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## A Qualitative Study of the Experiences and Practices of Muslim Women in Trinidad and Tobago: A Multiple Case Study

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A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF THE EXPERIENCES AND PRACTICES  
OF MUSLIM WOMEN IN TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO:  
A MULTIPLE CASE STUDY

DISSERTATION

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by

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## ABSTRACT

A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF THE EXPERIENCES AND PRACTICES  
OF MUSLIM WOMEN IN TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO:  
A MULTIPLE CASE STUDY.

Joanna Evonne Headley

Barry University, 2007

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*Purpose*

The significance and purpose of this study is to explain and understand the experiences of living as a Muslim woman in Trinidad, from a Muslim woman's point of view. This study allowed women to voice their feelings and ideas about their cultural and religious traditions, as outlined by Islam; more importantly, the study gave voice to Muslim women who by tradition are typically not heard. The main interview question will be "If I followed you through a typical day, what would I see you doing, what experiences would I observe you having?" During the study, the researcher will learn how Muslim women in Trinidad experience and practice their Islamic culture and traditions in a non-Islamic country. The researcher presented the traditional views, cultural and religious significance, and meanings in a way that both insiders and outsiders of the Islamic culture can achieve a greater meaning and understanding of the culture (Schein, 1985).

### *Method*

A qualitative multiple case study was used in this research to achieve detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (Creswell, 1998). Semi-structured interviews, document analysis, field and researcher notes, and audio taping was used in the data analysis for the case study, which consisted of detailed descriptions of the women's stories. Data analysis consisted of coding and identifying themes.

### *Major Findings*

The study found three major themes and three minor themes related to the experiences and practices of the Muslim women. The most prevailing theme was the Muslim women's self-expression of independence and individuality. Muslim women expressed themselves through various mediums such as, fashionable Hijabs, "private" sexuality, interactions between family and non-family males, and the practice of polygyny. The Qur'an as the center of a Muslim's life was the next predominant theme. A Muslim's strict adherence to the Islamic teachings from the Qur'an, allow them to fit their lives into their religion, versus fitting their religion into their lives. All the participants felt that Muslim women need to educate themselves to their status and rights within Islam. The responses from the participants clearly highlighted a need for more investigation and research into Islam. It was evident from participants' responses that Islam is a way of life, and it is a life they all choose willingly. The Muslim women all shared varying degrees of concern and fear due to being branded as terrorists. All the participants hoped the outcome of the study would help alleviate the negativity associated with Islam, and help others have a better understanding of Islam.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## DEDICATION

I dedicate this study to my mother and father, Stokeley and Monica Headley. This dissertation is as much theirs as it is my accomplishment. They have taken each step with me and they have both been an integral part of this process. My parents have always been my greatest source of support, happiness, encouragement and love. They have taught me to believe that I could accomplish anything I put my mind to in life. They also instilled in me the value of higher education since I was young enough to understand. Most of all, they taught me about sacrifice, by making sacrifices themselves so that their children could attain the highest level of education that would secure their future.

Well Mom and Dad, you've done it! Now you can sit back and relax and reap the rewards of your sacrifice. I want to be able to give you both all the things you so graciously gave up so that my life could be enriched with education and security. I will always be grateful to you both. I love you both and I thank you for allowing my wings to soar and nourishing my soul with your love, happiness and resilience. I am more than proud to be your daughter.



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## CHAPTER I

### PROBLEM STATEMENT

#### Introduction

Yza, like many traditional Muslim women, still finds her life controlled by her closest male relative, even in the twenty-first century. Yza's marriage was pre-arranged by her father, during a family trip to Morocco. Yza was blindsided by the many proposals of marriage she received upon her arrival; she was even more shocked when her father accepted the first marriage proposal on her behalf.

"My intended husband demanded a certificate of virginity. My mother told me that if I didn't want to marry him, it must be because I was no longer a virgin, and if that was the case, I would soon be dead. I have no choice. To prove I was a virgin and save my life, I had to marry him. I knew nothing about my husband. I wasn't allowed to ask any questions. He made me wear a full veil. I became invisible. He wouldn't permit me to work. I was afraid to say anything" (Goodwin, 2005, p. 118).

Yza reported her situation to the French social services, but they turned her away because the French government does not get involved in "cultural issues" (Goodwin, 2005, p. 118). Yza has since terminated all contact with her family, and has gone into hiding in France. Yza is fearful of being found, and losing her life (Goodwin, 2005), since she escaped from her forced pre-arranged marriage. It is difficult to imagine women living under these circumstances, and being treated with such inequality in Paris, one of the most glamorous cities in the world in the twenty-first century.

### Problem Statement

The central research question of this study is how do Muslim women in Trinidad experience and practice the Muslim traditions of which they are a part, in a non-Islamic country? Trinidad was chosen for the study because of its uniqueness in size, as well as, the social and political context in which Muslims exist. In the literature review, chapter two, the Trinidad context will be explained in more detail. Trinidad's Muslim population is a microcosm of the Muslim population in the world. Trinidad is a non-Islamic country, and it is easier and safer to interview Muslim women there, than in other Muslim populated places in the world. Trinidad is the only independent, republic Caribbean island where modern and traditional Muslims coexist side by side in a small area. Muslims coexist in a culture that is extremely opposite to their Islamic beliefs. The uniqueness of this situation is another aspect that allows for easier and safer interviews and data collection.

### Research Interview Questions

1. If I followed you through a typical day, what would I see you doing, what experiences would I observe you having?
2. Can you please describe how the women are treated in your community?
3. Can you please describe how the men in your family act toward you?
  - a. Do you feel free to express complaints or unhappiness to your husband?
  - b. If you had a personal problem or health problem, how do you expect your husband or other male relative to respond to you?
4. How would you define your role in your family?
5. What obligations fall on you as a Muslim woman that do not fall on Muslim men?

6. Can you please tell me how you are honored and valued as a woman in your family?
7. Can you please tell me what does being a good Muslim entail?
  - a. Can you please tell me how the way you dress as a Muslim has impacted your daily life in the Caribbean?

#### Background and Significance of the problem

Most women in the world are focused on economic survival, career success, raising healthy families, making sure that personal and family needs are met, and having a sense of emotional satisfaction from life. What is interesting is how different women's everyday lives are from men's. To see women's lives in full context, one cannot look at men's lives, and proceed to women's as an after thought. On the other hand, women everywhere are worse off than men; women have less power, more work and responsibility, and make less money. Women everywhere have been shortchanged (Buvinic, 1993; Goodrich, 2003; Layish, 1975; Nasir, 1990).

According to the Central Statistical Office in Trinidad (1994, 2000) The Muslim community comprises approximately 10% of the total 1.3 million population. The last census was conducted in 2000, and at that time there were 18,527 Muslim women versus 20, 824 Muslim men in Trinidad. According to the Central Statistical Office in Trinidad, the numbers are steadily growing. Trinidad is not an Islamic country because “the principle application of Shari’ah law is not applied. In Islamic countries, Shari’ah is not only law in the civil and criminal sense; it is also constitutional law. It dictates the form of government. (Hallaq, 2005) Since Trinidad is a non-Islamic country, Muslim women

are not subjected to the harsh treatment, victimization, public violence, or even death, which their foreign sisters face on a daily basis in the Middle East.

In Trinidad, there is evidence in the history and documentation of the island that Columbus was responsible for bringing Muslims into the islands, since the Commander of one of his ships, the "Santa Maria", was a Muslim (Khan, 1987). Enslaved African Muslims were the first Caribbean Muslims. They held fast to their Middle Eastern faith for many years and formed Muslim communities, but European dominance soon began to weaken the more "rigid and traditional" Islamic practices (Ibrahim, 1995). This European colonialism can be said to have significantly diluted the "pure" Islamic faith in the lives of the African Muslim slaves (Hamid, 1978). The undying religion was reintroduced into the region in the mid nineteenth century with the arrival of an East Indian indentured labor force. In Trinidad, there are both African and East Indian Muslims.

At this point, the religion slowly adapted to the new surroundings. Islam acquired a Caribbean chapter where the majority of the more rigid "traditions" were relinquished. When the indentureship ended, the majority of Muslims opted to remain in Trinidad and Tobago rather than journey back to their original homelands (Ibrahim, 1995). Muslim citizens of Trinidad and Tobago have resided in solace in their new Caribbean homeland, largely throughout the efforts of their pioneering ancestors (Ibrahim, 1995). Yet still, East Indian Muslims were in a better and more fortunate position to practice and perpetuate Islam than the enslaved Africans in Trinidad and other parts of the Caribbean, because of their strength in numbers (Hamid, 1978).

Islam is an Arabic word that means peace, security, and surrender, and a person who believes and follows Islam is called a Muslim, "one who peacefully surrenders to

Allah” (Dodge, 2003). The Basic tenets of Islam are Universal. Islam has seven core fundamental beliefs that every Muslim, in all parts of the world, must accept as part of his or her religion: Belief in God (Allah), belief in the angels, belief in the revealed books of God, belief in God’s many prophets, accepting that there will be a last day, belief in the divine measurement of human affairs, and belief in a life after death (Emerick, 2002). There are five pillars of Islamic practice: Declaration of faith, daily prayer, the fast of Ramadan, giving alms, and a pilgrimage to Mecca, the holy land (Dodge. 2003).

All Muslims follow the Qur’an however, the interpretations of it are different throughout the world, hence the reason for the many variations and distortions of Islam, and different sects of Muslims in constant disagreement. Shari’ah or Islamic law is not in itself fundamentalist or extreme, nor does it teach violence, inequality or subservience in women. However, it is the erroneous interpretations of the Qur’an by traditional Muslim men (Keddie & Baron, 1991; Lacayo, 2001; Pierre, 2002) who are often “uneducated and chauvinistic, and use religion selectively to maintain their dominance over women” (Emerick, 2002, p. 250) and justify extremism, that cause the outside world to react unfavorably toward Islam. In reality, men use religious statements, as well as, religious and cultural customs to control women (Pierre, 2002), even though the Qur’an states that men and women are equal (Qur’an 4:1; Qur’an 33:35).

The perception of Islam has been controversial in the world, especially since the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks on the World Trade Centers, due to extreme and fundamentalist Muslims. However, in Trinidad, modernism and traditionalism exist side by side. There are Muslims who lead a more modern lifestyle and do not wear the head to toe covering (hijab) and they participate in some cultural aspects of Trinidad, on the other hand, there

are the traditional Muslims who do not distract themselves with the secular part of the society. Traditional Muslims require women to wear the hijab and/or parda, and abide by many of the traditional aspects of Islam.

Muslim women claim not to be oppressed or subservient; that they do not live lives of servitude, without rights, opinions and choices (Gehrke-White, 2001; Bharose, 2002). However, Bharose (2002) and Hasan (2000) have stated that Islam is a way of life that is often not questioned. Furthermore, women have stated that “western women have gotten lost along the way by being caught up in modern clothing, which attract a lot of unnecessary attention” (Emerick, 2002, p. 253). One woman in Trinidad stated, that she doesn’t condone polygyny, but if she had to deal with it, then she would (Pierre, 2002). Another woman after she got pregnant said that her husband decided that she should stop working (Pierre, 2002). According to Lacayo (2001), in Time Magazine’s Special Report on lifting the Veil, “If women are going outside with fashionable, ornamental, tight and charming clothing, the ministry of Islam warned that they should never expect to go to heaven” (p.44).

It seems that Muslim women continue to cover themselves in the hijab due to cultural, family and religious pressures. According to Beyer (2001), Emerick (2002), and Lacayo (2001), Muslim women can create the ideal home and atmosphere by making their husbands comfortable. “This entails the wife not refusing her husband’s sexual advances so as not to alienate him, not having any friends that he dislikes, and not wearing much makeup in public or dressing specifically to attract other men’s attention. Paradise is promised to women who are sincere helpmates to their husbands” (Emerick, 2002, p. 235).

### Researcher's Interest in the study

The researcher first became interested in this topic as a young girl growing up in Trinidad. The researcher's high school friend, Farida was a Muslim girl whose life was controlled by her father and brothers. The researcher had the opportunity during the Muslim festivals of Trinidad, to become part of Farida's family for the entire week, during which she learned the intricate and detailed traditions of Farida's culture. Among these strict Islamic traditions, only a few have deepened their roots within the Trinidad culture: Arranged marriages, bride price or dowries, polygyny, and the man being the supreme head of the household. The birth of boys is a cause for joyous celebration, unlike the birth of girls. Domestic floggings and strict adherence to the religious codes are aspects of some Muslims way of life in Trinidad.

Farida was already promised to a young man in Canada at the tender age of eighteen. She was not allowed to have fun with her friends unless they came to her home. She was in charge of the daily household chores, which included cooking and cleaning up after her four brothers. In Muslim culture, boys are more celebrated and are higher in rank than the girls of the same family. Any one of her brothers could listen in on her private telephone conversations, without any correction or resistance. Disobedience on her part was often met with a flogging from either brother or father.

During the researcher's weeklong visit with Farida's family, she realized how different their future life paths would be, especially taking into consideration that they both have Trinidadian lineage. She got married at nineteen, whereas, the researcher is pursuing her college education. These profound differences have made the researcher take a deeper interest in women's experiences, their role in the family, and in the Muslim

community. An investigation into these issues is considered important as it is attempting to achieve a greater understanding of the Islamic culture, for both Muslim women and others who are not of the Islamic faith.

The researcher began thinking about Muslim women who defend the faith, enjoy wearing the hijab, and condone domestic floggings. Are these women socially conditioned? Conditioning can begin in infancy (Winn, 2000). The way a girl is raised influences her behavior, views, and attitude. Then, her society continues to shape her thoughts, through what she sees, hears, and reads (Bharose, 2002; Winn, 2000). Muslim girls are taught from young that they must be covered, that Allah favors head to toe covering, that she would go to heaven and be rewarded if she remains modest and decent, and that her body, and her sexuality are instruments of temptation for men. Women have to cover themselves, because men are not as strong to deal with the temptations and desires produced by an uncovered woman (Pierre, 2002).

These young girls continually hear this message in the home and in school. Thinking about these Muslim women allowed my mind to drift back to my high school friend, Farida. My knowledge of her Islamic teachings had such a profound impression on me that her story has inspired me to choose the topic for this dissertation. When the researcher was in high school with Farida, it was extremely difficult to understand and accept her Islamic teachings especially since they were vastly different to my Catholic upbringing. Farida seemed so complacent and passive at home, but in school, she longed to be different and lead a carefree life. However, she was often plagued by her guilty conscience, the result of rigid religious messages from both family and the Muslim



leaders. For example, a ritual of daily prayer is a must to serve as a reminder that the individual is God's servant.

Farida was taught to believe that God would only forgive some of her sins with every performance of salat. She was taught to not be negligent toward prayer because the lack of prayer negates all her good deeds. Ultimately, on judgment day when good and bad deeds are evaluated, God would look only at her prayers that were said and not the good deeds she has done. Prayers are said five times daily; before sunrise (Fajr), just after noon (Zuhr or Dhuhur), late afternoon ('Asr), after sunset (Maghrib), and at night ('Isha) (Dodge, 2003). Muslims are taught that frequent prayer serves as a reminder of one's duty to God, thus making them less likely to break God's laws. The researcher was always amazed at how unshakeable those religious and socially conditioned messages were lodged in Farida's mind, as if printed with indelible ink. The researcher seeks to further understand the impact of a socially conditioned mindset in the lives of Muslim women who, like Farida, longed to embrace change but was unable to grasp it.

The researcher is currently studying to become a therapist. Her interest in counseling and women's issues, and applying those interests to have a better understanding of psychotherapy, is crucial for a therapist's growth in the field. Women's issues have great implications for family therapy policies and practice, because the importance of women's roles in the family is universal.

#### Rationale of the Study

There is a need for further research on this topic because Islam is one of the world's fastest growing religions with more than 1 billion followers, half of whom are women (Emerick, 2002; Mehran, 1998). At present, "the United States is home to 3 to 4

million Muslims” (Emerick, 2002; Najar, 2002, p.17). Islam will increasingly affect our lives since any woman can convert or marry into this institution and have to adhere to the strict and rigid religious culture (Goodwin, 1994). In countries where Islam is practiced, Goodwin, (1994) relates that women are rarely addressed by their rightful names. Instead, they are referred to by the name of their fathers, husbands or sons, such as "mother of Abdul" or "Mrs. Mansoor Ali". Her own name is seldom used since, as a woman, she derives her status from the men in her family. According to Goodwin (1994), this is an atrocity against women that will continue to perpetuate unless significant research is done in this area. The inadequacy and inaccessibility of international data on women is conspicuously absent from conventional sources (Mosteshar, 1996). This invisibility of women perpetuates the idea that women are less important, and less significant. Women are made invisible by policies and priorities that discount the importance of collecting information about them (Wikan, 1982). Although the United Nations Decade for Women (1975-85) resulted in a considerable increase in international information on women, they are still not generally in the information mainstream.

This study will be useful in explaining the experiences of living as a Muslim woman, from a Muslim woman’s point of view. By addressing the issues in this study, and by understanding the role of women and their roles in family life, the researcher hopes to enlighten not only Muslim women, but also those who do not practice Islam. The importance immediate family and extended family hold for women, and women hold for their families, one must address not only the position of women in the culture, but also how the family reproduces this positioning within itself. This family positioning often affects how women view themselves and each other (Goodrich, 2003). The study's

utility is in its rich descriptions from the women's own point of view. More importantly, these women will be coming out of the shadows, and taking a stand for equal opportunities and fair treatment. The study will take the form of a scholarly manuscript. There is a need for widespread public information and education throughout media and literature, since it is not a question of eliminating cultural rights, but of redefining or replacing those rights that put women in physical and psychological harm.

Over the past two decades there have been tremendous advances for women, despite these proclaimed leaps and bounds, why are women still unconsciously thought of as second-class citizens, the weaker and subordinated sex? (Bullough, Shelton & Slavin, 1988). With the fall of the Taliban in 2001, the issues of Islamic life are brought into focus. Although Muslim women in Trinidad and Tobago are not subject to the harsh and extreme Shari'ah or Islamic laws, how free are they?

Since Muslim women are traditionally unheard, the researcher has a golden opportunity to understand the experiences of Muslim women by conducting the study in Trinidad, where Muslim women are a microcosm of the greater population of Muslim women in the world. Muslim women in Trinidad are easier and safer to interview than their sister counterparts in other countries in the world. This study has enormous implications for the family therapy field, because women's issues and wellbeing are important and critical to the maintenance of the family unit.

#### Summary Overview of Proposal

The ideological stance that will be employed in this study is critical theory. This theory seeks to critique and transform the constraints that exploit humankind. Over time, critical theory can provide restitution and emancipation through consistent advocacy,

education, and activism (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998). The researcher will also rely on readings about feminist family therapy research approaches. Feminist theory will be used to achieve a deeper understanding of how rituals, roles and customs within the family and culture could be utilized to improve the lives of women in the context of their families (Goodrich, 2003; Laird & Hartman, 1988). A multiple case study method will be used over time through detailed, holistic in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (Creswell, 1998). A case study is a holistic exploration of a case or multiple cases over time. Multiple sources of information such as, semi-structured interviews, document analysis, field and researcher notes, and audio taping will be used in the data analysis for the case study, which will consist of detailed description of the women's stories and lives. Data analysis will consist of coding and identifying themes (Creswell, 1998).

## Definition of Terms

**Allah-** The One True God

**Ablution-** State of cleansing the body for prayer. Women's preparation for prayer.

**'Asr-** Late afternoon prayers in Islam.

**Dowry-** Bride price. A sum of money, or token gift of value the girl's family gives to the family of the groom-to-be, prior to the prearranged wedding.

**Du'a-** Supplication of prayer to Allah.

**Dhuhr** – Prayers just after midday

**Eid Mubarak-** "Eid-UI-Fitr" A Muslim Festival that marks the end of the holy month of Ramadan. The joyous celebrations are enjoyed with prayer, food, and special drinks.

**Fajr-** The prayers that Muslims say before sunrise.

**Hijab-** Muslim women's head covering. Made of cotton material.

**Hadith-** The sayings attributed to the chief prophet of Allah – Muhammad.

**Hifz-** Memorization of the Qur'an.

**Haafiz-** A male who memorizes the Qur'an.

**Haafiza-** a female who memorizes the Qur'an.

**Ibadat-** Worship.

**Imam-** Islamic Leader who leads congregational prayers.

**Islam-** The religion of Muslims.

**'Isha-** The prayers Muslims say at night.

**Mosque-** Place of worship. All shoes are left at the entrance.

**Maktab-** Islamic studies school for young Muslim boys and girls.

**Maghrib-** The prayers Muslims say just after sunset.

**Niqaab-** Muslim women's face covering (purdah).

**Qur'an-** "Koran" The Holy bible.

**Purdah (Pardah)-** Muslim woman's face covering, part of the hijab.

**Polygyny** – Correct term for multiple wives. Muslim men have the right to have as many as four wives, as long as they can financially support them.

**Ramadan** – The holiest month of the year. This is a month of fasting, virtue, goodness, righteousness, peace, salvation, and perfection in spirituality and purity of the mind.

Fasting is from dawn to sunset, Muslims abstain from food and drink and from forbidden things, as well as overindulgence in any area. Fasting brings the Muslims closer to Allah.

**Shalwar-** The entire outfit for Muslim women. It consists of the knee-length dress, the ankle-length underpants, the hijab, and the parda. Entire head to toe covering,

**Salat-** The five daily prayers to Allah.

**Shari'ah-** Islamic law.

**Tasbih-** Glorification to Allah.

**Zikr-** Remembrance to Allah.

**Zuhr-** Prayers Muslims say just after noontime.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

#### Introduction

In this chapter, the relevant research studies and literature are discussed. The literature review spanned twenty-eight years for a more comprehensive view of the world of Muslim women and Islam. Given the diversity of Muslim women around the world, it is impossible to paint one picture of women living under Islam today. However, a growing number of people are concerned that the Islamic religion has been used to establish inequality rather than liberation (Beyer, 2001). The literature review will present a continuum of Islamic interpretation from the Taliban extreme, with its fanatical subjugation of women to a more secular model of Islam where women are modern and are afforded more equality (Beyer, 2001).

Since there were only a few relevant articles pertaining to the Caribbean, the researcher did a lateral search that accommodated the status of Muslim women in Trinidad and Guyana, as well as various other countries such as Canada, England, France, Netherlands, Middle East and the United States of America. Central issues and information about Islam and the role religion plays in the lives of Muslim women will be presented. These issues include cultural practices and traditions of Islam and how they relate to the segregation of the sexes, dress code, marriage and female sexuality; religious practices of Islam and how they affect the daily lives of Muslim women; educational practices of Muslim women with regard to the beliefs and attitudes about education, knowledge and learning; self perceptions of Muslim women and their role and importance in the family, the treatment by males in their community and within their

family and the views they hold about their own sexuality and bodies. According to the literature reviews Muslim women are punished for simply being female, and the inequities occur more often than we are aware (Fernea & Bezirgan, 1977; Ali, 2006). Silverstein & Goodrich (2003), state that inequality stems from the “invisible power” that is created through cultural values, first learned in the family (p. 8).

### Cultural Practices and Traditions of Islam

The entire basis of the Islamic tradition rests in the Holy Qur’an and the Hadith. The Qur’an is the book of Revelations; the final declaration of God’s will, and the Hadith is the sayings attributed to Muhammad, the chief prophet of Allah. The Hadith also contains reports of how Prophet Muhammad lived his life so Muslims can emulate his actions. Muslims believe that the Qur’an has absolute authority since it is God’s unaltered pure message conveyed through the Angel Gabriel to the Prophet Muhammad, who then translated it to the others without change or error. (Cooey, Eakin & Mc Daniel, 1991; Emerick, 2002). Furthermore, according to Cooey, Eakin & McDaniel (1991) all sources of Islam have been interpreted and translated by Muslim men, who have assumed the task of defining the ontological, theological and sociological status of Muslim women. These traditions and subjective interpretations have been imposed on women and have allowed men to claim authority over women (Manji, 2003) in the guise of being God’s will, as stated in the “perfect” Qur’an. Quite often something is attributed to the Qur’an when it is not the case (Goodwin, 1994). Muslim men and/or Imams are taking statements out of context or using metaphors in a literal sense for their own advantage and power. According to the Qur’an, good women must be obedient; therefore, “good women” do not doubt the “perfect” Qur’an. This cycle of tradition and cultural practice allows men to



keep women “in the dark” (Stern, 1979). Manji (2003) stated that compassion and contempt exist side-by-side in the Qur’an; positive and offensive verses about women and religious diversity follow one another in the Qur’an’s text. The Qur’an’s “perfection” and straightforwardness has now become suspect (p. 45).

### Segregation of the Sexes

Segregation of the sexes is a prominent feature of the Muslim culture (Wikan, 1982; Ali, 2006). Women are segregated or set apart from men in many aspects of Islam, including their form of dress, their prayer sessions in the Mosque and at social gatherings. In the Mosque, men and women enter through a different set of doors and are kept separated throughout the worship. Manji (2003) states that men never have to see women, and women never had to be seen. “This is the very definition of assigning women small lives” (p. 11). Justification for the segregation of the sexes can easily be applied to the lives of Muslim women because the Qur’an states “men have authority over women because God has made the one superior to the other, and because they spend their wealth to maintain them” (verse 4). Even more common in the Muslim culture is sexual segregation (Wikan, 1982; Ali, 2006). As stated by Islam, female features and sexuality are considered a source of temptation and seduction to men, therefore, women’s bodies must be covered up to prevent any disruptive potential or enticement to men. Beyer (2001) insists that sexual anxiety and the fear of sinful, illicit behavior are the source of many Islamic restrictions on women. These strict rules are in place because men fear women may arouse and stimulate the lustful desires of men who are not their husbands.

## Dress Code for Women in Islamic Culture

In Islamic culture, segregation of the sexes is also manifested through the institution of hijab, the controversial dress code for Muslim women. Haddad & Findly (1985) quoted a highly distinguished man in the Muslim faith as saying,

When the woman goes out naked into the street displaying her allurements to every seeker, arousing animal desire in the man, then there is no Islam, no religion, no doctrine...no bonding in public morality, no resistance (p. 289).

Ibrahim (1995) contended that Muslim women in Trinidad and Tobago wear the hijab with pride and joy because it is a Muslim statement. As reported by Dr. Ibrahim, the hijab signifies modest and chastity and the women know the reason for wearing it is to deter any dishonor of men lusting after their bodies. Veiling saves women from unwanted attention and hassles from men (Beyer, 2001). "Men are the ultimate protectors and maintainers of women in the Islamic home" (Ibrahim, 1995 p. 25). Furthermore, Khan (2000) states, "women should refrain from all actions and gestures that might stir the passions of men other than her husband. Women are warned not to display their beauty and charm or expose their physical attractiveness before strangers" (p. 23). Khan (2000) elaborates, "the veil saves a woman's soul from weakness, her eyes from lustful stares and her personality from demoralization" (p. 23).

The head to toe covering of Muslim women is universal, "though no law commands it" (Lacayo, 2001, p. 36). The hijab, chador and pardah are made from either a cotton material or polyester. Muslim women wear their head to toe covering always, day and night. The covering (shalwar) consists of a knee-length dress with long sleeves; she

wears ankle length pants underneath. The hijab or head covering always covers the hair and neck. Her face is sometimes covered by the pardah (Wikan, 1982) with the exception of the eyes. Although Islamic traditions say veiling and seclusion of Muslim women is stated in the Qur'an; this is not necessarily the case. One verse (24:31) tells women to "veil their bosoms and hide their ornaments", this interpreted to mean women should cover themselves modestly. According to Keddie & Baron (1991), this makes no sense if in reality our Qur'an instructs the head to toe covering as interpretation suggests. If the entire body of a woman was supposed to be covered, including her face, neck and hair, then there would be no point in ordering bosoms to be veiled separately. Another verse (24:33) tells women to "draw their cloaks or veils tightly around them so they may be recognized, but not cause any disturbance or dishonor". This reference in the Qur'an refers to the Prophet Muhammad's wives. His wives were required to veil to protect themselves from the sand and heat of the Arabia (Manji, 2003). Veiling was never meant as a requirement for all women in the Muslim faith (Armstrong, 2000).

The veiling of Prophet Muhammad's wives is the "only words in the Qur'an that is taken to refer to veiling" (Keddie & Baron, 1991, p. 5). According to Manji (2003), "to follow the Qur'an's instructions for women to dress and cover themselves modestly, they need only to wear a turtleneck and baseball cap" (p. 140). However, many Muslim women all over the world "accept veiling as an act of spiritual submission" (Manji, 2003, p. 140). Women are told that veiling and modesty secures a place in Heaven for them (Lacayo, 2001). While other women, feel societal and family pressure to veil themselves (Beyer, 2001). Others feel that wearing the covering symbolizes acceptance of the strict Islamic conditions (Brenner, 2004). Furthermore, Muslim women are only allowed to

relinquish their veiling upon the request of their husband. Veiling is supposed to protect women from any threat to their honor, and any dishonor to their families (Beck & Keddie, 1978). Dr. Mohammed, as reported in Camejo (2004) insists that women cover themselves because it assists in avoiding moral distractions, and it is divinely ordained. According to the French Islamic Leaders, Islam will soon be victorious and in the near future all girls will be covered from head to toe (Brenner, 2004).

### Marriage and Polygyny in Islamic Culture

Another aspect of Islamic culture and tradition that sparks controversy, and further promotes the segregation of the sexes is marriage and polygyny rites. For years, Muslim parents in Trinidad and Tobago have arranged marriages for their children (Khan, 1987). The arranged marriage is a traditional practice in Muslim culture (Ali, 2006). The couple meets when negotiations are well underway or perhaps concluded. In more recent times, Muslim families still arrange marriages for their children, but they are now allowed to meet each other several times in chaperoned social gatherings with the families present before final arrangements are made. The intended couple is not allowed to meet alone because according to Islamic teachings, dating or courting of women is not tolerated (Ali, 2000). According to Emerick (2002), early marriage is encouraged in Islamic culture to eliminate “the raging hormone syndrome” that drives young people to date and become promiscuous (p. 240). The concept of love, which is emphasized in American society, is considered second hand in Muslim culture. As stated by, Dr. Mansoor Ibrahim (1995), “You learn to love the person your parents have chosen for you; they have been guided by Allah” (p. 58).

Pre-marital sex is also considered un-Islamic and young Muslims of the opposite sex meet within a family setting only, since courting is not allowed and many young Muslim women wear the shalwars and hijab as a representation of chastity. In Trinidad & Tobago, marriage between Muslim partners led to the extended family, whereby the married couple lives with the groom's parents. In such a situation, the Muslim woman has to adapt to the "rules" that are already established for the household, and often conflict surfaces (Ibrahim, 1995). These arranged marriages create an economic network of family relations (Wax, 2005) and strengthen the Islamic alliances and influences.

The marriage process spans several years. The girl's parents usually seek the groom in another family whom they know, or from a family in another district. When the prospective family is sought, a promise or intention is made for future marriage between the children. In Trinidad, the Muslim man can also select his future partner by notifying his family who in turn, notifies the girl's parents. The two families come together and discuss the future of the intended couple. The families then start socializing together before final marriage plans are made (Ali, 2000). The lack of stratification in the Muslim society is perhaps most evident in Muslim marriage since it is quite common for wealthy Muslim parents to consent to their daughters' marriage into poor families, once husbands bear good characters and practice Islam. (Ibrahim, 1995; Khan, 1987). Up to 1963, Dowry or bride price never exceeded Two-hundred-and-fifty-dollars. However, recently the dowry has increased tremendously, but of course is still dependent on the family's financial status (Ibrahim, 1995; Layish, 1975). According to Wax (2005), women can be devalued in the eyes of men because they are seen as having a monetary worth because of the dowry or bride price.

In Guyana, an eighteen-year-old girl had just been married, and as is traditional, after the wedding she moved in with her in-laws. A few months later, his family began to complain about her dowry (bride price). The family demanded other gifts to supplement the dowry. The girl's parents were poor and could not help her. The girl, now pregnant, sold her wedding jewelry, but it was not enough. They beat her, and the neighbors did not intervene. The girl gave birth to a daughter and was criticized and beaten for that. Neighbors ignored the screaming and later said they thought it was just a routine beating (Ashworth, 1984). Furthermore, under Islamic law a woman must recognize the husband as the head of the family and treat him as such (Ali, 2000). She must guard his conjugal rights and keep her chastity when he is absent (Khan, 2000), and do not, in any way, create suspicion in his mind of any breach of fidelity. If the husband finds breaches of loyalty to the marital bond or disobedience on the part of the wife he can divorce her. The Holy Qu'ran states,

As to those (wives) on whose part ye fear rebellion and desert admonish them (first) (in case that does not reform her conduct), banish her to beds apart, if she prove to be incorrigible, ye are permitted to beat them, (not in harsh manner) but to awaken in the consciousness of the guild. (4:34).

According to Mohammed (1998) “chastising one’s wife has been permitted, but not made obligatory. It is a form of making her reflect and perhaps she will change”. (p.13). According to Beyer (2001), every Muslim man knows the Qur’anic sura 4:34, which sanctions spousal punishment, even if they know of nothing else in the Qur’an. As stated by the Qur’an, for a woman to deserve a beating or reprimand, infidelity on her part does not actually have to occur, the mere suspicion of it can be acted upon.

Similarly, Manji (2003) states that fearing a woman's disobedience is enough for a Muslim man to chastise his wife. Basically, a Muslim man's insecurities become his wife's issue (Manji, 2003). The Qur'an's verses also stipulate that, "women are your fields, go then, into your fields when you please. Do good works and fear God" (Manji, 2003, p. 35). This verse gives men excessive power, which they exercise to its full advantage within the marriage. Women not only have a monetary worth, but they can now be treated as fields on a property, with men entering when they please.

Polygyny in Islam is a right reserved to men. According to Dehghanpisheh, Conant & Nordland (2005), polygyny is the right of a husband to have more than one wife. It is adopted as part of the legacy of patriarchal Arab society (Layish, 1975). The Qur'an states, "Marry of the women, who seem good to you, two, three, or four, and if ye fear that ye cannot do justice (to so many) then one (only)" (Qur'an 1:3).

Furthermore, the Qur'an (4:3, 129) stresses the need for equal and just treatment of the wives as a condition of polygyny. However, many Muslim men enter into these relationships and marriage, but seldom are able to uphold the conditions of equal and just treatment of all the wives. In Trinidad, multiple wives have become fashionable among the African Muslim sects, and it is even considered "honorable" for a man to marry up to four women since marriage "protects the modesty and chastity" of Muslim women. Muslim men are allowed to become "protector" and "maintainer" of widows, divorcees or orphans (Ali, 1997). Currently in Trinidad, one of the leaders of the extremist African Muslim groups, Abu Bakr, has four wives and his example is followed by many of the men in his group. Abu Bakr is allowed four wives under the guidelines of his Islamic

religion, even though the surrounding secular community of Trinidad and Tobago allows its citizen's only one wife.

Goodwin is an investigative reporter who wrote an international report for an American magazine about Muslim women being prisoners in Paris (2005). She reported one woman being forced to marry a man who was twice her age and already had a sick first wife. The man married the young woman to do all the housework and other servant duties within the house. According to Goodwin (2005), the woman was beaten several times for rebelling against her husband. Currently, as polygyny increases, so does the need for counseling and mental health professionals. The first wives of these multiple marriages often feel jealous and insecure about the new wives their husbands marry (Ali, 1997; Layish, 1975). As stated in Ali (1997), one woman reported, "feeling lonesome" at home while her husband was at work. The husband married an orphan girl and brought his new wife home to keep the first wife company, and relieve her boredom on the nights when he was away from home. The wife found it difficult to accept the new wife, and thus began to harass and mistreat her.

Two serious problems arise from the polygyny controversy within Islam: The first wives are having difficulty accepting the new wives. Secondly, the first wives vent their frustrations on the new wives, who are often much younger, also the children who are born into this relationship can be confused. The need for counseling and mental health services is definitely great. However, many of the Muslims refuse to seek help from outsiders, instead, they rely on senior Muslim women who may not be qualified to give counseling or dispense any type of mental health service. This problem is slowly putting immense psychological strain on the first wives, as well as, the other wives who join the



marriage and the children. Islam speaks voluminously about women, particularly with regard to their roles in relation to men. In all the Holy Islamic literature (Afkhani & Friedl, 1997; Ibrahim, 1995), the devout and pious woman is elevated to the highest possible platform words can construct, but the constructions of piety are rigid and one sided (Goodwin, 1994; Stern, 1979). Muslim women are to be faithful to their husbands and must be virgins until they are wed, whereas, Muslim men are allowed more than one wife, and all it takes to get rid of any one is the repetition of the words “I divorce you”, three times, in the presence of a witness and signature (Beyer, 2001; Mosteshar, 1996). This is the Islamic way.

### Religious Practices in Islam

In many countries where Muslims reside, women’s place has remained second to a man’s, and their lives are deeply affected in the name of religion and Islamic tradition. Culture and religious customs often become confused (Beyer, 2001; Ali, 2006).

### Prayer in Islam

Prayer is yet another aspect of Islam that has been debated because of its daily intrusion to ordinary life and because it is another form of segregation for women. Muslims are required to pray five times daily; before sunrise (Fajr), afternoon (Dhuhr or Zuhr), before sunset (‘Asr), after sunset (Maghrib) and at bedtime (‘Isha) (Dodge, 2003). During menstruation, women are exempted from obligatory prayer because they are considered “unclean” at this time and not worthy for prayer to Allah. In addition, during this time of their cycle, women are not allowed to even touch the Qur’an or pray in the Mosque. According to the Qur’an, women in menstruation will be “rejected by God Allah, she is unclean”. Although women are exempted from fasting as well as Salat (the

five daily prayers), they are still encouraged to perform acts of Ibadat (worship) such as Zikr (remembrance of Allah), Dua (supplication), and Tasbih (glorification of Allah).

They spend one and a half hours at the Mosque (Muslim Temple) on Fridays. Assembly at the Mosque is further evidence of segregation between men and women in the Islamic culture. All men assemble at the front and women must situate themselves toward the back of the Mosque near the entrance. This segregation is also evident in social gatherings: The men and women often socialize separately, the women more frequently found in the kitchen or with other women. Muslim women worship both at home and at the Mosque.

According to Islam, Muslims must pray facing East in the direction of Mecca, their Holy Land. The laws of Islam have specific guidelines on how women must prepare for prayer (Khan 1987). Muslim women are required to wash their hands up to the elbows, mouth nostrils, face, wiping head, neck and behind ears with wet hands and washing feet last – this ritual is called “Ablution” (Dodge, 2003). If the woman goes to the washroom after this exercise is done, she must repeat the entire process or ritual, since she must be in a state of ablution for prayer: going to the washroom breaks the state of cleansing. However, a full shower is always required before prayer when the woman finishes her menstrual cycle. Women are also not allowed to lead prayer, and they must observe the prayer etiquette or ablution at an earlier age than boys because they mature soon and reach the “obligatory age of marriage before boys do” (Manji, 2003, p.14). Furthermore, Manji (2003) states that the programmed pieties, the habitual routine of the five times a day prayer and all the washing before prayer has become “mindless submission and habitual submissiveness” (p. 18). Essentially, when any act becomes

repetitive, a person then acts without thinking, and the act itself loses significance or meaning. This is evidenced by the many strict traditions of the Muslim culture, namely prayers and the dress code for women.

#### Religious Beliefs and Attitudes that Affect the Daily Life of Muslim Women

As stated by the “Women in the Caribbean Project” article (1982), a young man illustrated how difficult some traditions are to change, and how religious beliefs and attitudes impact their daily lives; particularly when cultures claim they have a religious basis or morale. The twenty-two year old man was a farmer; he stood at six feet five inches tall. He married a seventeen-year-old girl who endured pregnancy pain. In the hospital her baby was stillborn. She explained that for more than a week before her pain began, she had spent every day carrying water in metal pots, and getting wood in preparation for a wedding party. Her husband was told that he should do the heavy carrying for his wife. Irrately he said that it was not men’s work and women must carry water. Islam says men and women’s work are different. After further research, another villager explained that the young man would lose face in the village if anyone saw him help his wife get water (WHO, 1982).

In Islam, few women’s voices have been allowed to interpret or discuss the words of the Qur’an. They have been constantly told that their natural menstrual flow makes them impure, and that they would be defiling the Holy book if they touched it during menstruation. During menstruation, women would be disrespecting the sanctity of the mosque if they entered it during the most holy month of Ramadan, their fasts would be unacceptable, no matter the purity of their hearts. Men around them are instructed by the

Qur'an to "keep aloof" during the menstrual discharge (Baksh, 1999, p. 9). A young Muslim girl would hardly be told about the changes within her body until she is practically menstruating (Baksh, 1999; Dahl, 1997). Muslim girls and Muslim women are taught from early that their bodies are objects of shame. It is taboo to wash yourself with your right hand. This is because in Islamic etiquette, some parts of the human body are considered to be unclean that no amount of personal hygiene can sanitize it enough for contact with the right hand. This hand, according to Islamic teachings, is connected to the God-self (Cropper, 1980). It is also taboo for women to reveal their skin. They are to conduct themselves modestly (Ali, 1997; Baksh, 1999; Karim, 1992).

A Muslim girl growing up in the Caribbean island of Trinidad must suffer in silence under her hijab. She cannot play with the carefree abandon that is the right of every child; for fear that some of her skin might be revealed. These young girls live on an island, miles away from the Middle East, yet they cannot "freely" take a swim in their Caribbean waters (Baksh, 1999).

Islam's teachings prohibit excessive laughter. According to Manji (2003) the teachings state that a Muslim is not expected to frown all the time, but "an abundance of laughter proves that Muslims have been manipulated by charm and wit" (p. 23). Muslim teaching further states that excessive laughter can lead to doom. The Qur'an's religious instructions teach women to be good wives and mothers, while it encourages husbands to control their wives whenever they want (Lacayo, 2001). Khan (2000) states that a woman's role of wife and mother is a status, which is most highly valued and rewarded by Allah. Another Muslim woman states in Lacayo (2001), "she must teach her young

daughters the really important things such as, cooking, sewing and soothing a husband's ego because if the husband is uncomfortable then the woman's life is hell"

(p. 40) According to Emerick (2002), "A wife should not refuse her husband's sexual advances so as not to alienate him, and she should not have any friends that he dislikes" (p. 235). The way Islam is practiced has deeply affected Muslim women both mentally and physically. The Qur'an's scripture has preserved women's inequality as God's law. The Qur'an (4: 11-12) designates daughters half the inheritance of sons (Beyer, 2001; Schvindlerman, 2003).

Religious practices dictate the lives of young women in Muslim culture. According to Goodwin (2005), "good girls are expected to stay home, clean house and take care of younger siblings. Those who dare wear makeup, drink alcohol, smoke or go out, quickly earns the reputation of a whore" (p. 118). Many Muslim women in Trinidad and Tobago learn to exist in two different worlds. They have their strict Muslim lives at home with their families and their somewhat "free" life at school or outside the home with friends. The existence of two separate lives is common with today's Muslim women (Hasan, 2000; Brenner, 2004) who seek more freedom in their lives. According to Hasan (2000) and Brenner (2004), Muslim women often try to balance their loyalty to their family with the desire to live a modern life.

In Trinidad and Tobago, Muslim families keep tight reigns on their households within the secular community, making sure women and children continually lead a decent, Islamic life. Khan (2000) says that she believes the Prophet Mohammad's teaching about the best woman being the one who when you see her, you are pleased and when you direct her, she obeys her husband. Khan feels this is the model of a decent,

Islamic life she follows in Trinidad. Women and children usually find themselves “on the outside looking in”; they are a part of a society where they are truly not a part of it. The Trinidad government continues to remind the Muslim leaders that they live in a non-Islamic country. Even though, they enjoy their freedom of religious expression, Muslims cannot behave in an extreme manner. Abu Bakr, the leader of the Jamaat Al-Muslimeen, in Trinidad and Tobago often disregards the laws of Trinidad and Tobago. His behavior, along with the members of his group, led to the 1990-attempted coup in Trinidad and Tobago. Abu Bakr, heads his Muslim compound in Trinidad as if it were a small city in the Middle East. Women and children follow strict Islamic traditions.

All through the Islamic tenets, women are told they must be obedient and meek. They must serve their husbands who have been placed at the head of the household to look after them and glorify them. However, the suggestions are always the same; women are not able to think for themselves, nor can they look after themselves (Baksh, 1999). Women are taught to retreat indoors and cover up totally when visitors are present. They are not encouraged to speak freely, to articulate their thoughts in company or social gatherings. They must disappear within the confines of the home until needed (Baksh, 1999).

According to many Muslim men in Trinidad, they are aware of the transgressions against women; they defend "their Islamic laws" because they feel it is in their interest to protect their male-ordained rights and privileges over women (Baksh, 1999; Kasule, 1994). These men have stated in Baksh (1999), that they have tried to encourage women in Islam to articulate their private feelings of injustice, but women back away in horror.

The Muslim men criticize women by saying that "they want to suffer in silence, since they accept their duties joyously, and with pride" (p.9).

On the other hand, Baksh (1999) states that women are afraid of being ostracized and classified as shameless. They are afraid that their piety and devotion to Islam would be questioned. The literature further reveals that some women desperately want to change and challenge the "old ways" (Hasan, 2000), but fear doing so because of the consequences and hassles they must face afterward, however, others are quite content in their existence and fully accept their Islamic cultures and roles in society (Bullough, Shelton & Slavin, 1988; Cropper, 1980). In reality, whether Muslim women are content or not with their lives, they are expected to function with utter devotion, in the hope that, they will be welcomed into Paradise (Basit, 1997).

Honor killings are prevalent in many countries where Muslims are in abundance. Honor killings occur when a family feels that a Muslim woman has dishonored or brought shame to the family. Shame, according to Beyer (2001), usually entails an act of disobedience such as, loss of virginity, a sexual indiscretion or fleeing an arranged marriage. The brothers of the young women or other male relative are usually sent to restore the family's honor (Beyer, 2001; Brenner, 2004; Goodwin, 2005; Ali, 2006). In Trinidad and Tobago, honor killings and such extremist behavior do not exist because the island favors a more secular rule, which means Islamic law does not dominate the society. Honor killings, however, still occur in France and the Netherlands even though they are not Islamic governed societies. The men in their community are controlling Muslim women in France because the French government has not gotten involved in "cultural issues" (Goodwin, 2005, p. 114). Muslim women who find themselves in this

situation are risking everything to report what is happening to them to the French social services, but they continue to be turned away (Goodwin, 2005). Muslim women in these situations must often cut off all contact with their families if they want to survive.

### Educational Practices of Muslim Women

Islamic law and the Qur'an give women the right to an education; it is a sacred duty (Beyer, 2001). However, many Muslim women in the world are deprived of this God-given right. During the extreme Taliban reign, girls over the age of eight were banned from attending any type of school (Lacayo, 2001). Many women and young girls defied the ban and attended secret school in abandoned underground buildings (Lacayo, 2001). Along the continuum, toward the more secular end of Islam, women are educated equally, while still living a strict Muslim life. In Malaysia, women constitute half of the country's university students (Beyer, 2001). Similarly, Turkey is the most liberated in the Muslim world (Beyer, 2001) and women attend universities and academies in large numbers. In Trinidad and Tobago, a more secular model is followed with regard to education. Women existing between two worlds are quite common (Hasan, 2000). Many young women usually behave one way in school whereas; a stricter, traditional lifestyle ensues at home with their families.

### Assessment of Educational Level

Muslim females acquired secular education long after it was introduced (Ibrahim, 1995) as compulsory in Trinidad and Tobago. According to Ibrahim (1995) Muslim women contributed to the community through other avenues such as, her cooking methods and modesty of dress. The Muslim community slowly attached sheds to their



Mosques; these sheds were referred to as “Cowshed Schools” where makeshift classes were held. (Ibrahim, 1995). The beginning classes lacked the proper curriculum and teachers, however, these “cowshed schools”, became the first established Islamic institutions. Islam flourished through these Muslim schools and is responsible for today’s Muslims knowing how to read and recite Arabic (Ibrahim, 1995). Trinidad and Tobago’s Muslim community now has over fifteen Muslim centered schools (Ibrahim 1995), where Islamic studies and Qur’an classes become the center of the curricula. Having Muslim centered schools allowed the Muslim community to control the dress code, curriculum and the information being taught to the younger generation. Even though many Muslims attend Muslim centered schools, many also attend secular, Non-Muslim schools.

At the beginning of the 1994-1995 school year, the hijab controversy was taken to court (Ibrahim, 1995) when three Muslim girls were denied the right to attend school because they chose to wear the hijab to a government, Catholic-run high school in Trinidad (Renten, 2004). After reaching a decision to ban the hijab, fear of the radical Black Muslim sect, the Jamaat Al Muslimeen, arose because of their involvement in the attempted coup in Trinidad (Camejo, 2004). One of Abu Bakr’s daughters was one of the girls denied entry (Renten, 2004). In October 1994, the court ruled to allow the girls to wear the hijab to school (Camejo, 2004). Similarly, France was also entrenched in its own hijab or headscarf controversy. French schools where the secular public receives education will no longer accept girls in traditional Islamic dress (Brenner, 2004; Goodwin, 2005). French universities seem to have also put a cap on the number of Muslim teens they allow to attend (Goodwin, 2005). In France, “success via education” is no longer the case for many Muslim women (Goodwin, 2005, p. 117).

However, in Trinidad and Tobago many Muslim women are allowed to achieve success in education. For Muslim women, primary education (elementary and middle school) is usually achieved as well as, secondary (high school) education. University levels can be achieved, if the family permits and are financially able.

#### Beliefs and Attitudes about Education, Knowledge and Learning

Presently, Muslims in France are trying to preserve the Islamic way of life. Parents are pulling their daughters out of school at age sixteen to assume traditional roles at home (Goodwin, 2005). Muslim enforcers feel that the secular run schools will only corrupt their young women and encourage them to turn away from Islam. According to Brenner (2004), Muslim enforcers tell young people that “if they leave Islam and follow the west, they will die” (p. 203). In Trinidad and Tobago, Muslim parents are alarmed about the influence the outside secular community has on its Muslim youth (Ibrahim, 1995). Ibrahim (1995) states that it is a struggle to keep the youth from illicit behavior, especially when they attend the secular government public schools. Many young women feel more “free” at school because they are temporarily away from the strict monitoring they receive at home (Brenner, 2004).

Even though, many young Muslim girls attend secular, or non-Muslim schools in Trinidad, they are exempt from any education or activity in those schools that go against their Islamic teachings. (Ibrahim, 1995). The Muslim community continues to keep young people, especially girls, busy within the many Muslim organizations (Ibrahim 1995). Keeping them busy keeps them focused on a pious and devout Islamic life. The Muslim community believes in equal education for the Muslim girls, but they still try to

control or filter the information that is transmitted to them (Winn, 2000), through school placement, subject and activity exemptions and more time in after school Muslim associations and Mosque time. According to Manji (2003) Muslim centered schools ignore the multilayered world beyond Islam. These schools give young people "indoctrination" rather than an "education" (p. 12).

A school's success is no longer judged by the number of students that pass through its doors, but also by its ability to turn out responsible and tolerant citizens (UNESCO, 2003). Schools are expected to "instill shared values that will strengthen social cohesion" and links between people of many different backgrounds (UNESCO, 2003, p. 1). However, schools are often affected by religious "political and social tensions of their environment" (UNESCO, 2003, p. 2) and filter these biased ideas onto the younger generations. Manji (2003) states that the freedom to question ideas was afforded to her through the secular, Non-Muslim community. She was able to "think, search, speak, exchange, discuss, challenge, be challenged and rethink" in a way that she was unable in the "parochial Muslim microcosm" of the Muslim centered schools (p. 19). Furthermore, Manji (2003) revealed that Muslim leaders always feared her choosing western ideas over Islam. When in reality, western thinking made it possible for her to know and appreciate the true Islam. "Education is the path to freedom" (San Martin, 2002, p. 6).

### Self Perceptions of Muslim Women

Religious interpretations often produce an extreme variation of ideas about women in the Muslim world. There are prevailing conservative beliefs regarding the social roles of women. The importance of being a mother (Esposito, 1995) and wife is

glorified. Along with being a good wife and mother, purity of mind and body is the highest value of a woman in Islam. The value of a woman is expressed in terms of sexual control. The more controlled and passive the woman is, the more she is valued in Islamic society. However, Benazir Bhutto, a former Prime Minister of Pakistan who is Muslim, once stated when addressing the French Diplomatic press association, that Muslim girls who want to wear the headscarves or hijab perhaps want to make an identity of their own and observe what they consider to be their traditions. Bhutto further declared that she was “lucky” her father did not ask her to wear a veil, otherwise she would not have been in the position she was as Prime Minister (Taylor, 1994).

#### Muslim Women’s Role in the Family

According to Emerick (2002), “a good Muslim woman should never sacrifice her children’s or family’s needs for her own personal goals, she does not wear much makeup in public or dress to attract other men’s attention, and she looks forward to Paradise, as a reward promised to women who are sincere mates to their husbands” (p. 235). A woman from the Middle East was interviewed in Lacayo (2001), she stated that her husband often told her he could control her whenever he wanted, because the Qur’an told him he could. However, the woman said she knew that could not be true because she has read the Qur’an herself. The extreme interpretations of the Qur’an by the Taliban made the role of women in the family, an obedient, submissive and invisible life (Lacayo, 2001). The Taliban banned women from speaking or laughing too loudly, showing their ankles, wearing shoes that “click” or make noise when walking, wearing makeup, leaving the house unaccompanied by a close male relative, attending school, speaking to men who

are not close relatives and working outside the home (Lacayo, 2001). Muslim women in Trinidad and Tobago do not have to suffer these extreme and fanatical injustices.

Muslim women in Trinidad and Tobago play a greater and more significant role in the family and society because Trinidad is not an Islamic country. Even though Trinidad's Muslim women are spared from the radical atrocities of their sisters in the Middle East, they must still contend with the subtle male dominance that prevails (Hasan, 2000) in the Muslim family. The boys of a Muslim family are treated as young men full of respect and pride, whereas, the girls are constantly met with distrust, restrictions both inside and outside the home, consistent monitoring, care and household duties for siblings, and an overall subtle message that boys have a better and freer life than girls. The girls and women of a Muslim family must wear their Islamic garb and follow the segregation practices of the Mosque.

Muslim girls cannot partake in any secular activity that goes against their Islamic traditions. Often, girls find themselves rebelling against their families and religious traditions. The boys of the Muslim family are often used as "spies" for their sisters, making sure they continue to lead an Islamic, decent life outside the family walls. Muslim young women have "restricted freedom" in Trinidad and Tobago. They are free to pursue an education, work in society and practice their Islamic traditions, however, they must also contend with the prevailing double standard that has been passed down and fed to them from childhood throughout the generations of Muslim culture. Trinidad and Tobago's Muslim women are becoming more educated and successful in society, however, even though they are making positive strides in life, "they must stop the doubting that occurs within them: The doubting says they are second-class persons to

men” (Maharaj, 1999, p.9). According to Maharaj (1999) women from traditional families are being raised to be timid, and not to voice their needs.

### Views on Sexuality and the Female Body

The women’s body has always been a topic that has sparked variations of thought throughout time and within different cultures. The idea of the “stronger sex” versus the “weaker sex” has continued to permeate over time into modern day societal values, religions and cultures. Man has always been considered the dominant, strong sex and the women as the weaker, passive sex. In some cultures these ideas have become so ingrained into society (Winn, 2000) that they often create prejudices. When these prejudices take an extreme or fanatical path they become similar to the destructive Taliban of the Middle East, where women were killed for the slightest indiscretions and for things others take for granted.

In Islam, any deed or action that is associated with sexuality or a woman’s body is seen as immoral and attacking the very fiber of Muslim morality and decency. Basically, traditional Islamic teachings center mostly on the covering up of a woman’s body so that her sexuality and body does not cause lust or immorality in men, and thus the downfall of Islam. Since many Muslim men agree that, when a woman displays her sexuality in public or when there is no modesty, shyness or shame, then there is no Islam (Haddad & Findly, 1985; Ibrahim, 1999). Islamic teachings and interpretations view women’s sexuality and their bodies as a threat or corruption to Islam. Dr. Ibrahim (1999) insists that television and Internet have made nudity and carnality normal. Dr. Ibrahim, one of the main leaders in the Islamic Association in Trinidad, has stated that Satan is deceiving

us with forbidden acts such as, nudity on television, internet, beauty pageants, the carnival parading of bands; especially the parade of the queens (women in carnival costume) under the guise of modernism and progress. Furthermore, Dr Ibrahim (1999) reminded Trinidad's Muslims of the three Islamic ingredients to promote modesty and morality; modest dress (hijab), lowering of the gaze when in the presence of the opposite sex and the "prohibition of free intermingling between the sexes" (p. 35).

According to Emerick, (2002), Muslim young people are not allowed to go to concerts because of the effect the music has on people. Emerick (2002), states "when a person is caught up in a song, they are oblivious to everything else, and the songs teach lessons that are not proper to learn. The Prophet Muhammad considered dancing in public as an immoral and forbidden act" (p. 246). Furthermore, according to Emerick (2002), the Prophet also forbade any solo performances by women singers, as well as, the flute and other stringed instruments. The Prophet associated dancing in public, women singers and stringed instruments as having the ability to make people sin and forget their Islamic way of life. He felt that these aspects of life would make people turn away from Allah and engage in sexual acts or men lusting after the female singers.

Essentially, traditional Muslims men have said "there is no fun in Islam" (Davis, 1999, p. 4). Many young women feel the need to rebel against their parents and the strict Islamic ways because they want to have the freedoms that others possess (Brenner, 2004; Goodwin, 2005). One young woman stated in Davis (1999), that she didn't feel she had to turn away from Islam to get what she wanted. She felt that she could still pray and fast, while wearing makeup, having fun with her friends and boyfriend. More and more young women want to have boyfriends and date: They want to hold hands and slow dance

(Davis, 1999) all of which are strictly forbidden in Islam, because of the “fear of unchaste behavior” (Beyer, 2001, p. 56). The Barbie doll, a popular toy amongst young girls, is another aspect of Western life that Islam forbids, because of its likeness to a woman’s body and sexuality. According to El Deeb (2004), Muslims have declared Barbie a threat to morality: Her revealing clothes, body shape, indecent postures, tools and accessories and all offensive to Islam. Muslims have been told to warn their families about the doll’s negative qualities and suggestiveness. In Trinidad and Tobago, many young girls enjoy playing with Barbie dolls; however, young Muslim girls are not allowed to have this toy. Young women are beginning to feel that they can still be Muslims and practice Islam, without all the restrictions (Brenner, 2004; Davis, 1999; Goodwin, 2005) placed against them. According to a young Muslim women in Goodwin (2005), “we want the freedoms we see others having around us, we have the same dreams” (p. 117).

#### Treatment by Males in the Community and within the Family

The treatment Muslim women receive depends upon their geographical location. In the Middle East Islamic countries, women are totally controlled by men through an extreme double standard that views women as weak and inferior to men (Ali, 2006). These traditional Muslim men, whether it is in the community or within the family, treat their women as second-class citizens. Muslim men place their honor on virginity (Ali, 2006), and fidelity and if the family honor is in question, then all males respond the same way. They will impose a sentence or death; whichever the men felt would be more appropriate for the woman’s supposed indiscretion. On the other hand, Muslim women who live in secular communities are not subjected to this extreme treatment (Hasan, 2000). Even though, Muslim men may be traditional in nature, they allow the woman to



work outside the home and achieve success. However, women must first fulfill her duties at home before exploring other avenues outside the home. In Islam, Muslim men keep a unified alliance with one another, because they are deemed the head of the household, and because all Muslims are seen as brothers and sisters in Islam, therefore, a family business may become everyone's business.

Women have realized that men think, make and implement religious beliefs and moral codes, politics and the majority of the laws, thus making men the ones who are often in control. With the fall of the Taliban in the Middle East, a baffling phenomenon was uncovered. According to a report by the National Family Health Survey (2001), many of the women were still conditioned to support wife beating, even though the Taliban style social code was no longer in power. According to Winn (2000) and Bharose (2002), the way you are raised influences your behavior, views and attitude. If a person is taught negative ideas from childhood, then as an adult, those negative ideas become so ingrained into the mind that it is difficult to "unlearn" them. Similarly, the women in the study were taught several negative ideas about being women, about their sexuality and bodies and about how they should dress and behave. These ideas and behaviors become part of who the women are, a socially conditioned mind-set that may take several decades to "unlearn" (Newsday international report, 2001). The women in Kabul evidence this phenomenon, after the Taliban fell out of power. The women still continue to wear the burkas or heavy veiling that they previously despised.

French (1992) described the conditions of women in the world, in Silverstein & Goodrich (2003), as a "sticky web of disparagement" (p. 25). French continued by stating that, "in all patriarchal cultures, woman-hatred is common currency, the small change

lying in every man's (and many women's) pocket, easy to pull out to pay for – justify – any action” (1992, p. 25). According to Silverstein & Goodrich (2003), a multilayer of “structure, process, ideology” (p. 7), religion and culture allow the oppression of women to take place (Ali, 2006), and not just individual men exerting their power over women. These authors further state that the family system is the initial transmitter of these basic principles that become socially conditioned or ingrained in the minds (Winn, 2000) of women worldwide. In the case of Muslim women, when these conditions are coupled with erroneous interpretations of the Qur'an and other radical religious ideologies; then oppression of women becomes even more evident and critical.

### Muslim Women and Feminist Issues

The central stance of Feminism is “women are due the same rights and dignity as men” (Hymowitz, 2003, p.29), however, in the Islamic world, this fundamental belief does not always hold true. Over the last few decades, Muslim feminists have attempted to break taboos and speak out in an attempt to address the issues of inequality between men and women in the Islamic world.

The custom of veiling continues to be a topic that is in the forefront of feminist issues, inequality and gender debates. Dr. Mernissi, a prominent Muslim feminist and author, has openly criticized the use of veiling. Mernissi considers the veil to be a tool for censorship and punishment for Muslim women (Bartkowski & Read, 2003; Mernissi, 1991). Mernissi (1991) asks, “How did Islamic tradition succeed in transforming the Muslim women into that submissive, marginal creature who buries herself and only goes

out into the world timidly and huddled in her veils? Why does the Muslim man need such a mutilated companion? (p. 194; Bartkowski and Read, 2003)

Muslim feminists are becoming more knowledgeable about the Qur'an, and have even re-interpreted the Holy Book from a woman's perspective (Foley, 2004).

Dr. Mernissi (1991) and Dr. Wadud (1999) have both analyzed the Qur'an extensively and both feminists conclude that the Prophet desired equality between the sexes; which ultimately is the cornerstone belief of feminism. Dr. Wadud (1999), further justifies her feminist interpretation of the Qur'an by stating that the Qur'an in of itself does not promote inequality or submissiveness of women, however, she believes the domineering male interpreters of the Qur'an are responsible for the antifeminist or sexist practices against women under the umbrella of Islam (Wadud, 1999; Weiner, 2004).

### Feminist Views in Islam

#### *Islamist male "feminist" discourse*

The term Islamist refers to Muslims who wish to return to the Qur'an and follow a conservative interpretation of the text, including women submitting to patriarchal values (Foley, 2004). Radical or fundamental Islamists have reacted most strongly, over the past decades, to Western feminism (Weiner, 2004). According to Weiner (2004) "radical Islamism is steeped in resentment" (p.50) towards the West because of Western achievement: One achievement in particular is feminism and equality of women. Mernissi (1987, 1991) stated that these fundamentalists view modern Muslim women with degrees and careers as the ultimate traitors to Islam, especially women who do not

veil (Mernissi 1987, 1991; Weiner, 2004). These radical Muslim men have such extreme opposite views from the West about the way women should participate in everyday life (Dickey, 2005). These extremist views allowed the rise of a new “feminist wing of Islamism” (Weiner, 2004). This rigid and radical Islamism group has attracted many female followers, even though they advocate the severe total veiling of a woman (Weiner, 2004). This group advocates the “Jihad” or Holy War as “an obligation of all Muslims both men and women” (Weiner, 2004, p.52). The men in this group allow women to participate because they bring in Jihad revenues and other money for the organizations’ causes. These radical Islamist women also serve on publication review boards, and the group’s website; more importantly, these women are now answering the call for female suicide bombers (Weiner, 2004).

The men in this group have told the women that they are “the maker of men” (Dickey, 2005, p.30), and “the educator of future generations; the person who prepares future fighters” (p.30). According to the fundamentalist manifesto, quoted in Dickey (2005), women are important because the enemies in the West understand her importance in the role as mother, and if the enemy can corrupt her with Western values and attitudes, and move her away from Islam, then they ultimately win the battle. Radical Muslim men “equate the domination and invasion of Muslim lands by the West as a direct violation of their Muslim women” (Dickey, 2005, p. 30). They believe the invasion of Muslim lands is considered a “form of emasculation” and “part of a plan to steal our souls and castrate us” (Dickey, 2005, pp: 30-31).

Islamists believe that by controlling women’s morality, they in turn control men’s morality and sexuality. According to an Islamist leader in Weiner, 2004), “a woman can

be aroused at any moment, even when riding over bumps in a car, and once she is aroused, a man loses control. Control is not meant to punish women, but it is necessary.” (p.54).

Islamist women in the group consider themselves “feminist” because they have turned their backs on Westernization and taken a stand. In their effort to make a stance against secularism, they have chosen the ultimate “act of rebellion; educated women wearing the traditional Muslim black veil as a symbol of Islamism, and a “return to pre-modern Islamic traditions” (Weiner, 2004, p.52). Weiner (2004) states in her article that this “myth of Islamic feminism” enables the male leaders to claim they are “progressive and Islamic” (p.60), because they are for the achievement of women since they are giving them jobs and allowing them higher education.

### *The Women’s Organized Feminism*

According to El Guindi (2005), there were two branches of legitimate feminist groups that emerged in Islam organized by two women pioneers in feminism. One group formed by Sha’rawi was a Western influenced feminism, while the other group formed by Nasif was not affiliated with Western ideas. These two leading women had two feminist views, which are important because feminism is rooted in culture (El Guindi 2005, p.66), which seems to challenge the premise of “Western feminism’s claim of universality” (El Guindi, 2005, p.66; Hymowitz, 2003). Sha’rawi’s Western influenced feminism stressed “suffrage, education reform, health services, and employment opportunities” (El Guindi, 2005, pp. 66, 67) whereas, Nasif’s Islamic feminist ideas demanded all fields in higher education be open to women, even the fields that were

reserved for men. Nasif also demanded more women to be involved in Arabic and Islamic studies. She lobbied for space in the mosques for women to participate in prayer. According to El Guindi (2005), Nasif's "agenda was Islamic, and her goals were feminist" (p. 68). Even though both feminists have an ultimate goal of advancing women's rights and dignity, they differ in their journeys to get there.

El Guindi (2005) suggests that Nasif's Islamic feminism was insightful because it is grounded in "Arabo-Islamic culture"; it was a new Islamic feminism that situated itself in Islam, rather than being based in a Western or European culture.

### *Feminist Theory*

Historically, feminism was initially a political movement that liberated women from patriarchal oppression (Avis and Turner, 1996). Feminism gave women a voice and the right to be heard. Feminist theory has since evolved into a fundamental aspect of family therapy. As Reinharz (1992) states,

During the first wave of the women's movement in the United States...women struggled for the right to be educated. In the second wave women strove for additional goals related to education: The right to criticize the accepted body of knowledge, the right to create knowledge, the right to be educators and educational administrators (p.11).

Feminist theory presumes that gender is socially constructed and a constantly changing reality (Broido and Manning, 2002; Jones, 1989). For the purposes of this study, the researcher is interested in exploring how do Muslim women in Trinidad experience and practice the Muslim traditions of which they are a part, in a non-Islamic country. The dominant cultural meanings of gender will also be explored in the family and in the

community. Feminism will provide a framework or perspective on methods already chosen in this study such as the qualitative interviews and content analysis of the self-reflections. Feminism, like critical theory and family therapy aim to create social change and liberate individuals from oppressive, constrictive life experiences (Chung, 2005). Laird & Hartman (1988), use feminist theory to understand rituals, as it is used in family therapy. They state that a woman can change a certain ritual in her life, as the first step in changing the power relations that are apparent in her life. Qualitative approaches are congruent with feminist values and critical theory because of the focus on subjective experiences and meanings of the researched (Maynard, 1994). DeVault (1999), also contends that researchers must talk and listen from a woman's point of view, because talk, experiences and interactions are all gendered. "Women's ways of knowing must be acknowledged and valued" (Guerrero, 1999a, p.15; Patton, 2002). Qualitative feminist studies can range from the subjective personal experiences to the analysis of policy, society (Olesen, 2000) and culture.

This Western feminist theory, according to Mojab (1998) has many sound ideas that can contribute to the struggle of Muslim women for equality. In the past, women in Islamic societies have taken lessons from western feminism for universal rights and dignities. Furthermore, Mojab (1998) believes that women in the world can learn from the experience of other women in different regions. However, Foley (2004) suggests the rethinking of Muslim women's rights outside of the western feminist tradition. Duval (1998), El Guindi (2005), Foley (2004), Hymowitz (2003) and all believe that the liberal feminist or western tradition can no longer be the sole lens with which to view Muslim women's rights and equality issues. These authors believe that the liberal feminist view

is based on western experiences and values, and cannot be as effective when dealing with the major issues concerning Muslim women.

According to Foley (2004), Muslim women should be understood on their own terms, instead of being viewed against the experiences of the universal western example (p. 70). Mir-Hosseini (1996) calls for an Islamic feminist agenda when approaching Muslim women's rights and equality issues. According to El Guindi (2005), Hashim (1999), and Mir-Hosseini (1996), Islamic feminism is situated "within the context of Islam" and can provide empowerment and liberation without disputing the entire culture" (2005, p. 69). El Guindi (2005) believes feminism within the context of Islam is significant because "feminism is grounded in culture" (p. 53), and any feminist model or framework used to liberate Muslim women will contain assumptions, experiences and values from the Islamic culture (p. 53). Bartkowski & Read (2003), Foley (2004), and Hashim (1999) agree that Islam is a great part of Muslim, women's identity and any effort toward emancipation would be more effective if it is based on Islam.

This Islamic feminist approach weakens "patriarchal gender constructs" (Shaikh, 2004, p.99) and allows empowerment from within Islam. Even though, Western feminism and Islamic feminism are different, they both seek the ultimate emancipation and liberation of women.

### *Islamic Feminism*

An alternative path in feminism was forged in the late twentieth century (Badran, 2005) when Western feminism alone began to fall short in effectively and holistically dealing with issues that were pertinent in the lives of Muslim women. Islam provides a



sense of identity and support for Muslim women, and with only a Western feminist framework to draw from, many “Muslims are mistrustful of feminism” (Hashim, 1999, p. 7), because Western feminism does not support Islamic culture. In the absence of any alternatives, Muslim women find it difficult to give up their religion (Murray, 2002), which not only have they committed themselves to, but which also provides them with comfort and a sense of belonging (Murray, 2002). According to Badran (2005), Western feminism “needed a new edge, and Islamic feminism provided that by offering new ways of thinking and new tools” (p. 5) with which to achieve change. Furthermore, Moghadam (2002) states that Islamic feminist ideas can open dialogues between religious and western feminists, which can ultimately lead to “a breakdown of the hostility between Western and religious thought” (p. 5).

The basis for Islamic feminism is helping women achieve greater rights and dignities from within Islamic culture, with the Qur’an being the central text (Badran, 2005; El Guindi, 2005; Hashim, 1999). Similarly, Moghadam (2002) states that Islamic feminism is a movement of women who have “retained their religious beliefs, while seeking to liberate and empower women by using the sections of the Qur’an that support women in the fight for greater equality” (p.7). Moghadam (2002) believes the key to improving women’s overall status lies in the reform of “religion, culture, law and education” (p. 5). Islamic feminism’s arrival coincided with the new era of electronic or Internet technology, which allows ideas and information to circulate globally with greater speed (Badran, 2005). This globalization allowed Islamic feminism to borrow its modern ideas from Western feminism, while incorporating the new feminist interpretation of the Qur’an as its main voice and discourse.

As women become more fluent in Arabic and Islamic studies (El Guindi, 2005), the reinterpretation of the Qur'an by women would promote a new awakening of thought and ideas from women's own perspectives and experiences (Badran, 2005; El Guindi, 2005; Hashim, 1999; Stratton, 2005) while challenging the patriarchal interpretations that have been in existence for centuries. Ulen (2005) states that as a Muslim woman, she only recently learned that the Prophet allowed and approved women to lead mixed-gender services in the seventh century. Similarly, Dr. Wadud quoted Umm Waraqa's case in Stratton (2005), as the woman the Prophet gave permission to in the seventh century, to lead prayer. According to Ulen (2005), "generations of men, since the seventh century, have seized women's rights and forced women to the margins of their faith" (p. 138).

Islamic feminism and the re-reading of the Qur'an seek to address the issues that concern women the most such as, greater access in the mosques for prayer, access to education and what subject areas they can study, whether to join the workforce, and what to wear. According to Moghadam (2002), Islamic feminists "declare that the hijab and body covering should be voluntary and not mandatory" (p. 13; Spencer, 2005), and for women who still decide to wear the hijab by choice, they should have access to more fashionable styles and colors available to them. Islamic feminists believe that the new readings of the Qur'an would promote the "genuine Islam that holds women in high esteem, and gives them a high status both within the family and in the society" (Moghadam, 2002, p. 10; Stratton, 2005).

## Reinterpretation of the Qur'an

Muslim women scholars who have mastered public activism, leadership in Islamic issues, and have gained the credentials to teach, have begun to reinterpret the Qur'an. These women are al-Ghazali, Dr. Wadud and Dr. Mernissi. Dr. Wadud's reinterpretation of the Qur'an empowers women, but her work continues to enrage conservative Muslim leaders (Stratton, 2005).

Dr. Wadud, according to Stratton (2005), has spent years analyzing the Qur'an and reinterpreting the sacred text from a woman's viewpoint. She teaches women that there is "no difference between men and women in creation, that the Qur'an does not support any specific stereotyped roles for females or males, and that no man can determine the fate of his spouse, instead each individual is judged on their own merits in the hereafter" (Foley, 2004, p. 62).

There is "no discrimination against women within Islam" (Foley, 2004, p. 62). According to Hashim (1999), a reinterpretation of the Qur'an will allow women to become more knowledgeable about their Islamic rights, and educate themselves about the Qur'an's text. Women are often misled and manipulated by Muslim male leaders as to the exact Islamic laws in the Qur'an, especially since the Qur'an is often read in Arabic (Hashim, 1999).

The misinterpretation of the Qur'an and Islam on a whole has profound implications for women's treatment and equality. Hashim (1999) and Hasan (2000) states that the veil and body covering is at the top of the issues that is often misrepresented. Hashim (1999) strongly believes that Muslim women must have access

to knowledge and become more aware, so they can approach Islam and the Qur'an from a "knowing" standpoint (p. 9). With this knowledge, women can then challenge patriarchal interpretations of the Qur'an and become more aware of the rights that the Qur'an lays out for them (Hashim, 1999): These rights can ultimately be used to improve their status and overall life. Essentially, by addressing issues of status, rights and equality from an Islamic feminist viewpoint, Hashim (1999) believes that this perspective will appeal to more Muslim women, and allow them to question Islam and their place within it (Foley, 2004). The feminist movements that have begun in the Middle East affect the rest of the world, since Muslims currently reside in many parts of the world. This connectivity and influence according to Badran (2005), makes the Islamic feminism movement even more important. Moghadam (2002) believes that Islamic feminism should not be considered an alternative to Western feminist thought, but be considered as an added part to the puzzle, for a more holistic view of change. Furthermore, Moghadam (2002) states that Islamic feminists should "combine their religious or Islamic interpretations with a recognized universal standard of practices such as the UN's Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)" (p. 11) for a more complete outlook of change. However, Spencer (2005) states that many Islamic feminists believe that Muslims are to blame for gender inequality and not Islam itself. He challenges Islamic feminism to address "what exactly it is about Islam that gives rise to fanaticism and violence" (p. 1). Spencer (2005) believes that this issue is crucial for holistic social change.

Ultimately, however, women and not religion should be the focus of holistic change (Moghadam, 2002). Islamic feminists want to create a "female consciousness"

(Moghadam, 2002, p. 6), the more attention that is spread about women's status globally, the more likely a positive reaction will be achieved through heightened awareness.

The implications for Islamic feminism and family therapy are significant because of the importance the family holds for Muslim women. Muslim women's lives are centered on their family life, which is usually their first priority before working outside the home. Incorporating Islamic feminism, and critical theory into family therapy is important and crucial for the holistic empowerment of Muslim women.

The need to expand the boundaries of family therapy research has been a focus of discussion in the field (Atkinson, Heath & Chenail, 1991; Moon, Dillon & Sprenkle, 1990; Sprenkle & Moon, 1996). According to Avis & Turner (1996) and Rediger (1996), the importance of critical theory and feminist research for family therapy is logical and necessary because all focus on the goal of change, liberation and transformation of oppressed individuals within a community. This goal of change is accomplished by developing alternative beliefs, options and patterns with which one can use to live a better life.

#### The Need for Critical Theory in Feminist Family Therapy

Expanding the research boundaries of family therapy to incorporate critical theory and feminist research is well grounded (Evans, Kincade, Marbley, & Seem, 2005). This change within family therapy can be described as a "movement from constricting individual and relational life experience to an experience that is free from oppressive constraints. The change, family therapy seeks is emancipatory" (Rediger, 1996, p.127) and in this way, critical theory complements family therapy and feminist research. According to Avis and Turner (1996), feminist family therapy has been the most visible

representation of critical theory research in the field. The need for critical theory in feminist research and family therapy is apparent.

Therapists and clients alike are oppressed by the constraints of life experiences therefore; the goal is to alleviate these constraints by challenging the assumptions, values, beliefs and conditions that unnecessarily restrict freedom. By exploring the messages and beliefs that filter down from generation to generation (Framo, 1992), family therapists are able to understand how these beliefs systems affect the lives of individuals. Family therapists, Michael White and David Epston (1990), believe that people's lives are guided by a dominant story or belief, and by substituting a new story or belief one can be liberated. Similarly, critical theorists believe that every community is directed by its belief systems and ideologies (Rediger, 1996). Furthermore, Rediger (1996), states these belief systems are often unconscious, and thus, the possibility of oppression can occur.

Essentially, the belief systems and dominant stories that are derived from the families of Muslim women, must be brought into awareness and challenged in order to change the conditions of life for those that may desire it. Silverstein & Goodrich (2003) and Evans, Kincade, Marbley, & Seem, 2005 agree that the family unit itself often reproduces the larger communities' view or status of women. These authors realize that therapy cannot only address the position of women in the culture, but also the position or status of women within their own families. Critical theorists effect change through self reflection and action based on awareness and consciousness of new alternatives, therefore, from the critical theory paradigm, a theorist views others as "history creating and able to effect liberating change in themselves and in society"(Rediger, 1996, p.140).

## Summary

The review of literature has enlightened the researcher to the fact that one cannot approach the research with preconceived notions that all Muslim women want change in their lives. The researcher has realized that Westernized women have many concerns and issues about their roles as wives and mothers. However, these roles are already predetermined in the Muslim faith.

As a modern woman, the researcher must approach the research and its participants with a nonjudgmental attitude, openness, and empathy. The researcher further realizes that one must set aside one's assumptions and frustrations and mentally put oneself into their reality. Even though the researcher is familiar with the Islamic faith, one needs to maintain a broad perspective and allow the women to express their concerns and issues from their viewpoint. The researcher must be wary not to impose her values, beliefs, and frustrations on them, since the researcher would be doing exactly what the men have been doing their entire lives; controlling them.

The relevant literature and past experience have allowed the researcher to see the topic in a broader context. One must acknowledge that one must look beyond the obvious (first order mechanisms) and use one's imagination to become more creative in one's approach to the research (second order mechanisms). In other words, the researcher must depart from the conventional and compensate for the shortcomings in previous research. This study will enrich the present body of knowledge and thus stimulate further research and alternative ideas to assist women with daily coping skills.

## CHAPTER III

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### Introduction

Qualitative methodology is the research paradigm that uses “broadly stated questions about human experiences and realities, studied through sustained contact with persons in their natural environments, and producing rich, descriptive data” (Munhall, 2001, p.68) that help to understand peoples’ experiences. This methodology complements this research since it offers alternative options and new perspectives for action that can empower Muslim women. A Qualitative methodology also allows the researcher to incorporate their experiences into the process (Moustakas, 1994).

The ideological stance that will be utilized in this study is critical theory. This refers to the theoretical tradition that was developed by the Frankfurt school of social research in the 1920s as a critique of capitalism and modernism. Its members Max Horkheimer and Theodore Adorno along with their colleagues Herbert Marcuse, Erich Fromm and Walter Benjamin, and eventually Jurgen Habermas received attention for this new theory. They identified the underlying fault in modernism and offered approaches for correcting those faults (Wiggershaus, 1994). Critical theory is self-reflective and value driven (Jensen, 1997). The goal of critical theory is “to raise consciousness through self-reflection and dialogue” (Rediger, 1996, p.127), thus liberating the members of a community or group of individuals. According to Lincoln & Denzin (2000), critical theory calls for a “radical restructuring of society” (p. 1056), which will ultimately change the oppressive structures of society into a more transformative one (Broido and Manning, 2002). Habermas believes that the aim of critical theory is to have insights into



the past. Furthermore, he believes that with self-reflection, one can free oneself from the “historical compulsions of the past” (Bernstein, 1976, p. 216-217; Rediger, 1996). Held (1980) states in his introduction to critical theory, that Habermas believed it was essential to counter positivism and reaffirm the necessity of self-reflection for self-understanding, if emancipation from oppression is to succeed. The theory seeks to provide a radical critique of knowledge by taking into account the situation and the interests involved. It is also concerned with making explicit the controlling ideology of a political or social order.

Critical theory was chosen because of the central themes that a researcher may explore; namely the historical problems of domination, alienation, and social struggles. The theory also postulates a critique of society and the vision of new possibilities (Fay, 1987; Morrow and Brown, 1994). In Guba and Lincoln’s framework this critical theory paradigm articulates realism, an epistemology that is transactional and subjectivist and a methodology that is dialogic and dialectical (Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

Critical theory, on the whole, especially the “emotionally and sexually liberating work” (Kincheloe & McLaren, 1998, 2003, p. 261) provides a philosophical voice concerned with the politics of psychological and cultural resolution as well as emancipation. (Gibson, 1986; Wexler, 1991). As stated by Lincoln and Guba (1998, 2003), critical theory seeks to critique and transform the constraints that exploit humankind. Furthermore, they suggest that over time, restitution and emancipation result from consistent advocacy and activism. Morgaine (1994) believes that critical theory seeks to expose the ways in which societies and cultures can oppress human potential. This author believes that by exposing the ways of oppression, the oppressed group can

examine the societal structures around them, as well as, “their own values, beliefs and assumptions about every day life” (Morgaine, 1994, p. 325).

The critical paradigm can incorporate feminist theory/epistemology, which will consider not only the construction, but also the validation of knowledge as a social process and proposes means for making such validation into a more democratic process (Code, 1991).

### Philosophical Assumptions of Critical Theory

According to Kincheloe & McLaren (1998, 2003) there are certain basic assumptions that critical researchers, or theorists accept:

- All thought is essentially governed by power relations, which are created socially and throughout history.
- Facts are truths that are reality and cannot be dissected or changed to effectively conform to anyone’s opinion.
- The relationship between impression or idea and the goal is never stable or fixed and is often created by the social relations of capitalism.
- Language is paramount to the formation of individual thought both conscious and unconscious awareness.
- Certain groups in any society are privileged over others and, may vary widely; the oppression that permeates modern societies is reproduced when underprivileged individuals "accept" their social status as natural, necessary, or inevitable.
- Oppression has many faces and concentrating on one aspect over the others, often misses the intricacies and the interconnections among them.

- Conventional “research practices are generally, implicated in the reproduction of systems of class, race, and gender oppression” (p. 263).

A paradigm of scientific inquiry can be defined by its ontological, epistemological, and methodological beliefs (Guba, 1990).

#### Ontological: Historical Realism

Critical theory holds a critical realist ontology and asks the question, “What is the nature of reality and human beings?” (Rediger, 1996, p. 130). Reality exists apart from the observer; and can never be fully known. “This historical realism is the virtual reality that is shared by social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, and gender issues; crystallized over time into a series of structures now inappropriately taken as "real", that is, natural and immutable. The structures are "real", a virtual or historical reality” (Lincoln & Guba, 1998, 2003, p. 205).

#### Epistemology: Transactional and Subjectivist

Critical theory holds that humans interact with what they know and want to know and asks the question “What is the nature of knowing?” (Rediger, 1996, p. 130). The researcher and the participants are “interactively linked, with the values of the researcher and the participants, which in turn influences the inquiry of the study. Findings are therefore value mediated” (Lincoln & Guba, 1998, 2003, p. 203) and are made explicit and central to action (Rediger, 1996).

#### Methodology: Dialogic and Dialogical

Critical theory methodology refers to “how one will act to gain knowledge and is founded on self-reflection and dialogue” (Rediger, 1996, p. 130). There is a dialogue between the researcher and the participants that must be able to “change ignorance and

misapprehensions (accepting historically mediated structures as immutable) into a more informed consciousness” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998, 2003, p. 206). Working within the framework of critical theory, Muslim women can be invited to become more educated and enlightened so as not to simply "accept" without question. According to Giroux (1988),

As transformative intellectuals...to uncover and excavate those forms of historical and subjected knowledge that point to experiences of suffering, conflict and collective struggle; ...to link the notion of historical understanding to elements of critique and hope (p.213).

Genuine dialogue occurs when individuals can maintain their own ideas and/or viewpoints while simultaneously considering the viewpoint of another. According to Rediger (1996), critical theory research transcends any one methodological approach.

### Critical Methodology

Rediger (1996) highlights eight aspects of critical methodology that are essential to critical research.

#### *Identifying Oppression*

“Identifying oppression through dialogue and self-reflection is an essential element for critical research” (p. 133). The lack of self-consciousness and awareness often lead individuals to perceive a lack of options to change their situation or experiences.

#### *Meeting*

Meeting is meant as a “genuine” encounter where individuals come together to be “mutually understood and experienced through self-reflection and honest dialogue” (p.

133). These new relationships provide an individual with a deeper awareness and more alternatives.

#### *Commitment to Know*

Commitment to know refers to data collection methods that allow the individuals to refer back to their experiences. These methods can include a personal journal for self-reflection, interviews and videotape of meetings. Further more, this fosters an increase of awareness.

#### *Understanding Self and Other*

Each individual participating in the research would spend time reflecting and writing in a journal. The reflections become an integral part of meeting, as they provide opportunities for genuine dialogue. Genuine dialogue requires risk and vulnerability. Trust becomes essential in critical research. When an understanding of one-self occurs, a desire to know others develops.

#### *Increased Consciousness*

Increased Consciousness is achieved when the researcher reviews the reflections and dialogue, and interprets the experiences of the different individuals. Through a consistent comparative method of analysis (Patton, 1990; Strauss & Corbin, 1998), common themes emerge from the dialogue.

#### *Action*

Action is the essential component of critical research. As individuals become more reflective and aware of oppression, a feeling of uncertainty or apprehension is created that can only be solved “through action that leads to emancipation” (p. 136). Individuals may take action at “three different levels: Individual, family and community” (p. 136).

*The Responsibility to share Knowledge*

Individuals share their experiences with others so that liberation and emancipation can become widely spread. Sharing knowledge can occur through publications, television, video, and radio. Knowledge is power.

*Self-Sustaining Action*

As individuals become increasingly more aware of their situations and experiences they begin to see every aspect of their lives differently. Individuals become more astute to oppression all around them, even realizing situations where they may have been oppressive to others. An important and essential aspect of critical research occurs when individuals who were oppressed, help to enlighten others who are still oppressed

Intention's accomplished through this research

Critical research is best understood in the context of empowering individuals, (Lincoln & Guba, 1998, 2003) where knowledge is taught for the purpose of education rather than subjugation. Critical research also has the potential to illuminate the context in which women live, work and create meaning, thus giving them greater gender equality. The researcher will accomplish these intentions through expansion of knowledge, education, and emancipating the participants.

Assumptions of Knowledge and Major Tasks of the Researcher in Critical Theory

Critical theorists seek to produce transformations in the social order, producing knowledge that is historical and structural, judged by its degree of historical situatedness and its ability to produce action (Lincoln & Guba, 1998, 2003).

Change occurs when “ignorance and misapprehension is replaced with informed insights” (Lincoln & Guba, 1998, 2003, p. 212). The researcher has to expose the hidden assumptions represented by the empirical data. “As Einstein and Heisenberg, once pointed out, what we see is not what we see, but what we perceive” (Kincheloe, 1991, p. 153). The knowledge derived from the world has to be interpreted by men and women who are a part of the world. This information involves an act of human judgment. This act of human judgment that forms a critical point of view is an interpretive act. Knowledge is subjective and therefore, subject to criticism. Feminists assert that knowledge is power and those who control the access to knowledge, ultimately control the cultural construction of reality and meaning (Avis and Turner, 1996).

The end goal of this study is to gather responses to the central research question, which is how do Muslim women in Trinidad experience and practice the Muslim traditions of which they are a part in a non-Islamic country. In the process of self-reflection, Muslim women may view and comment differently with regard to the context of their lives in Trinidad and Tobago.

#### Differences between Critical Theory and the Conventional Social Science Research

Critical theory is transformative, therefore theorists in this perspective are unafraid of "political" issues, and taking a stand in an attempt to confront the injustice of a particular religious society; whereas traditional social science researchers tend to hold fast to neutrality (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998, 2003).

"Critical researchers often announce their partisanship in the struggle for a better world" (Kincheloe & McLaren, 1998, 2003, p. 264) Traditional researchers see their task

as description, interpretation or re-animation of reality; whereas, critical theorists, often regard their work as the initial step toward forms of political action that can redress injustices found in the field or constructed because of the very act of research in the field (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). Horkheimer, (1972), acknowledged that critical theory and research are never satisfied with simply increasing knowledge. Thus, critical researchers enter into the investigation with their assumptions in the forefront, in other words, they are publicly known. This assures that no one is confused concerning the assumptions they bring to the research site.

#### Relationships between Researchers and Participants

The relationship between researcher and participant is a complex one, and requires a high degree of rapport and trust between the researcher and participants. The relationship must be highly respectful, open and not exploitive. To access explicit and tactical knowledge, researchers must understand the role they will play in the discovery of cultural knowledge: Trust between participants and researcher is crucial. In this instance, the researcher becomes the instrument; this requires that the researcher participate in the setting and/or culture, observe participants and culture, document observations, interview members, analyze findings and report them.

The majority of the researcher's time is spent observing and conducting in-depth interviewing. Another role of the observer is that of an emancipator, wanting to free his participants from mental bondage. Collaborator is another role the investigator assumes when working so closely with the participants. (Moon, Dillon & Sprenkle, 1990) believes that the building of this trusting collaborative relationship is an important element needed for this type of research.



### Criteria for Evaluating the Research

In critical theory, the appropriate criteria for evaluating the research findings, process and report are “historical situatedness of the inquiry” (Lincoln & Guba, 1998, 2003, p. 213). This situatedness takes into account the “social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic and gender antecedents of the studied context, the extent to which the inquiry will act upon and erode ignorance and misapprehensions, and the extent to which it provides a stimulus to action, that is, to the transformation of the existing structure” (Lincoln & Guba, 1998, 2003, p. 213).

In interpretive and critical research, truth is constructed (Arminio & Hultgren, 2002) and the idea of discovering the truth through validity and reliability is replaced by the concept of trustworthiness (Mishler, 2000), which according to Lincoln & Guba (1985, 1998, 2000, 2003) is a way of establishing confidence in the research findings. The researcher must present evidence of trustworthiness, that the research is accurate, credible and well represented. Trustworthiness may be accomplished through triangulation, peer debriefing, participant debriefing and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 1990; Upcraft & Schuh, 1996). When evaluating the research, the researcher must also take into consideration that what represents bondage to an outside group, may not be experienced or considered bondage to the inside group.

### Critical Theory for the New Millennium

Kincheloe & McLaren (2003), suggests that critical theorists need new ways of researching and analyzing the construction of individuals due to the vast social and technological changes in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century. They suggest that some individuals in oppressive societies have been acclimated or reconciled themselves to feel comfortable in

relations of domination and subordination, rather than equality and independence.

According to Kincheloe & McLaren (2003), the new critical social theory “is concerned with issues of power and justice, and the ways the economy, race, class and gender, ideologies, discourses, education, religion, cultural dynamics, and other social institutions interact to construct a social system” (p. 437).

According to Kincheloe & McLaren’s (2003), new critical social theory “rejects economic determinism and focuses on the media, culture, language, power desire, enlightenment and emancipation, while embracing critical hermeneutics” (p. 249).

Critical hermeneutics, according to Kincheloe & McLaren (2003), assert that “perception itself is an act of interpretation” when conducting and evaluating research. Even though the authors suggest a new way to view critical theory, the outcome still remains similar: The empowerment of individuals.

### Research Method

Research methods embody principles of knowledge; these principles, in turn, determine the types of methods that are considered acceptable within scientific practice. A research design is the logic that links the data to be collected to the initial questions of the study. Every empirical study has an implicit, if not explicit, research design (Yin, 1994, 2003).

The case study method is the qualitative tradition of inquiry chosen for this study. A case study is an exploration of a "bounded system" or a case (or multiple cases) over time with the focus being the case or an issue illustrated by the case or cases (Creswell, 1998). Yin (2003), defined case study as “an empirical study that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries

between the phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (p. 13). The case study is a holistic approach that involves detailed, in-depth explorations and data collections from multiple sources of information that are rich in context (Creswell, 1998, p. 38). The case study can be of an individual, a group as an entity, an organization, or an event in context (Mariano, 2001). The research for the case study approach is conducted in natural real-life situations and emanates from the social and behavioral sciences (Patton, 1980).

According to Stake (1995), "Case study is the study of particularity and complexity of a case or cases, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances." (p. XI). Bromley (1986), states that the correct focus of a case study is not a person being studied, but more specifically, the person in a situation. According to Mariano (2001), there are four elements that characterize case studies; “context, boundaries, time and intensity “(p. 361).

The purpose for utilizing case study in this research is to gain an “in depth” understanding of the phenomena in a “real -life” setting (Dobson, 1999). The case study method is also used in this study because of its strive towards a holistic understanding of cultural systems of action (Feagin, Orum, & Sjoberg, 1991). According to Stake (1995), cultural systems are the sets of activities that participants of a culture engage in on an every day basis. Lincoln & Guba (1985), identified four reasons for researchers to use case studies: “to record facts or events chronologically, to describe, depict or characterize a phenomenon, or general condition, to teach or instruct, and to test a theory or hypotheses using a case” (p. 362). Case studies are also useful when a particular problem has arisen and needs a solution, therefore, requiring the exploration the case study

method offers. As Merriam (1988) stated, any phenomenon can be studied by using case study methods.

### The Multiple-Case Design

Multiple-case design was utilized in this study, because the researcher must interview a number of individuals. In the multiple-case design, inferences and interpretations are made from a group of cases (Mariano, 2001). According to Merriam (1988), a multiple case study requires two stages of data analysis; the within case, and the cross-case analysis. Each case is treated as a whole and the researcher must understand the dynamics of each case first, then analysis will begin within the case. Cross-case analysis then seeks to build connections between all the cases (Merriam, 1988).

According to Yin (1994, 2003), cross-case analysis attempts to build generalizations or explanations that fit across all the cases, even though each case varies in details. Miles & Huberman (1994), state “cross-case analysis allows for deeper understanding and exploration across the cases” (p. 173). However, the authors also state that before cross-case analysis can occur, it is crucial for the researcher to understand the dynamics of each individual case, before attempting cross-case explanations. Similarly, Winegardner (2001), agrees that researchers must carefully analyze the complex processes within a case, and understand the dynamics of each case, before beginning to see patterns or explanations that tie the cases together. When multiple case studies are compared to single case studies, Yin (2003), states that multiple case studies have the advantage of the evidence being considered as more compelling and descriptive.

### Criteria for Inclusion in Study

A participant was anyone living in Trinidad who was willing to talk to the researcher and fitted the criteria of a Muslim woman. To be selected as a Muslim woman, the woman could either be of African or East Indian descent, they had to be 18 years and older, their primary practicing religion had to be Islam, they also had to be the more traditional type of Muslim whose lifestyle demonstrated a strict adherence to Islamic teachings, and the participants were obtained from the Muslim community in Trinidad. Participants had to fit the criterion of being traditional, with a strict adherence to Islamic teachings, this was determined by self-report, and the key person or intermediary assisted the researcher. According to Mehran (1998), traditional Muslims place a high value upon “domesticity and motherhood” (p. 117). When a woman fulfills her duties at home, she may then explore other options outside the home, such as a job or other social interests. Traditional Muslims in Trinidad are more rigid in implementing religious rituals in their daily lives (Robinson, 2004). Traditional Muslims often use the verses of the Qur’an as a source of “protection and security for women” (Mehran, 1998, p. 117). They do not believe in modifying the original Islamic teachings to fit into the greater secular community around them.

### Sample Selection and Size

Selecting participants for this research was not random, for the mere reason that chance selection could severely affect the quality of the data because the participant randomly selected may not be cooperative or well informed on the topic or may not even fit the criteria of a Muslim woman. However, by using a purposeful sampling method (not selected by statistical chance) for selection, it was important to constantly verify

information with all other persons within the same setting. The sample was categorized as a snowball or chain sample, and consisted of five to six cases, which according to Creswell (1998) is the maximum participants for a multiple case study. The purpose for utilizing snowball or chain sampling was to identify cases of interest from key people who know of other people who know which cases are information-rich (Creswell, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Basically, snowball sampling allowed key Muslim women to assist the researcher in identifying other traditional Muslim women who fit the criteria for participating in the study. Traditional Muslim women were recruited using a self-report criterion system. According to Whitt (1991), a benefit of using a snowball sample is it can be used to expand the pool of respondents as the study progresses.

#### Gaining Entrance

"Getting in" involves gaining, building and maintaining trust and rapport with the participants you wish to study (Morse & Field, (1995). In this instance, gaining entry into the research context was not difficult because of the researcher's Trinidadian lineage and heritage. Furthermore, the researcher also kept in touch with key persons in the Muslim (African and East Indian) community. The researcher identified one key person or "gatekeeper" who was a well-respected, modern Muslim woman from the Muslim Woman's League, in the Muslim community in Trinidad, and who had the "insider status" that allowed the researcher to make contact (Creswell, 1998, p. 117) with other Muslim women who became participants in the research study.

A modern Muslim woman was important as a key person because the "modern" Muslims are less rigid in implementing religious rituals. Modernists usually modify the original Islamic teachings to make them more compatible with the dominant culture or

value system (Robinson, 2004). The modern Muslim woman had the “insider status”, and was able to divulge information to an outsider of Islam. The key person was selected based on the respect and status she held within the community, as well as the researchers Trinidadian connections. According to Patton (2002), these connections for gaining entry are called “known sponsor approaches” (p. 312). Researchers use the “legitimacy and credibility of another person or persons to establish their own credibility with the key people and within the community” (Patton, 2002, p. 313). The key person was knowledgeable about their culture and religious practices, and articulated their knowledge back to the researcher. This knowledge allowed the researcher to better understand what was happening within the community and why.

The key person was identified additionally because of her higher rank in the Muslim community and she had more males in her family; she had more insight into the norms and values of the culture. Quiet, less verbal participants were not ignored since they had a different perspective on the culture. According to Morse & Field (1995), any setting has at least four types of people who may be useful to the researcher.

The first "social gadflies", are well liked, lively but low-key people who have the ability to socialize and talk to almost anyone. The second "constant observers" are frequently older, long-established members of the group who can recall details from past events. The third "everyday philosophers" are people who think a great deal about a setting and can provide insights into what's going on. The fourth "marginal people" feel they do not really belong in the group, they feel ambivalent about the group, and they are usually the most common participants because they are able to describe the "inside" view

as well as, be willing to divulge information to an "outsider". Trinidad's Muslim community was categorized into these four types of participants for heuristic purposes. The key person was informed about the purpose and focus of the study, as well as the criteria for inclusion in the study. The researcher gave the key person a letter of cooperation that outlined their requirements as a key person, and a confidentiality agreement to protect the identities of prospective participants (See Appendices A and B).

The key person informed the researcher about rules and conditions of the community which the researcher had to abide by, so the research study was a success, and ensured that the researcher had an optimal experience and did not offend anyone in the community. According to Creswell (1998), the gatekeeper requires information in writing that includes:

Why the community was chosen for the study?

How long are the participants' interviews and for how many times they will be interviewed?

How will the results be reported?

Other issues that were required by the gatekeeper were: "central purpose of the study and procedures used in the data collection, comments about the confidentiality of respondents, a statement about potential risks associated with participation in the study, expected benefits gained by participating in the study" (pp. 116-118) and a mental health referral for any Muslim woman that required it as an additional resource.

The key person approached prospective participants and informed them about the study, by word of mouth and gave them a research information form/ flyer (See Appendix C). If participants were interested in participating in the research study, they contacted the



researcher directly using the contact information given to them by the key person. The women, who participated in the study, contacted the researcher and negotiated a meeting place, day and time for the interview. If a respondent chose to withdraw from participating in the study, they were told to contact the researcher. If a participant chose to reschedule a meeting, they were told to contact the researcher before the meeting, or participants had the option of also rescheduling during a meeting, thus splitting one meeting into two parts. The key person acted as an intermediary and as a resource for the researcher in the study, and they shared the responsibility of watching out for and being aware of general issues with regard to the participants, even though the key person did not know the identities of the actual participants that decided to participate in the study. The key person suggested possible procedures or plans of action that would help the researcher, if any safety issues or concerns should arise during the course of the study. These procedures were unique to the Muslim population in Trinidad, and came from within the realms of Islam, since these best served the participants.

The key person and the researcher did not make their relationship visible in the community. This low-key relationship further ensured the privacy and confidentiality within the community and research study. The researcher wore conservative clothing; long, loose pants, and a  $\frac{3}{4}$  length sleeve shirt that was collared and buttoned up. This attire was acceptable enough to conduct the interview with the Muslim women to assure comfort and professionalism. The key person did not instruct the researcher, to wear a modern style Muslim headdress in the community. Safety and security issues for the participants are discussed in detail below.

### Protecting Participants Rights

The researcher used informed consent to protect the rights of the participants (See Appendix D) The main ethical issues were informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, privacy and potential harm to the participants. All ethical issues and procedures were discussed with the participants prior to initial interviews. To address the ethical issue of *informed consent*, the goals of this research study were discussed with the participants as well as their freedom to voluntarily enter and withdraw (Munhall, 2001) from participation in the study. Permission to gather data was sought from the participants (Magolda & Weems, 2002). Informed consent was sought with regard to the actual data collected. All participants' had access to the transcriptions of their own interviews and field notes. Participants were able to make changes to their transcripts. The researcher followed up with the participants after the data had been collected. The follow-up meeting allowed the participants to discuss any questions, concerns or personal issues that arose and needed further clarification or explanation. General findings from the research study was shared and discussed with participants during this follow-up meeting.

#### *Confidentiality*

Confidentiality was another ethical issue that was addressed in the qualitative research. Confidentiality pertains to the agreements that the researcher makes with the participants about what is done with their data (Sieber, 1992). In this study storing all transcribed interviews, field notes and data in a locked file cabinet in the researcher's temporary residence in Trinidad for the duration of the data collection protected the confidentiality of the participants'. The researcher stored these confidential documents in her locked hand luggage as she returned to her permanent residence in South Florida,

where the documents were stored in a locked cabinet in the researcher's home. Only the researcher has the keys for the cabinets in both locations, and the hand luggage during transportation. All audio recordings are being kept in the locked cabinet, and will eventually be erased when the study has been completed. All other data will be maintained for five years as Florida law stipulates, and then destroyed. The researcher discussed possible publication and information reporting with the participants. If publication occurs, no names or possible identifiers will be used in the publication, essentially, protecting participants' identities. The researcher assured the participants that even though some of their direct quotations may be used in the publication; their identities will be protected (Munhall, 2001). The participants' names or any identifiers were not attached to the quotations. To further ensure confidentiality in this study, the researcher stored informed consents separately from other data, in a different locked file cabinet.

#### *Confidentiality/Anonymity*

Anonymity, according to Sieber (1992), is the "lack of identifiers, which is names or any other information or title that would indicate which individual provided which data" (p. 293). In this study, the researcher used pseudonyms or false names (Magolda & Weems, 2002) to protect participants' identity. Furthermore, data was coded with no names or titles associated to the participant. During data collection and analysis, no names were used, only pseudonyms and codes. To further ensure confidentiality in this study, during member checks when a participant checked their own field notes and interview transcriptions for verification of information, interpretations and conclusions, they were able to point out any information that could possibly identify them (Miles &

Huberman, 1994). The researcher specifically asked the participants' at this point if she was comfortable that her identity had been protected. The researcher stored the master list of codes and identifiers with the informed consent in a locked file cabinet.

### *Privacy*

Privacy, according to Sieber (1992), is the “control over others’ access to oneself and associated information; presentation of boundaries against giving protected information or receiving unwanted information” (p. 293). In this study, keeping the relationship between the key informant and the researcher, less visible in the Muslim community, protected participants’ privacy. The researcher interviewed participants in a safe meeting place, which was negotiated between the researcher and the participant, prior to initial interviewing. The interviews with participants were adequately spaced out in time to ensure that participants did not encounter one another, if by chance the chosen interview locations were in close proximity to one another. If two or more interviews were in the same location, then all data from previous interviews were locked away before the other participant arrived; this ensured that one participant would not accidentally view another participant’s data. In this study, participants were not aware of the identities of the other participants in the study, as well as the key person only knew of the prospective participants she suggested would fit the criteria for the study, but she did not know which of those prospective participants actually decided to participate in the study, further ensuring participants’ privacy and confidentiality.

### *Potential harm to the participants*

The issue of potential harm for participants was another ethical concern that needed to be addressed. The researcher had to be sure that the research process or

findings did not harm any of the participants. Such concerns, allowed the researcher to begin the research project with a “heightened sensitivity to the issues of potential harm” (Magolda & Weems, 2002, p. 505), especially when interviewing about and observing sensitive topics. According to Magolda & Weems (2002), researchers can address the issues of potential harm in the planning and conducting phase of their research by integrating ethical considerations into the planning process such as “advance planning as a way of reducing harm” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 292), discussing safety procedures, and “considering how negotiations or problems that arise in the study would be handled, forewarning participants and the key informant of potential harm and having a genuine dialogue to discuss the issues, demonstrating a sensitivity toward participants rights and concerns” (p. 505), and portraying or describing participants and situations accurately ensured that any potential harm was reduced (Munhall, 2001).

According to Lincoln & Guba (1989), awareness of ethical concerns and potential harm in fieldwork is the key, and by being aware of the issues, we as researchers, can institute procedures that seek to minimize harm to individuals. Lincoln & Guba (1989), state that the procedures of trustworthiness such as thick, rich descriptions, member checking, triangulation, journaling, tend to minimize potential harm to participants in the research study.

For the purposes of this study, potential harm to participants’ were reduced by

- Upholding and following the strict conditions of informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity and privacy that were detailed previously, throughout the study.

- Keeping the relationship between the key person and the researcher low-key.
- Asking each participant before the interview began, if they had any reason to be fearful for their safety, or fearful of consequences for participating in the study. If the answer were yes, the researcher would ask them if they wanted to withdraw from the study, or reschedule and go over the safety procedures that was planned in advance and included the contact information of at least two mental health professionals in Trinidad.
- Using member checking so the participants themselves could read their own transcripts to see if there was anything that they felt could identify them. If something were pointed out to the researcher, it was removed or rephrased with the participant's permission and approval.
- Using ongoing data and safety monitoring. Ongoing informed consent and safety included communications throughout the study, assessing participants' understanding of informed consent and the research, and continually asking the participants' if they felt safe and comfortable.
- Continually reminding the participants' that even after they had made a voluntary agreement to participate in the study, they could withdraw such agreement at any time without penalty.
- Having the key person sign a confidentiality form, kept the identities of the participants she informed about the study, private (See Appendix B).

- Assuring participants' that their identities were protected even from the other participants in the study.

It was easier and safer to interview Muslim women in Trinidad, than in other Muslim populated places in the world. The researcher considered any potential harm to the participants before the research began. Awareness, on the part of the researcher; allowed considerations to be built into the strict procedures of informed consent, confidentiality and privacy.

The researcher made sure the participants had the address and phone number of a mental health agency in Trinidad, as well as, the researchers contact information if the need arose. The researcher provided participants with her supervisor's contact information as an extra contact.

#### Data Collection and Procedures

Before data collection commenced, the researcher got the women's permission to meet with them, and socialize in a place of their choosing, whether it was at work, during their errands or other tasks. This was essential for observing rules of etiquette and getting familiar with the patterns in the Muslim community. Establishing rapport and trust before data collection was vital (Gitlin, 2000), especially when the selection of dress could have influenced one's acceptance into the Muslim community, since their dress code is extremely covered and conservative. Commonalties enhance rapport.

Four types of data or information were used in this study; interviews, observations, documents and audiotaping. Data collection techniques included interviews and follow-ups; document analysis such as newspapers; audiotapes, as well as handwritten field and researcher notes and notes from memory. Other research

procedures that were utilized in this study were narratives, visual texts (e.g. advertisements, Muslim television), and material culture (e.g. books like the Qur'an).

Data was collected over a five-week period of time from the various sources. The researcher was considered one of the primary research instruments. The use of a variety of data sources provided triangulation in order to increase the "trustworthiness" of the findings (Moon, Dillon & Sprenkle, 1990). In the search for accuracy and alternative explanations, there was a need for discipline and protocols that did not depend on mere intuition and good intention to "get it right". In qualitative research, these protocols are referred to as triangulation (Stake, 1995). Triangulation is the use of multiple methods to promote higher validity, rigor and depth to the research study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003).

#### Data Collection Procedures

##### *Interviews*

Interviews were used in this qualitative research to obtain participants' perspectives and perceptions (Merriam, 1988). The researcher conferred great weight on the interviews and direct testimonies of Muslim women concerning their own lives and beliefs. Extensive use of interviewing was employed because interviewing offered the researcher access to the Muslim women's ideas, thoughts, and memories in their "own" words, rather than the words of the researcher. This asset was particularly important for the study of women, because learning from women is a remedy for centuries of ignoring their ideas altogether or having men speak for women. Interviews were often like conversations between researcher and participant (Marshall & Rossman, 1989; Whitt, 1991) and can give the investigator an agile instrument to capture how the participant saw and experienced the world (McCracken, 1988). Participants defined problems as they



saw them, as well as, the terms in which they were considered. Interviews were designed to capture the famous "richness" of qualitative data and furthermore, it was designed to fashion a collaborative and friendly relationship between investigator and participant (Kleinman & Copp, 1993). During this in-depth interview the researcher demonstrated a benign, accepting, curious stance that was eager to listen with interest. The atmosphere was one of face-safety to make the opening questions simple and informational.

More specifically, semi-structured interviews were used over either structured or unstructured interviews. Semi-structured interviews take preference when the researcher knows the questions but cannot predict the answers (Morse & Field, 1995). This type of interview allowed the interviewer both the freedom of the unstructured type and the guidelines of the structured interviews. In this study, it allowed the information to be obtained in the way in which it was needed. This method gave the interviewer freedom to phrase questions as she saw fit and also allowed her the opportunity to ask the participant for clarification. Another advantage of this method was that the researcher was allowed to probe responses, which were unclear or ambiguous. Similarly, this method gave the participant freedom to explain the situation in her words. These stories provided the rich, descriptive context that makes qualitative research so valuable (Morse & Field, 1995).

The researcher decided what question to ask and how to sequence and word questions in order to solicit the detail needed. The seven interview questions included:

1. If I followed you through a typical day, what would I see you doing, what experiences would I observe you having?
2. Can you please describe how the women are treated in your community?

3. Can you please describe how the men in your family act toward you?
  - b. Do you feel free to express complaints or unhappiness to your husband?
  - c. If you had a personal problem or health problem, how do you expect your husband or other male relative to respond to you?
4. How would you define your role in your family?
5. What obligations fall on you as Muslim women that do not fall on Muslim men?
6. Can you please tell me how you are honored and valued as a woman in your family?
7. Can you please tell me what does being a good Muslim entail?
  - a. Can you please tell me how the way you dress as a Muslim has impacted your daily life in the Caribbean?

Initial interview questions were derived from the research question and the researchers knowledge of the culture, however, as the study progressed, three more questions were added for clarification or to obtain additional information (Whitt, 1991). One such question pertained to Abu Bakr, who at the time of the interview process was prominent in the media and in many heated topics of discussion in the Government of Trinidad and Tobago: He was labeled as a militant Muslim. When the researcher asked the question about Muslim dress code and the effects in the Caribbean, many participants added information about the Muslim swimsuit and sea bathing, which prompted the researcher to obtain this information from the other participants. At the end of the interview process, the researcher observed that the participants seemed to have additional comments that were not covered in the interview questions, therefore the researcher asked an additional question that allowed the participants to make these comments and be

fully heard and allowed to express themselves (See Appendix E). The researcher acquainted herself with the literature review and the cultural review (McCracken, 1988).

### *Observations*

Observations of the Muslim women and events that surrounded them enabled the researcher to see and record behaviors as they occurred (Merriam, 1988). Observational data was extremely valuable and the purpose was to describe the setting, activities, the Muslim women themselves and meanings (See Appendix F). Essentially, the descriptive detail allowed the researcher to know what had occurred and how it had occurred (Patton, 1980), and what was the meaning involved.

Observations of Muslim women during the rapport building initial stage and the interview allowed the researcher to understand the context within which they operated. The researcher had the opportunity to witness things that could have routinely escaped conscious awareness. Direct observational approaches enabled the evaluator to learn about things that were sensitive or difficult for participants to talk about in the interview. Observations permitted the investigator to move beyond the selective perceptions of others. At the beginning of the study, the researcher identified certain events or activities that could be observed, but after spending more time in the setting, the researcher learned of other important events and activities that should be observed, and became vital to the research study.

### *Narratives*

According to Creswell (1998), “narratives are extensively used in qualitative research” (p. 168). In this study, narratives took the form of the daily life events of Muslim women. Narratives were collected as part of the interview process. The

researcher was sensitive to hearing and encouraging these stories. Narratives, like vignettes are highly descriptive in nature, whether it described an individual or an event, whereas, other narrative reports captured “a typical day in the life of a Muslim woman in Trinidad” or they furthered a theme or perspective of the study (Creswell, 1998).

#### *Field and Researcher notes*

The most fundamental part the researcher had in the field was the recording of field notes (Patton, 2002). Field and researcher notes are extremely critical for qualitative data analysis, and contained the descriptions of what was observed. Essentially, the field and researcher notes contained everything worth noting by the researcher. Field notes were “descriptive in nature, dated, and reported who was present, what the physical setting was like, what interactions occurred, what activities took place and basic information such as, where the observation took place” (Patton, 2002, p. 303). The field and researcher notes were descriptive enough for another researcher to relive the experience through the words written in the report at a later time. Field and researcher notes also contained what the participants said, such as direct quotations, and the notes also contained the researchers feelings, reactions, reflections, insights, interpretations and early analysis. According to Patton (2002), field and researcher notes are “the fundamental source for building case studies and carrying out data analysis” (p. 305).

#### *Documents*

Documents are a useful, and often an overlooked source of data in qualitative research (Marshall & Rossman, 1989; Merriam, 1988; Whitt, 1991). Documents were readily available to the researcher at any time, which further made them an excellent source of data. For the purposes of this study, documents included; public records,

newspapers, memos and field notes (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). Documents also provided insights into the setting and culture being studied (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Documents were used to support the other data sources (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984), as well as, generated additional topics and questions during the interview process (Whitt & Kuh, 1991). The researcher was open to receiving various documents pertaining to Muslim life from the participants, only if they brought them to the interview.

#### *Other data collection techniques*

Visual texts are movies, television shows, advertisements or pictures (Harper, 2003) that provide a narrative or snapshot of daily life in the setting or culture being studied. In this study, the researcher included as part of the data collection, the advertisements and pictures shown on the Trinidadian or Muslim style television. These materials were used when the participants' referred to them as a way to clarify, or to help the researcher get additional information on the Muslim culture.

Material cultures are mute evidence such as, written texts or books, and material symbols surrounding rituals in a culture (Hodder, 2003). These data sources provided insight into the setting, culture or an individual. Essentially, these data sources are material reproductions of culture that show activity, social organization and cultural patterns. The researcher was open to receiving books or other written text pertaining to Muslim way of life, such as the Qur'an when the participants' brought them to the interview.

The equipment that was used to collect the data included tape recorders, cassettes, computer software, a personal computer and note pads for written field notes. Process notes of day-to-day activities, methodological notes and decision-making procedures

were used to keep track of the research process. The researcher documented her decisions, choices and insights in addition to personal notes about motivations, stories, incidents and experiences with the participants and others in the setting.

### Data Analysis and Interpretation

Qualitative analysis is turning interviews, observations, documents and field notes into findings (Patton, 2002). The qualitative researcher must make sense and reduce large amounts of data into smaller significant patterns and meaningful chunks of information. NVivo 7, the latest in qualitative research software, was used in this study to help manage and analyze the data collected. NVivo 7, according to its developers at QSR International, takes analysis and insight to a new level with powerful applications that combines the old, rich features of the NUD\*IST program with the flexible and easy analysis tool of the NVivo 2. NVivo 7 allowed the researcher to make sense of the information and data collected in the study in an easy way.

The data analysis was inductive and recursive (Moon, Dillon & Sprenkle, 1990). Analysis was ongoing and occurred throughout the data collection (Miles & Huberman, 1994), field notes and transcripts were copied verbatim, read, coded and categorized by the researcher. Early analysis allowed the researcher to go back and forth between data collection and analysis, this method allowed for detection of “blind-spots” and the generation of new, additional data (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 50). The data, field notes, and tape recordings of the interviews were all transcribed into “analyzable text” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 43), the task then was to reduce and display the text for interpretation or sense making. The researcher looked for patterns of action or meanings

in the data by using the early data analysis methods proposed by Miles & Huberman (1994). These methods of analysis included “a contact summary sheet, first level coding, second level pattern codes, memoing or general themes, a case analysis meeting and vignettes” (pp. 50-89).

A contact summary sheet was a simple way to summarize time-limited data. The summary sheet consisted of a one-page sheet that focused on clarification questions about a contact in the field. The researcher read the data collected and answered any questions briefly to get a better picture of the salient points in the contact.

First level coding allowed for recognizing repeated words, phrases or themes within data using codes to identify them for sorting at a later time. Coding allowed for the development of categories in the research as data was accumulated. Coding analysis involved the researcher differentiating and combining data that she collected, and the theoretical and analytic insights that were made about the information. Codes were tags or labels that were assigned to units of meaning such as, words, phrases or themes within the data; this guaranteed easy retrieval later in the study.

Second level pattern codes were codes that identified themes that the researcher identified and constructed or explanations. These codes were a way to group the first level codes of information into smaller sets, themes or constructs.

Memoing or general themes were the accumulation of the researchers theoretical and analytical insights that occurred while coding. Memos consisted of sentences, paragraphs or pages of thought. Memos tied different chunks of data together into a general theme or concept; these were the meaning units or categories that were generated from the data. The meaning units consisted of six categories that are apparent from the

data; non-verbal cues, interviewer reflections, traditions of the culture, religious practices, feelings/meaning and content. These categories were the initial start for coding the data.

A Case Analysis Meeting occurred when the researcher met with her supervisor to summarize the current status of the cases. In this meeting, questions and answers about the cases were asked and clarified. This meeting was useful because the researcher had multiple cases.

Vignettes are narrative, story-like reproductions or descriptions of an event in a case study. According to Erickson (1986), a “vignette is a vivid portrayal of the conduct of an event of everyday life” (1986, pp. 149-150).

As analysis procedures continued throughout the study, the researcher looked for incidents or stories that confirmed or disconfirmed her initial assertions about the culture and setting (Moon, Dillon & Sprenkle, 1990).

### Data Management

The researcher utilized a computer for constant back ups of data, and to use the qualitative software as a data management technique to help reduce the data collected in this study. Organizational computer software and qualitative research software (NVivo 7) was used in this study for making notes in the field, transcribing notes, editing, coding, storage, search and retrieval, data linking (connecting relevant data with each other, forming categories), memoing (reflective commentaries for deeper analysis), content analysis (counting frequencies, sequences or locations of words and phrases), data display (putting data in a reduced or condensed format such as, a matrix), conclusion drawing and verification (interpretation of displayed data, confirm findings), theory building (testing hypotheses, explanations of findings), graphic mapping (creating



diagrams to show findings or theories), and preparing final reports (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

A matrix was developed as a visual component to analyze the relationships between categories. Matrices were essential for “understanding the flow, location and connection of events. It was a great tool for illustrating an enormous amount of data connections; it crossed two or more lists that were set up as rows and columns” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 93).

#### Procedures of Verification and Reliability

Certain measures needed to be identified to ensure trustworthiness of the inquiry. In this research study, triangulation, member checking, and auditing was utilized. To ensure credibility, the researcher spent a week becoming more familiar with the women and their Islamic faith before data collection commenced, triangulation of data sources; which achieves broader and more accurate results (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003) from the time in the field and various data sources, negative case analysis (searching and accounting for disconfirming data) and member checking (having the participants themselves review and confirm the researcher's interpretations and conclusions) (Creswell, 1998; Stake, 1995). Other issues used to protect "reliability" and "validity" were transferability/generalizations into other applicable settings, dependability; could the findings be reproduced reliably, and the use of the audit trail which “verifies meaning making” (Whitt, 1991, p. 45) and clearly documented the researcher's decisions, choices and insights. It is a precise recording of “who said what, when, where and under what conditions” (Whitt, 1991, p. 45). Reflective notes were useful for enhancing reliability

and validity during data collection. The thick, rich detailed, in-depth descriptions of the Muslim women's stories and lives enhanced the external validity of the study.

### Preliminary Biases and Hypotheses

The researcher realized that she had struggled with the conditions of life that Muslim women live in Trinidad, even though the conditions of power and dominance are subtler and much less antiquated than the Middle Eastern women's lives. The researcher felt that there were some women in Trinidad who did not want change in their lives. In other words, they were quite content with their roles in life. The researcher suspected that the women who felt this way would be the older women who would have the tendency to fear change. To them, it represented the "unknown". These older women have lived so long in the patriarchal system that they have developed routines and coping skills that have allowed them to function under these circumstances. The researcher believed that some of the younger women, who have had more exposure to education and alternative lifestyles, would more likely want change. These young women sometimes rebel against the cultural system, which places several restrictions on their daily lives. There could also be some women who want to change but are hesitant to deal with the consequences. However, the researcher felt that many women were socially conditioned from childhood. This mind-set being so ingrained with certain negative information and restrictions could be extremely difficult to change.

### Summary

The researcher remained "open" to unexpected information. The researcher realized that what may seem "demoralizing and demeaning" is relative. What the

researcher sees as demoralizing and demeaning may not be considered as such to some Muslim women. Some Muslim women would not consider their situation as demoralizing at all. They have accepted their lives because that is what "Good, moral Muslim women do". The researcher was open to the fact that some Muslim women were content in a polygyny relationship. According to Mishler (2000), the researcher has to be aware of her "distortions, blind spots and limitations" that could color and define how one sees the world (p. 455). This is the researchers' lens of bias, and once the various stances are made aware, then the presentation of the study would be more reliable and valid.

#### Limitations of this Study

1. There may be reluctance on the part of the participants to answer certain questions in the interview process.
2. The non-random nature of the participant selection could limit the study's generalizability.
3. In this study, potential harm to participants was minimized, however; some women maybe hesitant to participate in the study or if they do participate, they may not want to admit to being abused or mistreated.
4. The traditions and / or religion of the Muslim culture always had a mistrust of the western media and publicity in general due to the often stereotypical and negative image of Islam. Therefore, some Muslim women may be ambivalent about participating in the study or they could use the study to advocate for Islam, so as not to further add to the negativity about Islam.

5. This study was done in a secular or non-Islamic country where there is a large Muslim / Islamic population. The study was not done in an Islamic religious state where the findings may vary.

## CHAPTER IV

### STUDY FINDINGS

#### Introduction

This chapter will describe the findings of the study. The first section is an overview of the study participants, including a table summary of the participants' demographic characteristics, as well as, a summary case description of each of the six study participants. The second section will present an overview of the themes derived from the data, including a discussion with excerpts from the interview transcripts for each of the three major themes that emerged from the data. The three major themes that described the experiences and the practices of the Muslim women were: Muslim women's self-expression of independence and individuality; the Qur'an as the center of a Muslim's life; and education and knowledge of the Muslim woman. The minor themes were: Abu Bakr as a negative representative of Muslim faith in Trinidad and Tobago; Muslim women fear pre-judgment of all Muslims as terrorists; Unfair treatment and discrimination; and Muslim women feeling that Islam is misunderstood in view of Islamic world events. This chapter concludes with a summary of the findings.

#### Overview of Study Participants

The six study participants were all articulate and able to express their ideas and thoughts during the interview process. Each Muslim woman was extremely interested in the study, and thought it was a privilege to talk with the researcher because the study was from a school in the United States, which made the project prestigious to them and they felt important to be part of such a study that inquired about their thoughts, insights and

stories about being a Muslim woman in Trinidad and Tobago. One of the six participants had slight reservations before the interview process. When she contacted the researcher, she wanted to know how the results of the study would be reported because she did not want to be a part of something that would reflect negatively on Islam. The Muslim women's ages ranged from 23 to 70 years of age. All the women were East Indians except for one, who was African descent. They are all married; three of the six participants are homemakers, while two others are human service workers and one a business owner. All the participants had several children each ranging in ages from five to forty two, while one participant was recently married and hoping to start a family soon.

All the participants wore hijab and full Islamic covering, except one who wore the purdah (face covering) in addition to the hijab. All participants' early academics and education were in non-Muslim environments. The participants all live throughout Trinidad. The six participants were all open about their experiences and practices within Islam and the conversation was free flowing and extremely interesting. All the participants shared a close proximity, on the same grounds with extended family, usually the husband's parents. All of the participants felt they were treated well in their lives, and none of them thought they were oppressed which was surprising and not what the researcher expected. To protect their confidentiality, code names were assigned to each participant. Table 1 presents a summary of the participants' demographic characteristics.

Table 1.

## Participant Demographic Information

<b>Participant's pseudonym</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Race</b>	<b>Profession</b>	<b>Children</b>	<b>Marriage Age</b>	<b>Early Academics</b>	<b>Hijab style</b>
Amina	45	African	Human Services Worker	4	20	Catholic, converted to Islam	Hijab
Ayesha	58	East Indian	Homemaker	5	20	Non-Muslim school	Hijab
Farida	23	East Indian	Homemaker	Hoping to become pregnant	23	Non-Muslim school	Hijab/purdah
Merriam	47	East Indian	Business Owner	3	18	Catholic	Hijab
Muslimah	70	East Indian	Homemaker/community worker	7	26	Non-Muslim school	Hijab
Salmah	36	East Indian	Human Services Worker	3	24	Catholic	Hijab

## Description of Participants

### *Participant 1: Amina*

Amina is a forty-five year old African Muslim woman, who works in human services. She has four sons, ranging in age from 16 to 24 years old: The two older sons are married, one lives abroad and the other lives with his wife on the same grounds with Amina and rest of the family. Amina was raised in a Catholic family. During her teenage years when she was questioning life and self-searching for answers, a young man Amina met in school introduced her to Islam. This young man would eventually become her husband. Amina realized that Islam answered all her questions about her purpose in life; it was what she was searching for at that time. Amina felt Islam spoke to who she was and who she wanted to become. Amina converted to Islam and eloped with the young man when she was 20 years old: Her parents were devastated and objected to the marriage initially, but with time have come to embrace their daughter's faith. Amina was dressed in her hijab and body covering. She was constantly fixing her hijab because she did not want her hair exposed; every time it slipped, she fixed it immediately. Throughout the interview, Amina was conscious of her clothing in public, making sure it was appropriate at all times. Amina is extremely educated and currently pursuing a higher degree.

### *Participant 2: Ayesha*

Ayesha is a fifty eight year old East Indian Muslim woman, who has always been a homemaker. She has five children, three boys and two girls ranging in age from 20 to 30 years of age. All her children are married, and were arranged when they were



younger; a promise between families. Ayesha married her husband when she was 20 years old and they met in the mosque. Ayesha said her husband had given her “the eye.” She knew there was an attraction there. He came home and asked her parents for her hand in marriage. Ayesha wore a black, enveloping hijab and body covering to the interview. She made a point of constantly fixing her hijab to keep it in its place, to hide her hair and any ornaments she was wearing. Ayesha grew up in the Muslim faith but did not wear the hijab as it is today, when she was younger. She wore the East Indian “orhni” which is a more light, see-through head covering than the hijab’s heavier opaque cloth of today. Ayesha felt that everything in life happens with the blessings of Allah, she pointed out that Allah sanctioned even the researcher’s presence for the interview. She felt if He did not give his blessings on the interview, then the researcher would not be able to conduct the interview successfully. Ayesha even commented on the increasing kidnappings in Trinidad, by saying she would not want her family to pay any ransom to get her back, since everything happens with Allah’s blessings and permission. Ayesha was always a homemaker, since her husband never wanted her to work outside the home.

*Participant 3: Farida*

Farida is a twenty-three year old East Indian Muslim woman, who is a homemaker. Farida is the youngest participant and newly married; she is hoping to start a family once she gets to know her husband a little better. Farida’s husband’s family lives in the front house on the same grounds as they do. Farida’s mother-in-law chose her as a suitable marriage partner for her 19-year-old son. Several arranged meetings were organized by the families for the new couple to meet and talk about their common

Qur'an and Hifz interests. Farida found the first meeting to be very funny since she was shy. Farida is the only participant to wear the purdah (face covering) along with her hijab and body covering. Farida removed her purdah for only a few seconds so that her husband could see her face for the first time. Farida, even though indoors, was constantly fixing her hijab to cover her hair; however, she did remove the purdah for the interview because the researcher was female. During the interview, Farida asked to pause on two occasions to get something outside. On both occasions, Farida had to put on her purdah and fix her hijab fully even though she only went outside for a few seconds each time to retrieve two items that were close to the door. Farida was the only participant to thank the researcher for allowing her to talk and express herself fully. She thought it was a great feeling to be able to talk about her life to someone else that is not Muslim.

*Participant 4: Merriam*

Merriam is a forty-seven year old East Indian Muslim woman, who is a business owner. Merriam has three children, two boys and a girl ranging in age from 20 to 28 years old. Her youngest child wears full hijab and purdah. Merriam's children are married. Merriam got married at 18 years old to a man that converted to Islam in order to be with her and marry her. Merriam met her husband in school, and she knew there was an attraction, but he was not a Muslim. When her parents found out, they were against the match because Merriam already had several marriage offers from since she was 13 or 14 years old, from suitable Muslim men. Merriam's husband was persistent and went to her parents and informed them that he would convert to Islam and be a "practicing" Muslim man so that he could be considered as a suitable marriage partner for Merriam. Merriam

now wears the heavier, opaque hijab and body covering of Islam today, however when she was younger and growing up in the Muslim faith, she wore the “orhni” which was a light, see through head covering of the East Indian culture. Merriam’s business caters to a majority female clientele, however, when males come to her business she must be fully covered in her hijab and body covering.

*Participant 5: Muslimah*

Muslimah is a seventy-year-old East Indian Muslim woman who has always been a homemaker. Muslimah is the oldest participant in the study and she has seven children, five girls and two boys ranging in age from 31 to 42 years old. All of her children are married with families of their own. Muslimah got married to her husband when she was twenty-six years old. Her husband’s family and her family socialized often in the Muslim community. Even more so, when Muslimah’s brother married her husband- to- be’s sister. The family grew even closer and Muslimah realized she “fancied” her husband- to- be. However, to her dismay, he left Trinidad to go abroad to study. Muslimah thought her chances were lost since most young men would marry when they go abroad. Muslimah tried to forget and put any thoughts of him out of her mind. She did not want to get her hopes up, but she admitted to thinking once in a while, “what if he comes back.” Surprisingly, half way through his studies, he came back to Trinidad for a visit and he and Muslimah were matched up and married. Muslimah grew up in the Muslim faith; however, when she was younger she wore the East Indian “orhni,” the light, see through head covering of the Indian culture. Muslimah now wears the traditional Islamic heavier, opaque hijab and body covering.

During the interview, Muslimah did not wear her hijab because she was indoors and the researcher was female. However, when the researcher was leaving, Muslimah walked the researcher to the open area door way which could be partially seen from the street: Muslimah did not put on her hijab during these few minutes when she was partially in view of the street.

*Participant 6: Salmah*

Salmah is a thirty-six year old East Indian Muslim woman, who works in human services. Salmah has three children, two boys and a girl ranging in age from five to eleven years old. Salmah got married to her husband when she was twenty-four years old. They both met in school and pursued similar professions in human service field afterward. Salmah and her husband to be were initially friends who knew one another in the Muslim community: Marriage was the next step in order to pursue a relationship. Salmah wore the traditional heavy, opaque Islamic hijab and body covering. She grew up in the Muslim faith and always wore the hijab, even in the Catholic high school she attended. Salmah was very educated and during the interview she often made several comparisons between Islam and Christianity. When the interview began, Salmah removed her hijab since the researcher was a female. Salmah told the researcher that her in-laws live upstairs while her family lives downstairs in the same house. At the end of the interview when the researcher was about to leave, her car would not start. Salmah called a family member to assist the researcher with the car. Another non-family male came along to help with the car, and Salmah immediately disappeared and rushed off to grab the nearest hijab to recover her head, before the non-family male entered the gate outside. Salmah explained her actions, and became very conscious of fixing her hijab and

body covering constantly to make sure her hair was covered under the hijab appropriately.

### Description of Findings

The general findings were three major themes and three minor themes derived from the data that described the experiences and practices of Muslim women in Trinidad and Tobago. The most prevalent themes were the Muslim women's self-expressions of independence and individuality, and the Qur'an being the center and focal point of Muslim's lives. The minor themes focused on the Muslim women expressing their concerns about the view of Islamic world events, and how this view has seemingly branded them as terrorists, and has impacted their lives in the small Caribbean island of Trinidad and Tobago. All the women had negative opinions and views about Abu Bakr, Trinidad's most controversial, radical, African Muslim man. Figure 1. and Figure 2. show the major and minor themes graphically.

Figure I. MAJOR THEMES & EXPERIENCES  
Qualitative Study of the Experiences & Practices  
of Muslim Women in Trinidad & Tobago.

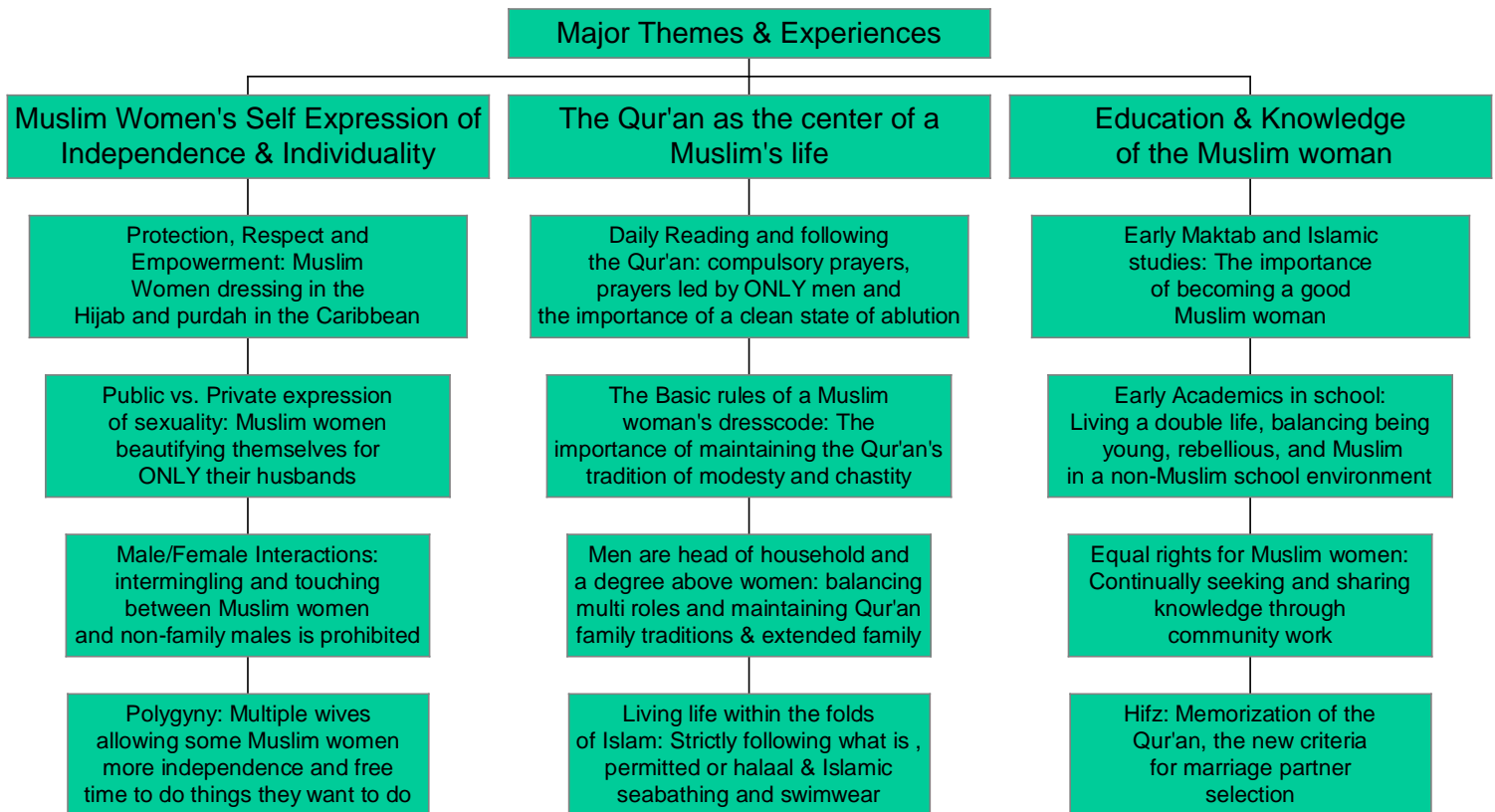


Figure II. MINOR THEMES RELATED TO EXPERIENCES & PRACTICES  
Qualitative Study of the Experiences & Practices of  
Muslim Women in Trinidad & Tobago.

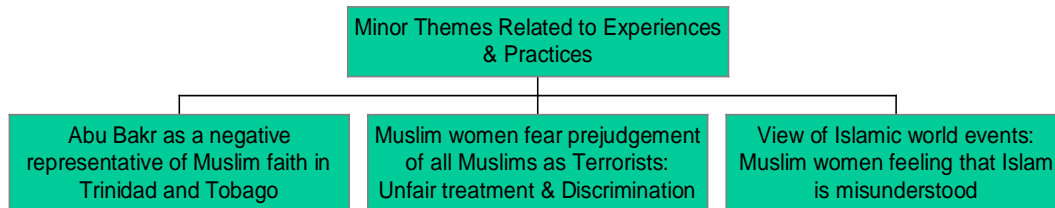
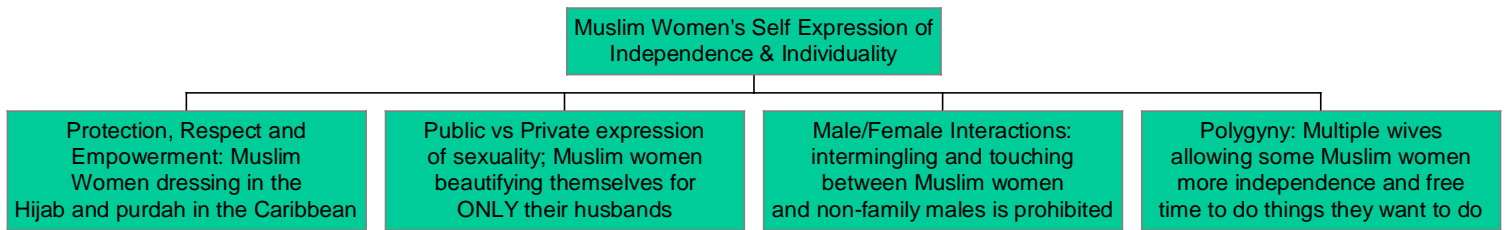


Figure III.  
Theme: Muslim Women's Self Expression of Independence & Individuality





## Muslim Women's Self Expression of Independence and Individuality

The term “self expression” has traditionally been used to describe how a person expresses himself or herself in word or phrase; in looks or facial aspects; in the showing of feelings, in the manner of speaking or performing; or in the representation of feeling in symbols or art (The Pocket Oxford Dictionary, 1984, pg. 259). Expressing one's independence and individuality is rather commonplace, and an everyday part of our very existence in the United States of America. How we express our independence and individuality makes us who we are in a very unique way. However, being a Muslim woman and following the teachings of Islam, makes their “self expressions” controversial, interesting and intriguing to a world who perceive them as shrouded beneath their Islamic garb, portrayed as having no voice, and belonging to a religion that is viewed so negatively in the world news. The Muslim women express themselves through their dress code, “private” sexuality, male/female interactions, and additionally, some Muslim women choose to express themselves more fully within polygyny (multiple wives).

*Protection, Respect and Empowerment: Muslim Women dressing in the Hijab and Purdah in the Caribbean.*

Muslimah is a seventy-year-old East Indian Muslim woman who has always been a homemaker and a community worker. She is a leading Muslim woman in her community and often attends conferences and other activities for the betterment of the Muslim community. Muslimah describes sometimes feeling like she is the only person wearing the Hijab in her surroundings: She feels she stands out like a sore thumb in the

crowds of people wherever she goes, whether it is a conference or simply running an errand at the bank.

*I was in the bank and people look at you from the time you walk in, and everything goes quiet. They all wonder whether you have guns in your bag. However you ignore that because you feel so confident, you feel so covered, you feel so protected, you feel so empowered that you are there and doing the right thing, you know you are not following fashion and not following other people. It takes a lot of maturity to think that way and do that.*

In Trinidad, everyone is used to seeing the Hijab and Islamic wear. Hijab is the head covering that comes in different forms depending on the individual Muslim woman's taste and fashion sense. Muslimah explained that it did not matter what ethnic group a woman belonged to because Islam is the focus point. She further explained that a woman could dress in her kimono, dress in her sari, dress in her African gown, once the woman fulfils the requirements of coverage; then the dress becomes Islamic. Muslimah described the many forms of the Hijab and how it is being used in Trinidad.

*There are triangular ones, square ones, short ones, big ones, and pretty ones. It has become a great item of fashion now for Muslim women. They match their Hijab, clothing, and shoes and add beautiful accessories. Women now have everyday Hijabs, dressy ones, old ones, pretty ones and extravagant ones; it all depends on the mood of the woman and the occasion she is attending. However the Hijab must fulfill its required job of covering the woman's entire body to protect her chastity, guard her modesty and protect her from what normally seems shady. After all, the idea is not to focus attention on the woman, but the idea is you must not look as if you are so sad and deprived that you are covered up and you are very unhappy. You must look happy and very proud to be wearing the Hijab.*

Merriam is a forty-seven year old East Indian Muslim businesswoman who did not wear the Hijab when she was growing up. Merriam wore the Indian style covering called the "Orhni." It is the type of head covering that is more light and see-through, commonly used by the Indian culture in Trinidad. Merriam now uses the Orhni in addition to the opaque, heavier Hijab. The Orhni adds a bit of style and fashion to the

regular Hijab. She feels the combination of styles and colors allows her to express herself in a unique style. Merriam described the impact of the Hijab in the Caribbean island of Trinidad.

*I don't have any problems. Trinidadians are accustomed to seeing Muslim women in their Islamic garb. I wear my Hijab proudly and I have found that wearing the Hijab gets me more respect. I am respected more from male persons out there. They would give me compliments for my unique style, like "oh you blend your colors well" or "it is nice how you blend color and fabric" things like that, not suggestive you know, more respectful. I have realized that I can cover myself and be decent and still gain respect from people.*

Merriam compared her Islamic garb to the researcher's long pants and ¾ sleeved top, and felt that in fact, she would get more compliments with her Hijab than if she did not wear Hijab at all.

Amina, a forty-five year old educated African Muslim woman who converted to Islam after growing up in a Catholic family for 19 years, felt that Islam provided all the answers for her as she searched for herself during her teenage years. Amina converted to Islam in the early 1970's at a time in Trinidad when Islamic awareness was not as strong as it is now. Amina described her feelings about wearing the Hijab in Trinidad, and what type of impact it has had on her.

*In Trinidad, nobody looks at me strangely anymore, but I don't know what people are really thinking in their minds. When I became Muslim in the 1970s, it was a big thing. I was one of a few, so people would look at me and laugh; people I did not even know laughed at me because of the strange way I dressed. Now, every two or three persons are Muslim. It is easy to see Muslims within a limited geographical area such as Trinidad. "I don't think people take us on anymore, we are just, another one you know?" I think wearing the Hijab and Islamic garb is an advantage sometimes because if it's hot and you expose your skin, your skin will burn, however, if it's hot and you cover your skin, your skin is protected and your clothes burn. "As strange as it may seem, if you want to know if a Muslim woman is hot, look at her face and you will see she is not sweating, but you may be". The Hijab is protection; my skin is protected from the sun.*

Salmah is a thirty-six year old East Indian Muslim woman who is educated and articulate. Salmah has strong, Islamic beliefs from her childhood. She feels that Muslims are on every corner of the globe. Salmah explained how common it is now to see the Hijab in Trinidad.

*Practically on every corner you are going to see Muslim women dressed in a long gown, long shirt and pants and a Hijab. It is becoming more common now than ever before in Trinidad. We are now respected and accepted in the way we dress.*

Farida is a twenty-three year old East Indian woman who is a homemaker and recently married. Farida is the youngest participant, and the only one to wear the Purdah, or Niquab, in addition to her Hijab covering. Farida is one of the many young Muslim women in Trinidad who are strengthening their Islamic beliefs at a younger age, which allows for a deepening of faith and an increase of Islamic awareness throughout the Caribbean. Farida defines herself by wearing the Purdah or face covering. She explained her initial experience and feelings with the Purdah or Niquab and how she has since adapted to wearing it everyday in Trinidad.

*I started wearing the Niquab or Purdah, which is the face covering, in addition to the full Islamic gown for about three years now. I used to only wear the Hijab and long skirts, and long sleeved tops before. Wearing the full Islamic garb began when I started Hifz class. Hifz or memorizing the Qur'an puts me on a higher level spiritually, which has to be reflected in the way I dress. The Hijab defines me, because as a Muslim, you stand out. Initially, I went through a tough period of feeling extremely hot and just wanting to pull it off my face. This period was short though, after the initial difficulties of adapting, and then I always wanted to keep it on: I just didn't want to give up on it. Now, I am so accustomed to it. The heat does not bother me anymore.*

Adapting to the Purdah took Farida some time; especially adapting to everyday life tasks with her face covered. Farida did not want the Niquab to sound like a burden on her, but it was a bit frustrating when she had to accomplish simple tasks such as running to the outside of her home.

*I had to put the Purdah on to just run outside. Sometimes, I don't even bother going outside because of it. Don't get me wrong; I enjoy this mode of dress. I really enjoy it, because I feel protected and I feel like I am in my own little world, because no one can see my face and really stare at me. When you are not wearing Purdah, your face is exposed, every one is seeing you, they can become attracted to you, and begin watching you, and thinking things. Now, people don't watch me like that: it is a comfort zone.*

Ayesha is a fifty-eight year old East Indian Muslim woman who has always been a homemaker. Ayesha did not grow up wearing the Hijab as it is now. She grew up wearing the East Indian "Orhni" which is a light, see-through head covering. Ayesha knows that the Muslim woman is different from anyone else, different from the whole of society. Ayesha realized that when she goes out dressed in her Islamic wear, with one glance, everyone knows she is a Muslim. It is the way she conducts herself in her dress code that makes her a true Muslim. She further explained that she makes a statement about who she is when she wears her Hijab: Her Hijab identifies her as a Muslim woman with good moral character.

*You and I can go out dressed how we are, and at a glance people know I am a Muslim. Our clothes are pretty, but not fitted, with no cleavage showing, nothing is tight on our bodies. When you expose these things, you don't know what you are exposing yourself to as a woman.*

Ayesha explained that Muslim women have the same privileges as other women, but in a different way. Ayesha takes pride in, and loves her Muslim way of life.

*It's lovely; it's a way of life to adapt to, but it is not forced upon us. I feel a sense of belonging to be a Muslim and wear my Hijab. I feel that nobody has ever forced me to wear this. My dress, my way of life, is a way of life that suits me just fine. It's a nice way of life.*

Ayesha thinks she commands a greater respect from others because of the way she dresses as a Muslim woman. When Muslim women cover in a modest way to go out in public, they don't have to worry about lecherous men looking at them, and saying lewd

and suggestive things to them. When a Muslim woman is covered up she gains greater respect wherever she goes because people are not given the opportunity to just look at her and lust.

*Our Trinidadian men, I don't know about other men, but men are men, if you showing them your body and revealing yourself, then they are going to watch. When a Muslim woman dresses she has pride in herself and covers up.*

*Public vs. Private expression of Sexuality: Muslim women beautifying themselves for ONLY their husbands.*

Salmah, who is a thirty-six year old East Indian Muslim woman, described female expression of sexuality in one word: Modesty. Salmah explained that everything in Islam is based on modesty and that is Islam's most unique quality. She further explained that all religions desire their women to dress and act in a modest way. Similarly, Amina, a forty-five year old African Muslim woman, who converted to Islam, defined Islam and female sexuality in modest terms. Amina explained how a Muslim woman must carry herself when she is in public.

*She has to lower her gaze with men that are of marriage age. When you get those urges most people fulfill them by going to a party, or engaging in a physical affair, but in Islam that is not allowed. Marriage is the ONLY outlet for female sexuality.*

Farida, a twenty-three year old East Indian Muslim woman who wears the Purdah (face covering) described the differences in the way a Muslim woman would carry herself in public versus in the privacy of her home. Farida explained that modesty is definitely the key when a Muslim woman is in public.

*In public, you must lower your gaze in the presence of strange men; you must be neutral, you cannot be too attractive, you cannot wear makeup or perfume.*

*Perfume can be a strong influence on the opposite sex. A woman must cover up and protect herself and her sexuality in public.*

Farida further explained that a woman could be herself when in the presence of ONLY her husband. She went on to say that a woman can be herself with family members as well, but even with family, a woman must have a certain level of modesty. Farida further added that women have to be covered in public because of not only non-Muslim men, but also the devout Muslim men who are in the public.

*When my husband goes out, women are in his view and they cannot be in revealing clothes and displaying their sexuality. It is a women's responsibility to be appealing and attractive to her husband ONLY.*

Ayesha, a fifty-eight year old East Indian Muslim woman said that with regard to sexuality, males and females are equal and have equal rights. Ayesha was adamant about women being modest in public.

*You don't show the public your sexuality or express yourself sexually; you don't do it. It is about morality; your morality is not for display. You lower your gaze with men in public places.*

Ayesha felt that a woman must dress properly, speak properly, and not be outside in public like everyone else: A Muslim woman is different to anyone else. She further explained that women could beautify themselves, but ONLY for their husbands inside the home, not for other men in public.

*Our hands, and feet are well manicured and pedicured, smelling nice but only for our husbands. For instance I have on ornaments (gold earrings and bracelets) but they are hidden under my Hijab because they are not for public viewing, they are for my husband when we are in private. When a woman dresses sort of naked in public it is not for her husband because he already knows what she has, and he has seen who she is and how she is.*

Ayesha further explained that a Muslim woman's ornaments (jewelry) shouldn't be

exposed because they can jingle and that jingling can attract unwanted sexual attention from lustful men in public: We have the same privileges but in a different way.

Muslimah, a seventy year old East Indian Muslim woman feels that the Hijab is meant to cover a woman's physical beauty to the public's eye, whereas in her home; in private, her husband is the only person she can expose her beauty to. With regard to family members, Muslimah said that with sons or male family members, a woman must still cover up, but not to the extent as when she goes out into the public. Women must cover the entire body except hands, feet and sometimes the face.

*In public, even though a Muslim woman covers up, it doesn't mean she can behave loosely on the street or behave in a manner that's not chaste, or walk and attract a lot of attention; she still has to be modest in everyway. Be modest in the way you walk, be modest in your speech: tonality on the telephone cannot be too charming or sexually expressive. A woman must cover her feet around strange men: She must not cross and uncross her legs and show her feet, because feet can tell a lot of tales.*

Muslimah stated that ornaments and certain accessories a woman wears must not jingle in such a way that she attracts attention from men. Muslimah was also adamant when she said that a Muslim woman's sexuality is something that she must preserve and express only for the pleasure of her husband. She agreed that a Muslim woman can beautify herself with any makeup, any perfume or any kind of dress or outfit, once she wears all these things in the privacy of her own home for her husband only, to suit him.

*It is forbidden or "Haram" for a Muslim woman to have or wear perfume on the outside in public. As for makeup, it must be applied very minimally only for her to feel good about herself, and enhance her personality for special occasions, but not to cover her entire face heavily.*

Muslimah further defined sexuality by saying that a woman cannot have pre-marital sexual relations; there is no courtship in Islam. At all times a Muslim woman must guard herself, her speech, and her sexuality in the outside world.



Merriam is a forty-seven year old East Indian Muslim businesswoman. Merriam was the most expressive and detailed about female sexuality and Muslim women. Merriam explained that women are permitted to do anything with their bodies, other than change it, or go overboard; a woman can wear anything, dress in anything, but it must be only for her husband, within the confines of their home. Men and women have equal rights sexually.

*If your husband wants you to belly dance for him or strip for him, and that is what he enjoys, then you can do that but only for him. If you don't want to have sex with him, he cannot force you; it must be consensual sex. Anal sex however, is forbidden, or haram, other than that if your husband wants to have sex on horseback it is permitted. Sex is permitted as often as you like.*

Merriam further explained that Muslim women have their hair done; they do facials; they wax their legs; they do everything that other women do: It upsets Merriam when non-Muslims wonder why they do all that beautifying only to cover up afterwards when they go in public.

*The beautifying we do is for the pleasure of our husbands. For some reason, non-Muslims do not understand this concept. A woman is supposed to be dressed, look nice, and take care of herself, but not for other men, but for her husband only. It is your husband you want to attract. Islam clearly says that a man's weakness is a woman's attraction. In order to not promote or make a man weaker or encourage weakness, a woman must cover herself entirely, and be modest in the public arena.*

Merriam compared the difference between Muslim women and the average woman by saying that their ideas or concepts of sexuality are totally opposite. Merriam simply stated that a Muslim woman makes herself most beautiful and attractive at home for her husband in private, whereas, the average woman would be most appealing for the outside public; but when she's at home, she is in the oldest possible dress or nightgown, her hair

is not combed or she is in rollers. In general, Merriam feels that the average woman makes themselves more attractive for the outside public than for their own husbands.

*Most people would be surprised when a Muslim woman takes off all her Muslim wear, her Hijab etc. at home: this is where you would see her in her sexy clothes and outfits, in short pants, because this sexual expression is only for her husband's viewing.*

Merriam further expressed her disappointment by saying that non-Muslims don't understand Islam and the general views. Merriam feels that non-Muslims say that Muslim women are oppressed by the way they dress, but she adamantly denies this view.

*We as Muslim women are not oppressed by the way we dress; it is not that at all. It is that we are supposed to dress only for our husbands, exclusively for him. It adds a thrill for a man to know that only he is allowed to see his wife in this particular way. Even more so, for the men whose wives wear the Purdah or face covering: only he sees her face alone with family members.*

Merriam described how beautiful Muslim women look underneath their Hijabs, full garb and Purdah. People would be amazed to see the beauty and how well the women are manicured; pedicured; their legs are waxed and their bodies are free of hair, and their hair is done. Merriam admits that she has adopted this same beautification process in her own life. Merriam believes that women should be proud of their bodies and prepare them for beauty, as Islam suggests it. Islam teaches Muslim women to love their bodies. Merriam compared this teaching to the teaching of Christianity, which in her opinion teaches Christians that it is a sin to admire your body or love your sexuality. Merriam, states it is not that way in Islam.

*A woman is supposed to bring out her sexuality but she is bringing it out only for her husband. You take care of your body for your husband; you are supposed to make your body beautiful; you are supposed to perfume your body for your husband only; not for other men that are strange to you. Even perfume, a Muslim woman is not supposed to wear perfume in public; only at home where it will attract her husband. The whole idea is that women can be beautiful and sexual but only to their husbands, and that's it.*

All the participants agreed that the requirement for modesty in Islam, allows for Muslim women to be viewed and/or evaluated for their skills and intelligence rather than being judged by looks or sexuality. Muslim women want to be taken seriously: They want others, especially men; to look at their personality, and mental capabilities. They do not want sexuality to play a part at all in their interaction with men. The participants all feel that Muslim women cover themselves to conceal their sexuality while their personalities are allowed to surface and shine through.

*Male/Female Interactions: Intermingling and touching between Muslim women and non-family males is prohibited.*

Farida, a twenty-three year old East Indian woman in Purdah, remembers being in high school with a mix of boys and girls. It was difficult for her being around boys and being a young Muslim woman. In Islam, women are not supposed to intermingle with boys that are not family members. Farida described being in several stressful situations where she got involved in wrong things, because she was exposed to them. She admits that as she got older; her faith and resolve got stronger and in addition to having more Islamic knowledge she now knows that intermingling with men who are not family is strictly prohibited. Farida described the attention that women can draw to themselves when they intermingle with men that are not family members.

*Women, according to whom they are speaking, to, tend to speak in a nice tone and intonation. We as women have to be careful how we speak, especially when reciting the Qur'an. If a woman recites the Qur'an in this melodious voice or tone, then that tone could incite other men who are around you, because it would cause them to turn their attention to you and wonder, "Hey who's that girl"*

Merriam, a forty-seven year old East Indian Muslim businesswoman describes not knowing the correct Shariah Laws when she was younger, and the fact that she learned the correct Islamic laws later on in her twenties.

*I never knew before that women were not supposed to work, or have male clients in the business that I own. Now, I make sure that any male clients I have are children or very old men. The reason being is that we have Muharams and non-Muharams. Muharams are men that you cannot marry like your father, brother, son, uncle...family. A non-Muharam is any/all other non-family male.*

Merriam described the appropriate interactions with both Muharams and non-Muharams.

With men that are your family, you can take off your Hijab, and touch them

affectionately. Merriam explains that she can kiss her dad and hug her brothers.

However, with non-family members or non- Muharam males, women are not allowed to

touch these strange men. Women have to be mindful that they cannot do certain things

like touching men in public. Similarly, Muslim women should not be in a position or

career that they have to work predominately with strange men and be subject to men

lusting after them. Merriam described her daughter's situation in the university where

she was attending school.

*My daughter who is a twenty-year-old practicing Muslim, wearing full Hijab and Purdah was accepted in the university engineering field. However, engineering is a very male dominated field and she chose to change her major because it would not be good for her to be around so many strange men as the center of attention. The new major she chose is not available in Trinidad, so she had to choose yet another major that is within the folds of Islam.*

Similarly, Muslimah, a seventy year old East Indian Muslim woman, explained

that women are supposed to be treated like gems, they are to be protected which is why

Muslim women are dressed in Hijab, they are not to be exposed to the public. She further

explained that Muslim women would not have jobs such as taxi cab drivers, because they would be exposed and intermingling with strange men on a regular basis.

*We wouldn't like our women to be driving a taxi because you don't know who is sitting with them in the taxi, who is going to talk what lewdness in the car, and what she will be faced with in that scenario. It is a job Islamic teaching would not want her to choose. These are jobs you would not expose the women, or Muslim females too.*

Muslimah clarified that the only way the “situation of driving others around” would be acceptable, is if it was only school children being chauffeured. Muslimah personally knew two Muslim sisters that had this choice to make. Muslimah described other situations where contact with non-family males has strict regulations: telephone contact, non-family males visiting the home, and Islamic counseling sessions. Muslimah stated that Muslim women must also be modest in their speech, whether it is in person or on the telephone.

*You have to speak in a business-like tone when speaking on the telephone to males in general, especially non-family males. A woman must only speak what is necessary, to a male that is not family. For males that are family members, you can say whatever you need to say, but you cannot put any charm in your voice. It is important for Muslim women to guard their modesty at all times.*

When a non-family male (non-Muharam) visits the home of a Muslim couple, the Muslim woman must cover herself up fully before he enters the home. She would dress in full Islamic garb just as she would if she were going out in public. The woman must also drop her gaze in the presence of these strange men. Muslimah is an elder and a leading Muslim woman in her community. She sometimes has to use her layman-counseling skills to help other Muslims in need. She described the regulations of Islamic counseling when the “layman counselor” is a Muslim woman such as herself.

*As women, we are very careful when counseling men; we must counsel them with another female present. I provided counseling to many people; however, when it*

*is for a man, another female must accompany him. We must always protect our modesty in any situation.*

Ayesha added that when men and women pray together, the woman has a degree of heat, a little bit more than the men, so standing close to a man when praying is very uncomfortable for the man; that is why when we go to the mosque; you see men on one side and women on the other side. Interaction during prayer is separated. Four out of the six participants mentioned the phrase “A Muslim woman must lower her gaze in the presence of strange men”.

*Polygyny: Multiple wives, allowing some Muslim women more independence and free time to do things they want to do.*

Polygyny is the correct term used for a man having multiple wives. In Islam, the Qur’an allows a man to marry up to four wives. In Trinidad, Abu Bakr who is the most controversial, African Muslim in the country, currently has four wives. Amina, a forty-five year old African Muslim woman who feels that Islam allows this so she accepts it, however, feels it is not the right situation for her. Amina commented that she knows three of Abu Bakr’s wives personally, and that all are comfortable with polygyny. Amina went on further to say that they actually enjoy the situation. Amina also commented on the fact that polygyny is sometimes abused because the Qur’an states that any man who has four wives must treat them all equally.

Similarly, Farida a twenty-three year old East Indian Muslim woman accepts that Islam allows a man to have up to four wives. However, she feels some men have multiple wives for the wrong reasons or intentions, and do not treat the women equally.

*Some men have many wives because they have money or to look like a “big man” because he has four wives. I am not saying Abu Bakr does this, but if he is, that is between him and Allah. Sometimes, this situation of multiple wives can take advantage of younger girls. There are girls in the Islamic school getting married a lot younger now, some at 16 years old.*

Salmah, a thirty-six year old East Indian Muslim woman agrees that four wives are allowed in Islam once the man takes care of them all equally according to Islamic law.

*If a man does not treat all of them equally, he is not following the Islamic religion properly. I am not sure if Abu Bakr treats his wives equally or not, but I do know several other families in the community where the men have more than one wife. I just hope for their sakes, that they are being treated equally. There is a grave punishment for men who do not treat their wives equally.*

Muslimah, a seventy year old East Indian Muslim woman, who is an elder in her Muslim community, is in the unique position of being a lay counselor, and being related to a woman who is in a polygyny relationship. Muslimah feels that polygyny can work in the woman’s favor by allowing women to have more independence and free time for herself. She further commented that polygyny could only work in the woman’s favor if the situation is fair and, as it should be under Islamic law. Muslimah agreed that the Qur’an allows a man to have four wives, so she accepts this. She would only have a problem with polygyny if the wives were mistreated or if one wife is treated less than another wife.

*The sisters who come to me for counseling with problems because the practice is not carried out as it should be, are those women who may have children from a previous relationship before they converted to Islam. These poor little sisters, they come and tell me their problems because some men are taking advantage of this practice and disregarding the permission Allah has granted to them. They are supposed to treat all wives equally and in equitable terms: A man is supposed to rotate the wives; one wife for each night, you cannot spend a week with one and abandon the others for that week. It is not easy.*

Muslimah commented on the guidelines of polygyny and how the practice can benefit a woman. Polygyny was used in times of war, when many women were left without husbands. Muslimah said it could be difficult for some wives when a husband has to be shared, because she has to share the husband's money, his time and everything else. Another factor that concerned Muslimah is the different children for the many wives: They all have to be cared for and looked after. If the practice is done in a proper way, then Muslimah said she has no objections to it.

*On the other hand, some of the wives tell me the benefits of the practice. When the husband is with one wife, the others have more time for themselves. These wives have free time to do things for themselves that they could not do when the husband is there in the home with them seven days a week. However, these wives are still answerable to the husband as his wives and responsible for all the things of the home: It does not alter the duties of being a wife. It is a sharing system that has to be taken seriously.*

Muslimah explained that the practice of polygyny could have both benefits and downfalls depending on how the situation is handled by the family. Muslimah further said that some wives report to her that they can't handle it and leave the relationship. She stated that the first year or two for the new wife is the most difficult, and usually after that time passes everyone in the relationship adjusts. Muslimah commented that Muslim women who are party to this practice, especially one of her family members who is a wife in a polygyny relationship; report the benefits and downsides to her.

Merriam, a forty-seven year old East Indian Muslim woman also stated that she accepts the practice of multiple wives because it is allowed in Islam; and it is very present in Trinidad. Merriam clarified that some find the practice difficult to accept because it is not their culture, but the majority accept it because it is permissible.



*Once you treat all the wives equally. It is not based on love or lust, it is based on if a woman is a widow, or the first wife becomes ill and cannot look after the children, or if a wife is not able to have sex or produce children. The first wife gives the husband permission to marry another wife, even if she is unable to keep up with him sexually, he can then take another wife who is more sexually active than the previous wife that is permitted.*

Merriam continued to define the grounds or basis for multiple wives. Islamic teachings say that you have to treat all wives equally, and if you cannot do that, then marry only one wife. When a man has more than one wife, he has more to account for both good and bad. Merriam further explained that a man must share equal value with all the wives; equality with proportion.

*One wife may have three children and another wife may have five children. The man therefore cannot give each wife equal money because that would not be fair or equitable; so equality, but with correct proportions. With regard to emotions, a man may love one wife more than the other, but he must keep that to himself because outwardly his actions must be equal: Equal love, equal time, and equal money.*

Ayesha, a fifty-eight year old East Indian Muslim woman, shared strong feelings about the practice of multiple wives. She acknowledged that there were reasons for the practice, and that the Qur'an clearly states that a man can indeed have up to four wives. However, if he cannot treat the wives equally, then he should have only one wife. Ayesha clarified what she meant by equal.

*Woman to woman: which man can have four of us and treat each of us the same? Impossible! When I say equal, I mean what a husband does with one wife he has to do with the other wives: The same, same, same things. Each wife must have their own residence and share equally. This is impossible to me. Even a man's ego cannot handle this situation. I think it has to be difficult for a man to share his time equally with each wife. This is a monumental task that no human being can really perform. This is why the practice can be abused.*

Ayesha felt that under normal circumstances, the practice of multiple wives is extremely difficult to manage for both the husband and the wives. However, if there are special circumstances such as illness, or infertility, then the practice becomes an “understanding” between the husband and first wife; which in the long run would make the situation less difficult and stressful.

*If I have my husband, and I become ill and I cannot serve him or I cannot be a wife sexually with him and comfort him in his times as I should, then he can talk to me and I will encourage him to take another wife. In so doing, it would not be cheating behind my back. I think out of the love and compassion for my husband, you cannot punish him like that. You let him marry another. The other wife will then come and help you with your chores and children: That is an understanding.*

Ayesha went on to describe other special circumstances that can happen in a marriage, where a husband can take another wife.

*If the wife cannot have children, if she is barren, then you talk to your husband. If you love him, you will tell him to take another wife because as a man, he needs to have children. The first wife should not make any trouble or get jealous with the new wife and the man would not divorce you for the new woman, because he wants to continue to give you status in life as a wife. Islam abhors divorce.*

Ayesha explained that it is better for a man to marry another woman beyond his wife, than to have outside women or mistresses, because Islam does not permit that.

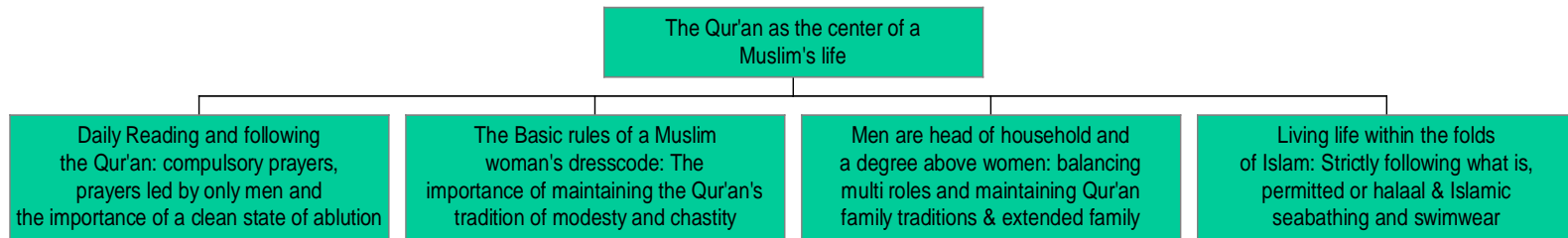
*Our way of life, especially here in the Caribbean, men have outside women, sometimes more than two on the outside and one wife at home. Islam does not allow this; therefore a man has to marry the other women. In Trinidad, in the laws of the land, a man can only marry one legal wife, but in Islam you can marry up to three more wives. However, only the first wife is the legal wife, the other women are given status in life as wives.*

Ayesha recalled all the reasons for the practice of multiple wives; a first wife becoming sick or ill, infertility or being barren, low sexual drive, to curtail infidelity, and to give some women status in life as a wife; women like widows, orphans or women who converted to Islam later in life.

*If you see a woman with her children, and she is widowed, or an orphan, or simply not married, then you don't want these women to become public property becoming promiscuous, and going from man to man. A husband can talk to his wife and take these women as a wife and give them status in life as a wife. You would not want an orphan exposed to the world for free; they too can become a wife and get status in life.*

Ayesha also commented that women here in Trinidad can get jealous, so the idea of multiple wives may not appeal to all, so you find a lot of Muslim women make sure they are capable of doing things so that their husbands would not be running off to other women. Ayesha said that it is just how people live their lives. Being Muslim, you have to live an Islamic life above all. Some men, their wives died and they do not remarry because they do not want to replace their lost wife, so they keep their children and grandchildren close to them. When they have desires they can take a cold shower or even fast, because these things bring down the sexual urges.

Figure IV.  
Theme: The Qur'an as the center of a Muslim's life



## The Qur'an as the Center of a Muslims' life

Islam has two sources for guidance, inspiration and rulings: The Qur'an (Koran) the revealed word of Allah written in Arabic, and the Hadith which is the life traditions of the Prophet Muhammad who was Allah's chief Prophet, and chosen to be a role model for all Muslims. The Qur'an along with the Hadith, are the center of every Muslim's life. These two important sources of guidance provide Muslims with all the answers they need to live life.

Muslimah, defined the guidance that Muslims seek from the Qur'an and Hadith, by saying that Muslims find everything they need to know there; how to eat, how to sleep, how to pray, how to greet people, how to dress, how to think of people, how you should judge people, how you say things that you really should not say, and the fact that you should not speak of someone in their absence, most of all right from wrong behaviors. That is how important the Qur'an and Hadith are to Muslims. Practicing Muslims follow the Qur'an and Hadith with strict adherence.

*Daily Reading and Following the Qur'an: Compulsory prayers, prayers led by only men, importance of a clean state of Ablution.*

Islam has a system of rituals and prayers that are designed for every Muslim believer, and it is required that all Muslims perform and incorporate these rituals in their daily lives as a reminder to keep on the straight path to Allah: To neglect any of these requirements is a grave sin.

The Five Pillars of Islam and the compulsory daily prayers (Salat) are the requirements for every Muslim; therefore, all participants reported these requirements in their daily life routines: The five pillars of Islam are:

1. Declaring Allegiance to God or Declaration of Faith.
2. Daily Prayer (Salat)
3. Charity (Annually) (Zakat)
4. Month – long fasting
5. Hajj or Pilgrimage to Mecca.

All Muslims are required to pray daily at five specific points throughout the day. These five points are predetermined and are designed to remind every Muslim that despite how busy they get or whatever they are doing during the day, they have just prayed and will pray again soon. These constant prayers throughout the day keep God ever present and in the foreground of every Muslim's mind. The Qur'an states the specific times of prayer and there is no exception to this requirement, only under special circumstances such as being a child under puberty, women during their menstrual cycle, the mentally challenged and the unconscious. According to the Qur'an, no prayer can be said before or after the specific time frames, otherwise the angels, who document every deed throughout every day to be read on Judgment Day, have recorded it.

The Daily Prayer Times are:

1. Before Sunrise
2. Just after noontime
3. Late afternoon
4. Just after sunset

5. At night before bedtime.

Amina and Farida both get up for prayer at 3:00 am. At this time they both perform voluntary prayers or supererogatory acts, which are duties or prayers that are beyond the requirement. Amina describes her typical morning routine.

*I get up at 3:00 am in the morning and say some voluntary prayers or read several verses from the Qur'an; usually, that would take me about two hours, until 5:00 am when I start the first of my compulsory daily prayers with my family. Then after the 5:00 am prayer I go to the kitchen and start preparing breakfast for my family so that we can all begin our day at work and school for the kids.*

Farida also describes her typical morning routine, now that she is recently married and has to adjust to new routines.

*Now that I am recently married, my husband gets up at 3:00 am for his Islamic studies, so he is usually moving around so I get up also, and would learn some work from the Qur'an before we start our first compulsory prayer of the day at 5:00 am. After prayer, I make breakfast and my husband leaves for Islamic school. I would sometimes take a quick nap or start cooking, cleaning and fixing up the house for when my husband returns home at lunchtime for noontime prayers. Our day really works by prayer: every day is centered around the prayers.*

Ayesha, Muslimah, Salmah and Merriam all get up for prayer at 5:00 am. They all perform extra voluntary prayers after praying the first compulsory prayer.

Ayesha describes her typical morning routine:

*I get up and pray for the 5:00 am first prayer, and then I will indulge in an Islamic Reading, like the Qur'an or part of it. My husband and I have tea and breakfast after prayers, read the paper, and the day progresses: You do what you want to do; nothing is forced upon you in any way.*

Muslimah describes her typical morning routine:

*I get up at 5:00 am and pray, and after that prayer I would read from the Qur'an for a while, then go back and take a rest. Otherwise, I would start my daily chores around the house or assist my husband. We eat breakfast together.*

Salmah describes her typical morning routine:

*The recommended time for getting up is 5:00 am for the first of the daily prayers. Other readings from the Qur'an may come after the first prayer. Sometimes, if you decide to go back and sleep a little after prayer, you tend to feel very sluggish, and it is more difficult to get up. We usually all stay up after prayer because it helps getting up at 5:00 am because you get prepared for the day mentally, emotionally and spiritually: You are better to face the day.*

Merriam describes her typical morning routine.

*My day starts early. I get up to start my daily prayer at 5:00 am in the morning. I sometimes read additional readings from the Qur'an afterwards. Then I start getting myself and my family organized for the day. I get to work and open up the business, as I am a professional. I incorporate my religion into all aspects of my life.*

Muslimah explained that a Muslim's life centers around the prayers throughout the day.

She commented on how beautiful Islam is and the fact that it is everything for them.

*I remember one lady telling me that she found in Islam there is always an answer for everything. She had not found that anywhere else. All the answers are in the Qur'an or in the Prophet Muhammad's (Peace be unto him) Life, documented in the Hadith. He was the last prophet (Peace be unto him) that came 600 years after Jesus Christ, so we have his example to follow in life.*

Merriam and Amina further described how they incorporate the other prayers during the day when they are at work. Merriam explained how the noontime prayer is situated during her hectic day in her business.

*I pray here as soon as I have an opportunity, because we have to pray at 12:30 pm, really we can say that prayer between 12:30 pm and 4:00 pm. You have that time slot for that particular prayer, so I pray right here in my business. Basically I work through the day, and I pray when the time comes.*

Amina described how she situates the noontime prayer between her hectic schedule of school and work.

*Midday prayers, if I am in the library or at work, we have a time period for that particular prayer from about just after midday until about 4:00 pm in the afternoon, so it is a long period of time. Sometimes, I have enough time to get to my mother's house or to get home to pray. Worse case scenario, I may pullover*



*and pray while sitting in my vehicle. Although, many people would not do that, they would spread their prayer mat on the ground anywhere and pray in front of everybody. I don't usually do that because I'm so conscious of men passing behind me, since all the prayer involves prostration. I would not want my behind to be raised when men are passing behind me. I would feel very uncomfortable.*

All participants agreed that ONLY men could lead prayers. Women can lead prayer only amongst other women.

*If I have women here for tea one evening, and the time for prayer comes, we can pray individually at the same time or a woman can lead other women in prayer. In the mosque, there is an Imam who is our leader in prayer, like a priest would lead a mass.*

Amina explained that men lead prayer because it is a man's role to do that, also because the man is the head of the household.

Farida further explained why only men are allowed to lead prayer.

*In the Mosque only men can lead prayer. It is not easy to lead prayer because I tried leading prayer with women alone and I was a nervous wreck. I have asked my husband how he feels and he too says he feels nervous at times. Remember too, women we see our period so it is usually better for a woman to pray at home, even though women aren't barred from the Mosque. Another reason men lead prayer is because women's voices can have a melodious tone and intonation to them. Women have to be careful when we are speaking, especially if we are reciting from the Qur'an, we cannot sound melodious because we could draw unwanted attention to ourselves and incite other men around us in the Mosque: This distracts from prayer.*

All the participants agreed that women are exempt from compulsory prayers during their menstrual cycle. Since women go through their menses, it is important to be in a clean state of ablution in order to resume compulsory prayer. Amina elaborated on the Islamic view about prayer and menstruation.

*When you have your monthly menses, you are not allowed to do the formal prayer; you are exempt. However, it is good to maintain the time period for prayer by doing the normal wash up for prayer. You could sit and do some remembrances for Allah, say little prayers for the duration of the time you would normally have had your prayer time. Some women get sick during their menstrual cycle so you are exempt and you don't have to make up those prayers.*

*During the menses, you cannot read the Qur'an out loud, because to read the Qur'an you have to be in a state of cleanliness. When a woman has her menses she is in an unclean state. A state of cleanliness is required to touch the Qur'an so you would have to use a cloth or something to hold the Qur'an during the menstrual cycle. After the cycle is over you have to do a cleansing ritual called ablution, where you prepare yourself to resume prayer.*

Salmah also commented on the Islamic view of prayer and menstruation.

*When a woman has her menstrual cycle she does not pray nor does she fast, similarly even when she gives birth and has a child, she has a sort of period, or if blood continues to come out after child birth: Therefore, women do not pray or fast after child birth. She has the new baby so God worked it out in such away that she would have more time to herself since she does not have to pray. During the period, women cannot recite from the Qur'an however, if I had to show my children a few words from the Qur'an and I have my menses, then I can still show them but I cannot touch the actual Arabic words.*

Salmah went on to compare Islam and Christianity by saying that in years gone by she learned from Catholic school that when a woman had her period, she could not read the Old Testament of the Bible, neither could she read from the Old Testament. Salmah also compared Islam to the Jewish rituals by saying that Jewish women cannot pray or touch their Holy book when they have their menses. Salmah believes that not praying or touching the holy book is not only in Islam but in other religions as well.

Ayesha further explained the Islamic view on prayer and menstruation.

*When a woman is menstruating, I think God really loves us so much that he lets us have our freedom. He knows we are in a little bit of discomfort at this time; therefore, he gives us the freedom of not doing anything, we are exempt from prayer. Even our families, if they know about the menses, then your husband should not bother you about breakfast. I mean really, if God can give us those days off from even prayer, then who is man?*

Merriam elaborated on the importance of the clean state of ablution.

*During the menstrual cycle we are not allowed to fast, perform Salat, the five compulsory prayers, or even read from the Qur'an. These missed prayers do not have to be made up. At the end of your menstrual period, you have to take a full ritual bath, wash hands, feet and face. You have to be sure you are clean for at least 24 hours because sometimes you get traces of blood after the period. You*

*must be clean with out any waste or bodily functions before you can resume prayer.*

Merriam went on to comment that if you have your menses during Ramadan month, then you couldn't fast on those days; afterward however, you have to make up for all the fasting days that you have missed. You make up those days because it is for your reward from Allah, for his blessings. Merriam stated that in Islam it says there is no compulsion in religion; you have to make the choices.

Muslimah also commented on the clean state of Ablution.

*The days a woman has her period, she is exempt from fasting and prayer: She does not even read from the Qur'an. At the end of your cycle, you have to take a thorough head to toe bath called Ablution and you say your intentions as you prepare yourself once again for prayer. The exempt prayers are the compulsory ones where you pray on the prayer mat and prostrate. At this time in a woman's cycle you do not even touch the Arabic Qur'an, but you can touch the English version of it. You must be in a state ablution In order to touch the big Arabic Qur'an.*

Farida also elaborated on prayer, the pilgrimage to Mecca (Hajj) and menstruation.

*During our menstrual cycle we are not allowed to pray, fast or recite from the Qur'an. If you are in Hajj and you get your menses then it could disrupt or break your hajj when you are making the circles around. In Hajj, there are different acts you have to do, so when a woman gets her period, she can't do that part of the Hajj when you walk around in circles. She would have to wait till her period is over and that may mean retaking the trip to the Middle East again. During the menstrual cycle you don't have to make up the missed prayers but you do have to make up your fasts, especially in Ramadan month. The Qur'an can't be touched because during menses, a woman is in an unclean state, not unclean like you are scorned, but remember the Qur'an is divine and pure, so you have to be in a state of cleanliness, Ablution. When you are praying, you pray in front of Allah, and the veils are drawn; therefore, if you have blood and what not on you, then that is not clean, or good to do acts of worship. It is just not permissible.*

*The Basic rules of a Muslim woman's dress code: The Importance of maintaining the Qur'an's tradition of Modesty and Chastity.*

The word "Hijab is derived from an Arabic word which means to hide or conceal from view. The Qur'an explicitly states the requirements of a woman's dresscode highlighting the maintenance of tradition, modesty and chastity. Two of the participants referenced these requirements of a woman's dresscode in the Qur'an.

*"And to say to the believing woman that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty, and that they should not display their beauty and ornaments except what must ordinarily appear thereof; that they should draw their veils over their bosoms and not display their beauty except to their husbands."*  
(Qur'an 24: 30 -31)

The participants highlighted another reference in the Qur'an.

*"O Prophet, tell your wives and daughters and the believing women to draw their outer garments around them when they go out or are among men. That is better in order that they may be known to be Muslims and not annoyed."*  
(Qur'an 33:59)

All the participants defined the requirements of the dress code as outlined by the Qur'an.

These requirements are:

1. A Muslim woman must be covered entirely, except hands, feet and face.
2. Clothes must be loose fitting so as not to describe the shape of a woman's body.
3. Thickness of the clothes, so as not to show the shape of the body through the cloth.
4. Clothing should not be extremely shiny, adorned or fancy, so as not to attract men's attention to the woman.
5. Clothing must not appear as a man's clothing.
6. Women should not dress in a similar way to unbelievers of Islam.

Farida describes her decision to begin wearing the Purdah or face covering.

*I began wearing the Purdah or Niquab about three years ago when I started Hifz, the memorization of the Qur'an. Memorizing the Qur'an is significant because it's memorizing the words of God. To a Muslim, that would be something, like a major accomplishment and benefit in this world and in the next world as well. The Purdah which also means segregated or set apart now sets me apart: It is a sign of purity and modesty. You stand out as a believing Muslim.*

Amina commented that Muslim women only expose the hands, feet, and face when outside in public and covering the face is a personal decision.

Salmah once again made a comparison of Islam to past Christianity.

*Mother Mary wore a veil and long clothes. How Mother Mary dressed in the time of Jesus is synonymous with how Muslim women dress now. This is a historical thing; veils have been worn on women's heads for a long time, not only in Islam. All religions require their women to dress modestly. If you look at all those movies with Prophet Moses, all the women are dressed in long, loose clothes and veils. We Muslims are simply choosing to maintain that tradition of modesty that once was. Muslim women are to be modest in the way we speak, walk and talk. It is a way of life. It does not interfere with how we live our lives.*

Ayesha described the difference of dress code as she grew up in the Muslim faith.

*When I was younger I did not wear the Hijab exactly as it is today; however, that changed as you get older and you hit puberty and learn more about Islam. I realized that the Qur'an and Allah says to cover. You are jolted and you realize this is what God commands you to do, so who am I to question that?*

Ayesha went on to elaborate what the Qur'an commands with regard to the dresscode of Muslim women.

*Our girls have to dress properly; you can't wear clothes that are tight, tight, as you are naked. The Qur'an forbids this type of clothing that people wear today that you see all the contours of their body and their boobs outside, and everything. You can wear anything at home, but when you come out in public you wear decent clothes, loose clothes; beautifully dressed but in a decent way. I have never forced my children to wear Hijab, they want to wear it because I tell them it is the right thing; it is what the Qur'an says to do. When a woman exposes herself in public, she does not know what she is really exposing herself to.*

Muslimah described the requirements of dress code for men versus women, as outlined in the Qur'an.

*The dress code is different for men and women. The man does not wear Hijab, once he is covered from his waist to his knee; he is covered in the eyes of God. For women however, it is required to cover the entire body, except their hands and face. Some women even cover their faces with Purdah, but generally the entire body being covered is a requirement for the women. You must however keep you feet covered from strange men; ankles and feet should always be in shoes or something because feet can tell a lot of tales, and ankles have to be protected and covered too.*

Muslimah went on to comment that women are supposed to be treated like gems, like gold, like cherished jewelry and protected which is why Muslim women are covered under Hijab. She says that Muslims believe that women are precious enough to cover them up head to toe and not expose them to the public.

Both Muslimah and Merriam experienced the differences of Islamic law versus Indian tradition in Trinidad and Tobago with regard to women's dress code.

Muslimah recalls how cultures mixed early on in Trinidad & Tobago.

*A long time ago when Indians came here, we did not have this kind of Hijab that we see now, we had an Indian type of long "Orhni" which didn't really cover you much. It was a modest light see-thru piece of cloth thrown on you that covered only part of your head. We grew up knowing we had to be covered, but we learned the true Islamic way to cover only years after: We did not know the Islamic way was to cover your entire head and your hair too. When I was younger, we had to then change from the "Orhni" to the Hijab. You can still use the "Orhni" to dress up your Hijab but you have to either use it along with the opaque Hijab or wrap the "Orhni" around your head twice. Young girls now are fortunate because once they hit puberty; there are ready-made Hijabs everywhere, because of the Islamic resurgence in this country.*

Similarly, Merriam recalls having to change from the "Orhni" to the Hijab once she understood the Islamic law and the requirements of a woman's dress code. Merriam's ancestors were from India and Syria, and the Islamic and Indian cultures often mixed in those early days because when the Muslim and Indian came to Trinidad, they had nothing

to follow, no example of religion like their own, so they stuck together in a close knit group. The Indians, both Hindu and Muslim cultures mixed. Merriam, as she got older learned the difference between the tradition and the true Islamic law.

*There is a lot of tradition in Trinidad, because in an Islamic country you would not have that mixed up culture: Trinidad and Tobago is unique for that. I mean years ago you would not see Muslim women in Trinidad with the Hijab. You would not see them covered in full Purdah; Purdah means only your eyes are showing, and face is covered. The reason is because of the culture. The "Orhni" was used back then. The Indian Orhni is a more see-through fabric/cloth worn by Indians from India: The Orhni, as we learned later on is not an Islamic thing. The Islamic ruling on women's wear is the total covering of the body, the head, bosom area, and not a strand of hair must be showing. The material of the Hijab must not be translucent; it must be opaque so you cannot see the hair beneath. These things are realized when we started going to Islamic countries. After that, Islamic law or Shariah law became more enforced and understood in the Muslim community in Trinidad & Tobago.*

Merriam remembered that one of her female family members had gone to Saudi Arabia to perform the holy pilgrimage (Hajj) in the 1970s; she was in her teens at the time. When she came back she started wearing the Burqua, the full sewn gown. Everybody in Trinidad saw her and thought she was some type of nun, because there was not that type of Islamic wear in Trinidad at that time.

*The thing is now in Trinidad; we women who are dressing in the true Islamic way are doing so by choice. It is because we want to do it; nobody is forcing us to wear the Hijab. We stand out as Muslims. There is a ruling in the Qur'an that says that you always follow your forefathers until the day that you learn that it is not right: then you adopt the right thing. Women are now educating themselves as to what is Islamic law, which is why we Muslims take Islam and the requirements seriously.*

*Men are Head of Household and a degree above women: Balancing multi-roles and maintaining Qur'an family traditions and extended family.*

In Muslim households, the husband is the head of the household, and the maintainer of Muslim women: He is the provider and educator of the family. Ayesha describes her marriage and her household.

*I must say that my husband is the head of the home, but I become like the neck that controls the head. It is not about power. Even though my husband is the head of the household, as a woman, I have many roles; I am the wife, mother, doctor, accountant, so many different things I do in the home. A man is really lucky to have a wife who could oversee everything for him: They go to work, they come back, they have their meals, play with the children. Everything else, the women do.*

Ayesha went on to say that her biggest obligation to the home is to make sure that her children were brought up in the Islamic way, and now, that her grandchildren are brought up in the same Islamic traditions of modesty and decency. Ayesha elaborated on the Muslim household, and the obligations of men and women.

*There are different kinds of Muslim men. The real Muslim man, who follows true Islam, does things for his wife and treats her with respect. When Muslim women are married, we don't have to wash and cook and suckle our babies. Our husbands are supposed to provide a washerwoman, a cook or whatever: If we do these things, we do them out of the goodness of our hearts, we don't have to do these things, but we do it. The husband has more responsibility in a marriage because he is responsible for our maintenance and providing for the family, that is why he is considered to be a degree over us. Any conflicts that you don't want the hassle of dealing with, you let your husband do it...so he is just a little bit over us. So when there are places where Muslim women are oppressed, then the men are not following the true Islamic way.*

Ayesha further commented that Muslim women are elevated to the highest. She explained that Muslim husbands don't really expect women to do the things that normal women would do. However, she said that they choose to do things out of their own free will.



*You have sense, and you know if your husband can afford to have these tasks provided for you or if he cannot afford that. If a woman isn't sick, then she can do the washing, cooking etc. for him. My husband never wanted me to work because he always felt that a home should be a home and his wife would make a better mother in every way for her children if she were at home. The money doesn't matter, nor the social status, nor work, it doesn't matter. My husband wants the children to have a mother and when he comes home he wants to have a wife, not just a tired lady.*

Similarly, Amina agreed that her husband is the head of her household, but she also commented on the fact that for some Muslims, because the man is the head of the household, the man feels he could be dominant. This dominant attitude comes sometimes from being the sole breadwinner and caretaker of the family, while the wife is at home cooking and taking care of the family and home. These men do not practice Islam as it should be practiced.

*My situation at home is a shared responsibility. My husband is the head of household, in terms of making final decisions; he is the one to make a decision. At home, I make decisions too, but I always confer with him. To get things endorsed and then I make the arrangements.*

Amina elaborated on her multi roles within her family, and maintaining the tradition of the Qur'an.

*I am a wife, mother, caregiver, counselor and the stabilizing force in the family. I keep the family together and I instill the traditions of Islam in the family. I am always on son's cases, they may get upset but they know they miss me when I am away. My children do not go out and do alcohol and drugs: I have instilled proper Islamic teachings into them. My boys have never fornicated or had girl friends, or things like that. Never fornicated. Our lifestyle is based around the Qur'an and prayer. Extended family is important especially, for instilling modesty and values. Two of my sons are married, and one lives abroad and the other son lives here at home in a little apartment at the back that we added to our house for his family. He and his wife, share a bathroom and the kitchen with us, so they prepare for their day in the main house.*

Amina went on to comment that as a Muslim woman in the community, she is treated like a queen, and feels honored and valued by the men in family and community. She

further stated that she could express herself whether it is concerns, or any feelings she has in her family. She explained that the Muslim men in her circle seem to be very aware of how to treat their women.

*If I go to a home and there are more men than women present or I am the only woman, then they would make special provisions to make me more comfortable. I can't say that is the norm for Trinidad, just in my circle. The norm for Trinidad, I think men here, Muslim men would treat their women like how the society would treat women. However, if you are a "Practicing" true Islam, as it should be practiced, then you should be treating women like queens. Many Muslims get absorbed into the society, and then they start compromising their Islamic values and wanting to be liked and accepted in society. Therefore, some Muslims do things the society at large would tolerate. Before you know it, you become absorbed in society and start treating your wife like everybody else, instead of how Islam states it. Then people misjudge and say "Look how that Muslim man treating his wife!" when in reality, he is doing what society is doing.*

Amina further stated that the code of conduct that Islam expresses is that men should treat their women like queens.

Salmah described her multi roles within her family of origin, and her present family.

*I am a daughter, sister and friend to my siblings and parents. My parents and I now see eye to eye even more so now, because I have my own family and I am an adult. At home, I am a wife, mother, disciplinarian, teacher and friend.*

Salmah went on to explain that she is treated with respect and like an equal in her family and Muslim community. Salmah's in-laws live upstairs of her house. Salmah further commented that in both her family, and in her extended family, all issues are discussed in an equal way. She feels comfortable expressing any concerns or feelings.

*Women are given a voice in the Mosque. We are given a say about what we like for certain events, and what we would like in the Mosque. We are not shut up or put in a corner. This is what Islamic practice is really supposed to be. People mistake Islamic practice to be one where women are subdued or don't have a say, but in my community we don't seem to have that problem: We are progressive thinkers. It's not so much about changing with the times but understanding Islam better.*

Salmah described the obligations of men and women in the Muslim household. She feels that overall men have a lot more responsibility than women under Islamic law.

*A Muslim woman does not have to do any housework. It is up to the Muslim man, to find someone to take care of the children, to feed the children, bathe them, clothe them etc. Although, you would find a lot of mothers happen to do these things because it is their children but under Islamic law, a woman does not even have to breast feed her own child. In the days of our Prophet Muhammad (peace be unto him), he was breastfed by a wet nurse. This is allowed in Islam; however, most mothers give birth and want to care for their own children, even though they are not obligated to do so in Islam. The man has the duty to provide someone to do all these things if the woman does not want to do them; for example, if a man gets groceries to cook, then he has to find someone to cook them or cook them himself. So you see, men have a lot more responsibilities than women. If women do anything in the house it is because they do it out of their own free will.*

Salmah went on to state that women have a high status in Islam, especially when a woman is a mother. She elaborated that in Islam a man went to the Prophet Muhammad and asked him whom shall I revere and treat with kindness after the Lord and you? Prophet Muhammad answered “Your mother.” The man asked this same question three times again, and the Prophet answered “Your mother” on all three occasions. When the man asked the fourth time finally the Prophet answered “Your father.”

*In Islam women have a very high status, and we have a lot of ... I wouldn't say freedoms, but we have a lot of comforts.*

Merriam described her multi roles and multi tasking within her family as well as, her business.

*My roles in my family are extremely important, in the sense that, I play a major part in everyone's life; from running the home and whatever the house needs to the decisions where my, children are concerned. I usually would buy their clothes, even though they are adults: I know what they like. I have played a major role in my children's lives and have made sure they all have kept on the cart of Islam. Islam keeps my children on the straight path. I have never forced anything on them, but I have instilled the right traditions of Islam from when they were young. In my business, I have the role as owner and make sure the women*

*who come to my business feel comfortable and protected. I have signs in my business place that prohibit men from certain areas of my business place without prior authorization.*

Merriam defines the obligations of men and women in her Muslim community. She feels that Muslim men have more responsibility than Muslim women in daily life.

*Muslim men have to go to the Mosque whereas, the women more likely pray at home; yet it is the same amount of blessings. The home is supposed to be taken care of by the woman, so if she leaves her home, neglects her family or leaves her kids at home and goes to the Mosque then she loses rewards or blessings. In Allah's eyes her rewards become less. A woman's responsibility is to her husband and children foremost.*

Merriam felt that women have many benefits in Islam. She stated that when a woman works for her money, it remains as her money. She should not have to share what she earns to look after the house or kids. However, if she wants to do that then she can.

*The man's obligation is to keep the woman like a queen. She should not even have to wash and cook, if it is within his means, the man should hire someone to do all these chores for her, and she should be given all that she needs.*

Merriam went on to comment that as a Muslim woman in her community she feels she is treated very well. Merriam said she is looked after, taken care of and has her husband's full attention. Merriam also said that other women in her community are treated the same.

*In Trinidad, the husbands are very protective of their wives and they take them places. Woman in Trinidad have a lot of independence. However, their independence is within the folds of Islam, that Islam would allow them. You will not hear or see them in the limelight taking a leadership role where there are strange men, because women should not be there. Politics, debates etc. women would be subject to men lusting after them. Women should not be shaking a strange man's hands.*

Farida has only been married recently and she explained that she is trying to adapt to married life, while still maintaining close ties with her original family and her new in-laws.

*I am focusing right now on getting to know my husband much better; his likes and dislikes. I have also been trying to adapt to cooking and keeping house: I did not cook much before so often, so cooking everyday for my husband takes getting accustomed to. My role really now is wife, daughter, sister, and teacher. In terms of my in-laws, I know they would be looking for a lot of support from me: They would also want my opinion because I have memorized the Qur'an. My in-laws will ask me about certain Islamic matters, and they will be looking at the way I carry myself and also they would expect a lot of simplicity from me.*

Farida further explained that the extended family is important in Qur'an; parental figures hold high esteem in the Qur'an. Farida stated that she and her husband live in an attachment at the back of her in-laws house. Farida also stated that her sister-in-law lives next door and her brother-in-law lives a few minutes away. Farida found it funny in the beginning of her marriage because she felt she had to "suck up" to her mother-in-law. After trying to impress her husband's family, Farida now feels more comfortable with them.

*I wanted to really impress my mother-in-law and make her know that she choose a good wife for her son. The expectations and roles are high, but it is not so overpowering that it affects me. I am trying to learn to draw the line at times; learn boundaries.*

Farida described the obligations of men and women in her household.

*The preferred role of the Muslim woman is to be a housewife, to be within the home and be a mother. In Islam the first classroom is the lap of your mother. I feel this is the role that Muslim women should be playing more now, especially in this kind of society we are in. It is not advisable for Muslim women to just go out to work anywhere and to be around strange men. The role I play now is seeing about my husband and ensuring all his needs are taken care of.... and again, within my own parental family as well as my extended family. Another role I play is maintainer of the Qur'an. To maintain the Qur'an is not something easy to do.*

*Since I memorized it; forgetting it is a grave sin against the person. Believe me, it is easy to forget it if you do not recite it everyday.*

Farida felt that obligations for men and women are similar, but different. She felt the woman's role is extensive at home, while the man's role is going out to be the breadwinner of the family. He has more responsibilities out of the house whereas; women have internal or indoor responsibilities. Farida explained that women could work out of the house; they have that right to do those responsibilities in addition to what they do at home.

*I prefer to be at home, while my husband goes out and works, as well as gives donations and teach the message of Islam. My husband has also memorized the Qur'an so he is expected to teach Islamic studies. My husband and I complement each other's roles and obligations. My husband provides lodging, clothes, and food for me. I can have my own money that is mine. I could do with it whatever I want. When he comes home: I take care of him.*

Farida feels that as a Muslim woman she is treated well and respected in her family, extended family, and community as a whole. Farida does not feel ill treated, or looked down upon by others in the family or community.

*More or less I think women here are taken care of financially and their needs are taken care of as well. However, their emotional needs, that is their business. I don't know what is going on there, as I can only see the outward appearances. With regards to me feeling free to express myself, I do generally. I feel I have a natural problem within myself of keeping things to myself, and not complaining about things. If my husband sees that I have a problem, he asks me about it.*

Muslimah described her very multifaceted role in her family and in her community. Muslimah felt that her many roles in both family and community not only keep her busy, but also makes her feel needed, and completes her life with purpose.

*My role is wife, mother, grandmother and sometimes manager for my husband's practice. I also help prepare bodies for Islamic funerals when they need extra help. I help bathe the dead and prepare the burial shrouds. Sometimes I would have to cut the cloth and find a funeral home to do the bathing and preparation. Only females can bathe and care for another female body. In Islam, women must*

*wear five pieces of cloth or garments and men wear three pieces. I have to bathe them and dress them accordingly to the Prophet Muhammad's teachings (peace be upon him). I attended classes at the Islamic studies Institute to be able to do this skill of Islamic funeral preparation. Grandmother is the roll most pressing now because I have to correct them everyday; how to dress, how to pray, how to speak; and I try to do a little bit of polishing everyday with them while they stay with me, because when they are not here I don't know what is going on.*

Muslimah felt that her roles as grandmother, and mother were most clearly define. She felt as a grandmother she has to pull her grandchildren together and instill proper Islamic teachings and values in them. Muslimah further stated that in today's society, most people don't know what is going on with their children. Muslimah described her household and marriage.

*My husband is the head of the household of course, and he too... well, it says in the Qur'an that he is a degree above her, in that he is responsible for her. Some people think that the man can "batter" the woman because he is a degree over her: that is not Islamic law. He is supposed to be responsible for her and must maintain her, protect her, feed and clothe her as he does himself.*

Muslimah described how different men could be in marriage and in life. She felt that you have to understand a male properly and realize that his attitude is different to a woman's attitude. Muslimah says now that she understands; she does not worry as much as before. She explained that there are scientific discoveries that found that men only hear with one half of their brain, so if they are reading the paper and the woman is speaking to them at the same time; men would not hear you, whereas women can multitask. Muslimah went on to say that women cannot blame the men for this: That is simply how they are made up.

*My grandson doesn't hear at all when he is watching television. He is a typical male makeup and God created him with half of the brain to receive only, the other half is for whatever else I don't know. I know God created him in a particular way, so we can't complain. However if you call the man on the phone, he hears*

*everything. My husband and I have the best conversations on the phone: we've made some of our biggest decisions over the telephone.*

Muslimah defined the obligations of men and women in the household and in marriage. She felt that men have a bigger role to play in one way, and women have a greater role and obligation in rearing children. Muslimah stated that both men and women have equal obligations when it came to practicing the five pillars of Islam; prayers; giving alms to the poor; practicing in the month of Ramadan; giving away some of your wealth annually (Zakat); the declaration of faith and the pilgrimage to the Holy land (Hajj).

*During Hajj, a woman must be accompanied by a male in order to complete her pilgrimage: The male can be her husband, son, brother, uncle, nephew, or her grandson, all Muharam males. Men are obligated to maintain their women. In Islam, a woman is not supposed to maintain herself or maintain him. The man is supposed to be the breadwinner of the family. The man is the provider, and the woman is in charge of the household, not cooking, washing and cleaning. In the Islamic marriage sermon, it says to love, with peace and tranquility, it doesn't say washing, cooking, cleaning, and ironing. Muslim women are fortunate that they are not required to do any of that, but of course, as women we do it out of love. Therefore, it means women do things more than what is required of them: It's instinct.*

Muslimah commented on how lucky men are and that they don't realize it. She felt that men don't realize how lucky they are to have a woman staying home and looking after their home and rearing their children in the Islamic way. Muslimah said with her husband's practice, she handles most of his business affairs as well.

*I do these extra things for my husband because I love him and love doing things for him. It's like two hands; one cannot clap alone. Both partners are needed to live a life. I feel we complement each other, and that I am treated well, and I am honored and valued as a wife, mother, and grandmother everyday. I share my knowledge with other women in the community and I feel appreciated.*

Muslimah went on to explain that every community has people who are mistreated in one form or another. It bothers her when these situations happen in the Muslim community because she feels Islam is already misjudged, without additional negativities.



*In every community you have women who are not treated well, or as well as they should be. Then there are women treated extremely well: They have both situations. I feel that women are not educating themselves in the manner in which they should, to know their rights. There are men who take tradition as their guideline and would think nothing if a woman is sad or unhappy or frustrated or needs someone to talk to. Even though most Muslim women are becoming more aware of their status, there still are a few pockets of people who will never change because these men do not see their women in the light of the Qur'an. Some of these modern age men are so stuck in their old traditions of not bothering with women. Or maybe it's the male ego. I don't want to say the wrong thing but it is hurtful to me as a Muslim woman to see men mistreating women and women not knowing the difference.*

Muslimah went on to comment that there are a few Muslim men that still think once you're married the woman should do everything. When men and women don't see the foundation as important, then the entire family structure will collapse and divorce can happen; this leads to people making bad choices in life. Muslimah elaborated that the wife can get frustrated and then make bad choices in her life. Muslimah described what she has come across in her own circle of friends.

*The husband is so complacent, that he is not aware that his wife is a partner. Some men feel the wife is a hired person in the house, and she does not need any companionship: She only needs to know she's married to him on paper. Some men feel that she is my wife and I have rights over her. This is my grouse. I have a hurt heart when it comes to men not doing, or playing their part. I don't think women are treated badly across the board; there are pocket areas that have failed. We are trying to introduce pre-marital counseling and shared responsibilities before couples get married. Any physical mistreatment is prohibited, if it does happen, he must apologize because what you do in the home your children will follow.*

Muslimah described the home of battered women that she is a part of, and gives her assistance to.

*In the battered women's home, there are not many Muslim clients, because many Muslim women would not report their battery if it was happening to them. The women would either settle their affairs, or some would put up with it, and some will leave, but they would not report it to the police or come to the battered women's home.*

Ayesha, Merriam and Salmah all feel that men have more obligations than women, whereas Farida, Amina and Muslimah feel the obligations between men and women are balanced, but in different areas.

*Living Life within the Folds of Islam: Strictly following what is permitted or Halaal, and Islamic sea bathing and swimwear.*

All the participants expressed “living within the folds of Islam” in what ever they are doing in their daily lives. The participants are all strict when following their Islamic teachings, and instilling these teachings in their children, and/or grandchildren.

Ayesha felt that living an Islamic life is easier in Trinidad, because of the culture and the easy environment: Living within the Folds of Islam seems simpler than living in an Islamic country.

*Trinidad is the best place in the whole world. I realized that when I went to the Middle East, and I saw the women stifling under the Burqua. Our culture here is heaven on earth. The freedom of practicing your religion is here. We are not oppressed as the women are in the Middle East. When I was in the Middle East, I could not wait to reach back home to Piarco Airport. I was so happy when I got back. I felt liberated and I felt good about everything, and about being a Muslim. I do what ever I have to do in my life within the Folds of Islam. I would not change my country for anywhere else in the whole world.*

Ayesha, even though she lives in Trinidad, does not like to bathe in the sea at all. She feels that it is like a public swimming pool, and the idea of swimming does not appeal to her. However, Ayesha said she used to bathe at times and a woman is supposed to wear her Hijab and clothing just as if she is in public. Ayesha went on to explain that a woman has to wear Hijab long dress and pants to go into the sea. She said that a woman does not have to wear a bikini and expose herself in order to enjoy herself on the beach.

Amina described her life as it centers around prayer. She felt that living within the folds of Islam is centering your lifestyle around prayer and Islamic teaching. Amina said that either she cooks, or her husband cooks, when they all get home, they eat and say their prayers then prepare for the nighttime prayer before bedtime. Amina recalls living her life according to Islam early on when she just converted to Islam. Amina married her husband at 20 years old; because in Islam you cannot have a boyfriend because there is no dating. When you reach that age, and you have urges you are supposed to get married, so I did. Amina also explained that living within Islam also determines or sometimes limits a career choice, because the career surroundings may not be conducive to Islamic teaching.

*At 20 when I got married I worked at the bank, until I found out that bank work was not right for a Muslim so I had to leave the job. Banks deal with interest, people who borrow money on interest. Muslims do not deal with interest because it is a major sin in Islam to collect interest.*

Amina described sea bathing in Trinidad and her Islamic bathing suit.

*I enjoy sea bathing: I walk in the water; I dip my head under water. However, the same rules of going out in public apply. Only the face, hands and feet should be exposed on the beach. I wear an Islamic bathing suit to protect myself from outside male gazes at the beach. The Islamic bathing suit I have consists of a total covering of loose fitting clothes, with only my face, hands and feet showing.*

Farida described her experience having to adapt her form of dress to her lifestyle in the Caribbean, and more recently having to adapt to the Purdah (face covering). Farida recalled when she was younger she used to go to a Muslim camp where a whole group of Muslims from Trinidad, would go camping together.

*It was about 80 people in all. We used to go camping by the beach, hiking, and various nature activities. I used to play a lot of sports, both in school and at Camp. I used to play hockey and in Form Five I used to play volleyball. I did not feel confined in any way, even though back then I only wore Hijab, pants and long*

*sleeved tops; not really dressed in full Islamic garb as I am now. I still could do everything normally. I bathed in sea in Hijab, long sleeved, loose fitting clothes and everything. I also hiked, and did all my sports in the Hijab garb. I have gotten accustomed to it. Bathing in the sea is a big thing for me because I love the sea. I just had to adapt. It is how you have to do it, you have to adapt your life to your form of dress, even more so now that I am wearing the full gown and face covering (Purdah).*

Farida felt that it was not difficult before doing things she liked in the Hijab garb; but it was more difficult adapting her life and all the things she liked to do outdoors to her new full gown and Purdah (face covering).

*In the beginning, when I started wearing the Purdah, I had to adapt to wearing more clothes and the face piece while hiking and bathing in the sea. It was real tough and hot at the time, but I did not want to give up on it. Sometimes I did want to pull it off but afterwards I adjusted, and the heat doesn't bother me anymore. Now I want to always keep it on.*

Muslimah remembered growing up and learning from her family what was permitted (halaal) and what was forbidden (haram) or prohibited In Islam. Muslimah recalled looking at other young girls in their tiny sleeves and shorter skirts and being told that because your friend dresses that way, that doesn't mean you can dress that way: That kind of dressing is not permitted in Islam.

*As I grew older, I became more and more aware of the right and wrong things in Islam. We know we couldn't eat the things that were forbidden and we did not have a problem with that because we knew why we couldn't eat those things.... The Qur'an tells us why we can't indulge in the forbidden.*

Muslimah further explained the reasons why courtship is forbidden in Islam.

*There is no pre-marital sex or courtship in Islam. Courtship is only okay in a big group of people, or with appropriate supervision from other family members. You visit someone if you are going to marry that person, or you want to get to know him or her for marriage. Courtship can lead to pre-marital sex, therefore they are forbidden.*

Muslimah elaborated on how women should be covered when bathing in the sea in the Caribbean. She went on to state that sea bathing is a big part of living life in the Caribbean; however, women must still maintain the traditions of modesty, even when enjoying the seawater in Trinidad.

*You must cover the way you cover in the public everyday. You cover yourself properly. Women should not cover with such a flimsy cloth that the material sticks to your body when it gets wet. Your clothes for bathing should be waterproof, like track pants material, and a similar thick tee shirt, long sleeves, and your Hijab / head scarf on your head, tightly enough that it would not fall off. I enjoy myself and my Hijab is held in place with a tight scarf underneath. You want to enjoy yourself, but you also have to do the right thing at the same time.*

Salmah has lived her entire life within the folds of Islam, so she feels that it has not been difficult for her because she was raised and instilled with proper Islamic values by her family.

*Marrying my husband was the next step in the friendship because in Islam you cannot date exclusively; one male and one female. If you want to go out together, then you have to do so in as big group with chaperones: Islam is about guarding women's modesty. Similarly, when I bathe in the sea, I have on full Hijab garb, just as I have on now, except the dress for sea bathing would be a bit older: Not my good, pretty Hijabs. I would wear long pants that would not retain water, and loose fitting, long sleeved tops. This is how we are supposed to bathe.*

Salmah elaborated on her life, living within and according to Islamic teaching, and how she feels others around her have become more tolerant and more accepting of Islamic practices.

*Islam is a universal religion; no matter where we go in the world, all Muslims follow the same basic practices. The food we eat must be Halaal or lawful. I can Dress like this in Hijab and go anywhere in the world because I am proud of whom I am, and I am comfortable being Muslim. I had a friend who was meeting some non-Muslim friends for a drink. My friend offered to meet me at a different venue because she knew where she was with her friends, alcohol was being consumed and she respected me and went so far as to accommodate me. I really appreciated that.*

Salmah went on to comment that a graduation ceremony at the University of the West Indies (UWI) happened to fall in the Holy month of Ramadan. She recalled when it was time for the break, some of the lecturers were having drinks, and one person asked the principal of UWI where the alcohol was located and the principal replied that there was no alcohol at the function because it was the Holy month of Ramadan and some of the lecturers were Muslim. The principal had accommodated the Muslim lecturers, even though he himself is not a Muslim. I mean there are intolerant people as well, but on a whole we are a tolerant people.

Merriam, like Salmah, lived her entire life according to the Islamic teachings she was taught as a child growing up in the Muslim faith.

*We never had anything in our house that was considered Haram (forbidden or prohibited). Everything was Halaal (permissible). Alcohol and pork are considered Haram and prohibited in Islam, therefore was not in our house at all.*

Halaal meat, according to Merriam has to be prepared similar to the Jewish Kosher method: The animal has to be killed in a ritually correct way. Merriam also described as she got older and deeper in her Islamic faith, how she instilled the same Islamic traditions and values she had learned as a child, to her own children through role modeling behavior.

*I remember when my boys were young and my in-laws, who were not Muslim because my husband had converted to Islam, refused to serve Halaal meat when we visited them. It was an obstacle to overcome with them, because I did not eat their meat because it was not Halaal. My in-laws made several little remarks like "we are too poor for you, that's why you would not eat the meat." It was difficult for them to understand the strict adherence to the halaal concept. However, my children were very young then, and their grandparents would feed them meat that was not halaal. They did not know any better because it was their grandparents feeding them. To help them understand, I asked the teacher at Islamic school to tell my boys the difference between halaal and haram. My boys asked me about their lesson when they came home. I told them what was permitted and at that young age, they had to make a choice. Next time they went to visit their*

*grandparents, my son told them that they could no longer eat the meat because they were not supposed to eat it. My boys even explained why they could not eat the meat. I was proud of them, and from that day on, my in-laws only had halaal meat in their house.*

Merriam went on to state that she never forced anything on her children, but they chose Islam on their own just like she chose Islam. She said that Islam plays an enormous role in a Muslim's life. Merriam further commented that as her children grew up, they were very free to come and go and be in different environments, but they always chose to do what is right in Islam. Merriam continued to explain how she also incorporates her business within the folds of Islam.

*All my business dealings are done within the folds of Islam and I have been successful. I have traveled for business and wherever I am I pray all my prayers and dress modestly in my hijab garb. I have realized more and more that I can practice my religion and still do most of the things I enjoy. I wouldn't go certain places that are forbidden, where certain things are going on. You would not see me in a carnival fete, or in a club or concert or party. You would see me in the movies and I will have on my hijab. You may see me at a play, only if it is decent and considered within the folds of Islam. I have found that others respect me when I go out. I remember one night when I was traveling, I went to dinner with a group of people, and everyone respected me for my Islamic principles. People would say, "no, don't drink that it has alcohol in it" or "that dish has meat" or "the fish is for her". They would all tell me where the fish or vegetable dish was located. Whenever anyone passed alcohol around, someone would give me a Coca-cola or water. When I am with a group and men are present, I am not pushy; I stay within the fold of Islam.*

Merriam commented that even in her business, she prays throughout the day in her office. She also makes her business female friendly, in that she has signs in her business that indicate that men are not allowed in certain places without prior authorization. Merriam also stated that she enjoys going to the beach during her leisure time, and that the same rules for women going out in public apply to the beach as well; complete covering of the woman's body, except for hands, feet and sometimes face.

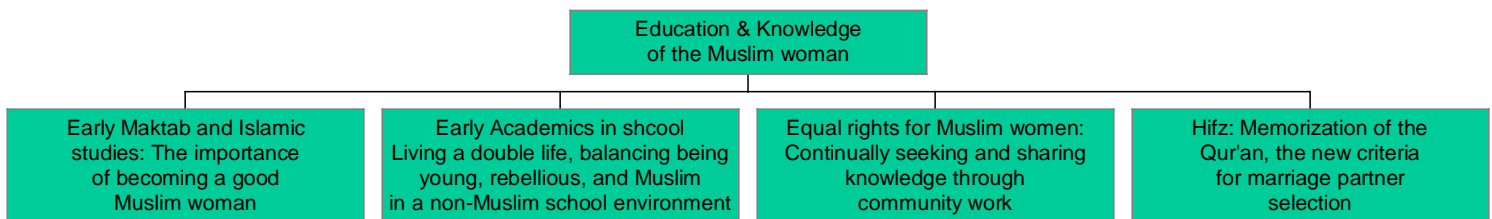
*I would tie my hijab in a way that it does not come off or I would wear a cap with a little fitted swim cap inside, so my hair does not show. I would wear long t-shirts, long sleeves and pants. I have special outfits for the sea that have special material so I am not kept from swimming. The only problem I have run into, as a Muslim woman with full Islamic dress is in certain pools they do not allow people to swim in t-shirts. However, Hilton understands that Muslims have a certain swimsuit requirement and they allow it.*

Merriam believes that women have to be mindful that they cannot do certain things.

Women must always be modest and stay within the folds of Islam in whatever they do in their lives. Three of the six participants had either personal experience or someone close to them had the experience of choosing between career/job versus living within the folds of Islam: The career or job choice was not compatible with Islamic teaching. All three of the participants shared that either they or the person close to them chose to sacrifice the career / job in order to continue to live life within Islam in the right way.



Figure V.  
Theme: Education & Knowledge of the Muslim woman



### Education and Knowledge of the Muslim woman

At one time in Trinidad, Many Muslims resisted any form of secular or non-religious education, because they did not want to become westernized. Today, Muslims have established themselves in most aspects of Trinidad's society, all while living according to their Islamic faith and teachings. With regard to education and knowledge, all the participants shared three similar quotes from the Qur'an: Seeking knowledge and education is compulsory in Islam for both males and females, one should seek knowledge from the cradle to the grave, and one should seek education and knowledge even if it is as far as China. Many of the participants expressed feelings of both anger and hurtfulness, when it came to some Muslim women still not knowing and still not educating themselves about their status and equal rights in Islam in this day and age.

#### *Early Maktab and Islamic studies: The Importance of becoming a Good Muslim woman*

Most of the Muslims in Trinidad that are of a certain age and older would have had their early academics in a non-Muslim environment. The first Islamic recognized school was opened in 1949 and many primary and secondary schools have since opened, however; even with all those advancements, the more recognized and prestigious schools today are still the non-Muslim government schools. Many Muslims did not want to sacrifice good education; so many still sent their children to non-Muslim schools. After school hours, Muslim children then had to attend Islamic school or maktab. These Islamic studies were intended to reinforce core Islamic beliefs, traditions and values in the minds of young Muslims. Islamic studies also helped young Muslims avoid temptations that may have occurred during the day in their non-Muslim school environments.

Amina's experience with early Islamic studies was different to most Muslim young people who grew up in the Muslim faith. Amina was born and raised Catholic and converted to Islam at nineteen years old. Amina described her early encounter with Islam when she was attending a summer program in school.

*I met a young man in my class. He was the first person to tell me about Islam. I wanted to argue about it and he put me on to a woman who told me more about Islam. I argued with her about Christianity and my Bible, but I then looked at her lifestyle and examined what she was telling me and I realized that Islam did not seem to bad after all. I started listening more, and before I knew it, I realized this is what I was searching for. I had a lot of questions and Islam answered those questions, whereas my family and Christianity did not. I converted to Islam at nineteen and became a Muslim. My family was devastated. My parents thought university was the next step for me, but in Islam; the next step when you reach my age is marriage. I eloped since my parents objected to the marriage. I figured I could continue with my education at a later time, because now I would have a husband and I would be protected.*

Amina defined what being a good Muslim woman meant to her. She felt being a good Muslim was about knowing Islam and following the commands of the creator. She also stated that the first classroom is in the lap of your mother so being a good Muslim woman is teaching your children the right Islamic values and teachings to sustain them in life.

*We have to know what is required of us as Muslims: We have to read the Qur'an everyday, pray the compulsory prayers, fast in the month of Ramadan, follow the five pillars of Islam, and apart from all that is required; you have to do extra acts of prayer and fasting.*

Amina further commented that Muslims have to purify themselves from negative and destructive feelings such as jealousy, hatred and the basic qualities that people have within them. Amina felt that getting rid of those qualities and spending time on Islamic values and beliefs is what makes her a good Muslim.

Salmah grew up in Trinidad, in a non-Islamic society and at the time when she was growing up there were no Muslim schools. Her parents were staunch Muslims and very strict. Salmah practiced Islam and prayed together with her family everyday after school when she was younger.

*We would pray at least three of the five daily prayers together as a family: The early Morning Prayer and the two evening prayers. We also had dinner together every night as a family, and talked about the day's events. The family time solidified our Islamic traditions and beliefs. My parents instilled strict Islamic values within us growing up.*

Salmah described what being a good Muslim woman meant to her, and the effect and importance that childhood traditions and values have on her life.

*You have to follow the practices of our Prophet Muhammad (peace be unto him), the Hadith, the teachings of the Qur'an and follow Islamic law. We learn from young to go even further and be a good Muslim woman. If a woman is unmarried, she is supposed to live with her parents in their home and take care of them, which gives her tremendous blessings in Islam. It is against the law to put your parents in an old age home. If you are unable to give them around the clock care, then you are supposed to hire someone to care for them at home. If a woman is married, she also gets tremendous blessings in Islam, whether she works or not. She takes care of her husband and her family and instill in them the proper Islamic traditions and values, especially dress code and modesty.*

Salmah went on to state that marriage is about compromise and women can agree to help take care of the house, but in Islam she is not obligated to do that. Salmah felt that her parents instilled important traditions and Islamic family values that she has now passed on to her own family.

Ayesha felt it was easy for her growing up Muslim; it was a way of life. Ayesha remembered growing up and going to school and going to Islamic studies class after school. Ayesha recalled that Islamic studies class was all week long, Mondays to Fridays

after school and usually lasted for an hour or sometimes the class went on longer. To Ayesha, this was a normal life, and she practiced what her parents taught her about Islam.

*You are supposed to learn the meanings of things you may not understand fully when you are younger. For example, prayer, you know you pray, but you must learn by a certain age why you do acts of worship, why you prostrate. You have to constantly learn things that will help you understand Islam on a whole, and become a better Muslim.*

Ayesha explained what being a good Muslim woman meant to her. She felt that as a Muslim first and foremost, she has to pray her five prayers, and practice the five pillars of Islam. Ayesha stated that women have to believe in God, believe in prayer, believe in giving alms, in paying your wealth tax (Zakat), give to charity and make the pilgrimage to the Holy land (hajj). She must also dress properly in modest fashion and attire, and honor her modesty and chastity.

*You have to live a life that is not bothersome, quarrelsome or envious: You have to live a good life with your husband and family. You don't interfere with people, you don't curse, or rant and rave, and most importantly, you bring up your children right. You teach them proper Islamic values because whatever you model, your children will follow your example. Being a good Muslim woman means setting good examples for your children to follow. A woman has to also set good examples both at home and in the community where she lives.*

Farida went to secondary school and after that, she branched off into an Islamic school for three years. At Islamic school, during that time there, she memorized the Qur'an (Hifz), which was a tremendous accomplishment for a Muslim young woman: It is like memorizing the words of God. Farida's life, like all the other participants, centers on prayer and reading the Qur'an. Farida recalled how the Islamic studies school began to change her life and deepen her Islamic faith. Farida felt herself becoming a better Muslim woman.

*I started teaching in the same secondary school that I attended. I soon realized that teaching was not for me. I stayed home for a year after that, and during that time alone, I found divine guidance. I noticed myself in that year beginning to change: I started praying more; really praying. Praying to where it began to mean something to me; it no longer felt like a routine action. I started fasting, and everything seemed to take on a deeper meaning than before. I started going to the Mosque every night for prayer during the month of Ramadan and I would recite the entire Qur'an in the month. It all sparked something in me, because I always loved the Qur'an, even though I did not always follow it, as I should have. I became interested in the Hifz course and I let my family know of my intentions. After three years of Hifz, I have memorized the Qur'an. My faith has soared. I also realize that if I put my mind to something and I have faith, then that in itself increases my faith further. With the Qur'an now memorized, I can compare how I was before and how I feel now. My faith has strengthened, and I don't worry about certain things anymore. It has been a whole transformation for me.*

Farida feels she has become a better Muslim woman because of her Hifz course at the Islamic studies school. Being a good Muslim woman has great significance for Farida because of her still newly married status. Farida felt a woman has to be a good Muslim first by saying her five compulsory elements of prayer, fasting and going on the hajj pilgrimage. Farida commented that once a woman has followed the compulsory elements, then she should go a step further and gain knowledge and educate herself, from the cradle to the grave. Farida further explained that going beyond the compulsory elements, brings more blessings to a Muslim; once the intentions are sincere.

*I think it is based on your intentions that say whether you are a good Muslim. I don't know for sure if I am a good Muslim or if my husband is, but we do go beyond the requirements and try. We try to be good role models for non-Muslims as well. I obey my parents because they hold a high esteem and respect in Islam. I am a good wife to my husband and I take care of him. I support him emotionally and I encourage him, especially with the Hifz. Being a good Muslim woman is all about when you have your whole family and your husband: It's about obedience to your husband, to your parents and to your creator, everything. Gaining knowledge and education makes you a better Muslim woman, not better as in, I am comparing myself to others; but better as in stronger in faith. Living at a higher personal level.*

Farida further commented on supererogatory acts. She felt that doing these extra optional acts that are beyond the compulsory; like reading the Qur'an at different times of the day, performing extra prayers and extra salaats, and even giving extra charity because it all is a great plus and is highly encouraged in Islam. Farida went on to state that furthering one's Islamic studies is also pertinent and important because otherwise, Muslims can become stagnated.

Merriam grew up in a strict, traditional Muslim family, even though she remembered the traditions of the Muslim culture being mixed up with the Hindu culture because of the Indian indentureship to Trinidad. Even with that mix up, she grew up with a strict Muslim background of beliefs and values, where the rules of the home were strictly followed.

*My mother was especially strict, we had to keep our fasts, say our prayers and go to the mosque when we were supposed to. My mother made sure we respected our fast and she made sure I dressed properly for a young Muslim lady. When I was younger they did not have Islamic schools, not like now. I sent my children to "maktab" from young children, so they can learn about Islam, and they learned the difference between "halaal" and "haram" things in Islam. Islamic studies help reinforce Islamic values. When I was younger it was more instilled by my family.*

Merriam described what being a good Muslim woman meant for her in her life. She felt that adopting the right behavior was paramount to being a good Muslim woman: Being respectful, and practicing what you preach.

*Dressing properly, performance of your prayers, adopting the right behavior is what it is all about. To me, a person cannot only dress the part; they have to play the part as well: It is your lifestyle and how you react to others, and how you treat people who are Muslims and non-Muslims. So many times nowadays, we see people in all religions calling themselves, "God fearing people" and yet their*

*conduct is less than desirable. Being a good Muslim woman means being modest, kind, true to yourself and being able to own up to your mistakes and correct them. Only dressing the part and not acting the part doesn't make you a good Muslim.*

Merriam went on to comment that as a Muslim woman, she wants to encourage people to understand her religion and see what Islam is all about. She wants others to share her beliefs and teachings and promote tolerance and not ignorance.

Muslimah's parents were very formal and strict as she grew up. Her family made sure there was strict adherence to the rules. Muslimah recalled there being no grey areas, just black and white when it came to Islamic rules and beliefs in her home when she was younger. Muslimah remembered going to the Mosque for Islamic studies everyday except Sunday: She had regulated classes after school.

*I learned how to read and write Arabic in class. My parents gave us children the foundation at home and then we attended classes. We had formal classes too so that we did not miss out on the academics part of school. We had competitions for best student, such as for a child who recited the Qur'an. These Islamic classes were called "maktab". You should finish maktab by ten or twelve because you then have to start going to high school. Muslim youngsters finish the Qur'an by ten or twelve before entering high school.*

Muslimah recalled her childhood and the instilling of Islamic values by her parents.

Muslimah felt the Islamic studies were valuable, but her parents instilled the basic teaching of Islam in her. Muslimah remembered that her family generations came on a boat from India with their Islamic traditions.

*We always knew from as early as I can remember what we were supposed to do and what we were not supposed to do in Islam. Islam was always a way of life for us, we never found it different or difficult or foreign because people knew we were Muslims. My mother fined tuned things with us, polished us in our beliefs and values. My dad gave us the general knowledge we needed to learn about Islam, he was so thirsty for knowledge. He was strict and made sure we always got up for prayers and did the right things.*



Muslimah in her teenage years joined a young Muslim women's association where she learned organizational skills, public speaking, health issues, first aid, home health, culinary arts, hygiene and teaching others and spreading the Islamic word. Muslimah's father constantly brought home booklets and pamphlets for them to read. He wanted his children to have access to all the Islamic literature they had available at that time.

*Looking at my parents, I always knew the way I had to go. I learnt by example, and I could not choose any other way but Islam. It was our way of thinking. My mother would get all the ladies from the Mosque, to pray at home during Ramadan because at that time, we did not have space for the ladies in the Mosque then, it only had enough space for the men.*

All that Muslimah learned in her childhood she now instills the same in her children and grandchildren. She wants her family to continue with the traditions of the Qur'an, modesty in dress and live a good life of Islamic values.

*I correct my grandchildren everyday, how they dress, pray, speak. I try to polish them like my mother did for me. My husband and I have now instituted a family night of fun and learning. Everyone makes a small contribution because knowledge and education is vital. The grandchildren have to write a small paper on family nights. The topics have included prayer, charity, Muslim women, youth of today, verses from the Qur'an, dress code, and eating habits. When they write, my husband and I would review it and discuss their answers afterward. We think it is a good way to reinforce Islamic principles and teaching, also the exercise keeps the lines of communication open in the family. With young people today, you have to keep them close otherwise you would not know what they are doing.*

Muslimah described what being a good Muslim woman meant to her. She thought honoring her family was important, as well as sincerity. Muslimah further stated that it is about being a good human being and mother, being a "practicing" Muslim and following the Qur'an and the Hadith; the teachings of our Prophet (peace be unto him).

*A good Muslim woman means not backbiting or gossiping. I help others, pray, and I make the atmosphere in my home pleasant. A good Muslim woman gains knowledge and passes it on to her fellow women, like I do with the community work. You have to forbid the wrong and practice what is right. I am a good soul, mother, daughter, aunt, listener and in times of need, I seek the help of God only. The role of the Muslim woman is like the role of any Muslim but womanhood has a different slant to things, a different responsibility in Islam.*

*Early Academics in School: Living a double life balancing being young, rebellious and Muslim in a non-Muslim environment*

Merriam remembered not being allowed to go to certain places, do certain things, or dress any way she wanted when she was growing up in her strict Islamic family. She remembers points in her life that she was not strict where the rules were concerned.

*Even in elementary school, we weren't allowed to take part in the carnival activities and things of that nature. When you reach late teenage years, you tend to stray a little bit from what you know is right. We are trying to be independent; and be an individual in those teenage years. I remember getting up and fasting whether I wanted to or not. When you're younger, you don't understand all the meanings about the rituals in Islam; all you know is you have to do them. I recall during the fasting times when you weren't supposed to eat anything, I used to nibble on food in secret. When the breaking of the fast came I said my prayers, as if I really fasted all day. When you grow up with this strict background, knowing this is your culture, and this is your family, then you accept things subconsciously in your mind. When I was a teenager I wanted to copy my friend's sometimes, but again in the back of your mind there is a voice that keeps telling you what has been imbedded in your mind since childhood. As I got older; early twenties, I began to get very, very deep into my religion, I yearned for Islam. Everything changed then at that point in life.*

Merriam thought of another point in her life where she did not follow the rules. She stated that Muslims are clannish and they stick together. Muslims marry Muslims, especially since dating or courtship is not allowed in Islam. Merriam remembered being attracted to a non-Muslim.

*We met at school; we never dated of course because that's not allowed. When we saw each other at school, we would write little letters to each other: That of course is not allowed but I did it anyway. My parents found out about it after two years and they were against the match because he was not Muslim, and I had many marriage offers since thirteen or fourteen years old. Families made offers for when you finish school to marry afterwards. My husband converted to Islam to be with me and marry me.*

Merriam went on to comment that her family, even though they were strict, they always included the children in everything. It made getting caught up in any negatives less appealing because of our family's strong bond. Merriam recalled her friends being invited on family outings as well. My parents believed in keeping everyone close. Merriam remembered her friends coming into her environment instead of she going into their environment.

Farida remembers her father being very strict about her hanging out with friends. He always told her about her dress and modesty,

*I used to be kind of rebellious back in those days, when I was younger. In school, the non-Muslim school had a lot of competition for boys because of the mixed sex environment. It was tough, more peer pressure at least that is what I felt. Having both sexes in the same school is a big stress in itself in terms of dressing. I used to wear my skirts short, even though we were supposed to be fully covered. I did not really think about that too much though, because as Muslim women, we are not supposed to be intermingling with boys. The Islamic school was much easier for me because it was all girls and no competition there. We all knew each other, and learned the Islamic laws there as opposed to the Non-Muslim school. Now that I have Islamic knowledge, I look back and it was a difficult time for me because I went through times where I got involved in wrong things, and I was just exposed to them and found it hard to turn away from the peer pressure.*

Farida went on to explain that when she was younger she was not "practicing" Islam as she should have been and that her parents thought.

*My parents used to think that I was praying, but I really wasn't. They thought I used to read the Qur'an everyday but I wasn't. I only picked up the Qur'an during the month of Ramadan, and after that I put the Qur'an down and did not read it again for a while. I tried to do everything my parents told me to do; wear my Hijab etc. but of course when my parents were not around, I did my own thing, what I wanted to do.*

Farida remembers feeling a struggle of personalities within her. She described the feeling like a split personality. Farida recalled when she was going to the non-Muslim school; she thought the feeling of a struggle inside her was normal because she had not yet experienced Islamic school, and practicing Islam fully. Farida stated that going to non-Islamic school was difficult.

*The struggle was like living a double life, but when you're in it you don't realize that it is a double thing. Sometimes your personality changes, because when I was around my parents I was doing what they would expect, when I was with my friends, I would "free up" and be myself. I would let loose and relax, do things I knew I shouldn't have done. I used to listen to rock music, and I know music had a big influence on how I used to carry myself. I used to change my clothes when I left the house. I still wore my Hijab, my friends did not mind, they treated me normal. The whole rock culture is what I was leaning toward. Of course, Islam is totally against that. However, I used to try to fit in. I thought that was what I liked. It was something I felt I had to experience at that time. I wanted to have some fun too.*

Farida further commented that Islam is against the effects music has on people listening to it. She recalls listening to the rock music and remembered how she carried herself differently. Farida expressed an understanding of why Islam forbids that type of music.

Muslimah and Ayesha did not live double lives, or experience the struggle within as Farida did, however; they both tested boundaries with regard to the dress code when they were younger.

*I knew that my friends dressed one way, and I could not dress that way so I sometimes I pushed a little. I would have loved to wear tiny sleeves with my arms out and my sister would always tell me No! I used to keep asking her to make the sleeves shorter on my dresses, but every time she told me no. I kept saying, "Just*

*as little bit.” She always said no. When I was younger I was so embarrassed to wear the Hijab, I sometimes would not wear it. I did not want my friends looking at me and saying, “What are you wearing?” I would always go with what my friends said; now it is so different. Hijabs are more accepted; and there are many Islamic schools now.*

Ayesha also tested a few boundaries when she was growing up. She recalled meeting her husband in the Mosque; realizing the attraction that was there; and the fact that dating was not allowed in Islam.

*My husband to-be gave me “the eye.” Sometimes you just know. You don’t have to be physical in any way to know that you are attracted to someone. The eyes talk a lot. He looked at me in a very special way. At least he had the good manners to come home and ask my parents. However, we did slip each other one or two little notes before he came to ask my parents for my hand in marriage.*

Salmah had a good experience in school because she went to a private school; however, it was a Catholic school. Salmah felt they were accommodating of other religions.

*Even though it was Catholic Private School, they were quite open-minded and I never felt like a minority: I felt accepted.*

Amina did not grow up as a Muslim. She converted at nineteen when she learned about Islam. Amina felt that even though she did not have the experience of being young and Muslim, she now looks at her sons, to make sure they are being raised in a proper Islamic manner.

*My children don’t go out and do alcohol, or drugs. None of them do. They never fornicated or had girlfriends or any thing. They never fornicated. They are different. Our lifestyle is based around prayer.*

*Equal rights for Muslim women: Continually seeking and sharing Knowledge through community work.*

All the participants attested to having equal rights as Muslim women in Trinidad. All participants agreed that in the Qur'an men and women are drawn side by side. The women also agreed that men and women couldn't be compared as equal, but that there is equality: They are not identical; they have many differences and responsibilities. However, the women all commented that seeking education and knowledge for both Muslim women and men is compulsory in Islam. Merriam commented on equal rights.

*Being a practicing Muslim woman in the Caribbean in Trinidad & Tobago, I must say that I have had equal opportunities as any other woman; that I choose to do. Women have equal rights as men.*

Farida decided to volunteer her services as a teacher to teach the Qur'an once a week. She will be teaching within the confines of education, as well as the basic and emotional needs of the Muslim women students. Farida stated that she felt by talking with them about Islam would be a form of encouragement to them.

*When I became involved in the Islamic school, I hope my opinions would be listened to but whether they will be willing to take them on and use them I didn't know. I am hoping they would listen to me and accept my suggestions. Another Muslim woman has come into the school in the past few months, and she is supposed to be in charge of getting things going for the young Muslim women in Islamic studies. Of course before she gets things going she will have to work through her husband to speak to the other men and the head people at the Islamic school. She has been making progress because classes have started: Both academics as well as Islamic studies. So, it's not like our opinions are not heard. We are given the opportunity. The New Islamic School would be great because there were no special classes before for Muslim women.*

Muslimah is a community worker at heart. She learned the importance of seeking and sharing knowledge through the community from her father, who was considered in

his time somewhat of an “Islamic social worker.” Muslimah’s father helped to look after the needy and supply Muslim followers with Islamic pamphlets and booklets. Muslimah was aware from childhood that community work always has to be done.

*My father was a great community worker, and so was my mother. She would bring women home from the Mosque, and take them under her wing and teach them the basics of Islam and being a Muslim woman. My sister continues that tradition where she lives, and I do my own community projects. I go out to different Mosques and teach the basics, I also help the Islamic school teach Arabic to the students. People always want to talk to you and you learn from others as well: I have never stopped learning, listening and searching for knowledge as well as education. I am no scholar, none of us are scholars in my category; we are just people striving for equality, knowledge and learning something new every day. It’s all about “polishing yourself.”*

Muslimah has been active in her community for eighteen years at the women’s association and in the home for battered women. Muslimah also works with the Islamic community services and other organizations. Muslimah attends conferences, seminars and meetings for her organizations. She feels that soon she may take a step back and let the younger women take charge.

*At the home for battered women, I am still there fully as a leader. I did not want to take on a more demanding role there, because I did not want to feel too overwhelmed and drained. Community work is special to me, because of my father. I was never employed anywhere in my life, because my father did not want me to be employed; he did not want any of his daughters to be employed. He wanted us to learn skills, to be prepared for life, and study. I never went beyond high school because in my day, it was not so fashionable to have a degree nowadays it is different. You can go to University, if you can manage being away from the home.*

Muslimah also offers her layman-counseling services, as well as her funeral body preparation services in order to educate and pass her knowledge to others.

*When Muslim women need someone to help bathe the body and prepare the body for funeral they may call me. The Prophet (peace be on him) gives us guidelines of how to bathe and shroud the body for Islamic burial. Only women can bathe women, and men bathe men. I took these preparations classes at the Islamic Institute.*

Muslimah describes her counseling skills. She sometimes visits homes and counsels' people in the community that may need an elders help. Muslimah did a counseling course called "Skills for counseling: Islamic methods for counseling."

*I did those classes over a year. The course contained elements of family counseling, and counseling with Islamic skills. I learned to counsel, not only Muslims but also non-Muslims. When I counsel I have an Islamic foundation and Islamic guidelines to follow. We must tell non-Muslims about our Islamic ways: That is the only way you can counsel a non-Muslim. If you think about it what a family counselor would say to a non-Muslim would be similar to what a non-Muslim counselor would say to a client. The only difference is the Islamic component: They have little difference in the counseling skills approach.*

Muslimah is bothered by some of the men she encounters that continue to be stuck in their old traditions of "not bothering" or "male ego." Muslimah stated how much it hurts her to see young Muslim women not learning about their status and their equal rights. Muslimah explained that all Muslims from the cradle to the grave must seek knowledge and education, even if it meant going as far as China.

*It is extremely important to empower women, and educate women, to know their rights. I continually seek knowledge and then try to pass it on to others. I think by adding new Islamic counseling components, we can have marital counseling and reach out to help others in the community. Women and children should get more attached to the Mosque, and help beautify it and help with education among women. The Hadith says no two days should be the same; each day should be better than the day before. You should have achievements and service to others incorporated in each day.*



*Hifz: Memorization of the Qur'an, the new criteria for marriage partner selection.*

The memorization of the Qur'an is one of the "new" criteria for marriage partner selection because it gives the person a quality that makes them more desirable as a marriage partner. Farida is the youngest participant, and the only participant who is newly married. Amina has been married for 25 years; Ayesha for 38 years; Merriam for 29 years; Muslimah for 44 years; Salmah for 12 years, and Farida has been married for less than a year. Farida stated that to Muslims, memorizing the Qur'an is like learning the words of God. It is a major accomplishment and benefit in this world and in the next world. Farida went on to comment that memorizing the Qur'an benefits not only the person but also the important people that surround that person: Parents, family, spouse.

*On Judgment Day, the person who memorizes the Qur'an can intercede for ten people in their family, who might be going to the hell fire. The parents of the person who memorizes the Qur'an will wear crowns of jewels and their faces will be glowing. The person who memorizes the Qur'an will be told to recite, and they would have to recite the whole Qur'an. As they are reciting, the people surrounding them would rise higher to greater levels of Heaven. The benefits here in this world is that memorizing increases your faith and transforms you. Many young people are now memorizing the Qur'an at an earlier age in Trinidad.*

Farida explained that the Islamic girl school has only been around for five years, whereas the boy's school has been around for many years. Farida commented that six girls graduated at the same time she did. In the boy's school, many more graduate than girls and the boys graduate by fifteen years old. Parents are sending their boys and girls to Islamic studies at a younger age than before: Boys at thirteen or fourteen and girls at eleven or twelve. Farida explained that a boy who memorizes the Qur'an, like her husband is called a "Haafiz" and the female who memorizes the Qur'an is called a "Hafiz." Farida went on to comment that when she graduated she was the oldest female

in the class at twenty years old. Farida explained how memorizing the Qur'an was a criterion in her marriage process.

*I used to go to an Islamic studies class and I met my husband's mother there. My husband was in England studying the Hifz course, and he came back for a vacation and told his mother that he was ready to get married. His mother started looking for girls for her son who had either finished or was nearly finished memorizing the Qur'an: She looked for all the Hafiz's in Trinidad that she knew and found out more about them. My husband was nineteen years old and he specifically wanted a girl who had memorized the Qur'an too. His mother approached me about her son, after asking another friend of mine first. I was a bit scared at first, because I did not want her to know that I was also looking at her son from before. The parents met and agreed to a meeting between us. Since it was a meeting for marriage, I took off my Purdah to show him my face for a few seconds. I put it back on and we talked together about the Hifz course and the Qur'an since those were what we had in common.*

Farida realized her husband to be was very religious oriented, which was what she was looking for in a husband as well. Farida remembered his mother asking her if she found her son to be handsome. Farida was shy, but she definitely found him to be attractive and a suitable marriage partner. Farida went on to state that her husband to be came to her house a second time and the marriage plans were confirmed with the families. Farida's husband had to return to England to finish his Hifz course, and Farida's father did not want the marriage to take place before he left. He did not want Farida to be left alone in Trinidad after marriage, without a husband.

*I begged my father to let the marriage happen before my husband left for England. We got to spend two weeks together; during the days only. We were not allowed to live together yet, until he returned. When my husband finished the course and returned then we were allowed to live together. I spent time by both my parents and his family while my husband was gone.*

Farida explained that more young girls in the Islamic school are getting married at sixteen years old. She went on to state that some of them get married when they meet the person because it is not permissible to date in Islam. These girls are learning the Hifz and

memorizing the Qur'an at eleven and twelve, which make them more desirable marriage partners: Marriage offers begin when girls finish the Hifz course and when they finish school.

*You have to get married, since you cannot date in Islam; even conversations over the phone are not allowed in Islam. My mother-in-law chose me for her son based on my piety and memorizing the Qur'an. My husband; even before knowing who I was; wanted someone who memorized the Qur'an. I also wanted my husband based on the Hifz and Qur'an too. We knew nothing about each other when we married and we trust that our marriage will work out and last: We trust our common interests, our piety and Islamic life.*

### Minor Themes

Three minor themes emerged from the interviews with the Muslim women. These themes relate to the women's feelings and concerns about Islam being constantly misunderstood worldwide due to current Islamic world events and the negative images associated with Muslims and Islam.

#### *Abu Bakr as a negative representative of Muslim faith in Trinidad and Tobago*

Abu Bakr is the African Muslim leader of the Jamaat al Muslimeen group in Trinidad and Tobago: he has four wives and attempted a coup in Trinidad in 1990. Abu Bakr is considered by most to be a fundamentalist Muslim leader, who has brought a lot of negative press to Trinidad. The participants all shared their views about Abu Bakr as a representative of their Muslim faith. During the time span of the interviews, Abu Bakr caused a controversy in Trinidad by being charged and jailed, and was recently released.

Amina is the only African Muslim woman participant and she shared her experience with Abu Bakr's group, when she initially became a Muslim and was searching for a Muslim community within which to function.

*I am a Muslim of African decent, and people tend to believe that I belong to Abu Bakr's community, but I don't. Some people think very well of him, but I don't. People usually would not tell you what's in their minds. I don't think badly about anyone; however, if you know true Islam, then you would not be attracted to Mr. Bakr and his group; in fact, you would run the other way. I went to his community when I became a Muslim. My husband and I were looking to find a place to worship, because the East Indian community has some racism issues with the African Muslims. They are very traditional, and they see African Muslims as an intrusion into their world. The older East Indians who live in the old traditional communities have felt this way. My husband and I soon realized we did not fit into Abu Bakr's group, because it was not true Islam. It was Islam mixed with something else: "Blackism". We left soon after.*

Amina went on to comment that Abu Bakr is practicing Islam mixed with black power, and other personal issues he may have, all mixed together. She believes that many African Muslims go to his community initially, looking for somewhere to fit in, looking for Muslims that look similar to them. Amina explained that when Muslims go there and see what he is about, and then they leave his community. Amina clarified that when she went to Abu Bakr's community, it was before all the worldwide terrorism and even longer before the attempted coup in Trinidad.

Salmah believes Abu Bakr tries to lead his followers on the straight path, but has some unconventional ways of achieving his objectives.

*Islam appears to be controversial because some Muslims themselves make it controversial by their actions. I do not worship at Abu Bakr's Mosque in his community. I do not know him personally. I do not know how he operates with his family, with his wives. However, if anyone does what he did like the attempted coup, and all the other trouble, then they are going against Islamic law.*

Ayesha commented that Abu Bakr and his negative actions in the past and present are not in sync with Islamic teachings and principals.

*I cannot judge him, but from what I see, like the attempted coup and other violence, that is totally against Islam.*

Merriam did not want to judge Abu Bakr because Islam teaches her not to be judgmental of people. Merriam went on to state that even though she is not judging Abu Bakr, she could still have an opinion about his actions.

*Abu Bakr seems to be using Islam: This is my personal view. He is claiming to be using Islam as a front probably; I don't know. I think he is fanatical. I don't believe what he is doing has anything to do with Islam because Islam does not teach what he is saying. Unfortunately, I have to say that he has followers who maybe true Muslims that are misguided and falling into his fold, under him. He is not a role model and he may be misleading some of the Muslim followers. Personally, I think internationally he is maybe the reason for Muslims in Trinidad being branded. There are many aspects to it, one being politics. Islam is one way and if a person follows Islam and follows the Qur'an, then they will never go wrong. You will not fall in that trap. That is how I view things with Abu Bakr.*

Muslimah explained that even though Abu Bakr and she share the same beliefs in the Qur'an; their ideas are different. Muslimah felt that Abu Bakr's rationale and his modus operandi is different to most Muslims who practice Islam as it should be practiced. Muslimah expressed a sorrow for Abu Bakr because she thinks he is a lovely brother in Islam. She remembers how he used to be, and the fact that when he dresses up, he has a look that is somewhat like her husbands.

*Actually, one of Abu Bakr's four wives is a relative of mine, and she tells me that all the wives have good things to say about him. However, his militancy and his actions is something I cannot understand. His way of thinking I cannot understand, his movements, his measures and his utterances; I don't think I would ever be that bold or brave to say the things he says. Even if I had such thoughts in my mind, I would put them in kinder words and go about things in a different way...The Islamic way. It is not Islamic to terrorize anyone like he has been doing. I just don't see with his eyes at all.*

Similarly, Abu Bakr's actions in Trinidad, and his negative representation of Islam, and Muslims in general to the world also confuse Farida. She found it difficult to understand why Abu Bakr would want to add negativity to Islam's already bad image in the world.

*I think his image is a negative one, portraying Muslims like we are into missiles, guns, and gun toting. I think a lot of young men are converting to Islam to join Abu Bakr because of the prestige they will get for being in his group: They will get guns to carry around. They will have prestige around Trinidad; it is a kind of gang. His actions portray a negative image of Islam and it is a wrong image. Islam is already misconceived, so the more people hear about things like this; it becomes a bad invitation to Islam. It is more like an invitation to high gangster living.*

Farida went on to express her confusion about Abu Bakr's actions in Trinidad. She explained that she does not ask any questions about him and she tries to keep a distance from his community.

*I don't understand his actions, like the time when he publicly demanded all the wealthy Muslims in Trinidad had to pay the Zakat (taxes) or it was war. That to me was extreme. He is not in an Islamic country to begin with, so he can't just threaten people like that: That is wrong.*

Three of the six participants were very careful with their responses and discussion about Abu Bakr. One participant in particular asked to change her response about Abu Bakr a few times during the member-checking phase of the study.

*Muslim women fear prejudice of all Muslims as Terrorists: Unfair treatment and discrimination.*

On September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001 the world changed for everyone: Non-Muslims and Muslims alike. Muslims and Islam were at the center of great controversy and fear: Newspaper and television all shared stories about: "Islam 101," "women being oppressed in Islam," and "Muslims portrayed as terrorists." Many Muslims came forward claiming discrimination, and unfair treatment. Everyone began looking at Muslims in a different light. The effects of 9/11 and many terrorist acts all over the world since then have

created a climate of suspicion. Muslimah described feeling like everyone stares at her when she walks into a room.

*There have been times when I would be the only one in a crowd in Trinidad wearing Islamic garb and Hijab. I was at the bank once, and people look at you from the time you walk in, and everything suddenly goes quiet. They whisper and they wonder if maybe you have guns in your bag or under your Hijab.*

Amina believes that she could never be sure how people are reacting to her because she does not know what people are thinking; and they usually do not come out and say anything negative.

*Being in the human services field and educating others as a Muslim woman, I educate people across the board: Muslims and Non-Muslims. I don't see people in terms of race, color or anything. If anything as a Muslim, I am more objective because I am aware that Muslims can be treated with discrimination and unfair treatment. The people I educate have a fair chance of being treated equally at my hand because I see them in terms of who they are, what they are supposed to do and how I could help them. If a non-Muslim is in school for example, and they have a Muslim teacher who is a "practicing" Muslim, then they have a good and fair person taking care of their child. However, you just can't say that the other way around. A Muslim child going to a non-Muslim school and being taught by a non-Muslim teacher may get discriminated against for many reasons.*

Merriam describes her encounters with prejudice in Trinidad.

*In Trinidad, sometimes people may make remarks of ridicule like referring to Muslim women in Hijab as "Ninja's" or "Bandits." Sometimes the remarks are sexually suggestive such as wondering what is beneath the Hijab and gown. I have not experienced serious discrimination in Trinidad. When I travel abroad people look at you, but you really don't know what they are thinking, or what reservations they have in their minds and they don't tell you.*

Farida describes her encounters with prejudice in Trinidad and wearing the Purdah (face covering).

*People always make comments, but I try to ignore them. My sister usually alerts me to the fact that people just stare at me. People sometimes make comments of ridicule and others make perverted comments. I don't like it when men say "I*

*wonder what your sweet face looks like under the veil,” and other people call you a “bandit.” I try to ignore it.*

Farida expressed how she felt about being treated as a terrorist in her own country, after 9/11 and the other recent terrorist acts, as well as Abu Bakr and his threats to Muslims in Trinidad.

*The United States has Abu Bakr “on watch” now ever since the attempted coup in 1990. Muslims have a very negative image right now. It is creating bad things for Muslims here in Trinidad. In the Islamic school, there is a boy’s school and a girl’s school, and for Friday prayer there is now a plain-clothes officer stationed at these schools. These officers are constantly “scoping” us out; looking at us when we are in the Mosques. Even where my daddy is, there are plain-clothes officers there too. They don’t hide; they let you know who they are. It is unnerving. If they look at your passport at the airport, and see where you are studying here, they question you and make checks on you. Some Muslim people are simply going about their own business as normal and the Government is targeting them as possible terrorists. When they do that though, they put a strain on the individual Muslim to carry themselves in a certain way: To be undercover in a sense, secretive. It is a terrible situation.*

Ayesha knows that there is discrimination and unfair treatment in Trinidad because her daughters have experienced it first hand.

*Since I am a homemaker, I have not experienced the public life as my children have, but I know the uncomfortable stares. My daughter has experienced discrimination in public with regard to wearing her Hijab. There seems to be a racial struggle between East Indians and Africans in Trinidad and my daughter has expressed to me that she had been passed over for less qualified people due to her Hijab. She saw the difference in the way people treated her when she began wearing the Hijab more strictly: People treated her with a marked difference, and changed their behavior. All of this is due to everything changing since the attempted coup in 1990 and the 9/11 attacks in the United States.*

Ayesha described discrimination by namesake. She explained that having a Muslim name is not synonymous with terrorism. Similarly, not everyone with an Islamic or Arabic name is Muslim. In Trinidad, there are many different East Indian and African Muslim names and each time people travel, they are pulled aside and extensively



questioned. Some of these Trinidadians have similar names to those Muslim names on the terrorist list: They are portrayed as terrorists.

*Nowadays, when you hear Muslim or Islam, everyone thinks about terrorism. Everyone thinks the fundamentalists Muslims have been branded all over the world; that is so wrong. Everyone thinks all kinds of evil things about us, because we are Muslims. Islam does not encourage people to bomb or kill. You cannot watch the Twin Towers and bomb it, and kill innocent people. You surely will go to hell; you would not even “smell the breeze of Heaven.” People should not judge a Muslim person by their name only. Not because some Muslims do bad things, means that all Muslims behave the same way. That is wrong. People must not judge. Don’t pass judgment on us all.*

*View of Islamic world events: Muslim Women feeling that Islam is misunderstood.*

Misconceptions and wrong information about Muslim women and Islam on the whole continues to spread in the world today among non-Muslims and even some Muslims themselves. All the participants expressed similar feelings about Islam being misunderstood in the world today; especially with regard to Muslim women. All the participants stated that if Muslim women are being oppressed, then the “true Islam” is not being practiced in their surroundings. The participants equally stated that another reason for oppression among Muslim women is lack of knowledge and education, as well as; not all Muslims are “practicing” Muslims, therefore they treat their wives as society sometimes treats their wives. Amina describes how some Muslims compromise their faith.

*I think some Muslim men treat their women like how the society would treat women. If you are a “practicing” Islam, as it should be practiced, then women should be treated like queens. When Muslims are absorbed into the society in which they live, they start compromising and wanting to fit in. Then people start saying, “look how that Muslim man is treating his wife!” This behavior and this code of conduct is what the world sees of Islam and they judge wrongly*

Muslimah believes misconceptions and wrong information go both ways for non-Muslims and Muslims alike. She feels that non-Muslims should educate themselves about Islam before judging; and Muslims especially women, should learn about status and equal rights from the Qur'an. Muslimah described the importance of education and gaining knowledge.

*It is important to empower women and educate women to know their rights, as well as, others; non-Muslims to learn about "true" Islam, and what the Qur'an actually teaches: peace and love. We as Muslims know that Islam is beautiful and all the answers are in the Qur'an.*

Merriam believes that any mistreatment of women is not due to Islam, but people or individuals themselves misinterpreting the Qur'an for their own gains. Merriam feels that these actions make others judge Islam negatively.

*I try to encourage people to understand my religion and me. I think it is important to tell people what Islam is really about, and maybe you will see what I see in Islam. Once a person understands, a bit more about my beliefs, then they would not misunderstand Islam: Tolerance not ignorance.*

Farida similarly believes that Islam is a highly misunderstood religion because people don't take the time to educate themselves.

*I hope for a better understanding of Islam throughout the world; more tolerance is needed. Trinidad is usually more accepting of other cultures because of our diversity here.*

Ayesha felt that Islam is misunderstood because of the Islamic countries and the wars that take place in that region.

*I know some people are much oppressed, and the only way to get satisfaction is to do things, like Palestine. When people are oppressed, and you block them off, you stab them, you break up their houses and kill families; you sort of taunt the people to act in a certain way. These people then retaliate by bombing and killing. That*

*is wrong, but this is where Islam and Muslims are misunderstood: These Muslims are not representative of all Muslims.*

Ayesha went on to comment that not because people are dressed in Islamic garb like hers, mean that they are “practicing” Muslims.

*People can wear my clothes, and go out, and people will say he or she has Islamic wear, however if you are going to do wrong things, then you are not following Islamic ways. You can copy our way, wear the Hijab, wear the clothes but if you go out there and murder someone, or kill people, then you are not a Muslim; you are “a wolf in sheep’s clothing.”*

Salmah believes Islam is definitely misunderstood. She feels that some Muslims interpret parts of the Qur’an to suit themselves, for their own purposes.

*Islam is a misunderstood religion. It is important that people investigate, not necessarily Muslims, but Islam. Investigate because people make mistakes: I make mistakes, everyone can make a mistake, and sometimes we may not practice Islam to the true Letter of the Law. One should investigate the scriptures, the books where the laws are written so that Islam can be properly understood. In Islam and in many cases if we investigate the laws of the religion, we would ask ourselves where, are the people who practice this. It would often be difficult to find in any sphere or in any religion, not only Islam.*

Salmah believes that Muslims are blamed for all terrorist acts, which causes further misunderstanding of Islam and the blame may not be placed proportionately.

*All the bombings and terrorism are not from Muslims, but they blame Muslims first and they figure out half the time it is not Muslims: Well maybe at least a quarter of the time. It is sad. I think it’s sad that Muslims have to go that far to get what they want, especially when they don’t get anything from it. I think it’s sad and they are ignorant of true Islamic law. Some Muslims may not be raised in a proper way; maybe guns and bombs reach in their hands from a young age. As I understand it, they take children and use them for fighting. It is a sad affair when Muslims resort to this. Surprisingly to many people, Islam is a religion of peace and love. If anyone mistreats women, it is not true Islam.*

### Summary: Narrative Description of the Experiences and Practices

The common description that emerged across all the participant narratives was, “*it’s a way of life for us.*” This description of Islamic life embodies acceptance, familiarity and choice. The Islamic way of life is a choice made by all the women in the study, and Islam holds great significance and meaning to them. The Islamic way of life is about piety, devotion and the blessings and rewards of Allah in this world and in the next world of the after life.

The experiences and practices of the Muslim women consisted of three essential themes: *Muslim women’s self-expression of independence and individuality; The Qur’an as the center of a Muslim’s life; and Education and Knowledge of the Muslim woman.* Three minor themes also emerged from the participant narratives: *Abu Bakr as a negative representative of Muslim faith in Trinidad and Tobago; Muslim women fear prejudgment of all Muslims as terrorists: Unfair treatment and discrimination; and view of Islamic world events: Muslim women feeling that Islam is misunderstood.*

*Muslim women’s self expression of independence and individuality,* were described as ways that the Muslim women expressed who they were, what they were about, and their sense of style. The Muslim women in the study described their self-expressions through their dresscode, sexuality with husband, interactions with non-family males and polygyny. (Multiple wives) From the participants’ perspective, their Hijabs and Purdahs are worn by choice, and the Islamic garb is considered to be a true test of being a Muslim woman. The participants described the Hijab as providing them with a feeling of *protection, respect and empowerment.* *Protection* was important to the Muslim women in the study, especially living in the Caribbean island of Trinidad and Tobago.

They all felt protected from the rays of the sun as well as protected from the unwanted lustful gazes of men in public. *Respect* was derived from the Hijab because of their choice to wear it and participants also felt that men respected them more for not exposing themselves in public. *Empowerment* was a feeling based on the strength and maturity the participants felt when they wear the Hijab and know that they are not following fashion trends but doing what is right in Islam.

The Muslim women were adamant that their expressions of *Sexuality* are meant only for their husbands and only within the context of a marriage. The beautification process that many women include in their daily routines, including hair, nails, facials, pedicures, jewelry, makeup, outfits and perfume, are all done by the Muslim women with the intention of revealing these things inside their homes and for their husband's eyes alone. In public, Muslim women are to be fully covered in Hijab and loose fitting clothes, only exposing their hands, feet and sometimes face.

Muslim women are not allowed to socialize with non-family males on a one on one basis. According to Islam, a Muslim woman's modesty and chastity must be upheld in all situations; therefore Muslim women cannot touch strange men or shake their hands. *Intermingling* with non-family males can lead to pre-marital sex or courting which is not allowed in Islam.

*Polygyny* or multiple wives is allowed in Islam, but the participants felt this type of relationship was not for them personally. Two of the six participants were either related to or were close friends with a woman in a polygyny relationship. These participants described the reported benefits of the polygyny relationships as extra free time. These women would be able to use this time to do things for themselves; they were

not able to do if they were with their husbands constantly. Sharing and equality characterize the polygyny relationship.

*The Qur'an* is the center of a Muslim's life, and all the Muslim women are devoted to following the Qur'an strictly and living an Islamic life outlined by the teaching in the Qur'an; which is the revealed word of God given to the Prophet Muhammad.

All the participants complete their *five daily compulsory prayers* throughout the day. The designated times for prayer are specific to remind Muslims of God's presence in their lives, and to keep them on the straight path during the day.

*Prayers are led in the Mosque only by men* due to the effects that the voice and intonation of a woman can have upon men; as well as, the focus of attention cannot be on a woman when reading the Qur'an. Prayers and fasting have to be done in a clean state of ablution; therefore women are exempt from prayer during their menstrual cycle.

*The basic requirements of the Muslim woman's dresscode as outlined by the Qur'an are, full covering of a woman's body to maintain her chastity and her modesty.* The participants all described the Hijab and Islamic garb as a sign of their purity, dignity and chastity. As well as, the Hijab acts as a covering separating them from the evil of the world. The participants also felt that by wearing the Hijab it is a testament of their Muslim faith and their pride. All six participants felt that the Hijab and Islamic garb is a choice of piety and protects them from unwanted attention from men in public.

All six participants acknowledged their husbands as the *head of their households*;

Three of the six participants felt that men are a degree above women because they have more responsibilities than the women, whereas the other three participants felt the responsibilities are balanced overall but different.

All the Muslim women in the study honor the *extended family tradition* by usually living in close proximity to the husband's family. All participants acknowledged having multiple roles in the family that hold great significance and meaning for them. The multiple roles span their primary family, their current family as well as, extended family.

*Living life within the folds of Islam* is described by the participants as fitting their everyday life into their religion of Islam. Everything a Muslim does in their life has to be done according to Islam. Whereas; most other people try to squeeze their religion and faith into their hectic lives.

Muslims must seek *education and knowledge* throughout their lives, because Islamic studies and furthering Islamic knowledge is vital to prevent stagnation. During *early Islamic studies* in the participants' lives, they all learned what it meant to be a *good Muslim woman*. The participants also learned valuable Islamic lessons and beliefs from their parents, who lay the initial foundation of education and knowledge. A good Muslim woman is characterized by taking care of their husbands and their children, and passing on proper Islamic teachings and values to their children for future generations to continue to live an Islamic life.

All six participants' *early academics were in non-Muslim schools*. Two of the six participants were *rebellious* when they were younger, and did not follow the Qur'an strictly until they got older and their faith strengthened. The other participants only tested

boundaries when they were younger, but still followed the strict Islamic teachings that they were taught.

The participants all agreed that it is distressing to them when women do not learn about their status and their *equal rights in Islam*. The Muslim women all felt that Trinidad's Muslims *continually seek and share knowledge through community work* and Islamic studies for the betterment of Islam.

*Hifz is the memorization of the Qur'an* and is now considered to be one of the new criteria for marriage partner selection. Only one of the six participants was recently married less than a year ago, and was able to describe the part Hifz played in the marriage process. The other five participants were all married for over twelve years; most were married over twenty-five years.

*Abu Bakr as a negative representative of the Muslim faith in Trinidad and Tobago* was a related minor theme that involved the Muslim women's views on the controversy surrounding Abu Bakr in Trinidad and worldwide. All six participants felt that Abu Bakr portrays Muslims and Islam in a negative light. The participants felt that this negative image further promotes a worldwide *misunderstanding of Islam*, which was another minor theme that emerged from the experience. The Muslim women participants fear this misunderstanding and misconception of Islam will continue to cause *prejudgment of all Muslims as terrorists* which has already lead to *unfair treatment and discrimination* for some Muslims. All six participants wanted the outcome of the study to be a better understanding of Islam.



CHAPTER V  
DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS,  
AND LIMITATIONS

Introduction

This study investigated the experiences and practices of Muslim women in Trinidad and Tobago, from a Muslim woman's point of view. Chapters one through four presented and described the background of Muslims in Trinidad, the relevant literature research, the methodology which included the procedures used to conduct the study and the data collection techniques: Data was collected from interviews, observations, documents and audiotapes and the study findings. This chapter summarizes and discusses the findings, as well as, the conclusions based on the findings of the study. This chapter concludes with the implications for mental health professionals, the recommendations for future research and the limitations of the study.

Restatement of Background and Rationale

According to the Central Statistical office in Trinidad (1994, 2000), the Muslim community comprises approximately 10% of the total 1.3 million population. In Trinidad, there are both African and East Indian Muslims: Enslaved African Muslims were the first Caribbean Muslims introduced by Columbus. European dominance weakened the more rigid and traditional Islamic practices (Ibrahim, 1995), and therefore diluted the pure Islamic faith. The Islamic faith was reintroduced to Trinidad as a stronger force with the arrival of the East Indian indentured labors. The majority of Muslims decided to remain in Trinidad and Tobago rather than journey back to their original homelands (Ibrahim, 1995). The East Indian Muslim community in Trinidad had

greater numbers and strength over the African Muslims to practice and perpetuate Islam in the Caribbean. Trinidad and Tobago offered a unique opportunity to research modern and traditional Muslims side by side in a small geographic area. Trinidad is a non-Islamic country and therefore allowed the researcher an easier and safer opportunity to interview and collect data from Muslim women.

The researcher learnt how Muslim women in Trinidad experience and practice their Islamic culture and tradition in a non-Islamic country. There is a need for further research on this topic because Islam is one of the world's fastest growing religions with more than 1 billion followers, half of whom are women. (Emerick, 2002; Mehran, 1998). The significance and purpose of this study was to explain and understand the experiences of living as a Muslim woman in Trinidad, from a Muslim woman's point of view. In this study, Muslim women were allowed to voice their feelings, ideas and opinions about their cultural and religious traditions in Islam. The significance of this study was more importantly, to give Muslim women an opportunity to be heard and to become more aware. In the past, there had been inadequate international data on women from conventional sources (Mosteshar, 1996). This invisibility of women's data perpetuated the idea that women were less important and less significant. This study addressed women's issues from women's points of view, which will help in the understanding of the role of women and their roles within their family lives.

In the years, since the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks in the United States, everyone has become more aware of Muslims and Islam. News and media stories have constantly highlighted the Muslim woman's perils and plights in the Middle East. These negative images of Muslim women and terrorist acts have permeated the Western culture. The

majority of past and current literature research mirrored the same negativity about Muslim women and Islam that has been seen in the news and media. There were very few research literatures that present a positive or objective light on Islam: Usually any positive literature has been written by Muslims themselves. In this study, the literature review spanned twenty-eight years for a more comprehensive view of Islam and Muslim women, however, the majority of the research showed Islam to be a dominant force and influence in women's lives, even with their own families to the smallest detail (Ali, 2006). Ali's (2006) research supports the majority of the literature by stating that it is an offense for a Muslim woman to glance at strange men, shake a man's hand or even brush past a man. According to Ali (2006), a Muslim man's reputation and honor depends on the "good" and obedient behavior of his female members of his family.

The literature also stated that Muslims do not often question Islam, and Islamic values and beliefs are passed from generation to generation. The past and current literature also reiterated the misinterpretation of the Qur'an by many Muslim men to have power over the women, however; recent literature has also shed light on the new feminist Muslims who have begun to reinterpret the Qur'an. Islamic feminism has slowly begun to surface in the recent literature and Muslim women are sharing knowledge and education of the Qur'an with each other, from within the realms of Islam. The purpose of this study was to explain and understand the experiences of living as a Muslim woman in Trinidad, from a Muslim woman's point of view. This study presented the traditional views, the cultural and religious significance, and meanings of Islam in a way that both insiders and outsiders of the Islamic culture can achieve a greater meaning and understanding of the culture (Schein, 1985).

### Restatement of the Methodology

In this study, the researcher selected traditional Muslim women who live in Trinidad, who were over eighteen years old. These Muslim women could be either African or East Indian descent and their primary practicing religion must be Islam. Traditional Muslims live a lifestyle that has strict adherence to Islamic teachings, and they are more rigid on implementing religious rituals in their daily lives (Robinson, 2004). The researcher recruited a key person from the Muslim women's league in Trinidad and this key person helped the researcher make contact with other traditional Muslim women who fit the criteria for being a participant in the study.

The key person informed the prospective participants about the study and gave them a flyer with the researchers contact information. The key person did not know who eventually became participants in the study. The researcher met with each participant and explained the confidentiality aspect of the study before they signed the informed consent form. The researcher conducted an interview with open-ended questions; audio taped the interview session and transcribed the responses for each participant.

The researcher chose the qualitative multiple case study method in this study to achieve a detailed, in-depth data collection and an understanding of the Islamic culture in a real life setting. Case study strives for a holistic understanding of cultural systems in action. Critical theory incorporated with feminist theory was the approach best suited to raise consciousness through self-reflection and dialogue. Critical theory seeks to expose ways in which societies and cultures can oppress human potential. Incorporating feminist theory with the critical theory was considered the most valuable approach because feminist theory validates women's knowledge and women's ways of knowing which

helped to better understand the expression and practices of living as a Muslim woman in a non-Islamic country.

### Discussion of Findings

The results of the interviews showed many common themes and experiences among the participants. Even though the women's lives were different, they all shared the same experiences with regard to their devotion to Islam and Islamic practices. The women, when interviewed, all used the same phrase "it's a way of life for us" when describing the role Islamic traditions and practices play in their lives. Islamic way of life is a conscious and willing choice made by all the women who participated in the study. This willingness embodies a true and total devotion to Islam, and all the religion's traditions. The women all describe their devotion to Islam in terms of piety and blessings from Allah in this world and even more importantly, in the after life in Paradise.

The predominant themes that surfaced from the Muslim women's experiences and practices were Muslim women's self expression of independence and individuality; the Qur'an as the center of a Muslim's life; and education and knowledge of the Muslim women. Muslim women's self expression of independence and individuality embodies each woman's personal style, as well as their individual testaments to Allah and Islam. The women were extremely vocal with their self-expressions because they all wanted the researcher and the public to know that in Islam women are allowed to express their feelings, ideas, opinions and thoughts openly, especially in Trinidad.

Three out of the six participants used their dress code to express a personal sense of style by combining their East Indian culture with the Islamic traditions. These participants used a combination of colors and fabrics for their Hijab and Purdah. The

other three participants wore the basic blacks and grays. The women all described the Hijab “choice” as a decision they have made willingly. The women consider wearing Hijab and Purdah, a true testament of being a Muslim woman: The Islamic garb sets them apart from all others in public. They all consider this separation as one that demonstrates their purity, chastity and modesty. The majority of the participants expressed frustration with regard to non-Muslims feeling that they are oppressed because of their dress code. The dress code is a willing choice that devout Muslim women make and it is a choice that is not forced upon them. Several of the women described the dress code as providing them with protection, respect and empowerment.

They all felt protected from the heat of the sun, especially living in the Caribbean island of Trinidad and Tobago. They also felt the dress code acted as a barrier that protected them from the unwanted, lustful stares of men in the public. Respect was derived from wearing the Hijab. All the participants felt that by wearing Hijab, they were respected more by men because they were not exposing their bodies in public. However, four out of the six participants expressed that men still made unwanted sexual and/or discriminatory remarks to them, despite them being fully covered. The women all expressed a sense of empowerment when they wore their Hijab. The Muslim women described a feeling of pride that was based on the strength and maturity it took for them to wear the Hijab, and to know that they were not following the fashion trends but doing what was right in Islam.

The women also described a sense of freedom because they never had to keep up with “so called western trends of fashion.” The majority of the women acknowledged the oppressive burka and dress code of the Middle Eastern Islamic countries; however, they

were adamant that anything oppressive to women was not the “true” Islam being practiced.

The Muslim women were adamant that their expressions of sexuality were meant only for their husbands and only within the context of a marriage. A woman’s usual beautification process includes hair, nails, facials, pedicures, jewelry, makeup, outfits and perfume, all of which are done by Muslim women with the intention of revealing these things in the privacy of her home, for her husband only. In public, Muslim women must be fully covered head to toe in Hijab, and loose fitting Islamic clothes that only expose their hands, feet and sometimes face. The Muslim women enhanced their husband’s ego and sexual interest because the husband often expressed a feeling of excitement, since he was the only person to see his wife without Islamic garb. The Muslim women commented that Western women were so overly concerned with displaying their beauty in public for everyone to see, that they neglected to make the same effort of looking special for their own husbands at home. The majority of participants expressed the fact that they felt Western women are oppressed because they are slaves to fashion; often over expose their bodies in public, and are often viewed as sexual objects, instead of independent, intelligent individuals.

In Islam, a woman’s modesty and chastity must be upheld in all situations; therefore, Muslim women cannot touch or hug strange men or even shake their hands. The participants felt strongly that intermingling with non-family males can lead to a situation of pre-martial relations or courting / flirting which is not allowed in Islam. Each participant felt that interacting in a “familiar” way with non-family males could

compromise their purity, modest and chastity. Familiarity, as the women described, included gestures and tone of voice.

Polygyny or multiple wives is allowed in Islam. All the women support this concept because it is allowed, once the wives are treated equally; however none of the participants felt this type of relationship was personally for them. Two of the six participants were either related to or were close friends with a woman in a polygyny relationship. These participants described the reported benefits of the polygyny relationship as extra free time to do things that they normally would not have the time to do with their husbands in the house constantly. Many of the women attest that Muslim women in these relationships are able to pursue separate individual interests such as school, career, personal interests or hobbies. Sharing and equality are the characteristics of the polygyny relationship.

The Qur'an is the center of a Muslim's life and it is the revealed word of God given to Prophet Muhammad. All the women used the phrase that "their lives are centered around prayer and strictly following the Qur'an and Islamic teachings." Many of the women made an interesting point about Islam and prayer. They stated that each planned their daily lives around their religious life, instead of the reverse. The participants felt that Westerners try to fit their religious beliefs into their hectic lives. The participants all agreed that the five daily compulsory prayers were the most important part of their days. Having the five scheduled prayers throughout the day, helped Muslims avoid temptation and kept them on the straight and narrow path to Allah: The prayers also remind Muslims of God's presence in their hectic lives. The women all support the idea of only Muslim men leading prayer in the Mosques. The participants all agreed that



the female voice and tone could cause unwanted male attention, which can detract from the Qur'an's prayer focus. During the prayers and reciting of the Qur'an, the voice is supposed to be monotone, or business-like, so the focus was always on the prayer verses. The importance of a clean state of ablution was for men and women equally. The women felt this process was misunderstood in Islam. The women participants agreed that the focus of ablution is usually on Muslim women because of their menstrual cycle, and the exemption from fasting and prayers during that time of their menses.

The Qur'an and Islam required a Muslim woman to be fully covered in Hijab and loose fitting clothes when in public, to maintain her modesty and purity. It was also a requirement in Islam that Muslim women have to dress differently and set themselves apart from the non-Muslims in the public. Therefore, wearing the Hijab and Purdah is a testament of a Muslim woman's faith, and an outward sign of her purity, modesty and chastity. The Hijab is also considered a barrier that protects the women from the lustful gazes, and unwanted attention from men in public. The Muslim woman has the responsibility of appropriately covering herself in public and deterring men's attention.

The six participants all support and acknowledge their husbands as the head of their households. Three of the six women in the study used the phrase "men are a degree above women" because they felt that men have more responsibilities in Islam than the woman has, in the maintenance of the household. The other three participants felt that the responsibilities were balanced overall, but different: Equality but not identical. The women participants felt that Islam is more progressive than other Western religions, since Muslim women do not "theoretically" have to cook, clean, wash or suckle their children;

it is their husband's responsibility to provide all these things for them, and maintain their needs. However, the women admitted that they do these chores in reality, out of love.

The Muslim women all honor the extended family tradition by usually living in close proximity to the husband's family. All participants acknowledged having multiple roles within the family, a characteristic that is highly significant in Islam. The Muslim woman is considered the mother and teacher of her family; she is the cohesive glue that keeps her family on the Islamic religious path. A woman's most blessed role in Islam is the role of mother; she instills the initial foundation of Islamic beliefs and values in her family, from generation to generation.

Living within the folds of Islam encompasses fitting their everyday life into their religion of Islam. Everything a Muslim does in their life has to be done according to Islam. Muslim women have to follow what is halaal (permissible) in Islam. The participants agree that the Qur'an and the Hadith provide guidance on how a Muslim should live all aspects of their lives, in order to get tremendous blessings from Allah in this life and the next life.

Muslim women must seek education and knowledge throughout their lives and pass that education and knowledge to other Muslim women. This passing on of knowledge helps Muslim women learn their status in life and know their equal rights in Islam. Muslim women have the responsibility of providing the initial foundation of education and knowledge to their families. Muslim women also teach their children how to be good Muslims and lead a devout Islamic life.

The six participants were all educated in non-Muslim school environments. Two of the six participants were rebellious in their youth and did not follow the Qur'an as

strictly as they were supposed to, until they got older and their faith strengthened. The other participants only tested boundaries when they were younger, but still upheld the strict Islamic teachings that they were taught by their families.

The participants all agreed that it is distressing to them when women do not learn about their status and equal rights in Islam. The Muslim women all felt that Trinidad's Muslims continually seek and share knowledge through community work and Islamic studies for the betterment of Islam.

Hifz is the memorization of the Qur'an and is now considered one of the new criteria for marriage partner selection. Only one of the six participants was recently married less than a year ago, and was able to describe the significance that Hifz played in the marriage process. Memorizing the Qur'an further assures Muslim men that Muslim women are devoted to Islam and pious. Memorizing the Qur'an also signifies a higher level of piety that is desired among Muslim men. The majority of participants were married for over twenty-five years. Muslim girls are memorizing the Qur'an at earlier ages now in Trinidad.

Abu Bakr as a negative representation of the Muslim faith in Trinidad and Tobago was a minor theme in the study that was related to the Muslim women's experiences and practices. The Muslim women all shared their views of Abu Bakr in Trinidad. All six participants felt that he is fanatical and a negative image of Islam worldwide. The participants felt that the negative image he portrays, further promotes a worldwide misunderstanding of Islam. The Muslim women participants fear that this misunderstanding and misconception of Islam will continue to cause prejudgment of all Muslims as terrorists, which has already lead to unfair treatment and discrimination for

some Muslims. All six participants wanted the outcome of the study to be a better understanding of Islam.

#### Findings in Relation to Critical Theory

In this study, critical theory was used in conjunction with feminist theory and family therapy. According to Rediger (1996), the goal of critical theory is to raise consciousness through self-reflection and dialogue. The women participants in this study spoke and acknowledged the oppression that Muslim women face in other Islamic countries. During the interview process, the participants' awareness of other realities became more apparent. The women all made a distinction between "practicing" and "non-practicing" Muslims with regard to oppressive tendencies. The women all shared their appreciation for living in Trinidad, where they felt for the most part, the "true Islam" is being practiced. Many of the women in this study expressed their frustration about some Muslim women still not educating themselves about their equal status and rights in Islam. This lack of knowledge allows others to take advantage of women by interpreting certain verses in the Qur'an for their own benefits or causes. The women realized that the passing on of knowledge and education to women by women is essential. Morgaine (1994) sees this as critical theory 's way to expose the ways in which societies and cultures can oppress human potential. Morgaine (1994) also sees this as the women in the study, examining the societal structures around them; as well as, their own values, beliefs and assumptions about everyday life.

The universal Western feminism is not universal in all international cultures, which is evident through Chung's (2005) theory and practice. Chung (2005) supports the fact that feminist theory can only be effective if it is culturally sensitive. This was evident

in the study when many of the women expressed an apprehension about Western ideas, because they felt that Western media and news have continually stereotyped Islam with negative images of oppression and terrorism. The Muslim women in this research study have continued to strengthen their faith, and become even more entrenched in Islamic tradition due to the worldwide negative perception of Islam by the West. The researcher's impression is that any external influence or ideas of change has to be a blend of Western and Islamic principles in order to be accepted by any Muslim community. When reflecting upon El Guindi's (2005) theory of Islamic feminism which situates feminism within the context of Islam and provides empowerment and liberation without disrupting or disputing the entire culture of Islam.

El Guindi's (2005) Islamic feminism is essential since the Muslim women in the study expressed that their Islamic faith and traditions continue to strengthen as they acquire more education; they also stated that they would never abandon their Islamic beliefs. Therefore, According to El Guindi (2005) and Badran (2005), Muslim women can achieve greater rights and dignities but it has to be from within the Islamic culture, and it may not be achieved exactly as the Western notions would perceive change. This aspect was evident when the Muslim women described their full body dress code covering and Hijab in terms of a feminist tool, which they felt kept them safe, and did not exploit them as sex symbols. The West often views the Islamic dress code as a tool of oppression; whereas, the Muslim women see their style of dress as a feminist tool of expression.

The importance the family holds for Muslim women is apparent from the data. Muslim women's lives are centered around prayer and family life; therefore,

incorporating family therapy into critical theory and Islamic feminism is crucial for any holistic empowerment of Muslim women. Framo (1992) believes that the messages and beliefs that filter down from generation to generation in the family must be explored, because these belief systems ultimately affect the individual. Each Muslim woman in the study described the instillation of values and beliefs from generation to generation, which secures the maintenance of an Islamic lifestyle. Islamic values and beliefs were instilled from each woman's primary parental family, and she in turn passed it on to her own family. Grandparents and other family relatives in the extended family unit also influenced each woman's children. Many of the Muslim women in the study live on the same grounds with extended family. Therefore, Silverstein & Goodrich (2003) and Evan, Kincade, Marbley, & Seem (2005) emphasize that family therapy has to address not only the position of the woman in the culture, but also the position or status of the women within their own extended family systems.

#### Findings in Relation to Other Related Literature

Upon reviewing recent literature, the researcher found the majority of literature on Islam and Muslim women contradicts the findings in this study. The majority of the existing literature and knowledge base about Islam and Muslim women are mostly represented in a negative manner within the mainstream Western media: Oppression, terrorism and abuse are almost always synonymous terms used when Islam is discussed. In reviewing the literature, Ali (2006) and Goodwin's (2005) research in the Netherlands and France, which are both secular, non-Islamic countries; mirrors the media stories of negative imagery that have long permeated the West about Muslim women's plights and perils in Islam.

Ali (2006) is an ex-Muslim who is calling for an Islamic enlightenment and reform in the Netherlands, and all around the world. Ali (2006) has publicly criticized Islam in the media, and she states that the essence of a Muslim woman is often reduced to her hymen. Ali (2006) relates her experiences as a Muslim woman to help other oppressed Muslim women in the world to seek their own liberation. Similarly, Goodwin (2005), explored the international crisis in France where many Muslim women are being held prisoner in their Islamic faith Goodwin's (2005) research examined Muslim women's oppression and inequality in France; as well as, the French Hijab controversy in the schools where Muslims girls were not allowed to attend schools in their Islamic garb. Ali (2006) and Goodwin's (2005) research on Islam and Muslim women embodies the majority of the research literature currently in existence.

On the contrary, Hasan's (2000) research on American Muslims supports the research findings found in this study. Hasan (2000) states that the Western media continues to discredit Islam by only highlighting Muslim women's oppression. She is frustrated that reporters do not point out that patriarchal culture, not Islam is often to blame for the mistreatment of Muslim women. The Muslim women in this study expressed similar ideas, thoughts and concerns that were congruent with Hasan's (2000) research. The one concern that was shared by these Muslim women; as well as, Hasan (2000) was the media's constant negative portrayal of Muslims and Islam. They felt that this negativity in the media and literature is what causes the damaging stereotypes of Islam to persist. Hasan's (2000) research examines many American movies and television shows that play on the harmful Muslim stereotypes that already persist. Hasan (2000) and the Muslim women, who participated in this study, felt they needed to come

together as Muslim women to help end the harmful stereotyping that continues to plague them.

Hasan's (2000) research supports the researcher's findings in Trinidad; however, it is still in the minority of the existing literature. The majority of the existing literature says that Islam is an oppressive, out dated religion that continues to marginalize Muslim women. On the other hand, the researcher's findings acknowledge oppression and injustice to some Muslim women; however, they feel that abuse and oppression of women is a global factor, and not just a factor in Islam. The researcher's findings also state that Islam is a religion of peace, and the actions of a few fanatical Muslims in the Middle East should not be generalized to all Muslims in the world. The researcher's findings has a place in the existing literature, since it highlights an objective and well researched view on Islam; the positive and the negative aspects are shown; as well as, the positive and negative reviews of literature, all of which allow the public to better understand Islam, its traditions and true meanings.

### Conclusions

Several conclusions can be drawn from the findings of this study.

1. Worldwide negative perception of Islam has brought Muslims closer together and further strengthened their faith in Islam creating a "we against the world" mentality.
2. Islamic faith strengthens with age, as well as with education in Trinidad.
3. All participants agreed that Muslim women in Trinidad are usually more educated in the Qur'an than in other Islamic countries.



4. All the participants acknowledged Middle Eastern mistreatment of Muslim women; however, they all disassociated themselves with abuse or mistreatment. They all felt that Muslim men who mistreat or abuse women are not following the true Islam: Instead they are being influenced by their culture or their own individual agendas.
5. “Traditional” is not synonymous with oppression, abuse or mistreatment of Muslim women, especially in the unique situation of Trinidad.
6. Social conditioning is strong in the Islamic family system. Islamic values and beliefs are instilled and maintained through family and extended family from generation to generation. The family system is held in high esteem.
7. Islam is a religion of peace, despite the fact that there are people in the world that will do horrendous acts in the name of Islam, but it is not the true Islam.
8. The sentences of the Qur’an are complex and can be misinterpreted by Muslims to suit their own selfish interests. Therefore, a critical reading of the Qur’an’s verses and themes with regard to gender roles and equal rights should be a priority for Islamic reform.
9. One’s perception is their reality, and perceptions are relative and different for various people around the world. What non-Muslims think is oppressive may not be considered oppressive for Muslims. The idea of change is also relative; the change the Muslim women were seeking was an emancipation and liberation from the stereotypes and prejudgments that have long plagued them in Western media.

10. Muslim women do not consider Islamic garb and the Hijab a form of oppression or abuse. It is a symbol of honor, duty, righteousness, purity, modesty and chastity: It is a choice that is not forced upon them.
11. Women's abuse is a global factor that occurs in every country and in every culture, and the Muslim women in the study cannot understand why the focus is solely on Islam.
12. Islam and the practice of Islam is not one or unified. Islam teaches peace and equality, but in practice it can be completely different. Islamic faith in practice teaches the faithful not to question Islam, but follow the leaders of Islam. At times, following a leader blindly can lead to misinterpretations of the Qur'an, and indirectly suppress human potential.
13. Muslim women have been given a great deal of responsibility to deter men's unwanted gazes and sexual attention. Women have to control what is not really in their power to control, since one cannot control another person's behavior. Many of the Muslim women admitted that men are men, and they still lust after Muslim women, even though they are completely covered in public: In Trinidad, some men find the Hijab and Purdah erotic.
14. More research on Islam and Islamic practices is needed, in order to have a better understanding of Islam, rather than only relying on the media.

Overall, the researcher's findings in this study were not congruent with the initial hypothesis of the study which was older Muslim women would be set in their traditional ways and may resist change, while the younger Muslim women who are being educated, would welcome change. The researcher found the younger Muslim women becoming

more educated in both academics and the Qur'an. However, the more educated they became, the more their strict Islamic faith was strengthened even to the smallest detail. On the contrary, older Muslim women were less strict with the small details, as well as with some of the Islamic traditions. These women were more inclined to introduce new possibilities to help reform and give the world a more positive view of Islam.

The researcher attributes this reality to the current worldwide negative image of Islam, and younger Muslim women wanting to show the world their devotion, strength and pride in being a Muslim. Therefore, they have reverted to a more traditional and strict solidarity in Islamic practice, creating the "Muslims against the world" mentality. Muslims, especially the women who are usually under constant scrutiny, have been drawn closer together, as a way of protecting themselves against the world's negative views of Islam. This is evident with the increased use of the Purdah or face veil and more young Muslim women now memorizing the Qur'an in Trinidad, to show a higher level of piety.

#### Implications for Mental Health Professionals

Mental health professionals living and counseling in today's multicultural world need to have additional tools in their clinician's toolbox. Vast migration has caused the population of the United States to become more diverse in nature: This diversity has significant implications for mental health professionals.

Counseling programs should make multicultural counseling a mandatory part of the curriculum. Counselors need to expand their knowledge base to include multicultural (Chung, 2005; Murray, 2002) or culturally sensitive counseling, so they would be better equipped to handle the issues of diverse cultures and clientele.

As more mental health professionals include multicultural counseling into their repertoire, they would also have to challenge themselves to think differently and broaden their own views to be congruent with an international world view (Chung, 2005). As counselors broaden their views, and challenge their thinking, they must also increase their knowledge of other cultures (Murray, 2002) by doing their own research and not relying on cultural stereotypes or knowledge that is based on media biases. Mental health professionals should also become more aware of the various issues specific to diverse populations such as Muslims and Islam: Some issues specific to the Islamic culture would be prayer (Murray, 2002), polygyny and fear of discrimination. Counseling can be beneficial when dealing with issues of the polygyny relationship, issues of Muslim women's self esteem, depression and jealousy could arise out of these relationship as well as the effect on the children born within this relationship. Counselors also need to incorporate a client's religion into their treatment if it is a significant aspect in their lives (Murray, 2002).

Counselors should expand their knowledge of dominant or increasingly popular religions or cultures such as Islam, by incorporating an Islamic component into their counseling skills and therefore blending Islam and Western ideas into counseling practice (Murray, 2002). Many of the Muslim women in the study expressed that modesty must be maintained in all situations, and one participant even included modesty in therapy sessions. The participant said that a woman couldn't counsel a man alone; another female must accompany him. In this situation, counselors can consider co-therapists as a way to be more culturally sensitive to Islamic issues and maintain modesty.

Another Islamic component that has to be considered in counseling is the relationship of Muslim women to their extended families (Evans, Kincade, Marbley, & Seem, 2005; Silverstein & Goodrich, 2003). Family therapy can help highlight the importance and significance the family holds for Muslim women, since Muslim women's lives center around their family and their extended family systems. Awareness at an international level, can improve the practice of counseling and helping diverse cultures with issues that are relevant to them.

#### Recommendations for Future Study

This study could be improved if a researcher compared and contrasted Muslim women's feelings and points of view in a secular or non-Islamic country versus the points of view of Muslim women in Islamic countries. A researcher could also go a step further and compare and contrast the Muslim women's feelings and points of view in several other secular or non-Islamic countries such as the Netherlands, France, United States and Guyana: The findings could be compared to these Trinidad's findings.

Another interesting possibility for future study would be the polygyny relationship. A researcher can study polygyny within Islam and the effect on the multiple wives and children born into this relationship. These recommendations for future study all focus on Muslim women's feelings, thoughts and ideas from all around the world; these findings and studies would be invaluable to the international women's research, and would allow others to have a better understanding of Islam and the woman's point of view.

### Limitations of the Study

The following section presents the limitations of the study.

1. There may be reluctance on the part of the participants to answer certain questions in the interview process.
2. The non-random nature of the participant selection could limit the study's generalizability.
3. In this study, potential harm to participants was minimized, however; some women maybe hesitant to participate in the study or if they do participate, they may not want to admit to being abused or mistreated.
4. The traditions and / or religion of the Muslim culture always had a mistrust of the western media and publicity in general due to the often stereotypical and negative image of Islam. Therefore, some Muslim women may be ambivalent about participating in the study or they could use the study to advocate for Islam, so as not to further add to the negativity about Islam.
5. This study was done in a secular or non-Islamic country where there is a large Muslim / Islamic population. The study was not done in an Islamic religious state where the findings may vary.

Additionally, the researcher examined as many possible interpretations of the data. However, there can be other possible explanations.

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APPENDIX A  
**Barry University**  
Institutional Review Board

Letter of Cooperation

Dear Prospective Key Person,

Your cooperation in a research project is requested. The research is being conducted by Joanna Headley, a doctoral student in the Counseling department at Barry University, and is seeking information that will be useful in the field of counseling and education. The purpose of this study is to answer the central research question, which is how do Muslim women in Trinidad experience, and practice the Muslim traditions of which they are a part in a non-Islamic country? The aim is to explain and understand the experiences of living as a Muslim woman in Trinidad from a Muslim woman's point of view. In accordance with this aim, the following procedure will be used: one- to -one interview between researcher and participant. The interview will take approximately one hour, and there will be a total of three meetings: one initial meeting, the interview, and the interview follow-up meeting, all meetings will be approximately one hour.

The community of Muslim women was chosen for this study to give women a voice to share their feelings, experiences and ideas, and the unique opportunity to present the traditional views, cultural and religious significance of Islam and its meanings in a way that both insiders and outsiders of the Islamic culture can achieve a greater meaning and understanding of the culture. Trinidad offers a unique situation, with modern and traditional Muslim communities living closely on a small Caribbean island.

If you decide to cooperate in this research as a key person, you will be asked to assist the researcher in identifying prospective participants for this study that fit the criteria of a traditional Muslim woman. See Research Information form for criteria. You will be asked to sign a confidentiality agreement to honor the confidentiality and privacy of the prospective participants. You will also be asked to inform the researcher about rules and conditions of the Muslim community that the researcher must abide by during the study, including keeping interactions in the community low-key and the conservative dress code that should be worn by researcher during meetings and interviews. As a key person, you will be asked to act as a resource to help the researcher better understand the Muslim community. As a key person, you will ONLY inform prospective participants about the study, and give them the Research Information form. As a key person you may also share the responsibility with the researcher for watching out for and being aware of safety issues for participants. See safety protocol form. As a key person, you will be asked in the initial meeting with the researcher to suggest possible procedures or plans of action to assist participants should a safety issue or concern arise during the course of the study. These procedures should be unique to the Muslim population in Trinidad, and should come from within the realms of Islam, since these will best serve the participants.

Your consent to be a key person is strictly voluntary and, should you choose to discontinue your cooperation and assistance as a key person, you can do so at any time during the study, and there will be no adverse effects or consequences.

For the purposes of this study, having a safety protocol in place, and discussing potential harm in the meetings with participants, as part of the ongoing data and safety monitoring will reduce any potential harm to participants. Upholding the confidentiality and privacy of participants will also help to reduce any potential harm to participants. Although there are no direct benefits to you, your cooperation as a key person will give women who participate in this study an opportunity to voice their feelings, ideas and experiences in an open, non-judgmental setting, and give the participants the opportunity for self-reflection with regard to the context of their lives in Trinidad and Tobago. Your cooperation will also help the outside world have a better understanding of Islamic practices, traditions and meanings especially in a time when Islam is so misunderstood throughout the world.

As a key person you will be aware that all names of prospective participants will be held in confidence to the extent permitted by law. You will be asked to abide by the confidentiality agreement that will be signed upon agreement to cooperate in the study. Any published research will refer to pseudonyms only; no names will be used in the study. All data will be securely stored and available only to the researcher and the researcher's advisor. Data will be kept at all times in a locked file cabinet in the researcher's office and/or residence. All video and audio recordings will be erased and destroyed as soon as study is completed. Video will only be used with participant permission. All data will be destroyed in five years. Signed consent forms will be kept separately from the data. All participants will be asked to sign an Informed Consent form, when they agree to participate in the study.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding the study, you may contact me, the researcher, Joanna Headley, at (868) 375-9872, (305) 812-1756, by email at [JHEADLEYMiami@aol.com](mailto:JHEADLEYMiami@aol.com) or my supervisor, Dr. Maureen Duffy, at (305) 899-3701.

Thank you for your cooperation,

Sincerely,  
Joanna Headley, LMHC



## APPENDIX B

**Barry University**  
Institutional Review Board

Confidentiality Agreement

As a Key Person or "gatekeeper" in this study, I will be assisting the researcher by identifying prospective participants for the study \_\_\_\_\_

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I understand that I will have access to prospective participants' names, and I will be acting, as a resource to help the researcher better understand the Muslim community. By signing this statement, I am indicating my understanding of my obligation to maintain confidentiality and agree to the following:

- I understand that names and any other identifying information about study participants are completely confidential.
- I agree to **ONLY** inform prospective participants about the study, and give them the Research Information form, which contains the researcher's contact information. If they decide to participate in the study, I understand that I will only know of the prospective participants' I suggested would fit the criteria for the study, but I will **NOT** know whether they actually decided to participate.
- I understand that I will be acting, as a resource to help the researcher better understand the Muslim community in Trinidad.
- I understand that a breach of confidentiality may be grounds for disciplinary action.
- I agree to notify the researcher or supervisor immediately should I become aware of an actual breach of confidentiality or situation, which could potentially result in a breach, whether this is on my part or on the part of another person.

Signature	Date	Printed Name
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Signature	Date	Printed Name
-----------	------	--------------

APPENDIX C  
**Barry University**  
Institutional Review Board

Research Information Flyer

Dear Prospective Participant,

Your participation in a research project is requested. The research is being conducted by Joanna Headley, a doctoral student in the Counseling department at Barry University, and is seeking information that will be useful in the field of counseling and education. The purpose of this study is to answer the central research question in this study, which is how do Muslim women in Trinidad experience, and practice the Muslim traditions of which they are a part in a non-Islamic country? The aim is to explain and understand the experiences of living as a Muslim woman in Trinidad from a Muslim woman's point of view. In accordance with this aim, the following procedure will be used: one- to -one interview between researcher and participant. The interview will take approximately one hour, and there will be a total of three meetings: one initial meeting, the interview, and the interview follow-up meeting, all meetings will be approximately one hour.

The community of Muslim women was chosen for this study to give women a voice to share their feelings, experiences and ideas, and the unique opportunity to present the traditional views, cultural and religious significance of Islam and its meanings in a way that both insiders and outsiders of the Islamic culture can achieve a greater meaning and understanding of the culture. Trinidad offers a unique situation, with modern and traditional Muslim communities living closely on a small Caribbean island.

Criteria for Inclusion in the study

Participants' must live in Trinidad and be willing to talk to the researcher and fits the criteria of a Muslim woman.

Participants' must be women who are 18 years or older.

Participants' can be of African or East Indian descent.

Participants' primary practicing religion must be Islam.

Participants must be more the traditional type Muslim woman whose outward lifestyle demonstrates a strict adherence to Islamic teachings, which will be determined by self-report.

If you decide to participate in this study, please contact the researcher, Joanna Headley, at (868) 375-9872 during the course of the study, and (305) 812-1756 after the study is completed. The researcher can also be contacted by email at

[JHEADLEYMiami@aol.com](mailto:JHEADLEYMiami@aol.com). The researcher's supervisor, Dr. Maureen Duffy, can also be contacted at (305) 899-3701.

Your participation in this study is strictly voluntary and, should you decline to participate, answer any questions, or should you choose to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no adverse effects or negative consequences for you. You may also choose to reschedule your meeting with the researcher either before the meeting or during meeting/interview time if needed.

As a research participant you will be aware that any information provided during the course of the study, will be held in confidence to the extent permitted by law. Any published research will refer to pseudonyms (fake names) only; no names will be used in the study. The confidentiality and privacy of participants will be protected at all times during the study. All information obtained, will follow the strict conditions of the informed consent (a form that will be given to you to sign once you decide to participate). Thank you in advance,

Sincerely,  
Joanna Headley, LMHC

APPENDIX D  
**Barry University**  
Institutional Review Board

Informed Consent

Dear Research Participant:

Your participation in a research project is requested. The research is being conducted by Joanna Headley, a doctoral student in the Counseling department at Barry University, and is seeking information that will be useful in the field of counseling and education. In accordance with this aim, the following procedures will be used: 3 one-to-one interviews with researcher of approximately one hour each at a time and place that is at the participant's convenience. The initial interview will consist of explaining the protocol, addressing any questions pertaining to the study, and all confidentiality and privacy issues that may arise. At this interview you will be informed of the researcher's intent to either audio or videotape according to your comfort level, take observational notes, and distribute the questions that will be asked in the second hour interview. The second hour interview will consist of participant responding to the 7 main questions and secondary questions that may arise due to the nature of the responses by each respective participant. These 7 questions can be summarized under the thematic heading: "How do Muslim women in Trinidad experience and practice the Muslim traditions of which they are a part in a non-Islamic country?" All these responses will be audio or videotaped and then subsequently transcribed by the researcher who, in addition to the taping, will be taking observational notes of the subject, as well as one's own personal reactions during the interview. The final follow-up hour interview, the participant will be presented with the text transcript of the tapes and the researcher's observational notes. A discussion will ensue regarding the accuracy of both, so recording and perceptions of participant and researcher are in congruence. This researcher anticipates the number of participants to be five.

Your consent to be a research participant is strictly voluntary and, should you decline to participate, answer any questions, or should you choose to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no adverse effects or negative consequences for you. In addition, you have a right not to have your second interview audio or videotaped, if you so choose, or refuse to answer any question that will be taped and this will not affect your participation in the study. Only I, the researcher, will have access to the tapes and will be transcribing them into text subsequent to second interview. If you choose to drop out of the study, your taped interview will be expunged from the record and the tape itself will be destroyed. This same condition applies to the observational notes that will be taken during the initial and second interviews.

The risk of involvement is minimal, that is, the probability and magnitude of harm or discomfort anticipated in the research are not greater in and of themselves than those ordinarily encountered in daily life or during the performance of routine physical or psychological examinations or tests. However, should any of the questions evoke an uncomfortable emotional response, I will move on to less anxiety producing queries. In

the event that any thing should arise in the course of the interview making you uneasy to the point that you may not be able to resolve momentarily, then I will gladly refer you to a counselor or counseling center to pursue this issue further.

While there may be some direct benefits to you by the fact that you will be able to voice your feelings, ideas and experiences about your Islamic culture and traditions in an open, non-judgmental setting, and will be given the opportunity for self-reflection with regard to the context of your lives in Trinidad and Tobago, your participation will help the outside world have a better understanding of Islamic practices, traditions and meanings especially in a time when Islam is so misunderstood throughout the world.

As a research participant you will be aware that any information provided will be held in confidence to the extent permitted by law. Any published research will refer to pseudonyms only; no names will be used in the study. Only group averages will be reported. All data will be securely stored and available only to the researcher and the researcher's advisor. The interview data, consent forms, and the audio/video recordings shall be kept separately from each other in secured draws of a locked file cabinet in the researcher's office which only the researcher will have access. All video and audio recordings will be erased and destroyed as soon as study is completed (researcher has submitted her study's findings to her committee). All other data will be destroyed after five years.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding the study, or your participation in the study, you may contact me, the researcher, Joanna Headley, at (868) 375-9872 during the data collection process, and (305) 812-1756 after data collection, or email the researcher at [JHEADLEYMiami@aol.com](mailto:JHEADLEYMiami@aol.com) or my supervisor, Dr. Maureen Duffy, Counseling Department School of Education at (305) 899-3706, or the Institutional Review Board point of contact, Ms. Nildy Polanco, at (305) 899-3020.

If you are satisfied with the information provided and are willing to participate in this research, please signify your consent by signing this consent form.

Thank you for your participation,

Sincerely,

Joanna Headley, LMHC

\*\*\*\*\*

### **Voluntary Consent**

I acknowledge that I have been informed of the nature and purposes of this study by Joanna Headley, and that I have read and understand the information presented above, and that I have received a copy of this form for my records. I give my voluntary consent to participate in this study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Signature of Participant*

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Date*

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Signature of Researcher*

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Date*

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Witness*

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Date*

(Witness signature is required only if research involves pregnant women, children, other vulnerable populations, or if more than minimal risk is present)

APPENDIX E  
**BARRY UNIVERSITY**  
**Institutional Review Board**

Interview Protocol

**Interview Questions:**

1. If I followed you through a typical day, what would I see you doing, what experiences would I observe you having?
2. Can you please describe how the women are treated in your community?
3. Can you please describe how the men in your family act toward you?
  - a. Do you feel free to express complaints or unhappiness to your husband?
  - b. If you had a personal problem or health problem, how do you expect your husband or other male relative to respond to you?
4. How would you define your role in your family?
5. What obligations fall on you as Muslim women that do not fall on Muslim men?
6. Can you please tell me how you are honored and valued as a woman in your family?
7. Can you please tell me what does being a good Muslim entail?
  - a. Can you please tell me how the way you dress as a Muslim has impacted your daily life in the Caribbean?

APPENDIX F  
Observational Protocol

Date:		
Setting:		
Activity Description:		
Description of Muslim women/ dress code:	Non- verbal observations:	Researcher's notes: