevertheless, also do connect fasting with compassion for the hungry and charitable feeding of the poor. The Qur'an says feeding an indigent person can be a substitute for someone who cannot fast due to health issues (2:184). In addition, various statements in the Hadith record the Prophet as encouraging feeding those with insufficient food, giving money, and manumitting slaves during the month of Ramadan. These practices make up for compromising the fast, such as a believer who admits having intercourse with his wife during the holy month (a forbidden act during these thirty days).[62] Indeed, often in Muslim-majority countries public feasts are held each night of the Fast in which those of lesser means are especially welcome. In North America mosques and Islamic centers may organize large dinners for visitors during Ramadan.

Conservative Discourse and Relaxed Implementation: *The Case of Music*

The localized, heterogeneous approaches to interpretation of Islam by young adult Muslims in the American Pacific region are further witnessed when looking at the issue of music. Islamic scholars and Muslim laity have intensely debated the morality and proper Islamic approach to the use of musical instruments, poetry, and singing.

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[62] Sahih Muslim, Book# 6, Hadith# 2457, 2461, 2465; Abu Dawud, Book# 9, Hadith# 1605

Statements in the Hadith indicate that it was a contested issue from the early Muslim communities, perhaps even from the Prophet Muhammad's lifetime. The Qur'an and Hadith do not give clear injunctions on the permissibility or prohibition of music, and eminent scholars have both censured and approved of its use. Arabia and the regions into which Islam spread had highly developed musical traditions, and while scholars debated, Muslims continued unabated to gather at their homes and in Sufi orders to play and enjoy the aesthetics of music.[63] From the 7th through 11th century, the courts of the caliphs, sultans, and kings often sponsored talented musicians.[64] Meanwhile, Muslims and non-Muslims alike have long appreciated the musicality inherent in many styles of Qur'anic recitation, performed and heard ubiquitously in Muslim-majority communities in public calls to prayer, prayer services, weddings, circumcisions, and funerals.[65] Additionally, many individuals in Muslim-majority countries, for whom their Islamic faith is important, enjoy music of many styles and from many global regions, Western, traditional Arab, South Asian, or Indonesian. They also listen to Islamically-inspired lyrics from the radio, cassettes, and digital devices. Arabic writers in different ages have used distinct terms to discuss particular genres of music, as there is no generalized term like the English word "music."[66] A cursory sampling makes evident that one can

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[63] Amnon Shiloah, "Music and Religion in Islam," *Acta Musicologica*, 69, no. 2 (Jul. - Dec., 1997): 143-4; Lisa Nielsen, "Gender and the Politics of Music in the Early Islamic Courts," *Early Music History* 31 (January 2012): 235–261; Jonas Otterbeck and Anders Ackfeldt, "Music and Islam," *Contemporary Islam: Dynamics of Muslim Life* 6, no. 3 (Springer, October 2012): 235-6.
[64] Jean Jenkins and Poul Vosing Olsen, *Music and Musical Instruments in the World of Islam* (London: World of Islam Festival Publishing Company, 1976), 8.
[65] Lois Ibsen al Faruqi, "The Status of Music in Muslim Nations: Evidence from the Arab World," *Asian Music* 12, no. 1 (1980): 60.
[66] Sumarsam, "Past and Present Issues of Islam within Central Javanese Gamelan and *Wayang Kulit*," *Divine Inspirations: Music & Islam in Indonesia*, ed. David D. Harnish and Anne K. Rasmussen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 46.

probably find as many websites made by Muslims in favor of music as those that rail against it.[67] Today, music is a nexus of larger conflicts over Islamic authority, authenticity, orthodoxy, and piety. The topic also reflects concerns about secularity and pop culture, approaches to *da'wa*, and engaging new generations of Muslims.[68]

With these debates about music, most leaders of the Muslim Student Association at UC Riverside regarded it suspiciously. On the five levels of Islamic legal injunctions (mandatory, recommended, permissible/neutral, inadvisable, or forbidden),[69] they either deemed it as inadvisable or often as a "gray area" that seemed to be between neutral and inadvisable. Thus, they usually advised to avoid music to be on the safe side. Marjan, spoke about her fellow Afghan Americans as "very culturized," since their weddings often serve alcohol, have a bosom-revealing bride's dress, and music: "No, you're

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[67] Here are some immediate websites that come up when entering "Islam and Music" in a Google and Youtube search: Q&A: Yusuf Islam: on Music and Faith," Aljazeera, April 18, 2012, http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2012/04/201241774025368229.html; "Fifteenth Greater Sin: Music," al-Islam.org, http://www.al-islam.org/greater-sins-volume-1-ayatullah-sayyid-abd-al-husayn-dastghayb-shirazi/fifteenth-greater-sin-music; John (Yahya) Ederer, "Regarding the Permissibility of Music," SuhaibWebb.com http://www.suhaibwebb.com/society/entertainment/regarding-the-permissibility-of-music/; "Is music prohibited in Islam?" Islamic Research International Foundation, Inc. http://www.irfi.org/articles/articles_351_400/is_music_prohibited_in_islam.htm; "Sheikh Yusuf Estes on Music in Islam," Youtube, posted November 29, 2008, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l4ifypK3qJw; "Music is Haram [Nouman Ali Khan]," Youtube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=od6OzHU5qKY; "Shaykh Hamza Yusuf Prohibitions of the Tongue Singing & Music" Youtube, February 13, 2013, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tNt3ZXy_iKw (all accessed September 23, 2014).

[68] Anne K. Rasmussen, "The Arab Musical Aesthete in Indonesian Islam," *The World of Music* 41 (2005): 65-67; David D. Harnish & Anne K. Rasmussen, *Divine Inspirations: Music & Islam in Indonesia* (2011), 26-27; "Paradoxes of Muslim Music in Boznia and Herzegovina," *Asian Music* 20 (Autumn, 1988 - Winter, 1989): 128-130; Regula Qureshi, "Muslim Devotional": Popular Religious Music and Muslim Identity under British, Indian and Pakistani Hegemony," *Asian Music* 24 (Autumn, 1992 - Winter, 1993): 111-113; Laudan Noushin, *Music and the play of power in the Middle East, North Africa and Central Asia* (Barnham, England: Ashgate, 2009); Dwight Reynolds, "La Música Andalusí como Patrimonio Cultural Circum-Mediterráneo," *El patrimonio cultural, multiculturalidad y gestión de la diversidad* [Cultural Patrimony, Multiculturalism, and the Management of Diversity], eds. Gunther Dietz and Gema Carrera. (Sevilla: Instituto Andaluz del Patrimonio Histórico, 2005): 128-141; Kamal Salhi, *Music, Culture and Identity in the Muslim World: Performance, Politics, and Piety* (London: Routledge, 2014), 1, 3-5.

[69] Corresponding to the Arabic words: *farḍ/wājib*, *mustaḥabb*, *mubāḥ*, *makrūh*, & *ḥarām*

walking in with music... and can you even do that? Islamically you can't; I feel like you can't; but culturally they feel it's right." A young leader who taught many study groups at UC Irvine's Muslim Student Union[70] advised against listening to music. Described above, most of the young men at the UCR "brother's" *halaqa*, or study group, argued that it would be inappropriate to attend an upcoming campus music festival. It was unclear to me whether it was the music itself or the promiscuous gender interactions, dress, and possible drug-use that was their main concern. One young man was comfortable with his Islamic loyalties and planned to attend the festival.

In the following quotation, Luqman exemplifies this sentiment of "avoiding the gray areas," and evokes the added discomfort that lyrical music often incorporates themes that are against Islamic praxis. I asked him about the process he goes through to interpret questioned issues within his faith, and he answered:

> Regardless of the issue, the best way is to avoid the gray areas. Music for example, there are a lot of opinions, and it would be best if you can avoid it, you should avoid it; our knowledge is limited; if it is *ḥarām*, possibility that it is, then should just avoid it; and the Prophet says to avoid these more gray areas, you don't want to be in the no-man's land. I personally, don't listen to music. If you listen to a lot of music these days, it speaks about usury of women and money, narcotics and drugs and alcohol; and definitely these things are clearly *ḥarām* or forbidden; and it wouldn't be proper to listen to things that aren't appropriate. And music influences you, and you wouldn't want music to poison your brain or poison your beliefs… Often music is just a distraction or just to sit down and relax. We also know music has an effect even on your emotions, whatever your previous emotions were; listen to a negative song, you feel that way as well.

This was a dominant concern about music for students: relying upon music instead of prayer and the Qur'an to address difficulties in one's moods and emotions. Baseem, who generally regards himself a "softy" when it comes to the issue of music, nonetheless said

[70] The UC Irvine's MSA was an organization dominated by foreign graduate students. Undergraduates who grew up in the United States, findings themselves to be interpreting Islam in a significantly different way, formed the Muslim Student Union as an independent student organization. Author conversation with the vice-president of MSU of UCI, May 2014.

that someone at his work was "feeling gloomy" and then she "put on some music and got cheered up" but "that cheering is just pushing it aside for a little while, can be distracting…away from God."

In practice, however, leaders tolerated and showed moderation with respect to the various opinions about music among their membership, among their activities, and among themselves. Many Muslim Student Associations hold banquets at the end of the academic year, one of the key pieces of which is the showing of a video slideshow of participants and activities from the year, often accompanied by rated-G pop music.[71] When the MSA of UCR showed again at their next general meeting the slideshow video with the background music, I whispered to the outgoing and incoming presidents, teasingly, "Do these videos show that MSA officially endorses music?" One said "No, no, no!" and the other said "No way," waving his hand back and forth for emphasis.[72] Likewise, some of the young women leaders of this MSA admitted to enjoying dancing together in their apartments to Bollywood music.

Indeed, some of the students involved in MSA are musicians themselves. One of UCR's officers who writes spoken word and raps said that he likes to "try to change up

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[71] The music at the 2014 MSA of UCR end-of-the-year banquet was three songs from Disney animated films: "I'll Make a Man Out of You" (*Mulan*), You Have a Friend in Me (*Toy Story*), and "Love is an Open Door" (*Frozen*). In addition, "Brave," by Sara Bareilles, was used. Nuor Shatila, Facebook chat, message to author, October 16, 2014.

[72] In official discourse, MSA leaders have the pressure to play the role of "gatekeepers" of Islamic legitimacy, sanctioned by authorities outside of the Muslim campus community, from which they would emphasize more conservative perspectives in official discourse while often being a lot a looser about matters like music, dancing, and gender segregation in their own private lives. Ethnographic data disaffirms interpretations in which conservative Muslims hold court in "official" interpretations over that of liberal Muslims; indeed the meaning of "conservative," "liberal," and "moderation and balance" shift along with their subjects as the issue in question and contextual factors also change, Shabana Mir, *Muslim American Women on Campus*, 158-160, 163-164.

the lyrics and make it so that it positive, make it formative, and so that it is beneficial."

He further explained:

> That way, people will, regardless of the different opinions, hopefully find what I'm doing is okay; you've got to strive and keep on doing what you're doing, and hopefully, God will forgive you, you know. That's the beauty of it… I feel like since so many people, including Muslims, listen to music, and listen to so much filth, on the radio, talking about all this sexual and drugs, and all these kind of messages that unfortunately aren't too great, and what I want to do, flip the script, you know, and hopefully, and have the same style, same style but different message…

This student is part of a large subculture of American Muslims who consume and/or write rap and hip-hop music, Islamic-centered and/or otherwise. There is a growing movement of children of immigrant Muslims who are adding their experiences and visions of Islam in America to that of the more established African-American and Latino Muslim rap artists. The genre of rap music can get by with just drums, leaving aside melodic instruments that some interpret to be even more explicitly discouraged in Islamic teachings than other forms of music. This style can also be reminiscent of the rhythms and poetry of Quranic recitation. Positive messages that are vital to formulating Islamic American identities can be expressed in music and fashion bridges between one's religion and nationality that resist negative stereotypes about Islam.[73]

Others students advocated that music can have a positive influence in the image it conveys about Islam to the general public. One young lady discussed at-length the music video that had Muslims, including *ḥijābī* women, dancing to Pharrell William's top 2013 billboard song "Happy." Shirin felt very annoyed that some Muslims appoint themselves as "*ḥarām* police" to attack their fellow religionists on online forums:

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[73] Suad Abdul Khabeer, "*Rep that Islam:* The Rhyme and Reason of American Islamic Hip Hop," *The Muslim World* 97 (January 2007): 125, 128, 130-1; Lori Zehra Goshert, "Sonic Bridges: The Rise of American-Muslim Music," *Muslims and American Popular Culture—Volume 1: Entertainment and Digital Culture*, eds. Iraj Omidvar and Anne R. Richards (Santa Barbara, California: Praeger, 2014), 361-362.

> I think that video definitely defeats the stereotypes of everything with Muslims; however, I feel that some Muslims, whenever they see something like that, they just attack; like its…*harām* to like dance or listen to music; and I'm like, they're not doing anything wrong, they're showing the people, how we are, we're very peaceful people, and we like to have fun and everything, we're peaceful, we're a normal religion…

Another MSA officer affirmed the potential positive effects of music: "there's also music out there that can motivate people to be good. It even connects people…"

With music, then, we find a diversity of individual and institutional practices among Muslims and their campus organizations. Cal State University San Bernardino's MSA is more informal in its organization style than UCR's, and one of the lead officers is herself a dedicated singer and aspires to be a music journalist. She said, "You know, I'm not perfect, I do enjoy listening to music; but I strive to stay away from inappropriate music; don't always do so, everyone has their little guilty pleasures; … but I try to more listen to music that is more inspiring, motivational, makes you happy." As part of their recreational time after their weekly meeting, this MSA would sometimes play a game in which members would guess the song or artist from a small part of a tune played. Sometimes, MSA officers at UCR organized their members to attend a debut showing of a highly-awaited film, such as they did with *The Amazing Spiderman 2* at the nearby movie theatre. These movies contain extensive lyrical and/or instrumental background music, so I asked some students about movies. Most admitted to being fans of movies but tried to avoid films with pervasive nudity, foul language, or perhaps excessive violence. Nuri said that he strives to avoid "ones that are…too vulgar or too obscene…but other than that, there's no problem in…watching movies." For Luqman, films like the *Lego Movie* or *Despicable Me 2* are harmless but he felt, as with music, "I could be doing something better with my time, listening to Qur'an or remembering myself of God, or

praying… could be studying or doing sports and being active; if you can't stay away from it, at least watch something positive or not harmful."

We can conclude that since music is usually a central facet to most youth cultures, even those students who worry that God disapproves of music experience a tension between what is expounded and what is actually practiced. Music produced and consumed by American Muslims—most predominantly hip hop, punk, and *nasheed* styles—has been and continues to be an important site for the production of their youth cultures.[74] Most of those I talked to about this issue themselves listened to music to some extent and believed that the grand majority of their Muslim peers also listened to music, whether mainstream radio and/or Islamic-inspired artists. This extends to leaders of the MSA who often have more pressure than other MSA participants to maintain a conservative image of Islamic praxis, at least in their role as officers. While they usually expressed conservative views, in practice they acted more in line with what Nabeel said: "In my opinion it's fine if it's not vulgar or promoting you to do bad things."

I posit that officers understand some of the complexities of interpreting subjects like music, they acknowledge the gaps between their own ideals and actions, and they also need and want to not just be leaders but friends. Hence, in more formal gatherings they may admonish fellow MSA members to take a conservative line but ultimately respect that each individual needs to interpret and strive for an authentic, Islamically-grounded practice for him or herself. In this we can also witness that when an aspect of the "official

[74] Su'ad Abdul Khabeer and Maytha Alhassen, "Muslim Youth Cultures," *The Cambridge Companion to the Study of American Islam*, eds. Julianne Hammer and Omid Safi (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013 [Kindle Edition]), 300.

tradition" (in Islam often represented by the scholars of *fiqh* [jurisprudence]) is disputed, these cracks create space for a variety of local practices and interpretations.[75]

Conclusions

The "Americanization" of immigrant Muslims is predicated upon essentializations of "Islam" and the "United States." These essentializations are imagined as contrasting and distinct. Yet for the children of these immigrants, Islam is their religion and the United States their nationality. The two need not clash any more or less than they do for Buddhists, Christians, or Jews who are Americans. Those of whatever religion who strive to uphold conservative sexual mores, avoid alcohol and drug-abuse, or eschew vulgar language, find difficulties when much in American culture and social practices seem to reflect the opposite of these. Yet, young Muslims also find much in their society to appreciate, whether shared values with other religious individuals, liberty to practice one's religion, educational and economic opportunities, freedom to voice opinions and be involved in politics and government, or compassionate care for and solidarity with the disadvantaged. For these young Muslims, Islam is one more religious flavor in the mix, albeit surely the best one in their experience, that enriches American society, strengths it, and helps improve morals.

Their American upbringing affects their interpretations of Islam and their religious lens influences their interpretations of their national homeland in dialectical ways. They

[75] Meredith McGuire, *Lived Religion: Faith and Practice in Everyday Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 42-43, 45; Michel de Certeau, *The Practices of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley, USA: University of California Press, 1988), 37; Michel de Certeau, Fredric Jameson, and Carl Lovitt, "On the Oppositional Practices of Everyday Life," *Social Text* 3 (Autumn, 1980): 6-7.

hone in on those overlaps between the ideals prominent in American and Islamic discourses. These overlaps emphasize the dignity of individualized interpretation and drawing on spiritual resources eclectically, prayer and fasting as ways of self-growth and charity to others, and the public virtue of caring for and being of service to others. Pressure to embody a conservative point of view can be witnessed in official MSA discourse on music even while MSA leaders are more flexible in its implementation. While some MSA leaders are hesitant about music's legal place within Islam, most listen to popular music, only often concerned that the lyrics are not vulgar. They recognize the importance of a growing number of the children of immigrants adding their talents to those of African American and Latino Muslim musicians in utilizing contemporary musical styles to express, debate, and develop this American Muslim identity and to resist prejudice.

To do justice in seeing this population for who it is, we must recognize that this population is not just Muslim and American. Like other stigmatized minorities in this nation's history, there is added pressure on Muslim Americans to "prove" that they are as American as anyone else, or perhaps even better Americans. Yet in their lives, each person negotiates the discourse, values, practices, and authorities of religious, national, and pop culture in unique ways for him or herself. This constitutes individuals who often have at least as much in common with non-Muslim young adult Americans as they do with their fellow believers. Many are also skateboarders, soccer players, dancers, foodies, actors, movie buffs, music-makers or connoisseurs, comic book aficionados, "geeks," social justice activists, community volunteers, and student government participants. As

college students, they try out a host of majors to find one that matches with their talents, interests, and aspirations, and they experiment with a virtually limitless set of other possible demarcations of self. While the discussion here helps us identity some prominent patterns in the ways this population constructs and responds to the intersection of religion and nationality, to respect the dignity of any individual demands a humble posture of openness to the myriad of possibilities that makes this person who she or he is and desires to be at a particular moment in time.

CHAPTER 3

Young Adult Muslim Americans and Gender: Finding their own Way

Introduction

Points of departure for the academic-activist study of female human beings have been women's rights, just treatment, equal economic opportunity, protection from violence, and freedom to develop the entire spectrum of human psycho-emotional characteristics without censure. While these issues remain foregrounded, scholars on Muslim women, recognizing that the characteristics of a liberated and empowered Euro-American middle class woman are not universal norms, have recently shifted the discourse to focus on the unique subjectivities, desires, values, and pursuits of women living in other regions and cultures of the world.[1] Some of this literature has also often sought to counter imagery produced by Orientalist neo-colonial projects that depict Muslim women as oppressed by Muslim men.[2] Concurrently, Muslim scholar activists have critiqued the patriarchal assumptions that created gender norms for orthodox Islam and offered new hermeneutics that emphasize as their methodological lens justice, human

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[1] Sherine Hafez, *The Terms of Empowerment: Islamic women activists in Egypt* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2003); Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005); Sherine Hafez, *An Islam of her own: reconsidering religion and secularism in women's Islamic movements* (New York: New York University Press, 2011).

[2] Homa Hoodfar, "The Veil in Their Minds and on Our Heads: The Persistence of Colonial Images of Muslim Women," (Resources for Feminist Research, 1993, vol. 22), 5-18; Lila Abu-Lughod, *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2013); Saba Mahmood, "Feminism, Democracy, and Empire: Islam and the War on Terror," *Women's Studies on the Edge* (Durham & London, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2008), 81-94.

dignity, and human beings' equal status before God.[3] In the North American context, Shahnaz Khan (2001) and Shabana Mir (2014) have analyzed the ways in which North American Muslim women create hybridized identities and practices, both resisting and partially appropriating orientalist stereotypes and liberal ideals of womanhood.[4]

As Julianne Hammer points out, "women studies" is shifting to "gender studies" and scholarship about Muslim American women is only beginning to focus on the category of *gender* itself, as produced by men, women, and other gender identities.[5] With this shift Muslim women voices must be recognized for their agency in not just producing themselves as Muslim women but as integral producers of Muslim American discourse, practices, and identity more generally. The voices of many Muslim women and men have been central each of the chapters in this dissertation, reflecting this ideal and reality that Muslim women do not just deal with the *ḥijāb* and other "women's issues." Rather, they, along with their male counterparts, think about and work out every facet of Muslim community life. Likewise, talking about gender and Muslims is about more than just *ḥijāb*. Instead of taking gender as a purely "women's issue," this chapter analyzes the

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[3] Julianne Hammer, "Studying American Muslim Women: Gender, Feminism, and Islam," *Cambridge Companion to American Islam*, ed. Julianne Hammer and Omid Safi, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Riffat Hassan, "The issue of Woman-Man Equality in the Islamic Tradition," *Women and Men's Liberation: Testimonies of the Spirit*, eds. Leonard Grob, Riffat Hassan, and Haim Gordon (Westport: Greenwood Press, Inc., 1999), 65-82; Nimat, Barazangi, *Women's Identity and the Qur'an: a New Reading* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2004); Amina Wadud, *Inside the Gender Jihad* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2006); Kecia Ali, *Sexual Ethics and Islam: Feminist Reflections on Qur'an, Hadith, and Jurisprudence* (Oxford: OneWorld Publications, 2006); Asma Barlas, *"Believing Women" in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002).

[4] Shahnaz Khan, *Muslim Women: Crafting a North American Identity* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000); Shabana Mir, *Muslim American Women on Campus: Undergraduate Social Life and Identity* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2014).

[5] Julianne Hammer, "Studying American Muslim Women" (2013): 332.

discourse constructed by young adult Muslim Americans, both women and men together, on diverse issues of gender and sexuality. How do these young people fashion values and practices for their campus religious spaces, leadership roles, and home life? What are their expectations for attire? And how do they respond to contemporary demands to socially recognize and legally approve of same-sex relationships and marriage?

As we shall see, Muslim men and women sometimes work to maintain but also challenge many traditional Islamic norms of gender. Often a single individual wants to continue certain practices as intrinsic to the sources of the religion itself while he or she wants to modify other practices, deemed "cultural" or inauthentic.[6] Negotiating gender norms occurs among students involved in the Muslim Student Association, men and women cooperating and contesting with each other, sometimes although certainly not always along gender lines.

The first goal of this chapter is to understand how these young adults define, perform, explain, and rationalize their normativities for gender and sexuality. I attempt to neither begin with presumptions that Islamic teachings and Muslim interpretations are oppressive and require revisions, nor with an apologetic purpose that Islamic ideals are liberating and empowering. Rather toward *verstehen*/understanding, I strive to learn how these young adults understand the wisdom of their religious tradition on its own terms, and in comparison to others' gendered practices, and how they critique fellow Muslims for failing to live up to what they view as the values of the Islamic faith. The subjects of the

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[6] Kambiz Ghaneabassiri, "Religious Normativity and Praxis among American Muslims," *Cambridge Companion to American Islam* (2013), 330.

study are not just working with stagnant Islamic texts, teachings, and practices. The lens in which they interpret the Islamically authentic and pious is fashioned by their context and ongoing participation in various local, national and global discourses and habitus, Islamic, secular, or otherwise. These young Muslim Americans wrestle with competing visions of Islamic ideal practices related to gender and sexuality, weighing and considering the value of divergent approaches both within and outside of their Muslim circles.

Visions of a liberated woman cannot be imposed upon subjects, young adult Muslim Americans or otherwise. Rather, the subjects' ways of living must be understood in itself by the power it exerts and its significances for its participants. This prioritization of understanding does not denote justifying the subjects' approaches as legitimate, equal, or better than other peoples. Nor is the goal a relativistic respect in the name of multiculturalism. Rather, understanding must be the first step in inter- and intra-cultural dialogue and critique. However, to stop at inter-cultural understanding is not sufficient. In our global community, the values of different groups and peoples intimately encounter and influence each other. Cultural practices do not just occur within localized social groups or communities, or even within national political, but are part of transnational discourses of a global network. For example, Sherine Hafez argues that for groups of Islamic women activists near Cairo, Egypt where she pursued ethnography, their "desires" are fashioned within inextricably linked Islamic and secular/modernist notions. Likewise, Shahnaz Khan's ethnography on Muslim immigrant women in Toronto, shows these women are compelled to confront the oppositional public ideals of "feminism" and

stereotypes of being "Muslim" as they work to create hybridized, "third spaces" of individual identity.[7]

The ethics and values with which young Muslims practice their faith in gendered ways, which discipline their consciousness and bodies, must first be discerned on their own terms to truly understand and appreciate their motivating power and aesthetics. The values for ways of living of women studies and gender studies must also be appreciated and understood before they can be juxtaposed toward the lives of these Muslims. Neither may be presumed to be superior or set the standard for the other; sober critical dialogue exhort each to learn and be transformed by the other. In this way can reflexively assess the specific ways that particular cultural practices, including those of the academy, are helpful or harmful to the wellbeing of individuals, families, and communities.

Islam is a tradition continually constructed, engaged, and modified via discourse. The young adult Muslim Americans of this study are integral participants in this discourse through which "Islam" is re-created and projected into the future.[8] They take on concerns of feminist politics and gender justice. They also are deeply aware of the *oppression of women* as one of the most frequent stereotype with which non-Muslims frame Muslims.[9] The way they talk about their tradition reflects a desire to resist these stereotypes but also to appropriate ideals of justice, equity, sexual purity, and human dignity. They posit distinct but equally valuable roles for women and men. To fashion and justify their interpretive choices, they draw critically on three sources: Islamic texts

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[7] Sherine Hafez, *An Islam of her own* (2011); Shahnaz Khan, *Muslim Women* (2000).
[8] Julianne Hammer, *American Muslim Women, Religious Authority, and Activism: More than a Prayer* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2012), 7-8.
[9] The other being that Muslim men are prone to violence.

and scholarly exegetes, their parents' cultures, and their wider American environment. It is difficult to isolate where each of these three influences begins and ends, as these three are overlapping, interpenetrating and shifting in ways that resist essentializations. These young people's interpretive processes reflect a fusion of these three as they construct and perform their own visions of what it means to be a pious, virtuous, and self-actualized Muslim man or woman. Because these young Muslim American women and men are themselves at the nexus of interpenetrating values, goods, principles, and praxes, in this chapter they largely do the work for us of weighing and considering their relative virtue in creating human flourishing and lives of significance and fulfillment. They only on occasion beckon me, here, to intervene and critique the ethics and wisdom of the habitus they instantiate and the interpretive choices they are making.

Representations of women in Europe and America are deployed as symbols of the enlightenment of Western civilization compared to the backwardness of the Muslims of North Africa and Southwest and South Asia. Producers of ideology focus on dress, critiquing the Muslim woman's pressures to cover in contrast to "Western" woman's freedom to reveal their bodies, neglecting the pressures in both societies to uphold complex and changing fashion trends. Authors and pundits contrast arranged marriages to one's own love marriages, ignoring the importance of parents and relatives in both systems. They highlight apparent "honor killings" in "Muslim culture" while overlooking the "passion" murders of intimate partners in the United States; if they do compare these two forms of gender violence, they blame the first on culture or religion and the other on enraged and or immoral individuals. They take as a given an adult's right to love and

have sex with partners of his or her choice, while disregarding that for many religious individuals self-disciplining the sexual impulse to be used exclusively within the martial relationship is dignifying and ennobling.[10] Many may also critique the male domination of mosques and religious interpretation in Muslim communities, ignoring that Christian churches and Jewish synagogues are also led by male hierarchies in the grand majority of cases, or that women carve out their own spaces of action and influence in each religious arena.

Rather than further the already abundant literature that critiques the unfair essentializing of Muslims and Arabs, this chapter attempts to provide 'thick description' of the diverse ideals and practices related to gender among those Muslims in the United States whose religion is a central facet of their identity. This chapter, however, unfolds that these ideals and practices appropriate, respond to, challenge, and complicate notions of gender *empowerment* and *oppression*. This chapter demonstrates that gender norms are constituted by both men and women, in concert and contestation, to create Muslim spaces and groups that they believe truly reflects Islamic ideals. Furthermore, we have seen in previous chapters, and will look in more depth in this one, that performing gender in specific ways are fundamental to creating campus spaces and communities that cohesively constitute a distinctive identity for these young Muslims. We see that between the lines of this search to perform a distinctive and cohesive identity through shared gender norms, actual views of individual young adult Muslim Americans on these issues are multifarious and complicated.

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[10] Lila Abu-Lughod, *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?* 18-19, 37, 114, 123, 218.

Islam doesn't oppress us: Islamizing Feminism and Gender Empowerment

"I've never been repressed by Islam but I have been oppressed by Muslims." –Noha Alshugairi

Young adult American Muslims' discourse on gender resists presumptions of Islam as oppressive. This discourse also works to resignify standards of gender justice on terms both similar to and other than those of real and imagined detractors of "Muslim" ways. Against definitions of equality as sameness, these young adults define their religion as stressing equity. For them equality means women and men aspiring to do all the same things, men essentially trying to imitate women and women imitating men. Nabeel, a Sudanese-American junior at CSU Los Angeles in computer science, said, "Equity [is] where you might do different things but your role is just as important." In equity, women and men have the same value and status but their practical roles are sometimes different, rooted in what young adult Muslims believe to be divine insight into their biological differences. Sana, a sophomore in media studies of Syrian heritage, explained, "We believe we were made differently; our bodies and our minds; we would have different ways to live; the Qur'an is our guide in life, it goes specific if you are a woman or a man; I cannot say that things specific for a man are always right for me and vice versa." Isra, a third year woman majoring in environmental engineering, asserted: "The differences between men and women are things that we should be extremely proud of; that in the first months of a child's life, I'm the only natural source of food for that child, things like that, should be honored and respected. At the same time if a woman wants to do something that's not motherhood, if she wants to be a career woman," she should still be able to do

that. These biological differences, they believe, explain the distinctive prescriptions in Islam about women and men's distinct ways to dress, proper places within a mosques, and their primary roles with respect to caring for children, as will be explored further in later sections.

While most interviewees took pains to assert that Islam empowers instead of oppresses women and men, some of them acknowledged that standardized rulings by Islamic jurists have not always been fair and that they did not seem to be equitable either. This included sons getting a larger share of wealth than daughters in inheritance (in most Islamic legal schools), Muslim men being able to marry any woman of the "people of the Book" while Muslim women need to marry a Muslim man, or needing two female witnesses (but just one male witness) as testimony for most kinds of criminal trials. Apologists in many books and websites have argued that these differences reflect the unique needs and positionality of men and women in society; not inequity. Notwithstanding, Marjan—an Afghani-American pre-law senior—complained, laughing slightly, "Guys always have that upper hand…compared to the girls, honestly I don't know why." She said, "If you get married…you need one guy as your witness, but…you need two girls as your witness, it's just like, why? Why? Am I not good enough?" Thus, while young Muslims stress equity instead of equality, they find difficulties in slotting some inequality rulings even under an equity rubric.

More often than these inequalities, within the course of our conversations, young adult Muslim Americans discussed that they encounter inequity practiced in their families and in older generation of Muslims, rather than by their Muslim peers. Qani, a young

man who openly identified as a "feminist" and participated more in the Middle Eastern Student Center than the MSA, said, "I really disagree with any inequality or patriarchy that might occur." He narrated that in a mosque he was attending, "Men and women were each talking really loud, and a man made a comment for the women to be quiet on the loudspeaker, and he went back to his socializing," and hearing this hypocrisy "made me bubbling with anger." Some complained that the way in which some mosques separate the genders into different rooms puts women in a place where they do not have access to engage with the speaker of a sermon except through a live televised projection. Mojdeh felt this undermined the value in attending the mosque; she could just watch Youtube videos from home. Most frequently, a young woman's brother being allowed much more freedom than she to go out made female interviewees angry. Marjan said that her younger brother is "allowed to do whatever he wants, he's allowed to stay out late with his friends or cousins or whatever while with me, it's 'who are you going out with, when are you going to be home?'" Her family worries that if she is seen out with a man others will talk bad about her and her family, reputations will be ruined, and she will "never get married."[11]

Likewise, the young people separate traditional Muslim "cultural" practices from the religion to defend the purity of Islam. Mojdeh, a junior Iranian-American, said on various occasions "I'm not a feminist by any means" to indicate that she is generally not passionate about issues of gender justice, "but it turns me into one because there is this

[11] The young generation of Muslim women are becoming more articulate about their frustrations of this double standard compared to their brothers, Yvonne Yabeck Haddad et. al, *Muslim Women in America: The Challenge of Islamic Identity Today* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 86-7.

idea that girls have to be so so-oo good. But then the guys can go do whatever they want… and I looked through all the *ḥadīth*s and there is no evidence to support their actions, that's why I say, culture is so mixed into it. But it's disgusting." She and other young Muslims blamed these practices not on "Islam" but the "cultural" assumptions and practices of some adherents and to male scholars interpreting the tradition with a patriarchal mindset. While gender double-standards are shared by Muslims, Christians, Jews, Hindus, and Buddhists around the world,[12] for Marjan and Mojdeh, they wish their religion would have worked harder to purge inequitable gender practices from its followers.

While some men and women interviewees called themselves "feminist" unabashedly, they acknowledged the hesitancy to adopt the term by some of their Muslim peers. Mujahida, who actively organized Islamic awareness and gender justice events on campus, explained that she gets "into arguments with…MSA brothers…about women's rights." She elaborated, "A lot of Muslim brothers do not believe in the term, 'a Muslim feminist,' because they believe that if you're Muslim you are already a feminist, and it's redundant. I disagree, I understand their point but that assumes that all Muslims practice feminism or taking care of their women, which not all of them do." Mojdeh and Isra believe that sometimes fellow Muslims reject the term "feminist" because they conceive it means "if you want to be respected as a woman you have to act like a man," or "women should be allowed to be shirtless like men when they go around town, or that feminism is

[12] On Jewish and Christian traditions patriarchy and male superiority, see Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1992), 34-37.

man-hating." Instead, they explained, Muslims believe in complementarity, interdependency, and the need to dress modestly. They take pride in some of the distinctive abilities and responsibilities men and women have been given due to their biology. Mojdeh and Isra both attributed the wariness toward the term because of its "close association" with the "LGBT rights movement"; this makes some Muslims uncomfortable, while others may even "have a genuine sense of homophobia."[13]

The young Muslims shared feminist concerns for human rights and the empowerment of women, yet often they defined these concerns in unique ways that reflected distinctive conceptions of the ultimate good of human life. Shems, a pre-med major, is a heritage Muslim of both South Asian and Arab descent who claims to have been raised very conservative and "cultural." He said, "I have a problem with the term feminist; I'm more a humanist, for all humans" to do things for God instead of following "the ways of materialism" or "caring so much about what other people think." For him, social image and materialistic pursuits chain both men and women; in contrast, making our "upmost responsibility…to God," liberates us, helps us become "independent thinkers," and be "strong." Likewise, Kawthar, an Arab American who is also pre-med major and infrequently participated with the MSA, does identify as a "feminist." She believes "feminism is strengthening the woman, allowing her to be independent, allowing to see her for who she is and not her physical self" or body image. As a result of her college courses, she has adopted the perspective that feminism gains distinctive significances in varying social contexts, "applied in different ways throughout the world." For her it is

[13] Also see last section of this chapter on homosexuality and young Muslim Americans

having a voice in public spaces, "to share my thoughts and opinions…speaking out" but also "to listen and find where other people are coming from." Considering her parents and grandparents, she believes in "the previous generation…wasn't really expected that women would work, but I have my passion and dreams" to be a medical doctor or professor, to also have a family, and "go after what [my] mind pursues." For her feminism is not just about freedom to pursue what she desires but to "have a sense of responsibility, my moral obligation to help those that don't have the same means as men."

Young Muslims believe the restrictions ordained by their religion, rather than curbing their freedom, actually bring order to society, protect women and men, and further collective well-being. Nuri, an MSA officer of Egyptian descent who is a junior and hopeful future industrial psychologist, said that the "boundaries" are there "because God knows how He created you," and He wants to protect us from acting on the natural "attraction." Giving an example of this principle, Syrian-American senior and former MSA brothers' chair, Bayan explained that once a person begins drinking alcohol, one is likely to drink too much and then "kill others and ruin their own lives" from drinking and driving. Or "someone goes to a party and just hooks up and then the girl's pregnant, and maybe they have to drop out of school, they have to get a job to take care of the child, or the guy just leaves" and the child grows up in a single-parent household. He says the Islamic teachings against drinking alcohol and premarital sex protect individuals and society from these things happening. He said the teachings on premarital sex are "hard in the beginning but are much easier than the alternative, and you and the child may have to

suffer for your mistake." Similarly, with drinking: "just stay away from it because the consequences are greater than the pleasure, the harm is bigger than the benefit."[14]

These young adults stressed that the Islamic restrictions have not prevented them and their female family members from pursuing their educational and professional dreams, or from being active and enjoying so much of what life has to offer. Layla spoke of her parents' support to let her make her own decision to continue to play soccer and basketball after she took up the headscarf when she was twelve years old: "My family encouraged a lot of things, I could still have a full American life." Having spent some of his childhood growing up in Saudi Arabia, Nabeel is grateful that the United States does not have the same "cultural views" that sometimes limit women's occupation. He explained that one of his sisters is in medical residency and the other is in government and banks, saying "maybe they wouldn't have the same opportunities in Saudi Arabia." Lateefa, who herself grew up in Saudi Arabia and was finishing her degree in engineering at a UC, disagreed with some of her country's interpretations of the religion, such as needing a male chaperone to go out or be driven in public: "I believe women can move where they want and make their own decisions and choices about holding to good values and purity." Bahaaj cited having family in the Levant: "I have cousins who are engineers who are women, cousins who are teachers who are women," while his own mother here is a chef and a teacher. Pursuing difficult majors in pre-medicine, pre-law, media, engineering, social sciences, or business and finance, these female interviewees presented

[14] Although he did not cite the verse, his last statement is based on Qur'an 2:219, "They ask you (O Muhammad SAW) concerning alcoholic drink and gambling. Say: "In them is a great sin, and (some) benefit for men, but the sin of them is greater than their benefit.""

themselves as defying stereotypes of Muslim women being restricted to waiting on their husbands or exclusively bearing and caring for children.

Thus, although only some take up the term "feminist" unhesitantly, these young adult Muslim American believe they apply Islam more consistently than the elder generation in ways that empower women. They believe that, while men and women have some distinct God-ordained social roles based on biology and some restrictions that protect individuals and society from harming themselves, Islam supports them to develop the fullness of their talents and abilities in sports, creative activities, community participation, and careers.

To be noticed, at this juncture, is the binary conception of sex and gender that they expound. In other words, for them each person is either male or female. This is a view that does not acknowledge ambivalence, a continuum, or variety of sex and gender based characteristics, which will be consequential as we look at their construction of male and female roles and positions in other facets of personal and community life.

Gendering Space in the Muslim Student Association

> At 5:15 on a Tuesday evening, young Muslim men are finding seats on the left side of a room in UC Riverside's Highlander Union Building for their main MSA weekly meeting; young women are finding seats on the right. A middle-aged gentleman, making an interfaith visit, seats himself to the right. One of the Association officers comes over and courteously informs him that the left side is for men.

Having distinct but equitable roles, young Muslims' views of biologically based binaries in sex entailed constituting separate spaces and roles within the Muslim Student Association. Although the gendering of meeting space described above is typical of most MSAs, such a verbal enforcement of the divisions is uncommon because most abide by

these unspoken divisions. Interviewees attested that they organize themselves on separate sides of the room "naturally," based on precedents of the Muslim student group from the previous year. The president of UC Irvine's MSA said that he was unaccustomed to this arrangement when he transferred to this university as a junior and that as an officer he would do nothing to enforce this; rather the student group segregated themselves. In a group interview, a member of the Riverside City College MSA said, "It's more implicit guidelines for men and women to sit on other sides of the rooms," and Sahara of this MSA said, it's "from Islamic events, we're used to the separation." At Muslim conferences in the United States, in the large halls where there is a speaker, men typically sit on the left, women on the right, and in the middle the family members of both genders may sit together. Marcia Hermansen argues that these rules for gendering space on American college campuses is important to Muslim groups to imbue themselves with an aura of Islamic legitimacy.[15] The question of whether or not this practice is authoritatively Islamic is secondary to MSA leaders' primary purpose to establish an identity characterized by wholesomeness through juxtaposing this practice from the promiscuous ones of college "partyers."[16] These gender divisions constitute the MSA group as a people of righteous distinction in a college environment in which other college groups serve partly as a means for 'hooking up.' In other words, 'We Muslims not only practice pre-marital celibacy, we do not even flirt with the opposite sex.' Interviewees

[15] "One way of asserting difference is through enforcing rigid norms of gender segregation at "Muslim" events on campus." Marcia Hermansen, "How to Put the Genie Back in the Bottle? "Identity" Islam and Muslim Youth Cultures in America," *Progressive Muslims: On Justice, Gender, and Pluralism* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2003 [Kindle Edition]), Kindle locations 7981-7984 & 8050-8051.
[16] Shabana Mir, *Muslim American Women on Campus*, 151, 159.

said that this gender segregation was important for gaining approval from Muslims of their parents' generation, many of whom believe that women and men should not even be in the same room in a Muslim gathering.

Of the Muslim Student Associations within which I participated, those of University of California at Riverside, University California at Irvine, California Polytechnic at Pomona, Riverside City College, and the University of Washington upheld this arrangement. California State University San Bernardino [CSUSB] was the lone exception with women and men seating themselves in no specific gender order around the room of the Campus Interfaith Center. This campus association had changed dramatically in the 2013 to 2014 school year when it became majority male after a large contingent of dedicated women members graduated in 2013. This MSA's president said that in previous years they met in a different room with a big table, and students of different genders usually sat on separate sides of the table.

Both of the two officers I interviewed of this CSUSB MSA acknowledged that they were a "more liberal" Muslim group and generally preferred a fairly informal style, yet they did not believe that their gender proximity during meetings was actually ideal. Zakir, a Palestian-American business major, said, "I don't like it, because I wouldn't want it for my sisters." He said he would recommend to the future leadership gender segregation. He believed that they get "too comfortable" where sometimes a member might touch a girl on the back in a friendly way or other kinds of casual touching might occur. His concern seemed based on patriarchal concerns for the sexual objectification and compromising the reputation of women rather than on Islamic prescriptions for the virtues of purity,

modesty, and dignity for both genders. The president of the group said, “It’s not something I’m completely proud of, it’s not completely inappropriate but it’s not completely appropriate either.” I asked her about the strengths and weaknesses of this approach and she replied, “The weakness is sometimes it gets inappropriate; it’s not really in an intended way, it’s just that we are so informal with each other and so friendly.” However, she confessed, “[it’s] harder to segregate unless I say, ‘girls on one side boys on the other,’ which I don’t feel comfortable doing,” but “if someone feels uncomfortable sitting next to another they can find a different seat.” She preferred that individuals implement personal interpretations of Islamic ideals rather than herself enforcing a popular MSA interpretation for everyone.

Likewise, the president of UC Berkeley’s MSA confessed her discomfort with enforcing gender divisions; however, she did not express a preference for gender mixing. An Egyptian-American who studied political science and comparative literature, she did not feel that her role is to either segregate or encourage gender mixing. While she and her fellow leaders would stress “modesty” and being “purposeful of Islamic boundaries,” they allowed individuals the freedom to interpret for themselves what these principles look like. She said: “This year, we have programming that is gender-specific; we have a sisters’ social and brothers’ social every week. And we have [both genders together] community socials each month that will be like a dinner, a banquet, or hike, and at those events people fall into whatever they feel comfortable with, like a group of guys in one area and group of girls in another, and then maybe an inter-gender group.” When asked, she confirmed that most students will choose to sit with their own gender. This gender-

specific programming is typical of most of the MSAs where men or women meet for a study group (*halaqa*), to socialize, or for some recreational activity like a sport, a movie, a barbeque, or video games.

About half of the students interviewed favored this gender division while about half opposed it yet participated in MSA nonetheless. A few did not have a preference. Those who were in favor of segregation argued that it helped students avoid distractions and temptations so that they could focus on the presentation or discussion. Segregation reminded meeting attendees of their principle purpose: growing together in Islamic knowledge rather than flirting or getting to know a potential mate. The president of Cal Poly Pomona's MSA said the gender divisions were about "giving each other space and respecting each other," assisting one to "pay attention to the speaker and not the girl next to me." Rafeeq said that these divisions helped avoid staring "at parts of the anatomy" of the other gender. Hamza, a Somali-American pre-med major, elaborated, "We are young and if we were put together they might start liking each other or holding hands and may not be professional about it." Hakeem added that being together in "close proximity" and easily able to glance or gaze at the opposite sex "elicits some thoughts." One may start to sexually fantasize or just become focused on "maybe this girl is the right one." Hence, their reasoning revolved around the popular Islamic notion of *fitnah* (temptation): that putting men and women too closely together undermines their concentration on acts of worship and religious learning.

Those students who told me in interviews that they opposed strict gender segregation argued that the benefits of freely interacting with the opposite gender far outweighed the

disadvantages. They said that normalizing gender relations would enhance competencies in inter-gender communication and allow regular opportunities to learn from and understand each other. This would increase unity of the Muslim *umma* as Muslims were better able to know and care for one another. It would also help the development of professional networks and increase one's prospects of meeting a compatible, marriage partner. Barroq said:

> You can be friends around certain guidelines [of modesty and chastity]…but I feel like we're too far apart, too far apart to the point that I don't know their names, can't be comfortable around them or talk to… It shouldn't just be professionally, it should also be to care, care for a Muslim sister; can't really be thoughtful unless you know her and what's going on with her.

Farzam also confessed that he knew the names of only a few of the MSA women. He said, "It's good to be able to interact and talk with different types of people… It's important to be able to communicate with the other half. It doesn't bode well for any group that half is with itself and other half with itself." Mujahida wants her MSA to "open up conversation between men and women, to understand each other's mentalities better … [Not having opportunities to interact] disables a woman from being able to communicate with a man, which is something she will have to do in the workforce… How are you going to speak with him if every time you looked down and twiddled your thumbs?" Marjan and Barroq raised concerns about needing to form of important professional networks. Barroq argued that the most competent person to mentor someone in the same major might be across the gender lines. Barroq, Marjan, and Qani each spoke of the MSA being the main forum for young Muslims to find a marriage partner of the same religion and values. Marjan said that the divisions greatly decreased the possibility of being introduced to eligible candidates for marriage. Mujahida added that when two

people come together to court in an Islamic fashion, these divisions increased the likelihood of awkward interactions and inability to discern the nuances of the characteristics of the other, necessary to choose wisely a compatible marriage partner.

Nonetheless, three of the women in the UC Riverside MSA said that the inter-gender dynamic had relaxed somewhat from 2012-13 to 2013-14, indicating that the leadership is key in setting the tone. Marjan said, “Last year was stricter, this year is friendlier and closer between the brotherhood and sisterhood.” Sana agreed that the previous year “felt a lot more rigid and strict.” She said that wanting to “help out and maybe guide it in a better way” was one of her reasons to run for an officer position. Marjan described the changing situation: “Whenever you go to MSA, it's like, 'oh, don't look that way, guys are over there, God forbid you look over there,' but now it's a little looser where you can say hi to the ones over there.” Indeed, conscientiously looking toward the speaker was still the performed norm in 2013 to 2014. Some MSA members of different genders would chat with others at the end of the meeting when dinner was served. Although it still seemed to me there was an invisible line that was courageously being crossed, the president of that year was sometimes the one crossing the line and this seemed to allow everyone to somewhat relax about it.

Officers on the boards of MSAs have the opportunity to interact with Muslims of the other gender in a way they agree is ethical. Most MSA Muslims commented that it is fine for the opposite genders to work together for business, study, or collaborative project, so

long as it is not just two of them secluded behind closed doors.[17] Rafeeq quoted a *ḥadīth* that "if an [unmarried] man and woman are alone together, the third person is *shayṭān* [Satan]." Only Shems of the UCR MSA advised against all forms of working with a woman other than one's wife or immediate family member: "Men and women shouldn't work together as it could cause problems, sexual tension, or *fitnah* [temptation]." In contrast, the 2013-2014 UC Riverside MSA president said that being naturally outgoing helped with his public relations officer position the previous year:

> I was always talking to people… I was a social butterfly, got to know everybody and the one thing that was different was that I even knew a lot of the sisters… like I had some good friends that were sisters too, they introduced me to other people. It's hard for guys to make friendships with sisters unless they are in their classes or something or they are just that social, like I was.

This combination of factors helped him build friendships with individuals of both genders and the interactions part of his officer work were judged as being Islamically-legitimate. Nuri, another lead officer, expressed more caution about working with women at board meetings:

> If you have to work with [a] Muslim girl, certain things you have to adhere to, shouldn't get too comfortable, keep more to business; like our board is not cut throat, don't need to sit there with backs to one another, say a few things and that's it, not free flowing, but all chill and cool with another and working for our MSA but some known boundaries; like sisters sit in one area and we sit in another, each in our clumps.

Even while keeping "more to business" and sitting across from one another, the board meetings are desirable spaces to engage with the opposite gender and serve the MSA at the same time. Not infrequently Muslims who get to know each other through their board work begin to court.

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[17] Mir, *Muslim American Women on Campus*, 140. Mir describes some MSA women and men who have the same class to meet in a room in the library under the acceptable pretense "to study" while actually spending most of their chatting casually and joking jovially with each other.

For official MSA business these gender divisions are crossed on other specific occasions as well. In working meetings when the University of Washington MSA was planning its Islamic Awareness Week and the Cal Poly Pomona MSA was planning their end-of-the-year banquet, each committee had both genders collaborating to plan and implement its designated task. The Cal Poly MSA president explained that it is important for both women and men to be on each committee, like ones for food or decorations, to make sure choices appeal to both genders. In his MSA, during general meetings, the men and women would sometimes sit on opposite sides of the table or the women would sit behind the men, depending on the event. However, he told me that even having women and men in the same physical space was surprising to many of their Kuwaiti foreign students who were accustomed to men and women having completely separate groups. He told me that he answered them, "Well, you know we are such a small number and it's more efficient for us to work together than to just split ourselves into two different groups."[18] UC Riverside's MSA's small *tajweed*, or Qur'anic pronunciation, class was led by two male MSA members, yet both men and women actively participated around the same small table. In structured games at meetings, such as Pictionary or Jeopardy played by UC Riverside's MSA, the genders also engaged with each other. In Riverside City College's small MSA, a member said "we don't really sit so close or touch," but

[18] Garbi Schmidt describes an MSA at the University of Illinois at Chicago that formed a separate association just for women in 1988: Muslim Women's Association. However, she explained the purpose of this was for the students to gain more space (such as for prayer) and resources on the university, in general, and also to provide a "safe" alternative for "some of the female Muslim students" who "felt uncomfortable around men." The MSA and MWA worked together on the same projects; however she did not mention whether many of the women also actively participated in MSA-hosted programming. Garbi Schmidt, *Islam in Urban America: Sunni Muslims in Chicago* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004), 96.

"otherwise we talk and joke around, and even play mafia [a role-playing game] with each other sometimes."

Many MSAers expounded that hugging, touching, and even shaking hands, except for when it is absolutely necessary, is Islamically *harām*, and I trusted the sincerity of their claims that they work hard to avoid these behaviors. They believed shaking the opposite sex's hand should be avoided, unless not following this American social convention would be "embarrassing." One young man on an MSA board even asserted that he does not interact with women at all unless he must do so for school or MSA work. At UC Irvine a young male leader of the study classes for MSA desisted from even making eye-contact with women, looking only to his right at his fellow 'brothers' even when 'sisters' asked him questions. He repeated this behavior at another class I attended in which I was the only other male along with about ten young women. In this case, he stared forward instead of looking toward the muslimas to his left. In answer to one question he spoke urgently about managing one's environment, including being wary of entertainment media and avoiding anything that would be a temptation to compromise one's purity.

While some other MSA members may see this young man's gender performance as exemplary, it was the exception to what the grand majority of men and women actually practiced. In greeting Muslim women friends I slowly learned to recognize physical cues on whether they preferred no touching, a handshake, or a small side hug from me. A few MSA young men confided to me that they believe in an ideal of no-touching, but they find it challenging to implement. They admitted that they were working on not giving little hugs to women friends, whether Muslim or not. Hamza said: "Some of my good

friends are guys and gals from my pre-med program. This goes onto [the] topic of like hugging and shaking hands, which…I'm not really good at, but I'm working on it... Once in a while I will have a hug from a friend, but I try to limit that until I have a better way to go about it. So I do believe there is a wisdom, but it's hard to apply." Meanwhile, two Muslim women who had developed strained relationships with the MSA reported observing some of the MSA young men freely giving hugs and flirting with non-Muslim women, even though they discourage inter-gender friendships among the MSA crowds, which they found hypocritical.[19]

Along with the general meeting, many campuses also have a prayer room or another space, whether indoor or outdoor, in which Muslims (most of them regular MSA participants) perform, constitute, and fashion inter-gender norms. At UC Riverside, Muslims lack their own prayer room but utilize the Meditation Room in the campus student center to fulfill the obligation at the appointed times. Most often, a student will come in and quietly say the prayer individually. Sometimes, usually on Fridays for *jum'a* in the early afternoon, the Muslims will pray as a group with men in the front of the room and women in the back.

These prayer rituals locate the proper place for each gender to be. Frequently when a woman enters she will 'lower the gaze,' looking towards the ground, and walk by the men to the back of the room where she may quietly greet a fellow 'sister.' Men also commonly will look down or away as acts of modesty. However, not all the Muslims

[19] Also see Shabana Mir, *Muslim American Women on Campus* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 136-137. She says that Muslim men and women most of all worry about the reputation they will be given from being seen giving hugs in public, especially to fellow Muslims.

support these practices of piety. Mujahida explained that having become a lot more "adamant" about "feminist" causes after her freshman year, she began to "sit in the middle" of the room to gently "chip away" at this norm. Meanwhile, I have observed and sometimes myself participated in conversations within this "Med Room" across gender lines. Baseem, one of the few Shia Muslims who is an active MSA participant, said: "the sisters would come in, put their head down, and walk to the back, without even saying *salaam alaykum*; but I was like it shouldn't be a walk of shame; so now I say that to everyone that comes in, with a smile; and now slowly, they will say it back; the smile makes the whole difference." However, he has to deal with others getting the wrong impression. "I knew it wasn't going to be easy in the Muslim community, as they might say, 'why is he saying hi to me?' I even heard from a sister that it's considered flirtatious, but I think it is a problem with the person, not with me; doesn't need to be that you say 'hi' means you want him/her; should be just 'welcome, you're not alone'." He claims to have not invented such inter-gender greeting but sometimes finds it at "mosques and conventions," where it may be said not in a "seductive" manner, "but sincere and with a smile, genuine, with your heart." Mujahida and Baseem, hence, through their small acts work to refashion MSA norms and spatial relations to reflect their vision of cordial and fluid relations between the genders.

Some young Muslims argued that, rather than needing to observe strict physical divisions, internal modesty and self-control were most important and could empower Islamically-sound friendships between genders. Mujahida believed, "I don't think you need to be hugging and touching and being BFFs, but at least acknowledge the fact that

they are people too and you can have a neutral relationship with them without having to fall in love and being accused of secretly running off with them in a car…" Mojdeh said she believes in "emotional separation" rather than "physical separation." She said inter-gender friends can confide in each other for problem-solving and they "can be friendly with one another, they can be associates, they can talk, they can work on projects together" but they should not get "very emotionally involved with each other," becoming "really buddy friends," or the result will be that "one will like the other." She said, "People can be sitting in a room as mixed as they want, but they should be following some kind of modesty in the way that they speak and act and talk." Other women also made distinctions between "internal" and "external" modesty but asserted that both are very important and should occur together. They insisted that intentions and inner states take priority and make negotiable what is allowable in external expression and interactions.[20]

Young Muslim Americans interpret ideals of equality and empowerment in their own localized contexts and in juxtaposition to the practices of party-culture of college peers. These interpretations often fetishize apparent signs of oppression or liberation of oneself or the other, overlooking other evidence to the contrary. At UC Irvine, Muslims prayed in congregation just outside the Cross-Cultural Center, the men standing in-front of the women, each in rows along long prayer mats. At UC Riverside, Muslims prayed together usually at the beginning of the general meeting and at other times in the Meditation

[20] This construction of the relationship between the internal and the external will be further discussed in this chapter in the section on clothing.

Room, the men's row's in front of those of the women. While outsiders assume that women praying behind men in the MSA-hosted Friday *jum'ah* manifests inequality, the muslimas I talked to resisted this interpretation. Halala said: "I think that people who argue that it doesn't support equality, don't really understand what they are saying or what that means; like I've heard some people say, 'well in Islam women pray behind men, that's not equality'; and I say, why do you think that makes someone inferior just because they are standing behind someone else; how does that make you inferior?" Mojdeh sees different areas for congregational prayer for men and women, needing to stand, lean forward and bend down, as being similar to having separate bathrooms or dressing rooms, "just so you can focus a bit more," although she finds praying alone best for herself to concentrate. Isra is not bothered either by splitting women and men or putting one behind the other except when there is a wall between them or separate rooms for lectures or presentations, as these prevent women from being able to fully engage in the learning process. "We can't participate in the discussion," she said. "I generally feel like you aren't as welcome to participate; can't learn as much or really be a part, or advocate for yourselves…" From what she understands, in the Prophet Muhammad's time women were either placed behind or to the right of men and this allowed full participation. She believed it would be best for contemporary mosques to replicate this precedence more consistently.[21]

[21] The Hadith are ambiguous on whether it was a regular and welcomed practice for Muslim women to pray at the mosques in the time of Muhammad, although Muhammad discouraged his followers from preventing their wives from attending, and at-least one *hadīth* indicates women could be found in rows behind men. But with this ambiguity and other factors of customary practices, most mosques in Muslim majority countries are not organized to regularly welcome female worshippers.

To Follow a Female: Women as Officers and MSA President

The issue of congregational prayer was appropriated by some UC Riverside MSA men who argued that since typically the MSA president leads the group *salah* and the leader (*imam*) of prayer in a gathering that includes men must also be a man, therefore the MSA president needed to be a male. Hadia Mubarak, the first MSA-National female president, believes there is an attitude among many first and second generation Muslims that the MSA president is not just a student organization leader but a kind of *imam* (mosque leader of prayer) of the campus Muslim community. This attitude has often prevented women from serving in this role as president until recent years.[22] However, because another 'brother,' officer or otherwise, often leads the prayer instead of the president in MSA gatherings, some interviewees disagreed with this reasoning. More commonly some men were apprehensive that a woman leader would decrease male participation because "guys do not take seriously" or respect women enough because of men's "immaturity." In other words, the young men's own immaturity was invoked as justification for the MSA to work institutionally in an immature fashion, preventing someone who might be the most capable and committed candidate for that position from serving in this role on account of her gender. Indeed, a key way to challenge and overcome such gender prejudice is in fact to have a female president. Alternatively, Northwestern University, near Chicago, has bylaws to elect male and female co-

[22] Hadia Mubarak, Conversation with author, annual Conference of the American Academy of Religion, San Diego, California, November 23, 2014.

presidents each year.[23] This sidesteps the tendency to see the president as the *imam* of the campus MSA and necessitates constituting a corporate leadership structure, de-emphasizing the charisma of a single personality.

Stereotypes about the abilities and traits ascribed to women and men also engendered and justified exclusively male MSA presidencies. Some of the young Muslim men believed that women tend to have difficulties staying calm in face of pressure, which compromises her ability to be in the lead, while men are able to stay more cool and collected. Luqman believes men more consistently than women are "logical," not "rash," and do not "let [his] emotions get the best of [him]." Bayan said, "I believe it's not only restricted to male, but it would be better with male, because…in times of crisis he could keep his emotions under [control], because females that's just how they are; that's something I've just noticed; females would break down a lot more when there is a lot of pressure." I asked Bayan if a woman candidate was good at staying calm and controlled under pressure if it would be fine for her to be president. He affirmed it would. However, instead of his own assumptions about women, he then worried about the stereotypes of other "guys" about women that would make that leadership backfire because the young men would not support her enough.

Other men and women interviewees contested this kind of thinking, arguing that women equally, and sometimes better, had the traits to be very effective presidents. Instead of giving in to stereotypes about men and women, Barroq believed the biggest

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[23] Elliott Bazzano, "Muslim Student Association," *Encyclopedia of Muslim American History*, ed. Edward E. Curtis IV, (New York: Facts On File, Inc., 2010), http://www.fofweb.com/activelink2.asp?ItemID=WE52&iPin=EMAH0201&SingleRecord=True (accessed November 26, 2014).

barrier to having a woman president is the "segregation" that prevents men from really knowing the leadership abilities of individual women. He found the idea that a male leader gets people to go to MSA to be "ridiculous." He said, "I think because no one knows the woman, she's not going to be president… If we got to know each MSA member, not as brother or sister, but MSA member; if we got to know everyone, there's no reason why a woman could not be a president, because they'll all know that this person is good for the job and they'll come to the meetings because they know her." Two women argued that even while the current male president of UC Riverside's MSA was doing a fine job, the then vice-president Noor Ahmed had the Islamic knowledge, confidence, and leadership strengths to have made at least an equally competent president. Cantara asked rhetorically, since women follow the men's leadership all the time, could not men also follow women sometimes? Zakir, a leader of the MSA of Cal State San Bernardino, said its previous officer Mahbuba was "our best President" because of her intelligence, self-confidence, her ability to manage others, and wisdom.

Conceptions about the differing abilities of females and males produced interpretations about their roles as leaders. Bayan believed women's tendency to be "more organized" made them well-suited for roles like vice-president. Indeed, in recent years the MSA vice-president at UC Riverside has been a woman, becoming the default "president for the sisters" while the male president maintains the presidency for the entire MSA. Interestingly, in fall of 2014 the new MSA president happened to need to take a class at the same time as the weekly MSA general meeting, so the public relations male officer took on the president's typical role as emcee of the general meeting. At the same

time the new female vice-president took on a role of more consistently helping to lead and emcee the gathering than that of previous years. Bayan explained the need to have both males and females as leaders to "keep a balance, because if you have two males as the leader, their focus isn't going to be on the women, you will always focus on your own gender by how you think." Differing from Bayan, Rafeeq asserted that it is women's supposed superior "ability to multitask" that actually makes her well suited to be president. Some women interviewees claimed that even while the MSA president was a male, the great majority of the organizational work was being done by the females, at least during the previous two years, which meant that if women can and do largely run the organization behind the scenes, why cannot they also do so up front?

Having an official woman leader of United States' Muslim national organizations has only occurred since 2004.[24] Over the next ten years, it has become less uncommon to have a woman as president of campus MSAs. In fact, in 2013 to 2014 eleven of the twenty-two campus MSA affiliates of MSA West (an independent California coalition of campus MSAs) had a woman as the president.[25] While interviewees did not know if the Universities of California at Irvine and Riverside had yet had women presidents, Cal Poly Pomona's president mentioned it having a previous female president. CSU San Bernardino had had three women presidents in a row when in 2014-2015 a male was elected. Riverside City College's advisor said that about seven of the fourteen years of his involvement this MSA has had a women president. UC Berkeley has also had a run of

[24] See chapter on the History of the Muslim Student Association for more details.
[25] Amal Ali, "The Muslim isms: Tackling Internal Racism and Sexism," An Islamic State of Mind: Sixteenth Annual MSA West Conference, lecture discussion breakout session, January 19, 2014, University of California Davis.

women presidents for the 2011-2012, 2013-2014, and 2014 -2015 academic years. Hadia Mubarak argued that it is not the gender of the president that makes a difference in student engagement and participation but the strength of the programming. If students are interested in the events, gatherings, speakers, and activist causes that the leadership organizes for them, students will attend in large numbers. She observed her own MSA of Florida State University move from inconsistent programming and participation to that of vigorous attendance as the leadership began to organize strong and dynamic programs for members.[26]

As presidencies with a woman in the post are occurring more frequently in campus MSAs, having a leader who is female is becoming more natural for both men and women Muslims. One of the Berkeley MSA presidents said that because recently her campus had had a female president, she "never thought that it was not possible; nothing in my mind that would make it strange." She believed both the Muslims and Americans more generally are "changing to believe that women can take on leadership roles and have a place, in and outside of Muslim communities." There is also yet to have been a President of the United States who is a woman, yet Americans, Muslims and non-Muslims alike, are overcoming prejudices that stifle such possibilities. However, she confessed "we saw our male participation fall this year," and someone suggested "maybe because the president is a female." She said, "That really upset me…and I thought that's very arcane thinking." She added, "I never thought the problems as president is gender specific; I

[26] Hadia Mubarak, Private Conversation with author, annual conference of the American Academy of Religion Conference, San Diego, California, November 23, 2014.

never felt limited in my position as a female." She believed "that the conversation needs to keep happening" among Muslims and Americans in general so stereotypes about women keep decreasing and opportunities for leadership open to both genders "keeps improving."

Questions about how MSAs conceive of and practice equality, equity, or complementarity are not just limited to who is president. MSAs of the University of California system usually have at least eight officer positions. Many also have a number of committees or task-forces responsible for various facets of programming, advertising, partnering with other groups, and activism in which many young women serve as leaders. While some positions are gender specific, such as "sisters' chair" versus "brothers' chair," either gender is eligible for most roles. At UC Riverside's MSA election process, usually any member could be nominated or volunteer to run for a certain position, the board would approve of the possible candidates, and then a week later the outgoing board supervised a vote, giving MSA participants about ten days to put in their votes.[27] Half the positions were held by women in both 2013-2014 and 2014-2015. Some other MSAs have the current board appoint the next year's board. For example, the officers of UC Berkeley's MSA have a mandate to appoint four men and four women to the eight

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[27] In 2013-2014, the positions of president and vice-president were open to nominations. However, the MSA constitution mandated that only those who have served on a previous MSA Board are eligible to be president or vice-president and only one person for president and one person for vice-president qualified. For the 2014-2015 elections, the MSA Board tried to increase transparency and widened the qualifications to anyone who had served on a previous executive Board, whether it was with UCR's MSA or another student association. Although one of the nominees for vice-president, who had served as Students for Justice in Palestine president, was accepted by the MSA board, one nominated for MSA president and who had served as MSA West president did not accept his nomination. Once the MSA participants elected the chief positions—president and vice-president—then they nominated and the MSA Board held elections for the new board. Saima Faheem, Facebook chat, message to author, February 27, 2015.

positions on the incoming board. Cal Poly Pomona's MSA has a similar appointment process but without an explicit mandate to appoint a certain number of each gender. However, its outgoing president told me that since the college and MSA membership is majority male, "[I] tried to put as many sisters on my board as possible."

Muslim women themselves are asserting their right through their work ethic, volunteering, and workshops to be in leadership positions at the different levels of MSA organizations and in other Islamic institutions. The MSA West regional organization had four of its seven board positions occupied by women in 2013 to 2014, and the following year it listed six of the ten board positions being occupied by women.[28] In one of the break-out sessions for the 2014 MSA West Conference held at UC Davis, a UCR student named Amal Ali gave a presentation on racial, ethnic, and gender justice within MSAs. She integrated into her talk definitions and discussions of institutionalized racism and marginalization, fusing ideals learned from her college coursework with ones derived from her Islamic sources. While bringing to attendees' attention critical issues that need to be addressed, she commended the University of California and Cal State University systems' MSAs, the majority of members of this regional organization, for electing women to over fifty percent of their board positions. She contrasted this to mosque boards and some other Muslim American organizations such as CAIR in which the majority of officers are still usually men, and those women who do serve are often in

[28] The MSA West listed seven positions as being part of their "Board" in 2013-2014, while in 2014-2015 they listed ten. Beside the "Board," they have various "Staff" positions as well as a "Steering Committee" for their annual conference. What is considered a "Board" position and what is listed as one of these other positions seems to change from year to year. Program, Sixteenth Annual MSA West Conference, January 2014, pg. 3; "Board of Directors," MSA West, http://msawest.net/index.php/menu-about/board-and-staff (accessed November 26, 2014).

stereotypical positions like “secretary” or “sister’s chair.” She urged her fellow college Muslims to not become complacent with these signs of improvement but to rise up and oppose the oppressive legacies of Muslim Americans’ individual and organizational inheritances of structural inequities and cultural stereotypes. She cited the Qur’an 5:8 about treating all people with justice, even those one hates, as well as the last sermon of the Prophet Muhammad about men being “kind” to their wives and the other women in their lives. Following her presentation a vigorous conversation ensued about the Islamic ideal of gender complementarity over “sameness.” Attendees stated that Muslims needed to challenge and investigate on what basis women or men should or should not be restrained to certain roles and spaces, rather than just assuming that the traditional practices of certain Muslim communities and organizations were inherent to the foundations of the religion.

Equality, equity, and complementariness are not just values in themselves but allow avenues for individuals of both genders to test their leadership skills and develop their self-confidence. Abia said that being in the MSA leadership is an “opportunity for Muslims to see what else they are good at besides what they are studying; get involved in events that you wouldn’t be part of otherwise; help you build new skill set and confidence.” She explained, being a leader “was very important for me… [It] gave me a ton of confidence in myself and what I could do.” She added that being in a leadership position is a “good baby step, stepping stone, for those trying to become leaders in society.” Her social activism was crucial to self-formation and preparation to enter law school upon completing her bachelor’s degree. Although these women can, and many do,

become leaders in one of the many other campus student organizations, taking part in MSA's leadership may set a precedent for what forums of leadership they might pursue long-term.

Despite the persistence of some gender stereotypes among individuals in this generation of Americans, women who had served on an MSA board believed mutual respect and professional collaboration had prevailed. They did not believe they had experienced patronizing attitudes. Abia, who had served on the Board of UC Riverside in previous years, said, "When we had board meetings we'd address these concerns [given by members in a suggestion box]; we'd really have a discussion, very rarely we would have to vote on an issue, usually arrive at a consensus that made sense to all of us." The former president of UC Berkeley's MSA said, "[I] felt like the members of the board respected me," which was four men and four women, and there "really was a partnership."

The Politics of the Muslima's Body: Activist Events on Gender

Many Muslims on American university campuses take on challenging neo-orientalists stereotypes about Muslim women as a central personal and collective mission. They strive to disorient assumptions of inequality and disempowerment and reorient understandings of the status, rights, and opportunities for women within Islam. Information booths, called "*da'wa* tables" in the free speech areas of campus, pass out pamphlets on this subject, as well as other subjects essentialized in inflammatory ways,

such as “jihad” and “Shariah Law.”[29] Towards these efforts, the MSA leaders and other Muslim activists on campus organize events to inform the public about Muslim women.

The “*Ḥijāb* Day” or “*Ḥijāb* Challenge” is the quintessential event for MSAs across the country to attract public awareness and change how others think about Muslim women. In interviews the Muslims had articulated to me the significance of the event to be “to try to be a *ḥijābī* for the day,” to “experience how a girl who wears it feels,” or in other words to “try to get people to walk in our shoes as it builds bridges between different people.” Bayan believes *Ḥijāb* Day is “the best thing MSA has ever put on” for it helps non-Muslims “to see that that woman is a person also, and she's doing all that by choice.” It's a huge topic in America,” he said, “like women are oppressed or what not; and that's the first thing…the easiest thing, people just shoot at….” He felt this event helps others see Muslim women who wear the headscarf as fellow human beings rather than subjugated objects of male oppressors, and envisioning the *ḥijāb* as expressions of women’s own agency rather than suppression. For the event, MSA members put up posters around campus and invite their classmates, friends, and acquaintances to sign up to participate. Most of the women who donned the *ḥijāb* for UC Riverside’s 2014 event were not Muslim. Morning to early afternoon, MSA women received those who signed up in a second floor room of the student center building, serving them breakfast, tying turquoise headscarves on the participants, and answering their questions or apprehensions about wearing it. When I went by at 11:45 that morning, the UCR MSA had given out to

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[29] Hadia Mubarak, “How Muslim Students Negotiate their Religious Identity and Practices in an Undergraduate Setting” (Social Science Research Council, May 8, 2007): 4. http://religion.ssrc.org/reforum/ (accessed May 25, 2014).

participants all one-hundred-and-ten of the headscarves made for the event. At five in the afternoon that day the MSA invited participants to come hear a short presentation on *ḥijāb* and share their experiences wearing it.

Those who took the "*Ḥijāb* Challenge" spoke of it at that afternoon's debriefing session as helping them develop empathy for *ḥijābī* women. Having worn it for a day gave them first-hand experience on its associated stigma and how others modify their behavior in how they treat someone with a headscarf. They also voiced appreciation that the event was a way to inform others about the *ḥijāb* and that they were pleasantly surprised to sometimes receive support from unexpected quarters. One young woman said it helped her to feel what Muslim women "are feeling." She described, "A girl was laughing at me and staring at me; my friend explained to them why I was doing it; I didn't like the attention but I liked to tell people why we're doing this." A self-identified Catholic and athlete said "running with this was one of the hardest things I'd ever done." However, a friend also told her with it on, "I never noticed you have a really nice smile," the headscarf helping to bring out this feature of her face. Another identified as Christian found out headscarves also have Jewish roots, and she enjoyed the solidarity among *ḥijābī*s: "you get a little nod from fellow women." Melissa noticed, "Since I'm usually not this covered up, there was a lot more eye contact, in general; they didn't look at what I was wearing, just eye contact, and I really appreciated that." A few women found themselves acting "calmer" or "less combative, or antagonistic" wearing it. Claudia said, "I want to commend all the ladies that do this every day; it's a strong show of your faith...and dedication; and something that I admire." Hence, while this event brings a

little more awareness about the headscarf, the debriefing itself becomes an opportunity for Muslim women to receive words of support and encouragement from non-Muslim women. This event helps Muslim and non-Muslim women and men deepen their sense that America is the home of Muslims too, where stereotypes are not set in stone but non-Muslims can change their perspective and experience solidarity with their Muslim "sisters."

MSAs have diverse approaches to trying to make the day inclusive of men as well. The UC Berkeley MSA held a "Modesty Challenge" instead of "*Ḥijāb* Day" in 2014. This was basically the same event with the addition of making learning "what Islam says the modesty code for men is" an explicit part of the agenda.[30] Nonetheless, other MSAs similarly encourage men to participate by "lowering their gaze" and not staring at women or sexually objectifying them in their thoughts, words, and actions. Tariq, an outgoing Somali-descent young man at UC Riverside, decided to participate by wearing a distinctive garment that day for the sake of his faith, going through his classes and campus activities with a white, long cotton-shirt called *thawb*. He said that when he was walking a woman behind him poked fun at him asking, "Is that a dress?" but it "helped me be more conscious to be a righteous person, lower my gaze, not objectify women." In 2014, the UCR MSA also encouraged its members to show solidarity and participate with a Sikh men's campus student organization putting on its own "challenge" later that same week, covering men's hair with a scarf and turban. Sikhs are often mistaken as Muslims

[30] "Modesty Challenge Day (3/19) Sign-up Form," https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1icBUKaKCiMOxtFeePENH5iYRQ8oafnffIofU2E2gLdc/viewform (accessed December 10, 2014)

and so receive many of the same struggles of being stereotyped.

Some Muslim women and men complained that while there were events about women, there were very few female Islamic scholars brought in by MSA to speak. Mujahida said:

> Stop bringing in Islamic sheikhs who are male all the time. I feel like we have an imbalance in voicing an opinion; if they do have a lecture about women, they bring a male sheikh. I feel like, if I'm a woman and not wearing a *ḥijāb*, and a man is telling me to wear *ḥijāb*, I'm like, 'you're a man, how can you even know what *ḥijāb* is? You don't know the implications, you have never worn a symbol on your head every day'....

Reportedly, UCR MSA did not have any women scholars of Islam in 2012-2013, but in 2014 they did have Lobna Mulla come from Garden Grove, California, and present on the mutual responsibilities of men and women to uphold modesty. Other MSA's understood the problems of having all male guest speakers yet many struggled to find women speakers to present. Cal Poly Pomona's president explained, "That's been a big plus this year because we've been able to get women scholars, which has been a problem in the past, never enough women scholars to go around, but that has been helpful to get a lot more women participants in the MSA this year..." Likewise, UC Berkeley's president told me, "It's hard, we try to diversify the people we bring in general, and we try to have women speak, but there aren't very many and there's few in our area, so we got [Maryam Amir Ebrahimi] to speak three times this year."[31] Some MSAs have also provided more women speakers by bringing back women alumni of their MSA to speak. Cal State San Bernardino's MSA, for example, made its president Mahbuba of the previous year one of

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[31] On her Facebook page Maryam Amir Ebrahimi provides an insightful perspective on the meaning and ramifications of sexism https://www.facebook.com/maryam.amirebrahimi/posts/672712446122949 published March 12, 2014, (accessed December 12, 2014).

the special guest speakers at its next year banquet. At times current women members of UCR's MSA also gave presentations in the general meeting on Islamic piety and spirituality—instead of just "women's issues"—in the 2013-2014 academic year.

Although the headscarf is the most salient symbol of being a Muslim woman, issues of gender concerns and Islam are more than just *ḥijāb*. The newly founded Middle Eastern Student Center [MESC] of UC Riverside in 2013 offered Muslim, Jewish, Christian, secular, and other students the space and the institutional and financial support to fashion identities independent of the more particular religious and ethnic clubs on campus. For the MESC, undergraduate student Faezeh Fathizadeh organized an event that compared Abrahamic religions in 2014, and Merima Tričić planned and participated in an event on "Women in the Shari'ah" in 2013 and another called "The *Ḥijāb* Monologues" in 2014. In the Shari'ah event, speakers clarified this term as encompassing much more in ethics, laws, and ideals of comportment than just a version of penal laws and sequestered women that demagogic news media personalities stress. Attendees asked questions about women not being able to lead a mixed gender congregation in Islamic *salah* prayer and about the place of domestic violence in the faith. The panel participants contextualized these concerns within Islam as a whole. They argued that men designated for the role of leading prayer does not signify that women are oppressed, because women are given rights and empowered in many other ways. They alleged that taking the complete body of teachings of the Qur'an and Hadith together, hitting and violence to women is never allowed in spousal disputes.

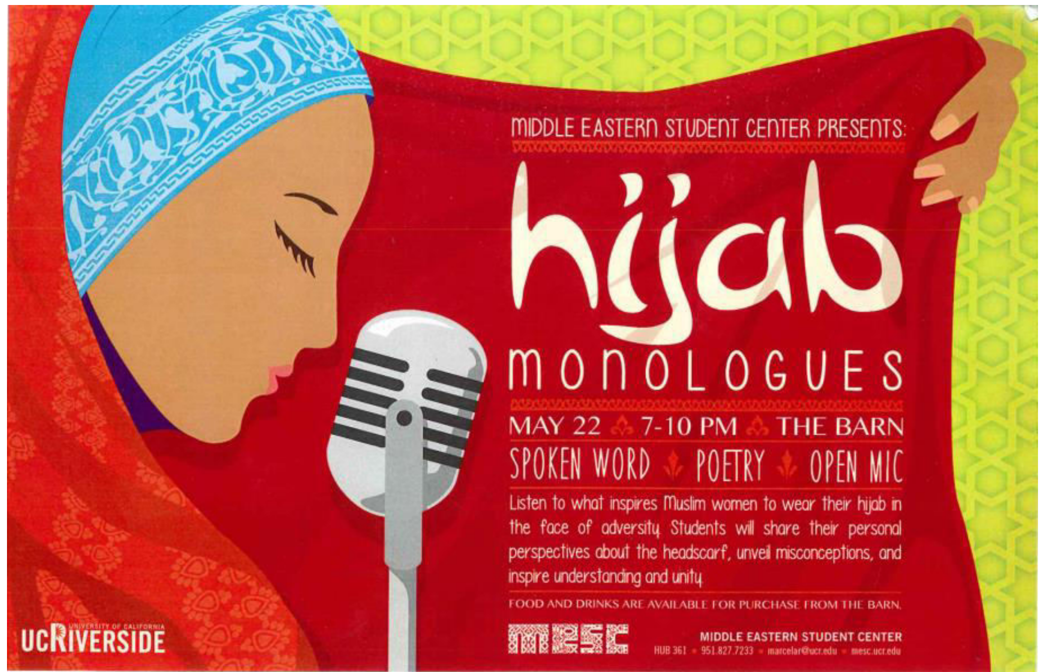

Image 2: Advertisement created by Merima Tričić and Rick Donato, posted in the UC Riverside campus for the "Hijab Monologues"[32]

In the *Ḥijāb* Monologues, Muslim women and men offered their personal perspectives and experiences with the headscarf and modest clothing, often communicated in poetic form. In Faduma Ibrahim's spoken word, she said, in part:

> The media perpetuates ignorance so well that they can't help but not know,
> That my *ḥijāb* doesn't cover me with feminine suppression
> but it in fact liberates me and allows you to peel away layers without peeling it off.
> It lets you get a glimpse of my intelligence before you can see my hair,
> And you should count your blessings because I'm smart as hell.
> It lets you know my character and reveals who I am beyond my physicality,
> It's significant for me but otherwise a small detail.
> Because all it is at the end of the day is a piece of cloth,
> Yet wars are being fought 'cuz I'm supposedly oppressed.
> Oh the little Muslim woman with the *ḥijāb* needs saving,
> As though My strength is something that can be diminished because of something I'm wearing.

Omar Erfan, who was then the incoming president of the MSA also recited a spoken word:

> Through the divine wisdom that she always neglected
> But now she would protect it, she began to sense it

[32] Used with permission by Merima Tričić, email, March 31, 2015.

> From within she meant it, this life changing intention….
> She began to wear the scarf and without a second thought
> The attention was surrounding her, but not ‘cuz of her beauty
> They were staring at her head and the cover she was using
> They kept abusing, with their condescending looks, their noses in the sky
> And the garbage from their mouths that was constantly oozing
> It was a bruising that she took but at the end she didn't mind
> She knew they couldn't feel the purity she felt inside
> The peace of mind, free at last
> From the shackles of the image that society has
> Of how a woman should look like, does she look right?
> Is she wearing designer clothes and does it fit tight?

This spoken word poetry emphasizes countering assumptions of the Muslim woman oppressed by the *ḥijāb* by portraying the headscarf as liberation from being judged by one's physical beauty. Garbi Schmidt criticizes that this common Muslim American rhetoric, such as that exemplified in these above spoken words, only counter essentializations of *ḥijābīs* with other essentializations of non-*ḥijābīs* as oppressed by concerns about clothing, fashion, and physical beauty. I argue that unless and until society evolves to be primarily concerned with peoples' personality and character traits, such battles of representation will continue. Nonetheless, counter-generalizations by Muslim Americans invite non-Muslim Americans to rethink priorities in physical self-presentation. Similarly, women (whether Muslim or not) who experiment with dressing in a non-revealing fashion without a headscarf may challenge Muslim men and women to rethink the nuances of dressing modestly.

Decoding the Dress Code: Men & Women Covering Up

Most scholarship on how Muslims dress has focused on women's headscarves, as their increasing popularity has made them "the most visible symbol of Muslim

identity…in America."[33] However, Muslim men also have dress codes that they strive to uphold. Muslim men and women are closely involved in negotiating the appropriate form of attire and its significance to both genders. Nonetheless, the *ḥijāb*—with the headscarf itself as the quintessential feature—becomes the focal point of MSA Muslim discourse that resists notions of oppressed Muslim women and strives to refashion Islamic ways of dress as truly representing liberation and empowerment. Whereas many of their mothers may not wear the headscarf or even discourage their daughters from taking it on due to its associated stereotypes, the second-generation Muslim American women are increasingly adorning themselves with this perspicuous symbol of their faith.[34] With this piece of clothing, Muslim women distinguish themselves from their non-Muslim women peers, idealizing their defiance of sexual objectification. Through *ḥijāb* a Muslim woman hopes to invite attention to her personality and character instead of others focusing on her physical appearance. Unfortunately, because in American society the headscarf is associated with negative stereotypes of Muslims, with the scarf she trades the veil of her outward beauty with that of a stigma that continues to block others from seeing past her exterior. While escaping self-presentations that prioritizes highlighting physical beauty, the *ḥijābī*s take on the loaded and often negative public notions of the "Muslim woman." Some women feel unbearably oppressed, not by the Muslims or the headscarf itself, but by the assault of stereotypes they encounter daily within the wider society. Graduating from college and its haven of fellow *ḥijābīs*, entering circles where non-*ḥijāb* fashion is

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[33] Rhys H. Williams & Gira Vashi, "Hijab and American Muslim Women: Creating the Space for Autonomous Selves," *Sociology of Religion* 68 (Fall 2007): 271.
[34] Geneive Abdo, *Mecca and Main Street: Muslim Life in America after 9/11* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 30-31.

the norm, many young Muslims stop wearing it. Other women proudly continue with this symbol of piety and modesty. Many of the latter, also see it as a social justice cause to be pursued with passion to resist the stigma. They want to reorient the public consciousness to perceive the *ḥijāb* as a mark of empowerment. In other words, they wear it not in spite of but partially because of the stigma.

MSAers more frequently designate the *ḥijāb* to be an expression of modesty which resists sexual objectification and invites others to pay attention instead to her personality, character, and inner attributes. Shems said that women shouldn't "need to worry about being super skinny or putting on all this makeup; her upmost responsibility is to God; you're not just here to please everyone, don't need to show your body; need to be a thinker, be a strong person, be a human being, be a Muslim." Kawthar explained that, contrary to perceptions of *ḥijāb* as a sign of oppression, she finds *ḥijāb* to be "a liberation" and her "empowerment": "It keeps from being judged just on your looks, encourages people to look more about your character, your heart." Halala, who does not wear a headscarf, argued that "in this society with the objectification of women, people think that beauty is being half-naked…I find that really disturbing; Islam tells women to cover up and our true beauty is our personality." Thus, she believes Islam dignifies and respects women in place of "objectification." Samira maintained that outward and "internal" modesty is "also a sense of respect that you're giving yourself."

Many MSA women reported positive changes of men no longer making advances or being sexually harassed after taking on the *ḥijāb*. Cala claimed, "If a girl walks down the street in a bikini, guys will look. If I'm walking down the street in a *ḥijāb*, guys may still

look, but I'm doing my part to try to prevent that." Nadra said that after she put on the headscarf her male friend stopped asking her to go to a pub or clubbing with him. When Mujahida first came to college she "never understood why women would want to wear it by their own accord" and then she "had this epiphany. This group of guys was behind me…walking on purpose, and they were making rude noises and whistles, and I know it's normal for some assholes to do that; but I know that if I was covered and wearing loose clothing, I don't think they would do that, so I know how it can be a protection." Samira recounted, "I mean I noticed that boys will act different around you when you remain modest…they won't be rude to you, they won't be crazy… No guy is going to come up to you, and be like, 'Hey, yo, your ass is cute! Can I get your number?' No one is going to do that, because I personally don't show those parts of my areas…" She explained that while self-control is essential to not objectify another sexually, "We're human, we have hormones" and instead of "walking out in booty shorts and a tank top and everything of mine is hanging out" or a "guy running shirtless on the street" showing off his six-pack," covering up is "a protection" and invites everyone to respect one another.[35]

At UC Irvine and UC Berkeley, over 60% of active MSA female participants wear a headscarf, while at UC Riverside and CSU San Bernardino about half do not wear it. At UC Riverside, whereas in 2012-2013 all women officers had been *ḥijābī*s, some of the female officers in 2013 to 2014 did not wear a *ḥijāb*, which may have helped other non-*ḥijābī*s feel welcomed and comfortable to participate. Indeed, frequently more than half

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[35] Commonly Muslim Americans express a pessimistic "distrust of human nature and its ability to resist sexual impulses" when the talk about gender and hijab, Williams & Vashi, "*Hijab* and American Muslim Women," 276.

of attendees at the regular meeting were not wearing the headscarf. UC Berkeley's outgoing president acknowledged, "There can be a cycle where if non-*ḥijābī*s don't see other non-*ḥijābī*s they might be wary to enter an organization." Hence it is very important that their MSA "is pretty good in having non-*ḥijābī*s and…non-*ḥijābī*s on [the] board." She recalled that when she was a freshman, she "and a few other girls…started wearing *ḥijāb*, and there was a lot of celebration of that; and there was some sensitivity about that." For the MSA it is a difficult balancing act to give recognition to Muslim women who take the courageous step to wear this demarcation of piety without making non-*ḥijābī* Muslim women feel inferior.[36] Halala said, "Surprisingly, I never felt pressure [to wear the headscarf]; but I think that's mostly because I'm very comfortable with who I am; but I don't think this is normal, especially for those Muslims going to MSA meetings." Other MSA's leadership have also been sensitive to how to balance these two values, such as the 2013 University of Texas MSA that produced a video for an inter-campus MSA competition that was critical of fellow Muslims who sometimes ostracize non-*ḥijābī*s.[37]

For many MSAers, the *ḥijāb* is a sign of a woman's piety and devotion, which in effect places those women who do not wear it in an ambivalent, liminal space. Before the Hijab Dialogues 2014 event described above, one young Muslim woman who was preparing to present why she did not feel it was necessary to wear the headscarf

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[36] Garbi Schmidt, *American Medina: A Study of the Sunni Muslim Immigrant Communities in Chicago* (Lund, Sweden: University of Lund Press, 1998), 138.
[37] Naureen Syed, "UTA MSA Short Film - Judged - 1st place Texas MSA Showdown 2013 Winner!" Youtube, published April 1, 2013, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aYuTJJ9gQGQ (accessed April 1, 2015).

attempted to convince her friend who had stopped wearing the *ḥijāb* to present also or "MSA will monopolize the view on *ḥijāb*." Some of the most active and otherwise ritually faithful MSA women do not wear the headscarf, yet in interviews they consistently asserted that they would take it on in the (near) future. Most non-*ḥijābī* muslimas I interviewed used the language of not being "ready" to wear it "yet"; very few stated that it was not mandatory or inessential. While *ḥijābī*s and non-*ḥijābī*s were alike welcomed to this MSA, this implicit assumption, voiced aloud at times, demarcated women who had not taken on the headscarf as less religious evolved and feeling judged negatively. Mexican America convert Cristina described, "They will always bombard you with, 'why aren't you wearing *ḥijāb*?' And sometimes they make you feel like you're less because you don't wear *ḥijāb*, and I do get the looks and I do get the comment like, 'you know, you should be wearing it, it's good for you.'"[38] Although no longer an active participant in MSA, Cristina did begin wearing the *ḥijāb* less than a year after this interview.

Wearing a headscarf in a way that completely covers one's hair and chest is the chief aspect of dress emphasized by MSA men and women for muslima modesty, yet *ḥijāb* also meant covering wearing loose-clothing that does not outline the shape of the body, long-sleeves that cover to the wrist, fully covering the legs, and usually a sweater long enough to drape the buttocks. *Ḥijābī* women acknowledged that they probably put as much attention, thought, and anxiety each day as their non-*ḥijābī* counterparts to clothing

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[38] Other scholars have noted an ostracizing in MSA circles of those who do not wear the *ḥijāb*, although in my research many women who do not wear it also feel fully welcomed and respected for their "choice," see Williams & Vashi, "*Hijab* and American Muslim Women," 281.

choices. Within the *ḥijābī* universe whether one's headscarf is of a plain or colorful design, how it is tied, whether one shows some hair, the looseness or tightness of one's clothing, brands and fashion choices of clothing, and whether one reveals some of the forearm, all communicate much to fellow *ḥijābī*s.[39]

Muslim women are very attentive to these details, because a muslima who would be assumed to be very conservative and pious in non-Muslim circles may be interpreted as "liberal," rebellious, defiant, or just "not quite there yet" in MSA circles should she be showing some of her arm, wearing skinny jeans, or revealing some hair. Mujahida recounts fellow Muslim women being critically aware, and sometimes judgmental, about what other Muslim women were wearing: "They would look at other girls and say like *istaghfru'Allah* [literally, "I seek God's forgiveness"], look at how this girl is dressed." When I asked Mojdeh about the long-sleeves rule she defended the choice she had made in a sweater that day which was covering three quarters of her arm, "No, sleeves to here, no one is getting turned on looking at my arms, trust me." She went on to confess, "I've recently broken some *ḥijābī* rules; because I'm wearing tight pants [to work out today] and didn't wear a long shirt to cover my booty." Although the issue is magnified in MSA circles, her friend Mujahida, who did mostly abide by MSA *ḥijāb* codes, did not believe it was very important in the big scheme of religiosity: "I don't see God as a kind of being who will condemn you for missing a prayer or two or throw you into hell because your hair is not covered or your arms." Mojdeh and Mujahida formulated their own notions of

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[39] "Young women talk about *ḥijāb* with each other as if they were talking about their clothes from the mall," Williams & Vashi, 285

piety, defining the deity to be not as concerned as their MSA counterparts are with the details of *ḥijāb*.

With *ḥijāb* including more than just a headscarf, some women appropriated these other facets of the code to argue for alternate ways to dress Islamically without becoming a fashion outcast. For some, this meant that they could realize the *ḥijāb* ideal of dressing modestly without covering their hair. Marjan said, "I just feel as long as we are conservative like covering our arms and our butts, and this and that, then it's fine." Riya feels that even though she likes to wear designer clothes and does not wear the headscarf, by not showing "cleavage" or wearing "skin tight" clothes she still dresses more "conservatively" than her roommates. On the other hand, other women would wear the headscarf while otherwise dressing as in vogue as some of their most fashion-conscious, non-Muslim college classmates. Because of this, Ahmad Khan—who spent his childhood in Pakistan—argued that some women wearing the headscarf may not really be fulfilling *ḥijāb*. He said, "Over here *ḥijāb*, something that stood for modesty and dignity, is now being reduced to simply a headscarf…where girls wear heavy make-up and tight clothes but then they will wear a headscarf and call it *ḥijāb*." Yet what is modesty is always relative. Many Muslim women see themselves as dressing modestly compared to the revealing outfits or stylish hairdos of their college women peers. At the same time, they may also see themselves as immodest compared to some other Muslim practices of dress found more frequently overseas. For example, Mujahida explained, the MSA women "were always talking about the *abaya* stage, which is basically over time the women would keep covering themselves more and more and more until they get to the point

where they are wearing an *abaya* [usually a black gown that hides a woman's curves] and a *ḥijāb*; and so I never really considered this *abaya* stage, but I did when for a while I wanted to be like [the MSA women]." By the language of "stages" MSA women idealized increasingly more modest forms of Islamic dress while at the same time gave themselves tacit approval for their own current more fashionable choices.

When I asked about dress standards for men, interviewees acknowledged that these dress codes are stressed much less in MSA circles, although men nonetheless usually dressed modestly.[40] This may perhaps be because the codes are comparatively less difficult to fulfill. Shariq explained that men need to wear "good clothing, that is neutral, not shirts that have a bad sign on it or encouraging profanity… For both sexes, they say to wear clothes that are not too revealing or too tight." In addition, men are expected to cover "the area from the navel to the knee." A few of the Muslim young men wore shorts, but since shorts styles currently usually go over the knee, this was not necessarily problematic. Ahmad Khan went on to explain that it is debated whether the knee needs to be fully covered but:

> A lot of brothers have forgotten that it's your responsibility…so often you'll see them with their basketball shorts all the way up here. You can't even pray unless that is fully covered, past the knee… Then you see sometimes a brother take their shirt off exposing the bellybutton for the sake of showing off their six-pack. So this is going against modesty because one, this is going against what God told them to cover up…and second it's arrogance, meaning it's showing off.

Indeed, Mojdeh and some others also argued that at least one shoulder also needs to be covered as one would do so "in prayer and hajj." She argued that it is much easier for men to look modest and fashionable, not having to think much about the Islamic ideal,

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[40] On the other hand, the authors of this article did observe men's modest dressed emphasized a number of times in their ethnography, Williams and Vashi, 279.

"because of the cultural standard for how to dress in society; there's a standard [for men] that the more you wear the more status you have; with suits or military generals… I think it's just a cultural thing that they are covered, not so much Islam."

Few men wore obvious signs of their religious identity. Sometimes MSA men at UC Riverside would wear distinctive Middle Eastern dress such as the long-shirt called *thawb* and/or the brimless, skullcap often called a *kufi*, although both were fairly rare. Luqman often wore a *thawb* the first half of his first year at UC Riverside but infrequently by the end of that year; Tariq just wore it for the "*Ḥijāb* Day" event. Nonetheless, male MSA participants usually dressed more conservatively than their non-MSA peers, more consistently wearing long sleeve shirts and wearing pants more often than shorts.

Growing a beard is very popular for MSA men. Many of them, along with the MSA women, perceive this as the male's equivalent of an outward sign of piety.[41] They believe they are following the example of the Prophet Muhammad with facial hair. Mujahida said because of this belief she would sometimes hear MSA sisters say they "wanted to marry a man with a beard," but in her experience emphasis on having a beard was not common in Muslim American circles outside of the MSA.[42] Yet each of the

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[41] The second generation is concerned with having an outward sign of their Islamic identity that is so important to them and the beard has popularly been chosen. However, as it is often interpreted by outsiders as more of an expression of "radicalism" than the "piety" of *ḥijāb*, it is adopted with some reluctance; while some follow an ideal to not cut it, others keep it neat and tidy so it does not so easily distinguish them from other young non-Muslim men who keep a beard, Geneive Abdo, *Mecca and Main Street*, 22.

[42] The *hadīth* collector al-Bukhari contains reports of the Prophet Muhammad having a beard (vol. 1, book 12, no. 728; vol. 2, book 13, no. 55) and that he admonished Muslims to make themselves distinct from polytheists by growing out their beard and trimming their moustache (vol. 7, book 72, no. 780); the popular Islamic jurist al-Qaradawi interprets beard-growing as recommended, rather than obligatory, and shaving it as discouraged, rather than forbidden, Yusuf al-Qaradawi, *The Lawful and the Prohibited in Islam*, trans. Kamal El-Helbawy et. al, (Kuwait : International Islamic Federation of Student Organizations, 1989), 91-93. On the other hand the most popular Islamic television preacher, Amr Khaled, just keeps a moustache, and other Muslims on the internet maintain that facial hair is more a cultural custom for particular times

American male Islamic teachers or *shaykh*s who are most popular to MSA young adults—such as Hamza Yusuf, Suhaib Webb, Nouman Ali Khan, and Siraj Wahhaj—keep a beard, which has helped standardize this show of piety.

MSA men and women negotiate through discourse and actions what they believe was part of pious practice for all Muslims and what was just culturally incidental to the Prophet and his first followers. While for many the beard is part of the prophetic model for Muslim men, fewer believe a loose-fitting Arab *thawb* that the Prophet probably wore is also mandatory for Muslim men. Ahmad Khan argued that if Muhammad came to the "twenty-first century" in "southern California," he would basically dress like other men of this "culture." It was unclear to me how he determined the beard is for all Muslim men while the *thawb* is just a particular cultural practice. Likewise, Mujahida asserted that the *niqāb* [face veil] may have been an expression of modesty and a need to keep "sand" out of the face in Arabia, "but by today's standard, if you wear *niqāb*, in a society where nobody's wearing *niqāb* …like you have a lot of problems there." Samira explained, "There are some Muslim countries that take it to another level, like wearing the *niqāb*, which is covering your face and stuff; Islam doesn't promote that, but just overall modesty." Yet both of them are certain a headscarf is essential for all Muslim women even though it is not explicitly prescribed in the Qur'an. Husayn stressed the need to not make Islam "a side thing" and just go with the flow of what your peers are doing, yet you can "adjust" "traditions" "to your environment so that things move smoothly." As an

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and places rather than a universal ideal for all Muslims, such as, "Is growing beards mandatory in Islam?," http://www.answering-christianity.com/growing_beards.htm (accessed January 7, 2015).

example he said, "Like women wear the *ḥijāb*, but they can also wear American clothing, as long as it doesn't violate the terms by which they wear the *ḥijāb*, don't need to necessarily wear the whole *niqāb*, can still be comfortable and still be Islamic." Although MSA male leaders liked to quote a *ḥadīth* that "what's *ḥalāl* [righteous, correct, lawful] is clear and what's *ḥarām* [forbidden, sinful] is clear," in discourse about dress and the beard it is evident that determining what is "culture" and what is "Islamic" *for them* is continually debated and negotiated.[43]

With Islamic standards enjoining women to cover up a lot more of their bodies than men, I wondered if any interviewees found these expectations inequitable. Zahir, an MSA officer at Cal Poly Pomona, acknowledged having studied Sikhism, and so I asked him about how in Sikh men should cover their hair [and wear an uncut beard], while in Islam covering the hair is just for women. He answered, "If I covered my hair it wouldn't be as big of a deal; women are lot more prettier [*sic*] when hair is showing, it's a get up." So, for him, women's hair enhances her beauty and sex appeal, while for men it does not increase his sex appeal much; hence, it is enjoined for women and optional for men.

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[43] Quoting this *hadīth* is a rhetorical strategy that lends the young advocate of Islam interpretive authority. In quoting a *ḥadīth*, he makes himself sounds credible and knowledgeable. Quoting it is also an appeal to logic that works in a kind of syllogism: Islamic prescriptions are clear. This [other] *hadīth* says to wear a beard. You can trust that all Muslim men should wear a beard, and this matter should not be interpreted in any other way. On the other hand, as argued in the chapter "The Islam of the Second Generation," the trope of "culture" opens a window to challenge other Muslims' interpretation and which asserts one's right to re-interpret the issue. An argument based on this trope works as follows: Some things the Prophet, his wives, and his companions did were because of Islam and other things just happened to be the culture of that time and place. A beard was the common cultural norm for a man at that time and place. Therefore, a beard is cultural and not mandatory for all Muslims men. Either rhetorical strategy is used in persuasive manners to address an issue the way the person feels is best or most correct. What remains debated is when an issue is "clear" and when it is "culture." Interviewees answered that one can tell the difference based on whether the issue is in the "Qur'an and Sunna." However, as this and other chapters have shown, even those issues talked about in those traditional sources may be argued as "culture" by those same young adult Muslim Americans.

Mojdeh agreed with Zahir, "Hair does add a lot to a woman's sex appeal and our religion doesn't allow for sex appeal to be flaunted on the streets." Nonetheless, she did acknowledge that "some guys have it all…all of it is problematic for me… There was a guy in my gym class who was just too cute and probably should be covered, his hair and his whole body." Thus, some women had also taken on the reasoning that their gender's physical features are intrinsically more attractive than those of men and so they need to cover up more. However, when directly questioned muslimas admit that they do not know exactly how men feel but they often find male features that do not require veiling to also be sexually alluring. Sana took a different approach than Zahir and Mojdeh, arguing that women are made constitutionally "stronger" than men, so they can handle greater burdens, such as a stricter dress code. All three of these interviewees' arguments, however, were intended to counter assumptions that women have more Islamic restrictions than men because males oppress and dominate them. Their arguments, regrettably, also implicitly belittle men's capacities for Islamic virtue and piety.[44]

Most MSAers believe that the headscarf is mandatory but should not be forced on any woman. Rather she must be given the space and freedom to decide by her own "choice"

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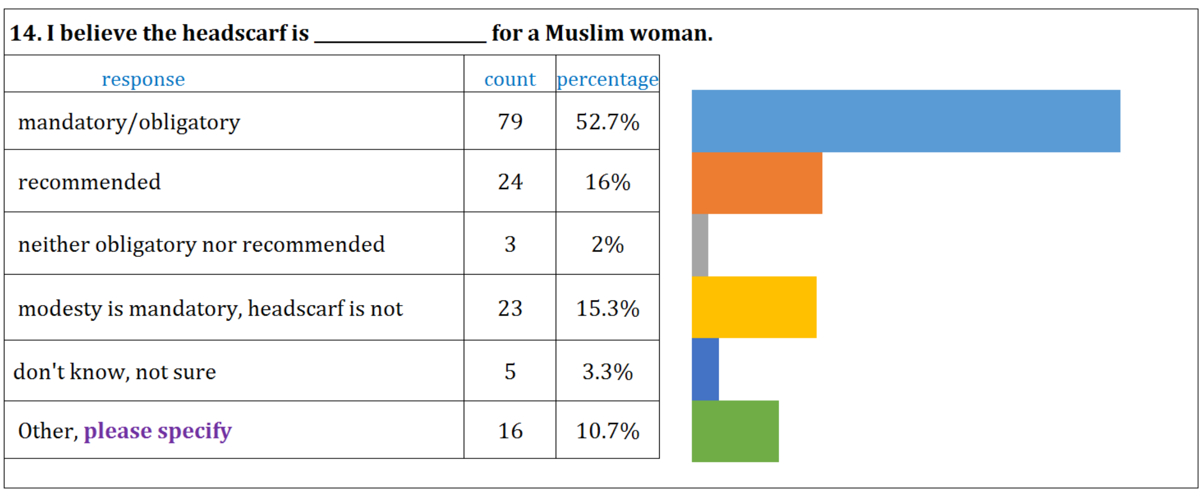
[44] Read & Bartowski say such talk of women being "precious" "diamonds" that must not be revealed except to one's spouse and close kin "rhetorically inverts traditional gender hierarchies that privilege "masculine" traits over their "feminine" counterparts, Jen'nan Ghazal Read & John P. Bartowski, "To Veil or Not to Veil: A Case Study of Identity Negotiation among Muslim Women in Austin, Texas," *Gender & Society* 14 (June 1, 2000): 404. However, this "inversion" is based on the attractiveness of men and women's physical features, not those internal factors of personality, character, and abilities that Muslims often value over exterior "ornaments." In addition, this argument may demean both men and women, implying that men cannot control their thoughts and urges unless women hide their most attractive physical features and that men needing to also cover to protect women from similar thoughts and urges is not as important.

whether she herself will take it on or not.[45] In my survey deployed in May and June 2014, fifty-two percent of the one-hundred-and-fifty respondents marked that the "*ḥijāb*/head-scarf is Mandatory/Obligatory for a Muslim woman." However, when adding the ten individuals who mentioned it is mandatory with an explanation in "Other, please specify…" this number increases to about sixty percent of respondents. A number of individuals who wrote in answers in "Other…" wished to state that it should not be "forced" on a woman but is a "choice" when she is "ready to take that step." One individual wrote: "I believe it is mandatory, however it is a choice to follow that or not, and I believe that a person should only choose it if they are 100 percent sure of their choice and are comfortable and fully knowledgeable on the topic of *ḥijāb*." An additional sixteen percent marked that "*ḥijāb*/head-scarf is recommended." Just over fifteen percent of respondents believed "modesty is mandatory, head-scarf is not." Other write-ins emphasized that the headscarf is important, or even obligatory, but internal modesty and intentions for external modesty are even more crucial. Men and women answered in very similar percentages. We should note that the Qur'an does not explicitly prescribe what parts of the body or how women should cover themselves and the most important *hadīth* on the subject is usually deemed as weak or unreliable.[46] Nonetheless, the majority of

[45] Choice is a "fetishized" ideal of European-Enlightenment genealogy that too often fails to acknowledge the deep constraints and the social and existential limitations of all our lives, whether Muslim or not, see Lila Abu-Lughod, *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2013), 208-220.

[46] "Most veiled women I have met report that they cover because the Qur'an prescribes it." Sahar Amer, *What is Veiling?* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 22, 30-33. "The theological validity of classical rulings on *hijab* is derived from Qur'anic commentaries rather than Qur'anic prescriptions." Ziba Mir-Hosseini, "*Hijab* and Choice: Between Politics and Theology," *Innovation in Islam: Traditions and Contributions*, ed. Mehran Kamrava (University of California Press, 2011), 193. Trying to discern the reliability and universal guidance on dress for women from the Qur'an and Hadith is laden with difficulties. Besides the above-noted ambiguity of the Qur'an, for a subject matter that is now

respondents have been influenced by Islamic interpretive traditions that regard the headscarf as a central practice of faith for women. I posit that this perspicuous symbol also helps individuate Muslims' unique identity in the American context and their serious commitment to their religion.


14. I believe the headscarf is ______________ for a Muslim woman.

response	count	percentage
mandatory/obligatory	79	52.7%
recommended	24	16%
neither obligatory nor recommended	3	2%
modesty is mandatory, headscarf is not	23	15.3%
don't know, not sure	5	3.3%
Other, **please specify**	16	10.7%

Table 8: June 2014 Survey, Young Adult Muslim Americans Opinions on Hijab, by Daniel Azim Pschaida

Not all MSA women interviewed were certain that the teaching about *ḥijāb* is so obvious or important. Usually these debates centered on the interpretation of the one Qur'anic verse that prescribes women to wear a scarf. While a number of verses in the Qur'an prescribe covering one's biological features, whether this includes the areas above a woman's neck is left ambiguous. Only 24:30-31 says: "And say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty; that they should not display

treated as central to the religion, only the Hadith collector Abu Dawud records clear statements about covering the hair. Some of these statements have broken chains of transmission, however. Furthermore, other Hadith statements seem to proscribe women's public movement altogether in contrast to prescriptions of women's clothing which imply empowering women to move freely publically. Lastly, many more Hadith statements are on men's clothing than on women's. Lynda L. Clarke, "Hijab according to the Hadith: Text and Interpretation," *The Muslim Veil in North America*, eds. Sajida Sultana Alvi, Homa Hoodfar, and Sheila McDonough (Toronto: Women's Press, 2003), 218-230.

their beauty and ornaments except what (must ordinarily) appear thereof; that they should draw their *khimār* over their breasts and not display their beauty except to their" husbands, close male relatives, and female friends and family.[47] In the one UCR MSA event in which a Muslim women scholar was the guest speaker in 2013-14, Lobna Mulla[48] gave an understanding of this verse I also heard at various other times during my research: women at the time and place of the Prophet Muhammad would already cover their hair with a scarf but sometimes show their jewelry and parts of their chest; so in this verse God reveals a need to use the ends of their headscarves to also cover-up their chests. Meanwhile, Khadija who wears the headscarf admits the ambiguity of "The way that the verse is in the Qur'an can be interpreted in different ways." She said, "Some say that women have to wear it when they reach puberty; others say that you need to wear a certain cloth that covers the neck and bosom but didn't necessarily have to cover your head." Cala went to her father, who is a well-respected scholar and teacher of Islam in Southern California. He explained that *ḥijāb* is like prayer in the Qur'an: the Holy Book enjoins us to pray but does not say how to pray; Muslims must rely on the *hadīth* to know that, and likewise to know what and how to cover. "Muhammad says to cover everything, but leave your hands and your face," Cala quoted her father as saying.[49] Nonetheless,

[47] While there has been and will continue to be debate about the implications of this verse when it was revealed and for Muslim women in other socio-historical contexts, women who wear the headscarf interpret it as obligatory, Syed Ali, "Why Here, Why Now? Young Muslim Women Wearing Hijab," *The Muslim World* 95 (Oct. 2005): 517-518.

[48] Lobna Mulla is an African American convert to Islam who studied alongside her husband for a number of years at Al-Azhar University in Egypt and who currently assists in the affairs, activities, and study classes in an Islamic center called Islamic Society of Orange County in Garden Grove, California.

[49] This *ḥadīth* more precisely reports that Muhammad did not verbalize what to cover but pointed to his hands and face. However, this *ḥadīth* has questionable reliability due to a broken chain of transmitters. It also only appears in one collector of Hadith, named Abu Dawud. Lynda L. Clarke, "Hijab according to the Hadith: Text and Interpretation," *The Muslim Veil in North America* (2003), 220-221.

Mojdeh questioned whether the *ḥadīth*s were so certain to be reliable on this issue. Likewise, Marjan—a non-*ḥijābī*—challenged her cousin and friends to “show” her “where it says cover your hair,” although she found the explanation of Lobna Mulla to “make sense.” Ikhlas, meanwhile, believed that if the *ḥijāb* was such an important part of Islam the “language of the Qur’an” would have made it “*explicit* that it is necessary. I wear modest clothing but I don't feel I need to wear a scarf all the time.”

Others emphasized a prominent Islamic opinion (*fatwa*) that if wearing the *ḥijāb* puts a woman in danger, then it is more important for a Muslim woman to not wear it to protect herself. This opinion was frequently cited in the aftermath of September Eleventh. Isra said: “I genuinely believe some women…shouldn’t wear *ḥijāb*, if—for example—it’s going to be ripped off your hair; Allah doesn’t want to put you in harm’s way just to let people know that you’re Muslim.” Mojdeh found she was not so much in physical danger but had difficulties dealing with some prejudicial encounters that came with wearing the headscarf. In one of the last experiences a man came into the shop she was working at, asked her if it means she is a Muslim, and when she said “yes” he then “spit on the floor and walked out.” Some of her older generation Persian friends misconstrued that the headscarf signified that she supported the Ayatollah of Iran, who had persecuted their families. They gave her a hard time about it. While skeptical that the headscarf is mandatory, she said experiences like these were “so hard for me to handle,” that “even if I come to the conclusion that it is obligatory, I don’t think I would wear it again.” She described, “It got to the point that it was changing me and it made me be

timid. And I didn't want to show [my face to] people because I thought that they would judge me before they even know my name…It made me want to go hide." She eventually decided, "This puts too big of a barrier between me and the way people see me. I figured that I wanted people to at least know my name" before being judged. Having worn it for three years, after much praying, crying, and studying, she decided to stop wearing it (unless praying), although she expressed gratitude for it teaching her to be more "humble" and "modest."

A number of other interviewees acknowledged the difficulties of wearing the headscarf with its associated stigma. When I asked Cala, who had worn it for two years, if she ever contemplates taking it off, she said:

> Yeah I have. I work at a tutoring agency…a lot of people get confused when they see me and a lot of people judge me. I work in a hospital as well, in a Christian hospital, so sometimes it gets to the point that I hate people staring at me. I walk down the street and I scare people, they will literally get scared with me walking down the street. And I'm like, I'm not going to do anything to you, I'm five-foot-two, I'm not that intimidating.

Samira, who was contemplating putting on the scarf when I interviewed her, and who did adopt it six months later, hoped she would be able to wear it without the stigma: "I don't want them to see me and to see the scarf, I want them to see me and be like, 'oh yeah she also has the scarf on'; you know, there's a difference."

Many MSA women willingly take on *ḥijāb* and its associated stigma because they want this symbol to help them "proclaim Islam" and challenge people's stereotypes about Muslims. They described the headscarf as making a woman a "banner of Islam." Shirin said, "When I started wearing the *ḥijāb*…I knew I wanted to show people that I am Muslim, that I am proud for what I believe in or what I stand up for…especially that I wanted to defeat the stereotypes of 9/11." Sana explained, "When I'm wearing *ḥijāb* I feel

that I'm wearing Islam, like a walking Qur'an; I'm the closest people will come to this message for a lot of people… to create a good image." She believed strongly that Muslims must also interact with non-Muslims and become friends with them. Samira, who wants to go into advertising, said:

> I want people to know that yes I'm Muslim but I'm also cool; I can also be in this industry, I can attend events, I can communicate with men, organize events and be a normal human being. Because especially right now the Islamophobic thought is that women are so oppressed in Islam; and I want to prove that we are going places in our life, we are doing things, like give us the same respect we give you…

Some acknowledged that it puts more pressure on women than men to be constantly vigilant about being "good Muslims" as it's a more obvious symbol of Islamic commitment than a man's beard, shirt, and pants.[50] Najeeb acknowledged this unequal pressure. He said, "It's easy for me, I don't advertise my religious beliefs, don't wear a beard or *kufi*; a girl with her *ḥijāb*, it might be harder." Sana further remarked that in this country "every action someone is going to be looking at me and saying that this is Islam, she's doing that because she's Muslim when it's actually just because I'm me. We do our best to represent our religion, even though some say it's not fair or it sucks, it gives us an opportunity to grow and strengthen." Muslims who wear the *ḥijāb* work under the shadow of stereotypes in which, disciplined by the public gaze, they must appropriate both the non-Muslims' and fellow Muslims' stereotypes of what makes a "true" Muslim. At the same time, they work to explode expectations by being worldly, broad-minded, have ambitious career goals, not overly prudish, and by propounding chic interests.[51]

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[50] "We often heard women say they monitored their own behavior when wearing hijab because "you represent Islam" to others," Williams and Vashi, "*Hijab* and American Muslim Women," 282.
[51] Shabana Mir, *Muslim American Women on Campus*, 152-153.

However, some MSAers challenged this signification that the *ḥijāb* is for proclaiming Islam, asserting that one's intentions should be to just please God by the way she dresses. Abia evaluated that when she first wore a headscarf it was so others would know she is a Muslim but "now" it's "because I want my relationship with God to be better."

In the face of stigma in the general public, the multi-ethnic, multicultural public universities on the United States West Coast offer a measure of security for women to experiment with this explicitly Islamic form of dress while they pursue their education. It is nearly impossible to walk across the campus of a University of California without passing by at least a few *ḥijābī*s. Nonetheless, it may be difficult for a Muslim woman to refrain from comparing herself to other young women who are presenting themselves with the latest styles in fashions and hair. Mojdeh said, "The only place I didn't feel like I was looked down on was within the Muslim community itself." Spending time in the campus and off-campus spaces consistently occupied by MSA men and women then becomes a safe haven and support network for *ḥijābī*s and others striving to strengthen their Islamic identity and practice. Once they graduate and leave, however, it is not unusual for many young women to take off the headscarf.

To Not Fool Around: Dating, Courting, & Marriage

The young Muslims expounded that the only situational reasons in which men and women should interact to be when there is business or studying to conduct, an organization to run, medical emergencies to attend to, or the sincere intention to explore marriage possibilities. This ideal reflected an ethic of purity, chastity, self-discipline and

self-control, and respecting the dignity of the person. They believed human sexuality is a weighty matter with extensive ramifications in individual and collective life that should not be used or exploited outside of the socio-religious institution of marriage. To preserve one's reputation and not become an object of gossip were also concerns expressed by both the interviewees and, reportedly, their parents. Most fundamentally, those who spoke of this ideal believed that God knows human beings best, what we can handle and not handle, and what is in the best interests of the order and strength of society. Although students articulated a variety of approaches to courting, all believed that intentions should be made known to parents or other family members very early in the process and that the couple should not be alone together in a private place. Most also asserted that a chaperone should be present at all interactions of the potential couple. Nonetheless, observations and interviews made evident that in practice some MSAers do date without family involvement and third party supervision.[52]

Like so many non-Muslim students, finding a 'special someone' is a central pursuit during the college years. Within campus MSAs, this goal is lent legitimacy when framed by the language of "marriage." At the MSA West Conference in January 2014, a breakout

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[52] Although my subjects rarely used the language of "courting" to designate the process of meeting and getting to know someone before an actual date for a wedding is fixed, here I adopt "courting." Most Muslims I talked to rejected the language of "dating" due to its concomitant contemporary implications of a sexual relationship and/or its side-stepping a meaningful intent to get to know this person for the purpose of very possibly marrying him/her, i.e. frequently couples date for years without any plans to marry being on the horizons. MSA leadership promotes conservative standards of courting or "talking" without physical intimacy or sex. Likewise, according to Mir, those with a Muslim identity on college campuses span the range from chaste courting to sexual relationships with one's boyfriend or girlfriend. However, where young Muslims and their parents emphasize celibate relationships, they avoid what they deem the implicitly sexual connotations of "dating," preferring "talking" or "seeing each other," Shabana Mir, 134-139. I found young Muslims sometimes also appropriate the Arabic word and usage of "engaged" [*khāṭib*] when more precisely they meant "getting to know each other" or "courting."

session on marriage, "The Most Talked about Subject in MSAs," was the one forum that filled the large lecture hall to overflowing. In addition to the biological impulse, the romanticizing of relationships in pop media, and greater independence from families it allows, students also held religious motivations to get married as an act of Islamic worship.[53] Many interviewees paraphrased *ḥadīth*s as saying "marriage is half your *deen* [religion, faith, worship]."[54] However, six women critiqued the UC Riverside MSA's sister's *halaqa* as focusing obsessively on the subject of marriage, and I learned that the subjects of marriage and chastity were not uncommon to the brothers' *halaqa* either. Those who critiqued the concentration on this topic in the religion had five concerns: 1) students need to focus on developing themselves and getting their education instead of finding that "one"; 2) students romanticize weddings and the ensuing companionship without dealing with many of the challenging realities of marriage; 3) students believed their future marriage and partner would magically "fix" their personal problems, instead of just working on themselves and realities in the present moment; 4) there is a general lack of educational focus in the *halaqa*s on the rights and responsibilities of women and men in writing marriage contracts, roles within family life, and rights in conflict mediation, divorce, and child custody; 5) focusing so much on marriage takes away from learning about other important facets of the religion. Mujahida reported meeting in the

[53] Marriage and family life is emphasized within the Islamic tradition and has been a "basic institution" within Muslim societies, Yvonne Yabeck Haddad et. al, *Muslim Women in America* (2006), 83.
[54] This oft-stated paraphrase is based on two *ḥadīth*s, the entirety of which state: 1) "Whomever Allah blesses with a righteous wife, He has helped him with half of his religion, so let him fear Allah with regard to the other half"; 2) "When a person gets married he has completed half of his religion, so let him fear Allah with regard to the other half." Based on what interviewees spoke about, we can imply the other "half" of the "deen" may be such things as prayer, fasting, eating halal meat, staying sexually pure, and living an ethical and upright life.

Meditation Room a freshman who reminded her of herself. The freshman really wanted to have the "boy-friend stage where you hold hands and everyone sees you and it's cute" but who knew almost "nothing" about rights and responsibilities within Islamic marriages. Likewise, Isra said, "Girls are just interested in boys right now; I think we are all just a bit boy crazy, to be honest."

While the topic of "marriage" itself was prevalent in women discussion groups, the discourse emphasized by the young Muslim men was keeping themselves pure and chaste until they could legitimately engage in sexual activity with their spouses. In MSA men's groups for study and discussion (*halaqa*s) resisting temptation, sexual self-control and self-discipline is emphasized as a central moral struggle [*jihād*] during their college careers. Marriage then becomes a desired object for men and women to be able to satisfy their urges in "lawful," God-approved, ways. In the words of Bayan: "It would help me [to get married] because it sucks being around campus and everyone is hooking up, and meanwhile I want to purify myself and avoid temptation." Interviewees acknowledged that this is one of the biggest struggles for their fellow Muslims who have varying degrees of success and failure in avoiding sexual activity.[55] Some MSA men kept a traditional practice of fasting on Mondays and Thursdays as a reminder to also have sexual self-control.[56] Hakeem found even socializing with the opposite sex in mixed

[55] Mir's research explores the individual desires and pressures to sexual encounters and relationships for American Muslim women, Shabana Mir, *Muslim American Women on Campus* (2014), 127, 131.

[56] Fasting on Mondays and Thursdays has been a religious act for many observant Jewish throughout the ages; hadith speak of the Prophet Muhammad fasting on these days as well. Shaykh Muhammad Saalih al-Munajjid, "Is it better to fast on Mondays and Thursdays or three days each month?" Islam Question and Answer, http://islamqa.info/en/69781 (accessed February 27, 2015). Many individuals in the early Christian communities began to fast on Tuesdays and Fridays to further distinguish themselves from the Jewish,

groups to be problematic as it will made a man prone to start "fantasizing, 'oh maybe this girl is the right one…' and when you're put in that close proximity, it elicits some thoughts, and definitely we are not held accountable for our thoughts but the more you think about something the more you are likely to act out upon it." By "act upon it" he may be thinking of acts of masturbation or premarital kissing or sex, which most Islamic legal schools either discourage or forbid.[57] For him and many others, men and women do not have any business socializing unless they are exploring marriage compatibility while chaperoned.

Many students look for alternative ways of finding suitable candidates for marriage outside of the bars and parties that campus students typically attend. Typical forums for them to meet someone were: 1) the MSA itself and other campus organizations that are likely to have a large number of Muslims such as Students for Justice in Palestine and the Pakistani Student Association; 2) classes; 3) Facebook and similar online social networking websites; 4) friend networks as matchmakers; 5) family's networks as matchmakers; or 6) one's family formally hires a matchmaker. For some Muslim students, the MSA and the network it provides largely serves the purpose, as Christian and Jewish clubs do for other students, of finding potential mates with similar values, beliefs, and practices. Although Muslims, like many other Americans, often expect the

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although this practice slowly tapered off over time for most Christian groups. Bart D. Ehrman, "The Rise of Christian Liturgy," *From Jesus to Constantine: A History of Early Christianity* (The Great Courses, 2004).

[57] Yusuf al-Qaradawi, *The Lawful and the Prohibited in Islam* (1989), 146, 166; Sayyid Muhammad Rizvi, *Marriage and Morals in Islam* (Vancouver: Islamic Education & Information Center, 1990), http://www.al-islam.org/marriage-and-morals-islam-sayyid-muhammad-rizvi/chapter-three-islamic-sexual-morality-2-its#b-masturbation (accessed January 1, 2015); Abdelwahab Bouhdiba, *Sexuality in Islam*, trans. Alan Sheridan (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985), 15.

man to “make the first move,” Shariq acknowledged the right of women to follow the example of Khadijah who initiated getting to know the Prophet Muhammad and then proposing to him [through a mediator]. Utilizing family networks is less attractive for this generation of Muslim Americans who like to have more control in initiating and finding possible mates. However, many of these students have grown up with their family’s close friends, often of the same national or cultural background, who their parents may see as potential mates for their son or daughter.[58] From my Muslim friends, two young men married cousins, one in Syria and one in Jordan, during this period of ethnographic research. Reem’s parents wanted her to marry a cousin in Jordan, but she rejected this because she deemed him comparatively poorly educated and occupationally unambitious.[59] On the other hand, Riya said that converts like her are at a disadvantage as they usually do not have channels to meet someone through their families, who usually did not convert with them, and so they have to rely on some of these other avenues.[60]

Once one has found someone he or she would like to get to know better, most students believed that parents should be made aware and involved early in the process. Some stated that this should happen immediately. Bayan said that after initially becoming

[58] Mir’s research finds there is a stigma among American Muslims for arranged marriages, seeing them as only for the “leftover” young people who cannot find someone on their own; however, she bases her conclusion on just about twenty-five interviewees. Shabana Mir, 144-145.
[59] Those Muslim Americans who identified more strongly with their religion than their ethnic heritage tended to utilize teachings of Islam to advocate self-initiation in finding a marriage partner and were more likely to marry someone outside of their parents’ national heritage, while those who identified with their ethnic heritage first tend to be more open to family-instigated matchmaking or arranged marriages, Denise Al-Johar, “Muslim Marriages in America: Reflecting New Identities,” *Muslim World* 95 (October 2005): 557-558, 567-569.
[60] Mir also says converts “lacked access to ethnic networks that other Muslim women had,” Shabana Mir, *Muslim American Women on Campus*, 140; Yvonne Haddad et. al, *Muslim Women in America* (2006), 58, 86.

friends with Sana from meeting her in a class, “We went to her father right away” as “I know if I had a daughter I wouldn’t want some dude sneaking around with her.” Zakir explained that many parents have strong preferences about the cultural background of their future son- or daughter-in-law and going to the parents very early on may avoid becoming very emotionally involved in a relationship that will be forbidden. He recounts observing a lot of heartache from fellow Muslim friends who dated without these conditions of parents’ involvement and *walī* supervision. Tariq, who is black African, reported becoming serious with a Pakistani-American woman over a period of six months, and then it turned out her parents would not accept him. Nonetheless, some young adult Muslims prefer to have some leeway to get to know someone initially before involving parents. Mujahida explained that she usually meets people through the educational system. She said, “I first want to really know their mentality, I will not get into any talk about relationship, engagement, or marriage until I know their mentality...” She was not concerned with always being chaperoned as long as she meets with him in public places such as a restaurant. If she finds compatibility, she will then introduce him to her parents.[61] Adeela believed the involvement of parents, aunts, uncles, and older cousins helps garner guidance from couples with extensive experience with marriage so as to be able to make a good choice in a partner. Shariq said you might need “a few weeks to months” to get to know him or her before seeking approval from parents of the

[61] Williams and Vashi also noted the need for more casually getting to know someone’s basic characteristics before one rejects him/her or formally courts, Williams and Vashi “*Hijab* and American Muslim Women,” 278-279.

potential marriage, but at least other family members should be informed from the beginning for the sake of "accountability."[62]

This "accountability" he speaks of usually implies gaining some form of supervision by having present a *walī* (chaperone) from one's family or friends to help maintain proper Islamic decorum between the two while they get to know each other. It is also a way to help protect the reputation of both parties, especially the woman, from being seen as flirtatious, promiscuous, or spoiled goods. Shariq explained that preserving one's chastity before marriage is "equal for [both genders in] Islam" but "the cultural part unfortunately emphasizes much more with women." Zakir said that Muslims share with other Americans this "stupid double standard" where "a guy can go around and sleep with a bunch of girls and he's called a 'player,' but a girl can't go around with a bunch of guys" without being called something very derogatory. The difference between Muslim norms and that of more general American society is that Muslim women may just celibately get to know various men and still receive the pejorative label.

Parents worry about protecting the reputation of their daughters, although in the process they further the perpetuation of the double standard. Marjan recalled her parents' anxieties when her male volleyball coach gave her a ride home: "You're a girl, what if someone talks about you? And then you'll never get married; you're a girl and our daughter, then they'll talk bad about us." Likewise, Sana recounted that when she began to get to know Bayan, "My Mom warned me that you have to do it carefully, as you are

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[62] However, conservative immigrant parents may become wary or "unnerved" of their son or daughter if every time they "like" or start "talking" to someone they are told about it, see Shabana Mir, 141.

more vulnerable to reputation as a woman," even though they brought in their families very early on and were conscientious about including a chaperone. Indeed, she and some others found themselves subjected to gossip as to "why" she "was with a guy." She said, "It seems like even though the intention to get married is popular, however you're doing it you can't do it right for some people." Most men and women students agreed that gossip about relationships was a big problem, especially among many of the women of the MSA, while men's casual conversations centered more on sports, video games, classes, and Islamic subjects. As much as censuring the acts of others, constituting Islamic boundaries, and affirming oneself as "holier than [she]," gossip is a way for these students to understand for themselves and negotiate what is Islamically moral and practical in finding a potential marriage partner.

Once the young Muslims are mutually interested in pursuing each other and contact with the families has been made, they then get to know each other (usually chaperoned) to find out if they get along and if the other has the desired characteristics.[63] While most Muslims agree that Islamic law prescribes women to marry Muslims and men to marry anyone of the 'people of the Book'— commonly understood to designate Jews, Christians, and Muslims—interviewees universally preferred to marry a fellow Muslim.[64] Luqman referred to a *ḥadīth* to guide how he thinks about choosing a partner:

[63] Not infrequently, Arab American Muslim students referred to this period of getting to know each other as "engaged," which is quite different than common usage of commitment to getting married usually with a specific date for the wedding in place. This term seems to be a direct translation of the Arabic *kh̲aṭabat* which an many Arab contexts is used for both what English would deem "courting" stage as well as the later "engagement."

[64] The Qur'an actually proscribes women from marrying an "unbeliever" yet that has traditionally been understood to mean "non-Muslim," Yvonne Yabeck Haddad et. al, *Muslim Women in America* (2006), 85. The term is *mas̲h̲rikun* (polytheist) in Surah 2:221 and *kufār* (nonbeliever, ingrate) in Surah 60:10. The

> The Prophet said, 'marry a woman, go on three categories, one being religion, two being beauty, third being her family, fourth being her wealth'; religion is a big factor; since in Islam character is important, I would want someone with a good character to raise righteous, good children; beauty, not just outside but on the inside; family isn't too much of a big deal but should be a good relation, we all like each other; wealth isn't too much of a big issue, as who is to say you can't come from nothing or receive happiness from little; five dollars to you may not mean much to you but mean a lot to me, all in the value you give it.

In MSA, many looked for others who prioritize living the teachings of Islam. However, some learned early that being Muslim and involved in MSA does not necessarily make someone of strong moral character. Mujahida said "I was introduced to an MSA guy, and this guy, seemed cool at first, but then some things occurred where he…he just did some things that were inappropriate… and it kind of taught me the hard way that you can't just trust someone because they are Muslim." For this process Mujahida said that she strives to get to know "his mentality… how he solves problems, his open-mindedness," and that she personally prefers a man who is willing and able to cook for both of them.

Some of the students I became friends with, instead of pursuing someone on campus, they had to learn to adapt to long distance forms of communication to get to know the other person. Jasmine met her husband-to-be through a Muslim dating service website and had to creatively find a way to bypass the system to be able to fluidly get to know him online without the delays of the website supervisors in chaperoning their blossoming relationship. Nadra became acquainted with her fiancé, who lives overseas, over Skype, asking each other questions. I asked her if she thought it was thorough and if you can

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Qur'an and early Muslim community has been argued to have been more inclusive about who is considered a "believer" than later demarcations between "Muslims," "People of the Book," and polytheists, Fred M. Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers: at the Origins of Islam* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010), 69-74. Beside the pursuit of religious unity, there may also be a growing concern that if Muslim men frequently marry Christian or Jewish women, the pool of potential candidates for Muslim women dwindles. In Canada, about 20% of Muslim women have, nonetheless, married non-Muslim men, Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad et. al, *Muslim Women in America* (2006), 85-86.

sufficiently learn about a person just online. She answered, “We were very honest and because we were very upfront, I have no fear that he will shift on me or show a different personality.” Taha, a UCR alumnus, also got to know his wife-to-be while she was finishing college in the Midwest, and they would “run through scenarios,” like if he were often to get home late due to work, if he would help with household cleaning, or questions about how many children they wanted to have. Bayan found Sana “pretty” and “nice” and proceeded to spend time with her while his friend acted as chaperone. He said you cannot possibly get to know “everything about them; even when you’re already married you learn new things about them; but you want to make sure the most important things you’re looking for is there…how she is and her goals in life… that’s in the first six months.” Adam explained that working with a woman on common projects in MSA, or for class, can help one see how the other works and how they are able to communicate and cooperate, as part of this process of exploring marriage compatibility.

If the young Muslims believe they have found compatibility and want to proceed with marriage, they then attempt to secure the blessing of their parents who may desire to delay or hasten the wedding for various reasons. Some interviewees cited an Islamic opinion that it is better to get married sooner, such as within a few months, than delay the wedding long-term, perhaps due to concerns about stretching out a difficult liminal period between courting and being married. More concretely, immigrant parents from North Africa and Southwest or South Asia who encourage marrying sooner than later may be anxious to allow the young couple to become sexually active within the sanctity of marriage. Other times parents may ask them to delay it due to wanting their son to

secure a good job first or wanting their daughter to finish college before possibly having children.[65] This was a concern of Sana's parents because was just a sophomore when she became engaged to Bayan, although they then married the following year.[66] Some interviewees spoke of the importance and great care that must be taken in the Islamic obligation to write a marriage contract "to guarantee the women's side and needs, that she receive something in return for the relationships and be taken care of." Mujahida stressed the need for women to understand their right to *maher* [dowry], their right to work outside the home and keep their own money, their right to a divorce, and their custody rights.

Students acknowledged that these strict and sexually conservative standards made meeting someone and developing a relationship more difficult. However, they insisted that there is a great God-given wisdom to this method that makes it superior. Nuri said that these "boundaries" represent the best for individual and societal well-being "because God knows how he created you." He described the process of first struggling to control one's natural inclinations, and then sex becoming "a first" with your spouse, as "beautiful." Many students spoke of the difficulties of having children out of wedlock

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[65] Shabana Mir, 145-146, also discusses these concerns. We can recognize that these desires for later marriage or earlier marriage are at odds. Parents seem to make a cost-benefits calculation based on their values. For those who religious and cultural reputation of their children is most important are probably more likely to encourage their children to marry while in college to help protect them from desiring and needing to become sexually active outside of marriage. Parents for whom the financial and career success of their children is a more fundamental goal, may hope that their young adult children do not become sexually active, overlook if they do, and calculate that they are probably using protection and are unlikely to get pregnant before they are financially prepared.

[66] In their case, I am unsure if they actually only became married by the Islamic wedding contract called *katb al-kitab* in which couples afterwards live celibate for a designated period until they have a wedding party and reception from which they then initiate cohabitation. This seemed to have been the case for Sana and Bayan as well as for Nadra and her fiancé or husband.

and then perhaps having to raise a child as a single parent. Hakeem believed these standards help prevent "premature relationships where they thought they loved one another but it was just a physical desire." Shariq asserted that sexuality activities of dating culture unfairly exploits women where they are "used for men's specific purposes and then dumped out." Nadra believed "marriage…is a contract between God and your family," but when one seeks sex outside of marriage "just to pleasure yourself, you are taking away the rights" and responsibilities to each other and to God. She understands the Christian tradition to have similar standards of chastity, confining sex to the sacrament of marriage, yet today those who do not date and have sex "are considered an outcast" in this majority Christian country. She said "society and the relationship would be stronger if your spouse didn't hook up with everyone in the room." Rather, for her, sex is a special bond that one should share just with one's spouse.[67]

The Serious Business of Playing House:
Rights and Responsibilities within Family Life

Young adult Muslim Americans explanations of the division of domestic responsibilities for their present and future families furnish further examples of their understanding of their tradition as upholding equity and complementarity in gender relations rather than an equality of sameness. Sana explained, "We believe we were made differently, our bodies and our minds, we would have different ways to live." Riya

[67] Bouhdiba argues that the Qur'anic view of the creation of everything in pairs is a sign (*āyah*) of God: sexual intercourse and its potential results "is a mimicry of the creative act of God" and due to its both private and social implications, it requires divine regulation, Abdelwahab Bouhdiba, *Sexuality in Islam*, 7-10.

said, “We're equal in value but don't approach these things the same; all have roles to play to make things work.” Nabeel averred that with “equity…you might do different things but your role is just as important.” Husayn believes that instead of the social status of the job one does, an individual “should be put in high regard naturally.” This generation of Muslims, born and raised in the United States, adopts expectations that have been traditional to most cultures in Europe, Asia, and North Africa for the responsibilities of men and women in the family, but with a modernist twist. Many of this generation distinguish themselves from their own parents whom they often represent as mostly stay-at-home mothers and fathers who provide financially but do not help much with household chores. The new generation, while expecting that husbands will be the primary providers and wives the principle caregivers for the children, also asserts the woman’s right to work outside the home and the husband’s duty to help clean, cook, and supervise the children. However, young Muslim Americans do not always agree on what roles women and men should play within the family. Thus, a few interviewees advised that these subjects should be discussed when getting to know a potential partner instead of assuming that he or she would necessarily share one’s own understandings of Islamic teachings. Khadija added that what an engaged couple agree upon can even be written down in the marriage contract, so that legally the two could hold each other responsible, such as that she would have the right to work, or study, and he would have to do certain household chores and child supervision.

Interviewees stated that the husband or father has the responsibility to provide financially for the family. Luqman said, “I'm supposed to be the breadwinner, at least I

hope to be." Isra wanted to also "be contributing" to finances but stated she "will be asking" her "husband…to provide, that he potentially needs to provide everything." So important is this responsibility to provide and the right of the wife to be financially supported, explained Khadija, that "if a man isn't doing that, the woman has the right to ask for divorce." This right to be financially supported complicates contemporary thinking that focuses on equality viewed as women's right to work outside the home and men's duty to help with the household and caring for the children. Young Muslims' neo-traditional interpretations of spousal roles may be seen as a protection from the negative effects of the "equality" movement in the wife's "second shift," where after working the same hours as her husband she must also shoulder the lion's share of domestic duties.

Many interviewees explained an Islamic teaching that if the wife or mother also earns money she can choose if and how much of it to use to provide for her family. Sana said, "For the woman, the earnings are for herself, she doesn't have to contribute and it is the woman's choice of what she does with her earnings." Shariq related this to the Islamic virtue of *ṣadaqa* (charity): "Women have the option to work and any money they earn from this is for them, can use it to support the family…and anything she gives is like a donation and act of worship." Khadija, however, acknowledged that in many places in the United States and abroad a family really needs the financial contributions of two working spouses, although this may also be related to the standard of living the couple desires.

Almost all of the women and most of the men believed it is a Muslim woman's right to choose if she is going to work outside the home or spend the majority of her time, energies, and talents on her house and children. They commonly cited the examples of

the wives of the Prophet Muhammad to support their arguments, notably his first wife Khadija who had her own business and later ʿAisha who was a scholar and political leader. Luqman said, "We're equal, if she wants to work, she has the right to do so." Likewise, Zakir claimed, "You'd be surprised, a lot of the MSA people" want to marry well-educated women and "want their wives to work… 90% of the time…guys want her to go get a job." Most of the women interviewed were attending prestigious California universities and had ambitious dreams of becoming medical doctors, pharmacists, engineers, lawyers, professors, business executives, and entrepreneurs, as well as mothers. Islam "doesn't say that a man has to work and a woman has to stay home and take care of the kids," pre-med student Khadija explained, but the religion has been interpreted in global contexts that "back in the day, that's traditionally how it was done. Times are changing… women are going to college and have their own goals of what they want to accomplish." Qatara said, "If I get a degree I want to do something with it. I want to be doing something to help the community." Qani asserted that society is most vital when women are also able to develop and express their talents through working in many ways: "Restricting their abilities to do things…to be able to work at a job or to study, you're only half as good when…you're denying them their rights; there are fantastic things a woman can do if educated."

Some women interviewees wanted to be stay-at-home mothers. Mujahida was surprised to find some of her MSA friends who had very difficult majors like neuroscience talk in this way. Indeed, many young Muslim women in interviews spoke of the value and significance of child-raising. Layla, who majored in writing and then went

on to do an intensive study program in Islam, said, "I don't think I have a problem with a guy who wants me to be a mother and wife; can have a role in my masjid [mosque] and being an activist." She found a good example in her sister "a stay-at-home Mom, no career or job, but volunteers many hours to an organization that does Islamic scholarship. I can teach on the weekends, or teach Qur'an, that's a satisfactory route." Hence, she does not feel it is necessary to have a full-time, non-domestic profession to be able to use her talents and make a difference in the broader community. Sana, who is in media studies and does photography and videography, said: "For me, I do want to take the role of the housewife and take care of the children and make it a full-time thing." She made clear that this would not be forced upon her by her religion or husband but "that's what I want to do personally and dedicate my time and energy to, just because I feel that that's best for me." She contrasted herself to "a lot of Muslim women who want to work, or they'll take a break when their kids are small but then go back."

The young men and women were concerned that if both spouses worked full-time then their children would not get sufficient care and education. Shems believed that wives and mothers are to be the "backbone of society" through educating the children, "rearing the family, making the new generation, new leaders, new people in charge." He explained this was due to women's unique ability to bear children and their tendency to be "more nurturing," "better caretakers," and "often more intelligent" than men. Husayn maintained that each woman should be educated and "be able to pursue what" she wants. "Coming to that decision if she wants to be full-time worker or full-time mother, there are sacrifices involved in each, do one and sacrifice somewhat the other; the party needs to

figure out if they hold off on work for the kids, or hold off on having kids." Luqman explained the need to have at least one parent who has enough time to be very involved in raising "good, righteous, moral children." Convert to Islam, Jasmine, resented when some of the older generation Muslims have told her that "the place for women is at home." Her response was, "It took two people to make the kids so it should take two people to raise them." Some men claimed that they would be happy to take the role of stay-at-home father and homemaker, if that was best for the family. Nabeel said: "I wouldn't want to force my wife to stay home; I wouldn't mind staying home, I don't think most Muslims in American have a problem with that, or with the woman being the bread-winner, or breaking roles." Likewise, Sana observed: "I've seen Muslim families as well where it works better where the man is the primary caretaker of the children and the house." Muslim men and women adopt traditional gender roles based on their religion, while also appropriating contemporary ideals of women's right to work and some of them affirm that role-reversals may sometimes work better for particular couples.[68]

Many of the men planning to be the primary breadwinner also envision themselves as playing significant parts in taking care of the home and children. Luqman said: "It's our responsibility, our house, I help out; one day she's tired, I take the majority; other days I'm tired, she takes majority; she or I not feeling too well, the other can take the majority; same thing with the kids; some nights she may want to go out with her friends or see her parents, I can take over; and the same thing she for me." This may be a difficult transition

[68] Whatever their ideals about spousal gender roles, for many Muslim couples the decision for the woman to be a full-time stay-at-home mother is only one many upper-middle or upper class families have; poorer families may necessitate two incomes, Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad et. al, *Muslim Women in America* (2006), 91-94.

for some young men, like Hamza and Safi, who did not grow up doing many chores. I asked Safi, who said his mother still does his laundry and his father did not do much housework, if he planned to “replicate this” in his own future marriage, to which he answered “I hope not.” His brother Taha’s future wife asked him when they were courting if he expected her to do all the housework and he wisely answered, “What would you like?” Today, he is able to work from home for an Islamic activism organization and also take care of their home and baby while his wife works at a school. On many evenings she takes over while he attends meetings for his profession.

To solve spousal disagreements, students believed they would use mutual consideration, respect for each other’s rights, verbal communication, and compromise. Safi believes that in a successful Islamic marriage, usually the couple will “meet in the middle,” while “sometimes she will have her way, sometimes you have your way; though sometimes when you have a strong opinion on something you need to put your foot down, and vice versa.” Luqman said family is the place to build the positive habit and ability “for life in general that you can talk out any situation. I would want to instill this in the kids and exhibit this early on as well.” Isra believes that in Islam the husband is given the right to “have the final say” on things like “who you're friends with,” while she insists that any “specific rules” of gender roles taught by Islam is “eclipsed by” the teaching “that you're supposed to respect and love your spouse” and take into consideration the other’s feelings, “needs and wishes.” Nonetheless, she understands that “people have a large spectrum of possibilities about how they would interact in a man-woman relationship and the roles they would take,” and sometimes the “woman will wear

the pants in the family, so to speak." Shems gave a seldom view that the husband has the ultimate decision on whether his wife works or stays home; most students believed that spouses should deliberate on what was best for the family and that it was the wife's ultimate decision.

Many Islamic scholars interpret the sources of their tradition as giving most weight to enjoining gentleness, kindness, and consideration in solving domestic disputes. However, a statement in Qur'an 4:34 has been interpreted by other scholars in the tradition to legitimize a degree of physical force as way for a husband to correct his wife.[69] In part due to this verse, some Muslim-majority countries have been hesitant to forbid domestic violence in their legal codes. Some interviewees acknowledged that this verse has been a test to their faith. Farzam said, "Traditional translations is that the man can strike the woman, and immediately off the bat I had a problem with that, because what kind of a religion that's authentic and true can legitimate domestic violence, that's what I saw, that was always a struggle for me… my aunt was willing to cry, she was like 'this can't be a real religion if it is legitimizing domestic violence.'" Notwithstanding the complications of this verse, interviewees forbade "violence of all kinds" except in the context of self-defense, whether considering domestic or international relations. Nabeel spoke of the need to take Islamic teachings in its overall context rather than focus on just one specific verse when he said, "I definitely think Islam disallows [domestic violence], but I think there's something that says you can hit someone for doing certain kinds of things; but

[69] For a discussion of prominent interpretations of this verse, see Stowasser, Barbara, "Gender Issues and Contemporary Quran Interpretation," *Islam, Gender, and Social Change*, eds. Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and John L. Esposito (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 30-42.

there are lots of guidelines on it and when you follow all those things you basically can't hit anyone, and I would not condone domestic violence."

Luqman acknowledged domestic violence "in Arab culture, it happened, but it is definitely… prohibited in Islam; the wife of the Prophet narrates about Him that she never saw him raise his hand once, not to hit anybody" for it "degrades any individual, if I raise my hand to you, it disrespects you. We are human beings, we can solve any problem through rational conversation and an understanding talk; so shouldn't be violent towards the women or have a buff wife (*sic*) violent to you." He added that this includes not being violent "to your children. There are other forms and modes of teaching a kid that something is wrong: explaining, time out, help them realize what they did, or let…the children cool off, no need to force my opinion with a fist, nothing gets done, just creates tension." Isra believed Islam recognizes anger as a legitimate emotion and a need to provide an outlet for it, but not in ways that "harm" others. A convert interviewee likewise said, "[We are] told by the Prophet to treat your women well… should be no reason you're beating anybody." Later that year she married another convert, but after being beaten by him, they separated and she filed for divorce, not countenancing such treatment.

These American-born Muslims construct their ideals about gender in contrast to those of their elders and ancestral countries. Safi hopes in his future marriage not to be like his childhood self or his father, letting his mother do all the household work and defying when she asked for help. Layla explained: "I have to admit that growing up, going home to Palestine, had lots of influence, and from cousins back home, from my culture, there's

a lot of pressure to just be a mom and wife, and almost brain-washed for that… even if my parents didn't totally emphasize that." Jasmine said, "A Muslim family told me the best place for a woman is at home and that just pissed me off." Qatara and Farzam each reported their fathers expecting all meals be made for them. Qatara said, "I don't think that women should cook all the time, a male should cook too." She desired to model her own marriage on that of her older sister: "[her] marriage is complementary. My sister doesn't make breakfast for her husband... It is teamwork and they do the same amount of work. If someone is free, and the laundry needs doing, you should." While it is not uncommon in Muslim-majority countries to see women working outside the home and men helping out with the children and household chores, these youth's own essentializations of what they believed to be prevalent elsewhere and by their elders helped them determine their own self-perceived more enlightened values.

These Muslim youth also saw positive models in their parents' generation, including their parents' adaptation and change on these issues. Qatara, Khadija, and Isra admired the professional achievements of their stepmothers who were an obstetrician-gynecologist, medical doctor, and psychiatrist respectively. Safi appreciated that "in the last ten years" his father has "started helping out" more. Most of these young women have had their families encourage academic excellence and pursuit of highly competitive fields in the sciences and humanities. Layla admits that in her family "getting an education" was "sometimes more as something to do" only if "a job…doesn't conflict with your family life," but she believes "now…there's more acceptance of me getting a job or career." For some others, their families featured a highly educated woman.

Palestinia-American Bahir's mother works as a teacher and chef. Marjan's Afghani mother, aunts, and older cousins all attained university degrees, so this was a natural path for her as well. Farzam described coming from a Pakistani family in which most of the women worked outside the home, so for him also this was normal and he would like to "find someone who is also an educated, working woman." Thus, most Muslims interpreted Islam in what I call neo-traditional fashion, prescribing husbands as principally holding the financial responsibilities for the family and for the women domestic ones, while taking on contemporary ideals that men also clean and care for the home and that women can choose to pursue professional to contribute their many other talents to society.

Women as Islamic Scholars and Political Leaders

Most interviewees, male and female, agreed that Islamic traditions restricted to men the role of prayer-leader (*imam*) and giver of the Friday sermon (when men are present). Historically most Muslim scholars interpreted the Qur'an to prescribe a domestic role to women with men having public ones while also heads of their households, although there has been a movement of twentieth century scholars to reinterpret the Qur'an in light of its fundamental values of gender equality.[70] However,

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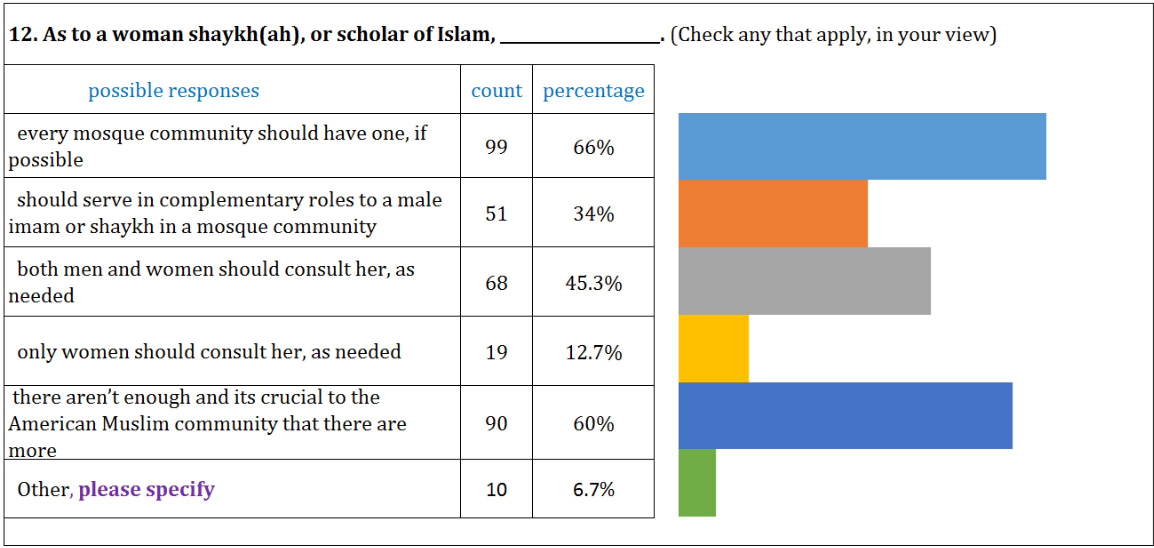
[70] Stowasser, Barbara, "Gender Issues and Contemporary Quran Interpretation," *Islam, Gender, and Social Change* (1998), 30-42. In "medieval Islam" (9th to 16th century), upper and middle class women's lives centered on their homes that they managed and often, in making of cloth and clothing. Very wealthy women would sometimes invest in trade or real estate. Public lives for women of these classes usually consisted in visiting each other's homes, seeing each other at the public baths or at funerals and weddings. Women of the poor class—and the nouveau poor of widows, divorcees, and those abandoned by their husbands (when they did not have male family members to support them)—did have to seek a living publically as midwives, bakers, greengrocers, peddlers, washers of the dead,

they also agreed that women can and should be mosque teachers, conference speakers, scholars, and interpreters of Islamic law. Some men believed that a woman scholar should only counsel another woman, while almost all women believed that both men and women can and should be able to learn from an accomplished female scholar. Some bypassed this dichotomy by referring to Muslim couples in Southern California where both husband and wife were scholars at Islamic centers. Interviewees of both genders saw a positive example of religious scholarship and political leadership in the Prophet Muhammad's wife 'Aisha.



12. As to a woman shaykh(ah), or scholar of Islam, ______________. (Check any that apply, in your view)

possible responses	count	percentage
every mosque community should have one, if possible	99	66%
should serve in complementary roles to a male imam or shaykh in a mosque community	51	34%
both men and women should consult her, as needed	68	45.3%
only women should consult her, as needed	19	12.7%
there aren't enough and its crucial to the American Muslim community that there are more	90	60%
Other, please specify	10	6.7%

Table 9: June 2014 Survey, Opinions on Women Scholars of Islam, by Daniel Azim Pschaida

Muslims of both genders accepted the prevalent traditional interpretations that the *imam* who leads the prayer in a mosque, unless it is an all-women group, should be a

mourners, and singers. Higher class women sometimes were given academic education by older women and men. Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1992), 109-118.

male.[71] Luqman explained, “She couldn't be the prayer leader unless it's a mosque of all women, because in there you bend down, so it wouldn't be proper for a women to be there bending down, would be distracting to other guys.” Mojdeh said, “I think from the very beginning it was a male role; I think there’s other places or forums for women to do good deeds and/or get their voice heard…like conferences.” Only Jasmine opined, “I don't think there should be any difference, women should be able to lead prayer, don't see what the issue is,” but “I wouldn't go fight for it, not that big a deal for me.” Most mosques in the United States have separate rooms where women and men can pray without being distracted by each other, but central rooms and halls are usually occupied by the men.

Thus, women speakers at mosques (on occasions other than to lead prayer) and at North American Islamic conferences or MSA programs are important settings for women’s voices to also be heard. These occasions also confirm that norms of propriety for American Muslims do not restrict women from serving in roles as scholars, legal advisors, and teachers of Islam. Luqman asserted, “[A female Islamic scholar] could give advice to anybody…granted she has the knowledge and expertise; any kind of knowledge, worldly knowledge, Islamic knowledge… there are many women speakers out there that are good, they are good women speakers; as long as you benefit from it,

[71] Based on hadith precedence, in the four Sunni schools of law, the Shafi’i and Hanbali schools allow women to lead fellow women in prayer, the Hanafis dislike it but permit it, and the Malikis claim a woman should not lead other women in prayer; all four schools prohibit a woman from leading men in prayer, while a man can lead women, Zaid Shakir, “An Examination of the Issue of Female Prayer Leadership” (2005), *The Columbia Sourcebook of Muslims in the United States*, ed. Edward E. Curtis IV (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 244; Iran’s top religious leaders began to allow women to lead all women mosque congregations in the year 2000, “Iranian Women to Lead Prayers,” *BBC News*, August 8, 2000, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/861819.stm (accessed May 1, 2015).

any speaker, then it is good." Jasmine lamented that locally there are "very few women speakers, and trying to learn about female issues from a man is very uncomfortable. [Women] have insights into matters that men wouldn't; it would be nice to have more female leaders, especially as far as knowledge goes." Palestinian-American Adeela, who served as a lead officer in both Students for Justice in Palestine and MSA, affirmed, "Women scholars can provide insights into many issues that a man's experience may limit him from having." Farzam asserted, "I think if a woman gives a *fatwa* [legal opinion], that's fine, if it's a legitimate *fatwa* and it is reasoned well, it should be just as binding as any a male gives." Likewise Sana believed a women scholar's teaching to be valuable for both genders: "Women offer a different perspective that men don't know about; also vice versa, like the [woman] speaker we just had [Lobna Mulla]…her speaking did benefit all of us in how to communicate and approach people of the opposite sex." She continued that women scholars have a lot to offer as well "not just matters of gender itself" but "things the women know from them just knowing about various subjects…they have a lot to say and offer."

With most immigrant Muslims understand traditional sources and precedence to say that women cannot lead men in congregational prayer, some mosques and Islamic centers have been able to hire married couples who are both scholars to lead in complementary roles. Isra said, "Definitely we need more women religious leaders. And if not more female religious leaders then more couples because, and this is something that astounds me, because the Prophet was always surrounded by women and always asking their advice and always having them participate in Islam." At the Islamic Society of Orange

County in Garden Grove, California Lobna Mulla serves alongside her husband Suhail Mulla, both having studied together at Al-Azhar University in Cairo, Egypt. Likewise, the nearby Islamic Center of Irvine hosts Scholar in Residence Jamaal Diwan who works closely with his wife and fellow scholar Muslema Purmul, and they also studied Islam intensely for a number of years in Cairo.

Some interviewees also mentioned that women have crucial roles to play in educating their children in the religion and some of the young men talked about how important their mothers have been in teaching them Islam. Luqman said, "[She] would be a religious leader in the family, teaching the kids during the day about the religion… Moms give advice all the time, granted she has the knowledge and expertise." Na'il, who helped lead a Qur'an class for UCR's MSA, often spoke highly of his mother who had memorized the entire Qur'an [*ḥāfiẓa*]. He, Luqman, and Shems each spoke about the crucial part their mothers played in educating them in Islam and nurturing a Muslim identity.

Most interviewees also believed women ideally can and should play roles of political leadership in government, but some worried that prejudice would prevent them from being effective. Adeela spoke of the "precedent" of the first women believers in Islam: "We had in the time of the Prophet women who were Muslim in leadership roles in business, military, and scholarship… In the teachings…there's no problem with women in leadership roles or in charge of managing with men under them." Mujahida said, "During the time of the Prophet Muhammad, 'Aisha would teach Islam and she would also lead going to war and make policies, and she would heal the soldiers. [Thus, women] should be political leaders in Islam." From her understanding of Islamic early history,

"Aisha was able to instruct men and women." Just a few young men worried, as they had about possible female presidents of an MSA, that a woman lets her "emotions get the best of her," instead of being logical and calmly handling pressure, and this would keep her from leading well. Isra believed from the Islamic teachings that women can and would be just as capable as men as political leaders but "in general people do not respond as well to female authority… Like if Hillary [Clinton] were President right now, cool, awesome, she'd be just as capable a President as the male presidents we have had. Would she get anything done, because people would let her? I don't know, I don't think so." Most believed that women's roles in societies are limited not so much by Islamic injunctions as by contemporary societal immaturity. Instead of a tactic to avoid facing patriarchal interpretations of their own tradition, we may instead interpret this rhetoric as a candid framing that the limitations women often still find within Islamic organizations are not that different from those in organizations and businesses in the broader American society. Both arenas need to improve prospects for women.

Compassionate Disapproval: Homosexuality

American public opinion about homosexuality has changed dramatically in the past forty years from disapproval to acceptance and support.[72] Over seventy percent of young adult Americans perceive homosexuality not as aberrant or immoral and they believe that same-sex couples should have the same right to marriage as heterosexual couples. On the

[72] About 43% of Americans believed gay or lesbian relations between consenting adults should be legal in 1977, but 66% believed so by 2014: Gallup, "Gay and Lesbian Rights, http://www.gallup.com/poll/1651/gay-lesbian-rights.aspx (accessed January 9, 2015).

other hand, less than ten percent of Muslim youth in Muslim-majority countries agree that homosexuality should be accepted.[73] Mediating these views, most of the nineteen young Muslim American interviewees I conversed with about this issue did not believe homosexual acts are moral but they did strongly believe in kindness, respect, and friendship to those struggling with, identifying with, or practicing a homosexual orientation.[74]

Literature on Islam and homosexuality has focused on interpreting traditional sources on the topic, the laws of nation-states, and the attempts of homo- or bi-sexual Muslims to reconcile their faith and their queer sexual identities. No scholar has yet investigated how young Muslim Americans activists on college campuses, who do not identify as gay or lesbian, think about this topic. With a relatively small sample size and limited questions, my research offers a foundation for further research on how this demographic conceives of this issue. Thirteen of the interviewees believed that homosexuality acts were wrong according to their religion. One believed the act may be justifiable from an Islamic point of view, and another thought it acceptable if one were born with a homosexual orientation. Four gave nuanced answers that neither clearly condoned nor disapproved of homosexual practices from an Islamic perspective. What all nineteen agreed upon is that even if they did not approve of homosexual acts or relationships, they believed the

[73] There was generally a correlation between level of religiosity and degree of acceptance, with those who are more religious having less acceptance of homosexuality. Pew Research: Global Attitudes Project, "The Global Divide on Homosexuality," published June 4, 2013 http://www.pewglobal.org/2013/06/04/the-global-divide-on-homosexuality/ (accessed January 9, 2015).
[74] Due to needing to not make the interviews too long but having many topics I wanted to discuss, time did not allow discussing every topic with ever interviewee.

orientation may be biologically natural to some human beings and all people should be treated with friendship and kindness.

While some *hadīth* censure homosexual acts in general, the Qur'an does not explicitly speak against them but must be interpolated from its rendition of the story of the prophet Lot/*Lūt* and the people of Sodom and Gomorrah.[75] Islamic legal interpretations, however, have usually censured same-sex intercourse and traditionally specified varying degrees of punishment for those caught in the act. In Muslim-majority societies a same-sex orientation was usually not recognized as a static or essential identity; rather individuals may engage in same-sex acts, and those who sometimes engaged in such acts were still expected to marry heterosexually and have children. Thus, censuring homosexuality was not perceived as rejecting a human being and a central facet of his or her nature but proscribing what was seen as immoral conduct. [76]

Recently coalitions of those who claim rights to *queer*/LGBTQ sexuality have emerged in some Muslim-majority countries.[77] As of 2004, twenty-six of the eighty-three countries that condemned homosexuality as part of its criminal code were Muslim-majority nations; six of those twenty-six carried the death penalty for offenders. In

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[75] The Qur'an does not actually name the cities in which Lot/*Lūt* is inhabiting as "Sodom and Gomorrah," but due to the similarities of the story to that which is told in the book of Genesis of the Bible one may assume that they are.

[76] Rights scholar-activists have argued the *ahādith* on homosexual acts are of questionable authenticity, Samar Habib, *Islam and Homosexuality, vol. 1* (Santa Barbara, Calif.: Praeger 2010), xlvi-xlvii, xvii-xxii;

[77] Scholars and activists have searched to find language to describe gendered and sexual realities in other cultures that neither impose equivalence nor essentialized difference in comparison to categories used in North America and Europe. In addition, we should be careful in asserting that classical scholars of Islam had anything to say at all about "homosexuality." They certainly had things to say about same-sex acts but their framework for understanding such acts was quite different from contemporary understandings of homosexuality. "Sexuality, diversity, and ethics in the agenda of progressive Muslims," Scott Siraj al-Haqq Kugle, *Progressive Muslims: on Justice, Gender, and Pluralism*, ed. Omid Safi (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2008), 194.

practice those who engaged in homosexual acts were usually ignored, although non-government authorized violent attacks sometimes have occurred against alleged perpetrators. In 1997 an internet-based support network was founded in North America for those who identified as homosexual and Muslim. It has developed local chapters as well as regional and national conferences.[78]

Just two of the nineteen interviewees believed that homosexual relationships and marriage could be acceptable according to their personal ethics and Islam. In Farzam's understanding, the Qur'an does not clearly delineate the ethics of homosexuality and so interpreters are reliant upon *hadīth*s which in turn requires a critical reading to determine authenticity. He believed common interpretations on this topic have been undermined by the lack of women and gay translators who are Islamic jurists. He contextualized the issue by stating that in Islam the only unforgivable sin is *shirk* (idolatry / making created-things equal to God), and so even if homosexuality turns out to be a sin before God's judgment it may be a small stain in a life otherwise full of good deeds and integrity. Furthermore, "It might be possible to be validated…that gay marriage is okay, but we need more scholars and *ijtihād* to do translations." Munirah, believed homosexual acts were fine for those who naturally only feel sexually attracted to the same gender, but it

[78] Walter L. Williams, "Islam and the Politics of Homophobia: the Persecution of Homosexuals in Islamic Malaysia Compared to Secular China," *Islam and Homosexuality*, vol. 1, ed. Samar Habib, (Santa Barbara, Calif.: Praeger 2010), 8-9; Omar Minwalla, B. R. Simon Rosser, Jamie Feldman and Christine Varga, "Identity Experience among Progressive Gay Muslims in North America: A Qualitative Study within Al-Fatiha," *Culture, Health & Sexuality* 7 (March 2005), 114-115; Anissa Hélie, "Holy Hatred," *Reproductive Health Matters* 12 (May, 2004), 120-122; there have also been a number of films about homosexuality and Muslims, "4 Films about LGBT Muslims Everyone Needs to Watch," QWOCMEDIA: Diversity Speaks, http://www.qwoc.org/2012/05/4-films-about-lgbt-muslims-everyone-needs-to-watch/ (accessed May 1, 2015).

was immoral for those predisposed as heterosexual: “if God made you straight and you go to homosexuality, it's wrong.” She rejected the reality of bi-sexuality or sexual orientations being along a continuum: “Maybe they're just confused; but I'm like, can you just pick one partner?” However, only God knew and could judge other people: “I don't know who is who, I'm not inside your body; only God has the ability to judge you one by one.” Therefore, everyone else should learn to “see it as normal and it should be accepted.”

Four others did not say whether they believed homosexual relations are right or wrong. Rather they felt what is most vital is for Muslims to be inclusive, understanding, and kind to people of all sorts of gender and sexual identities and to respect their right to make decisions for themselves. Yunus, who moved to the United States from Jordan to pursue his undergraduate college education, said that being in this country has “opened” his “mind to other things.” He said, “I use to be one-hundred percent against gays but now see the reasons… I appreciate that I have more rights in this country, and I believe others should be free as well; I’ve become less a judgy person.” Qani held that same-sex relations do not directly hurt other parties, so: “If you personally believe that it is wrong, you shouldn't restrict it; it's their decision, they should do what they want, it's not between you and them it's between themselves.” To him sexuality was a private matter and need not be legislated by public institutions. For Bahaaj, acceptance and befriending of others is the more essential priority than him defining for himself and others the moral status of homosexual acts; and this could only happen if one leaves evaluation of the moral content of others’ behaviors to God. He said:

> I feel that we should take care, appreciate; we should look beyond anyone's beliefs that might separate us in any way shape or form, and that we should tolerate how they are, tolerate them in every way possible. [Daniel:] Are you saying you can disagree with some of the behaviors they choose to do but be kind and compassionate to the human beings themselves? [Bahaaj:] Well, I don't disagree with any choices anyone makes, because at the end of the day it's not me who is the Ultimate Power; I see God is someone who judges us people, and I'm not saying that God will just judge people just on being gay or not; but ultimately I'm not one to judge; at the end of the day, what people decide to practice, to look to, to live their lives, it's completely fine with me. [Daniel:] So you can make different choices on how to live your life than your friend over here but you'll give them the benefit of the doubt that they are trying to make a good choice themselves. [Bahaaj:] Exactly, and I will be there for them too, if they need any help…

Abia disclosed that recently having "a number of friends who are homosexual and Muslim," she has "had to refashion" her beliefs on this issue. Through reflection and soul-searching, she said she has learned that Islam is "a religion much more encompassing of humanity, shouldn't exclude people, because of the way they are or have some habits." She explained, "The thought that Islam excludes certain types of people is against my current approach to Islam… I don't believe that this is how Islam was originally and how it should be now." She thought the problem was with how some people interpreted the religion.

Thirteen of the interviewees believed that Islam teaches homosexuality is an immoral act, although homosexual thoughts and feelings are not. Shems said, "In Islam it is forbidden; it is people's inner animal telling them to do this; …you're not an animal, you're a human being; if you're relying on this you're just submitting to your inner animal and demons." Husayn stated, "Homosexuality is *harām*, it's a sin… That's that bottom line, but…homosexual thoughts are not *harām*, but it's when you act upon it. Like when you have feelings for a woman, but don't act upon it, it's okay. Some think it's abnormal to have the thoughts, but I don't think so; kind of just *shaytān* (Satan) acting upon one to increase the thoughts." Husayn then explained a common view I heard that controlling

their thoughts and restraining the temptation to act on it is their personal "jihad." He said that this is an expansion of the similar practice of disciplining and tempering one's "hedonistic" tendencies to not eat, drink, or have sex, during daylight hours in Ramadan fasting.

These students rejected the Freudian-derived, contemporary assumption that sexual repression is unhealthy and will lead to disorders. They interpreted self-restraint "for God" as a type of personal discipline that assists spiritual development. Sana compared homosexual urges to those of heterosexuals which neither should be acted upon outside of marriage: "If you're a Muslim or a person with gay thoughts, in Islam you cannot act on those thoughts; so it is basically their struggle in life, or at least one of their struggles, what they need to work on in life …we also don't believe men and women should touch before marriage." Thus, for her, both heterosexuals and homosexuals need to learn to control their sexual promptings, the difference being that people with homosexual orientations should not enter homosexual marriages but only heterosexual ones. She asserted that people of heterosexual orientation do not make a big deal out of their orientation and neither do those of homosexual orientation need to make it the crux of their personal identity.[79] For young adult Muslims, self-control was not self-repression, and self-discipline was not oppression but similar to Foucault's concept of working to transform the self in ways significant to oneself and or the group.[80] However, perhaps it

[79] It is ironic that for both being Muslim or being homosexual part becomes a major part of their identity in resistance to prejudice, discrimination, and stereotyping, or as a cause of social justice. However, I do not fault her for not catching the parallels between American Islamic and homosexual identities.
[80] Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety* (2005), 28, discussing Michel Foucault, "On the genealogy of ethics: An overview of work in progress," *Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984: Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, vol. 1, ed. P. Rabinow, trans. R. Hureley et al., (New York: New Press), 225.

is due to this common rejection of the legitimacy of homosexual acts among these Muslims that a lesbian woman whom Mojdeh met said she tried to participate in of UCR's MSA but felt "judged" and did not return. In other words, their maintaining that homosexual acts are a sin can easily be translated as rejection by someone for whom homosexuality was an important facet of her identity.

Many of those thirteen also believed homosexuality should not be blown out of proportion compared to many other sins Muslims may regularly commit. Jasmine said, "It's wrong, but…for me…I think, if someone is gay or lesbian, or whatever they identify as, I don't think that they can't be Muslim, or not pray, but just as there are racist or prejudiced people who continue to be Muslim, they can as well." Layla said, "God talks about it as a sin, like alcohol, substance abuse, disrespecting your spouse, domestic violence, but we [Muslims] make it even bigger and talk about it as the worst sin and push a lot of people away through it." These views are a far cry from the recognition of homosexuality, often sought by gay rights activists, as no less natural or moral than heterosexuality. However, those Muslims who thought of homosexuality in this light voiced that they need not make it a barrier to friendship and respect any more than they would with those who commit the un-Islamic acts of abusing drugs, eating pork, expressing prejudices, gossiping and backbiting, or being sexually promiscuous. Of course, for some people their homosexuality is such a central facet of their personal identity that they would find it difficult to be close friends with someone who did not completely recognize its legitimacy.

While Shems and Husayn talked above about "inner demons" and Satan partially

influencing homosexual tendencies, many of these twelve believed them to be not genetically driven but socially, culturally, or environmentally induced or nurtured. Luqman said homosexuality "isn't something that is natural but probably induced by the society." Mojdeh said her lesbian Muslim friend's "father was really abusive" to his wife and children. "Maybe had I gone through what she has gone through, I would have been where she's at." Cristina believed, "Islam teaches that it is a sickness." Baseem saw food as the main culprit: "Go back to all the things they are putting in the food, or that men shouldn't drink too much soy milk, as raises estrogen levels… hormones make men more feminine, chicken breast, something in there that increases femininity." He also believed cultural discourse "promotes it, and I believe we're in a flawed society here." Adeeb said it "stems from the pornographic proliferation all over our society…I think the real problem is the very sexualized society we have, like so many of my eleven or twelve year old classmates in school had already had sex." Husayn said that he didn't believe homosexuality comes from "a gene" but nevertheless recognized that it was "hard to say I'm going to cure you of your sexuality." He believed that instead of struggling against this urge "many people are fascinated by the idea of love or lovers [and] have this urge for this pleasure," that they must pursue it as a type of hedonism. Instead of a place just for companionship and sexual satisfaction, he asserted that marriage was "a sacred thing…based more on religion…a more structural view of life…and it comes with obligations; don't do it just to have fun, it's half our faith…to bring you closer to your *deen* [faith]." Nonetheless, most interviewees tempered their statements with the acknowledgement that they were still trying to understand and educate themselves about

this issue, so they regarded their own statements more as personal speculations to help them make sense of the Islamic injunction against homosexual acts.

What all nineteen interviewees agreed upon was that people need to be understood and treated with compassion and kindness no matter what, whether or not one personally agreed with everything the other does or believes. Jasmine said, "We're taught to be tolerant and respectful of all people, not just if they abide by what we think is right; all should be dealt with decency and mercy if we are to call ourselves true Muslims." Shems stated that even while practicing homosexuality was *harām*, in his view, it was also "*harām*…to shun them away." Mojdeh confessed, "Obviously I'm not perfect. So why should I look down on someone else?" She believed what was most important was not to be judgmental of people dealing with a homosexual orientation so as to not "drive them away." Adeeb said, "I think in the end it is essential to being Muslim, treating other people kindly; no matter who it is, have to treat them nicely, very kindly." He explained that when he was an MSA leader at UCLA, he was involved in a coalition, and one of the eight groups was a homosexuality group that he "tried to treat… with the utmost respect." Layla believed people dealing with homosexuality "don't really get the support or understanding; although we don't talk about gang violence or smoking weed either, but we pay attention to homosexuality even less; we need to have a movement of support and love, to help people make the decision they will about it and still be loved whatever their decision."

Conclusions

In Lila Abu-Lughod's book named after an earlier essay of hers, "Do Muslim women need saving?" she counters mostly fictional accounts in recent quasi-biographical literature of the lives of Middle Eastern women that paint pictures of harrowing abuse and suppression by men and families. She calls for the public to "take time to listen" before "clicking on a website to donate $10 or flying to distant lands to bring school supplies to girls, and certainly before calling in military troops." Instead of our primary sources of information being from this literature that reifies and radically otherizes the gendered lives of the Muslims, she offers the work of anthropologists that demonstrate realities are much more complex. She says that we may find local contexts that are distinct in many ways from our own yet ones working in international contexts very similar to our own: "These contexts are shaped by global politics, international capital, and modern state institutions, with their changing impacts on family and community."[81] I agree that while becoming friends and learning with and from men and women all over the planet, we may take pause to learn and reflect instead of jumping to the rescue to save women from the *niqāb*, their governments, and their men. What we will instead find is that women (and men) in these societies have been and continue to empower themselves in creative ways, drawing on authorities within their religion and culture, to change consciences and demand being treated and treating others in way that is significant and moral to them. Likewise, we will find non-governmental agencies, Islamic and secular, that work in solidarity with women and men in their contexts to bring learning, skills, and

[81] Lila Abu-Lughod, *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?* (2013), 202.

collaboration to transform their individual, family, and collective lives in ways meaningful to them.

Muslim American young women and men are also answering Lila Abu-Lughod's question with a definitive "No!" In UC Riverside's March 2014 "Women in Sharia" event, organized by a young Muslim activist, panelist Noha Alshugairi gave a similar answer to Abu-Lughod's above question, "Do Muslim women need saving?" Muslim women and men, whether in the East or West, are reforming their situations themselves, they just need time. As this chapter has shown, young adult Muslim Americans do not require the interventions of fellow Americans to tell them what justice looks like or how to be empowered, free, fully actualized human beings.

This new generation is itself discerning, debating, and experimenting with which values are relevant and how to translate those values to daily life in a way that they can view as Islamically authentic. Instead of flirtation and competition for the attentions of the opposite sex, most of this generation emphasize bonding and strengthening the relationships with fellow Muslims of one's own gender. However, others contest strict restrictions for the sake of caring for, collaborating, and learning from one another. Instead of dressing to show off and bring attention to one's physical features, they value covering up for modesty, dignity, and to focus on personality, although many also appreciate and pursue the aesthetics of fashion. While resisting the promiscuous connotations of "dating," they are finding creative ways to meet and get to know possible marriage partners. They subscribe to the importance and value of traditional roles for men and women within a marriage while affirming a wife's right to work and a husband's

responsibilities to help care for the children and the home. Some Muslim young men worry about women receiving enough respect, and having the emotional balance needed for effective Muslim Student Association leadership, but such notions are being challenged by their fellows, and many California university Muslim groups are nominating and electing women as their presidents. Most young Muslims welcome the advancement of women as Islamic scholars, political leaders, and business executives and many of the young women are working diligently to make strides in these areas. Finally, the majority of these young adults affirm traditional Islamic interpretations that disapprove of the homosexual act, yet they are conscientiously thinking about how to make Muslim communities welcoming and supportive to those who may have a homosexual orientation, identity, or lifestyle.

Julianne Hammer has called on research of Muslims to overcome the dualism embedded in "women studies" and prioritize "gender" instead as a category of inquiry.[82] Indeed, I have argued here that the construction of American Islamic femininity, masculinity, and gender relations is being shaped by young adult Muslim women and men. The women help shape not just American Muslim femininity but masculinity as well, and men likewise help shape both. They are collectively actively engaged in thinking about and acting on these issues. This research shows that Muslim women searching for norms of gender justice are not pitted against their male co-religionists. Rather they often have sincere partners in young men, together finding new ways of

[82] Julianne Hammer, "Studying American Muslim Women," *Cambridge Companion to American Islam*, 332.

living their faith that reflect their highest ideals. In their own hearts and minds, with each other, within the educational system and global discourses they grow up in, these young women and men are bringing together varying values and ethics to solve what it means to be free, pious, empowered, actualized, and fulfilled as a woman, as a man, as a human being. These values and ethics are rooted and grounded in the authoritative Islamic tradition that they believe offers a vision of existence more penetrating and salutary than any purely human-constructed ideologies.

CHAPTER 4

Out of Many One: Young Adult Muslim Americans Dealing with Differences

Introduction: Dealing with Differences—the Ethics and Practices of Pluralism

Young adult Muslim Americans are surrounded by religious and ethnic others, both within and outside Muslim communities, who press them each day to answer how will they deal with these differences. In Muslim Student Associations and other Muslim spaces on campus they find havens that partly insulate them from the diversity around them and in which they can experiment with and cultivate their religious identity. However, Muslim Student Associations must also negotiate possible differences within their own ranks and with fellow student organizations. Furthermore, MSA does not quarantine its members from religious others in their college classes, workplaces, and other "non-Muslim" spaces they inhabit during their time at college.

The increasingly popular call of American intellectuals and educators, Muslim and otherwise, to deal with the diversity of this nation has been to turn to an ethic of pluralism. Historian William R. Hutchison has defined pluralism "as the acceptance and encouragement of diversity."[1] In the face of "the endless conflicts between Christians and Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs, Tamils and Buddhists" and "the attendant atrocities committed against innocent civilians," American scholar of Islamic studies Abdulaziz Sachedina urges an ethic of pluralism for the global village as well. He says:

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[1] William R. Hutchison, *Religious Pluralism in America: The Contentious History of a Founding Ideal* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 1.

> The term *pluralism* is one of the catchwords of a new world order whose diversity of cultures, belief systems, and values inspires both exhilaration at the endless shadings of human expression and dread of irreconcilable conflict. The invocation of pluralism has become as much a summons as a celebration, an urgent exhortation to the citizens of the world to come to terms with their dizzying diversity.[2]

I argue in this chapter that pluralism is often becoming an essential approach to working with diversity for young Muslim Americans as well. However, they face many challenges to find and apply meaningful models that they believe is authentically Islamic and practical for organizing their student organizations. Hence, many Muslim Student Associations emphasize what most Muslims have in common to deal with differences and to prescribe what they believe is Islamically authentic for everyone.

Coming to terms with diversity, accepting, encouraging, being exhilarated by, and celebrating it still leaves unanswered what beliefs and practices should be embraced by an individual, group, or society with a pluralistic ethic. From having surveyed prominent literature on religious pluralism, here I offer six forms or approaches to pluralism, each of which is affirmed, incorporated, and enacted to varying degrees in the discourse and praxis of young Muslim Americans and their student organizations.

1) **Legalized freedom of practice**: one is free and protected to practice, or not, one's religion of choice so long as practices do not break other laws of the political unit.
2) **Tolerance and respectful difference**: one gives others the benefit of the doubt that they are doing what they believe is right.
3) **Understanding and relationship building through dialogue**: one confronts the religious other, seeking to understand and cultivate friendships through dialogue, engagement, conversation, and shared activities.
4) **Appreciation, respectful critique, & learning from each other**: one deeply engages other religious commitments and content to find characteristics to appreciate or even critique about other religions.

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[2] AbdulAziz Sachedina, *The Islamic Roots of Democratic Pluralism* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2001), 22.

5) **Inclusion**: leaders of a religious group attempt to welcome others in their religious commonalities and differences, holding that this diversity enriches and strengthens the group.
6) **Collaboration and Solidarity**: one works side-by-side with the religious, ethnic, class, or sexual other in concert, collaboration, and cooperation toward a common cause of justice, liberation, well-being, or service.

I argue that some of these forms of pluralism are stronger than others, such as the third and the fourth offering more depth than the second, and the sixth offering a more egalitarian horizontal approach than the more top-down fifth. However, instead of seeing this list as a hierarchy, each pluralistic form may be in itself very valuable, according to contexts. Since I use these forms of pluralism to measure and analyze young adult Muslim American approaches to pluralism in the proceeding sections, I will further define each.

In the first form, an open "playing field" for religious pluralism is founded on a legal constitution that protects the freedom to practice one's chosen religion.[3] Freedom of religion is premised upon the principle that faith is fundamentally a private affair or matter of conscience.[4] The freedom to choose one's beliefs and exercise one's religion is guaranteed nationally in the First Amendment of the Constitution of the United States, recommended internationally in the second and eighteenth article of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and also incorporated in the constitutions of many other countries.[5] Diana L. Eck believes this legal freedom is "the fountainhead of

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[3] Courtney Bender and Pamela E. Klassen, eds., "Introduction: Habits of Pluralism," *After Pluralism: Reimagining Religious Engagement*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 112.
[4] Nonetheless, this being a "private affair" does not delimit being able to participate in public discourse based on religious values.
[5] "The Universal Declaration of Human Rights," The United Nations, http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/, (accessed March 5, 2015); "Bill of Rights," The Charters of Freedom, http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/bill_of_rights_transcript.html (accessed March 5,

this" religious "diversity."[6] However, legal pluralism may also limit a particular religious practice (although not a religious tradition more generally) when that practice is in direct conflict with interpretations of fellow democratic principles such as fairness, equality, choice, autonomy, or freedom of speech.[7] Thus, a person's religious teachings cannot be an excuse before the law for committing murder or imprisoning someone without consent. Citizens are also encouraged and disciplined to restrain themselves from making religious differences a cause of violence. Young adult Muslim Americans value living in a country where their freedom to peacefully practice their religion is protected and those who would inflict violence on them on account of religious difference are held accountable before the law. They also value the religious freedoms allocated to other religious groups in the United States.

The second approach to pluralism, characterized by tolerance and respectful difference signifies that religions "will be able to live comfortably side by side in a global community," whether local metropolises, nations, or the planet itself.[8] In this approach to

2015); "Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms," Justice Laws Website, http://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/const/page-15.html, (accessed March 5, 2015); "Constitution of India," Constitution Society, http://www.constitution.org/cons/india/p03.html (accessed March 5, 2015). Robert Wuthnow, *America and the Challenges of Religious Diversity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 73. For Wuthnow, these "laws and regulations," protect those of varied religious groups from "violence and discrimination." James Madison, "Memorial and Remonstrance," *Letters and Other Writings of James Madison* (Philadelphia: 1867), 1:16ff. Madison, one of the authors the First Amendment, had argued in 1785, "While we assert for ourselves a freedom to embrace, to profess, and to observe the religion which we believe to be of divine origin, we cannot deny an equal freedom to those whose minds have not yet yielded to the evidence which has convinced us."

[6] Diana L. Eck, "Forward," *Taking Religious Pluralism Seriously: Sacred Politics on America's Sacred Ground*, eds. Barbara A. McGraw and Jo Renee Formicola (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2005), x-xi.

[7] Benjamin Berger, "The Cultural Limits of Legal Tolerance," *After Pluralism: Reimagining Religious Engagement*, eds. Courtney Bender and Pamela E. Klassen (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 112.

[8] Harold Coward, *Pluralism: Challenge to World Religions* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1985), 95.

pluralism, one lets the other do what he or she chooses to value and do, and the other lets you do the same; neither concerns oneself much with the practice or belief of the other. This approach may have two distinct dispositions toward religious diversity. The first holds that I do not agree with your religion but I will let you be. The second holds that I will presume that your religion is valuable and worthy of perpetuation, at least for you, but I need not understand it.[9] However, both effectively lead to the same result: one does not interfere or make other peoples' religions one's concern. Social scientist Robert Wuthnow writes that America has "a pattern of coexistence" where "the new minority religions exist as enclaves that have very little interaction with" each other or with "majority religions in their communities."[10] I view this as pluralism at its weakest. Tolerance and "respectful difference" do not demand being confronted with understanding other religions, and whether we could work together on common projects with people who hold them to be true. Nonetheless, this approach to the religious other is sometimes the most that can be done, "agreeing to disagree" in the name of peace. Interviews and observations disclosed that most young Muslim Americans, while having friends of other backgrounds, usually do not actively seek out faith-based conversations with religious others but focus on cultivating faith-based relationships with fellow Muslims.[11]

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[9] Charles Taylor, "Politics of Recognition," *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, ed. Amy Gutmann (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994), 42, 63-64, 67.
[10] Robert Wuthnow, *America and the Challenges of Religious Diversity* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2005), 74. In fact, Wuthnow does not even consider this coexistence as a form of pluralism. For our purposes here, we need not take or reject this differentiation but just leave this as pluralism at its weakest.
[11] In this approach to tolerant co-existence, some interviewees made reference to Qur'an 109:6, "*Laykum dīnukum wa lī dīn*," commonly translated as "To you your religion/way, to me mine."

The third approach confronts the particularities of the religious other, seeking to understand and build relationships with people of other religious groups through dialogue, engagement, and friendships. Over three-fourths of Americans believe it is desirable for people of different religions to cooperate and learn about others' religions but only about a sixth annually participate in specific interreligious activities.[12] While this approach may happen in formally organized interfaith dialogues, it may also occur more spontaneously through friendships and conversations with religious others at work, in school, in family, or among neighbors. Diana L. Eck, director of Harvard University's Pluralism Project, argues that pluralism is "the dynamic process through which we engage with one another in and through our very deepest differences" so as not to create "agreement" but cultivate "relationships."[13] Sociologist of American religion Wade Clark Roof adds that through such activities believers of different faiths also become more self-conscious of who they are, affirm common values, and build social capital." These activities do not attempt to ignore or erase differences but honor and engage them.[14] Ethnographic observations and interviews found that most Muslim Student Associations do not consistently make interfaith activities as part of their official programming, yet they do encourage members' participation in events planned by others. In addition, many

[12] Wuthnow, *America and the Challenges of Religious Diversity*, 223-227.
[13] Diana L. Eck, *A New Religious America: How a "Christian Country" Has Now Become the World's Most Religiously Diverse Nation* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2001), 70-71.
[14] Wade Clark Roof, "Introduction," *Religious Pluralism and Civil Society*, ed. Wade Clark Roof (Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications, 2007), 7-8. Similarly, scholar of comparative religion Harold Coward believes, "The experience of those now seriously engaged in dialogue…is an enriching and deepening of one's own religious experience." Dialogue seeks to move beyond "intellectual knowledge of the facts" to "empathize with the sense of the transcendent reality that the forms of each religion seek to convey," see Harold Coward, *Pluralism: challenge to world religions* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1985), 107.

Muslim students do have friendships with individuals of other backgrounds and facets of each other's religions are sometimes shared with each other.

Full interreligious engagement may require the fourth form of pluralism in which individuals and groups appreciate or even critique characteristics of others' religions. Such serious engagement with the other's religion may be prompted by a realization that one's Hindu, Buddhist, Christian, Muslim, or atheist neighbor is a genuinely good person.[15] Conversations ensue in which one may find that the views and practices of others often have good reasons and morality, even if one comes to conclude those reasons and morality are relatively weak or deficient compared to one's own stance.[16] Openly and candidly engaging with the other may result in rejecting one's previously held truths, expanding or deepening of the truths one holds sacred, challenging the truths of the other, or even complete religious conversion. Interreligious contact in history has produced the most creative periods of religious formation.[17] Indeed, instead of imagining religious traditions as separate, pure, and self-sufficient entities with fixed, impregnable boundaries, the history of religion has demonstrated that "crossings, borrowings, and transformations" has been the rule instead of the exception.[18] Thus, to call a religion "syncretistic" is redundant.[19] So, instead of fear of deviation from some imagined "pure,

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[15] Martin E. Marty, "Pluralisms," *Religious Pluralism and Civil Society*, ed. Wade Clark Roof (Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications, 2007), 19.
[16] Amy Gutmann, "Introduction," Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition (1994), 22-24; Steven C. Rockefeller, "Comment," *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition* (1994), 92-94, 98.
[17] Coward, *Pluralism* (1985), 107.
[18] Courtney Bender and Pamela E. Klassen, eds., *After Pluralism: Reimagining Religious Engagement*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 14.
[19] Meredith B. McGuire, *Lived Religion: Faith and Practice in Everyday Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 188-190. This view need not deny divine revelations but recognizes that even revelations are given in the language and cultural prisms of people.

original" commitments, this approach encourages a person to enrich and to be enriched through the interreligious encounter. One becomes comfortable with the possibility that through interreligious encounters the very values by which one judges the merits of the other's religion may themselves change.[20] Barbara A. McGraw believes the intentions of America's constitutional founders to preserve "the rights of conscience and expression" was not only to "protect America's minorities (including religious minorities), from discrimination, but also to expand all Americans' opportunities to glean insights from each other, in the hope that together they would advance their understanding of how America can fully realize its promise" of "the good society."[21] Muslim Student Associations rarely organize or participate in such deep pluralistic engagements, yet individual members in their friendships and *da'wa* efforts at times do take part in such critical reflections.

A fifth mode of pluralism is defined by a posture of inclusion. The value of inclusion proceeds from recognition that, first, all beings crave acceptance and to be valued as fellow uniquely precious human beings, and, second, the group itself is usually enriched and strengthened by a diversity of background, experience, insights, perspectives, skills, and abilities.[22] Finding virtue in variety, leaders of groups welcome those who may go about the religion differently than themselves. Leaders of an otherized religious group strives to treat those who are distinct within their own group with the

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[20] Charles Taylor, *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition* (1994), 70-73.
[21] Barbara A. McGraw, "Introduction to America's Sacred Ground," *Taking Religious Pluralism Seriously: Sacred Politics on America's Sacred Ground*, eds. Barbara A. McGraw and Jo Renee Formicola (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2005)
[22] "A basic and profound universal human need" is "for unconditional acceptance." Steven C. Rockefeller, "Comment," *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, 96-97.

same degree of cordialness that they would like the greater society to treat them as members of a minority religion. Religious leaders do not try to present a homogenous front and hide the diversity that exists within their own group but highlight it and attempt to learn from it.[23] Those different from the leadership are not just allowed to participate and given friendship but are encouraged to contribute in unique ways to the enrichment of the organization. This pluralism is "that they should take part, often for the first time" in conducting community affairs. It is not just to have a "place at the table" but "a right to speak and be heard, and a right to help formulate the agenda." This "unity in diversity" is to have "something like a proportional voice" in the continuing creation of the group, its values, and practices.[24] In Muslim Student Associations, African Americans occupy an ambiguous position: some experience nothing but respect and friendship while others encounter racial prejudice. We also find Muslim Student Associations' leaders often welcome individuals of sects and ethnicities different from themselves but are most comfortable in emphasizing common beliefs and practices of "most" Muslims rather than

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[23] "The world is constituted by a "fundamental diversity of being"" or "a diversity of diversities, held to by their adherents with deep "affective intensity"" that scholars and religious leaders must themselves deeply engage if they are to be true to the pluralistic mission. Courtney Bender and Pamela E. Klassen, *After Pluralism*, 10, engaging William Connolly, "An Interview with William Connolly," *The New Pluralisms: William Connolly and the Contemporary Global Condition*, ed. David Campbell and Morton Schoolman (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2008), 307, 309; "Inclusive Christians…affirm the person's worth and validate whatever interpretations of the sacred the person may hold, whether they conform to church traditions or not." See Wuthnow, *America and the Challenges of Religious Diversity* (2005), 143.

[24] William R. Hutchison, *Religious Pluralism in America: The Contentious History of a Founding Ideal*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 218, 221. The concept of "unity in diversity" may go back thousands of years but perhaps first used in English by the head of the Bahá'í Faith, Shoghi Effendi Rabbani, in a 1931 letter to the "Bahá'í World" called "The Goal of a New World Order." It is now the official motto of the European Union and the nations of Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, and South Africa. See Roxanne Lalonde, "Unity in Diversity: Acceptance and Integration in an Era of Intolerance and Fragmentation" (Ottawa, Ontario: Department of Geography, Carleton University, 1994) bahai-library.com/lalonde_unity_diversity, Accessed March 10, 2015; Shoghi Effendi Rabbani, *The World Order of Baha'u'llah* (Wilmette, Illinois: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1974), 41.

making MSA a space in which distinctive Islamic beliefs and practices may also be shared, learned about, and experienced.

A sixth form of pluralism moves beyond simply dialoguing, conversing with, or including the religious other but works side-by-side in collaboration and cooperation with that other. This pluralism of solidarity is one that Farid Esack attempted to cultivate as a leader of Islamic organizations working with Christian, Hindu, and other organizations against the institutionalized racist structures of apartheid South Africa. Interpreting the Qur'an to make sense of how to deal with the oppression of peoples under South African apartheid, Esack believes the Qur'an enjoins standing and working in solidarity with the "marginalized," whether they be of the same faith, sect, tribe, race, class, nationality, gender, or sexual orientation, or not. He believes Muslims should work for and with those who are being oppressed for collective justice and liberation.[25] In Wuthnow's study of interreligious work in the American context, he found that interreligious activities are most fruitful when participants do not so much focus on theological differences or similarities as on praying together, eating together, and working cooperatively together on common projects. Understanding and deep relationships emerge as byproducts of these activities. He also found that the leadership of the higher levels of religious hierarchies in creating agreements among themselves is not so necessary as that of any individuals who are interested in the interfaith collaboration coming together to build relationships of service to a common cause.[26] Eboo Petal has had similar findings in

[25] Farid Esack, *Qur'an, Liberation & Pluralism: An Islamic Perspective of Interreligious Solidarity against Oppression* (Oxford, England: Oneworld, 1997).
[26] Wuthnow, *America and the Challenges of Religious Diversity*, 292.

finding and developing the Interfaith Youth Core.[27] Ethnography revealed that Muslim Student Associations often do work in solidarity with other student organizations to address issues of social justice.

Replacing assimilation models, pluralism is becoming the preferred framework in the United States and internationally in dealing with differences between individuals and groups, yet some social theorists find it incapable of facilitating its underlying goals of equality, justice, and peacefulness. Janet R. Jakobsen argues that even though pluralism is becoming a defining value of American society "segregation in housing, schooling, and labor markets…continue to be the order of the day." She believes:

> it is precisely the assumption of separable "units" of difference, whether delineated along lines of race, class, or religion, that undercuts the possibilities for connection and understanding across difference so often sought by advocates of alliances (and of pluralism). The analytic problem is clear enough: Pluralism does not adequately describe the complexity of religious differences. Because it obscures both internal diversity and external connections, pluralism cannot provide an adequate model for those hoping to improve interactions.[28]

However, perhaps it is not the framework of pluralism itself that is the problem but the common framing of this ideal in a way that actually looks and sounds like more like multiculturalism. Religious pluralism is not multiculturalism. Multiculturalism perceives the American nation as being made up of discrete global cultures that are given the space to practice in separate communities that which make them distinct and which sometimes come together in public festivals to showcase and celebrate their foods, dances, music, ceremonies, or other goods that make them unique. Religious pluralism, if practiced in the way scholars and I have described above, will embrace "internal

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[27] Eboo Patel, *Acts of Faith: The Story of an American Muslim, the Struggle for the Soul of a Generation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2007), 165-168.
[28] Janet R. Jakobsen, "Ethics After Pluralism," *After Pluralism* (2010), 33.

diversity" as well as build off of the intricate network of relationships already fashioned with other religions. Indeed, religious communities will be able to cooperate together to better address issues of inequities, discrimination, and injustice.

Young adult Muslim Americans are embedded in struggles like those of other religious and ethnic groups to fashion identities that they feel are authentic to their specific tradition yet which are also in solidarity with the dignity of fellow human beings more generally. Such identities actively seek to work with the unique capacities of other individuals and groups to contribute to the betterment of humankind.[29] If this pluralism, characterized by engagement, inclusion, and constructive partnerships, has indeed become an axiomatic moral principle of what is socially good, then much can be learned about the pragmatics and challenges of realizing this ethical ideal through the triumphs and difficulties of this country's young Muslims in trying to actualize it.

Religious identities are constructed in contradistinction to others that seeks to highlight the significance of one's own chosen symbols. For example, many religious African Americans have historically taken on the symbol of God's oppressed 'chosen people' (à la Jews of Egypt) whom He favors to liberate from the damned oppressors (à la Pharaoh) of whites responsible for institutionalized racism.[30] Sikhs in North America

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[29] This signification of what we may regard as a healthy human identity is what Appiah believes is an ethical form of cosmopolitanism: both local and global, being in fellowship and cooperation for goals of collective well-being with one's particular community and human beings of any other religious, ethnic, national, political, gender, or sexual identity than oneself. See Kwame Anthony Appiah, *Ethics of Identity* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2005), 222-223.

[30] Frederick Douglas and later Martin Luther King, Jr. attempted to make racism and discrimination itself the essentialized difference. Human beings of all races in this country and abroad can take pride in opposing such ideologies and practices and showing depths of human character and virtue, capacities which all human beings share. Eddie S. Glaude, *Exodus!: Religion, Race, and Nation in Early Nineteenth-Century Black America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

believe their highly developed and central use of music in worship distinguish them from other religious groups.[31] Muslims in their Christian-majority America, instead of their shared belief in the exalted stations of Moses and Jesus, contrast the perceived compromise of the unity of God in the doctrine of the Christian Trinity with their own projected upholding of ‘pure’ monotheism in the rejection of Trinitarian doctrines. This is “reified difference” as Muslims may instead choose to interpret the Trinity in ways similar to Muslim beliefs: that there is one God yet who is said to have ninety-nine names and attributes.[32] However, they rarely interpret the Trinity as comparable to the ninety-nine names and attributes so as to emphasize Islamic uniqueness.

Are Other Faith-communities also among the saved?

Believers in one of the Abrahamic religions must grapple with whether they can have respectful and collaborative relationships with people of other religions who they believe may not be on a path to heavenly salvation. Is it possible to not be dismissive of those whose existential paths are believed to be doomed?[33] Can believers in Judaism, Christianity, or Islam be motivated to search for common ground and build mutually respective relationships with persons they believe destined for ultimate perdition? Can

[31] Charles M. Townsend, “Music in the Gurus' View: Sikh Religious Music, Memory, and the Performance of Sikhism in America,” (Ph.D. diss., University of California Riverside, 2015).
[32] To be sure, Christian interpretations of the trinity as one Godhead of three persons, each with the same substance, and each fully God, differs in some important respects to the Islamic idea of one Godhead with many attributes; however, with the exact way there can be three persons but still one God for Christians, or for Muslims the relationship between God and His attributes, have been and continue to be debated, Muslims at-least have a language to accept the basic intention of the Trinity, even if they reject an interpretation in which three distinct “persons” are each fully the one God.
[33] Similarly, Sachedina asks if the early Muslim community “could…build its ideal, a just public order, without creating an inclusive theology to deal with the broad range of problems arising from the encounters between Muslims and human beings of other faiths?” See Sachedina, *The Islamic Roots of Democratic Pluralism* (2001), 23.

believers have the humility to try to learn from another's religion which they believe to be fundamentally flawed? Although the answers to these questions are not unequivocally "no," positive regard for the religious other and cordial coexistence are indeed inextricably linked, as social philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau insightfully argued: "civil and theological intolerance are…inseparable. It is impossible to live in peace with those one believes to be damned."[34]

Religious believers who are attracted to a pluralistic ethos are challenged to extend potential salvation to people of different faiths without undermining the weighty importance of one's own faith. Islamic studies professor Abdulaziz Sachedina identifies the intrinsic tendency of "each tradition, armed with its self-awarded patent on divine revelation" to seek "supremacy rather than accommodation when confronted with an alien faith." One of the challenges of the early Muslim community was to "provide the necessary instruments of integration and legitimation" for itself "without denying other religious groups their due share in God-centered religious identity."[35] Similarly, noted historian Martin Marty explains that Christian theologians, inspired by the Second Vatican Council, have "tried to find new ways to affirm the presence of "the other" religion and to see whether they can, in congruence with faithful Catholic teaching,

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[34] Rousseau in the *Social Contract*, quoted by Yasir Qadhi, "The Path of Allah or the Paths of Allah? Revisiting Classical and Medieval Sunni Approaches to the Salvation of Others," *Between Heaven and Earth: Islam, Salvation, and the Fate of Others*, ed. Mohammad Hassan Khalil (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 109.

[35] Sachedina, *The Islamic Roots of Democratic Pluralism* (2001), 22-23. In contrast, Qadhi argues that there were relatively few attempts in "classical and medieval Islam" to open the door of salvation to other religions and sects, as one's own religion "being the sole path to God" was "the norm in other religious traditions" at this time as well. The question was not how much legitimacy others have but whether religious others "would be forgiven for their heresies." Yasir Qadhi, "The Path of Allah or the Paths of Allah?" *Between Heaven and Earth* (2013), 110.

[extend salvation to], for example, Hinduism, without advocating a wan and thin blurred, common faith, yet stressing particularities without prejudice."[36] Among religiously affiliated Americans, this approach is the most attractive, as about 70% believe "Many religions can lead to eternal life" and only 24% believe their own religion is the only true path to salvation.[37]

Historically, most scholars of the Islamic sciences have been uncomfortable with an interpretation that every non-Muslim would be damned. Based on such statements as Quran 17:15 '"We do not chastise until We have sent a messenger'' those scholars have interpreted that hellfire was only clearly the destiny of those who were given clear divine guidance yet were heedless and unrighteous. More recently, close contact between Muslims and non-Muslims, as well as ease of access to information about Islam and other religions, argues Michigan State University scholar Mohammad Hassan Khalil, have increased the number of both clearly exclusive interpretations of soteriology and unflinching inclusive ones.[38] For some Muslim scholars of Islam, including most of those in the very influential eleventh through thirteenth centuries, only those who accept the prophethood of Muhammad and follow the particular religious tradition he founded would have access to paradise.[39] For others, the message of believing in God and doing righteous deeds represents *islām* [surrender]: persons of any or no religious label who

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[36] Martin E. Marty, "Pluralisms," *Religious Pluralism and Civil Society*, ed. Wade Clark Roof (Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications, 2007), 19. Bracketed phrase added by the author for the sake of clarity.
[37] PewResearchCenter: A Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life Report, "Religion among the Millennials: Less Religiously Active Than Older Americans, but Fairly Traditional in Other Ways": 17.
[38] Mohammad Hassan Khalil, "Salvation and the 'Other' in Islamic Thought: The Contemporary Pluralism Debate," *Religion Compass* 5 (Blackwell Publishing, 2011): 511.
[39] Yasir Qadhi, "The Path of Allah or the Paths of Allah?" *Between Heaven and Earth*, 110-113.

fulfill this in their heart and actions may be chosen by God for heavenly reward, not just those who specifically follow the Prophet Muhammad. Other interpreters have a more limited approach to Islamic inclusivity, expounding that the Qur'an proclaims salvation for followers of the teachings of the prophets of Judaism and Christianity; since the Qur'an does not mention other religions, Muslims cannot make categorical statements about them.[40]

Hamza Yusuf and Zakir Naik, two of the most popular scholars of Islam and public speakers for young adult Muslim Americans as well as for many Muslim youth in Europe, give nuanced views on the possibilities of salvation for religious others. Hamza Yusuf in expressing his own views on these questions discusses traditional Islamic scholars' views that he deems to represent the most orthodox positions. He cites these scholars' statements and concludes that the operations of God's justice in consigning unbelievers to Hell only includes those who were given the message of Muhammad, or that of Jesus or Moses, in a clear and pure form but who consciously rejected or disregarded it. Hellfire is not only the destiny of non-Muslims but of people who may be called Muslim yet whose heart and actions may be hypocritical or unfaithful and who commit grave sins without repenting. While the Qur'an proclaims the mercy of God to be more fundamental than His justice, rescuing many from perpetual punishment, eternal hellfire is a real experience for those who deliberately deny Islam in their intentions and their actions. However, Yusuf advises that ultimately a Muslim's duty is not to judge the eternal destinies of others but to focus on one's own, praying for others, inviting others to

[40] Mohammad Hassan Khalil, "Salvation and the 'Other' in Islamic Thought" (2011), 512-516.

Islam, and showing goodness unto others.[41] Zakir Naik, from his recorded talks and writings, clearly interprets Islamic sources to say that the religion proclaimed by Muhammad offers the best and most reliable path to paradise. However, he also finds in the Bible and in Hindu texts teachings similar to those of the Qur'an; if a follower of those religions were truly to follow those similar teachings, then salvation may be in their reach.[42]

Since being a Muslim is often deemed the fundamental prerequisite for salvation, I asked the young adult Muslim interviewees "Who is a (true) Muslim?" Most answered with the common usage of the word, naming the particular historical-religious community of followers of Muhammad. Muslims were described as those who take the *shahada* of belief in the one God and Muhammad's prophethood and who follow the other four Pillars of the religion—fasting, ritual prayer, pilgrimage, and the charity-tax (*zakat*). Husayn, a Palestinian-American and MSA officer, said, "A Muslim is someone who believes in God, that there is no God but Allah, and that the prophet Muhammad is the last prophet; that's the very statement, believing that statement makes you Muslim." Although the *shahada* does not explicitly name Muhammad as the "last" prophet, for him it is implied from normative interpretations of Islam by Muslim scholars. For Layla it is not just saying aloud the *shahada* at one time in one's life but requires sincere follow-

[41] Hamza Yusuf, "Who are the Disbelievers?" *Seasons* (Spring 2008), 45-49.
[42] Such a view by Zakir Naik must be pieced together from various statements. See Zakir Naik, "will non muslim go to heaven?" YouTube, uploaded April 19, 2009 (accessed March 12, 2015); "Will Muslim go to Paradise & Non-Muslim go to Hell – Dr. Zakir Naik" YouTube, Uploaded, June 30, 2010, (accessed March 12, 2015); "Dr. Zakir Naik - How will Allah judge a person born in a non-muslim Family?" YouTube, Uploaded Sep 9, 2010, (accessed March 12, 2015); Zakir Naik, *Common Questions Asked by Hindus about Islam*, downloaded from http://islamhouse.com/en/articles/333646/ (accessed March 12, 2015).

through of "every day affirming that faith in Allah and constantly learning what is pleasing to Allah." After that first pillar, some of the interviewees deemed ritual prayer to be most important. Husayn expounded upon this and Zakir said, "If you don't pray then you're considered a non-Muslim." Having "a good moral character," with emphasis on respecting others and assisting the less fortunate, were key characteristics of a Muslim also mentioned. Interviewees did not stress the *ʻaqīda*: the Islamic creed that includes belief in one God, the angels, Scriptures, past Prophets, Day of Judgment, and God's power or justice.[43]

Many students said that believing in Islam is crucial for salvation because the prophet Muhammad renewed and established, once for all and in perpetuity, uncompromising belief in the oneness of God and because he revealed Scriptures (the Qur'an), preserved as complete and incorruptible. As Ahmad Khan, a Pakistani-American and MSA officer, explained, the Qur'an reveals "the most recent version" and "the original version" of "the religion of God." The prophets of the past, these Muslims believe, also revealed *islām*.[44] However, the purity of the message became corrupted over time; Muhammad was sent to bring back God's authentic message. In the words of Shems, most people "were originally Muslims, as they submitted themselves to God, they prostrated themselves to God; but Islam teaches us that over time after the Prophet passed away people changed the Book to make it more for their own will, add things or take

[43] However, it was not until the 2014-2015 year after most of these interviews that UC Riverside MSA organized a series of talks by *shaykh*s on the subjects of the *ʻaqīda*.
[44] This is a transliteration of the Arabic word that is the same as the name of the religion "Islam" to distinguish the world religion proclaimed by Muhammad that Muslims identify with from the idea of Muslims that prophets before Muhammad also proclaimed this same religion.

things away." It is this changing of the Book that makes other religions susceptible to committing *shirk* [idolatry].[45] Interviewees cited *shirk* as the only "unforgiveable sin," making one very vulnerable to depriving oneself of a joyful afterlife. *Shirk*, for them, consists in lack of belief in God, worshipping multiple gods, or making images of god(s). However, if one is "ignorant" of God, one may be forgiven. Husayn said, "It's Islam that's the path to *Jenna* [heaven], but God is the judge, so someone who is not Muslim can make it to *Jenna*."[46] Indeed, for him and Nuri, Muslims do not even know if they or other Muslims will be forgiven, let alone non-Muslims. Yet they also affirm the Qur'an to be the "complete" and unchanged guide to heaven. Husayn said that the Qur'an is like a weather forecasting tool, that other religions may also forecast the weather, but this revelation is the most accurate to "prepare for *Jenna*." It is for this reason, the preservation of the purity of the message of how to follow the one God revealed in the Qur'an, that some, like Mojdeh, believe "on the Day of Judgment the majority group that will be chosen to go to heaven will be amongst the *umma* [Muslim community], from Muhammad," even while some people of other religious communities are likely to be there also.

Students draw on statements in the Qur'an about God sending Messengers to the various regions of the planet to explain that even those ethnic groups and religions not explicitly mentioned as "People of the Book" could have also been recipients of divine inspiration and guidance. Munirah, whose family is from Pakistan, explained, "In the

[45] Literally, "to make partners or associates" with God, or polytheism and/or idolatry
[46] *Jenna* means paradise, heaven, or the garden, designating a peaceful, joyful, and delightful afterlife.

Qur'an God says I put all these prophets on earth, some of them are not mentioned (by name); I thought [to myself], you know, Hinduism too probably had a prophet and it just got corrupted." To some Muslims, Hindus worshiping the God(s) through *murti* [images and statues] and multiplicity of deities is a problematic or idolatrous. However, Barroq—who is a Palestinian-American preparing to enter medical school—agreed with Munirah. He cited a video of the popular Indian teacher and preacher of Islam, Zakir Naik, saying that "they all believe in one Being…in one God." This was evidence for him that Hinduism may have begun as revelation from the one God before many Hindus began to "believe there are different gods." Other students mentioned the Christian Trinity, the idea that the one God is three persons [the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost], as also compromising belief in the one God. Hence God needed to send Muhammad, give the Qur'an, and preserve the holy book from modifications to bestow on humanity a completely reliable testament until, and in preparation for, the universal Day of Judgment.

While Islam, for Muslim interviewees, provides the best guidance toward salvation, they did not believe it should be forced on others; rather, they believe the best approach is tolerance and friendliness towards others' right to conscientiously choose their own religion. Khadija said, "No compulsion in religion is really important to Islam; forcing people to be Muslims defeats the purpose as *islām* means voluntary submission to God." She saw this principle exemplified in "The Jews in Medina had an alliance with the Prophet and he wasn't forcing anyone to change their religion." Kawthar also asserted, "Everyone has a right to do whatever they think is correct as long as it doesn't

hurt anyone else." Layla, a creative writing major who studied at an Islamic institute after graduation, offered this ideal of respect as an application of the golden rule: "I don't believe the way you believe, but that doesn't mean that I can't relate to you as a human, and relate to you on that level; Islam is my way of life, and I hope that people can respect it, so I try to do the same thing for them." As an ostracized religious minority in Europe and North America, Muslims are keenly sensitive to this need for reciprocity: treating other religions as one wants others to treat one's own. In these ways they grounded their agreement with the first and second forms of pluralism, legal based respect to practice other religions and tolerance of religious others, in their interpretations of Islamic teachings.

They also spoke of this respect and kindness as being the best way to attract and "invite" others to Islam. Bayan explained, "If you're going to put down other people's ideas and beliefs, that's an automatic turn off for them, then they won't want to hear what you have to say, and you probably just give them a bad image about the religion." I asked him if he believes it is good to call people out if he thinks they are wrong. He said, "You can disagree with them, but in a polite way; you shouldn't say, 'you're an idiot'…that's wrong to do; you can just say 'no thank you,' I have already my belief in Allah." Barroq believes this respect for others, practicing the rituals, and being of good character are the best ways to tell others about Islam: "You don't have to tell others what to do and what not to do, as long as you're doing what you're supposed to do and you're not doing the things that you're not supposed to be doing, then you're a good model, then people will see you and say, that person is nice, maybe I should go learn more about it."

For them, kindness and respect towards others is both Islamically valuable for its own sake and is also a way of *da'wa* [teaching and inviting others to Islam] and creating a good image of Islam.

Key to these young people's positions on the question of non-Muslim's possible salvation in heaven is the ideal of not judging. For young adult Muslim Americans "judgmentalness" is among the worse sins one can commit.[47] By using the language of "not judging" they embody pluralistic ideals of respect towards others. With this language they also avoid stating an Islamic view that might be interpreted as intolerant.[48] Badiya, a sociology major and active MSA participant, explained, "It's not up to you to judge, you can't say 'they are for sure Muslim'; you don't know what other people are going through, don't know their intentions; God knows their good and bad deeds, God knows." Thus, being non-judgmental proceeds from acknowledging that one cannot truly know the situation and motivations of others' actions. Likewise, Bahir stated, "You can't see what is in someone's heart." Sana, a media studies major, elaborated on this point: "Everyone's situation is different, and God judges us based on our situation and life circumstances specifically… There are some people that may seem not very religious or practicing but may actually be very attached to God." Munirah decried the judgmental

[47] Shabana Mir, in her book, in fact calls "judgementalness…the cardinal sin" for them. See Mir, *Muslim American Women on Campus: Undergraduate Social Life and Identity* (2014), 163-164.
[48] In other words, Muslims who frequently feel under the disciplining effects of a public gaze that suspects them of disloyalty or not being "true Americans" are often extra cautious to not incriminate themselves as intolerant (i.e. non-American) by citing views from their religion that censures what are deemed as immoral views and practices. "In the case of Muslim Americans, behavior that might reflect on our perceived loyalty to the United States of America is under constant scrutiny… Our own understanding of what will be perceived as reasonable by which audience suits with our understanding of how we are perceived by that audience… We regulate our political expression to avoid fulfilling our stereotypes as suspect and disloyal." Saba Fatima, "Liberalism and the Muslim-American Predicament," *Social Theory and Practice* 40 (2014): 595-597.

statements she often observes in the Muslim community and averred, “Even God waits till the Day of Judgment to judge you, then these people have the audacity to judge you now.” For these young Muslims, not knowing what is truly in the heart of fellow human beings or the situation that has led them to certain actions, and recognizing God’s own delay in judgment, means that a Muslim should withhold judgment altogether.

For the young adult Muslims Americans, one can best develop this posture of non-judgmentalness by developing humility before God as the only perfect One and by recognizing that all people, as fellow human beings, share many of the same moral weaknesses. Samira said, “In a lot of verses of the Qur'an, Allah will say that He is most Just and He is Most Merciful, so who are we to say anything, because we are imperfect creatures.” Rather, as fellow imperfect creatures, our job is to “turn back and repent,” seeking God’s mercy and forgiveness. Meanwhile, Samira called for humans beings to be “empathetic and compassionate” towards one another, “because, who knows, one day you might be in that person’s situation.” Mojdeh related the ideal of non-judgmentalness to the Islamic virtue of humility, saying there is an Islamic ideal that “even those that have an apple’s seeds of arrogance will not get into heaven.” She said, “There is a verse in the Quran that says the servants of God are those who walk on the earth humbly.” She asked, “How are you going to do that if you are looking down on everyone that you are walking past every day? The trick is, you have to assume that everyone is better than you. You should assume that everyone that you meet is better than you so that you approach it correctly.”

I_ Islamic Soteriology

While recusing themselves from playing the part of moral arbitrators of other's souls, they did mention certain situations, such as ignorance of the Islamic truth, which may clear a person from guilt before God. Badiya explained, "In Islam, if you don't know about it, it's not your fault; if you have a lack of knowledge or wasn't explained to you properly; if you only believe in Moses, don't know the Prophet Muhammad, not your fault… God's not going to judge you on parts you don't know and cut you off." Indeed, Munirah recognized that with the massive amount of stereotyping of Muslims that occurs, others are likely to be "introduced into a negative view of Islam," and reject it purely from inaccurate information. Luqman spoke of the *surah* [chapter] of the Qur'an called *al-Bayyina*: "*Bayyina* means the clarity, in short it means the Prophet is the messenger, he came down and he gave a clear specific message and the people denied it, and this surah talks about that… God makes the distinction between those who are given the message but deny it and those that were never given the message." Thus, those who did not receive the clear and accurate message of Islam may not be guilty of denying what Muslims believe to be the latest and last of God's revelations.

These young adult Muslim Americans, furthermore, asserted that there are people of other faiths, or no particular faith, who may be quite worthy, in God's sight, of an afterlife of paradise through their belief in God and righteous deeds. Shems reported that he has heard that "God said people that are good will be plucked from hellfire and still be

able to enter *Jenna* [the Garden]."[49] When I asked Halala "Who goes to heaven?" she answered, "I think it's someone who has the best character, best and kindest character; I imagine someone, not necessarily Muslim, as there are those like of the time of Moses who were monotheistic and had this character, they would go to heaven… There's a *ḥadīth* that God loves those who have good character, who are the best in their nature." Likewise, Munirah said, "God…says the practicing Christian and Jewish would go, as long as everything else is correct, will go to heaven; and a lot of Muslims who declare themselves "Muslim," will not go to heaven… I would say that if they are being good, they will go to heaven." Mojdeh cited a *ḥadīth* "that says, there is one thing that will lead you to heaven or one thing that will let you enter heaven and that is a pure heart." She elucidated, "So if the Buddhist has a pure heart, if a Bahá'í has a pure heart, what am I going to say?"

I asked interviewees whether there are people who may not be literally "Muslim" in name but who may be fellow Muslims in many ways. Answering, many admitted to not having previously really considered this question. Yet upon considering the question, some affirmed that by the content of their heart and the way they conduct themselves, people of other faiths may truly be living the life of a Muslim in important ways. Sana said, "Even people who don't consider themselves Muslims, may consider themselves part of another religion, but maybe have amazing hearts and have amazing beliefs, those are great people too, I connect with them a lot." Husayn extended the ideal of *islām* to

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[49] Hadith seem to indicate that the prophet Muhammad may intercede on behalf of those in hellfire who have the least bit of faith and also those that did a "date"-fruit worth of good or charity. See Sahih Bukhari, Volume 9, Book 93, Number 600-603.

other religions when he explained, Islam means “submitting to God, so if you do something for the sake of God, it’s Islamic, it’s a good deed, depends on how you use the word. Someone praying to God, reaching out to God, it’s Islamic even if you’re Christian or something. God doesn’t just talk to Muslims and leave everyone behind, God reaches out to everyone.” Munirah said, “I would say [if] they are good human beings, they are good Muslims.” Likewise, Nuri stated, “They may not be Muslim in name but maybe they go through their whole life believing in one God and doing righteous things.” Luqman expounded, “You find people in other faiths that have outstanding morals and character, and you also find people who are Muslims, born into Islam, but don't practice these things of good morals or ethics.” Adeela, an ethnic studies major very passionate about social justice and equity, answered my question “Who is a Muslim?” with “I don't like to put people in a box or box them in; anyone who believes in God and strives to live in a good way, humble and reverent, not just people calling themselves "Muslim".” Layla tries to see each person as having *fiṭra*—that is, the human soul’s intrinsic potential and disposition to worship God and surrender to His will: “Everyone has it, so might become Muslim” and if not she said she can “still relate to you as a human…but I hope I can help people learn about Islam and fall in love with it… I don’t want Islam to make differences and obstacles of friendships between human beings.”

The continuum between exclusive and inclusive approaches to who is truly a ‘Muslim’ or believer in God was exemplified by two different veteran, local *shaykh*s of Islam that gave lectures to UC Riverside’s MSA in the fall 2013 quarter. The first, Hasan Radi who is an *imam* in neighboring Moreno Valley, California and the principal of the

Islamic Academy of Riverside, interpreted the idea of the "believer" in broad, universalistic terms. He said that the Qur'an is about the "*mū'minūn* [believer]" instead of what came to be conceived as the historic community of Muslims. He stated that only two hundred and fifty of the over six thousand verses of the Qur'an are about the pillars of Islam while most of the rest are about believing in God and doing good deeds. To him, anyone who believes and consistently does good deeds will gain God's good-pleasure and attain Paradise. He quoted a *ḥadīth*, "Ye are not a true believer until you love for your brother that which you love for yourself," interpreting "your brother" as all humankind, "all children of Adam."[50] He quoted another *ḥadīth* that said going out to help others is even better than worshipping for a month in the *masjid* [mosque]. He closed by recounting Leo Tolstoy's story "What Men Live By" about the angel of death being sent to be a mortal man to learn that God allows seeming imperfections in this world to provide opportunities for people to show forth true love.[51] In other words, for him, being a Muslim, even more than believing in Muhammad or fulfilling the prayers, was about having such faith in the God of *Raḥmān* [mercy, compassion, grace] that acts of loving-kindness becomes the dominating concern of our lives.

The following week, came another well-respected *shaykh*, Imad Bayoun, who works in an academic department at UC Riverside and also serves as advisor to the MSA. He stated that since the holy books of past religions were corrupted, it is only Muslims who truly know through the Qur'an the way of pure belief in God, good deeds, and fulfilling

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[50] From al-Bukhari, volume 1, book 2, number 12.
[51] Author's notes, lecture, Highlander Union Building, UC Riverside, November 26, 2013.

ritual acts of devotion to become closer to God. The only way for people who are non-Muslim to get Paradise is not by their faith but by their "excuse" that they could not get the message or got the message in a corrupted way. In a later lecture he elaborated: "God will know whose excuse is acceptable and He is All-Just, so leave it in His hands. Also children of other faiths who die before the age of maturity will attain paradise. This is based on God's infinite justice, infinite mercy, and infinite wisdom." Hence, the first *shaykh* interpreted that anyone of any or no religion could be a true follower of God, while the second *shaykh* believed true followers of God to be found in the historic Muslim community.[52]

II_ Finding Common Ground

Seeing that other religions shared many teachings with Islam, young adult Muslims believed the best approach was to look for common ground with people of other faiths rather than focus on differences. When I asked Adeela, "What do you think of people who practice other religions?" she answered, "I often find I have a lot more in common with them than not; we find that we can talk about what we like about our faiths; they often live humble and reverent lives as well…" Kawthar also saw "more commonalities than differences" in "a lot of the religions," each one helping their followers deal with difficulties. Farooz emphasized Islam, Christianity, and Judaism all having the story of Adam and Eve's temptation in the Garden of Eden. Qatara also found

[52] Author's notes, lectures, Highlander Union Building, UC Riverside, December 3, 2013 and November 4, 2014.

the prophets Abraham and Moses emphasized in all three religious traditions. Barroq, as mentioned above, was happy to learn that many Hindus believe in one God with many manifestations of divinity. Nadra saw similarities in Buddhist meditation and Islamic *salah* [ritual prayer], both prompting a person to rise above material interests. Khadija said, "[I] like the ideas of karma and morals" in Buddhism, "what actions you do comes back to you, and what you do in this life makes your condition in the next life"—an idea she finds also emphasized in Islam in different words. She says that if she had not chosen to follow Islam, the religion she was brought up with, then she "probably would have become Buddhist."

III_ Learning from other religions

Some interviewees also mentioned that it is crucial to learn about and from other religions. This is not just to connect with others by finding commonalities, but to recognize that our diverse global communities make it imperative for each person to endeavor to become increasingly cosmopolitan.[53] Bahaaj, a Palestian-American studying business administration, explained:

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[53] Cosmopolitan literally means "citizen of the world." My use of it is derived from that of Shoghi Rabbani in which while "patriotism" and other "lesser loyalties" are "safeguarded" and "preserved," a world citizen's principle solidarity lies with her genuine love for all of humankind, "of whatever race, creed, class or nation," striving to be "the determined upholders of its best and truest interests." She "subordinates, without hesitation or equivocation, every particularistic interest, be it personal, regional, or national, to the paramount interests of humanity, firmly convinced that in a world of inter-dependent peoples and nations the advantage of the part is best to be reached by the advantage of the whole, and that no abiding benefit can be conferred upon the component parts if the general interests of the entity itself are ignored or neglected." See Shoghi Effendi Rabbani, *The World Order of Baha'u'llah* (Wilmette, Illinois: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1974), 197-198. Kwame Anthony Appiah similarly argues that an ethical form of cosmopolitanism is both local and global, being in fellowship and cooperation for goals of collective well-being with one's particular community and human beings of any other religious, ethnic, national, political,

> This is a world where billions of people live, it's not one religion or one race that makes up this world, you need to learn about your neighbors, you need to love your neighbors, you need to care about people who believe in different things and of different backgrounds and different ethnicities; you need to be open-minded, that's one thing that will lead to peaceful solutions, the whole world learning about one another; you can't be confined in a box just because this is something we were raised with, something we were born with, that's ignorance.

Hamza knows that in his future career in medicine, he will "be interacting with people of different faiths." Wanting "to make them comfortable with any treatment they are going through," he finds it very important "to hear about the different philosophies and find out what the similarities are and what the differences are." For Kawthar, negotiating diversity goes beyond caring for one another despite differences but to learn about each other to promote peaceful solutions. She asserted, "I see that this world is diverse for a reason, we can learn from other people; we live in a time where we have access to all types of people and communities; we can learn so much listening to them and their beliefs."

Many of these young adults have seemingly taken to heart the value of learning about other people's religions. In my June 2014 survey, over 50% of respondents self-assessed that they know "a moderate amount" about religions other than Islam, plus a further 22% marked that they know "a lot" about other religions. Just 3.3% of respondents saw themselves as knowing "very little" about other religions, and 24% said they know "some things" about other religions.

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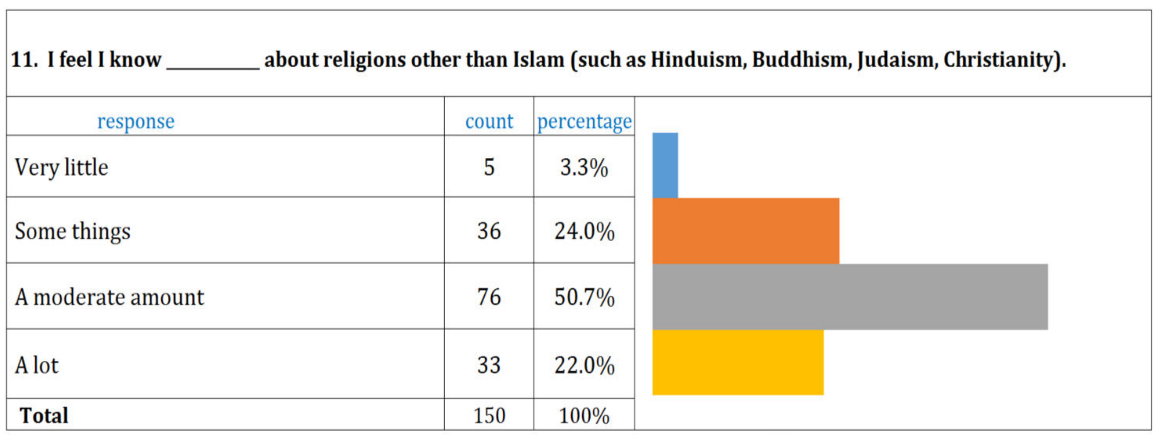
gender, or sexual identity than oneself. See Kwame Anthony Appiah, *Ethics of Identity* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2005), 222-223.

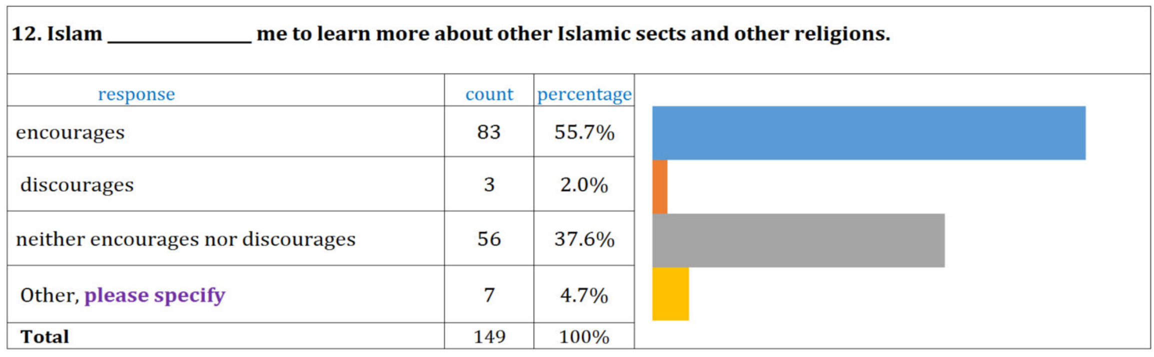


11. I feel I know _________ about religions other than Islam (such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity).

response	count	percentage
Very little	5	3.3%
Some things	36	24.0%
A moderate amount	76	50.7%
A lot	33	22.0%
Total	150	100%

Table 10: June 2014 Survey of Young Adult Muslim Americans, levels of knowledge of others' religions, by Daniel Azim Pschaida

We cannot tell from this survey if this familiarity with other religions stems primarily from public education, such as curriculum on world religions in social studies in junior high and high school, if these students went out of their way to take a world religions course in university or did their own research. However, a majority of respondents to the next survey question indicated that Islamic ideals have inspired them to try to learn more about religious diversity within and outside of Islam. 55.7% marked that Islam "encourages" them to learn about religious diversity, and this number increases to 58% when adding the four of the seven answers in "Other, please specify" that spoke of the same ideal. However, over a third of my respondents indicated that Islam "neither encourages nor discourages" them to learn about other religions.



12. Islam ____________ me to learn more about other Islamic sects and other religions.

response	count	percentage
encourages	83	55.7%
discourages	3	2.0%
neither encourages nor discourages	56	37.6%
Other, please specify	7	4.7%
Total	149	100%

Table 11: June 2014 Survey, Islam as inspiration for learning about religious diversity, by Daniel Azim Pschaida

Living in a very religiously heterogeneous society, and one which increasingly values and celebrates diversity in discourse and public events, may be the chief factor in encouraging these young adults to understand better both Islamic diversity and other religions. Many interviewees said that growing up in a Christian majority country, they wished to understand better this predominant religion of the United States. Living in a country in which one's own religion is different than that of most one's neighbors and classmates may prompt a defensive approach in which people assert the superiority of their own religion and strive to inoculate themselves in faith-based enclaves from anything which might contradict their beliefs and practices. For many others, such an environment seems to encourage understanding others' religions and developing a degree of positive regard for those others to motivate respectful social relations.

The Muslim Student Association and Intra-Faith Diversity

The politics of recognition and the dilemmas of inclusion for religious groups, such as the Muslims on campus, mirror those that face a democratic nation-state. While legal precedent has allowed a multiplicity of religious beliefs and practices within the

United States, historically influential advocates of particular religious identities have conflated specific liberal values with specific religious allegiances and racial constructs, labelling as morally suspect those with a different racial and/or religious background. These advocates, pundits, and political spokespersons have often framed United States' national identity in exclusivist terms. They have rhetorically, legally, and sometimes physically assaulted Irish, Italian, and Latino Catholics, eastern European and Russian Jews, Native Americans, and Africans brought to the country in chains. These voices of national identity have contrasted their own projected, enlightened rationality, racial superiority, and 'good' religion with that of the superstition, inferior stock, and unethical religion of the other.[54] Many individuals of these *othered* groups, pressured by visions of what constituted a good American, embraced Protestant Christianity, took on English names, and formed ethnic organizations. Some of the immigrant ethnic organizations even argued in American courts that they were in fact "white" and deserving of citizenship.[55] Others who could not change their racial characteristics enough to argue whiteness and would not convert to mainstream forms of denominational Protestant Christianity found that to be accepted they must at least emulate the intellectual, political, and religious formations of their host society.[56]

Partly in reaction to the visceral horrors manifested by Nazi intolerance and to form a common religious alliance against "godless Fascism" in World War II, from the

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[54] William R. Hutchison, *Religious Pluralism in America*, 2, 17, 49, 182; Kambiz GhaneaBassiri, *A History of Islam in America: From the New World to the New World Order* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 98-106.
[55] GhaneaBassiri, *A History of Islam in America* (2010), 162-164.
[56] William R. Hutchison, *Religious Pluralism in America*, 124, 128.

1950s Protestantism, Catholicism, and Judaism were increasingly proclaimed to be the religious foundations of this (newly coined) "Judeo-Christian" country.[57] Native American traditional practices such as the peyote sacrament of the Native American Church remained suspect and intermittently persecuted by Christian missionaries and government forces who implemented various plans for cultural reprogramming of America's indigenous inhabitants.[58] African American churches (including those that embraced Islamic symbols) often sought to self-censure "emotionalism" in a politics of respectability even while emotional religious expressions were popularized in emerging charismatic and Neo-Pentecostal white churches.[59] Hindus from South Asia and Buddhists from East and Southeast Asia, although initially rejected as "not white," have drawn on the 1960s immigration laws that welcomed the highly educated to fashion images as "model minorities," and at the same time they have built on the value of

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[57] William R. Hutchison, *Religious Pluralism in America*, 196-201; James Terence Fisher, *Communion of Immigrants: A History of Catholics in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), ix-x, 124, 143-5.
[58] William A. Young, *Quest for Harmony: Native Americans Spiritual Traditions* (New York: Seven Bridges Press, 2002), 40, 42-44, 56, 308-313, 325-326
[59] Frazier traces an emerging Middle Class of African Americans, mainly in cities of the North, who largely leave the Methodist and Baptist folk traditions to join churches that they deem more intellectual, emotionally subdued, and fine, striving to replicate images of White church. In this aesthetic and these politics of 'respectability' acceptance and self-worth is seen to come from following in a white-middle class lifestyle. See E. Franklin Frazier, "The Negro Church and Assimilation," eds. Cornel West and Eddie S. Glaude, Jr., *African American Religious Thought: An Anthology* (Westminster: John Knox Press, 2003), 60; Fredrick C. Harris, "The Rise of Respectability Politics," *Dissent* (Winter 2014), http://www.dissentmagazine.org/article/the-rise-of-respectability-politics (accessed March 17, 2015); Moorish Science Temple and the Nation of Islam…sought to universalize African American experiences in a way that would reconfigure the conflation of race, religion, and progress to "de-negrofy" their followers and to allow blacks to partake in American modernity," GhaneaBassiri, *A History of Islam in America*, 226-227; Noble Drew Ali and Elijah Muhammad "were appealing to Islam as a means of raising the concerns spirit of Black Religion to train new level of respectability among Blackamericans, just as Christianity had facilitated the appeal to white America in earlier times," Sherman A. Jackson, *Islam and the Blackamerican: Looking Toward the Third Resurrection* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 43-44.

multiculturalism to become exotic yet welcomed others.[60] While immigrant Muslims and their children have attempted to tap into these same politics [i.e. "model minority" and "multiculturalism"] global and domestic terrorism has not only sustained but fueled their stigmatization as suspect citizens at best and foreign viruses at worse.[61]

The young generation of Muslims would like the greater American society to consistently accept them as equals, fellow citizens and as followers of a respected religion, as valued facets of American diversity. However, ironically, the young Muslims may not always extend this hoped for acceptance to some other Muslims who may wish to participate in the Muslim Student Association. In the Muslim Student Associations, there is a tension between those who take inclusivity and diversity as the central values of the organization and those who believe faithfulness to their version of Sunni Islam is the fundamental principle for their campus organization. Those who take the first approach maintain that unity in diversity is more important in organizational management than implementing any specific Islamic teaching or practice, welcoming any fellow student who identifies as "Muslim" to participate and contribute his or her unique flavor of Islam to the group. Those who take the latter approach believe that a set of basic beliefs and practices constitutes a Muslim as a Muslim, and beliefs and practices that are different from this kind of Muslim-ness not only deviate from Islam but may also threaten the

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[60] Vijay Prashad, *The Karma of Brown Folk* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 198-199, 211-215; Gurinder Singh Mann, Paul David Numrich, and Raymond B. Williams, *Buddhists, Hindus, and Sikhs in America: A Short History* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 29.
[61] The Islamic Society of North America has been in the forefront of these Muslim efforts to articulate an Islamic identity fully compatible with Liberal American values. Although it has been stymied each time a horrific violent act occurs, domestically or abroad, in the name of Islam, these moments have also become occasions for this organization to make public statements condemning these acts as the wrong kind of Islam

identity of the group. They think that everyone who would like to participate in the MSA should be ready to embrace the established Sunni way. Those students with Muslim identities that are in some way distinct from the MSA leadership often feel dismissed or rejected rather than welcomed as valued and equal members of the student organization.

Marcia Hermansen's research on college campus Muslim organizations noted the word *kāfir* [unbeliever, infidel] frequently deployed to censor and dismiss not just non-Muslims but Muslims who diverged in some way to the approach of leaders of the student group.[62] UC Riverside's and neighboring MSA's participants did not tell me that this word was used or wielded as a weapon of authority. Multiple students cited a *ḥadīth* that said if you called someone a *kāfir*, one of the two people in this situation is indeed a *kāfir*. Nabeel commented, "It might be either." In other words, the act of judging someone as an infidel might in itself bring upon one a state of an infidel. "Someone might be a Muslim later," he said, "maybe a much better Muslim than oneself." Nonetheless, Muslim Student Association leaders and members have a difficult time working with the diversity of Muslim belief and practice, often striving to veil differences, other times censuring it, often tolerating it but much less often actively attempting to learn about and embrace it.

One of the most inclusive approaches to a Muslim Student Association was constituted in 2011 as an interfaith group. This was largely forced upon its founder,

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[62] "*Kafir* in American Muslim youth culture has been extended to signify anyone who is different than you, rather like the semantic function of "honkey" in Black Power discourse. It migrates from the theological referent of being a denier of God to that of non-Muslim, or anyone, even another Muslim, co-opted by the majority Western system." Marcia Hermansen, "How to Put the Genie Back in the Bottle: 'Identity Islam' and Muslim Youth Cultures in America," *Progressive Muslims*, ed. Omid Safi (Oneworld Publications, Kindle Edition, 2011), kindle location 8056.

Amarra Ghani, who had great difficulty finding other Muslim students at the University of North Carolina Ashville, although she even tried emailing those in the school directory who had a Muslim-sounding name. Finding instead a kindred spirit in a Jewish classmate, the two organized an evening vigil in solidarity with the lives lost in Egypt's Tahrir Square peaceful protests in 2011 and the organization was born. She reported that eighty students signed up for the association and only "three or four" were Muslims. Christians, Jews, and non-affiliated students also served on their board and their faculty advisor was a Mormon. Looking for religious fellowship, living far away from her home in New Jersey, what she found in this interfaith approach was not a diluting of her faith but:

> At that time, I learned more about Islam and myself than I had interacting with Muslims my entire life. The community I longed for has been extended through an interfaith base. No race, religion or ethnicity is restricted in my ever-growing interfaith family and I am grateful for it. Islam is about compassion and I think we, as Muslims, forget that sometimes when we live in our bubble. Stepping outside of it is one way to truly test who you are and where you stand in your faith. I have attended several synagogues, churches and temples, and have openly participated in these services because of my interactions with my friends and colleagues at school.[63]

Although this fully interfaith approach is so different that other MSAs may not even consider it an MSA, and the author's experience is anecdotal, Eboo Patel's work with the Interfaith Youth Core has also found religious identities strengthened through developing vital links with leaders of other religions.[64]

In their approach to organizing and planning events for Muslim Student Association events, young adult Muslim Americans usually concentrate on what they believe all participants should have in common instead of highlighting possible differences. In this *common denominator* approach, they elide distinctions between varying sects and invite

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[63] Amarra Ghani, "An Interfaith Muslim Student Association," *Azizah* 7, 3 (May 2013), 66-67. Proquest: http://search.proquest.com/docview/1370696374?accountid=14521 (Accessed March 20, 2015)

[64] Eboo Patel, *Acts of Faith* (2007), 165-168.

speakers to give talks on facets of the religion they understand Sunnis, Shias, Sufis, Salafis, African Americans, or Ahmadiyyas may all share.[65] Such topics mentioned by leadership and observed in programing included the Five Pillars of Islam, the Islamic Creed/*'Aqīda*, love of God, and living a moral and God-conscious (*taqwa*) life. MSA of UC Riverside officer Nuri explained: "There is no need to think about special nurturing of Shias or anything else. We try to bring in topics that everyone will be interested in, and try to stay away from controversial topics; just trying to come together as brothers and sisters in Islam." Former officer Bayan believed that showcasing diversity of sects and schools of opinion in Islam is divisive and counterproductive for MSA members: "MSA should just focus on the basic principles of Islam, that's the simplest thing. People always forget the basics and the principles, so reinforce the basics…because once you start bringing in different things, you start breaking up community; you realize there's differences and start focusing on those differences."[66] Hence, while young adult Muslim Americans take pride in MSA and similar groups as transcending the ethnic barriers that often constrain their parents' generation, this kind of unity they create may be characterized as a unity in commonalities rather than a unity in diversity. This approach attempts to not just be "color-blind" but sect-blind, forgetting that it is important to better

[65] The second largest of the two main denominational divisions within Islam, شيعة or shīʾah is variously transliterated as Shia, Shiah, Shi'ite, Shii, Shi'i, Shi'a, or Shi'ah. For simplicity, I will use "Shia" to refer to both the denomination and followers of the denomination.
[66] The desire to create an image of a unified front proceeds from perceived attack from the hegemonic "Christian world," see Ali S. Asani, "On Muslims knowing the "Muslim other": Reflections on Pluralism and Islam," *Muslims in the United States: Identity, Influence, Innovation*," ed. Philippa Strum (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 2005), 182. This is a strategy that projects legitimation of one's own type of Sunni Islam as majoritarian and orthodox and at the same time justifies ostracizing other Islamic identities as problematic.

understand people of varying cultural, ethnic, racial, and religious backgrounds in order to recognize what they bring to the table and to treat them sensitively and humanely.[67] They also forget that learning about other sects is also learning about Islam.

Most student leaders, thus, rejected that benefits outweigh the costs of bringing in speakers who could discuss varied denominations and schools of thought within Islam. When I asked the outgoing president of UC Irvine's MSA, "Is it appropriate or important to help teach members about the diversity of belief, practices, and sects within Islam?" he answered, "Generally, in our classes, not necessarily focused on a specific sect, much more spiritual and to the heart, a wide scope of things rather than a specific issue." Bayan similarly responded to this question, "I don't think it's a good idea, because once you allow a group a certain allowance then they'll want more or another group will say, 'What about us?' and you can't please everyone… so if you're someone else and want to learn, if you're Shia and want to learn that, go somewhere else where they do that, if you're Sunni, go there." He believes there are other forums that exist in the wider Muslim communities that can accommodate particular sectarian interests. MSA functions to heighten interest in Islam and to fan excitement about having a Muslim identity. MSA cannot cater to each niche-interest so they attempt to create programming that would be of interest to students of varied backgrounds. Unfortunately, by exclusively using this approach, they sacrifice learning about some of the diversity within their own faith's

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[67] Although Abdo uses the words "color-blind faith" and "multiculturalism" interchangeably, I argue that these two approaches toward diversity are vastly different, the first attempting to obfuscate differences and the latter embracing differences as human ornaments that should be learned about and celebrated. See Geneive Abdo, *Mecca and Main Street: Muslim Life in America after 9/11* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 196.

interpretive authorities and their memberships' own practices, undermining their often quoted thirteenth verse of chapter forty-nine of the Qur'an: "O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you into peoples and tribes that you may know one another."

This approach of omitting diversity in their programming was exemplified in an incident in UC Riverside's MSA in the year prior to my research. A few interviewees told me that a group of Shia student members approached the MSA leadership to get permission to organize a *Muharram*/*'Ashura* event under the aegis of MSA.[68] The board did not know how to proceed with this request and so they consulted their campus organization advisor Imad Bayoun. He, reportedly, told the board members that having such an event would create too much "confusion" while many of the members were still struggling to learn the "basics" of Islam. Thus, they rejected the Shia students' request, a rejection that may have created a falling out with some of the Shia participants. An officer during this episode explained the reasoning behind this decision: "This prevents us from having a lot of conflict, because some members have things that might be offensive to others… We want to be on common ground with everybody, and most sects accept that."

Finding this "common ground" often is based on judgments by leadership of what is "pure" or foundational to their religious tradition. The officer mentioned in the above incident, who then served as president, said, "It sounds harsh but…for us our club is only

[68] *Muharram* and *'Ashura* commemorates the sacrificial martyrdom of their third Imam named Husayn on the plain of Karbila, killed by the army of Yazid I who Shias (and Sunnis) believe was a usurper of the Islamic Caliphate/leadership, having been appointed by his father, effectively transforming the Sunni Caliphate into a monarchy and preying on the Shia Imams/leaders.

based on the Quran and Sunna, what is outside of that we reject it. There is a concept of *bida'* [heretical innovation] and we do not acknowledge it and we do not propagate it." Asking him about Sufi dance, he answered, "That did not exist in the Prophet's time and none of his companions practiced this tradition or form of worship." He affirmed others' right to practice these things on their own time, outside the MSA, "but we follow Quran and Sunna so this way everybody feels loved" instead of offended by practices different from their own denominational approach. However, he did not believe that MSA should hold any events that would explicitly "go against" Sufi or Shia theology either, because "you can get into a very sticky situation." He also acknowledged that his stance is [a version of] Sunni Islam and if the majority of the MSA membership were Sufi or Shia "then things would be different and this type of stuff would be more acceptable because there would be a big demand for this." Likewise, in February 2015 UC Riverside's African American Student Center approached the MSA to co-host an African American History Month event, but there was resistance when the Student Center wanted to bring in a member of the Nation of Islam as one of the speakers.[69] In these incidents and the officer's discourse, we can see that MSA is an organization that does not just try to represent their wider membership but, rather, board members believe it is part of their role to be religious arbitrators of the accepted boundaries of "true" Islam.

On the other hand, in recent years, leaders of some MSAs believe the organization should not just emphasize similarities but should be a forum for learning about

[69] Many Sunni Muslims view the Nation of Islam, now led by Louis Farrakhan, as an aberrant and highly problematic form of the Faith for the view that the "white man is the devil," their emphasis on racial separation, and their focus on Elijah Muhammad (1897-1975) as a prophet instead of Muhammad ibn Abdallah (570-632 CE).

differences. A formerly very active MSA member critiqued the above-described posture of the organization. “This is not something they are good at: embracing diversity. This is one of my problems. I tried so hard to have an interfaith dialog between the Shia and the Sunni and their excuse was this will bring more attention to the differences. And I talked to the Shias and they were really thinking about forming their own MSA,” due to this lack of sensitivity to their own beliefs, practices, and concerns. Adeela also believes, “We have to recognize the differences we have so we can be more cohesive as a global community.” Rafeeq of the Cal State University San Bernardino MSA, similarly asserted: “We should focus on things in common as well as differences, or we would not be following Islam to its fullest. In the time of the Prophet even the diversity was acknowledged.” He believes that in the years of Muhammad a wide range of approaches to Islam was deemed acceptable and Muslims of today should also have an inclusive approach that recognizes the diversity.

MSA officers, in contrast, said that they try to avoid hosting official events with topics that have a range of acceptable opinions within Islam. Nuri explained, “We try…to stay away from controversial topics… Let's say I'm eating a burger at In-N-Out and someone feels I can't eat that burger…I can't look at you and say that you're doing something that's *ḥarām*, not eating *d͟habīḥa*… because there's scholars on each side and have done their research and on both sides; and it's part of intentions, if you feel like it's okay, then okay.” Bayan said, “There are lots of opinions about different things, following one doesn’t mean you’re wrong because the other person is doing it different; rather…focus on the main foundations and principles which is more important than all

the knickknack things that people bicker about." He gave the example, "So music isn't allowed in Islam, or oh yes it is… sometimes they'll have a topic on one of these things if someone is demanding it, but if it is going to cause a lot of conflict they'll stay away from it…" Desiring to promote unity, they avoid topics—like music or which meat is *ḥalāl*—with a range of acceptable opinions. The downside of this approach is that many students may gain a false impression that there is a single approach to the Faith that is correct instead of gaining examples of ways in which a range of interpretations may be legitimate.

Sometimes the problem is not so much the sect of a particular speaker but the views and style of a lecturer. MSAs try hard to avoid events that would obviously create disunity or discord. An officer of Cal Poly Pomona's MSA described an incident in which a member wanted to bring in a Shia scholar, but the president at that time believed this speaker to be someone who vehemently expressed anti-Sunni views. He said, "Even if you're different denomination you shouldn't bag on the other." He told the member that it is okay to find a Shia teacher to speak but someone who can speak on something of common interest that would not offend varying sects. But "then that guy never came back." He reflected, "It was disconnect, I don't know, it was a bad situation."

While the common denominator approach is default for most MSAs, some years MSA leadership have worked to practice an inclusiveness that embraces differences instead of attempting to mask them. In 2011-2012, acknowledging that "MSA is more Sunni" and so Shias "engage socially" while often creating their own religious spaces, the leadership of UC Berkeley's MSA strived to create an environment of "open dialogue

and understanding… whether or not one is Shia." They made "informal agreements" to "bring two Shia *khaṭīb*s (Friday sermon-giver) per semester," to recite a prayer from the Imam and Caliph ʻAli ibn Abu Talib, and to have "specific events around Muharram, to educate about the Shia understandings of this history." Meanwhile, explained their former president, "When it came to Sufi and Salafi stuff, in terms of spiritual education, we try to keep things as broadly applicable as possible, and try not to make things inflammatory to folks or take on a particular ideological leaning," keeping the commonalities framework. After the 2013-2014 academic year, I asked the then outgoing president if the board envisioned the need to also understand the diversity that exists in the Muslim communities. She replied, in contrast to other presidents who see themselves partly as adjudicators of what is Islamic, that "there comes a point where as a MSA board member, you need to recognize you're not in a position to make calls on religion." She believed the MSA "can and should find ways to acknowledge and appreciate the diversity of opinions in the community; but for me, I didn't find a good way to go ahead and do that, maybe that's a weakness with me, but I didn't feel like I had the expertise to do so." She said they planned to have an event and consulted with the Shia students to bring in a scholar who could explain some of the similarities, like they "don't have a different Qur'an, "but [such events] just stayed in the development stages." Indeed, since this model of promoting awareness of Islamic diversity is very new for most MSAs, figuring out how to base programming upon it is often slow and tottering.

In 2012-2013, working with their advisor from the anthropology department, the University of Washington MSA held a series of Intra-Faith Unity Dialogues.[70] An officer from that year explained that the impetus for these dialogues was to try to "bridge a gap between Sunni and Shia students and how events can be held to engage and honor both understandings of Islam…making sure that every member understood that there were two sides to the coin and that the minority's presence needed to at the very least be recognized."[71] This officer had been in conversation with three Shia young women who "felt like they were not being allowed to practice the way they wanted" and that "events were only geared toward a Sunni way of Islam." He had to convince them to stay engaged and keep contributing ideas for events. Indeed, in the second dialogue the advisor began the meeting by asking the poignant question, "Is MSA for representing Islam or for representing its Muslim membership?" He believed the latter was the healthier choice to make it an inclusive forum of the diverse members of the university student body who identify as Muslim. A Shia student encouraged the board to make efforts for Shias to feel as included in this MSA as Sunnis. Later, the president of the MSA anxiously asked if there are limits to what practices should be included within the student group. This question remained unanswered: each Muslim Student Association has to figure out for itself if it would represent what was perceived to be the majority and/or

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[70] While this anthropology professor is Latino and Muslim, Bilici uncovers similar interfaith dialogue work led by African American Muslim and activist in CAIR, Dawud Walid, to "bridge the gaps" between African American and immigrant Muslims and between Sunnis and Shias. See Mucahit Bilici, *Finding Mecca in America: How Islam Is Becoming an American Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 155.
[71] MSA University of Washington officer, Facebook chat message to the author, October 22, 2013.

the common denominator or create programming that recognized the diverse approaches to Islam.

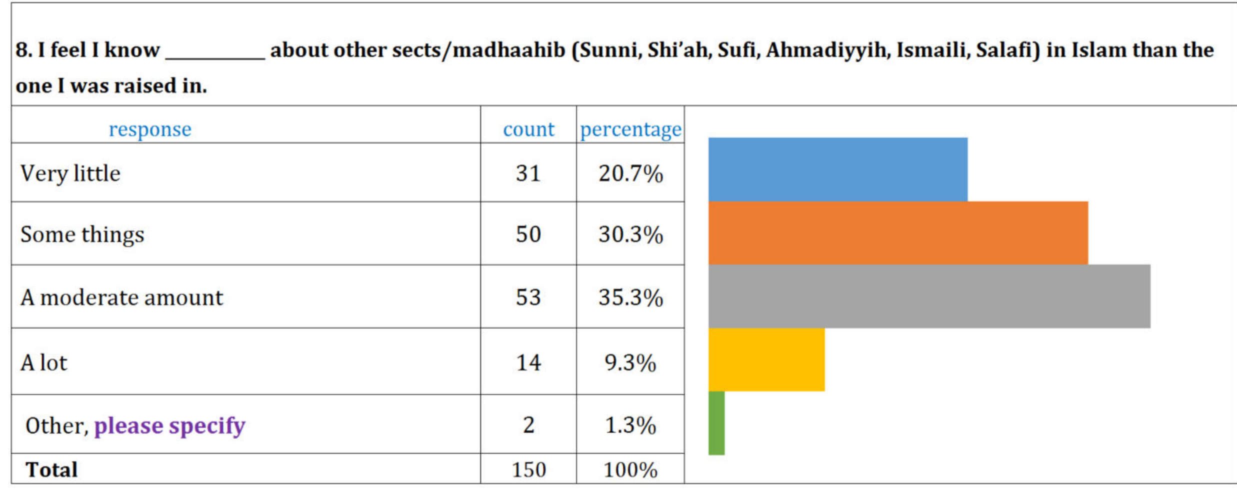
Cal State University San Bernardino attempted to represent its diverse members by having a lecture series in the 2014 Winter quarter. The president explained, “Students in our MSA would give lectures, and we had one of the members who is a Shia give a lecture on *khaṭīb*s [preachers on the pulpit] who are Shia, so get a different perspective… It was really educational, because even a lot of the Muslims don't really know much about the Shias; so we try to educate each person about it.” Since Muslims in general are part of one of the most negatively stereotyped religious communities, a Shia member of the UCR MSA believes Muslims should know to be more sensitive to the situation of those who may in turn be discriminated against within Muslim communities. He said that “knowing what it is like to be discriminated against,” he tries to be open-minded, to listen and learn about differences. He stated, “Our religion teaches us to be lenient and willing to listen, but we can't even be lenient and listen and be accepting of a sect in our own religion.” I asked MSA UCR officer Samira what she would say as a board member if someone from a Shia or Sufi background wanted to present in the general MSA meeting something unique about their own approach to Islam, and she answered, “I would say go for it, because it is a part of Islam, it is a sect of our religion.” Nonetheless, she acknowledged that when the Shia students wanted to present in the previous year, she felt the MSA board would “get some heat” if they approved of it: “I didn’t know what I would do” and felt the “need to consult with someone more knowledgeable on this.” Thus, embracing diversity instead of trying to hide it is new ground for most MSAs, and

board members fall back on the system that has "worked" before instead of attempting to trail blaze new and potentially precarious territory.

The MSA of UCLA has had Shia Muslim students serving on its board, and one of its officers claimed that this helped the leadership be more sensitive to the needs of Shia Muslim colleagues. They attempted to create programming that includes communal prayer at a time that works for Shia and Sunni prayer times, which sometimes diverge. She also said that they keep in the MSA office, accessible to all students, prayer rugs, headscarves for women who may not be *ḥijābī* to use in prayer, and stones that Shia press their heads against in *salah* prayer prostrations. They have also had a recent Shia college graduate lead an MSA class on *tafsīr* [the Islamic science of interpreting the Qur'an]. Thus, instead of just dismissing Shia ways as *bida'* [heretical innovation], this MSA leadership has made efforts to be inclusive and accommodating to some of the unique ways that makes Shia Muslim students Shia.

In my June 2014 survey, most MSA participants reported that they do not necessarily come into the MSA, or leave it, with a solid understanding of forms of Islam different than the one in which they were raised. A large minority of respondents, 35.3%, self-assessed that they knew "a moderate amount" about "other sects," with an additional 9.3% who self-assessed as knowing "a lot" about other Islamic forms. However, 51% of respondents responded that they knew "very little" or "some things" about "other sects/madhaahib…in Islam" than the one in which he or she was raised. Although individual research online, in books, or through a formal class at university or at an Islamic institute is likely the best place to increase understanding about Islamic others for

the majority of MSA participants, having programming that acknowledges and introduces some basics about Shia, Sunni, Sufi, or African American forms of Islam could be helpful to initiating this learning. Such programming would also encourage an identity that does not just emphasize Islamic unity but one that also appreciates differences.



8. I feel I know __________ about other sects/madhaahib (Sunni, Shi'ah, Sufi, Ahmadiyyih, Ismaili, Salafi) in Islam than the one I was raised in.

response	count	percentage
Very little	31	20.7%
Some things	50	30.3%
A moderate amount	53	35.3%
A lot	14	9.3%
Other, **please specify**	2	1.3%
Total	150	100%

Table 12: June 2014 Survey, knowledge of intra-faith diversity, by Daniel Azim Pschaida

While the common denominator approach may succeed in veiling diversity within the general meeting, differences frequently raise their head in the common areas of prayer. Having purported that Islam is a unified tradition, in which what is "right is clear and what is wrong is clear,"[72] some MSA members may react with confusion, dismissal, or censure when they encounter peers praying in distinct ways. Shirin, growing up in a "mixed" mosque in which Sunnis and Shias pray together, is not perturbed when a Shia prays differently than she does: "In the Med [meditation & prayer] Room we have some Shia that pray right next to me, it doesn't matter, as even in the Qur'an it doesn't say

[72] Most officers who used this language also understood there is also a range of practice that is acceptable yet stressed this latter idea much less than the former in their public discourse among fellow Muslims.

exactly how we should pray; it doesn't say how you should bow down or how to make *wudu'* for example; as long as you're praying...” However, not everyone has such a harmonious posture. Baseem, a Shia, finds that although some sincerely want to learn and may ask “if I had a different Qur'an,” some other “Sunnis…are very critical or close minded.” Hence, “a lot of Shia brothers are uncomfortable to go to the Med Room to pray, because they are afraid to be scrutinized or criticized.” He has heard others say “that Shias worship Imam Ali” or not to “talk to that guy because he's Shia” or to keep it secret that this young woman’s mother is a Shia.

Mojdeh has also heard others being very negative about Shias and Sufis. She recounted an episode of a Sufi young man who used distinctive rituals of devotion to God:

> There was a guy who was a Sufi, this poor boy…would come in and he would put out his rug and seat himself and he would do his prayer differently…and it almost looked like a dance. He only showed up a few times. And…he was treated so badly. It was so bad that he only showed up a few times… He followed different prayer times. There was one time and he was waiting for a certain time and then he went to start praying. A girl said it’s not pray time yet, and he was like, ‘oh ok,’ but then went to go pray. There was always whispering about him. They haven’t dealt with so much diversity.

Focusing on similarities between Muslims, MSA members are often at a loss on how to deal with the differences they encounter with Shia, Sufi, and others. Then those who pray or practice differently may feel such scrutiny and rejection that they abandon MSA-dominated spaces.[73]

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[73] In the early 1990s at the University of Chicago, due to these kinds of differences between MSA leaders’ ideas about authentic Islam and those students of Sufi practices, a Naqshbandiyya-inspired student association called the Muslim Students Forum was established as an alternative to the MSA. MSA leaders censured their practice of *dhikr* (rituals of praising God, sometimes incorporating dance and melodic mantras) because it sounds like “singing” which was interpreted as un-Islamic. A Muslim Student Forum leader, on the other hand, censured the MSA as having no genealogical lineage [*silsila*] that can be traced continuously in chain back to the prophet Muhammad. Nonetheless, these two Islamic student groups

Other visitors to MSA may feel rejected due to already formed friendship groups that are difficult to penetrate or because they do not believe they can hold themselves to the same standard of behavior they imagine characterizes the MSA members. Both men and women interviewees believed the problem of "cliques" was much more prevalent on the "sisters' side" than the brothers'. Jasmine said, "I tried," to be a part of MSA "and it didn't go too well, didn't really feel accepted; feel like they do good things there, have lectures and bring Islamic knowledge…but unfortunately there was a clique system that I wasn't able to be a part of." Isra, who had been an active participant, explained, "I think that the MSA tries very hard and puts out a good effort to be welcoming, but—I can speak for the girls' side—it's a fairly cliquish community that can become very intimidating for someone who wants to join the MSA." She has a "personal theory" that this dynamic is due to home-training in which, coming from cultures in which "women don't always have a very big say in society, they make themselves feel useful by gossiping" and "make themselves feel more important by forming cliques and making power plays in a very petty way." While many men were oblivious to the gossip, cliques, and power games occurring within the women's circles, some young men also found it intimidating to come into already formed groups of friends. Farzam said, "People are very nice; but it is kind of cliquey, these four or five guys who always hang out and talk with each other, other group of four; and as a commuter student it's hard to get into that tight-knit group."

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sometimes put their differences aside to work together such as in organizing Islamic Awareness Month. Garbi Schmidt, *American Medina: A Study of the Sunni Muslim Immigrant Communities in Chicago* (Lund, Sweden: Lund Studies in the History of Religion, 1998), 123; Garbi Schmidt, *Islam in Urban America: Sunni Muslims in Chicago* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004), 95, 97-98.

To counteract some of these tendencies and make the MSA more welcoming and inclusive, leaders create programming to help students meet each other and encourage nascent friendships. Cal State University San Bernardino's MSA began its school year with icebreakers and games. In 2012-2013 one of the student leaders at UC Riverside initiated a Peer Mentorship Program. It paired up incoming freshmen with "more experienced MSA students" by gender and often by similar majors of study. One of the founders explained, "We try to get by some of the cliques that form and make sure everyone felt welcomed and they have a friend in MSA." They had ten pairs that first year and reportedly "many of them became really close friends." Kawthar had a positive experience in this program: "I had a really awesome Peer Mentor…who helped me out a lot, so I became a peer mentor myself." Samira, who participated and had a mentee, had her doubts about the program, however:

> I feel like if you put in the effort to attend enough meetings and to make friends, you can actually have your mentors… forcefully matching people up may not result in what you expected. I think people naturally glide toward, you are attracted to a person based on their personality and they will naturally go together… but I know some people it is working really well for them.

Nonetheless, it may be helpful to help facilitate initial friendships. This Peer Mentorship Program was initiated by other California MSAs before UC Riverside and increasingly more MSAs are implementing it to help facilitate bonds between new participants and veteran members of the Association.

Geneive Abdo recounts a verbal and sometimes physical battle that took place in 2004 at the University of Michigan Dearborn campus about whether the MSA would take an inflexible conservative approach or an inclusive, nuanced one. The outgoing leadership group would not let women who did not wear headscarves join the student

group and condemned Shias, other minority sects, and non-Muslims. Farhan Latif was elected president in 2004 and "revolutionized the association," enjoining etiquette against hate speech in Friday sermons, welcoming non-*ḥijābīs* as much as *ḥijābīs*, accepting Shias as much as the Sunni majority, and hosting interfaith events, including a drama called "Children of Abraham," to highlight commonalities and relationships among the monotheistic faiths.[74] Although the MSA grew quickly under the new leadership, the old vanguard and its successors were angry at this change of tone, believing it to be a betrayal of authentic Islam. They sent threatening messages to Mr. Latif's email and cell phone and later assaulted him just outside his apartment. Abdo states that cases like this of violence are rare among American Muslims, yet this episode speaks to the ideological battles taking place in "student associations, mosques, and Islamic centers to work out for themselves just what it means to be a Muslim in contemporary America."[75] In my fieldwork, I found less extreme gaps between exclusive and inclusive postures towards the Islamic faith, the varieties usually coexisting in tolerance and or close relationship. However, strong *muslima* leaders, finding frequent roadblocks within UCR's MSA,

[74] This project emerged out of conversations over lunch between a Muslim imam Abdullah El-Amin and his friend Brenda Rosenberg, along with a mystical dream Rosenberg had, where they bring Jewish, Christian, and Muslim youth to share their stories together and weave them into a play which reflects Isaac and Ishmael coming together in family reconciliation. Mucahit Bilici, *Finding Mecca in America: How Islam Is Becoming an American Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 155. Bilici describes the "Abrahamic" language used by Muslims who would like to reorient the minds of the broader Americans to see Islam on equal footing as kindred monotheistic, moral, faiths as Judaism and Christianity. He critiques that although in a climate of Islamophobia, this strategy is understandable, but problematic—as some Muslims active in the interfaith scene also acknowledge—as it perpetuates the perception of Buddhists, Hindus, Sikhs, and others as non-Abrahamic faiths and thus wholly alien religions.

[75] Abdo, *Mecca and Main Street*, 187-191. In Hermansen's research such aggressive exclusivism too often gets the upper hand in Muslim organizations through bullying and intimidation. Hermansen, *Progressive Muslims*, 313.

increasingly turned to the new Middle Eastern Student Center as a forum to create events for interfaith and intrafaith unity.[76]

Thus, MSAs have been challenged by the diversity within their own religious student body, and many struggle to envision and implement paradigms that embrace varied forms of Islam rather than hide them. Finding such paradigms is new territory for all religious and political communities, including Muslims. Yasir Qadhi, professor of Islamic Studies and influential Sunni teacher among young American Muslims, argues that scholars of classical and medieval Islam (like those of their Christian contemporaries) spent much more energy debating whether God would forgive other Islamic sects' heresies rather than imagining inclusive frameworks.[77] Professor Ali S. Asani, an Ismaili Shiah, likewise says despite *hadīth*s that celebrate "difference of opinion" as a strength of the community of the faithful, the lack of contemporary paradigms is due in part to the difficulty of finding them in Islamic history. Muslims have been better at tolerating or ignoring the inter-religious other and co-religious other than embracing them, and current Muslims often look to much earlier Islam to understand authoritative interpretations of their religious tradition. Although lacking precedents, Asani believes Muslim Americans have the unique opportunity to fashion pluralistic paradigms for intra-religious diversity, because "no other country in the world has a Muslim population as diverse as that of the United States." He would like "the United

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[76] In a phone interview with Marcela Ramirez, the then director of the Middle Eastern Student Center [MESC], brought these gender differences to my attention, March 17, 2015. With four of the MESC Muslim women leaders also being interviewees and MESC being a secondary site of ethnography, I observed the same.
[77] Yasir Qadhi, "The Path of Allah or the Paths of Allah?" (2013), 110.

States" to become "the crucible in which new principles of intra-Islamic pluralism are forged and one in which the Qur'anic injunction "to know one another" is realized for all humans."[78] I agree with his vision and I would add that Muslim Americans also have a unique opportunity to develop this here as other religious and ethnic groups and communities are also experimenting to fashion a pluralistic praxis. These groups can learn from each other. Just as important are the inter-MSA forums such as MSA West, as well as inter-MSA presidents' meetings, in which individual MSAs, such as those of UC Berkeley, UCLA, and Cal State University San Bernardino, may share with each other what they are learning about working with the challenges of diversity.

Ethnic/Racial Prejudice, Paternalism, and the Inclusion of Converts

Schmidt, Hermansen, and Abdo have each detailed young adult Muslim Americans attempts to articulate and live a Muslim identity that rises above cultural differences, race, and ethnicity, that unites all in what the young people believe to be the purity of true and authentic Islam. We have already explored some of the problematics of this singular Islam imaginary, the thrust of the critique being the difficulties in embracing, or at least being sensitive to, the diversity of belief and practice. We find that the members of the second generation may be justified in their claims to have achieved a greater degree of integration of Muslims of different ethnic backgrounds than many of their parents' generation. The latter often stay within linguistic, national, and ethnic

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[78] Ali S. Asani, "On Muslims knowing the "Muslim other"" *Muslims in the United States: Identity, Influence, Innovation* (2005), 182. Asani, like Eboo Patel cited above, is a Nizari Ismaili, a follower of the Shia Aga Khan, who has himself emphasized pluralism as an ethic of his religious community and Development Network.

cliques in their mosque socializing, friendship groups, and organization formation. Nonetheless, my data in this section shows that the new generation still has much room for growth in creating an environment free of racial discrimination and arrogant paternalism.

Young adult Muslims take pride in the diverse ethnicities of Muslims who come together in their organizations with Islam as their center of unity. Shems distinguished his generation from that of his father: "Among our generation we have a lot more ethnic unity; for my father he likes to hang out with Pakistanis… Here we get to associate with people of all nationalities, and we're all just Muslim brothers." Ilm spoke fondly of her Cal State San Bernardino MSA, saying, "We have people from Palestine, Colombia, our last MSA president was from Chile... another from Bosnia... [It's] amazing to see people from different backgrounds come together and share this experience… [That they] come together on the basis of our faith is really powerful." Nuri stated, "you learn that this religion is so beautiful, for so many reasons: one reason is that there are so many different people; it's labeled sometimes that Islam is for Arabs, but you look around Asian Americans, African Americans, Arab Americans, all these different ethnicities coming together, mesh, for one purpose, to prostrate and to worship God alone with no partners." Islam's power to bring Muslims of different ethnicities together as "brothers and sisters" is strongly emphasized for American Muslims, in part confirming for them that their form of Islam is truly the correct and authentic form.

The young adults take Islam's power to create inter-ethnic unity as a positive affirmation and feature of their identity as American Muslims. They assert this inter-

ethnic unity to be firmly rooted in the ideals of the religious tradition itself. Many students quoted the Farewell or Last Sermon of the Prophet Muhammad to support this vision. Although this sermon has many iterations in distinctive chains of *hadīth*, the one most quoted by students—and most prominent on the Internet—had the prophet Muhammad as saying in part that all people are descended from Adam and Eve, Arabs are not superior to non-Arabs, and no race is better, not black or white, and that only levels of piety distinguish one person from the next. Many other students spoke with admiration of the example of Islamic *hajj* [pilgrimage] in which Muslims of many colors, from many nations, rich and poor, come together and donning ritual white garments, circumambulate the Kaaba, pray, and worship side by side. In Luqman's words: "All colors and races and genders; all wearing the same clothing." Najeeb believed that in Islam there are "no colors, everyone is just human." Barroq asserted, "It really doesn't matter what skin tone you are, what really matters is your soul." Interviewees believed Islam teaches unequivocally the equality and unity of all races and ethnic groups but that prejudice and racism does exist among Muslims because misguided perspectives of "culture," "tribalism," and other forms of ethno-centrism are "mixed in."

Interviewees acknowledged that prejudice, racism, and discrimination exists among Muslims, sometimes even among members of their own generation, even though these ideas and practices are completely against Islam and its teachings. Arabs and South Asians did not mention experiencing prejudice within Muslim communities but some realized that other ethnic groups are discriminated against. However, Adeela believed "there's a problem with Arabs having paternalistic postures towards non-Arabs," not just

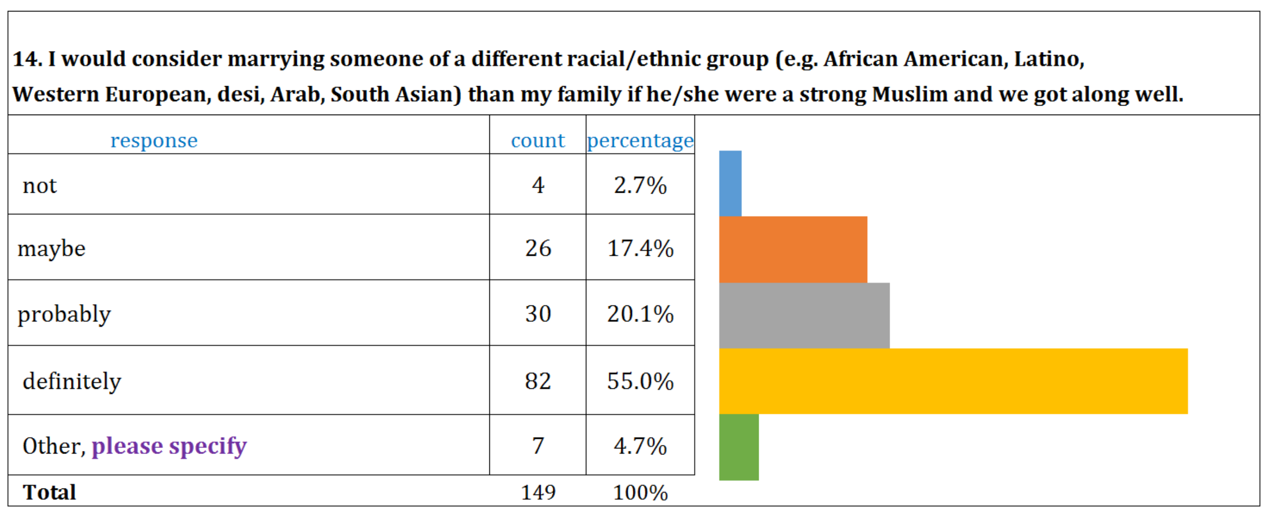
“blacks,” but “*desi* [South Asian].” She went on to say, “There's a problem I've seen in not treating darker people well or seeing them as of equal value; in our own MSA we just have Somali and Eritrean black Muslims… We don't have that many black members of MSA.” Najeeb, a young Somali-American male, enjoys spending time in MSA and he said that did not experience prejudice from fellow Muslims. However, Jasmine, who is African-American, has experienced racism in the campus Muslim community and in the mosque near campus. She reprimanded her fellow Muslims: “To me there is such a problem with racism… We follow [the prophet Muhammad] when it comes to eating with the right hand, but when it comes to prejudice we put it on the back burner.” Mojdeh, who is Middle Eastern, lamented, “Islam is so above racism” and “It came to destroy racism” but “[Muslims] are some of the most racist people. And my best friend heard something and will not come around again.” This African-American friend who converted to Islam described: “I went to a girl's house, playing games, someone had gotten engaged, and they were talking about what parents allowed, and this girl says [her parents] wouldn't care [who she married] as long as he is not black; and then they were trying to shush her; very awkward.” Fortunately, this problem is increasingly acknowledged and in each of the 2014 and 2015 MSA West conferences there were general and break-out sessions to address it. Likewise, the Southern California Gamechangers program for Muslim youth and young adults also strove to bring greater awareness to and challenge prejudice and stereotyping through its workshops.

Many of the Muslims I spoke with mentioned that their parents would resist if they wanted to marry someone of a different nationality but that choosing someone of the

same religion was ultimately most important. When I asked Barroq, “Would your parents allow you to marry an African American woman?” he answered: “My Mom, most important thing she cares about is the religion and although she says that that's the most important thing, I believe she'd like me to marry someone who is an Arab.” He explained the reasoning for this: “She'd like to be able to relate to my wife… they'll have the same food styles…raise kids the same way… everything in the household to be Arabic.” However, young men mentioned that even if their parents had such preference, they would be open to marrying someone of a different racial background and were confident their parents would come to like her. Although most Arab and South Asian young men asserted they would marry an African-American even if their parents were opposed, often their resistance to parental expectations is more modest: they will marry a fellow Palestinian but not the cousin they were set up for; or a Syrian will marry a fellow Arab but one with heritage from another country; less often a South Asian will marry an Arab. Marjan asked her parents if she could marry someone outside their Afghani heritage, a black or white man, and she reported, “They don't care as long as he's Muslim and practicing.” Halala said her parents would let her brothers marry a non-Palestinian but probably would not let her because they believe a wife tends to adopt her husband’s cultural ways. They want their daughter’s family to be close to Palestinian ways and prefer to travel to their own homeland instead of a different one. She defended her parents: “Yeah it sounds like racism but it's not; like, my parents are probably some of the most non-racist people ever.” Two young women interviewees who each had families from the Levant region were initially arranged to marry cousins in the home country, yet

both protested and refused because these men lacked higher levels of education.

Of those surveyed in June 2014, most respondents regarded themselves as open to marrying someone "of a different racial/ethnic group." Over fifty-two percent of self-identified heritage Muslims marked "definitely" and over twenty-one percent marked "probably," making almost three-fourths of them saying they were willing to marry someone of a different racial/ethnic background. Of the self-identified convert Muslims, eleven of the fourteen marked "definitely" and one more marked "probably." In contrast to the survey, most of the women converts I interviewed were apprehensive about marrying a man who is a heritage Muslim, afraid about experiencing prejudice from his family. They consistently said they would prefer to marry a fellow convert as he would really be able to understand the convert experience in the Muslim community. These fears come from hearing about negative treatment of other converts as well as visceral experiences of racism themselves. Jasmine, for example, reported, "When I was at a masjid…one of the [older] ladies told me, 'How are you going to get married, you're so dark?'" While heritage Muslims framed reluctance to marry someone of a distinct racial/ethnic group as a matter of cultural compatibility, converts to Muslims were afraid of racist or patronizing treatment, even though most did not regard race as a legitimate barrier to marriage within Islam.



14. I would consider marrying someone of a different racial/ethnic group (e.g. African American, Latino, Western European, desi, Arab, South Asian) than my family if he/she were a strong Muslim and we got along well.

response	count	percentage
not	4	2.7%
maybe	26	17.4%
probably	30	20.1%
definitely	82	55.0%
Other, **please specify**	7	4.7%
Total	149	100%

Table 13: June 2014 Survey, Openness to Marry Racial/Ethnic Others, by Daniel Azim Pschaida

In January 2015 at the annual MSA West Conference held at UCLA, a few of the invited speakers addressed this problem of racism among immigrant Muslims and their young adult children. In a breakout session second-generation Muslim American shaykh Osman Umarji presented on “Race, Social Class, & Power in the Qur’an and Sunnah.” He argued that the prophet Muhammad sought to reform social valuations of human beings from those of tribe, economic class, and skin color that pervaded seventh century Arabian social structures to those of virtue, character, and piety. He gave the example of a believer from Medina who wanted to marry a dark-skinned woman from another area, stating that it was on this occasion that the oft-quoted Qur’an 49:13 was written: “Oh mankind, God has created you from one male and female” for the purpose “to know one another,” and “the most noble is the most God conscious” was revealed. He also cited the example of Muhammad’s encouragement of his own adopted son Zayd, who was dark-skinned, to marry Muhammad’s cousin Zaynab. The marriage did not work out, yet divorce was not uncommon to this social context, and so “we shouldn’t say, "Oh, it’s

because of their different race or social class."” A student from the audience then asked “So is us all meshing and marrying a solution [to the racism problem] provided by Islam?” The Islamic scholar answered, “Previously, it was unheard of for people of different social classes or races to marry; the Prophet opens the door for us to go beyond these barriers.” He paraphrased the second caliph Omar advising not to follow the tradition of marrying one’s cousins as children from exogamous relationships are typically physically stronger and healthier. He explained that Islamic scholars have often encouraged marriages within the same social class because large socio-economic disparities in family backgrounds is frequently a source of conflict. One of his last comments was a rhetorical question, “Is it best for our children to marry doctors and lawyers or good Muslims?”[79]

Interviewees of diverse backgrounds acknowledged a problem of unhealthy patterns of paternalism on the one hand and abandonment on the other toward converts. Cristina, who had converted to Islam two years previously, complained, “Online [Muslims] pay more attention to racism against Islam but don't pay enough attention about racism within Islam, looking against other races and converts.” She described, “I love Islam [but] I still have a hard time integrating into the Muslim community… They are always looking at you and seeing if you're doing it right.” Other converts, including a Caucasian friend who has practiced and closely studied Islam for over twenty years, reported regularly receiving scrutiny and interventions in mosques when he performed

[79] Author’s notes, MSA West Conference, University of California Los Angeles, January 17, 2015.

salah.[80] Cristina continued, “In the beginning when you revert everyone is there, "sister, if you need anything come and see us," and…I know it's on the individual to look for help, but then when I would, they are not there… And I didn't have the support of my family either.” She said, now “I have kind of isolated myself from the Muslim community” and have “moments of depression where my faith decreases.”[81] Pakistani-American UCR MSA leader Ahmad Khan agreed that this is a big problem: “A lot of people are leaving Islam as well, because our community lacks the support for converts which is something that is terrible and that really needs to be fixed right away. I’m actually heading the new Muslim committee at the masjid” to help support converts. In an interview, a UCLA MSA officer reported that they have a convert among the student officers, and this helps remind them to be sure to include converts, such as when the Ramadan celebrations only occur off-campus at Islamic centers or among individual extended families.

Addressing the alienation and treatment of converts became a central theme of the two guest speakers at Cal State San Bernardino’s end-of-the-year banquet in 2014. Former

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[80] Also see, Jane I. Smith, *Islam in America* (Columbia University Press, 2010), 67. Whether the intentions of the Muslim to intervene for the convert out of a superiority complex that the supposed novice lacks the traditional grounding from an Islamic family and societal lineage or that the supposed convert is likely a novice and may actually need mentorship, the actions performed may look very similar. Perhaps the difference emerges more subtly out of a sincere desire of friendship for a fellow Muslim, and equal as a fellow human being, both in a mutual process of learning and growing, rather than a superficial and transient posturing that performs self-superiority in which one knows and the convert/novice does not. Convert, immigrant, and multiple generation Muslim Americans alike are often constituted partly by a perception that authentic Islam is to be found abroad, particularly in Arab countries, and so lack of the pedigree of a Muslim lineage and geographic distance alike are problematic. Also see Zareena Grewal, *Islam is a Foreign Country* (2014), 33-42.

[81] Despite the community-oriented emphasis of many Islamic practices, because Muslims do not just identify themselves by religious commonalties but family, ethnic, national, and linguistic ones as well, loneliness is a common issue for converts. Jane I. Smith, *Islam in America*, 67.

president Mahbuba encouraged listeners to step out of their own social groups, meet new people, and make friends with them, especially the converts for whom it took a lot of courage to embrace Islam, going against the powerful stigmatization of the religion. She said, "In order to invite the youth we have to show them an environment in which we care about them and we treat each other well. What matters the most is touching their hearts…and letting them know that someone cares about them." Professional skateboarder Jordan Richter, who had converted to Islam in the mid-1990s, encouraged Muslim community leaders to broaden their vision of the potential skills, talents, vocations, and approaches of fellow Muslims. He narrated:

> When I got to the masjid…when I took *shahada*… when I told people that I'm a professional skateboarder, certain brothers couldn't really [accept this], they would say 'brother, this is not good; skateboarding, it doesn't make any sense to me; brother, maybe you should do something else, like drive a taxi… do something like that..' …This aspect of dismissal, dismissing this person's hopes, their dreams, their ambitions, their everything that is important to them…to kind of discount them, and to put them in a place that we feel comfortable with them; and if they don't fit that comfort zone for us… Maybe we feel uneasy, don't want to deal with that. So we want to dress them in a certain way, look a certain way, act in a certain way, talk a certain way, to make it feel comfortable to us. We are living in this country and we have a trust, and the trust is that we will reflect high standards, standards that are the embodiment of the Sunna of the Prophet… There is no other role model that we have; but each of us have our own capacities and abilities to act that out and to show that out into the world in their own way, in their own beauty; and Islam gives us those liberties.

A general session in the 2015 MSA West was also devoted to a panel about treatment of converts. They discussed the problems of trying to remake converts in an Arab or South Asian image and of the isolation and lack of institutional support for converts. A common theme among panelists was that whether or not there are formal institutional supports in place to welcome, mentor, and include converts, those who were able to find at least one close friendship with a practicing Muslim were able to nurture their initial attraction to the religion. Yet whether or not converts will find such friendships is

haphazard, and many mosque communities seem to make the unwarranted assumption that the person who introduced the convert to Islam will be there to support him or her.[82]

The MSA of UC Riverside board members in 2013 to 2015 were predominantly of Arab background, with some South Asians (Pakistani, Indian, and Bangladeshi). Arabs and South Asians have formed the grand majority of officers, partly because they constitute the majority of the American Muslim community in general. Only one student of Black Northeast African ethnicity served on the board at UCR for a few months during my two years of research, and students and recent graduates had a difficult time recalling Blacks on the board in the years before that. Neither were there any converts on the board during this time, although at least one African American convert served on University of Washington's board from 2012 to 2013 and around 2009 Cal State University San Bernardino reportedly had an African American president of the MSA.

Friendships with Non-Muslims

Most of the interviewees believed friendship with non-Muslims should be pursued. However, they confided that actually doing this often posed difficulties. Spending time at non-Muslim parties, where activities against Islamic teachings may be taking place, might prompt the individuals to compromise their own values. Barroq's experienced of his "friends of old" from high school, now they are in college "seems like we're in two different worlds now, and can't connect as much." He finds he now needs

[82] A convert on the panel who learned about Islam through his work at the Guantanamo Bay Detention Center, who now lives in Arizona, described that the only real friendship group he has found is two hundred miles away in Riverside, California, and he drives there to spend time whenever he can. Author's notes, "Convert-sations," MSA West Conference, University of California Los Angeles, January 17, 2015

“to make a choice on whether you are going to follow your religion or follow your friends.” He said, “I want to hang out with them, but I know [that] in return [it] won’t be great for me… would be fine hanging out with them in broad daylight, but after certain times and certain places they are not my friends, not the people that I know; could influence me to do those things too.” Tahira believes college Muslims need to know themselves, each individual determining for herself whether in going to that party she will be compellingly “tempted” or if she can “control” herself to “still go and have fun [but] stay sober.”

In high school and college where they find many of their peers experimenting with drugs and their sexuality, some Muslims also found friendships with practicing Christians with whom they could find mutual support and understanding. Sana said:

> In high school there was a Christian girl who was like my best friend; there weren't many other Muslims and she didn’t feel there were many practicing Christians; our belief in modesty and how we dressed brought us together… We do this instead of what they do and know not to get into drugs and things like that, that some of my other friends were into; that we believed in God, and we did have a lot of talks about religion; our lifestyles brought us together.

Likewise, Cala explained: “One of my best friends is…very Christian. We used to commute together [to college], we would just talk about our different stories, and she was surprised to see how similar some of our stories were… It’s eye opening for me as well to see that we believe many of the same things.” With shared religious stories, a passion for one’s faith, and a common modest and drug-free lifestyle, these Muslims find meaningful friendships with other young women with conservative values and similar stories from their Abrahamic religions.

While often it’s a similar religious lifestyle that brings inter-faith friends together, religion is not often a central topic of conversation. Instead, the similarity of other

interests, experiences, and personality may draw them together. Khadija said, "When I become friends with people, I think of them as themselves and individuals and don't necessarily look at this person is Christian or Buddhist, or analyze their religion or ethnicity, [but] their personality and who they are." She explained, "Religion comes along later once you become better friends; people know my religion, and we sometimes have discussions about our religions, but it doesn't come into play a lot." Marjan's "Christian-Catholic" friend from high school now attends college in San Diego, while she is at Riverside, and "so when we get together we'll just catch up" about school-related matters. A lot of Farzam's friends are also in political science with whom he likes to have intellectual debates; Munirah enjoys political conversations with her campus Libertarian club friends and Reem about international affairs with her Model United Nations student group friends. Ameen moves fluidly through the week on campus between his Muslim friends and his skateboarding friends. Tariq sometimes experiences disconnect with members of the Muslim Student Association who have a higher and different socio-economic background than he, and who are often into soccer, and so he often associates with "other friends; we play basketball together, we ride together, have young adult sense of humor, and [share] music tastes."

Other interviewees acknowledged that their predominant friendship circles were with fellow Muslims. These circles function as support groups, shelters, and incubators of Islamic identity and praxis.[83] Shems said he is not sure or not if Islam "encourages" him

[83] "Today's young Muslim men who have been raised in the United States…often separate themselves spatially and socially from the wider society, achieving a kind of group solidarity with other young Muslim males. From this group sensibility, they then reintegrate collectively into larger society, but often with the

to make friends with non-Muslims but the injunction to "give *da'wa*," or "invite" others to Islam, may necessitate making friends outside Muslim circles. Some other students also mentioned *da'wa* as the reason to become friends with non-Muslims. Shems is careful about the people he spends time with because "the people you keep company with, you'll become like them" and so his parents encourage him "to just keep Muslim friends." Husayn is "not opposed to having non-Muslim friends" but he prefers "to have Muslim friends and cliques," because "I want them to be better Muslims than I am" who will challenge him to improve and become a "better [person] every day." For him, it is most often outstanding Muslims who will exemplify the characteristics, mannerisms, and virtues that he himself wants to develop and so Muslims form his core friendship groups. Trying to strengthen their Islamic identity during their college years, these young adults have surrounded themselves mostly with fellow Muslims.[84]

While not doing things to compromise their own values, many interviewees believed that their religion teaches them to connect with and get to know people of other religious, racial and cultural backgrounds. Many quoted Quranic 49:13: "O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you into peoples and tribes

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express purpose of propagating the faith." He argues "often," I would argue "sometimes" for *da'wa*/faith-propagation. Moustafa Bayoumi, "Being Young, Muslim, and American in Brooklyn," *Being Young and Muslim: New Cultural Politics in the Global South and North*, ed. Linda Herrera & Asef Bayat (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 2010), 164. Muslims on campus who do attend alcohol dominated parties, even though she may decline drinks, may be accused by interrogated by non-Muslim friends and acquaintances "why she did not isolate herself from alcohol spaces the way normal Muslims did." See Shabana Mir, *Muslim American Women on Campus*, 59, 86.

[84] In a 2011 survey, Pew found that most Muslim Americans "only about half of U.S. Muslims (48%) say that most of their close friends are Muslims, and just 7% say that all their close friends are Muslims." Pew Research Center "Muslim Americans: No Signs of Growth in Alienation or Support for Extremism," August 2011. http://www.people-press.org/files/2011/08/muslim-american-report.pdf (accessed April 14, 2015).

that you may know one another." Mojdeh said she does not "like it when people stick to one group of people… I have an interest in peoples from different cultures, different understandings… One of my goals is to understand each person I come across and I really do aim for that." She told me that she did not really realize how much she appreciated the diversity of the United States, and Southern California in particular, until she went to visit her parents' home country, which she found a lot more homogenous. Munirah explained that in college she became really involved "in the MSA and then started judging" her non-Muslims peers and old friends. Then she told herself, "Go back to your friends and then you really can have a diverse group of friends... You don't just have to have Muslim friends to make you better; everyone is the same, everyone is equal." She said, "Islam brought me to know that we really are one… God in the Qur'an says we made you different so that you know one another; to know that your image is God and your father and mother are Adam and Eve, that's your true root. You really are one, and these different colors make the world unique, doesn't make the world boring." Likewise, Kawthar said, "You're going to have a whole range of beliefs in this world; you can't have everyone with the same mentality, if it were to be otherwise, why wouldn't God have just made angels on the earth." She cited stories in the Qur'an in which "angels asked God why he was making Adam" and "He said, 'I know what you know not'; we're meant to have different perspectives and ideas… the world is diverse, it's meant to be diverse, you're supposed to learn about people and learn about religions."

Thus, while connecting with religious others is an ideal pursuit for most students for whom their Islamic identity is a highly important facet of self, the practice of this

ideal often poses difficulties. In a relatively large survey study in 2008, Diane S. Shammas researched the friendship patterns of 753 Arab Christians, Arab Muslims, and non-Arab Muslims in twenty-one community colleges in southern California and southeast Michigan. These Muslims reported that sixty percent of their friendships are with someone of the same religion, although that friend sometimes had a different ancestry or ethnicity. Only 27% of friendships were with someone of a different ethnicity and a different religion. She did not find a very strong correlation between reported experiences of religiously or ethnically based discrimination or prejudice on campus and homogenous friendship patterns.[85] Rather, anecdotal evidence from her study, other's studies, and my own study all indicate that students predominantly pursue intra-religious and or intra-ethnic friendships to further cultivate their Islamic identity and knowledge and to safeguard themselves from being tempted to engage in acts they deem contrary to Islamic teachings. They also pursue these homogenous friendship patterns due to their higher degree of comfort with people of the same religious or cultural background, language, and values.[86]

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[85] Diane S. Shammas, "Post 9/11 Arab and Muslim American Community College Students: Ethno-Religious Enclaves and Perceived Discrimination," *Community College Journal of Research and Practice* 33 (2009): 283, 298, 300.

[86] Shabana Mir, *Muslim American Women on Campus* (2014); Lori Peek, "Community Isolation and Group Solidarity: Examining the Muslim Student Experience after September 11, 2001," *Beyond September 11: An Account of Post-Disaster Research,* ed. J. L. Monday (Boulder: Institute of Behavioral Science, University of Colorado, 2003), 333-354; for distinct conclusions from Shammas, see Patrick L. Schoettmer, "Threat, Faith, and Community: the Transformation of American Muslim Political Identity in 21st Century America," (Ph.D. diss., University of Notre Dame, 2014), 126.

Inter-faith Activities, Collaboration with other Student Associations, and Campus Organization Contestation

Pluralism goes beyond learning about, tolerating, respecting, and/or appreciating diversity within other religious and ethnic groups. It is also realized in working in solidarity with individuals and groups of differing beliefs and cultural identities. Interfaith dialogues and collaborations between groups of the more general American Muslim community and other religious groups, however, typically still occurs only on the initiative of these other groups and only a very small portion of Muslims actively participate. The Muslims who do participate typically are ones that have lived in this country for a long time or are converts and the children of converts, Muslims who can "speak without an accent" and who have great confidence in navigating the socio-political arenas of this country.[87] The members of the young adult second generation, then, are naturally candidates for such work. However, in my research I found interfaith dialogue is rarely a central mission of MSAs. Rather, individual Muslim students on their own initiative outside the MSA, and typically (though not exclusively) converts, are the ones to actively organize or pursue interfaith activities. The individual who initiated an interfaith panel at UC Riverside in 2014 was Persian, raised in a non-religious household, and converted to Christianity in high school and then to Islam in college. Another individual who, along with a Protestant Christian friend, founded the Interfaith Club at Riverside City College is an African American who converted to Islam in prison. With

[87] Mucahit Bilici, *Finding Mecca in America*, 157-160, 162.

two other friends, one nonreligious and one Catholic, he initiated another club called Linked Arms that does service projects, such as feeding the homeless, donating clothes, and acquiring a washer and dryer on campus for homeless people to wash their clothes.

Leaders of the Muslim Student Associations believe that Islam offers the best solution and most complete program for addressing humanity's ills and the purest form of God's religion. Therefore, engagement with other groups is often motivated by the desire to bring in newcomers to MSA's events and lectures to fulfill the duty of *da'wa*. However, they more generally desire to enact Islamic injunctions to make the world a better place more generally. They frequently quoted the Qur'anic verses that say to "enjoin good and forbid evil" (e.g. 3:110) and to change the condition of yourself so you can also improve your society (13:11). They also often quoted this *ḥadīth*: "Whoever of you sees an evil must then change it with his hand. If he is not able to do so, then [he must change it] with his tongue. And if he is not able to do so, then [he must change it] with his heart. And [this last] is the weakest [effect of] faith." They also believed other organizations share common concerns for human rights and social justice, and so in various activities they supported and collaborated in shared causes with other groups.

Many students defined reaching out to other groups in terms of performing *da'wa* (inviting others to Islam) and improving the public image of American Muslims. A president of Berkeley's MSA said: "It's…a form of *da'wa* to teach them about our religion, that what we're doing is part of being Muslim, part of our identity, by showing other people what we are and what we are about." Similarly, Husayn explained the pursuit of inter-faith activities: "Muslims are required to give *da'wa*…Islam is truth to us;

so we need to respectfully expose the differences between Islam and their religion; don't want to say they are wrong, but there are some important aspects of their religion that we believe is incorrect." Hence, he approaches inter-faith activities as a way to bring people to what he believes to be the best form of religion. He does not find value in visiting other religious groups' gatherings: "I'll be approached by the Christian club, we're having a Bible reading and I'll just say thank you for the invitations but won't go as I'm not that interested. I have a theory on how to solve a problem; they have their theory on how to solve a problem; but I know mine already works... I would be more interested if it was a Qur'an-Bible study together, finding verses of agreement." Thus, he does not view visiting other religious communities as an interfaith activity but an activity that makes him susceptible to conversion. However, if such engagements give him a chance to also teach about Islam and find points of unity, he believes it is worth his while.

Cantara and Husayn, who served as officers of UC Berkeley's and UC Riverside's MSAs respectively, both believed interfaith activities were valuable to pursue for learning about and from other religions. Cantara said, "You learn about them as well and grow as well, by learning about and working with people in different backgrounds." Husayn said, "It's important to understand and learn about other people's faiths… We shouldn't be an isolated community, we need to be outgoing." He believes this way is based on "how the Prophet lived, Jews in Medina, shared a commonality as people of the Book, and inter-faith activities help heal the wounds of differences. Just telling them how we are not that different will make bonds stronger between faiths and peoples and cultures in general." Barroq finds interfaith events are important "to build better

community” and to stop spreading “rumors.” He said, “Let's say you're in a mosque and you start saying, ‘all these Christians do this,’ or ‘all these Jews are like this,’ then you created a bias, and now everyone thinks of Jews this way, but have you ever met a Jew or Christian to ask them about this yourself, you'll find that this is wrong.” For them, meeting people of another religion gives one direct knowledge of others rather than drawing on assumed stereotypes.

Although not central to the missions of most MSAs, many MSA members attend—and sometimes help organize—interfaith dialogues, panels, or recreational events. UC Riverside’s MSA helped host an inter-religious team of comedians to perform on campus in February 2012 called “Laugh in Peace,” organized with two Jewish students groups and a Coptic Christian one. The Jewish comedian, Rabbi Bob Alper, said, “We hope the audience will be able to discern the close friendship, even love, between this Muslim, Christian, and Jew, bonded by comedy and delighting in every chance we get to hang out,” hoping that audience members will be encouraged to form similar friendships. Muslim student organizer, Heba Diab, believed such events helped to counteract stereotypes: “We are just like any other people. We have the same problems as anyone else. We’re no different.” [88] UC Berkeley also hosted an “inter-faith conference, on science and religion from a Hindu, Sikh, and Muslim perspective” in 2014. While “Laugh in Peace” built off of the politics of recognition to help Islam become accepted as a kindred “Abrahamic” faith to Christianity and Judaism, UC Berkeley’s interfaith panel on

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[88] Ross French, “Laugh in Peace Comedy Show to Bring Three Humorous Perspectives on Religion to UCR,” *UCR Today*, February 17, 2012, http://ucrtoday.ucr.edu/3139 (accessed February 7, 2015).

science and religion demonstrated that young adult Muslim Americans were also capable of working from a pluralistic ethos to help fellow Muslims and the public understand two faiths of South Asian origin that are not typically considered "Abrahamic."

Bilici's research found that American Muslims—mostly of the older generation—who are active in interfaith work typically emphasize the language of "Abrahamic religions" to work for inclusion in a way that the designation "Judeo-Christian" denies. However, the young respondents of my 2014 survey rarely marked that they envision this country's religious identity to be "Abrahamic."[89] Perhaps conscious that "Abrahamic" might include Muslims while excluding this nation's many Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs, and others, 57% of respondents said they "envision America to be" a "multi-religious country."[90] That most respondents identified this country to either ideally or realistically to be a multi-religious, secular/non-religious, or Christian country problematizes interpretations in which Muslims draw on the "Abrahamic" trope and are insensitive to its exclusionary implications. However, further research will be required to confirm the reasoning for such responses.

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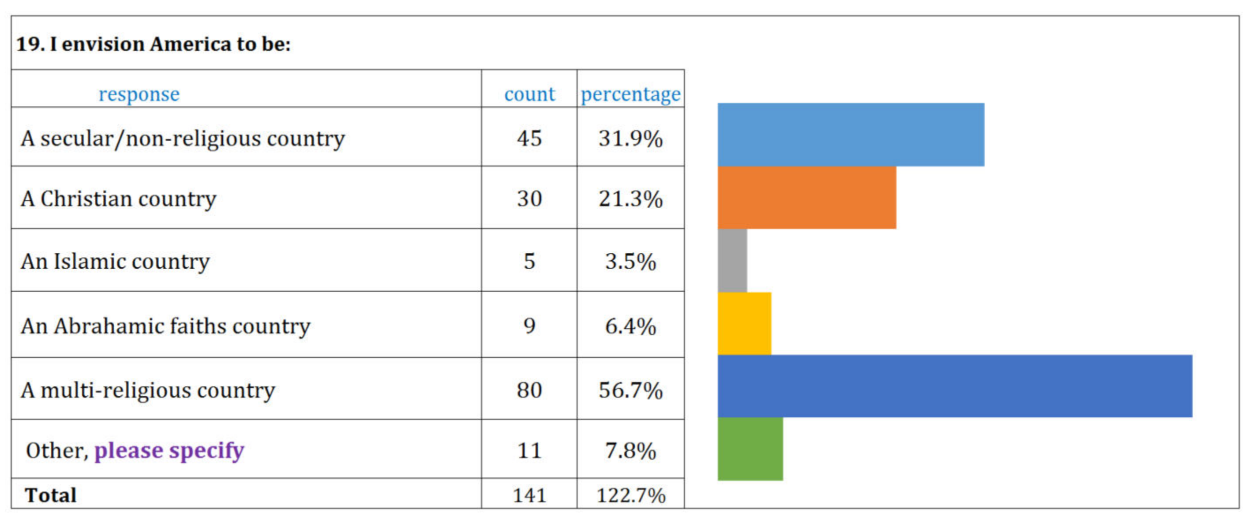
[89] Bilici's research of Muslim mosque communities, primarily in the Detroit and Dearborn, Michigan, areas found that Muslims more commonly draw on the language of the common religious father Abraham between Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, to work for America's still popular "Judeo-Christian" religious identity to include one more "Abrahamic" religion—Islam, rather than be relegated to the periphery of American religious identity that they see the language of "pluralism" embodying. See Mucahit Bilici *Finding Mecca in America*, 168-169.

[90] Due to financial and length restraints in the deployment of this survey, I combined what were originally two questions, the first "America is…" and the second "America should be…" into one with the language of "envision." The downside of this approach, however, is we do not know what percentage responded to manifest their desire on how they would like this country to be identified and how many responded as a realistic reading of the current situation. This question also allowed respondents to mark more than one option so that they could indicate their multiple understandings of this complex nation; however, most respondents only marked one.



19. I envision America to be:

response	count	percentage
A secular/non-religious country	45	31.9%
A Christian country	30	21.3%
An Islamic country	5	3.5%
An Abrahamic faiths country	9	6.4%
A multi-religious country	80	56.7%
Other, please specify	11	7.8%
Total	141	122.7%

Table 14: Survey, June 2014, religious vision for America, by Daniel Azim Pschaida

My research did not find evidence that interfaith events are regularly part of different MSAs' programming. A UCLA MSA board member acknowledged that their MSA usually participates in interfaith events when they are organized by other student groups. She recalled, for example, that in previous years the MSA leadership sometimes attended *shabbats* on the invitation of the Jewish student groups. This was also observed with UC Riverside's MSA where its active members gave a strong student turnout in events organized by other groups, such as a "Creative Coexistence" event held annually at UCR that invites religious student groups to share something about the significance of their student group as well as showcase talents of its members such as poetry, art, or dance. One of the most positive interfaith events I witnessed was an interfaith games and recreation day organized by Catholic Student Association student leader Matthew Taon in 2011 in which Jewish, Catholic, Protestant Christian, Muslim, and Bahá'í students came together to meet each other, eat together, and to play soccer, basketball, and board games together. In spring 2014 Faezeh Fathizadeh, a Persian American convert to Islam,

organized an event under the auspices of the new Middle Eastern Student Center in which professors presented on the Jewish, Christian, and Islamic religions, and many MSA members attended.[91]

Young adult Muslims also believe that people of different religions and/or ethnicities often have similar values and concerns that can draw them to work together to address injustice and improve the world. Husayn asserted, "Working together for the same goal, even though we have some different beliefs, we can agree that mankind needs to be helped in many different ways, sick or poor, saving mankind together." Hakeem explained MSA's and Students for Justice in Palestine's work with other student organizations: "[These other student organizations] supported us, and it was wonderful because it showed that humans of all races, creeds, and ethnicities can unite under a righteous cause, and that's our goal. We're not here to, convert people necessarily, but we are here definitely to spread justice and social activism, for all people." In addition, Cantara believed that working with other groups helps activism be more effective: "If you think about the concept of action in Islam, and making the world a better place, so to speak, and that can come through different routes, so if you're doing work that is helping people or standing up for justice, or helping the unfortunate, doing it with other people is the leverage and resources and tools to get it done." Rafeeq also emphasized this: "Many

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[91] Ms. Fathizadeh expressed disappointment that after working for a long period with the director of the Hillel Student Association—the core Jewish group on campus—at the last minute he was not able to help find a speaker on Judaism. She was grateful that the religious studies instructor who had been invited to speak on Christianity was able to then step up to also speak about Jewish history and religion. However, this difficulty may have been that the event coincided with Passover holidays; some Jewish students, nonetheless, attended this event as well as were usually involved in other interfaith events on campus. Faezeh Fathizadeh, Facebook messenger "Chat" with author, February 5 and 12, 2015.

social ills come from being too divided and doing our own thing instead of pooling our resources together."

Frequent events in which MSA works together with non-Muslims and other organizations include the Hijab Challenge, feeding the homeless, a Black History Month program, and issues of justice in the Palestine territories. For the Hijab Challenge, described in detail in the previous chapter, young Muslims invite fellow organizations and their friends to experience what it is like to wear the headscarf for a day. In addition, some of the Muslim men showed solidarity with the Sikh student organization event held the following day at UC Riverside by also wearing a turban or *pagri/dastar* for a day. Charity to the disadvantaged is also a cause that has united the MSA with other student organizations. The University of Washington's MSA came together with "other religious groups and an atheist one to make sandwiches and distribute them at a food distribution center" in their yearly Sandwiches for Homeless event. UC Berkeley's MSA collaborated with others to make lunches and give them out to the homeless, sometimes working with the Jewish organization Hillel, the Japanese Student Union, the Black Student Union, or the Middle East and South Asian Coalition. UC Riverside's MSA recently worked with the Pakistani Student Association and the Students for Justice in Palestine to provide food for the homeless. These activities, more than interfaith events that deploy representation as an "Abrahamic" religion to push towards inclusion in

America's national identity, reflect what Judith Shklar calls "an aspiration of civic participation as a deeply involving activity."[92]

For Black History Month, MSAs often co-host a lecture and/or film about Malcolm X who is depicted as a symbol of social justice, resistance to racial oppression, and the importance of Islam. In 2014 UC Irvine's MSA worked with the Mexican activist organization MEChA and African American student organizations on a Malcolm X event to talk about "how we can work together to fight injustice around the world." UC Riverside, Cal Poly Pomona, UC Berkeley, and Riverside City College MSAs have worked with similar groups on their own campuses for such an event. However, appropriations of Malcolm X is a nexus of contestation over representations. MSA leaders proudly present his powerful voice against institutionalized racism, but they are apprehensive about co-sponsoring events that might involve members of the Nation of Islam giving presentations to evaluate his importance to this political-religious movement that Malcolm X was spokesman for during most of his public career. Rather, they prefer to focus on Malcolm's embrace of Sunni Islam during his *hajj* to Mecca as the pivotal climax of his lifework. Yet to ignore his association with the Nation of Islam is to omit most of the activism that made him a public figure. This stance refuses to seriously consider how this apparently aberrant form of Islam was so compelling to millions of African Americans in the 1950s and 1960s, why the idea "the white man is a blue-eyed

[92] Judith Shklar, *American Citizenship: The Quest for inclusion* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 3, quoted from Mucahit Bilici, *Finding Mecca in Medina* (2012), 169.

devil" resonated with so many people, and why the Nation of Islam continues under the current leadership of Louis Farrakhan to be relevant to tens of thousands of people.

Other times MSA members go out to support fellow student organizations that create events toward social justice and human rights. In fall 2013, UC Riverside's MSA members attended events hosted by the campus Abyssinian Club to publicize and protest the treatment of Ethiopian immigrant workers in Saudi Arabia. They later supported a similar event protesting the treatment of Ethiopian and other guest-workers in Israel. Hakeem explained:

> We try to work with everyone because…at the end of the day we are all humans, we are all humans and we have to watch out for each other…for the Abyssinian student union, the Ethiopian club, we stood against the Saudi Arabian government for mistreating the slaves, technically they are not slaves, but it is slavery at the end of the day, for Ethiopian immigrants in Saudi Arabia, they're working there; they're not called slaves by name, but just because you don't call by name doesn't mean it's not, they are slaves, they are being mistreated horribly; so we went there and showed our support, that we stand with them against anyone or anything that is mistreating anyone, regardless of race, religion, skin color… we stand against [injustice], no matter who it is, even against our own selves. Also with the same student organization, with Israel, mistreating the Ethiopian immigrants in Israel, we stood by them, we made sure that they know that they have our support.

When Hakeem says "we stand against injustice…even against our own selves," he is paraphrasing a frequently quoted verse 4:135 of the Qur'an: "Believers, be strict in upholding justice and bear witness for the sake of God, even though it be against yourselves, your parents, or your kindred. Be they rich or poor, God knows better about them both. Do not, then, follow your own desires, lest you swerve from justice." Pushing against self-interested, tribal, and classist pursuits, for them this verse is a powerful call

for Muslims to stand in solidarity with non-Muslim groups as well as non-Sunnis who are being oppressed.[93]

A UCLA MSA board member explained to me that having other student associations as neighbors in the student activities building has assisted collaborations to form naturally. In 2014-2015 this MSA worked with the African American, Vietnamese, Filipino, and Queer student groups on a campaign to encourage UCLA faculty to vote to add a class to the diversity requirement for the undergraduate degree. It also hosted with the Armenian Student Association an event to learn about Armenian genocide—a surprising but important gesture because even though the targeting of Armenians had more of a political and ethnic than religious basis, the Turks who persecuted were at least nominally Muslim while the Armenians were mostly Christian. Furthermore, after two different university officials made statements that were deemed Islamophobic and homophobic, this MSA worked with the Queer Alliance in a united front to address their concerns to UCLA's administration.[94] This MSA of UCLA in Winter 2015 quarter worked with the Hillel student group to hold a memorial event for the three Muslim college students killed at the University of North Carolina in February 2015. These

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[93] Esack argues that one of the core messages of the Qur'an in general and Muhammad's example is "co-operation and solidarity across 'belief' lines for justice and righteousness." Farid Esack, *Qu'ran, Liberation, & Pluralism*, 180.

[94] Although working the Queer Alliance may be unexpected due to Muslims' common stance of homosexuality as immoral, such mutual support is not unprecedented as a homosexual organization Just Acts was one of the first groups to advocate for American Muslims after the 9/11 attacks. Karen Isaksen Leonard, *Muslims in the United States: The State of Research* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2003), 121.

seeming unlikely manifestations of solidarity highlight the often unpredictable character of pluralistic practices.[95]

The 2015 annual MSA West Conference, held at UCLA in January, was dedicated to the theme of "Rooted in, Rising up: Solidarity through Stories." Many excellent sessions addressed important aspects of this theme. One of the most helpful that I attended was a presentation given by Zienab Abdelgany on "Building Coalitions."[96] She urged MSAs and other organizations to enter into coalitions on the basis of solidarity, not charity, and not a kind of self-interested "I scratch your back, you scratch mine." She said that Muslim Americans can learn a lot from other social, religious, and ethnic organizations that have been working longer than the Muslims in building coalitions to work on grave issues of social injustice, such as "cycles of poverty and mass incarceration." She differentiated identity-based coalitions (LGBTQ, Students of Color, or Latina Future Engineers) from issue-based coalitions (justice for Palestinians, immigration reform, or educational access), both being important in working with others for justice. She described how one begins to build coalitions, beginning with sharing one's story and personal stake, and then by framing the issue in a language of common values and systemic change rather than a particular case of injustice or violence. She

[95] "Messiness and unpredictability, whether in conflicts within a particular religious community over questions of gender and sexuality or in the development of unexpected alliances, borrowings, or transformations effected among "religious traditions"…are as constitutive of living religious groups in the modern period as are their claims to purity and distinctiveness." Courtney Bender and Pamela E. Klassen, eds. *After Pluralism* (2010), 12.

[96] Ms. Abdelghany is a former president of MSA Berkeley's MSA who was then working for a Southern California office of the Council of American Islamic Relations [CAIR].

exemplified this by having the attendees to the session share who they were and what brought them to this presentation.

An attendee at Ms. Abdelgany's presentation, Aliyah, shared her involvement in co-founding "Chai Talks," a coalition at UCSD[97] and UCLA dedicated to bringing members of the various South Asian student organizations together to discuss social, political, and philosophical issues of mutual interest. Many South Asian MSA members concurrently participate in ethnic organizations. In one "Chai Talk" students came together at UCLA on January 29, 2015 to dialogue about the reality of anti-black racism among South Asians. This event's goal was to "deconstruct, and reflect on anti-blackness, what it is, how it operates and how South Asian communities benefit from it, as well as how it contributes to the economic, political, social and systematic oppression of the Black community." This event aimed to "stand in solidarity with our Black community and work with them to actively combat this oppression by taking a look at our own communities and being critical of ourselves."[98]

Sometimes MSA's solidarity with one group engenders strained relationships with other groups. This often happened in activism for Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank territories. MSAs sometimes held events to create awareness and to protest treatment of Palestinians, and their membership largely overlapped with a student group

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[97] University of California at San Diego

[98] "Chai Talks [Episode 6]: Deconstructing Anti-Blackness in South Asian Communities," Thursday 29 January 7:00 pm, heyevents, http://heyevent.com/event/1598068077071489/chai-talks-episode-6-deconstructing-anti-blackness-in-south-asian-communities (accessed March 19, 2015; for further discussion of this important issue, see Vijay Prashad, *The Karma of Brown Folk* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000); Jamillah Karim, *American Muslim Women: Negotiating Race, Class, and Gender within the Ummah*, (New York: New York University Press, 2009).

dedicated solely to that cause: Students for Justice in Palestine [SJP]. With University of California campuses usually also sporting Jewish student organizations that work closely with pro-Israel student organizations, Muslim and Jewish students have come into conflict. Students for Justice in Palestine meetings are announced each week at MSA meetings, and although SJP also has members who are not part of MSA or even Muslim, UC Riverside and other UC campus MSAs annually have presentations that highlight the significance of Jerusalem/*Al-Quds* to Muslims.[99]

Pro-Israel students frame opposition to the state of Israel, or its activities, as anti-Semitism while pro-Palestine students construe Israel's treatment of Palestinians near and across the border as a practice of apartheid equivalent to that implemented in South Africa.[100] On March 1, 2012, organizations that support Israel invited Israeli Defense Force [IDF] soldiers to come to UC Riverside and present their experience. SJP members, many of whom also involved in the MSA, attended the event and in highly emotional exchanges protested the work they were doing.[101] A week later an Israeli flag of the Hillel student center at UCR was defaced with the word "Terrorist," and some

[99] For a discussion of the differences in narratives and political capital in which Muslim and Jewish students engage in their discursive battles on the Palestine-Israel issue, see Aaron J. Hahn Tapper, "The War of Words: Jews, Muslims, and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict on American University Campuses," *Muslims and Jews in America: Commonalities, Contentions, and Complexities*, eds. Reza Aslan and Aaron J. Hahn Tapper (Palgrave Macmillan, New York: 2011), 71-83.

[100] Jewish students who equate opposition to certain Israeli government practices to that of anti-Semitism are lacking nuance, just as much as one can criticize Muslim individuals and institutions without blanket statements that would make it Islamophobia. One may criticize individual actions of individual members of a religion or their institutional representatives without disrespecting the general value of that religious identity itself.

[101] "SJP Protests at UC Riverside," March 1, 2012, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xdQvRgW4fVM (accessed February 12, 2015).

Jewish students believed SJP was responsible, but SJP also condemned the acts.[102] The following year on February 27th the Students for Justice in Palestine held a "silent protest" of IDF soldiers with signs such as "No to Israeli Propaganda" and SJP members progressively walking out. The IDF officers asked them to stay, and then two lead SJP officers—both Palestinian-American, one Muslim and the other a Christian—engaged in courteous debate with the two IDF officers.[103]

A year later, UCR's student senate approved a divestment bill, eight votes to seven, to recommend that the university boycotts corporations that allegedly profit "from Palestinian human rights violations." Over one hundred and fifty students attended, including many from the MSA who were also part of the SJP.[104] Two years earlier, UC Irvine's student government had unanimously passed a similar bill and on February 8, 2015 UCLA followed UCR. UC San Diego, UC Berkeley, and UC Davis student senates have also passed such divestment bills.[105] Such bills are principally a symbolic statement; however, UC Riverside did stop selling Sabra hummus for a very short period, due to

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[102] Mark Muckenfuss, "Riverside: UCR Jewish group complains of being targeted," *The Press Enterprise*, March 8, 2012, http://www.pe.com/articles/students-646603-flag-center.html (accessed February 12, 2015).
[103] Michael Rios, "SJP walk out during Israeli soldiers' speech," *Highlander* (March 5, 2013), http://www.highlandernews.org/8036/sjp-walk-out-during-israeli-soldiers-speech/ (accessed February 12, 2015).
[104] Aaron Grech & Sandy Van, "ASUCR: Pro-divestment support reflected in audience turnout," *Highlander*, April 29, 2014, http://www.highlandernews.org/13366/asucr-pro-divestment-support-reflected-in-audience-turnout/ (accessed February 12, 2015).
[105] Uzma Kolsy, "UC Irvine Students Vote to Divest from Israel," *The Nation*, November 27, 2012, http://www.thenation.com/blog/171471/uc-irvine-students-vote-divest-israel accessed February 12, 2015; Editors, "In historic vote, UC Student Association endorses call for divestment in favor of Palestinian rights," *Mondoweiss*, February 9, 2015, http://mondoweiss.net/2015/02/association-divestment-palestinian (accessed February 12, 2015).

SJP's condemnation of the company for providing financial support for two of Israel's military brigades that have attacked Palestinians.[106]

Whereas UCR's MSA lets its "sister" organization the SJP handle Palestinian activism, UCI's Muslim Student Union sponsors, often with SJP, events to raise awareness of what they believe is oppression of Palestinians. During the last week of April 2014, it held its annual anti-Zionism week, putting up large painted walls in a free speech area. The walls were created by the MSA and SJP of Cal State University Long Beach and gave information about the mistreatment of Palestinians; the demonstration represented the 430 mile wall of separation that Israel is building along the West Bank.[107] In 2013 Cal State University San Bernardino's MSA hosted a similar event, including inviting students to participate in mock check-points to bring awareness about the lives of Palestinians who need to cross Israeli-controlled borders daily to attend work or university or care for their farms.[108]

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[106] The articles do not specify the length of time UC Riverside's dining services stopped selling Sabra, perhaps less than a week, nor do the officials quoted clarify how they decided to stop selling it was a "mistake." Joseph Serna, "UC Riverside official: Decision to stop selling Sabra hummus a 'mistake'," *Los Angeles Times*, April, 29, 2015, http://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-ln-uc-riverside-hummus-israeli-ties-20150429-story.html (accessed April 30, 2015).

[107] Admin, "Palestinian Activism: MSU-UCI Presents: Anti-Zionism Week 2014," MSU UCI, April 26, 2014, http://www.ucimsu.com/events/azw/ (accessed February 12, 2015).

[108] Omar Abdelkhaleq, author's interview, Interfaith Center, California State University San Bernardino, May 22, 2014.

Image 3: April 2014, "Anti-Zionism Week," University of California Irvine, organized by the Muslim Student Union[109]

UC Irvine's MSU was itself banned during part of the 2010 to 2011 school year by the university administration for the events surrounding what came to be known as the "Irvine Eleven." After eleven students from UCI and UCR were disciplined by UCI administrators for interrupting a speech of Israel's ambassador to the United States, the case became a nexus of political contestation by officials of the campus and the broader Orange County government. These interruptions of the ambassador's speech were represented by adjudicators and commentators on a continuum from "hate speech" to civil protest "free speech." Ten of the eleven were convicted of interrupting the speech

[109] Used with permission of University of California Irvine's Muslim Student Union president from 2013-2014, Safeer Mohiuddin, email April 18, 2015.

of Ambassador Michael Oren, shouting such comments as “Michael Oren, propagating murder is not an expression of free speech.” Each student, after shouting his comment, voluntarily walked out, escorted by campus police who held him with handcuffs in another room for a period. Angry comments and gestures were exchanged between the supporters of the Israeli ambassador, many of whom were non-student older adults, and those who had attended to protest him as a representative of what they see as reprehensible Israeli government policies of violence and abuse.

As the protest was partly organized and implemented by leaders of UCI’s Muslim Student Union, using an email thread of that organization, this student group was suspended for a quarter; in addition, Orange County prosecutors convicted them of misdemeanors for “conspiracy to disturb” and “disturbing” a meeting. The judge put ten of the eleven on one-to-three year probation and gave them fifty-six community service hours to complete. Some Jewish national organizations and campus students condemned such protest activities as creating an atmosphere of anti-Semitism on campus. On the other hand, some Muslim, Jewish, and secular leaders of organizations believed the affair manifested a sharp double-standard based off of ethnic stereotypes in implementing American laws. They pointed to similar interruptions of public meetings and speeches of Democratic politicians by Tea Party activists at town hall meetings in 2009 and then in 2010 by Jewish students interrupting a lecture of Israeli Prime Minister in New Orleans, which both received little or no punishment.[110]

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[110] Jonathan Lloyd and Vikki Vargas, “Students Convicted in Irvine 11 Case,” *NBCLA*, September 23, 2011, http://www.nbclosangeles.com/news/local/Verdicts-in-Irvine-11-Case-130440693.html (accessed February 13, 2015); JTA, “Jewish groups react to charges filed against Irvine protesters,” *The Jewish Daily*

Thus, creating alliances and working with other groups in projects for social and political awareness is not a conflict-free, feel-good, type of pluralistic activism. Solidarity of Muslim activists with some groups for social justice may put them in conflict with other groups and make some students' identities feel attacked. At the same time, legal judgments about such cases may be influenced by stereotypes of the Arab/Muslim as aggressors and Jewish as a historically vulnerable ethnic group. Nonetheless, Muslim students have shown an ability to cross lines and cooperate with other groups that they may disagree with on other issues: for example, they have work together with the Jewish organization Hillel, the Queer Alliance student group, atheist clubs, and the Abyssinian and Ethiopian clubs. Issue-based alliances, hence, empowers activists to form solidarity with others across lines in ways that identity-centered politics may restrain.

The first Middle Eastern Student Center

For four years, Muslim students at UC Riverside worked to have a campus student center that would be a safe space of support and a haven for prayer. They were possibly inspired by the Jewish student peers who have a Hillel student center (although

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Forward, February 8, 2011, http://forward.com/articles/135250/jewish-groups-react-to-charges-filed-against-irvin/ (accessed February 13, 2015); Ian Urbina, "Beyond Beltway: Health Debate Turns Hostile," *The New York Times*, August 7, 2009, http://www.nytimes.com/2009/08/08/us/politics/08townhall.html?_r=0 (accessed February 13, 2015); Jewish converts to Islam, "Irvine, CA - 11 Arrested for Disrupting Israeli Ambassador's Talk at UC Irvine," YouTube, February 9, 2010, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OcaryZbL3gE (accessed February 12, 2015); Nuor Shatila, Facebook message conversation with author, February 16, 2015 [Ms. Shatila, a student of UCR, was in February 2015 researching and producing a documentary on the "Irvine 11" as part of a class project in her media studies major]. Ms. Shatila said that part of the motivation for the protests were that in the previous year two of the eleven students had lost family members in Israeli offensives in Operation Cast Lead; most of the other eleven were not of Palestinian ancestry but were in sympathy with the sufferings of Palestinians.

they perhaps did not realize that this center was principally paid for by outside funds). The Meditation Room had acted as a default center for Muslim students who spent time there to pray and to see their friends. Those that made efforts for a Muslim Student Center may have also realized that some students of other religions who wanted to come to the Meditation Room to pray or meditate might feel intimidated by the large and almost constant presence of Muslim students. When they had difficulties making headway for a Muslim Student Center, they changed tactics and formed alliances with other student organizations to propose a Middle Eastern Student Center. Abia explained: "We were trying to get the Meditation Room as a room for MSA; it was difficult, because there was a lot of push back from others, such as Hillel; so we changed our approach to try to get a center as a Middle Eastern Student Center."

This switch was momentous as MSA leaders moved from controlling the locus of representations of Islam on campus to pushing for a center that could include the various representations of Islam and also put Muslims in close association with other religious groups. Abia said: "We wanted to more be representative of Islam than Muslims and do our best to clear misconceptions about Islam; our pursuit of [a center for Muslims] would be to represent Islam and Muslims on campus; but then changed our approach to become happy with having an MESC on campus and try not to have a singular voice of Muslims on campus." This shift was deeply valued by some campus Muslims. Mujahida said:

> I got super involved…and was able to find my identity with this group because it was a wide variety of views, it was not just Muslims, we had Christians and Jews, which made me feel better because I did not grow up in an all Muslim community; and then it was a also a space where people could express themselves and their views without being seen as like…not-really [that] Muslim… The MESC was kind of respectful of all views.

After over three years dialoguing with the university administration toward the goal, the Middle Eastern Student Center was inaugurated October 21, 2013.

In the Launch Party for the MESC, founders made clear that their vision is that the center will be a space and forum for students of very diverse identities—religious, national, ethnic, or otherwise—who felt a connection with that region of the world or had interest in learning more about the region and its history. Author, professor, and media personality Reza Aslan was the keynote speaker who explained its importance as a center for the diverse people associated with the Middle East and for the discovery of not just religion and politics but its culture, literature, art, music, and cuisine. In an interview, Kawthar—a Muslim who is active in a couple of UCR student organizations but infrequently in MSA—explained her support:

> The staff here is very welcoming and want to make one's time here as good as possible. I felt like having a Middle East Student Center is a great platform—no matter what religion, ethnicity, or identity—that people deserve to know about it, even more because 'our voice has been stolen'; a lot of Arab Christians talk about how not all Arabs are Muslims; totally sympathize with them with that, that they want to say, 'no, we have our own identity,'… It's so important for people to know the diversity of the Middle East; a lot of it is for establishing 'a voice for the unheard.'

Muslim, Jewish, and Christian students were among the founding members, and while they soberly admitted that this center would not solve the Middle East conflicts (and this is not its underlying purpose), this campus space would be open for students of varying backgrounds to dialogue, form friendships, understand each other better, and collaborate on common causes.

In the year leading up to the inauguration, however, the board of the Muslim Student Association of UC Riverside decided to withdraw official relationship with the

Middle Eastern Student Center. I learned the reasoning for not joining the MESC from this conversation with the then president of MSA:

> [Daniel:] So far what concern have you faced in your leadership and how has the MSA addressed them? [President:] Concerns? MESC, the student center. MSAs official position is to not join it officially, so that's one of our concerns, some of our members want us to join it, but leadership is very adamant about our decision not to because MSA is not a cultural organization, we're not a Middle Eastern club, we have many members from outside of the Middle East region, I'm not Middle Eastern, I'm South Asian and I don't consider myself from the Middle East. And even if you look at a map for the Middle East, Pakistan doesn't show up. [Daniel:] So that was the major reason why not to join? [President:] No it's not the major reason, but this is the reason that sounds good on paper, so that's the one we'll go with. The real reason is that some of the groups working for the MESC that are part of it officially, their ideologies directly conflict with our principles. So we cannot be hand in hand working with them because of that reason. [Daniel]: Do you feel comfortable giving me an example? [President:] Mainly Halal and Highlanders for Israel. Those two clubs are directly supporting the slaughter and murder and imprisonment of Muslims in Palestine… These organizations…support and defend the dehumanizing of those people; they shove those atrocities under the carpet; they make it seem like Israel is a perfectly good state, like it's a great democracy and has equality for everyone, what's happening over there is not that bad; yeah sure, we bulldoze thousands of homes, kicked out Palestinians from their historic homelands, destroyed their livelihood, destroyed their olive trees, their farms. You can look at the news how Israel launches rocket attacks on innocent people. We are completely against that because I imagine that if my blood family was there how I would feel. So if you would defend what your state is doing to Palestinians, I have no business working with you. We don't have any official relationship with them, I don't meet with their officers.

Hence, this MSA officer believed that association with a student center that houses organizations with practices that MSA opposes would be granting those organizations tacit approval; in contrast, disassociation implied protest of those organizations.[111]

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[111] Aaron J. Hahn Tapper, "The War of Words: Jews, Muslims, and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict on American University Campuses," *Muslims and Jews in America*, 81. Professor of Jewish Studies and Social Justice and professional conflict meditator Aaron Hahn Tapper finds the Jewish American establishment lengthy political and financial development compared to Muslim American organizations and the fact that Israel is a recognized and supported nation-state while Palestine holds an ambiguous status both effect the power disparities of Jewish campus groups over Muslim and Palestinian-interested ones. As such, dialogue in these cases necessitates the facilitation of trained professionals in conflict mediation who are specialists on these issues, such as himself, to be helpful. Even though it is reasonable that "disempowered groups commonly choose not to engage in "dialogue" activities," their choice not to is "usually misinterpreted as animosity and hostility." While my instincts are to disapprove this decision of the MSA board as it halts conversation and hinders understanding from continuing to be created, Tapper finds such a move as not only understandable but politically astute. He has found dialogue to too often be counterproductive when one of the parties hold a far more politically powerful ground and "reinforces the very power inequalities fueling intergroup strife in the first place."

Many MSA members were deeply disappointed with this decision by the board, especially those MSA members who had been working concertedly for the past four years, meeting weekly with other founders to turn the idea into reality. The MSA had an official liaison between it and the Middle Eastern Student Center for a few years before new leadership pulled away. Lateefa, who was a former liaison, explained: “The new MSA leadership has been against [the MESC] because of thinking that the best way to deal with Israeli student support in MESC is to boycott it. I don’t think that’s the best way, you don’t have to work with those students if you don’t want to, and if you can do inter-faith dialogue through this forum, that is great. I wish they would reconsider their current position…” In Ikhlas’s account the decision to disassociate from the MESC was unilaterally made by the 2012-2013 president of the MSA: “My problem with that was that I never saw an actual vote from the MSA whether they wanted to be involved with that; I had never missed a meeting last year, I was upset over that, lack of democracy or allow ourselves to think for ourselves whether we wanted to be part of that coalition.” On the other hand, the Students for Justice in Palestine, MSA’s close sister organization, decided to maintain its association with the MESC. In addition, individuals—mostly women— involved in MSA continued to attend MESC meetings and essentially became unofficial ambassadors between the new student center and the Muslim student organization.[112]

I asked the MSA president about this, explaining my own view: “I see this as a positive, the fact that SJP has decided to keep the dialogue going with Highlander for

[112] Marcela Ramirez, phone interview by author, March 17, 2015.

Israel's leadership to make sure there is a working relationship. It's probably difficult to see eye to eye but this relationship can help them understand each other's point of view." The officer replied:

> What we're against is normalization because [before] there was a very stark difference of opinion…and very hostile; that was actually very good for SJP because it motivated certain individuals to be active within SJP and they needed those people to move their organization forward. Ever since they began this dialogue with the Jewish organization, SJP has been viewed as a very soft organization, a lot of people tell me that they don't do much… That kind of hostile environment was actually beneficial to them in some ways. [Daniel]: Like firing them up? [President]: Exactly! Because SJP would build up a wall and then the Highlanders would protest and table against them. …we don't want to live in a boring world, it was fascinating, you know? It was interesting to a lot of people so it engaged both sides. And [recently] Highlanders for Israel had an Israel day and SJP didn't do anything, so they are kind of viewed as this weak organization now, and it's pretty much a shell of what it used to be. And I'm not bashing them, their leadership is doing a great job, they are doing as best they can with what they have, what the situation allows them to be.

Hence, just as much as collaborating with other groups can strengthen what can be accomplished toward a common cause, for this officer the spirit of competition with other groups can also be very important in motivating membership to be passionate and active.

This either/or approach of normalizing-relations or protesting the position of the other is problematic. Eschewing another, although in some situations a necessary approach, in this case perpetuates a radical alterity that amplifies the perceived moral faults of the other. This furthers the propensity to demonize the other and invites the other to do the same to you. In contrast, a pluralistic approach of dialogue and keeping open the lines of communication is based on a posture that others likely share similar capabilities of ethical discernment and moral reasoning and perhaps the other may deepen one's own moral perspective. If a principal root of violence and injustice is a dehumanizing of the other, relationships that nurture insight into others' fellow humanity is a powerful antidote. Martin Luther King Jr. taught that, for lasting change and justice to prevail, the

proclivity to defeat perpetrators of oppression must be replaced with actions that win them over, ones that work on the consciences of the other and that ultimately enhance mutual trust and partnership.

Conclusions

This chapter complicates representations of Muslim Student Association religious identities as being either inclusive, exclusive, or caught in a fierce battle between the two. Language, activities, and treatment of others that may be characterized by any of these two broad signifiers exist in varying degrees of harmony and tension within a single Muslim Student Association and among Muslim Student Associations of different campuses. Some student leaders may be eager to make MSA a forum to learn about varying Islamic denominations and interpretations; other leaders believe MSA must just focus on commonalities that most types of Muslims can agree upon. Some, although certainly not all, of this latter group are openly denunciatory of Shia or Sufi approaches to Islam. Some members of MSA strive to focus on similarities they have with other religions and are enthusiastic about understanding differences, while other members are only interested in other religions to verify why and how Islam is a superior religion. Some MSA participants almost exclusively spend their free time with fellow campus Muslims, while others move fluidly with Muslims and non-Muslims met through classes, other student clubs, and extracurricular interests.

This chapter has demonstrated that young adult Muslim Americans are largely being shaped by an ethos of pluralism in dealing with the religious and ethnic diversity

that exists within their country and also within their faith. Some believe learning about other people's faith is not only important for responsible cosmopolitanism but can also offer insights to deepen one's own faith. This belief supports efforts to make friendships outside of one's own religious and ethnic communities. Many of the young adults work diligently to create Muslim Student Associations that are welcoming to the diverse ethnicities and sectarian backgrounds of students by emphasizing basic Islamic beliefs and practices shared by most all Muslims and by extending the hand of friendship to new visitors to the organization. Many MSAs also have worked in collaboration and solidarity with other student associations on local community service projects or to address human rights and social justice issues that do not directly affect fellow Muslims.

Muslim Student Associations are challenged, as are other religious and ethnic groups in this country, to work through and apply the nuances of a pluralistic ethos to deeply engage fellow religionists and other American citizens.[113] Content with frequent simplistic reification of other faiths and other Islamic sects so as to affirm the value of their own religious identity, they fail to understand more deeply divine unity in the Christian trinity, Hindu images of God, Shia veneration of Imams, or Sufi association with saint worship. Within the Muslim Student Association, the leaders default approach to ethnic and sectarian differences is to focus on what most all Muslims may have in

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[113] "The seeking of a Muslim identity easily packaged into "1-877" numbers and billboards, while well-intentioned, marks a break with the past, and a move toward homogenization that is counter to the expression of diversity that have characterized most of Muslim history." "…dialogue among Muslims could include a willingness to see diversity within Muslims communities as a strength rather than an obstacle on the way to becoming American." Taymiya R. Zaman, "Jewish and Muslim Immigrant Communities and American Campuses," *Muslims and Jews in America*, eds. Reza Aslan and Aaron J. Hahn Tapper (2011), 100, 102.

common instead of also making MSA an opportunity to learn about and from differences. Additionally, believing their role is to not only to represent members but prescribe true Islam, leaders are anxious to teach about forms of Islam they find suspect. Typically, then, MSAs function in modes of unity in commonalities. Some MSAs are doing significant work in experimenting with models of unity in diversity, yet such efforts are still in their beginning stages and have not yet taken root in most MSAs. Finding limits to what they can do within the MSA, alternate forums often become important to Muslim activists, such as the newly established Middle Eastern Student Center at UC Riverside, to implement the kinds of pluralistic programming they find significant.

Muslim campus communities, like other religious and ethnic groups, still have much room to grow in translating into reality ideals of inter-ethnic unity and inter-religious relationships. With converts to Islam often experiencing arrogant paternalism from heritage Muslims, both parties may need to reevaluate their prejudice toward each other in hopes of finding true friendships of mutual caring and learning from each other. Young Muslim Americans have opportunities to continue to purify their thoughts and actions from the racial prejudices still prevalent in their heritage and American cultures so that they more fully reflect their ideals of a unified inter-ethnic *umma*. However, many young Muslims clearly draw on Islamic ideals "to know one another" and Muhammad's "Last Sermon" in which racial equality is believed to have been prescribed to claim that differences in skin color would not deter them from possibly marrying someone of not just a different national ancestry but a different race. MSAs and young Muslim Americans may explore further friendships with other campus religious associations (and

their members), ones sharing similar values of reverence to God, regard for fellow human beings, and abstention from drug abuse and promiscuity. Many youth, like the generation that preceded them, see the chief (or only) value in interfaith activities when done to be *da'wa* work, teaching others about Islam for the sake of possible conversion or at least further a positive image of Islam. Some others, however, see other important fruits of interfaith work, such as forming deep friendships, based on mutual understanding, and cooperating to create just and healthy local and global communities.

The beginning sections of this chapter have also filled a critical gap in understanding Muslim Americans' views on questions of pluralism and soteriology of the religious other. Previous research has focused on the views of these questions of eminent medieval Islamic scholars, contemporary Islamic scholar-activists, and mosque community leaders. No research to date has explored how the second generation young Muslim American interprets his or her faith to make sense of the spiritual resources and social stature of religious and ethnic others. I found that many young adult Muslims recuse themselves from judging the eternal fates of others by citing an Islamic ideal that "only God can judge." Nonetheless, many generally have an inclusive vision of salvation in which the godly are not just those who are "Muslim" in name and thus have the clearest vision of God's "straight path," but also others who do good deeds, live lives of integrity, and believe in one universal God. Many young Muslims active in MSAs believe they can find much common ground with not only Abrahamic religions but often with Hindus, Buddhists, and Sikhs as well. They ground this increasingly popular pluralistic vision in their faith in ways that they see as fully American and fully Islamic.

CONCLUSION

Young Adult Muslim Americans' Ethical Encounters

Choosing Islam: Dissertation Summary

Young adult Muslim Americans at West Coast colleges and universities, at the intersection between their parents and grandparents cultural heritages and that of their American upbringing, frequently draw on Islam to help them find (what they deem to be) universal norms and ideals. The frequent clash between their heritage cultures and their American one(s) bring to light for them the relativism, contingencies, and arbitrariness of human made norms and values. Threatened with this sense of anomie, yearning for moral certainty, desiring to strengthen familial relationships but in new adult ways and form a meaningful friendship group of peers, they turn to Islam and fellow Muslims on campus. Believed to be a religion revealed directly from God, Islam rises above the randomness of culture to provide a vision for their life that they feel is reliable, certain, and significant. Through their own research, conversations with friends, and interactions in Islam-based settings, their chosen faith tradition provides for them key insights to make sense of fundamental questions of identity, citizenship, gender, and human diversity.

Chapter One explored in detail this social matrix in which heritage Muslims come to embrace and assert Islam as a central facet of their personal identity. Appropriating Urie Brofenbrenner's Ecological Systems Model and based on interviewees' own narratives about what was crucial to their religious formation, I found religious education at home and frequently also at a mosque or Islamic center—through stories, discussion of

teachings, and memorization of the Qur'an—to be important influences in their childhood and into adolescence. As youth and young adults, viscerally conscious of the unfair negative treatment of Islam in mass media and the suspicion of Muslims among a large portion of fellow Americans, many rose up to defend their faith as fundamentally holy, beautiful, and precious. In college, finding fellow Muslims in the Student Association and similar campus spaces provided a haven and support network, relatively free from prejudice and social pressures (e.g. parties of alcohol, drugs, and sexual activities). They need not engage in activities contrary to their religion and family rearing. At the same time, perhaps just initially 'experimenting' with Islam, MSA lectures, study groups, social activities, and friendships—often with more experienced individuals who become peer mentors—cultivated and strengthened the students identification with Islam. Through this "who am I" journey in college life, the current North American ideology of multiculturalism—rather than the intense pressures of earlier eras to assimilate—encouraged them to celebrate family heritages that makes them unique. For many students, even more so than other characteristics of ethnicity, this family heritage was Islam.

Chapter Two uncovered contours of a "Muslim" identity and how it related to being "American" as well as various other demarcations (e.g. college major, ethnicity, gender, social class, political values) and activities (e.g. music, dance, sports, work, social justice activism, etc.) of their personal identities. Although some found the combination of religion and citizenship (e.g. Muslim American, Christian American, or Hindu American) awkward, most unhesitatingly identified with Islam as their religion and the

United States as their citizenship. At the same time, although it is difficult to identity a single “American Islam” among the grand diversity of articulation of Islam by this population, I demonstrated that their national environment did closely influence the interpretive choices they made in regards to their religion and their religion influenced how they interpret their citizenship. They creatively discerned overlaps of ideals emphasized in their country and faith tradition to articulate an American Islam that stresses: the dignity of individual conscience and interpretation; eclectically drawing on spiritual resources; and prayer and fasting as acts of self-growth and charity to others. Indeed they often defined religion principally in terms of those “rational” and pragmatic pursuits of public virtue, caring for and being of service to others. This claim of an “American Islam,” while wholeheartedly agreed with by some of my young Muslims friends, would be rejected by others who wish to project single, authentic and universal Islam, free from contaminating cultural influences of individual countries. This chapter also discussed that conservative interpretations of their faith attempted to demarcate Islam from other religions and cultures, making it uniquely “Islam.” In an environment of multiculturalism, this conservative Islam was often interpreted by insiders and outsiders as having more legitimacy than many other moderate interpretations.

Conceptions and practices related to sexuality and gender being central factors in how a society or group organizes itself, Chapter Three examined the institutional practices and individual interpretations related to the constructed binaries of male and female. Organizing space by gender divisions was an intentional practice by which campus Muslims individuate themselves and fashion distinctive identities. Individuals

who appeared to be engaging in dating activities, whether or not chaperoned and sexually abstinent, became vulnerable to the censure, ridicule, and gossip of their fellow Muslims. Many rejected practices of dating altogether, preferring specific conditions of only courting to possibly marry, getting to know each other under strict guidelines of family supervision. Nonetheless, men and women did work together in shared governance of the Muslim Student Association, represented quite equally in MSAs across California, although some—and certainly not all—male participants had challenges with the idea of a woman serving as president of the campus organization. On the other hand, central to the activist work of the MSA was to challenge neo-orientalists stereotypes about Muslim women, asserting the station, rights, and opportunities of the female gender within Islam and the headscarf as a dignifying symbol of her empowerment. The quintessential event of this mission was "*Ḥijāb* Day" or "*Ḥijāb* Challenge" in which MSA invited women who do not wear the headscarf, Muslim and non-Muslim alike, on campus to wear one for the day and share what it was like in an end-of-the-day reflection gathering. This event invited empathy and understanding for Muslim women who don this religious garb and also was a medium for performing *da'wa*—inviting others to learn about Islam.

Did young Muslims also show empathy and concern for religious, ethnic, and racial others, who were often also stereotyped and reified in ways that inflict violence on healthy human relationships? Chapter Four tackled this question, revealing that in their programming Muslim Student Associations emphasize a common denominator of Islamic beliefs and practices to include the diverse Muslims who may want to participate. Many MSAs were only beginning to learn how to enact models of pluralism that engage, learn

about, and include intra-Muslim differences, instead of veiling such religious diversity existing among the group's membership.

I argued that this challenge of creating a student association in which unity in diversity is as powerful to the group identity as any other particular notion of what it means to believe in Islam parallels the challenge of American national identity. Constructs of American national identity are also challenged to include, learn about, and engage the multiplicity of religious, ethnic, racial, gender, and socio-economic identities that exists among this country's denizens. Young Muslims would like to be included in American national identity, so were they making efforts to include what many of leadership might deem to be heterodox forms of Islam? In Chapter Four I highlighted and discussed the ways young adult Muslims have also been learning about these challenges in the trenches of fashioning alliances, coming together in solidarity over common issues of concern of social justice and human rights with student groups on campus of predominantly of other ethnic or religious bases (e.g. African American student group or Jewish student group) or of distinct social cause, such as LGBTQ. I argued that helpful to developing such positive social relationships was having regard for the potential salvation of non-Muslims, and so I also presented patterns from interviews in the ways young Muslims understood the creedal differences and eternal destinies of peoples of other religions. Other studies have only looked at this question of non-Muslim salvation from the perspective of popular theologians, and this is likely the first in-depth study of the soteriological perspectives of the young adult Muslim American population.

I will offer a few words of caution about generalizing these findings. With eighty young adult Muslim Americans interviewed, the one-hundred and fifty surveyed, and eight MSAs in the Pacific region of the United States examined, this research drew on an abundance of data. I am confident that these findings accurately reflect prominent trends among young adult Muslim Americans in colleges and universities along the west coast. However, further research is necessary for young adults attending colleges and universities in other regions of North America. Similarly, since most of the interviewees were active in MSAs, the findings here may not represent Muslim students who do not participate in MSA. Furthermore, we cannot be certain if young adults Muslims who do not immerse in higher education environments have similar experiences to ones that do. Abbas Barzegar seems correct in his argument that American Muslims forms of identity cut across ethnic lines, as my interviews did not disclose any systematic differences between Arabs and South Asians in how they articulated their faith.[1] Aside from the issue of *ḥijāb* being central to many Muslim American young women's identity formation, young women and the young men also spoke about their faith in many similar ways. A tentative finding, however, is that women officers of MSAs and converts (of both genders) were more consistently concerned than were male officers and non-converts with issues of inclusivity and embracing diversity. More MSAs with women presidents and more converts will need to be interviewed to confirm this trend. This study is a qualitative study but its involvement of large number of participants gives weight to its

[1] Abbas Barzegar, "Discourse, Identity, and Community: Problems and Prospects in the Study of Islam in America," *The Muslim World* 101 (July 2011): 520-521, 524-525, 527, 530, 532, 534, 536.

findings; further quantitative research is necessary to confirm or modify its representativeness of Muslim American young adults.

Being Muslim and American

Young Muslims would like to be included in American national identity, yet American national identity politics often intends to exclude them. On April 5, 2011, United States presidential candidate Herman Cain explained why he would not appoint an American whose religion is Islam to a White House cabinet position:

> If you take an oath on the Qur'an, that means you support Sharia law, I support American law. Our laws were derived from principles that are Biblically based… I don't want anyone in my administration that I'm going to have to be looking over my shoulder to try to figure out if they are going to try to do something against the principles I believe in which are also the principles that the majority, the overwhelming majority of the American people also believe in.

The next day, Sean Hannity discussed Cain's remarks with invited guest panelists, opening with the question (intended rhetorically), "Now, Sharia is the antithesis of our founding documents [of American government and laws], is it not?" Three out of the four panelists agreed with the essential legitimacy of Cain's comments.[2] Hannity closed this segment by answering his own question, "There seems to be irreconcilable differences between free society and those that believe in Sharia which control and especially repress female rights, women's rights, and [that of] non-Muslims and apostates and infidels."[3]

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[2] The one who did not agree said that she is a proud Christian but does not believe everything in the Bible is worthy of basing American law upon, perhaps alluding to many Muslims who may be similarly critical of the Islamic tradition. She later asserted the ridiculousness of Sharia-law being a cause for concern: since fewer than one percent of Americans are Muslims, it is very unlikely that Sharia would be an official part of the American legal system any time soon.

[3] Media Matters Staff, "Hannity Uses Segment On Cain's Plan To Keep Muslims Out Of His Cabinet To Fearmonger About Sharia," Media Matters for America, April 6, 2011, http://mediamatters.org/video/2011/04/06/hannity-uses-segment-on-cains-plan-to-keep-musl/178423 (accessed May 3, 2015).

Such comments by Cain and Hannity were not isolated events but were part of a decade-long agenda by some pundits on national news stations to represent Islamic and American values as polar opposites.[4]

For tens of thousands of young American Muslims, however, the world is not nearly so simplistic. They see much in American culture to admire and enjoy, as well as much to criticize. They also find much beauty and significance in Islam. It anguishes them when some fellow Muslims use Islam as justification to abuse others, since they believe Islam should encourage peace, justice, and respect for the dignity of others. There are aspects of popular American youth culture with which many young Muslims disagree, such as drug and alcohol use, sexual promiscuity, or revealing clothing. Yet there are other American practices that they interpret to align with Islamic values, such as the freedom to practice one's religion of choice, consultative decision-making, rights for women and minorities, and a concern to not just be held accountable to the force of the nation-state but to God as well. Thus, they very often find little conflict in being loyal to Islamic values and American values. They feel that they are nationally and culturally entirely American and that they are religiously entirely Muslim, and they yearn for the wholeness that this lack of inherent conflict can deliver. Yet sometimes non-Muslim Americans give demeaning comments and stares that communicate "foreigner," the Muslims sense of America as their homeland is shaken. This experience of racial, ethnic, or religious prejudice as a minority in the United States consistently constitutes what

[4] Mohamed Nimer, "Islamophobia and Anti-Americanism: Measurements, Dynamics, and Consequences," *Islamophobia: The Challenge of Pluralism in the 21st Century*, ed. John L. Esposito & Ibrahim Kalin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 121.

W.E.B. Du Bois calls a "double consciousness": Negro and American for the group on which Du Bois focused, Muslim and American for that on which I focus.[5]

The decision of these young adults—whose parents are from North Africa, eastern Europe, and Asia—to pursue their Islamic heritage religion as a central facet of their identity is itself a very American one. Or, more precisely, it is a very American Muslim choice. Freedom of conscience is a foundational principle of the United States and these young adults have exercised it in "choosing" a religion that is not the majority's choice (Christianity). They correlate this American principle of freedom of religion to Qur'anic verses that say "there shall be no compulsion in religion"; they also cite the Islamic ideal of protecting religious minorities [*dhimmi*s] under Islamicate rule.[6] This American value of individual experience and conscience over tradition and conformity is reflected in the young Muslims' choice to follow the religion they experience as and believe is good, holy, and beautiful. For them, not following majoritarian religious pathways highlights their own decision to surrender [*islam*] to the will of God instead of that of the larger society.

Furthermore, although the majority of Americans today identify to varying degrees with the Christian religion, the popularization of multiculturalism denotes that one does not become American by necessarily adopting the majoritarian characteristics

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[5] He defined double-consciousness as the "sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity." W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Project Gutenberg Ebook, 1903), chapter 1, http://www.gutenberg.org/files/408/408-h/408-h.htm, (accessed May 5, 2015).

[6] "Islamicate" is a term popularized by Marshall Hodgson in his *The Venture of Islam* multi-volume history to designate the societies and empire implemented by Muslim rulers in the 7th to 19th centuries of the common era, which were actually mulit-religious societies and actually practice Islamic derived principles of government and laws to varying degrees.

but by being or becoming “ethnic.” Arguably, in this politics of multiculturalism, demonstrating characteristics that distinguish one as Muslim, despite many of their fellow Americans are suspicious of Islam, actually helps one become more American. This identity move also appropriates the overlapping American values of individuality and nonconformity.

Authenticity in multiculturalist politics is projected through adopting some practices that make one’s group identity distinctive from that of the majority. The practices that work best in multiculturalist politics are ones that are conspicuously visible and apparent. Such an approach also lends the group a veneer of traditionalism. Thus, as discussed in chapter three, taking on conservative practices on various topics gives an appearance of legitimacy. In this way dividing meeting spaces by gender and asserting the unquestionability of Islamic injunctions for women to wear a headscarf—yet that she should only do so by her own “choice”—are not just expressions of Islamic traditionalism but very American interpretations.[7] Projecting an aura of conservatism on these issues then gives them the room to practice liberal or egalitarian values on other issues without it seeming like inauthentic novelty or innovation [*bida’*]: both genders leading the Muslim Student Associations together by council [*shura*] or a board instead

[7] For followers of many religions, trying to identify and emulate what was taught and practiced by their religious founder(s) and his/their first community is what lends authenticity and authority to their own practice. What was actually taught and practiced by the original community, what of this are essential foundations of the religion and what is extraneous or even impiety, are matters of diligent interpretation and (often fierce) debate. Young Muslim Americans, thus, are not just imitating pious precedents of the prophet Muhammad and his first followers, but their traditionalist impulse to understand and emulate that which was pious and that which was not takes place fourteen hundred years later in a very different geo-political-cultural environment than Muhammad’s original community. Traditionalism, then, is always a very contemporary, modern, and creative human activity.

of a single charismatic figure [e.g. emir, caliph, shaykh, imam]; or the right of a woman to pursue the development of her full range of talents, skills, and passions and contribute in every sphere of society instead of staying in an exclusively domestic role. While these young adult Muslim Americans have grown up witnessing Muslim and non-Muslim women and ethnic minorities breaking glass ceilings in each sphere of public and business life, they also legitimize their visions of women in these spheres by drawing on the examples of the prophet Muhammad's wives, Khadija and 'Aisha, who were leaders in business, religion, and politics. Indeed, the choice of Islam partly appeals to their sense of justice and idealism, as they defend the goodness and purity of Islam to counter bombardments of media depictions of "Muslims" doing bad things. They present a positive image of Islam through their own civic virtue, peacefulness, and encouragement of the empowerment of women.

An American Islam

The emerging American Islam of the young adults I got to know highlights ideals with which many, if not most, leaders of Muslim student organizations would agree. What has been presented here also complicates simple theses of this population's beliefs and practices. Young Muslims are a more diverse population than most previous research, as well as sometimes their own rhetoric, has accounted. Some young Muslim leaders, in their quest for moral certainties and the creation of coherent Muslim communities, readily quote a prophetic tradition that what is right is clear and what is

wrong is clear and one should avoid the gray areas.[8] Yet perhaps this *ḥadīth*'s advice is not so much to consider gray areas as being wrong but to avoid their discussion as possible sources of contention and disunity. Indeed, other young Muslims leaders consider the very diversity of the American Muslim community, and not just in ethnicity and cultural background, but also in religious views about music, the headscarf, or homosexuality, as confirmation that it is truly a vibrant and healthy American and Islamic religious community. They can honor sincere quests to use their powers of thorough investigation and moral reasoning to make individual decisions about Islam. That they can fashion unity despite and through these differences is their own microcosm of the American *E Pluribus Unum* and the Qur'anic precepts to "know one another" from different peoples and tribes and to "hold firmly to the rope of Allah all together and do not become divided."[9]

Learning from Each Other

This drive toward unity in diversity is both attractive and challenging to young adult Muslim Americans. Studying their journeys to create coherent communities based on Islam may not just encourage them to further their conscientious identity formation but to also help others do the same with their identity formations within American and global society. Young Muslim women feel hurt and driven away when they become the

[8] "That which is lawful is clear and that which is unlawful is clear, and between the two of them are doubtful matters about which many people do not know. Thus he who avoids doubtful matters clears himself in regard to his religion and his honor, but he who falls into doubtful matters [eventually] falls into that which is unlawful, like the shepherd who pastures around a sanctuary, all but grazing therein." 40 Hadith Nawawi 6, http://sunnah.com/nawawi40 (accessed May 24, 2015)
[9] Qur'an 49:13 and 3:103.

object of gossip and backbiting instead of their peers addressing them directly with any questions or concerns. Muslim women who do not wear a headscarf feel less-than when the *ḥijāb* is given preeminent attention as a marker of piety by fellow MSA women. Converts feel rejected when they receive patronizing questioning as if they are not good-enough Muslims instead of being approached as equal partners in a mutual process of learning. Dark-skinned Muslims feel broken hearted when comments by fellow Muslims imply they are inferior or ugly instead of expressions of God's beautiful and diverse creation. Shia, Sufi, and Ahmadiyya Muslims do not feel fully included when the MSA leadership will not host events that may help fellow Muslims learn about their similarities and differences. Muslim leaders of other and future MSAs and Islamic organizations can learn important lessons from these groups struggles narrated here.[10]

The triumphs of the Muslim analyzed here also offer fellow Muslims and non-Muslims important learning. Putting brotherly or sisterly fellowship before ethnic or religious differences offers lessons about emphasizing human commonalities to promote unity. When MSA leaders go out of their way to make sure converts are invited to family gatherings to celebrate 'Id festivities, to assure resources and timing is in place so Shias can pray the way they believe, or to invite Sufi-oriented speakers to give a talk at their general meeting, they exemplify that embracing diversity is also crucial to cultivating unity. Likewise others can be encouraged by many young Muslims refusal to dismiss Buddhists, Hindus, Jews, and Christians for their apparent different conceptions of God

[10] Yet many of these struggles are not peculiar to Muslims but all of us may derive helpful insights about creating compassionate, welcoming, and unified communities.

but make efforts to learn about parallels and appreciate differences. When young Muslim Americans define heaven as for not just those traditional followers of Muhammad but also for anyone who also believes in God and does righteous deeds, they are fashioning identities in which the more generality of humanity may be included. When they prioritize friendship and care for another before differences of interpretation about sexual orientation, music, or clothing, they demonstrate that human bonds are able to transcend any specific disagreements.

Muslim leaders on one campus often interfacing with Muslim leaders on other campuses helps to spread types of programming, models of working with Muslim differences, and other Islamic views and practices between MSAs. MSA West has become an especially important forum for officers of individual campus MSAs to come together, form inter-campus friendships, reflect and share learning about how there is not only one way to lead their MSAs. Hesitation to embrace the unique identities of Muslim Sufis, Shias, and others occurs just as often because officers are unsure about how to do this as because some influential officers attempt to adjudicate what (they believe) is true Islam. Muslim leaders passionate about social justice have been very active in giving presentations for MSA West, so this regional organization will continue to be important in sharing new models of unity in diversity that can work hand-in-hand with common denominator forms of inclusivity.

Cultural Polyglots and Ethical Identities:
From Reactionary Pride to Pluralistic Cosmopolitans

Kambiz GhaneaBassiri's 2010 publication of *A History of Islam in America* keenly problematizes a lineage of scholarship that sets United States' ideals as a golden standard to which the Muslims in our country may or may not be successfully conforming. He presents as a central example of such works the 1998 book entitled as the question *Muslims on the Americanization Path?*[11] He argues that this framing engages and reinforces fears about whether American Muslims "ought to be regarded as a disruptive source in American society."[12] Secondly, this framing sets up "Muslims" and "America" as inherently distinct and dichotomous rather than part and parcel of each other.[13] As GhaneaBassiri argues, Muslims have been intimately involved in the creation of the United States, and the United States has likewise created this country's Muslims, in a mutual process of "encounters and exchanges." America belongs to Muslims, as much as it belongs to Jewish, Christian, Buddhist, Hindu, Sikh, Bahá'í, atheists, or agnostic people in the United States. And Muslims belong in America.[14]

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[11] Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and John Esposito, *Muslims on the Americanization Path?* (New York: Oxford Univesity Press, 1998).
[12] Kambiz GhaneaBassiri, *A History of Islam in America: From the New World to the New World Order* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 4-5.
[13] GhaneaBassiri, however, notes that the above cited book itself then works to undo such initial dichotomies by arguing that "Americans need to "realize that Muslims are 'us.'"" *A History of Islam in America*, 6.
[14] GhaneaBassiri critiques these books "for evoking these conceptual dichotomies of "Islam and the West" "Islam and Democracy," or "Islam and Modernity," "even while working to counter them." His own approach seeks to overcome such binaries by making American Muslims an irreducible category that has shaped and been shaped by non-Muslim Americans. This approach allows him to develop new questions, categories, and analyses beyond whether Muslims are adapting and being recognized as fellow Americans (although he does tackle the latter question as well). GhaneaBassiri, *A History of Islam in America*, 7-8.

I argue that the question "Are Muslims on the Americanization Path?" is wrong for other reasons as well. In my view, there is nothing intrinsically good or holy about American or any other nationality. "American" is not some divinely-decreed scale that stamps individuals and communities as "good" or "bad" in relation to whether their values and practices are completely in harmony with its values and practices. If Muslims' values and practices are in many ways distinct from an idealistic conception of the majority, does this necessarily make the Muslims "un-American," suspicious, or troublesome? Have projected American normativities been sufficiently interrogated to know which of its values and practices could be considered ideal values and which ones could be abandoned?

That Muslims need to Americanize draws on a triumphalist rhetoric in which, instead of "a more perfect union," a "city on the hill," or a "promised land," that is continually pursued and constructed by this nation of Native Americans, immigrants and their native-born descendants, this country's journey has been completed. In this view, new immigrants and their children should either adopt current majoritarian norms or go back to where they originated. However, America is not a finished product. This country has in many ways taken the lead among fellow nations in its experiment in democratic government "of the people, by the people," in freedom of conscience and religion, in technological and intellectual ingenuity, in creating a powerful globally-linked economy, yet a sober reading of reality shows this nation grossly lacking in fashioning a Garden of Eden for its inhabitants.

If neither Islamic nor American ideals are necessarily the golden standard for the world, where does that leave American Muslims and non-Muslim Americans in the quest for symbols of selfhood? Ashraf's statement below begins with responding to fear-mongering rhetoric that Muslims represent a growing fascist, oppressive, and violent force in America.[15] However, in what he says next lies the seed of better reasoning of why understanding Muslims and their membership in American society is important:

> …the other day I read this letter in Turkey…and it was basically the Prophet's letter to a [Christian] monk…about protecting that person's rights. So we are protecting the right for other people to worship also, Christians to worship, they should have their churches, their synagogues, you know, to have their different realms. Islam is not a giant ship that is just taking over and parking and wrecking everything in sight… So…the Prophet said he came to perfect human characters, so it is just adding on to it, it is perfecting it a little bit, reinforcing what is already there. So these different things that are already in society, it is being reinforced. The media, there might be already a lot of ethics, but might be some things that are missing, so as Muslims we might be reinforcing the ethics that are in there…and taking it to a different level, and trying to implement it. The same thing in government politics there are lot of unethical practices, we're basically reinforcing that ethics again. So we are not creating something new, and we're not here to destroy systems. We're here to work within the systems and reinforce things; that would be stupid to just destroy the whole systems, and to say that we're going to try to build it from scratch. A lot of people try to do that and they end up not building anything from scratch.

While "Islam is the answer" to all problems manifests just as much illegitimate arrogance as American triumphalism, Muslims—like many Protestants, Catholics, Jews, and a-religious individuals and communities—surely continue to have ideas and practices valuable to the fashioning of a more perfect America. America, likewise, has ideas and practices helpful to fashioning more perfect Muslims. Kambiz Ghaneabassiri's history of Muslim Americans gave a broad look in how this country's Muslims and the generality of American society and politics have helped constitute each other in search of a "more

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[15] In contrast, the research I have presented here depicts that the Islam of these young Muslims is quite unlike the monolithic, hegemonic, and homogenous virus that Islam/*shari'ah* is often depicted in fear-mongering editorial news. Also see A. Michael Weinman, "*Hiwar* in Albuquerque: Members of an American Muslim Community in Conversation," (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of New Mexico, 2009), 7

perfect union." This dissertation takes a more detailed look at young adult Muslims on campuses' involvement in these processes.

What is interesting about the fashioning of an American Muslim identity is not to continue to scrutinize whether this nation's Muslims are a threat to "*the* American way of life" or to national security. Abundant evidence suggests that America's Muslims are no more or less a threat than this nation's Orthodox Jews, Latino Catholics, Evangelical African Americans, or white Mormons. Muslim Americans, like others who choose to take on a religious identity as central to who they are, offer a case study in the fashioning of a contemporary religious identity at the nexus of a multiplicity of global political, ideological, social, and religious forces and values. American Muslims, like people of other religions and ideologies, no matter how much they would like to represent their religion as singular, authentic, and pure, work through a myriad of global influences and intellectual lenses to define the teachings of Islam. They attempt to make sense of the myriad forces and values in their environments to live in ways they believe will be faithful to their Lord, fulfilling to themselves, strengthening relationships with friends and family, and contributing to the betterment of their local, national, and global communities. For these Muslim Americans, the values of each major component of this identity (American and Muslim) are related and have important things to furnish for him or her.

Whether one's imagined community is the local religious group, the nation, political party, or global village, the reality of the planet is that networks and confluences of influences are so complex that efforts at categorizing what is authentically Islamic,

Christian, Republican, Democratic, Nigerian or American are fanciful at best. Martin Luther King Jr. eloquently stated, "We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny."[16] It is not just that no human is an island but that we are all the members of a single planetary organism—the human species, itself member of the earth's biosphere. Although I have attempted to find overlaps between contemporary Muslim Americans' discourse and popular rhetoric in the broader American public sphere, rarely can we identify who or what actually was the originator of which rhetoric. To me discerning genealogies and networks of linguistic and behavioral practices, making judgments about authenticity, or evaluating whether another is becoming comfortably *like me* have not been the key questions. Counteracting prejudice and stereotyping has been a more important objective. However, for me the more pressing interest in young adult Muslim Americans on campus is using them as a further case study, among many significant ones gathered by the humanities and social sciences scholars about other populations, to help each other define *what values (or combination of values) and practices from our global heritage instantiate the kinds of individuals, communities, and global village that we would like to become?*

Those who are religious or ethnic minorities (although often those of "majorities" as well), such as these young Muslim Americans, grow up in homes whose ways are distinctive and in which parents often differentiate from the wider society that these young people are also forced to navigate. As cultural polyglots, they do not assume the

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[16] This line was frequently stated in speeches and was also included in his April 16, 1963 "Letter from Birmingham Jail."

given-ness of any single lifeworld. Through their childhood and youth, their situation (betwixt and between) offers vital opportunities to develop capacities to perceive the differences in life worlds and the possibilities and limitations, the strengths and weaknesses, of each one.[17] The triumphs and difficulties of these young Muslim Americans in fashioning healthy identities and cohesive communities offer insights into conditions and propensities that can either facilitate or deter such identities and communities.

Marcia Hermansen's own critical observations also help us better perceive the conditions and propensities that stifle the fashioning of such healthy community identities. Hermansen characterized the "identity Islam" that she observed (especially among participants in MSAs and related organizations/mosques) as one of uncritical mythologizing of the perfection of Islamic teachings and the politic of the original Muslim community. She asserted that this Islam dismisses as *kāfir*s [infidels] Muslims and non-Muslims who did not think and act exactly as it taught. This identity Islam is:

> not an intellectual critique of alternatives but rather a mindless and rigid rejection of "the Other" and the creation of a de-cultured, rule based space where one asserts Muslim "difference" based on gender segregation, romantic recreations of madrasa experiences, and the most blatantly apologetic articulations of Islam. It replaces spirituality with arrogance and a smug pride in one's superior manifestation of visible symbols of identity. [18]

The negative forms of identity Islam critiqued by Marcia Hermansen occurs as a quick, defensive posture against rhetoric that sets an enlightened West or America or Judeo-

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[17] This is to say their situation offers the potential to develop such capacities. Young Muslim Americans are just as susceptible as other populations to gross oversimplifications and prejudiced reifications in judging particular aspects of each life world.

[18] Marcia Hermansen, "How to Put the Genie Back in the Bottle? "Identity" Islam and Muslim Youth Cultures in America," *Progressive Muslims: On Justice, Gender, and Pluralism* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2003 [Kindle Edition]), Kindle Locations 7981-7985.

Christian tradition against a backward and barbaric Islam. Some Muslims then react to this thoughtless religio-nationalistic (and Occidentalist) pride with a thoughtless pride of their own for Islam and a romanticized classical Islamic civilization.[19]

If many in American society would like our country's young Muslims to be thoughtful and careful about how they interpret their religious tradition, we can all exemplify strong levels of thought and care in how we define and enact our own religious, philosophical cultural, or nationalistic ideals. Do we parrot "America is the best country in the world" without knowing strengths and weaknesses of other nations? Do we assume the superiority of our faith while knowing very little about other faiths? Does our atheism scoff at religion as superstition without weighing the intimate role of faith in the construction of scientific knowledge or love for the transcendent in fashioning lives of significance? Patriotism, pride, or epistemological certainties are not inherently problematic but they must not stifle an equal measure of kinship with so-called outsiders and the humility and sobriety to listen, learn about, learn from, and learn with those who are not apparently members of our nexus points of identity. In Islam and American ideals alike we can see an encouragement of these latter traits, such as when they enjoin reflecting and carefully discerning our realities, knowing and understanding each other instead of quickly dismissing different subjectivities. Such humility and sobriety is necessary if we Muslims and non-Muslims are to take advantage of the clash and

[19] "One can at least understand the rigid stance and triumphalism as empowering individuals feeling disempowered in other contexts." Marcia Hermansen, *Progressive Muslims*, Kindle location 8013-8014. This discussion is not about a blame game, however. One who is punched in the face still has agency in deciding if he or she is going to respond in kind or take an alternative, and hopefully a more productive, route

intersection of varied perspectives and practices so as to question our assumptions, weigh and consider our values, and spark discernment on what should be perpetuated, what should be laid to rest, and what can be improved upon. These young Muslims colleges and university settings of human diversity and course offerings also provide special opportunities to further such vital work. This work of deep, engaged pluralistic cosmopolitanism is the work that all of us, including our nation's Muslims, have many challenges, triumphs, and opportunities to realize more fully.

APPENDIX I

Brief Profiles of Young Adult Muslim American Interviewees

1	Pseudonym	Gender	Major	National / Ethnic heritage	Upbringing	MSA Relation	College Status
2	Aadil	M	Not Available	Not Available	Middle East, USA	Former Officer	CPP Student / prez MSA
3	Abia	F	Law	Afghani	USA	Former Officer	UCR Alum / law student DC
4	Adam	M	Political Science	South Asian	USA	Former Officer	UCR Alumnus
5	Adeeb	M	Engineering	Palestinian	USA	Former Officer	UCLA Alumnus
6	Adeela	F	Ethnic Studies	Palestinian	USA	Officer	UCR Student
7	Ahmad Khan	M	Political Science	Pakistani	Pakistan & USA	Officer	UCR Student
8	Ameen	M	Business	Bangladeshi	UAE, USA	Irregular Participant	UCR Student
9	Anya	F	Religious Studies	Indonesian	USA	Non-Participant	UCR Alumnus
10	Asadullah	M	Not Available	African American	USA	Officer	RCC student
11	Ashraf	M	Graphic Design	Indian	USA	Former Officer	CSUSB Student
12	Badiya	F	Sociology, Admin. Studies	Pakistani	USA	Participant	UCR Student
13	Bahaaj	M	Business Administration	Palestinian	USA	Participant	UCR Student
14	Bahir	M	Biology	Egyptian	USA	Participant	UCR Student
15	Barroq	M	Chemical Engineering	Palestinian	USA	Participant	UCR Student
16	Baseem	M	Psychology	Persian, Latino	USA	Participant	UCR Student
17	Bayan	M	Health Fitness Science	Syrian	USA	Former Officer	UCR Student
18	Cala	F	Microbiology	Jordanian	USA, Jordan	Participant	UCR Student
19	Cantara	F	Pol. Sci., Comp. Lit.	Egyptian	USA	Officer	Berkeley grad '14
20	Cristina	F	Linguistics	Latina	USA	Estranged,	UCR Student
21	Dani	M	History	Latino, Palestinian	USA	Former Participant	UCR Alumnus
22	Dawud	M	Biochemistry	Levantine	USA	Participant	UCR Student
23	Farah	F	Psychology	Indian	USA	No MSA at her College	Eastern WA grad student
24	Farooz	M	Dentistry	Moroccan, Swedish	Sweden, Morocco, USA	Participant	UCLA Grad / Dental School
25	Farzam	M	Political Science	Pakistani	USA	Irregular Participant	UCR Student
26	Hakeem	M	Biochemistry	Syrian	USA	Officer	UCR Student
27	Halala	F	Biology	Palestinian	USA	Participant	UCR Student
28	Hamza	M	Pre-Med	Somali	USA	Former Officer	UCR Student
29	Husayn	M	Neurobiology	Palestinian	USA	Officer	UCR Student
30	Ikhlas	F	English, Middle Eastern Studies	Lebanese	USA	Irregular Participant	UCR Student
31	Ilm	F	English, Journalism	Palestinian	USA	Officer	CSUSB Student
32	Isra	F	Environmental Engineering	Iraqi, Levantine, Caucasian	USA, England	Participant	UCR Student
33	Jai	M	Accounting, Business	Bangladeshi	USA	Former Officer	UCR student
34	Jalaal	M	Not Available	African American	USA	Not Available	Not Available
35	Jasmine	F	Linguistics	African American	USA	Estranged	UCR Student
36	Kawthar	F	Pre-Med	Levantine	USA	Irregular Participant	UCR Student
37	Khadija	F	Creative Writing, Pre-Med	Somali	USA, Kenya	Irregular Participant	UCR Student
38	Lateefa	F	Engineering	Saudi Arabian	Saudi Arabia	Former Officer	UCR Student
39	Layla	F	Creative Writing	Palestinian	USA	Former Officer	UCR Alumnus
40	Luqman	M	Mathematics	Lybia	USA	Officer	UCR Student
41	Majid	M	Business, Political Science	Indian	USA	Non-Participant	UCI '14 Alumnus
42	Marjan	F	Pre-Law	Afghani	USA	Participant	UCR Student
43	Mark	M	Sociology	African American	USA	Officer	Univ. WA Alumnus
44	Melanie	F	Not Available	Not Available	USA	Officer	UCLA Student
45	Mojdeh	F	Religious Studies	Persian	Iran & USA	Participant	UCR Student
46	Mujahida	F	Global Studies	Bosnian	USA	Participant	UCR Student
47	Munirah	F	Environmental Policy	Pakistani	Pakistan & USA	Officer	UCR Student
48	Nabeel	M	Computer Science	Sudanese	USA, Saudi Arabia	Former Officer	CSULA Student
49	Nadra	F	Pre-Med	Sri Lankan	Sri Lanka, USA	Irregular Participant	UCR Student
50	Na'il	M	Environmental Engineering	Egyptian	USA	Officer	UCR Student
51	Najeeb	M	Political Science	Somali	USA	Participant	UCR Student
52	Nuri	M	Industrial Psychology	Egyptian	USA	Officer	UCR Student
53	Omeed	M	Biological Engineering	Indian	USA	Participant	UCR Student
54	Qani	M	Law	Palestinian	USA	Non-Participant	UCR Student
55	Qatara	F	Biology	Pakistani	USA	Participant	UCR Student
56	Radi	M	Economics	Sudanese	USA	Participant	UCR Student
57	Rafeeq	M	Computer Science	Indian	USA	Participant	CSUSB Student
58	Reem	F	Global Studies	Palestinian	USA, Jordan	Irregular Participant	UCR Student
59	Riya	F	Business, Marketing	African American	USA	Estranged	College of the West student
60	Rohana	F	Neurobiology	Iraqi	Iraq	Officer	UCR Student
61	Ruhi	M	Engineering	Egyptian	USA	Participant	UCR Student
62	Sabir	M	Psychology	Afghani, Pakistani	USA	Officer	UCR Student

63	Pseudonym	Gender	Major	National / Ethnic heritage	Upbringing	MSA Relation	College Status
64	Sadeeq	M	Islamic Sciences	Caucasian	USA	Popular Guest Speaker	UCSD '05, Al-Azhar 2012
65	Safi	M	Business Marketing	Palestinian	USA	Participant	UCR Student
66	Sahara	F	English, Pre-Law	Libyan	USA	Officer	RCC student
67	Samira	F	Cultural Studies	Indian	USA	Officer	UCR Student
68	Sana	F	Media Studies	Levantine	USA	Officer	UCR Student
69	Shakir	M	Not Available	Arab	USA	Officer	UCI Student
70	Shariq	M	Engineering	Palestinian	USA	Former Officer	UCR Alumnus
71	Shems	M	Pre-Med	Saudi, Pakistani	USA	Participant	UCR Student
72	Sheng Lan	F	Psychology	Chinese / Taiwanese	USA	Irregular Participant	UCR Student
73	Shirin	F	Biology	Levantine	USA	Officer	UCR Student
74	Sira	F	Sociology	Lebanese	USA	Non-Participant	UCR Student
75	Taha	M	Political Science	Palestinian	USA	Former Officer	UCR Alumnus
76	Tahira	F	Environmental Engineering	Bangladeshi	USA	Irregular Participant	UCLA student
77	Tana	F	Pre-Med	India	India, USA	Non-Participant	UCR Student
78	Tariq	M	Political Science, Pre-Med	Ethiopian, Somali	USA	Participant	UCR Student
79	William	M	Pre-Law	African American, Indonesian	USA	Irregular Participant	UCR Student
80	Yunus	M	Engineering	Jordanian	Jordan	Participant	UCR Student
81	Zahir	M	Computer Information Systems	Levantine	USA	Officer	CPP Student
82	Zahra	F	Middle Eastern Studies	Middle Eastern	USA	Former Officer	UC Berkeley Alumnus
83	Zakir	M	Business	Palestinian	USA	Officer	CSUSB Student

APPENDIX II

Common Interview Questions

Questions for young adult Muslim Americans and Muslim Student Association Participants:

1) Tell me about yourself: who you see yourself as being, who do your good friends see yourself as being, what do you stand for, how do you identify yourself?
2) Would you tell me about your life story that has led you to this identity?
3) (For MSA participants): How did you come to be involved in the MSA?
    a. What do you appreciate about participating in MSA
    b. What has been your experience participating in MSA
    c. Do you find MSA has a very welcoming atmosphere
    d. What does MSA do to welcome those who may practice Islam differently than the student leadership?
    e. Welcome those that may practice another religion or no religion?
4) (For MSA participants): Do you have Muslim friends who do not participate in MSA?
    a. Do you know why they choose not to participate in MSA?
    b. Is this a barrier to your friendship?
    c. Do you have close non-Muslim friends?
5) Do you identify yourself as a Muslim? (please explain)
    a. How has the MSA been helpful or harmful to the development of an Islamic identity for its participants?
6) What do you appreciate about the Islamic faith?
    a. What difficulties have you found in Islamic teachings and/or practice?
    b. How do you define being a Muslim?
    c. How do you define Islam
7) (For MSA participants): How does the MSA deal with the diversity of interpretations of Islam found among Muslims and within their own membership?
8) What do you think is unique about being Muslim in the United States?
9) What solutions does Islam offer to modern-day problems?

10) What do Muslim Americans have to offer to their communities (local, national, global)? And you personally: goals or doing now?
11) What might we do to help progressively decrease the Islamophobia that is still rampant in our country?
    a. How does MSA work on this issue?
12) Which – if any – other religions, philosophies, value systems, have you contemplated or had close friends who participated in?
    a. What do you appreciate it?
    b. Where does it seem to fall short?
13) Do you believe Islam is the only way to Paradise or can other religions also help their followers attain heaven?
14) What are the convictions of your close friends?
    a. Do you find the Islamic faith helps or presents certain challenges to make friendships with those of different faiths and practices? (explain)
15) (For MSA participants): MSA's collaboration and relationship building with other campus organizations?
16) What makes a strong Islamic marriage?
    a. What roles should men and women take within the marriage?
    b. How should they solve disagreements?
17) Should women be leaders in public society?
    a. In government and politics?
    b. In mosques, Islamic centers, and Islamic organizations?
18) What are your thoughts about the contemporary issue of homosexuality and marriage equality rights?
19) What – if any international issues – are you passionate about (e.g. Israel-Palestine, Syrian civil war, AIDS epidemic, child welfare, protection of the natural environment)? What are the best ways to go about working out these challenges?

Interview questions for MSA Officers or Board Members

1) What were your goals and that of the leadership during your tenure in MSA?
2) What MSA activities were you involved in during your tenure of leadership?
3) What issues of concern did you face and how did MSA address these challenges?
4) Do you think MSA is for representing Muslims or representing Islam on the college campus? (please explain)
5) Do you find the MSA has been successful in embracing and welcoming those who approach Islam in varied ways (Twelver Shiite, Ismaili Shiite, Sufi, 'political' Islam, 'cultural' Islam, just wanting to learn more)?
6) Has the MSA been successful in making partnerships with other student organizations or religious associations in the college and community? What have they done?
7) How has MSA addressed issues of Islamophobia?
8) What is the importance of MSAs on college campuses?
9) What is your vision for Islam in America?

APPENDIX III

Muslims and Diversity on Campus – brief questionnaire

1. Age Range: 17-25 26-35 36-45 45<

2. National or ethnic family heritage:
____
____

3. How many years has your family been in the US? ____________________________
____

4. *Born in the US OR *Age when came ______________

5. Gender: Female Male ________________________________

6. Religious and National Identity?

   *Muslim American *American Muslim *Other___________________

Comment:____
____
____

APPENDIX IV

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, RIVERSIDE
CONSENT TO ACT AS A HUMAN RESEARCH SUBJECT

Young Muslim Americans in Muslim Student Associations: Identity, Activism, and Pluralism

You are being asked to participate because you are, or were, a participant in the Muslim Student Association or identify (to some degree) as a Muslim. Participation in this research study is completely voluntary. Please read this information below and ask questions about anything that you do not understand before deciding if you want to participate. The researcher listed below will be available to answer your questions.

INVESTIGATORS AND SPONSOR
Lead Researcher: Daniel Azim Pschaida - Department of Religious Studies – University of California, Riverside
Study Location: University of California, Riverside
Study Sponsor: the University of California, Riverside.

PURPOSE OF STUDY: My dissertation project will attempt to bring more understanding to your generation of young Muslim Americans. I wish to better inform the public about Muslim Americans through this Muslim Student Association, as well as the religious and social consciousness of those young Muslim leaders who do not participate in the MSAs, and the potential and challenges of working with religious and ethnic diversity and effecting social change as young student activists in the United States.

SUBJECTS
Inclusion Requirements: You are being asked to participate because you are, or were, a participant in the Muslim Student Association or identify (to some degree) as a Muslim, and probably also a youth or young adult.
Number of participants: The investigator plans to enroll 50 to 100 in total from various sites.

PROCEDURES
Individual Interviews**:** In the interview I will ask you about your story of how you developed an Islamic identity, your participation (or lack thereof) in the MSAs, your values & social consciousness and activism in various causes, and your views on various issues related to diversity and gender. It will take between 15 minutes to 2 hours, depending on your preference and how much detail you would like to give. I can do the interview 1-on-1 or in small groups, in person, on the phone, or over Skype, as is convenient for both of us. I am very grateful for your time and effort in participating. However, you are free to not answer any specific questions, to end the interview at any time, or not participate at all without any negative consequences.

KNOWN RISKS: This study involves no more than minimal risk. There are no known harms or discomforts associated with this study beyond those encountered in daily life.

BENEFITS ***to the Participant, Academia, Society****:* Participating in this study will be helpful to counter stereotypes and over-generalizations of young Muslim Americans. Publication of this study will further

enrich public-knowledge about the diversity of experiences, ideas, activities, and hopes of your generation of young Muslim Americans. The in-depth knowledge from this study will be helpful to academia and society to counter stereotypes and over-generalizations of young Muslim Americans.

COMPENSATION/COST/REIMBURSEMENT: You will not be compensated nor asked to pay for any costs related to this research.

CONFIDENTIALITY
Data Storage: These research records will be stored in a locked cabinet or on a password protected computer.
Data Access: I alone will have access to your data.
Data Privacy: The written notes will be transcribed. All typed notes will be erased at the end of the study and all written notes will be shredded.

NEW FINDINGS: If during the course of this study, significant new information becomes available that may relate to your willingness to continue to participate, this information will be provided to you by the investigator

IF I HAVE QUESTIONS: If you have any comments or questions regarding the conduct of this research or your rights as a research subject, please contact the Office of Research Integrity by phone (951-827-4811/4810/4861), by email (irb@ucr.edu) or at University Office Bldg #200, Riverside, CA 92521.

You may also Contact:

- Daniel Azim Pschaida, Department of Religious Studies, **Daytime Phone:** 425-306-4189, **Email:** danielpschaida@gmail.com or dpsch001@ucr.edu
- The dissertation chair, Dr. Muhamad Ali, Department of Religious Studies, **Daytime Phone:** (951) 827-5111 x25111, **Email:** muhamad.ali@ucr.edu

QUESTIONS ABOUT ANY CONFLICT OF INTEREST: Investigators must satisfy campus requirements for identifying and managing potential conflicts of interest before a research study can be approved. The purpose of these requirements is to ensure that the design, conduct and reporting of the research will not be affected by any conflicting interests. If at any time you have specific questions about the financial arrangements or other potential conflicts for this study, please feel free to contact any of the individuals listed above.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION STATEMENT
I understand that participation in this study is voluntary. I may refuse to answer any question or discontinue my involvement at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which I might otherwise be entitled. My decision will not affect my future relationship with UC Riverside or the Muslim Student Association. My signature below indicates that I have read the information in this consent form and have had a chance to ask any questions I have about the study. I consent to participate.

____________________________________ _____________
Signature of Participant Date

____________________________________ _____________
Signature of Investigator Date

APPENDIX V

May and June 2014 Online Survey Questions

Survey request Advertisement: Help out a UCR grad-student. Many of you know I am writing my dissertation on young adult Muslim Americans and how you apply your faith to your daily lives and work with issues of diversity. I am hoping that between studying for your finals and writing final essays, if you would spend that time filling out my little survey, thus doing (in my eyes) a good deed too. As extra incentive, I'm going to raffle a ***$20 Amazon.com Gift Certificate*** for every fifty participants to say thank you for your time and effort. This survey can be completely anonymous (except for those of you who enter your email/contact-info at the end [question 19] of the survey; but still, only I will see your responses and keep it confidential). Thank you very much and Jazaak Allah Khayr! http://fluidsurveys.com/surveys/daniel-PPR/young-adult-muslim-americans-2014/

1_ I identify as Muslim:
- Not at all
- Somewhat
- Important
- Most important

2_ Please Check one:
- Heritage Muslim (parent(s)/upbinging are/were Muslims)
- Convert/Revert (parents/upbringing are/were not Muslim)

3_ My age is:
- Under 17
- 17 to 19
- 20 to 23
- 24 to 28
- 29 to 36
- 37 or older

3_ My gender is
- Male
- Female

4_ The most central THREE influences on choosing Islam to be a big part of my life:

- Family
- Friends
- Study groups for youth/young-adults at mosque or university
- Reading closely the Qur'an
- Learning the beautiful teachings of Islam
- The scientific insights given in the Qur'an (such as about the human embryo or astronomy)
- Desiring to counter negative stereotypes toward Islam in the media and society
- Other ___________

5_ I considered and studied______________ other religious faiths or ways of life (e.g. Buddhist, Christian, secular/non-religious/pop cultural values) when/before choosing Islam.

- not at all
- somewhat
- closely

6_ I read and study the Qur'an (in Arabic and/or English-translation/interpretation) ______________.

- Daily
- Weekly
- Only in khutbahs or halaqas
- From time-to-time
- Never or almost never

7_My favorite (or among my favorite) verse of the Qur'an is:
(You can just cite the surah and verse [e.g. 2: 153] and/or write it out)

8_ When I have questions about the teachings or correct interpretations about some issue as related to Islam, I turn to____________(please check the most important one or up-to three most important)

- Internet research
- knowledgeable friends
- my parents or family
- shaykh(s) or imam(s)
- my own logic or reasoning
- my own research of Qur'an and hadith

9_ I feel I know _____________ about other sects/madhaahib (Sunni, Shi'ah, Sufi, Ahmadiyyih, Ismaili, Salafi) in Islam than the one I was raised in.

- Very little
- Some things
- A moderate amount
- A lot

10_ I feel I know _____________ about religions other than Islam (such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity).
Very little

- Some things
- A moderate amount
- A lot

11_ Islam _______________ me to learn more about other Islamic sects and other religions.

- Encourages
- Discourages
- Neither encourages or discourages

12_ I would _______________ consider marrying someone of a different racial/ethnic group (e.g African-American, Latino, Western European, desi, Arab, East Asian) than my family if he/she were a strong Muslim and we got along well.

- not
- maybe
- probably
- definitely

13_ I believe, the hijab/head-scarf is ________________ for a Muslim woman.

- mandatory/obligatory
- recommended
- neither obligatory nor recommend
- modesty is mandatory, head-scarf is not
- don't know, or not sure

14_ As to a woman shaykh(ah), or scholar of Islam, ____________________. (Check any that apply, in your view)

- Every mosque community should have one, if possible
- Should serve in complementary roles to a male imam or shaykh in a mosque community
- Both men and women should consult her, as needed
- Only women should consult her, as needed
- There aren't enough and its crucial to the American Muslim community that there are more

15_ Inter-faith dialogues and social events:

- I participate often
- I participate sometimes
- Are important but I don't participate
- Are not important
- I don't know

16_ America

- Supports/Encourages the practice of my faith
- Challenges the practice of my faith
- Is a neutral entity in regards to the practice of my faith

17_ I envision America to be:

- A secular/non-religious country
- A Christian country
- An Islamic country
- An Abrahamic faiths country
- A multi-religious country

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