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The dynamics of wearing *hijab* for Muslim American women in the United States

by

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A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

Major: Sociology

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ABSTRACT

Over the past decade, and particularly since the September11th terrorist attacks, the Muslim community in the United States has experienced an increased level of social and religious scrutiny. This unfortunate incident has fundamentally changed the way the American society views Muslims, especially Muslim women who wear the veil or *hijab* in public. Muslim women have experienced various instances of discrimination including people trying to remove their *hijab*, and/or name calling. A unique aspect of Muslim women in the US is that they not only confront the stigma of gender, race, ethnicity and religion, but that which is attached to Islamic dress as well. Despite some of these problems, however, the experiences of Muslim women in the United States remains one of the least researched topics in sociology. The purpose of this thesis is to explore the social and familial factors that affect Muslim women's decision to wear the *hijab* and how their families react to their decision to wear the *hijab.*

I specifically argue that the process through Muslim women in America come to wear the *hijab* is multi-faceted and involves both social and familial factors. I also argue that these women encounter both supportive and unsupportive attitudes from their families over their decision to wear the *hijab*. With Muslim women as such visible symbols of Muslim American society, it is imperative that they become active in the Muslim society as well as in the mainstream American society in order to improve the public impression of Muslim women as meek, uneducated and confined to their homes. This thesis also discusses the reaction of their families to their *hijab*. Future research is needed to study how these women negotiate their everyday lives while wearing the *hijab* outside their homes.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Hijab is an integral part of everyday appearance and life of most Muslim women all over the world. According to feminist scholarship, the general stereotype associated with *hijab* is seclusion of Muslim women and restricting them from leading an independent life separate from their male relatives (see Afshar 1985, Fox 1977, Odeh 1993, Papanek 1973). But what this scholarship fails to notice is that in most parts of the world, *hijab* has multiple interpretations. Today, Muslim women do not view the *hijab* as a restriction but more as a symbol of empowerment. They attend colleges and universities, work in various professions, have families and friends and enjoy life, all the while wearing *hijab*. Their *hijab* can be a regular headscarf covering their hair, neck and chest area or something more traditional like an *abaya* (long, loose robe) or even *niqab* (face covering). But they don't let their form of *hijab* come in the way of a successful and meaningful life.

In other words, unlike the common stereotype that they are forced into covering themselves, many Muslim women these days choose to wear the *hijab* because of their own will (Read and Bartkowski 2000). Some of them even face resistance from their families for the right to wear it. The common dilemma most of these women face in non-Muslim societies is the stereotype and discrimination associated with the *hijab*. In the United States, perceptions of Muslims have especially changed after 9/11 attacks. Some Muslims feared for their lives immediately after the tragic attacks and eliminated any identifying factors that would emphasize their Muslim identity, including taking off the *hijab* (Badr 2004:331). In this paper I examine the multidimensional familial and social factors that affect the process through which these women arrive at the decision to wear the *hijab*. Some women find themselves directly or indirectly influenced by the *hijab* practices of their families. Others find themselves wearing *hijab* because

it was introduced to them as an institution of the society they lived in. And yet many other women started wearing *hijab* due to a turning point in their lives as a result of an illness, current political events or conversion to Islam. These turning points brought Muslim women in this study closer to Islam and helped them make the decision to wear the *hijab*.

The next section will discuss the historical and contemporary views of *hijab* in the literature. I discuss the presence of *hijab* in ancient societies before it came to be associated with Islam and what Islamic religious texts (the Quran and *Hadith*) say about the *hijab*. This section also discusses how colonization of Muslim countries shaped the way we currently view *hijab*, as well as the range of literature on the practice of veiling, mainly in the US.

The next chapter provides a theoretical framework for this study which is primarily derived from symbolic interactionism. I draw on the works of Erving Goffman, Gregory Stone, C.W. Mills and Lamont and Molnar to explain the use of *hijab* by Muslim women.

The chapter on methodology describes the methodological approach used to collect and analyze data for this thesis. I used grounded theory methods for this purpose and this chapter carefully lays out the way I collected data, coded it and looked for various themes using grounded theory methods. This section also compares the two cities I collected data in as well as sample characteristics.

After laying the theoretical foundation and discussing the research methods, research findings are presented. Analysis of the data revealed three most commonly occurring themes occurred in relation to the process Muslim women go through to adopt the *hijab*. I also discuss in this chapter the reaction of their family and friends on their decision to wear the *hijab*. Finally, I conclude the thesis with a discussion on how my thesis fills the gaps in research on Muslim

women in America and other possible avenues of research that can be built off of research findings in this thesis.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The image of *hijab* has been synonymous with Muslim women for quite some time. This chapter discusses how *hijab* came to be associated with Islam and Muslim women and how the Muslim holy texts view the *hijab*. It is important to understand the religious background of *hijab* in Islam to understand *why* Muslim women find it necessary to wear it. After laying out the historical roots of *hijab*, this chapter discusses the reason *hijab* came to be known as backwards and something that is not modern during and after the colonial era. After that, I discuss the contemporary views of *hijab* in current literature.

History of Hijab

Hijab in the pre-Islamic era

Even though *hijab* or veil is mostly associated with Muslim women, it is not a practice that started with Islam (Furseth 2011:367). In fact, *hijab* was present in ancient societies well before Islam. In ancient Mesopotamia, veiling was the sign of respectable, upper class, free women while slaves and prostitutes were not allowed to veil and were actually penalized if caught illegally veiling (Ahmed 1992:14, Walther 1993:70). Overtime, successive invasions of the Mesopotamian region, Syria and other areas of the Middle East by Alexander, Parthians, Sasanians and eventually Muslims, led to the slow fusion of local communities with the culture and customs of their conquerors (Ahmed 1992:17).This continued on to the first Christian centuries where the seclusion of women and veiling became part of upper class life in Mediterranean Middle East, Iraq and Persia (Ahmed 1992:18). “Mesopotamian, Persian, Hellenic, Christian and eventually Islamic cultures each retained practices that both controlled and diminished women, and each of these cultures and religions also apparently borrowed the controlling practices from their neighboring cultures and countries” (Ahmed 1992:18).

Scholars do not agree whether veiling was a part of Judaism among other ancient cultures or not. Ahmed (1992) is of the opinion that it was not, while El Guindi provides biblical evidence that it was and Jewish tradition asked women to either cover their hair with a veil or shave their heads (El Guindi 1999:150). In the years preceding and around the advent of Christianity, “Judaism allowed polygamy, concubinage, and unrestricted divorce and did not allow women to inherit or play a role in religion, to mention only some salient features” (Ahmed 1992:34). The advent of Christianity followed patriarchal teachings similar to Judaism, by endorsing an inferior status for women from a religious point of view and solidifying their position as second class citizen (Ahmed 1992:34). Some scholars suggest that Islam improved women’s situation by giving them basic rights such as inheritance and forbidding the killing of female infants at birth as was practiced in Arabia around that time (Engineer 1992:20-37, Esposito 1982:48, Hussain 1984:11-25, Mernissi 1991:115-140, Minai 1981:15,). However, others such as Ahmed (1992:42), say that Islam did not better the lives of women in the era as usually claimed by Muslim historians, and if anything, it took away some of their rights. “Their autonomy and participation were curtailed with the establishment of Islam , its institutions of patrilineal, patriarchal marriage as solely legitimate, and the social transformation that ensued” (Ahmed 1992:42). Still others, (Esposito 1982) take a middle road on this issue and is of the opinion that even though Islam improved women’s situation by giving them some rights previously denied, it also rendered them sheltered and dependent upon their male family members while men were given more rights and privileges in matters such as, but not limited to inheritance, divorce and custody (48).

Hijab and Islam

Quran is the Holy Book for all Muslims, and it defines the rules and regulations of the religion. Throughout the 30 chapters of the Quran, it is quiet on the subject of clear seclusion of women and veiling (Hussain 1984:25). In total, the term *hijab* occurs seven times, mostly referring to a physical or metaphorical barrier without any reference to women or their clothing (Alvi, Hoodfar and McDonough 2003:184, Mernissi 1991:96). There is only one place in the Quran where the word *hijab* is mentioned in relation to women:

> "O you who believe! Enter not the Prophet's houses, except when leave is given to you for a meal, (and then) not (so early as) to wait for its preparation. But when you are invited, enter, and when you have taken your meal, disperse, without sitting for a talk. Verily, such (behavior) annoys the Prophet, and he is shy of (asking) you (to go), but Allah is not shy of (telling you) the truth. And when you ask (his wives) for anything you want, ask them from behind a screen, that is purer for your hearts and for their hearts. And it is not (right) for you that you should annoy Allah's Messenger, nor that you should ever marry his wives after him (his death). Verily! With Allah that shall be an enormity." (Quran 33:53)

Mernissi (1991) and other authors believe that the *hijab* was instituted when some Muslim guests overstayed their welcome after the wedding feast of the Prophet's marriage to his wife Zaynab bint Hajash (Ahmed 1992:54, Alvi *et al*. 2003:230, Mernissi 1991:85-90) resulting in the revelation of the above mentioned verse. Notice that Mernissi believes that the when this verse was revealed, the Prophet let a curtain fall between himself and Zaynab who was in the same room and his male companion Anas. This is the verse that many people use to justify a face veil for Muslim women. Mernissi does not agree with this interpretation because she believes the verse actually means to separate two men by a curtain, while ignoring the presence of Zaynab in the room. Bullock disagrees with this interpretation of the verse since Zaynab was also present in the room when the Prophet separated himself and Zaynab from Anas with a curtain. Bullock

finds it hard to believe that the above mentioned verse was misunderstood at such a vast level for such a long time and no one saw the misinterpretation until Mernissi (Bullock 2002:174-175).

Some people claim that the *hijab* or the veil was only descended upon the wives of the Prophet Muhammad, also called the Mothers of the believers. Initially, the Prophet had barely any division between his public and private life. The living quarters of his wives were directly connected to the mosque which acted as headquarters for the Prophet and his Companions. People from all over Arabia and beyond, used to visit him there whether it was for political reasons or if they had questions of a religious nature or needed advice for their personal lives. Some authors believe to protect the privacy of the Prophet and his family and to distinguish his wives from everyone else, Quranic verses 33:28-34 were revealed, thus imposing the veil or *hijab* on his wives only (Hussain 1984:23, Mernissi 1991:103). Muhammad's wives were the first to be secluded and during his life, they were the only ones to be secluded (Ahmed 1992:53). By instituting seclusion, Muhammad was creating a distance between his wives and the mass of people literally on their doorstep (Ahmed 1992:55, Hussain 1984:23, Mernissi 1991:103).

Another account portrays having the Prophet's father in law, one of his closest companion, and the second Caliph after his death, Umar ibn-al Khattab being the reason for their seclusion. He is said to have insisted to the Prophet to seclude his wives. On one occasion when Sawda and Ayesha went to the woods for bathroom purposes, Sawda being tall was recognized by Umar and he called on her to be careful since he could recognize her. Umar's insistence to the Prophet to seclude his wives could be to guard them against the vulgar ways of the hypocrites of Medina who didn't fully believe in the message of Islam and would harass Muhammad's wives and other Muslim women claiming they thought these women were slaves (Ahmed 1992:54,

Alvi *et al*. 2003, Mernissi 1991:173,). According to a commentator Ibn-e-Saad, the following verse was revealed in response to that situation (Alvi *et al.* 2003:191):

> "O Prophet! Tell your wives and your daughters and the women of the believers to draw their cloaks (veils) all over their bodies (i.e.screen themselves completely except the eyes or one eye to see the way). That will be better, that they should be known (as free respectable women) so as not to be annoyed. And Allah is Ever OftForgiving, Most Merciful. (Quran 33:59).

Here it seems that the Quran is asking the Muslim women to draw their already existing cloaks closer to themselves so as to be distinguished from the non-Muslim women (Alvi *et al.* 2003:192). Although this verse seems pretty clear, a famous Quran commentator, Al-Tabari believes that it actually implies free women should conceal their hair and face (Alvi *et al.* 2003:192). In his time, this is how free Muslim women were differentiated from the slaves and this is the social reality that comes through in Al-Tabari's interpretation of Quranic verses (Alvi *et al.* 2003:192-193).

When Quran talks about covering for women, it tells them to be modest and seems as if it is asking them to use their existing clothing to cover their chests:

> "And tell the believing women to lower their gaze (from looking at forbidden things), and protect their private parts (from illegal sexual acts, etc.) and not to show off their adornment except only that which is apparent, and to draw their veils all over Juyubihinna (i.e. their bodies, faces, necks and bosoms, etc.) and not to reveal their adornment except to their husbands, their fathers, their husband's fathers, their sons, their husband's sons, their brothers or their brother's sons, or their sister's sons, or their (Muslim) women (i.e. their sisters in Islam), or the (female) slaves whom their right hands possess, or old male servants who lack vigour, or small children who have no sense of the shame of sex. And let them not stamp their feet so as to reveal what they hide of their adornment. And all of you beg Allah to forgive you all, O believers, that you may be successful.". (Quran 24: 31)

The terms "open" and "hidden" adornment in the above mentioned verses have been the subjects of later commentaries of the Quran. Instead of using the term adornment to mean what it

literally means, that is ornamentation of one's self, Al-Tabari takes the more strict route and believes it means in this particular verse, to be taken as a woman's ornaments as well as her entire body except her hands, feet and arms up to the elbow (Alvi *et al.* 2003:190). Hajjaji-Jarrah believes that the reason these terms are not defined in the Quran is because they can be open to interpretation according to the different times of Muslims to be evaluated and applied according to the norms of those times and this is exactly what makes the Quran "valid for all nations, times and places" (Alvi *et al.* 2003:209).

After the Quran, *hadith* is the most revered Islamic texts. These are the sayings of the Prophet later recorded by historians after a rigorous verification process. The six most referenced collections of *hadith* are by Bukhari, Muslim, Sunan ibn Sahih, Sunan Ibn-e-Majah, Sunan Abu Dawood, Mishkat Shareef and Tirmidhi. There seems to be not many *hadith* that are concerned with the covering of women. In fact, most of the *hadith* are concerned with the clothing of men, instructing them to cover their private parts appropriately (Alvi *et al.* 2003:218). As mentioned above, the Quran tells the believing women to cover their chests, but the *hadith* is devoid of any mention or application of this instruction (Alvi *et al.* 2003:219). Mostly, the *hadith* tell the women to avoid flashy clothing or clothing that is too thin or revealing, and from which a woman's body can be seen through (Alvi *et al.* 2003: 218-220). There is also a clear lack of *hadith*s concerning women's covering their hair or their heads (Alvi *et al.* 2003:222). Since many *hadith*s talk about ambiguities in cases of covering, suggests that women were already covering at the time and hence it wasn't necessary to state the obvious and talk about the existing norms of the society (Alvi *et al.* 2003:228). This theory also seems to be supported by the above mentioned verse where women are told pull their *khimars* to cover their chests (Quran 24:31).

Another dimension of *hijab* is physical seclusion of women as mentioned previously where the Prophet let a curtain fall between himself and his new bride Zaynab and his companion Anas. The term *hijab* in *hadith*s seem to have a more abstract meaning and actually becomes an institution (Alvi *et al.* 2003:233). It is mentioned several times in relation to the wives of the Prophet where they are separated from the rest of the Muslim community through a curtain and are not easily viewable by others (Alvi *et al.* 2003:234). As mentioned above, seclusion seems to have been divinely ordained on the insistence of Umar, who told the wife of the Prophet, Sawdah to be more careful when going out. But the Prophet assured her to go out if needed and not be confined to the home as Umar might have liked (Alvi *et al.* 2003:244).

Thus it seems, however simple the instructions on *hijab* might be in the Quran, later commentators when writing explanations of *hadith* and Quran added their own interpretations according to the social realities of their times (Alvi *et al.* 2003:192, Hussain 1984:25). Hajjaji-Jarrah believes that the early Muslims did not take *hijab* to mean what it is taken to be, namely as a way of concealing women (Alvi *et al.* 2003:184). Later commentaries of the Quran alienated women and made their status inferior than that of the men which was not the original intent of Islam. As a result of that, Muslim women thus continue to be marginalized and excluded from the Muslim public life in some countries (Hussain 1984:27).

Hijab in the colonial era:

The stories in Arabian Nights seem to have created exotic ideas in the mind of western readers about Muslim men and women (Mabro 1996:28). Ahmed talks about colonial feminism where it was understood that the veil and segregation were the main reasons for the backwardness of Muslim societies (Ahmed 1992:152). She especially mentions Lord Cromer who was a firm believer of the Islamic religion and society as being inferior to the European

culture (Ahmed 1992:152). To Cromer, Christianity "elevated" the status of women through its religious teachings while Islam did the opposite through veiling and segregation (Ahmed 1992:153). His activities on the other hand were more hurtful to the women since he raised the school fees for children, both male and female as well as discouraged the training of female physicians by saying, "….I conceive that throughout the civilized world, attendance by medical men is still the rule" (Ahmed 1992:153). Though seemingly a champion of Muslim women in Egypt, he was actually the President of Men's League for Opposing Women's Suffrage in England (Ahmed 1992:153).

During the colonial era European men and women saw veiling as oppressive and Muslim women as oppressed (Bullock 2003:1). The Muslim veil as an oppressive symbol elevated the West as superior and the non-West as inferior (Bullock 2002:31). Not just the colonial rulers but the native elites of the colonized territories also saw the *hijab* as backwards and uncivilized (Bullock 2002:31). The campaign to unveil was not started by Muslim women but instead the native elite men such as Qasim Amin of Egypt and Tahar Al-Haddad and Habib Bourguiba in Tunisia to form a modern state (Haddad 2007:257, Zayzafoon 2005). As Bullock sums it perfectly, "women's choice has little to do with it" (Bullock 2002:31).

What does *hijab* mean?

Hijab in the literal sense means a "curtain" as shown above. In the era of the Prophet, *hijab* may have started as seclusion for his wives as a physical barrier along with the restrictions it applied. It slowly spread through the rest of the Muslim community. How this happened is not entirely clear although Ahmed thinks that a combination of factors such as the raised status of Arabs and the wives of the Prophet, increased wealth, and Muslim conquests of areas where veiling was common amongst the elite, all contributed to the adoption of the veil by the rest of

the Muslim community (Ahmed 1992:56). What we do know for a fact is that Muslim men and women are required to dress modestly and protect their *awrah* (private parts). Men are required to cover at least the area between their navel and the knees (Al-Qaradawi 1999:154). In presence of men who are not their *mahram*, meaning a woman is allowed to marry them, women are required to cover their whole body except their face and their hands (Al-Qaradawi 1999:159).

In the Arabic language, there are various words that describe the clothing used for modesty and covering, such as *abaya, lithma, buqa, dishdasha*, among many others (El Guindi 1999:7). To make things complicated many of these terms are also used to refer to men's' articles of clothing (El Guindi 1999:7). This complex issue of naming Muslim women's' clothing is denoted by the single word "veil" in the western world which seems inefficient to convey the true meaning of *hijab*. Today, *hijab*, veil or a headscarf usually refers to a piece of clothing worn to cover a woman's hair and neck area along with other conservative clothing such as long sleeves, long skirts and loose pants (Haddad, Smith and Moore 2006:9). For Muslim women who follow this practice, *hijab* is much more than a piece of cloth covering one's hair. Since Muslim women are required to refrain from wearing transparent and tight clothing, they choose various styles of clothing to cover, from the Indian and Pakistani *shalwar kameez* to western pants and dresses to Arab *abayas* and *jilbabs*. The head cover mostly known as the *hijab* also comes in many different shapes, sizes and colors and is made from various materials. Most South Asian women wear a triangular *hijab*, which is a square piece of fabric folded into half like a triangle or a rectangular scarf covering their ears and neck area (Karim 2009:82). Many African American Muslim women wear variations of the African head wrap which covers the hair but exposes the ears and the neck area, because they believe that even though the Quran

requests modesty, it does not implement a specific style of dress (Karim 2009:82). There really is no limit to what a *hijab* can look like.

For purposes of this paper, I use the word *hijab* when referring to the western word "veil" since this is most commonly recognized and used by Muslim women and specifically refer to the head covering. The type of veil that covers the face is called *niqab* as is it commonly known among Muslim American women.

Empirical Literature Review

Over the years and especially since the unfortunate incident of 9/11 terrorist attacks, Muslim women and their *hijab* have become the symbol of Muslim identity in general, and the stigma associated with Muslim identity in America (Badr 2004:335). However, even though Muslim women throughout the world are recognized by their veil or *hijab*, not all Muslim women wear it. Some feel it is not a part of Islam since Islam only requires them to dress modestly (Bartkowski and Read 2003, Meshal in Alvi *et al.* 2003, Read and Bartkowski 2000). In what follows, I will discuss the literature regarding Muslim women who wear the *hijab*.

Muslim women wear the *hijab* primarily to create a cultural space for themselves, and to negotiate the conflicting values between their Islamic values and those of Christian centered America. They specifically use the *hijab* to be a part of both worlds; their Muslim faith and their country, the USA (Williams and Vashi 2007:284). In essence, they are creating what Williams and Vashi call "practical dimensions of an American Islam" (2007:284). This confirms that American Muslim women who adopt the *hijab* in a secular society see their *hijab* as a liberating experience that helps them construct their own identity in reaction to the society they live in (Gurbuz and Gurbuz-Kucuksari 2009:39; See Barktkowski and Read 2003:88 for similar findings). The veil allows them to declare they are Muslim. And for some women, their Muslim

identity overrides all other identities and is some times more important than their ethnic identity (Abdo 2004:4, Droogsma 2007:301, Furseth 2011:372).

Most all studies on Muslim women wearing *hijab* have found that they associate the *hijab* with Islam, and in one way or other, they believe by covering one's body they are fulfilling a commandment from God and a religious obligation (Ali 2005:517, Alvi *et al.* 2003:17, 90, Bartkowski and Read 2003:80, Bullock 2002:42, Furseth 2011:370, Gurbuz and Gurbuz-Kucuksari 2009:392, Omair 2009:420, Read and Bartkowski 2000:403). Although Muslim women claim a religious purpose for wearing the *hijab*, the veil does not hold the same meaning for all of them. It means different things to different people within the Muslim society, as well as people within the broader mainstream society (Abu Lughod 1986, Alvi *et al.* 2003:18, Bullock 2002:38, Droogsma 2007:295, Fernea 1993:122, Read and Bartkowski 2000, Walbridge 1997, Williams and Vashi 2007:282, 38-39).

Contrary to popular belief that Muslim women are forced into wearing the *hijab*, literature finds that the majority of the women are proud to wear the *hijab*, they have adopted it out of their own free choice and will, and there is not any person that is forcing them to dress in a certain way (Ali 2005:518-519, Frank 2000:927, Furseth 2011:375, Omar 2009:421, Williams and Vashi 2007:284). This is clearly opposite to the image portrayed by western media, that women in Muslim countries are oppressed and that they need to be "freed" from their garments (Omair 2009:421). In fact, most Muslim women have been reported to take up the *hijab* against the wishes of their families who often think it is not needed for them to veil or see the *hijab* as a step backward in civilization, as opposed to the common notion that they are forced into wearing it (Ali 2005:519, Alvi *et al.* 2003:15, Bartkowski and Read 2003:84, Bullock 2002:67, Furseth 2011:375, Read and Bartkowski 2000:407, Williams and Vashi 2007:284). Omair's study of

women managers in United Arab Emirates finds this indicative of the fact that Muslim men might be becoming more liberal in terms of women's clothing (Omair 2009:423).

Some women who wear *hijab* feel they receive more respect from others around them because of it (Bullock 2002:53, Droogsma 2007:307, Franks 2000:921). They often find that their families' restrictions on them ease a bit when they start wearing the *hijab* and they are allowed to move around in public without being criticized by others (Alvi *et al.* 2003:18-21, Bartkowski and Read 2003:81, Omair 2009:424, , Read and Bartkowksi 2000:405, Williams and Vashi 2007:283). Wearing the *hijab* also becomes a "safe" way for women to communicate and work side by side with their male colleague without being gossiped about their character (Omair 2009:424). *Hijab* can signal to other men that a veiled Muslim woman is not available for dating (Alvi *et al.* 2003:21, Bullock 2002:103, Droogsma 2007:306). It defines a sort of moral boundary around these women, sets the tone of interaction with others and makes clear to others how these women wish to be treated (Furseth 2011:374, Omair 2009:424). This is what Goffman calls exerting a "moral demand upon the others, obliging them to value and treat him in the manner that persons of his kind have a right to expect" (1959:13).

More importantly, Muslim women feel that those who do not wear the veil are under great pressure to accommodate society's view of beauty. Their hair has to be perfect, their makeup needs to be impeccable and their clothing has to be up to the current fad. Whatever their reasons to cover are, most American Muslim college girls find their *hijab* as "liberating" and "empowering" (Gurbuz and Gurbuz-Kucuksari 2009:388). It liberates Muslim women from "America's oppressive beauty culture and the objectifying male gaze that accompanies it" (Bartkowski and Read 2003:88). It liberates them from objectification by men, and forces others to focus on their personalities instead of their sexuality (Alvi *et al.* 2003:29, Bullock 2002:72,

Droogsma 2007:306,310, Franks 2000:921, Gurbuz and Gurbuz-Kucuksari 2009:394, Read and Bartkowski 2000:405,). It is, in other words, a Muslim form of feminism that rejects the objectification of women as merely sexual objects.

As far as Islam is concerned, *hijab* not only requires Muslim women to be modest in their dress but in their behavior as well. It puts them on a higher pedestal than others, where they need to do the "right" thing more than others and set a good example for others, because they represent Islam (Ajrouch 2004, Droogsma 2007:304, Gurbuz 2009:396, Williams and Vashi 2007:282). It also acts as a reminder for them to act in a way to please God (Droogsma 2007:304).

Despite their reasons for wearing the *hijab*, Muslim women in America often face the question why they would feel the need to cover themselves in this age and era, while living in western countries where there is no pressure for them to do so. However, Muslim women can resist this western pressure due to the fact that in recent years, multiculturalism has become the rage, diversity is considered important and immigrants no longer feel pressured to assimilate and thus feel freer to display their identities publicly (Ali 2005:522). Franks (2000:920) finds in Britain that even though women technically have the right to dress as they please, it still takes courage and boldness on their part to voluntarily dress different than the common dress code as opposed to Muslim countries where they are expected to dress modestly. This confirms the fact that Muslim women are not "passive victims" but "bold and intrepid" to wear the *hijab* in Britain today (Franks 2000:920). Muslim women find that by wearing *hijab*, they are using their clothing style to display that they are their own person, different from what their dominant society or westernized or traditional parents might want them to be (Williams and Vashi 2007:285).

Muslim women are also defying the common perception of them being backwards, oppressed and uneducated by taking up the *hijab* and during this process, constructing a "liberated religious woman identity (Gurbuz and Gurbuz-Kucuksari 2009:397). Haddad finds that it is important for *hijab*-wearing, English speaking Muslim women to participate in the society to correct the common prejudice against Muslims and Islam (Haddad 2007:264). Women wearing Islamic dress are not seen as backwards only in the West but even in some Muslim countries. Women managers in Omair's study in United Arab Emirates are going through the same thing. They find themselves having to work hard in negating the popular image of them being incapable and rework this image so they can also be seen in positive light despite of their Islamic dress (Omair 2009:426). But some of these women, especially the ones wearing the face-veil (*niqab*) found they were directly discriminated against, at their workplace because of it. Although the society deems religiosity as an important and admirable trait, only so much of it is acceptable at workplaces (Omair 2009:423).

CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual framework for this study is derived mainly from symbolic interactionism. The term "symbolic interactionism" was originally coined by Herbert Blumer and operates on three fundamental assumptions: 1) that human beings act towards things on the basis of the meanings the things have for them, 2) that these meanings are derived from social interaction and 3) that such meanings are created and modified through an interpretative social process (Blumer 1969:2). Thus, unlike psychologists who tend to explain human behavior as a result of stimuli and other psychological inputs, or sociologists who rely on social position, social roles and cultural values and norms, symbolic interaction sees both human behavior and meaning as emanating from a different source. According to Symbolic Interaction, "the meaning that things have for human beings are central in their own right", and does not emanate from an intrinsic source, but rather from a process of interaction between individuals and groups and the context under which this interaction takes place (Blumer 1969:7). I draw from symbolic interaction's general formulation of human behavior, identity and meanings to explore the ways in which Muslim American women come to wear the *hijab*.

Presentation of self in everyday life: Goffman

I also understand the process of wearing the *hijab* as a form of identity work/presentation of self in everyday life, and therefore draw on Erving Goffman's Presentation of Self in Everyday Life. Goffman's articulation of the self and identity is very important in order for us to understand Muslim American women and the *hijab* in that he relies on visual and verbal appearances as part of social interaction as well as, studies the role our appearance plays during social interaction. To Goffman, identity is a special type of a social performance that is acted out in everyday social interaction. Once we are in the company of others, we want to discover as

much as possible about the situation and the participants to be able to fully predict the outcome of the social interaction (Goffman 1959: 2). For this purpose, we rely on inherent cues such as signs, hints, gestures and cultural symbols amongst others to assess the situation and relate our identity to our audience. In other words, we must rely on appearances to tell us how to react to and behave with the people involved in social situations (Goffman 1959:249). Goffman's views on impression management raises interesting points in terms of dealing with how others perceive the image we portray versus how we see our own selves, as well as acceptable and unacceptable ways of representing our identities (1959).

Goffman states that when activity occurs in the presence of other people, we accentuate our best behavior to make a good impression while holding back on behavior that might shed a negative light on us (Goffman 1959:111). He differentiates the front region, where we are on our best behavior from the back region or back stage where "suppressed facts make an appearance (Goffman 1959:112). This separation of front region from the back region can be very useful in explaining how a Muslim woman's world is divided into a public and private sphere by *hijab* (Goffman 1959). At home, with her husband, father, brothers, or nephews, a Muslim woman is in the backstage region where she is free to dress up the way she likes as long as she has protected her *awrah* (privates). But in the front stage region, she wears the *hijab* and is more reserved in her interaction with others. For Muslim women, wearing the *hijab* marks a boundary for others not to cross and signals to others how their body is private and sacred to them and not for others to stare at (Goffman 1959).

Goffman also mentions the roles of a team and how their identity can make or break their case in the general public. These are what he calls, "colleague groupings" (Goffman 1959:166). Members of some of these groupings can be highly identifiable in the sense that the

good or bad reputation of one member depends on the reputation of other members, through no direct involvement of their own (Goffman 1959:166). It is apparent that *hijab* has different meanings for different women wearing it in various parts of the world (Abu Lughod 1986, Alvi *et al.* 2003:18, Bullock 2002:38, Droogsma 2007:295, Fernea 1993:122, Read and Bartkowski 2000, Walbridge 1997, Williams and Vashi 2007:282, 38-39). In some countries such as Saudi Arabia and Afghanistan, they are forced to cover up and is considered necessary if they want to be a part of these societies (Deshpande 2001). As compared to that, in places such as Europe and America, women are choosing to go back to this practice because "they" think it is important to them. Muslim women in any part of the world are a part of a "colleague grouping" (Goffman 1959:166). The restrictiveness of women in one part of the world but not in another makes all Muslim women bear the grunt of that impression and they are mostly all labeled oppressed and uneducated because they are part of the same "colleague grouping" (Goffman 1959).

Goffman suggests that at times of crises lines may momentarily break and members of opposing teams may momentarily forget their appropriate places with respect to one another (Goffman 1959:204). This is similar to how some women may have taken off their *hijab*s after 9/11 to avoid the backlash, for fear of their own safety (Badr 2004:331).

Appearance and the self: Stone

As seen in Goffman's work above, social interaction amongst individuals depends widely on how one's self is seen by others. Identity has become one way to conceptualize the self. To identify one's self, appearance is often used. One of the most important works in terms of self defined by our appearance is provided by Gregory Stone, specifically in his most famous work, Appearance and the Self. According to Stone, appearance establishes identification of participants and the development of a sense of self in a social interaction (Stone 1962:89).

Usually appearance is communicated through non-verbal communication such as clothing, location and grooming but it also done through discourse (Stone 1962:89).

Clothing not only helps to communicate our appearance, it also adds value to both the person wearing it, in his own eyes as well as to the ones observing him (Stone 1962:92). The response of our audience is important for establishment of one's self. That is probably why it is important for Muslim women to be recognized as Muslim when barely any other religious group in the U.S. wishes to identify themselves on the basis of their religion.

Identity situates a person on the societal ladder. One is often identified through his participation in society and social life. To situate a person according to his/her social relations, we think of him/her as others in the same social situation while being different from some others (Stone 1962:93). To have an identity is to identify with some social groups while rejecting others (Stone 1962:93). Thus, Stone would say that a Muslim woman signals to others that she belongs to a social group (based on the religion of Islam) and that she is off limits to everyone except those she takes the *hijab* off for. Her *hijab* provides a protection for her from unwanted stares and releases her from the chains of "perfectness" that society tries to enclose the women in all the while retaining her identity as a Muslim woman (1962).

Stone clarifies, "the meaning of appearance, is the establishment of identity, value, mood and attitude for the one who appears by the coincident programs and reviews awakened by his appearance" (Stone 1962:92). Hence, one's identity is situated when the observers assign him the same identity he intends to portray himself as (Stone 1962:92). To have an identity is to identify with some social groups while rejecting others. This may not be held true for Muslim women wearing *hijab* in the West today. The reasons some Muslim women wear *hijab* today are totally different than what the Western world thinks of them as doing. To them it represents an

adherence to their faith, modesty, following the command of God, while rejecting immodesty, and immorality (Read and Bartkowski 2000). To others, it represents oppression, lack of education and backwardness (Brasted 1997). Thus there is a gap between the identity Muslim women *want* to portray about themselves and the identity understood by others.

Appearance is meaningful for Stone when it elicits the same identification by the observer as intended by the wearer. In the case of *hijab*, its meanings and motives can be different for those who wear it versus those who see it being worn. Hence the *hijab* becomes meaningful for the observers, but not for those who wear it (1962).

Identity is not the same as self to Stone (Stone 1962:92). When others place him in the same social category one declares for himself, identity becomes a meaning of the self. This is often done by recognizable clothing such as uniforms (Stone 1962:92). In the same way, a Muslim woman's distinctive appearance, that is, the *hijab*, reinforces the image of her as a woman following the path of Islam. Hence, being recognized as a Muslim becomes important for these women. They want to do good deeds and stay out of places that they should not frequent such as night clubs, because their *hijab* projects this identity as good, moral and religious women (Ajrouch 2004, Droogsma 2007:304, Gurbuz 2009:396, Williams and Vashi 2007:282).

"Life must be viewed as a continuous socialization, a series of careers, in which old identities are sacrificed as new identities are appropriated, and in which old relations are left behind as new relations are joined. Each critical turning point of life is marked by a change of dress…" (Stone 1962:115). An excellent application of this point of view is how Muslim women may have a change of dress when they reach puberty and don the *hijab* or when they get married and either start or stop wearing the *hijab* or other types of clothing to please their husband and in-laws. Some women also report becoming more religious and adopting the *hijab* after

performing the pilgrimage (*hajj*), which somehow becomes the point in their life to become more "religious" (Cainkar 2009:252).

Motives and *Hijab*

How motives inform Muslim women who wear the *hijab*, will be drawn from C. Wrights Mills' work called "Situated Actions and Vocabularies of Motive". Motives are not just reasons for an act because these reasons themselves have reasons of their own (Mills 1940:904). As Mills propose, vocabularies of motives are "subjective springs of action" (Mills 1949:904). In other words, motives are "accepted justifications" for past, present or future acts (Mills 1949:907). Humans as social groups ascertain motives for social actions which are then used to describe social behavior (Mills 1949:905). The rejection and acceptance of motives are thus important phenomena that need to be studied

Mill's ideas of motives can be articulated in four different thematic areas: 1) Motives can be fluid; they do not have to stay fixed. Even though, we may begin an act for one motive, but over the course of time, we may take on another motive. In no way does this negate the effectiveness and legitimacy of either motive (Mills 1949:907). Implicit in Mill's work is that motives are conditional and contextual. They depend on certain conditions and can change according to the situation a person is in to better define and describe their intentions. Motives have no value outside of their societal situations in which they are situated. 2) Mills also finds it significant that since the Socratic period, ethical and religious vocabulary has been used to describe many theories of motivation (Mills 1949:913). "Motive is that in man which leads him to do good or evil. Under the aegis of religious institutions, men use vocabularies of moral motives: they call acts and programs "good" and "bad", and impute these qualities to the soul. This lingual behavior is part of the process of social control" (Mills 1940:913). 3) Mills also

thinks that “various motives can release similar acts in a given situation” (1940:911). 4) Mills says “the long acting out of a role, with its appropriate motives, will often induce a man to become what at first he merely sought to appear” (Mills 1940:908).

Mills ideas of motives can be applied to study the various motives Muslim women have when they decide to wear hijab. They may have started adopting *hijab* for a different reason but over time, their motives for covering evolve after discovering other positive consequences. Mostly, Muslim women’s main motivation to wear *hijab* is because the Quran teaches them to cover and that its ordained by Allah (Alvi *et al*. 2003, Read and Barktowski 2000 among others). To them, to be a good Muslim woman, they need to wear the *hijab*. Muslim women wearing *hijab* are deemed “good” morally. Whether they are good or not in their actual day to day life, is a different thing. Often, Muslim women find that once they started wearing the *hijab*, restrictions on them by family are lightened by quite a bit and their families start trusting them more (Alvi *et al*. 2003, Read and Bartkowski 2000). This is especially true of young, single, Muslim women who are otherwise not allowed to go out with friends. Somehow, Muslim women wearing *hijab* are also good companions for non-*hijab* wearing women in the eyes of their parents, since the *hijab* signals a certain character and persona that makes the parents feel safe about their daughters hanging out with a *muhajjaba* (Alvi *et al*. 2003, Read and Bartkowski 2000).

Also, Muslim women often find that their *hijab* grants them a status of “pious” and “pure” and somehow just “good” in general (Alvi *et al*. 2003). And because of that label and of what others might think of them if they are seen doing something inappropriate makes them stay away from such activities (Ajrouch 2004, Droogsma 2007:304, Gurbuz 2009:396, Williams and Vashi 2007:282).. The *hijab* thus becomes a motive itself to stay away from non-*halal* activities; things that are not allowed in Islam such as drinking, dating and clubbing amongst

others. This constant assumption of people, not the *hijab* makes them stay away from these activities. In this way, certain expectations like these become part of one's identity, due to their *hijab*.

Hence, even though Muslim women have various reasons for donning the *hijab*, from pleasing Allah to gaining their families' trust, they all get the same reaction: that they must be oppressed, backwards, uneducated and pressured into covering (Mernissi 1991, Odeh 1993). Regardless of their starting motives, their perception of reaction to their covering from the public is the same.

Hijab and Symbolic Boundaries

Symbolic boundaries are defined by Lamont and Molnar (2002:168) as "the tools by which individuals and groups struggle over and come to agree upon definitions of reality." Symbolic boundaries are essential for us to understand the characteristics and identity of a social group (Lamont and Molnar 2002). "Symbolic boundaries include symbolism, rituals, gestures, and discourse" (Furseth 2011:366). They are used to impose and uphold social boundaries (Lamont and Molnar 2002:186). Religious communities can often build boundaries between themselves and the "public" (Becker 1999). For Muslim women in this study, their *hijab* is a symbolic boundary that they draw around themselves so others can distinctly see them as Muslims versus the "others" situated outside their religious community (Furseth 2011: also seen in Bartkowski and Read 2003:73). It is important for these women to be identified with their religion, and they take great steps to mark this identity (Furseth 2011:381) so others know how to treat them. *Hijab* allows Muslim women to keep their adornments private. *Hijab* is as symbolic boundary is also used to stay away from some activities that Islam as a religion does not permit (for example

drinking, clubbing and intimate relationships outside of marriage) (Ajrouch 2004, Droogsma 2007:304, Gurbuz 2009:396, Williams and Vashi 2007:282).

Drawing symbolic boundaries can have a negative connotation too: Muslim women wearing the *hijab* become the symbol for all things negative about Islam (Brasted 1997). They have to endure stereotypes connected to the *hijab* and the religion of Islam. One of these stereotypes is that "others" feel these women are forced into wearing the *hijab* and are oppressed by their male relatives among other assumptions (Mernissi 1991, Odeh 1993). But that is not necessarily true. Read found in a study of Arab Muslim and Christian women that religiosity and ethnicity had more to do with traditional gender attitudes than the religion they follow religious affiliation (Read 2003:217). It is important that we hear the voices of the women in this study to understand their motives behind the identity they choose to display to others so publicly.

Summary theoretical framework

Drawing on symbolic interactionism, we make use of the works of Erving Goffman and Gregory Stone. Symbolic interactionism maintains that social interaction is dependent on the meaning inherent during this interaction. We cannot fully understand the meanings behind a situation unless we fully grasp the situational and cultural contexts around it. Meaning is thus a variable, constantly being changed and developed by the parties involved and their interactions with each other. Thus, it is important to understand the meaning one's appearance is supposed to communicate. Both Stone and Goffman agree that appearance can be communicated both verbally and non-verbally through discourse as well as visual cues such as grooming and dress. Appearance also conveys our identity to others and lets one identify with certain groups while discarding association with others. As much as it is important to study why *hijab* is so important in terms of identification of Muslim women, it is also important to study the motives behind

adopting *hijab*. For this purpose, we turn to the works of C.W. Mills. Mills suggests that to understand the reasons behind the different motives, we must first draw a boundary of conditions under which various motives occur (Mills 1949:904). We must also understand why some motives are verbalized and not others (Mills 1949:905). In the case of Muslim women and our concern with their *hijab,* these motives can be more visual than verbal. After that, Mills suggests we should study how these different motives are linked to each other.

Mill's theory of motives suggests that in order to understand the process through which Muslim women start wearing the *hijab,* it is important to discover the reasons behind their motives to alter their appearance at a large scale as well as the situations that drive them to do it. This theoretical framework can also help us understand how a motive is formed, how it is described and the way it is linked to the larger societal structure we live in. Mill's theory of vocabularies and motives is essential to the study of Muslim women and the *hijab* because it puts *their* experience at the forefront of this understanding. It is important to hear their voices directly for an explanation of their actions.

So far much importance has been given to how restrictive *hijab* is for women in some Muslim countries. Not enough attention is being paid to what it means to the women in the rest of the world, including the United States, where most women are "bringing the veil back". As a fast growing minority, it is imperative we understand the motives of these Muslim women behind adopting the *hijab,* the process they go through to wear it and the reactions they endure from their loved ones

CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY

The Research Problem

In this study, I explore the nature and the process through which Muslim women in Houston, TX and Des Moines, IA, arrive at the decision to wear the *hijab*. This is done using qualitative analysis on data collected through in-depth interviews. I specifically ask two questions. First, I ask how do Muslim women who wear the *hijab*, decide to so? Is it a personal decision or pressure from family and friends make them arrive at this decision? This should help shed light on the widely held conjecture that *hijab* is forced upon Muslim women and they have no say in the decision to wear it. Second, I ask, what are some of the consequences they have faced as a result of wearing *hijab* in their personal lives? Do these women ever receive backlash from the people around them because of the decision to wear the *hijab*? I explore how the participants in this study were treated by their family and friends once they found out they had decided to don the *hijab*, and if they did it willingly or under some sort of pressure from family and friends. This chapter describes the methodological approaches used in addressing these issues. In this chapter, I first discuss the research questions pertaining to the study as outlined above. Next, I describe the methodological perspective used to analyze the data. I then talk about the field sites, namely the cities of Houston and Des Moines and lay down their general characteristics in terms of demographics. This is followed by the participant eligibility criteria employed for this study and who the research participants are. I then discuss sampling techniques and how I got hold of these participants. After that, I describe in detail the interview process. I then explain how I made sense of the data using the coding process and the various codes and constructs I developed after sorting through the data.

Methodological Perspective

The methodological perspective employed in this thesis is mainly derived from grounded theory (Charmaz 1990, 1996, 2003, Corbin and Strauss 1990, Glaser and Strauss 1976). Grounded theory methods are a rigorous, methodical and consistent set of data collection and analytic procedures that can be used to develop theory instead of forcing data to fit existing theories and concepts (Charmaz 1996:27).

Grounded theory methods can be used to analyze both quantitative and qualitative data, collected through any source, including but not limited to surveys, case studies and newspaper articles. (Charmaz 1996:28, Glaser 1978:6). It allows researchers to use the same set of logical rules to systematically organize and structure data collection and analysis (Charmaz 1996:28, Glaser and Strauss 1976:2). More importantly, grounded theory methods can be easily reproduced and verified: if a researcher follows the same theoretical perspective, same rules for data collection and analysis and a similar set of conditions, he or she should be able to arrive at the same general idea as the original researcher (Corbin and Strauss 1990:424).

Most quantitative researchers collect data long before starting the analysis process (Charmaz 1990:1162, Corbin and Strauss 1990:419). Grounded theory methods do not follow this pattern (Charmaz 1990:1162). Data collection and analysis go hand in hand in grounded theory (Corbin and Strauss 1990:419). Grounded theorists use existing data to come up with relevant categories and ideas (Charmaz 1990:1162). Emerging categories shape further data collection which is then used to clarify, refine and extend those categories in various dimensions and properties (Charmaz 1990:1162, 2003:86). This process is called “Theoretical Sampling” (Charmaz 1990:1163, Corbin and Strauss 1990:421). This allows a researcher to avoid relying on preexisting theories and preconceived categories to which their data are forced to fit, as is done

in quantitative analysis (Charmaz 2003:86, 93). They can generate their own analytic categories and theories rooted in the data which makes it harder to refute or replace them with another theory (Glaser and Strauss 1976:4).

Grounded theory also allows one to understand the processes and the multiple layers of meanings embedded in their data (Charmaz 1996:35, 2003:90). To make sense of the data, coding mechanism is used to create the codes found during initial analysis of the data (Charmaz 1996:37, 2003:93). The coding process allows the researcher to immerse in the data, dissect it, sort and organize copious amounts of data (Charmaz 2003:93). Initial codes emerge by going through the data line by line and coding it, thus allowing theory to be built from the ground up based on the data itself (Charmaz 1990:1162, 1996:37, 2003:93-95, Glaser 1978:57). Initial coding also allows the researcher to determine what kind of data to collect next (Charmaz 2003:97). The second step is to now do selective coding by focusing on codes that occur more frequently and/or are significant during the initial coding process (Charmaz 2003:97, Glaser 1978:61). Corbin and Strauss allow a third type of coding called axial coding that links main categories with sub-categories and study the relationship they have with each other (Corbin and Strauss 1990).

The next step in developing grounded theory is to use memos to further develop the relevant categories (Charmaz 2003:102). Writing memos is like having a conversation with one's own self about the data (Charmaz 1990:1169). Memo writing lets us define each category by its analytic properties, expand and compare the codes and categories, and bridges the gap between analysis and writing (Charmaz 2003:102-104). It also helps us see what is implied in the data versus something which is clearly stated (Charmaz 1990:1169).

Even though grounded theory methods discourage forcing preconceived notions on the data and rather encourages emergence of core concepts and categories through the coding process, I went in the field with a set of questions in mind. I believe Glaser would agree with me when he says, “Other researchers, usually those with training of some duration, find it more comfortable to enter the field with some combination of a clear question or problem area in mind, a general perspective, and a supply of beginning concepts and field research strategies. This is less than being completely open, but still quite receptive to the emergent" (Glaser 1978:45). Even though I had some idea of the questions to be asked, I still remained true to grounded theory methods of coding by letting the themes emerge themselves instead of imposing preconceived ideas on the data.

Field Sites

Houston is the fourth most populous city in the nation and is the largest in the southern U.S. and Texas. In 2010, the city of Houston had a population of 2.1 million, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. Roughly half of the population is female (49.8%) (Houston Department of Planning and Development, 2010). 25.62% of the city identifies itself as Caucasian, 23.15% as African American, 43.8% as Hispanic or Latino and 6.15% as Asian (Department of Planning and Development 2012).

Texas is also one of the states that boast a large Muslim population. Estimates of Muslim population are especially hard to come by. According to Pew Research Center, there are currently 2.75 million Muslims in the US in 2011 (Muslim Americans, Pew Research Report 2007:20). About a third of the Muslim female population claims they wear the *hijab* while out in public at all times (Muslim Americans, Pew Research 2007:31). Kahera estimates there are 140,000 Muslims in Houston (2002:371) while ISGH (Islamic Society of Greater Houston)

estimates 250,000 Muslims living in and around Houston (Stephens 2011). A CAIR study done in 2011, called "The American Mosque" found that the Greater Houston Area has 42 mosques, while the whole state has 166 mosques that caters to the needs of Houston Muslims (2012:6). Houston also has an ethnically diverse community and hosts a variety of South Asian (Indian and Pakistani among others) businesses (Afzal 2010). It is home to well-established neighborhoods that include markets offering ethnic and *halal* food items, religiously appropriate clothing, as well as ethnic restaurants that let immigrant Muslims feel at home, away from home (Curtis in Tarlo and Moor 2013:142).

Des Moines on the other hand is a small metropolitan city. A 2012 population estimate claims the city's population at around 206, 688. (US Census Bureau). The racial characteristics of the state are about 79% Caucasian, 10.2% African American, with 12% Hispanic or Latino of any race. Des Moines has a decent sized Muslim population with a large number of Bosnian and African refugees. The CAIR study "American Mosque" lists 17 mosques in the whole state of Iowa (2012:6). The first mosque built in the US, today known as the Mother Mosque was built in Cedar Rapids, Iowa in 1934 (The Dream of the Mother Mosque of America). Des Moines is home to four known mosques in the area, which have struggled to keep up with the waves of Muslim immigrants, often due to conflicts in their home countries of Iraq, Sudan, Bosnia and Palestine (Glaze 2010). There are an estimated 25,000 Muslims living in Des Moines (Glaze 2010).

Research Design and Sampling Techniques

The data for this study was gathered using semi-structured face to face interviews. Face to face interviews allow a high response rate as well as permitting the researcher to gather rich, detailed information from the surroundings and other non-verbal communication (Gubrium and Holstein

2001:60). For this reason, I developed a two part survey to be administered in person which consisted of both quantitative and qualitative questions. Muslim women can come from a variety of backgrounds as demonstrated by this study. The quantitative section allowed me to gather some basic demographical information as well as other questions that did not require an elaborate, open ended response. The qualitative part of the study allowed the interviewees to respond as they appropriated the situation and answer accordingly. It also gave me the option to ask more questions pertaining to each interviewee's individual situation and probe further as needed. In the qualitative section, I was able to dwell deep into the research question and gather detailed information about how Muslim women's *hijab*s affects their lives. See Appendix C for the questions that were asked.

Using snowball sampling method, I was able to meet women who could share their experiences while wearing their *hijab* (Gubrium and Holstein 2001:87). I decided to conduct the study in Houston, Texas and Des Moines, Iowa. Since I am not too familiar with the city of Houston, a relative helped me get acquainted with and meet some Muslim women in the area who were employed and wore the *hijab*. Most of the interviewees were able to further direct me to other friends and acquaintances. This helped me immensely in finding research participants.

Research Participant Eligibility

To be eligible for this study, the participants were required to reside and work in Houston, TX and Des Moines, IA at the time of the interviews or the surrounding suburbs in case of Houston, while wearing the *hijab* or the veil and be at least eighteen years of age at the time of the interview. Some of the women told their friends and family across the US about my study who then contacted me to volunteer their time but unfortunately I had to turn them away since I wanted to focus on two metro areas at a time, that of Houston and Des Moines.

Before I could begin with the research process, I designed a questionnaire suitable to the needs of my study and gleamed input from my committee members. After incorporating their input in the research materials, I went through the formal approval process of getting my proposal approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Iowa State University (Gubrium and Holstein 2001:88-89). Once I had their approval, I entered the field to conduct the study.

Since I am not too familiar with the area of Houston, I enlisted the help of a relative who lives there and was able to introduce me to some friends and later friends of friends who wore the *hijab* and were willing to be a part of this study. These women were then able to point me in the direction of other friends who were willing to be a part of the study. Contact with potential participants was done through telephone, email as well as the social networking site facebook.com. I also frequently visited various mosques in the city to meet women there. I found it was easier for women to see me in person and they were more receptive in talking to me. Some women could talk to me then and there, while others would set up a time to meet later. I interviewed many of the women at the local mosques like Masjid Al Farook, Masjid al Quran, as well the Champions Mosque in Spring. The mosques made the women feel safe since they were in a public place.

Since I am a part of the Muslim community in Des Moines, I had no trouble finding people to talk to. It's a small community and even smaller number of women wear the *hijab*. I felt very comfortable talking to almost all the interviewees and they were more than happy to be a part of my research.

Initially the purpose of my research was to study how Muslim women negotiate their identities at their places of employment while wearing *hijab*. For this purpose, I only interviewed Muslim women who worked outside their homes and wore the *hijab* while doing so. After data

collection and initial coding, I realized that the data I collected did not support the initial area of research and I then started to analyze the data for the process through which Muslim women go to wear the *hijab* as well as the reactions they get from their families and friends.

Interview Process

Once the potential interviewees had agreed to talk to me, we either talked right then and there or set up a time and place to meet later (Gubrium and Holstein 2001:90). Since Houston is a large city and also caters to its attaching suburbs, due to travel and/or time restrictions, some of the interviewees felt more comfortable being interviewed over the phone. Once the interviewee and I got talking, she was asked to read a recruitment form that listed information about the study and sign an Informed Consent form to ensure she was aware of her rights and responsibilities as a respondent (See Appendix, Gubrium and Holstein 2001:88). They were also encouraged to let me know if any of the questions felt uncomfortable and if at any point they did not want to be a part of the study, they could certainly let me know and we could stop immediately. None of the study participants were compensated for their participation and their contribution was completely voluntary. I felt it was easier for women to relate to me since I also wear the *hijab*.

Although I was following a structured interview schedule, my intention was to keep the conversation flowing as naturally as possible (See Questionnaire, Appendix). The goal of the study was to discover the process through which these women started wearing the *hijab*. If the interviewee wasn't clear enough, I tried to probe gently to get at the heart of the matter to gauge how her family and friends reacted to her adoption of *hijab* (Gubrium and Holstein 2001:87).

If the women agreed, the interviews were digitally recorded with their permission and I would transcribe them at a later date (Gubrium and Holstein 2001:90). If not, then I would try and take notes immediately while the information was still fresh in my mind. The interviewees

lasted anywhere from 10 minutes to an hour or more depending on how much the women had to share. The average interview was approximately forty minutes in length.

Sample Characteristics

The women ranged in age from 19 to 58. Despite popular belief, Muslim women, as the ones in taking part in my study, come from various racial and ethnic backgrounds including South Asian, Middle Eastern, African Americans, Hispanic and Caucasian. I interviewed fifteen women in Des Moines and twenty three women in Houston. The following tables list some characteristics of the sample in terms of race and educational level.

Table 1 Sample by Education and Race/Ethnicity: Houston Sample N=23, Des Moines Sample N=15

Variable	**Houston**	**Des Moines**
Education	*Frequency(Percentage)*	*Frequency(Percentage)*
High School	1(4.3)	2 (13.3)
Some College	4 (17.4)	5 (33.3)
Bachelor's	10 (43.5)	5 (33.3)
Master's	3 (13)	3 (20)
Post Graduate	5 (21.7)	0
Race/Ethnicity		
African/African American	4 (17.39)	1 (6.6)
Hispanic/Latino	2 (8.7)	6 (40)
South Asian	13 (56.5)	4 (26.67)
Caucasian (Middle Eastern origin)	2 (8.7)	4 (26.67)
Caucasian (non-Middle Eastern origin)	2 (8.7)	0
Age (years)		
Age range at time of interview	20-53	19-58
Average age at time of interview	33.2	31.3
Age range when first wore the *hijab*	6-31 (n=16)	11-52 (n=12)
Average age when first wore the *hijab*	19 (n=16)	23.25 (n=12)

As we can see from the table, majority of the respondents have at least some college education with a majority of the participants with a bachelor's degree. In Houston, I was able to talk to a lot

of women of South Asian background (mainly from India and Pakistan). Despite my efforts to especially locate and talk to non-Middle Eastern and non-South East Asian women, it was hard to find Muslim women who were Caucasian, African American or Hispanic or Latino mainly because they are not very many of them and if there are, they don't gravitate towards a certain place of worship. I also found ISGH (Islamic Society of Greater Houston) area mosques that I visited to be predominantly attended by South Asian women.

In Des Moines, even though there is a large presence of African refugees, most of the women do not work outside the home, even though they wear *hijab*. There is also a large Bosnian population, but majority of the Bosnian women, although work outside the home, do not wear *hijab*. Again, most of the women in Des Moines had at least some college education if not a bachelor's or a master's degree.

For purposes of coherence, while looking at the age range and average age Muslim women start wearing the *hijab*, I only considered Muslim women who were born into the religion rather than converts. Women who are born into Islam have a longer time to consider the *hijab* as compared to converts into the religion, who most likely only get interested in *hijab* when they become interested in the religion. Including their information when considering the ages of respondents when they first started wearing the *hijab*, would have skewed the results.

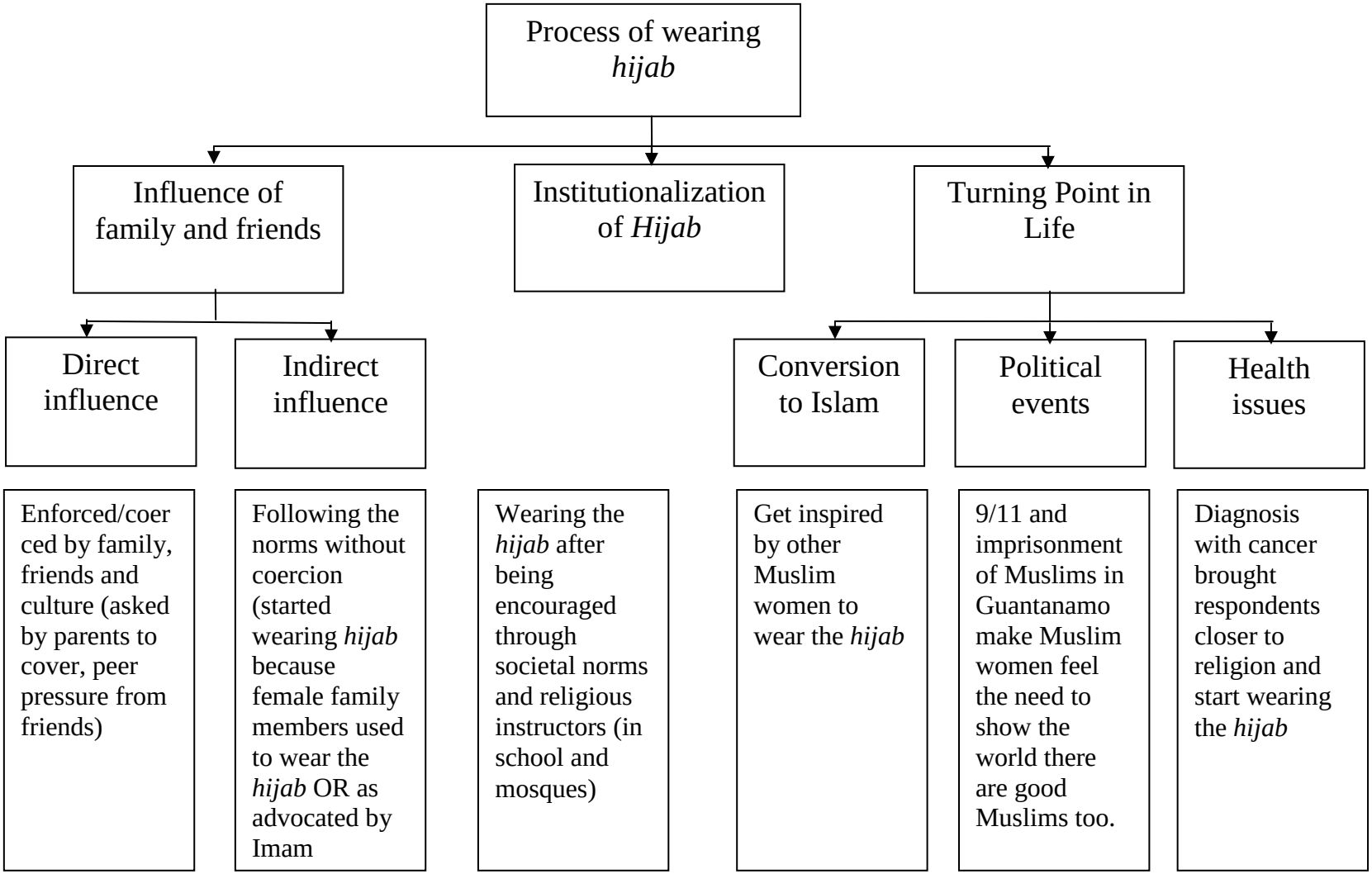
Data Management and Coding

After collecting the data using recorded interviews or note taking, it was time to convert it into an easy to read format. I transcribed all the interviews to make them more accessible. The data was then scanned thoroughly to elicit meaningful concepts through the process of coding (Corbin and Strauss 2008:159). After considering all possible meanings that can be drawn out from the data, I started putting conceptual labels on the data (Corbin and Strauss 2008:160).

Conceptualization allows the researcher to sift through the enormous amount of data to extract the parts most relevant to the question of study as well as provides a medium to talk about the data (Corbin and Strauss 2008:160).

For purposes of this paper, I went through the transcribed interviews and looked for the parts most relevant to my research questions. I then used open coding to make sense of the vast amount of data and condense the massive amount of information into more manageable codes and categories (Corbin and Strauss 2008:195). Through the process of coding, certain themes and categories started emerging in the raw data (Corbin and Strauss 2008:159). I was then able to organize these themes and categories and label them as certain concepts related to our research questions (Corbin and Strauss 2008:159). By going through these concepts, I was able to employ axial coding and see how these themes related to each other (Corbin and Strauss 2008:198). Corbin and Strauss define axial coding as “cross cutting or relating concepts to each other (2008:195). Through axial coding, I was able to discern the overlapping of some categories as well as their relationship with other codes and concepts. During this step, I came up with the following codes and their various dimensions and properties for my research questions.

Table 2 Process of wearing *hijab*



Even though I tried to code the data for the research question pertaining to reactions from family and friends when Muslim women start wearing the *hijab*, various complexities, dimensions, and variations in the data made it impossible to fit it into discernible categories. The relative nuances of the data will be discussed in the next chapter, during the analysis of the data.

Here is a practical example of how I came up with the categories. While going through the research questions that had answers relative to my area of study, a few themes started emerging. One person told me how she started wearing *hijab* as follows:

> "I am very glad *Alhamdulillah* that I started wearing *hijab* just by imitation. So my mom wore it, my grandmother wore it, my aunts wore it and I just actually in 5th grade, before I was, when I was in elementary school I used to wear short sleeves and even sometimes shorts and stuff when I was a little kid and my mom didn't really say much. But something hit me in 5th grade, maybe it was my mom talking or just watching my mom and I said, you know mummy, I think I am going to wear all long sleeves and long pants from now on and I gave all my short sleeves and short shorts to the goodwill".

She also mentioned at another part of the interview that her first *hijab* was a bandanna but it looked weird so it didn't last long. And in the initial days of her adopting hijab, she just wore that but slowly she realized wearing hijab just not meant covering her hair but also neck, chest and back area. And slowly her hijab became longer and she started wearing long sleeved shirts and looser pants. Here is a memo that I wrote after reading the above mentioned quote:

Memo: The interviewee started wearing *hijab* through imitation of her mother and other female relatives around her. Since they all wore *hijab*, she automatically started doing it at a young age too. In other words, she is also indirectly influenced by family and friends. The participant also seems to have the sense at a young age to start wearing long sleeves and give away her shorts and short sleeved shirts to Goodwill. Since she started at such a young age of 10 or 11, she started off by wearing a bandana on her head. At her age, that made sense even though that is not the traditional way of wearing *hijab*. Once she was comfortable with that, she started wearing the full on *hijab* as well as covering the rest of herself like her neck and chest area with her *hijab*. Thus *hijab* not only covers ones hair, but also enforces a more modest dress code such as long sleeved tops and looser pants.

From this, I deduced that she started to wear the *hijab* by imitation of her mother, aunts and other female family members in her life but it was not something she was forced into. Hence it was an

"indirect influence" on their part. By growing through other interviewees, a similar theme emerged where the participants in this study were indirectly influenced to wear the *hijab* by their female family members. There were also cases where they women were "told" to wear the hijab by family or friends and in that case they were "directly influenced" by family and/or friends. Similar tactics were applied to the data come up with the other categories.

CHAPTER 5: RESEARCH FINDINGS

My purpose in this chapter is to explore the process through which Muslim women in the United States arrive at the decision to wear the *hijab*. I specifically ask two questions: 1) what are the social and familial factors that inform whether or not a woman wears the *hijab*, and 2) how do family and friends react to one's decision to wear the *hijab.* I argue that the process by which Muslim women in America come to wear the *hijab* is multi-dimensional and involve both familial and social factors. I also argue that the reaction of family and friends towards wearing the *hijab* involve both supportive and non-supportive family and friends. The thesis findings are divided into two sections. In the first section, I discuss the multiple ways in which Muslim American women come to wear the *hijab* and in the second section, I discuss the ways in which different family members and friends react to one's decision to wear the *hijab*.

Process of Wearing *Hijab*

Most Muslims believe that *hijab* is mandated by Allah in the Quran. However not all Muslim women wear it. For those who do, the process through which they arrive at this decision varies with each individual according to their circumstances. I explored the data to examine these variations and discuss them below.

Influence of family and friends

For Muslim women in the West wanting to wear the *hijab* depends on their exposure to it. Often times they are introduced to *hijab* by relatives and friends. This influence can sometimes be very subtle. For some women it is as easy as imitating their mothers or other female relatives who wear the *hijab* (Also see Read and Bartkowski 2000:403 for similar findings). This is especially true for women who start wearing the *hijab* at a young age. About 12 out of 38 participants in this study started wearing the *hijab* at age 18 or younger and most of

them did so by emulating their mothers, sisters or other female family members. For women who started wearing *hijab* by imitation at a young age, the process of wearing the *hijab* may not have taken much thought. It was an automatic process: because others around them were wearing it, hence it must be the right thing to do. One respondent said:

> "I started to wear the *hijab* when my mom started to a wear the *hijab*. My parents got more involved with the *masjid* (mosque) so my mom started to wear the *hijab*. At the same time, I think more out of following my mom, if she was doing something than it must be the right thing to do." (South Asian in Houston, Age 32).

Starting to wear the *hijab* in one's childhood, can also mean not being fully aware of what wearing *hijab* really entails. At this stage, it is merely a piece of cloth covering their hair. Once they get older, they start becoming conscious of its true meaning and replace their articles of clothing with something more modest like longer tops and looser pants. Over time, their reasons for wearing *hijab* develop and mature according to their life experiences. As they get older, these women find *hijab* is much more than a piece of cloth covering their hair. It also refers to dressing modestly as described in the Quran. Translated to today's fashion, that means wearing long sleeved shirts, tops that cover your upper and lower body and clothing that is not too tight or revealing. One interviewee told me:

> "I am very glad *Alhamdulillah* that I started wearing *hijab* just by imitation. So my mom wore it, my grandmother wore it, my aunts wore it and I just actually in 5th grade, before I was, when I was in elementary school I used to wear short sleeves and even sometimes shorts and stuff when I was a little kid and my mom didn't really say much. But something hit me in 5th grade, maybe it was my mom talking or just watching my mom and I said, you know mummy, I think I am going to wear all long sleeves and long pants from now on and I gave all my short sleeves and short shorts to the Goodwill." (South Asian in Houston, married, Age 20).

Many women often see other family members wear the *hijab* and know they will wear it too but don't know the right time to do so. For one participant, it was important to be in a

familiar environment around other women who wore the *hijab*, her mom, friends and neighbors before she made the decision to wear the *hijab*. She said,

> "When I was younger, when I was not married, I was living with my mom, and she never pressured me into wearing *hijab* but she would always say oh so and so's daughter is wearing *hijab*, and I am like mom, they are them, not me. I will do it in my own heart. She wanted me to do it, to make that change. It didn't happen to me as quick as I would have liked to have. But I am happy that I got to do it after I got to know my husband and his family and it came from the heart. So I changed it, after my son was born, when my son was born, is when I changed, *Alhamdulillah*. And the only way I could do it, I couldn't do it here because nobody is wearing it here. The social and the family aspects of it, my in-laws don't wear it, my sisters-in-law don't wear it, nobody wears it here. So for me to go back home, in my mom's home environment where everybody, my neighbor, my sister, my cousin, everybody wears *hijab*, they all wear *hijab*. And so when I went back home after my son was born, he was like 2 I think, and I told my mum, I think this is it, so we went shopping, we bought *hijab*s and everybody, so it was like a *hijab* party." (South Asian, Age 37).

This woman rejected the *hijab* initially even though she grew up around other women who wore it, until she felt ready to do it. Once she decided it was time to start wearing it, she had to return to her familiar environment where other women were wearing the *hijab* as well to feel comfortable enough to wear it herself.

Although most women made an independent decision to wear the *hijab* without any coercion, some do report pressure from family and friends to start wearing the *hijab*. One person said:

"I think it was more of an influence. Like my friend, she just told me it would be kind of weird, it's not bad or anything, if you hang out with a bunch of other Muslim friends they are gonna wonder why you are not wearing the *hijab* you know. And especially with guys around. And I thought yeah, you know I don't want any snide remark (laughs)" (South Asian in Des Moines, Age 26).

This respondent's decision to wear the *hijab* stemmed from peer pressure. Her friend directly influenced her by saying that since she hangs out with other Muslim friends, they might wonder why she does not cover. And since she wanted to avoid gossip or rude remarks, she decided to wear the *hijab*. It should be noted that this respondent had no pressure from her family to wear

the *hijab*, none of her female family members wear it and the pressure to conform in her case came from her friends.

Other women were told by families to start covering because it was part of their culture. One woman reported wearing the *hijab* in Bangladesh, a Muslim country, because her parents asked her to.

> "(My parents) they just like tell me cover your hair, pray every day, five times a day, and whenever I go outside, cover yourself, like basic, but I don't wear *burqa* at all in Bangladesh, but when I came USA sometimes I use *burqa*. But not every time. But Bangladesh I just always use *hijab* because they were very strict about that, my parents. Yeah. Like my two sister in laws, they are very religious…they tell me sometimes you have to cover your full body, even you have to cover your face, just you can, take out your eyes, otherwise you have to cover. I told them no I cannot do that much. It's too much pressure for me so I just want to cover my hair, no I cannot cover my face" (South Asian in Des Moines, Age 34)."

The respondent now lives thousands of miles away from her and her husband's family in Des Moines and still wears the *hijab*. That speaks volumes about the way she feels about her *hijab* now. This also contradicts the public theory that Muslim women in the US need not wear the *hijab* because no one is forcing them to do so unlike in their countries of origin. As was discussed by the participants in this study, wearing the *hijab* is a conscious decision. They may start wearing the *hijab* because of one reason, such as pleasing God but as they spend more time with their *hijab*, their motivation to do so starts developing and changing. This resonates with other research done about Muslim women in America (Furseth 2011, Read and Bartkowski 2000, Williams and Vashi 200). Along the way, they discover various advantages or disadvantages of wearing the *hijab* and covering themselves and that shapes their reasons to stick to their decision to wear the *hijab*. The fact that women in the United States are opting to dress the same way they may have in their home countries, suggests that they continue to take advantage of the *hijab* as it works for their particular situation.

Institutionalization of Hijab

For some women, it was not about peer pressure or imitation but figures of authority such as teachers, whether religious or not, who encouraged them to wear the *hijab*. One participant remembers being told to start wearing the *hijab* by her mother at the age of 12/13, most likely at the onset of puberty. Also, in her school she was required to wear the *hijab* starting at a certain grade level as part of the school uniform. She stated,

> "I remember it, my mom told me that you are big now, you should wear it, also the school said children in certain grades should start wearing it" (Arab American/immigrant in Des Moines, Age 32).

Because this respondent grew up in a Muslim country, it was the norm there for girls to start wearing the *hijab* at a young age and hence the school was perhaps reinforcing the common societal customs. Another interviewee went through a similar experience while growing up in the Middle East:

> "I was at school and we have religion lesson, like every day we have religion lesson and she was talking about the *jahannum* (hell), if you not wearing *hijab*, if you not doing, if you not pray, yeah if you wear *hijab* you are gonna go with Khadija (first wife of the Prophet Muhammad, with Asma (sister-in-law of Prophet Muhammad), you gonna be, you feel it when your friend is gonna be Mohamed daughters and Mohamed wives. Just like make it, like a picture in your mind, how its gonna be when you been to paradise with Mohamed daughters and Mohamed and those is your friends. I feel like I am happy, I (have) the same feeling, when I been to the home, I just take it from my mom closet, and I take *hijab*, and I just wanna show up anywhere in *hijab*. She (mom) said what are you doing? I said ok, from now on, I have a *hijab* and she said ok, just decide and I said I decided, and she said no you cannot decided so fast and I said yes" (Middle Eastern, Age 35).

This interviewee's experience illustrates how cultural norms shape religious expectations. In her experience, she was simultaneously scared into wearing the *hijab* to avoid the hell fire and encouraged to be in the company of the female companions of the Prophet Muhammad. This goes on to show how religion is taught to people in some Muslim countries. For both of the aforementioned participants, *hijab* was deeply embedded in the society they lived in. Living in a

Muslim society, *hijab* comes as second nature, just like blue jeans does in Western countries. By early education of the Quran and Islamic tradition, *hijab* becomes a mandatory practice. Allowing it to be a part of the school uniform, the society makes sure it is followed by everyone who attends that school. In the case of the second participant mentioned above, it wasn't a part of the school uniform, but the students were told stories of the hellfire and colorful pictures were painted of the heaven where one could be in the company of the female companions of the Prophet. All they had to do was put on the *hijab*.

As compared to her, the next interviewee told me how she was encouraged positively by the *Imam* at her local mosque to come closer to her religion and in turn, start wearing the *hijab*. She said:

> "How it came about was, in our *masjid*, in our local *masjid* in Maryland, we had a new imam, very young, probably around 26, 27, so when he came to our community, because he was so close to our age and stuff, he really inspired us, he got us to think more about our religion, come closer to our religion. And that's when, by his words and encouragement we all got you know, starting to wear *hijab*. In the beginning, it was very hard. I remember when I first started wearing it, some of my non-Muslim friends, who obviously knew me, were joking around, what is this, we have already seen your hair, why do you have to cover in front of us, you know. I actually would start it for 2 months and then stop it for maybe another month or so and then start it up again. This went on for about a year. Before I actually graduated, and left Maryland to go to New York. When I went to New York, I did it full time and never stopped then." (South Asian in Houston, Age 36).

This interviewee had a hard time getting in the groove of things in terms of wearing her *hijab*. She tried to start wearing it but peer pressure from her non-Muslim friends stopped her from wearing her *hijab* continuously. Once she moved to a difference place and start afresh, she was able to keep her *hijab* on. A new place meant new friends and fresh faces who had not seen her without her *hijab* at all. That meant no pressure to conform to a look others were accustomed to. This is in line with what other participants in this study have said previously: it was easier for

them to start wearing the *hijab* either at a new place they moved to or starting at the start of a new school year.

Turning Point in life

Another way in which Muslim American women decide to wear the *hijab* pertains to personal, social, and political turning points. Turning points refer to the ways (s) in which individuals and/or communities change how they view themselves and their surroundings as a result of changing personal, social, and political events (Strauss 1997:95). In this section, I will explore how personal, social, and political turning points in the United States inform whether or not Muslim women wear the *hijab*. Although *hijab* is considered compulsory at the onset of puberty, some women who participated in this study did not start seriously thinking about it until they were forced to by a personal turning point in life, such as an illness. At least three women who participated in the study started to wear the *hijab* in the wake of being diagnosed with cancer. One participant reported:

> "I had cancer so, and then I had polycystic ovaries so in that sense I was told I could not have kids and once I did get pregnant and I had my son, we went to, it was the month of Ramadan and we were going to some religious studies, so we were going to that and there, and in the Quran I read about, in Surah Nisa (chapter of the Quran called "The Women") about covering, yeah. And then I thought to myself, you know, *Alhamdulillah* (All praise is to Allah), Allah blessed me with my son so I need to do, you know, this is something so small compared to that so why can I not do it so then I decided to read more and I started wearing *hijab*." (South Asian in Houston, Age 32).

Suffering from a life threatening illness such as cancer brought her closer to her religion and once she started studying Islam and the role of *hijab*, she decided to cover. This was her way of being grateful for her blessings by following the command of God. However not all women come closer to religion as a result of an illness. One woman chose *hijab* as a way to deal with her illness, but not necessarily to please God. She told me:

> "In the past, before I became Muslim I used to would wear certain, I used to dress differently. When I became Muslim, I began to wear long sleeves. But I didn't wear

> *hijab*. When I was diagnosed with cancer, I knew I was going to lose my hair. So I made a choice of well, how I would like to look to the public. Because I would have to wear something on my head, because I didn't want to go working with a bald head. I could have had many choices but I took the opportunity to tell the public that I am Muslim because they don't usually associate Hispanic with Muslim, it really, really strike people. So ok I want to give the appearance I am Muslim and see what happens. And I wanted to do it for Allah too. But it wasn't my motivation." (Hispanic in Houston, Age 50).

The aforementioned participant chose to take the *hijab* off after her treatment was over and her hair started growing back. Her motivation to wear the *hijab* was to hide her baldness due to cancer treatment as well as to see how people react to her *hijab*. In her opinion, she did not need a symbol to wear and show she is a Muslim. She felt as a convert, she has the passion about Islam in her heart because it is something she chose for herself and whether she wears the *hijab* or not, has no bearing on it. She did mention she found it easier to be recognized as a Muslim when she wore the *hijab*.

Most of the participants who converted to Islam as adults, rather than being born into it, accepted Islam with the whole package. They had the opportunity to read about Islam in detail, including the *hijab* before they accepted to be a part of the religion. They knew it came with the territory. Some of them started covering right away, from day one of their conversion. This is clear from the following excerpts. One interviewee said,

> "I took my *shahadah* (conversion) earlier this year, end of June, and from day 1, covered." (Caucasian in Houston, Age 36).

Another participant stated,

> "So before I took *shahadah*, you know, I was playing around with it a little bit. Once I took *shahadah*, once I became Muslim, it was automatic." (African American in Houston, Age 34).

These women reported no hesitation in wearing the hijab starting from day 1 of their conversion. They knew it was part of the package and had time to adjust to it and think

about before their acceptance of Islam. Once they converted, it was easy to make the transition to start wearing the hijab.

And yet for others, it took another kind of turning point in life to make this decision: Some women were deeply affected by the unfortunate events such as 9/11 and others and the backlash Muslims received because of it. And they wanted to use their *hijab* to signal to the world that there are good Muslims too. One participant told me:

> "Well when I first became Muslim, (I knew) I should cover and I did cover my head. But like I said, when 9/11 happened, before that if we go to the mosque, I had my *hijab* on, sometimes if I was out I would be covered but not full *hijab*. Once 9/11 came, I just said you know what, let me wear my *hijab* because they need to see all Muslims are not like what happened and I need to be a representation so when they see *hijab* by my efforts and what I am doing, they'll say oh I know that Muslim and that's a good person and they are covering and all Muslims aren't like that. So I just take it as part of I need to wear *hijab* to represent Islam to show a good example" (African American in Houston, Age 42).

Another person said she was very motivated to wear the *hijab* after the Gulf war because of the negative publicity Muslims were getting at the time and she wanted to let the world know that there are good Muslims out there too. She said,

> "…The other thing that was going on around that time was the Gulf War, and that was the first time I remember being negative media about Muslims. It was really mild as compared to now, but I just remember thinking, oh my gosh, this is how people think Muslims are and that's not how we are and that's not what we are about and I wish I could explain that to people, I wish they could see that you know, I wish the non-Muslims could see that. And I thought well I walk around and if they could see me, they would know that Muslims are nice people and regular people and you know, I started thinking. At that time, it was more of an incentive for me to wear *hijab*, because it was like here, look at me, I am a Muslim and I could portray a positive image of Islam by wearing *hijab* and people would automatically associate me with my religion. Whereas when I didn't wear *hijab*, people didn't associate me with my religion, I was just that Indian girl, you know. But now I became that Muslim Indian girl, you know? Just by putting on my *hijab*. And so then my actions were a reflection of just me as an Indian girl but me as a Muslim girl. And I wanted to do that because I wanted to give out a positive image to people amidst all the negative image that was out there" (South Asian in Des Moines, Age 36).

Another convert to Islam reported initially being unsure how she felt about the *hijab* after her conversion to Islam but a story about the prisoners in Guantanamo changed her outlook. She told me:

> "When I decided to wear *hijab*, I remember it was after (the event) in Guantanamo. I don't know if you know but it was basically about brothers who were arrested in Afghanistan and they became religious; well they were religious before but not consistently. And how they started praying while they were in prison. And so I decided how I was taking my religion for granted and how I was free and able to do all these things and I wasn't doing it. So I started to wear *hijab* the next week" (Caucasian in Houston, Age 26).

These women felt the need to publicly assert their Muslim identity to the world mainly because they were able to do so, and also to show the mainstream American society that good Muslims exist too. This supports the findings of Badr (2004) in her study of Muslim women in Houston area that American women found the September 11 attacks and the following negative media publicity of Muslims as a motivating factor to start wearing the *hijab*.

Some of the women who converted to Islam, made an interesting observation how they were introduced to the idea of wearing *hijab* by other Muslim women and not as openly by men as commonly assumed. This resonates with findings of Furseth 2011 who found that Muslim women are often affecting other women's decision to adopt the *hijab*. An African American convert (African American in Houston, age 33) I interviewed reports being brought in to the religion by her now husband but he wasn't the one to introduce her to the *hijab*. Her husband and his other male Muslim friends actually taught her to focus on the other aspects of Islam, like concentrating on her prayers; teaching her about *hijab* was not the focus at that time. She was introduced to *hijab* by the women at the mosque she was attending and that made her think that she should look into wearing it too. Another convert was also introduced to *hijab* by the Muslim

women going to the mosque in her area and she looked up to these women in terms of the way they practiced their religion and wore their *hijab*. That gave her the strength to do the same.

This also implies that Muslim women who convert to Islam do not have the family support structure available to women born into the religion. Born Muslims have the support of their families around them in terms of the religion. As seen above, some of them find the strength to wear the *hijab* through their female family members. Converts do not have this option since they don't have the same support structure around them. They must look to different avenues of support and one of the ways they can do that is to emulate other successful Muslim women who wear the *hijab* and are well versed in the basic teachings.

Reaction of Family and Friends

Muslim women in the US often make a conscious decision whether or not to wear the *hijab*. Therefore, the reactions they get from their family or friends are not always as expected. Women participating in this study reported various responses from their families, from support and encouragement to neutrality to others being scared for their safety and even being angry at their decision. Sometimes they got support from their parents but apprehension from their husbands or vice versa. It was hard to articulate the reactions of their family and friends in neat, distinct categories. Below are some of the experiences of the participants.

A few women "shocked" their families by making the decision to wear the *hijab* since they did not feel it was necessary for these women to wear it. One woman said,

> "My parents, were shocked, it's so funny because it's totally different now, of course but back then even my dad was like, they weren't, upset but they were like well, you don't have to wear it, you know, they weren't into it, and my mom was like, oh that's good, whatever you want. Now, she wears it better than I do and of course, it's just different now, but what was it, 16 years ago, I wouldn't say, they were ecstatic but they weren't against it or anything" (South Asian in Houston, Age 36)."

As opposed to the popular belief that Muslim women are forced into wearing the *hijab* (Mernissi 1991, Odeh 1993 among others), this participant's parents did not force her into covering. In fact, they were surprised at her decision and did not feel it was necessary for her to wear the *hijab*. She also did not have a role model to follow in terms of *hijab* since she was the first one in her family to wear it. One she decided to wear it, her mother and sisters followed in her footsteps and started wearing the *hijab* themselves. Since she had started wearing the *hijab* before she met her husband, he didn't have a hand in her decision to do so. But she did say that her husband actually likes her with her *hijab* now and would probably be upset if she decided to take it off now.

Another participant talked about her husband being shocked by her decision to wear the *hijab* as follows:

> "My husband was shocked. He actually, he did not say he did not want me to but he didn't say he wanted me to...And my family? My family was like WHAT THE…..WHY? They didn't understand it and I had to go through the whole…, it was very hard actually because they didn't want me to and they didn't understand and they didn't feel that it was necessary" (South Asian in Houston, Age 32).

Once again, this goes against the common assumption of women being forced into dressing a certain way (Mernissi 1991, Odeh 1993). It is interesting to note that Islam as a religion advocates that women's beauty be preserved through *hijab* for her husband and close family (Badawi 1995). But the male family members of some of the women in this study were the ones not supportive of their decision to wear the *hijab*. One participant described her female family members being supportive of her decision to wear the *hijab* but it was the male family members who disliked for her to wear the *hijab*.

> "At that point both my dad and my husband weren't into it. Like those were the major main figures in my life. My father wasn't enthusiastic about it and neither was my husband. My mother and my sister were already wearing *hijab* at that point. They respected my wish, they weren't happy with it. So it's not that the men of the family were

> all trying to you know, Muslim women should do this, why don't you want to wear it" (South Asian in Houston, Age 40).

When I asked her what she thinks their reasons were for her to not wear the *hijab*, she said,

> "Oh, I think they fear for discrimination and growing up, the time when we grew up in Pakistan, and the generation that my dad came from and my husband, it w as like women who were less educated or the village women would be covering their hair , it wasn't something modern and moderate people did so it was different cultural baggage. I don't think there is a religious definition to wearing *hijab* but their perception of somebody who wears *hijab* is somebody who is not educated and who is not independent and I think it was all that they had in the back of their mind. Even if they didn't express it, I think that's where they were coming from" (South Asian in Houston, Age 40).

As seen from the aforementioned quotes, some of the women's families didn't think it is necessary for Muslim women to cover. In some cases, these women reported getting negative comments from the men in their families. One woman said,

> "My husband didn't talk to me for 3 days. My mother-in-law and mother were really mad at me, they used the word maid, that I had become a maid, once my husband used the word too, that I had become the maid, maid servant is the word. But my sister supported me. My sisters don't wear the *hijab* but they supported me. They were in the US and sent me *hijab*s and supported me all the way" (South Asian in Houston, Age 52).

This woman started wearing the *hijab* when she was living in Pakistan, a predominantly Muslim country. Wearing the *hijab* should be a natural part of female dress there but it is not the case necessarily as can be seen from these women's responses that it is considered backwards and something that the lower class women take part in. Another woman reported.

> "Some people in my family thought I wasn't gonna make it in life, it's not gonna be good, people are not gonna like you, they are gonna dislike you, you are not gonna be able to have more opportunities in life versus if you don't wear it. Especially a job and good knowledge you have, if you wear it, then your chances you getting a job is less if versus you don't wear it. But I didn't listen to anyone" (South Asian in Houston, Age 28)

Another respondent also echoed this feeling of apprehension from her family:

> "The family was against it. It is not the way people do in Bosnia, or did at the time when we were there. And there was some concerns that here, you might lose some rights or might be looked (at) differently or discriminated against. So I think that's where that

> concern comes from. And they don't think it's fashionable" (Bosnian in Des Moines, Age 38)

So, for some women, their families were opposed to them wearing *hijab* because they consider it old fashioned or lower class attire, an idea they bring from their countries of origin, which are predominantly Muslim. Not all men in Muslim countries consider *hijab* mandatory for women: they would rather have their women not wear it and want them to be considered modern. This is similar to what Omar found in her study of women wearing the *niqab* in UAE (2009). The negative connotation and stigma attached with *hijab* in the western society also makes some families fear for lack of opportunities or discrimination for their loved ones. But despite the criticisms they received from their families, these women continued to wear the *hijab* because that is something that they believe in. This corroborates the findings of Furseth 2011 and Read and Bartkowski 2000 that some women decide to cover despite opposition from their families. By doing so, these women show they are in control of their own lives. Like Furseth 2011 finds in her study, "As women who have lived in the U.S. for a number of years, they draw on American cultural values regarding individualism and subjectivity when they refer to the head-scarf as an individual choice and the realization of the individual self" (Furseth 2011:376).

Wearing *hijab* for some women might mean being limited in the way they can enjoy life. I spoke to three women of Arab descent in Des Moines who are related to each other, and had started wearing the *hijab* around the same time as each other. Once they had made the decision to wear the *hijab*, all three of them reported their mothers and other female family members asking them to wait for a few years and enjoy life before doing so. But they still decided to go ahead and start wearing it because, as one of them said,

> "Even though in our culture, in our family, we don't do any parties, we don't go out and like, have boyfriends, no, there is nothing (like that), like we are just simple. So there was no point (to wait)" (Arab in Des Moines, Age 24).

Other women reported feelings encouragement and support from their families which made it easier for them to wear the *hijab*. One woman who started wearing the *hijab* at a young age told me,

> "(When) I broke the news to my parents, my mom was excited yet apprehensive, didn't know how to acknowledge that. And my father was scared because he was like you are young, (do) you know what you are doing, you can put it on, you cant take it off, its not a game, but they both supported me and everyone in my family supported me 100%. They were very proud and thought I was very courageous to do that" (South Asian in Houston, Age 33).

Another participant when asked about her family's reaction to her decision to wear the hijab, said:

> "Really nothing, they smiled and they did not say anything. Of course your family supports you no matter what." (South Asian in Des Moines, Age 33).

Thus, not all women's decision to wear the *hijab* was received in the same manner by their families. Various families have different interpretations of the Islamic requirement to dress modestly. Some were supportive of *hijab*, while others were not for various reasons but these reasons are not portrayed by the media since all women wearing the *hijab* are grouped under the same umbrella of "oppressed Muslim women" (Mernissi 1991, Odeh 1993).

CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to explore the process through which Muslim women in the United States arrive at the decision to wear the *hijab*. Specifically, I tried to study the 1) social and familial factors that contribute to a woman's decision to wear the *hijab*, and 2) how do family and friends act in response to one's decision to wear the *hijab*. I have found that the process by which Muslim women in America come to wear the *hijab* is multi-dimensional and is shaped by both familial and social dynamics. I also argue that the reaction of family and friends towards wearing the *hijab* involve both supportive and non-supportive family and friends.

Women in this study find themselves being directly or indirectly influenced by other Muslim women around them. This influence can both be subtle such as following into a female relative's footsteps. Chances are if a woman's mother or sister is wearing *hijab*, she does too. It is what they have seen while growing up, and seems like the normal thing for them to do as well. But there are also cases where these women are the first women in their family to start wearing the *hijab*. In that case, they themselves become the source of inspiration for other women around them to start wearing the *hijab*. In the case of women who converted to Islam as adults, they found strength, inspiration and encouragement from other Muslim women attending the mosques in the area. Because of the lack of any female family members they could follow in terms of their decision to wear the *hijab*, converts to Islam found other Muslim women to be their role models.

Often times, *hijab* is part of the current culture and part of the bigger society these women once or still belong to. When *hijab* acts as an institution, it becomes the part of necessary, everyday clothing. Some women in this study started covering because they lived in Muslim countries at the time where *hijab* was worn by everyone around them and advocated in

the school by teachers. Some women were also influenced by teachings of religious scholars and teachers, both in their home countries and in America.

Other women in the US are so deeply affected by some turning points in life that it ultimately leads them to wearing the *hijab*. Women who convert to Islam know before accepting it, that *hijab* is part of the package. As opposed to Muslims by birth, they study the religion for some time, and hence when they become Muslim, wearing the *hijab* is an automatic response. This is what happened to the participants in this study who converted to Islam. Some women's decision to wear the *hijab* was shaped by being diagnosed with cancer. Their illness brought them closer to God and their religion. By studying more about Islam and realizing it is a teaching of Islam they should not ignore, they started wearing *hijab*. Other women, mostly converts to Islam were deeply influenced by political events of the time where Muslims were in the negative spotlight, such as the September 11 attacks, the Gulf War or the media coverage on prisoners in Guantanamo. Many women reported starting to wear the *hijab* after these events to show the world that not all Muslims are bad people or terrorists, and that some Muslims are good people too. By wearing the *hijab*, they wanted to negate the stigma attached to it, attaching some normalcy to the image of *hijab*.

By wearing the *hijab*, they signal to others what code of life they subscribe to. Muslim women wearing *hijab* in Muslim countries do so to fit in the dominant culture. They may or may not be forced into wearing it. When these women move to western countries such as the United States, *hijab* symbolizes something else entirely. It suddenly holds a multitude of meanings depending on their interactions and experiences. It becomes a way to express their Muslim identity to others, to symbolize their differences.

As discussed by the participants in this study, the decision to wear the *hijab* does not come easy to these women. As expected many families are happy to see their daughters, sisters and wives start wearing the *hijab* and dressing modestly. At the same time, there are also families who originate from Muslim countries but think the *hijab* is backwards and is worn by people low on the social hierarchy ladder. Women belonging to these families have had to fight for their right to wear the *hijab* because that is what they believe in. For some the *hijab* may represent lack of modernity and education but for these women, it represents the identity of a Muslim. Yet many other women decided to wear the *hijab* and get no reaction from their families. They have neutral thoughts on *hijab* and are fine with their female family member's decision to take on the *hijab*. Although in many cases, women can be subtly encouraged or coerced into covering, most women in this study came across as strongly opinionated women who *made* the decision to wear the *hijab* regardless of what their families think of it. This act of courage shines a new light on the character of Muslim women who are traditionally seen as submissive and meek. This resonates with findings of Williams and Vashi (2007) that women in the US are "creating the space for autonomous selves".

It is important for these women to be identified as Muslim, the identity that the *hijab* affords them. These women use the *hijab* as a symbolic boundary between themselves and the mainstream American society. Even though the *hijab* makes them stand out, it also signals to others that they will not take part in the social activities that are part of the mainstream American culture such as drinking, clubbing or going on dates, to name a few. The *hijab* acts as a chaperon for them.

As mentioned previously, the findings of this study corroborate findings from previous studies of Furseth 2011, Read and Bartkowski 2000, Williams and Vashi 2007. This thesis

discusses the various social and familial factors that help these women make the decision to wear the *hijab*, as well as how they deal with reactions from their families due to this decision. Implications for future research suggest the public aspect of their lives also need further studying to see how these women negotiate their everyday lives outside the home while wearing *hijab*. Since Muslim women are highly visible members of their religion, that is hugely misunderstood, Muslim women in the US can use this public focus on their *hijab* to educate the West about it. I suggest it is important for Muslim women to be active members of the mainstream American society as productive members of the society they live in, as well as slowly help change the public perception of them. It is imperative that the idea of *hijab* not be addressed from a feminist perspective and instead needs to be studied in a pragmatic, political and sociological context.

This thesis focused mainly on Muslim women who wear the *hijab*. It is also important not to ignore Muslim women who choose not to wear it. Read and Bartkowski 2000 compare identity negotiation by both veiled and unveiled Muslim women in Austin, Texas. It would be interesting to study the experiences of Muslim women in other areas of the United States. Further research on Muslim women, both veiled and unveiled is required to understand the dynamic of their interactions with each other is required although Read and Bartkowski found feelings of mutual tolerance and leniency towards each other (2000). It would also be interesting to study Muslim women who once wore the *hijab* but decided to forgo it, why they decided to do so and what they think about their decision now. Additional research also needs to accommodate women who are converts to Islam and how they negotiate their way into the existing Muslim society and prevalent culture in the mosques in the United States, as well as fitting Islam into their pre-existing lives.

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APPENDIX A

INRODUCTION

Interview Number _____

Date _____

Good Morning, I am Erum Tariq-Munir, a master's student at Iowa State University, Department of Sociology in Ames, Iowa.

I am conducting this interview to get your input on how working Muslim women who wear the *Hijab* negotiate their identities at their place of employment. This study will also examine if these women experience any discrimination because of the way they choose to dress.

So that I can concentrate on our discussions, I would like to digitally record our conversation, if that is okay with you. If not, I will just take notes. I assure you that your comments will be confidential. I will not be reporting your name or any other distinguishing details to anyone. If you agree to this interview and its recording, please sign this consent form.

If you have any questions about the project, or what I have told you so far, I will be very happy to answer them for you.

Signed,
Erum Tariq-Munir

APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

Title of Study: Muslim Women and the *Hijab*: Identity Negotiation at the Workplace

Investigator: Erum Tariq-Munir

This is a research study. Please take your time in deciding if you would like to participate. Please feel free to ask questions at any time.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to examine the identity negotiation processes of working Muslim women who wear the traditional *Hijab* or the veil in everyday life. The study will also examine if Muslim women in *Hijab*, experience any discrimination because of the way they choose to dress. The proposed study will enhance our understanding of Muslim women's experiences at their places of employment. You are being invited to participate in this study because you are a part of the social group to which this study is concerned.

DESCRIPTION OF PROCEDURES

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to participate in an in-depth individual interview concerning discrimination at your place of employment because of the way you choose to dress and wear the *Hijab*. You will be asked to complete a short survey questionnaire that includes questions concerning demographic characteristics, migration history, employment background and any instances of discrimination. Interviews will be audio taped only upon the consent of the interviewee, and for transcription purposes only. All interviews will be completed in one visit. Your participation will last for approximately 1 hour and 30 minutes.

RISKS

There are no foreseeable risks at this time from participating in this study.

BENEFITS

If you decide to participate in this study there will be no direct benefits to you. It is hoped that the information gained in this study will benefit society by providing valuable knowledge concerning attitudes towards working Muslim women who wear the *Hijab* and provide awareness about any discrimination that they may or may not experience.

ALERNATIVES TO PARTICIPATION

None.

COSTS AND COMPENSATION

You will not have any costs from participating in this study. You will not be compensated for your participation.

PARTICIPANT RIGHTS

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or leave the study at any time. If you decide not to participate in the study or leave the study early, it will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Records identifying participants will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by applicable laws and regulations and will not be made publicly available. However, federal government regulatory agencies, auditing departments of Iowa State University and the Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves human subject research studies) may inspect and/or copy your records for quality assurance and data analysis. These records may contain private information.

To ensure confidentiality to the extent permitted by law, the following measures will be taken. The interviews will be strictly confidential and each individual will be assigned a unique code and letter and will be used on forms instead of their names. All identifiers will be kept separate from the data. Once the data are transcribed and the results of the study published, the audio tapes will be destroyed. If the results are published, your identity will remain confidential.

QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS

You are encouraged to ask questions at any time during this study.

- For further information about the study, please contact Dr. Abdi Kusow, Associate Professor at Iowa State University at (515) 294-3128 or Erum Tariq-Munir at 773-216-9216.
- If you have any questions about the rights of research subjects or research related injury, please contact IRB Administrator, (515) 294-4566, IRB@iastate.edu or Director, (515) 294-3155, Office for Responsible Research, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa 50011.

PARTICIPANT SIGNATURE

Your signature indicates that you voluntarily agree to participate in this study, that the study has been explained to you, that you have been given the time to read the document, and that your questions have been satisfactorily answered. You will receive a copy of the written informed consent prior to your participation in the study.

Participant's Name (printed) _____

_____ _____

(Participant's Signature) (Date)

APPENDIX C

QUESTIONNAIRE

Interview# _____ Date _____ Time _____ Location _____

QUANTITAVE SECTION: MUSLIM WOMEN INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. How old are you? _____
2. What is your marital status? Single ____ Married _____ Widowed_____Divorced_____
3. What is your race/ethnic background?

   White (non-Middle Eastern origin)___ Black____Hispanic or Latino____ South East Asian (Pakistani/Indian/Bangladeshi)____ Middle Eastern____ African _____
4. What is your current level of education? Less than High School ____ High School_____Bachelor's degree____Master's degree_____Ph.D._____
5. What is your country of origin? _____
6. Are you a US citizen? Yes_____ No_____
7. If not, do you intend to become a US citizen when the time is right?

   Yes____No_____
8. If an immigrant, how many years have you resided in the United States? _____
9. How often do you communicate with friends and relatives from your original homeland?

   _____Not often _____Sometimes _____Very often
10. At what age did you start wearing the *Hijab*?_____
11. Does wearing the *hijab* inhibit your day-to-day activities in any way? Yes____ No_____
12. Have you ever been discriminated against or treated differently outside of work because of the way you dress? Yes___No_____
13. Have you ever been treated differently because of

Gender_____Race____Ethnicity_____Religion_____

14. How long have you been working? _____

15. How long have you been at your current place of employment? _____

16. Do you like your current place of employment? Yes_____ No_____

QUALITATIVE SECTION: MUSLIM WOMEN INTERVIEW GUIDE

SECTION 1: Homeland Context and Social Upbringing

1. Tell me about your country of origin.
2. What do you think of your social and class background?
3. Growing up, what were your parents were like? (Probe: Do you come from a socially and culturally conservative family?)
4. What is the size of the Muslim community in your city?
5. How often do you interact with non-Muslim individuals in your daily routine?

SECTION 2: Background on *Hijab*

6. Tell me about the way you dress and about the type of *hijab* that you follow. (Probe: Do you wear the scarf, the niqab, a jilbab etc).
7. Please tell me about when you first started to wear the *hijab* and how that came about.
8. Did you start wearing the *hijab* as a result of your own decision? (Probe: Was it because another family member thought you should wear *hijab*?)
9. Please explain your reasons for wearing *hijab*.

SECTION 3: Employment background and *hijab* at the workplace

10. Tell me about the kind of jobs you have had so far.
11. What do you do at your current job? How long have you been at this place of employment?

12. Please share what you think about your current work environment. (Probe: Do you feel comfortable going to work every day?)
13. Do your think your colleagues treat you differently as a result of your wearing the *hijab*? If so, how?
14. Do you feel the way you are treated as a Muslim employee or colleague has changed since the September 11th terrorist attacks?
15. If a convert to Islam, do you think the way people treat you has changed since you became Muslim and started wearing the *hijab*? How so?
16. How many people do you approximately work with? Are there many/any Muslims at your workplace that you directly work with?

Section 4: *Hijab* and Life in General

17. Do you think the *hijab* is restrictive to your way of life in any way? Please share examples.
18. Do you think it stops you from assimilating yourself into the American way of life? (Probe: Explain).
19. Some people say that the *hijab* is a form of gender oppression; what do you think about that?