

American Muslim Women's Experiences with Abuse:
An NRSA Grant Application

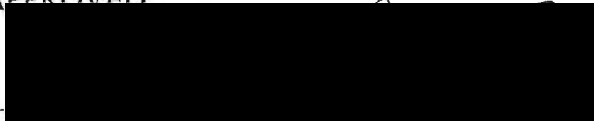
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A Master's Research Project


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Table of Contents

Content Guide.....3
Activities Under Award.....4
Research Proposal.....4-26
 Specific Aims.....4-5
 Background/Significance.....5-11
 Design and Methods.....13-19
 Preliminary Findings.....19-22
 Literature Citations.....21-25
Appendix A: Community Assessment Survey Form.....26-29
Appendix B: Community Assessment Findings.....30
Appendix C: Overview of Pilot Study.....31-55

American Muslim Women's Experiences with Abuse: An NRSA Grant Application
Content Guide

The contents of this master's research project is comprised of the research proposal portion of a National Research Service Award (NRSA) grant application. Included here are the research proposal portion of the grant application along with appendices outlining preliminary findings from a community assessment project and a pilot of the proposed future dissertation study.

This NRSA grant proposal is submitted for partial fulfillment of the Master of Science in Nursing degree. If approved, the NRSA will fund future dissertation research on American Muslim Women's lived experiences with physical, emotional, and sexual abuse.

29. Research Training Plan

29a. Activities Under Award:

1995-1996 research 30% coursework 70%
1996-1997 research 40% coursework 60%
1997-1998 research 70% coursework 30%

29b. Research Proposal

1) Specific Aims:

The proposed study will examine the lived experiences of American Muslim women with regard to their experiences of emotional, physical, and/or sexual abuse. Abused American Muslim women are a marginalized group subject to the harsh effects of multiple systems of oppression including gender, racial, ethnic, and religious oppressions (Henderson & Erickson, 1994, Tift, 1993, Memon, 1993, Ba-Yunus, 1995, Toulan, 1995, Haddad, 1995). These multiple systems of oppression interface and intertwine with American Muslim women's unique cultural systems, shaping their experiences of abuse in ways that are unique and culturally bound. For this reason, American Muslim women's experiences with abuse cannot be adequately addressed by the general abuse literature alone. Despite their vulnerability as a group, and despite the emphasis on cultural diversity in nursing literature, American Muslim women's unique culturally bound responses to health and illness have been largely ignored by researchers (Hall, Stevens, & Meleis, 1994, American Academy of Nursing, 1992, Stevens, 1993). This gap in nursing knowledge requires the development of new knowledge that will provide nurses with an understanding of the experiences of this vulnerable group of women. Ultimately, this knowledge will increase this population's potential for health and their potential for a healthy environment by promoting the delivery of culturally competent care (Meleis, 1992). Therefore, the overall long term goal for this program of study is to generate knowledge that will promote the provision of culturally competent nursing care of American Muslim women in general, and abused American Muslim women in particular. In keeping with the overall research goal are the specific aims for this proposed future dissertation research. These specific aims are:

1) describe American Muslim women's lived experiences with abuse.

2) identify culturally specific phenomenon which shape American Muslim women's experiences and perceptions of abuse.

Researching the lived experiences of American Muslim women will provide insights into the phenomenon of abuse as it occurs in American Muslim families and communities. Since providing culturally competent care requires that nurses learn more about the beliefs, values, and experiences of people belonging to disenfranchised and stigmatized groups this knowledge will be useful for nurses who encounter American Muslim women in practice (American Academy of Nursing, 1992). Additionally, information from this study will be useful for American Muslims themselves who are coming to terms with the problem of abuse. Finally, this study will provide a foundation upon which further research efforts can be based.

2) Background / Significance

Abuse of women is a personal and social phenomenon that affects millions of women each year in the United States alone (Tift, 1993, Campbell, 1993). American Muslims whose numbers have been estimated to be between two and six million in the United States are also affected by this devastating phenomenon (Memon, 1993, Goodwin, 1994, Kosmin & Lachman, 1993, Afranji, 1995). The costs of abuse are both monetary and human as individuals and families are destroyed, and the legal, social, and health systems in this country are accessed by abusers, victims, and children (Tilden, 1987, Campbell, J., 1993, Jensen, 1994, Bray, 1994, Jones, 1994, American Nurses Association, 1993).

Abuse as a Socio-Cultural Phenomenon

Abuse as a socio-cultural phenomenon and not only an intrapersonal and interpersonal problem, has only recently received the attention of domestic violence researchers (Tift, 1993, Dobash & Dobash, 1978, Greenblat, 1985). This perspective provides a holistic view of the problem, broadening the focus to include the contextual elements of society and culture, and decreasing the likelihood that victims will be studied as pathological (Tift, 1993). In keeping with this trend, and in recognition of the unique influences of the ethos and tone of culture on health and illness behaviors, some nurse researchers and theorists have begun to examine abuse from a cultural perspective (Geertz, 1973, Meleis, 1992, Bohn, 1993, Campbell, D., 1993, Torres, 1993, Rodriguez, 1993, Fishwick, 1993). The resulting literature addressing abuse as it

occurs in unique cultural systems present two primary reasons as to why such an understanding is of critical importance: 1) Cultural knowledge and sensitivity is a precursor to the establishment of trusting nurse-client relationships. In turn, such relationships must precede effective intervention strategies. In some cases this will mean the difference between life and death for abused women who are isolated and lacking in social support; 2) Eurocentric models of human behavior do not transcend differences in race, gender, class, and ethnicity. Thus, Eurocentric interpretations of behavior and values in nursing assessments and interventions lead to inappropriate judgments and subsequent inappropriate intervention strategies with minority populations. Both of these ideas stem from one overarching principle reflected in all of the cultural diversity nursing literature investigating abuse. In short, abuse is a public health issue that cannot be effectively remedied in minority populations without an understanding of the cultural variations in meaning and context in which it occurs. (Campbell, D, 1993, Bohn, 1993, Torres, 1993, Rodriguez, 1993, Oregon Public Health Association Public Health Nursing Section & Washington State Public Health Association Public Health Nursing Section, 1993).

While abuse affects women across many cultures and of varying ethnicities, the cultural and social structures that support men's ability to batter women are imbued with culturally specific meanings. As an Arab-American Muslim woman who has experienced spousal abuse within the context of the religious culture, this researcher has observed that Muslim women are a marginalized group who are particularly vulnerable to becoming victims of abuse in ways that are culturally constructed. By invoking religious text to justify and uphold their abusive behavior, abusers use their victims own spirituality as a weapon against them. Through this manipulation of religious text (without regard for the context of the verses or the progressive intent of the faith itself), abusers attempt to maintain power and control over their wives, culminating in emotional and/or physical assault. This disempowerment of Muslim women is further supported within a cultural context that values abusers over victims. Social support for men is high within the religious culture, and female victims are frequently left without community supports finding themselves ostracized and alone (Memon, 1993).

Because abused American Muslim women must often seek help outside of their communities, the negative societal stereotypes that stigmatize Muslims in this country are problematic, creating barriers to care for this population (Memon, 1993, Ba-Yunus, 1995, Toulan, 1995, Stevens, Hall, & Meleis, 1994, Stevens, 1993). Such attitudes, accompanied by a paucity of information about American Muslim women

in the literature leave nurses unprepared to effectively provide care to this population. This proposed study will begin to amend the gap in the literature about this population, providing a springboard from which other research efforts can be formulated. Finally, this proposed research is intended to develop new knowledge that will enable nurses to reach out to these vulnerable women and promote an understanding of their lives.

Contextual Aspects of American Muslim Women's Experiences with Abuse

Contextual elements of American Muslim women's experiences with abuse include the disempowerment of American Muslim women via the manipulation of religious text (literal decontextualized quotations of religious text used to "keep women in their place"), the availability and quality of social support, and negative societal stigmas which influence care.

Cultural influences shape American Muslim women's experiences with abuse. One significant factor that shapes this experience is the use of women's own spirituality to disempower and oppress them both in their families and in the Muslim community at large. Religious text is manipulation when men invoke decontextualized literal interpretations of scripture for the purpose of justifying abusive behavior and maintaining men's position of power over women within the community. Additionally, the acceptance of misogynist tradition renders greater support for such manipulation, ultimately leading to the disempowerment and devaluation of women individually and collectively.

The original spirit of Islam was progressive in nature, moving toward a "progressive embodiment of the fundamental human values of freedom and responsibility" (Rahman, 1979, p. 39). Taken in context, allowing for individual interpretation, and keeping in mind the progressive nature of the faith, religious text could easily be used to advocate for and defend women's progress. Unfortunately the reverse is true. Over time, the progressive spirit of Islam has been eroded by Muslim lawyers and dogmatics who have generated law and theology that is said to "apply to any society, no matter what its conditions, what its structure and what its inner dynamics" (Rahman, 1979, p.39). Stripped of context and interpreted literally, religious text is frequently used to uphold male authority and foster female obedience. Memon (1993), in a commentary intended for Muslim readers describes how abusers use religion to justify abusive behavior:

Focusing on rituals, considering themselves to be Islamically knowledgeable, and disregarding the spirit of Islam, they wrongly use the Qur'anic verse that says men are

the protectors and maintainers of women to go on power trips, demand total obedience, and order their wives around (Memon, 1993, p.14).

The oppression of women via the manipulation of Koranic text, is reinforced by the acceptance of misogynist hadith (traditions of the prophet Mohammed) as authentic and unquestioned truth. Mernissi, (1987) in her investigation of the historical and methodological conditions surrounding misogynist hadith presents these two examples: "Those who entrust their affairs to a woman will never know prosperity" (Mernissi, 1987, p. 49) and "The Prophet said that the dog, the ass, and the woman interrupt prayer if they pass in front of the believer ..." (Mernissi, 1987, p. 64). Although there are also numerous hadith enjoining kindness to women and daughters and elevating the status of mothers, the acceptance of misogynist hadith creates an environment that is destructive toward the mental and physical health of Muslim women. This environment allows abusers to flourish while victims are left without social support within their own communities (Memon, 1993).

In addition to the use of religious text to disempower Muslim women, the availability and quality of social support including non-Muslim social services for abused women are important contextual aspects of American Muslim women's experiences with abuse. Social support is an important concept when considering the health of individuals and families (Norbeck & Tilden, 1983). Social support systems are comprised of meaningful ties with friends, relatives, and social groups which provide satisfaction and assistance when needed (Friedman, 1986). For American Muslim women who object to abuse or who attempt to leave an abuser social support is lacking. These women find themselves ostracized from the Muslim community often the only source of American Muslim women's social ties (Memon, 1993). This is significant in view of the research that has demonstrated that "encouraging less contact with family members exclusively and more with friends within a person's social network can be helpful in reducing the tension and isolation that often precipitate battering" (Tilden, 1987, p. 62).

Because social support for victims of abuse is lacking within the Muslim community, many abused American Muslim women are forced to look outside of the Muslim community for help in the form of social services. Unfortunately, because American Muslim women are subject to the marginalizing effects of societal stigma, negative stereotyping, and discrimination, access and quality of non-Muslim services for this population is likely to be poor (Stevens, 1993, Hall, Stevens, & Meleis, 1994, Haddad, 1991, Ba-Yunus, 1995, Toulou, 1995). Negative societal stigmas reinforce the fear harbored by many American Muslims that non-Muslim service providers lack

sensitivity to and understanding of Muslims' unique cultural beliefs (Memon, 1993). For abused American Muslim women, this means that access to care is compromised and the humiliating experiences of abuse are compounded. Clearly, the absence of social support for abused American Muslim women both from within and outside of American Muslim communities represents an alarming increase in risk and vulnerability to abuse for these women.

American Muslim Women's Perceptions of Abuse

American Muslim women's perceptions of abuse are filtered through the lens of culture (Unger, 1993, Saleebey, 1994). Providing culturally competent care to abused American Muslim women requires an understanding of and sensitivity to their perceptions of the phenomenon of abuse. Thus, the cultural factors which influence American Muslim women's perceptions of abuse are presented here.

For Muslims, Islam permeates daily life. Proscriptions for behavior, from significant acts to even the most banal aspects of life proliferate. The duties of Muslims direct "everyone toward the same idea: submission of the daily behavior of the individual to a strict discipline" (Mernissi, 1987, p. 27). Indeed, for Muslims, Islam is the "matrix and the worldview within which all other human activities, efforts, creations, take place" (Nasr, 1993, p. 339). Thus, because Muslims experience their religion as a "total way of life" (Nasr, 1993, p. 440) abused Muslim women must necessarily perceive their experiences through a religious lens.

This religious lens is shaped by a system of values and beliefs that place a serious emphasis on the importance of family life with clearly defined roles for husbands and wives framed within a patriarchal structure. According to religious tradition the Prophet Mohammed said "the man who marries perfects half his religion" and "Never did God allow anything more hateful to Him than divorce" (Ali, no publication date found, p. 602, 671). Because of this emphasis, American Muslim women may perceive themselves bound by duty to God and family not to leave their abusers. Finally, because of the environment created by the manipulation of religious text, abused women may believe their abusers claims that they are justified in their actions through God given authority.

The Nature of the Abuse Experienced by American Muslim Women

The nature of the abuse experienced by American Muslim women remains largely undocumented. Still, descriptions of abuse that are not culture specific are salient to the experiences of most abused women including American Muslim women. Thus, abuse of American Muslim women can be said to fall into the same categories that have been generated in the abuse literature. These categories include emotional, physical and sexual abuse (King, 1993). Similarities and differences of these forms of abuse as they are experienced by American Muslim women in comparison to other women remains speculative. However, it is clear that within each unique cultural system, abusive acts are imbued with culturally specific meanings and the ways in which American Muslim women make sense of their experiences of abuse are culturally mediated (Unger, 1993, Saleebey, 1994).

The abuse suffered by Arab Muslim women has been noted to include battering, genital mutilation, rape, emotional cruelty, and legalized murder (El-Saadawi, 1980, Akeb & Abdulaziz, 1985, Manasra, 1993, Goodwin, 1994, Shaaban, 1991, Zenie-Ziegler, 1988). While it seems clear that battering and emotional abuse are forms of abuse that are common to the experiences of both Arab and American Muslim women, to what extent practices such as genital mutilation occur in the US is unknown.

Of all of the forms of abuse, emotional abuse is most common and often precedes other forms of abuse for Muslim and non-Muslim women victims (King, 1993, Memon, 1993). Because of the paucity of information specifically addressing American Muslim women's experiences of abuse one article must be relied on to explore the nature of the emotional, physical, and sexual abuse experienced by American Muslim women. Memon's (1993) commentary on wife abuse in the Muslim community provides a rare picture of abuse in the American Muslim family.

Memon's (1993) description of emotional abuse includes these actions toward a Muslim wife:

verbal threats to divorce the wife, to re-marry, or to take the kids away if she does not do exactly as she is told; intimidation and threats of harm; degradation, humiliation, insults, ridicule, name-calling, and criticism; false accusations and blaming her for everything; ignoring, dismissing, or ridiculing her needs; neglect and the silent treatment; spying on her; telling her she is a failure and will go to hell; twisting Islamic teachings to make her feel worthless because she is a woman; restricting her access to transportation, health care, food, clothing, money, friends, or social services; physical and social isolation; extreme jealousy and possessiveness; lying, breaking promises, destroying trust; etc... (Memon, 1993, p. 12).

Most of the behaviors outlined by Memon (1993) are pertinent not only to Muslim abusers but are common behaviors of all abusers. However, the meaning of the abuse can be very different depending on the context and meaning provided by the culture in which it occurs. For example, threats of divorce can be devastating for Muslim women in the context of a culture where divorce is highly stigmatizing and economic dependence is common. Additionally, the threat to re-marry takes on a different meaning in this culture when one considers Muslim men have the right to marry up to four wives at one time.

Memon (1993) further reports that battering and rape characterize the abuse experienced by Muslim wives:

physical abuse includes pushing, shoving, choking, slapping, punching, kicking, and beating; assault with a weapon, tying up; refusing to help her when she is sick or injured; physically throwing her out of the house; etc... The third form of abuse is sexual abuse, involving forced violent sex. For example, a wife may not want to have sex for health reasons, but the husband may force her anyway (Memon, 1993, p. 14.).

Again, while many of these forms of abuse occur across cultures, how these acts are defined and what they mean is dependent upon the values and mores of each cultural system. This is evident in Memon's (1993) example of sexual abuse where rape is couched within the context of a woman's health needs and not a woman's right to control over her own body.

In summary, the nature of the abuse experienced by American Muslim women like other American women, includes emotional, physical, and sexual abuse. These forms of abuse are perpetrated on American Muslim women by their abusers via behaviors that appear (based on the Memon (1993) commentary) to be in many instances much the same as behaviors characteristic of non-Muslim abusers. The important differences appear to lie not in the abusive behaviors themselves, but in the culturally unique meanings that surround these acts. These meanings evolve in the context of a system of values, beliefs, and customs that shape experience (Unger, 1993, Saleebey, 1994). Addressing the health needs of this vulnerable group of women requires an understanding of these meanings and the contexts from which they are derived. This understanding is crucial in view of the seriousness of the problem, the vulnerability of the group, and nursing's commitment to provide culturally competent care for diverse populations.

3) Design and Methods:

Design:

American Muslim women's experiences with abuse are complex, culture specific, and contextual. Gaining an understanding of this phenomenon requires a method that will provide a thorough understanding of the contexts and conditions of American Muslim women's lives. Thus, the method chosen for this study is interpretive phenomenology, a method which examines the nature of meaning of everyday experiences (Van Manen, 1990). Interpretive phenomenologists look for commonalities in culturally grounded meanings by studying the phenomenon in its own terms. This approach considers the human world of self-understandings, meanings, skills, and traditions (Benner, 1994).

Because American Muslim women are already subject to negative societal stigmas, it is imperative that the results of this proposed research do not further stigmatize this population. Interpretive phenomenology is a method well suited to purpose. Unlike traditional research methods which tend to produce data that are decontextualized, elemental, rational, and atomistic, interpretive phenomenology approaches the study of human lives by considering the contextual elements of daily life (Benner, 1994). This approach is particularly useful when studying phenomena occurring among marginalized groups. Considering the contexts of person, temporality, locale, conditions and concerns, within the framework of common culturally grounded meanings (all components of the interpretive phenomenological method) provides for an expanded understanding of the participants' experience while simultaneously minimizing the likelihood that decontextualized study results will further stigmatize the population of study (Hall, Stevens, & Meleis, 1994). For the purposes of this proposed research, unstructured small group interviews can best achieve this understanding by eliciting rich narrative accounts that capture the everyday understandings and culturally shared meanings of American Muslim women with regard to the issue of abuse.

Interpretive phenomenological research methods are described by Van Manen (1990) as a dynamic interplay among six research activities:

1. turning to a phenomenon which seriously interests us and commits us to the world;
2. investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it;
3. reflecting on the essential themes which characterize the phenomenon;
4. describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting;

5. maintaining a strong and oriented pedagogical relation to the phenomenon;
6. balancing the research context by considering parts and whole (pp. 30-31).

These activities are intended to be used as guidelines and not as a cookbook (Benner, 1994). Still, these guidelines are salient to the research process, providing useful and practical approaches for interpretive phenomenological researchers.

In depth unstructured small group interviews are uniquely suited to the process of uncovering the phenomenon of American Muslim women's lived experiences with abuse. This method allows for the research process to capture American Muslim women's experiences using the richness of detailed narratives. In this way, the voices of the women themselves guide the inquiry in meaningful and culturally unique ways (Hall, Stevens & Meleis, 1994).

Unstructured interviews are "an effective way to set up a familiar communicative context and dialogue" (Benner, 1994, p. 108). Interviews are conducted in naturalistic settings using conversational language that encourages participants to talk about their experiences using their own natural language. Participants are asked to talk directly to one another rather than talking down or up to the researcher. This approach attempts to minimize the anxiety of the participants at the same time that it encourages a familiar context in which to generate narrative accounts (Benner, 1994). Narrative accounts are explicated employing a story telling approach structured by the participants themselves. Participants are instructed that narrative accounts which include descriptions of "events, situations, feelings, and actions" are desired (Benner, 1994, p. 108). This strategy encourages the sharing of narrative accounts that are more than just facts and opinions allowing for the production of text rich in the details of everyday concerns and practical knowledge (Benner, 1994). This approach will allow for the everyday lived experiences of American Muslim women with regard to the issue of abuse to come forth, capturing important cultural nuances while avoiding the generation of accounts that reflect the researchers preconceived notions about what is relevant.

During the interview, the researcher serves as an active listener interrupting the story as infrequently as possible. Engaged active listening leads the researcher to probe further, clarifying whether understanding has occurred (Benner, 1994). Following the completion of the story, clarification and paraphrasing of the account takes place. At this point in the interview process, the researcher must take special

care to avoid asking leading questions that might skew the meaning of participants' accounts.

An important benefit of unstructured small group interviews are the insights generated through the sharing of like experiences with others. Stories triggered by narratives serve to clarify participants' understanding of stories and provoke the explication of story links that may be indirect and unexpected. This process provides enriched narrative accounts that may be difficult to generate in individual interview settings. This may be particularly useful within the cultural context of American Muslim women who are accustomed to sharing personal stories in women's groups via a tightly bound women's social network. Additionally, American Muslim women may feel more at ease sharing their stories with each other instead of directly to the researcher.

In the proposed research study, multiple interviews of the same groups will be conducted as often as circumstances allow. Multiple interviews allow the interviewer to address gaps, blind spots, and discrepancies, and to further clarify ambiguous meanings that become apparent following the reading of prior interviews (Benner, 1994).

Unstructured individual interviews will also be used to collect narratives. Women who have been identified as participants and who are known to have particularly painful stories will be offered the option to engage in either individual or group interviews. Interpretive phenomenological research interviewing methods for individual unstructured interviews follow the same processes as the small group interview process described above and are based on the same principles. Additionally, topics explored are identical, and multiple interviews with the same participants will be attempted for further clarification of meanings and exploration of emerging themes.

Study Participants and Setting:

American Muslim women will be the primary participants for this study. For the purposes of this study, American Muslim women are defined as women who self identify as Muslims and are citizens or permanent residents of the United States. While all American Muslim women will not provide first hand accounts of abuse it is expected that all participants will have some knowledge of abuse that has been experienced by friends, family or acquaintances within their Muslim communities. Thus, inclusion criteria for the proposed study require that participants be American

Muslim women aged 18-45. Minors and vulnerable elderly will be excluded from the study. Pregnant women may be included as incidental members of the general population of American Muslim women.

As a member of the group of women targeted for this study, the investigator has access to potential participants for this study. Network sampling using community contacts to locate potential participants will be utilized. The use of network sampling is optimal since it increases access to women who might not ordinarily come forward. This minimizes the danger that American Muslim women who firmly believe in the rights of husbands to “discipline” their wives, and/or women who are extremely isolated will be missed in the sampling process. American Muslim women who have personal experiences with abuse are the primary target group for this study. However, two groups of women will be included as study participants: 1) American Muslim women who are self identified as having experienced abuse; 2) American Muslim women who have not personally experienced abuse but are aware of the phenomenon within their communities through knowledge of the abuse experiences of American Muslim friends, family, or acquaintances. In addition to American Muslim women, some individual interviews with American Muslim men who are key informants will be conducted. Key informants include Muslim community leaders and decision makers. These interviews will be conducted solely for the purpose of gathering data that will bolster an understanding of the context in which American Muslim women experiences abuse. The data from these interviews will serve as supplementary data to the narrative accounts of American Muslim women.

Data will be collected from participants residing in the Seattle and Portland Muslim communities. Gathering data from two sites will increase the availability of participants for inclusion in the study. Additionally, the use of two settings allows for the possibility of increased diversity of the data collected, revealing potential differences in American Muslim women’s lived experiences with abuse as a function of locale.

Qualitative research usually requires small samples of participants “nested in their context and studied in depth” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 27). Initial plans are for four small group interviews consisting of three to four women. Depending on the richness and depth of these four interviews, additional small group interviews may be obtained. Additional individual interviews will be conducted as needed to ensure the privacy of participants who do not wish to tell their stories in a group context. The sample size for this study will be limited by the size of the text generated by multiple interviews. No greater than three interviews of the same persons will be conducted.

Potential difficulties with the research plan include an inadequate description of the lived experiences of American Muslim women specifically with regard to the issue of abuse. In order to achieve the desired level of description, additional interviews may be necessary. Ultimately, the sample size will depend on the adequacy of description obtained in all interviews.

Study Procedures :

Identification of potential participants will occur through community contacts, known to the investigator through community membership via American Muslim women's groups. Community contacts will provide potential participants with information about the purpose of the study and the method that will be used. Following the initial contact, the investigator will invite potential informants to participate in the study. At that time any unanswered questions will be addressed by the investigator.

Small group interviews will include between three and five participants and will be conducted in the homes of Muslim women and/or at Muslim community centers in Seattle and Portland. Every effort will be made to arrange transportation for participants who are unable to access the interview site. Participants will be asked to speak about their life experiences as Muslim women with regard to the issue of abuse. In particular, participants will be asked to speak in detail about events, situations, feelings, concerns, and conditions that surrounded the experiences. All interviews will be conducted by the investigator. After obtaining informed consent, interviews will be audio-taped and transcribed confidentially to prepare for data analysis.

Tentative Sequence for the Investigation:

The study pilot have been completed. During year one of the proposed dissertation study, interviews will begin along with a preliminary analysis of results. During year two, follow up and additional interviews will be performed as necessary. and the analysis phase will approach completion. Year three will be utilized to complete all study activities and present study results in dissertation form. Following the completion of dissertation work, study results will be summarized in article form and submitted for publication.

Data Analysis:

The goal of data analysis in interpretive phenomenology is "to uncover commonalties and differences, not private idiosyncratic events or understandings"

(Benner, 1994, p. 104). Commonalties rooted in culturally grounded meanings will be sought during the analysis of the text. The lived experiences of American Muslim women with regard to the issue of abuse will be extracted from the texts using three narrative strategies: 1) paradigm cases, 2) thematic analysis, and 3) exemplars.

First, each interview text will be read in its entirety for the purpose of obtaining a global understanding of the narratives. Next, topics, issues, concerns or events will be selected for closer analysis. The interpreter will attempt to “articulate the understandings created by the process of reading the text” (Benner, 1994, p.114).

Paradigm cases are used as an early strategy in analysis of data to promote a sense of clarity and understanding of the text for the researcher. Additionally, paradigm cases are used as means of presenting data (Benner, 1994). Paradigm cases should reflect many of the themes uncovered during the process of thematic analysis.

The goal of thematic analysis is to uncover meaningful patterns, stances, or concerns by moving between the parts and the whole of the text. Likewise the researcher’s analytic viewpoint moves between that of an imaginative dweller in the world of the participants to that of a detached observer. Thus, the interpretive researcher “engages in cycles of understanding, interpretation, and critique” (Benner, 1994, p. 116).

Once the analysis of the text has progressed, patterns of meaning and common situations and experiences will have been identified. At this point, exemplars are extracted from the text to illustrate important aspects of a paradigm case and thematic analysis. Additionally, exemplars may substitute for operational definitions “because they allow the researcher to demonstrate intents and concerns within contexts and situations in which the ‘objective’ attributes of the situation might be quite different” (Benner, 1994, p.117). Finally, a range of exemplars allows for the description of multiple nuances of a phenomena, providing for the reader, a greater understanding of the complex relationships and meanings embedded in the text.

Evaluation of the interpretive account generated by the analysis will follow the four approaches to evaluating an interpretive accounts as discussed by Packer and Addison (1989). These criteria are:

- 1) Coherence: an interpretive account should have a particular internal character that is plausible and intelligible.
- 2) External Evidence: an interpretive account should reflect the intent of the source from which the interpretation is derived. This requires going back to the participants to confirm that the researcher has captured what the

participants really meant in the interpretation.

- 3) Consensus: an interpretive account should be convincing to others. This may be accomplished via discussion among the investigator and the sponsor, discussion among colleagues not involved in the project, and by peer responses to published reports.
- 4) Practical Implications: an interpretive account should have implications for practice. It should prove useful in understanding related phenomena and have the power to change practice.

These criteria provide a model of practical reasoning that will be used to assess the quality and test the integrity of the interpretive work produced by the proposed dissertation research.

To facilitate the process of data analysis, the computer software program Non-numerical, Unstructured Data Indexing, Searching and Theorizing (NUDIST) will be utilized. This program was selected for use because of its strong coding, search and retrieval, and database management abilities. Additionally, NUDIST allows for the recording and storage of interpretive commentary as it unfolds during the research process (Weitzmen & Miles, 1995). Finally, NUDIST is a user friendly program that is accessible to the researcher through the Oregon Health Sciences School of Nursing.

Protection of Human Subjects:

Protection of human subjects will be assured through careful handling of the data to ensure the complete confidentiality of all participants. Code numbers assigned to transcripts that are linked to participant names, and signed consent forms will be stored in a separate location from the data. All data including data stored on disc, audio tapes, and hard copy notes, and signed consents, will be kept in a locked file. Access will be restricted to the investigator.

Because of the sensitive nature of the subject matter, the participants will be encouraged to promote a supportive environment that is comfortable for all participants. Acceptance and understanding of fellow participants will be encouraged, and the investigator will monitor the emotional level of the group to maintain at an acceptable level. Should a participant become too emotionally distraught, the interview will end and referral for additional intervention will be provided. All of these precautionary measures will be taken with individual as well as group interviews, with emotional support being offered by the investigator alone during the individual interview process. In cases where participants are experiencing abuse during the time period that the study is being conducted, safety of the

participant will be the primary consideration of the researcher. Safety issues in domestic violence research include the following concerns: 1) contact with the participant should not alert the abuser to the study; 2) performance of interviews must take place at a safe time and at a location that is private and secure; 3) finally, the safety of the data is critical and procedures to protect confidentiality must be followed stringently (Parker, Ulrich, Bullock, Campbell, D., Campbell, J., King, Laudenburger, McFarlane, Ryan, Sheridan, Smith-McKenna, & Torres, 1990).

This study has been reviewed by the Oregon Health Sciences Committee on Human Research and was designated as exempt with no further committee involvement required. However, future committee involvement may be necessary as the need to perform repeated interviews surfaces.

Preliminary Findings

The findings of a community assessment project and a pilot study support the need for further research exploring the phenomenon of abuse among American Muslim women. Both of these inquiries indicate that abuse is a serious problem among American Muslims and that the cultural context in which the abuse occurs is key to understanding this phenomenon.

Community Assessment Findings

Purpose: The purpose of this project was to assess the needs of the American Muslim community in Portland with regard to the issue of spousal abuse. More specifically, this project focused on the needs of wives who are abused by their husbands. This assessment was conducted within the confines of a community assessment course.

Method & Design: The method and design for this project were naturalistic, and the results and were not intended to be generalizable. The design and methods reflected the assessment focus of the project. In order to assess the culturally specific needs of abused American Muslim wives in the Portland Muslim community, a survey tool was developed (see appendix A). This tool was developed by the researcher in conjunction with a group of American Muslim women in attendance at a Muslim women's group.

Sample: A convenience sample of Portland Muslim men and women was accessed through two community leaders in the Portland Muslim community. Because these leaders distributed the surveys and not the researcher, it is unknown how many non-responders to the survey there actually were. Fifteen anonymous surveys were returned for data analysis to the researcher.

Results: Results of this survey indicate that abuse among American Muslim women is a critical problem that has not been addressed by the Portland Muslim community. Several of the female respondents reported current and/or past abuse experiences. Additionally, a large percentage of respondents identified culturally specific issues salient to American Muslim women's experiences with abuse. Issues identified included the manipulation of religious text by abusers to justify abusive behavior and the subsequent subjugation of women in Muslim families and communities (see appendix B). It is clear that this phenomenon cannot be fully understood without further exploration of the culturally shared meanings that shape American Muslim women's experiences of abuse. Further, it is also apparent that these experiences occur within the context of a cultural system that is not well understood by the majority of nurses. This lack of understanding was identified by participants as a barrier to care for abused American Muslim women who fear being misunderstood and stigmatized by non-Muslim providers. The findings of this project should be considered within the context of its limitations. Limitations include the small sample size and non-random sampling method.

Pilot Study Findings

Purpose: This study was a pilot of the proposed research plan. The purposes of conducting the pilot included: 1) identification of the scope of the problem; 2) testing the basic research design; 3) testing participant recruitment procedures and 4) interviewer training.

Design & Methods: This pilot utilized an interpretive phenomenological approach in keeping with the research plan for the proposed study. One unstructured small group interview lasting approximately two hours was conducted. American Muslim women were asked to relate stories about their lived experiences with abuse. These narratives were audiotaped and transcribed for analysis.

Sample: The sample for the interview consisted of three American Muslim women from the Portland area. Two of the participants were African-American and one was Arab-American. All participants were married adults.

Results: Analysis of the text revealed several themes that suggest that American Muslim women are vulnerable to abuse in ways that are culturally constructed (see appendix C). Some of the areas of concern include: 1) manipulation of religious text by abusers to enslave women via their own spirituality; 2) the devaluation of women as manifested by high social support in the Muslim community for abusers and low social support for victims; 3) reports of abuse including emotional abuse and

battering. These results indicate a need for further inquiry. An in depth exploration of the culturally specific phenomena that shape American Muslim women's experiences with abuse is necessary for a deeper understanding of the results of this pilot to emerge. Likewise, illuminating the culturally shared meanings associated with the context, perceptions, and nature of American Muslim women's experiences with abuse is necessary for an authentic understanding of this phenomenon to arise. Finally, the results of this pilot confirm the usefulness of the Interpretive Phenomenological approach to provide results that are non-stigmatizing, holistic, coherent, and culturally grounded.

Both of these studies point to a significant problem with abuse in the American Muslim community that requires further exploration. The research methods used in the pilot study yielded rich data which provided a beginning understanding of the issues and concerns salient to American Muslim women's experiences with abuse. Using these same methods, the proposed dissertation study would provide a deeper and more thorough understanding of abuse among American Muslim women. This understanding is vital if the needs of this highly vulnerable group of women are going to be addressed by nurses in practice. Without the understanding provided by such a study, American Muslim women will continue to be hidden, stigmatized, and vulnerable to abuse without the benefit of a health care system that is sensitive to their needs.

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Appendix A

Community Assessment Survey

Oregon Health Sciences University - Nursing Research**Information About the Survey**

This survey is being conducted by Dena S. H. Phillips, a graduate student in the School of Nursing. Information obtained from this survey will be used to complete the course requirements for Nursing 530. Additionally, the survey results may be used for other research purposes including but not limited to future dissertation work. The investigator can be reached at 786-0509.

Purpose and Benefits

This survey is a tool developed for the purpose of assessing the needs of Muslim women with regard to the issue of spousal abuse. Results of the study will be useful in evaluating existing community needs and resources. Since information on abuse in American Muslim communities is extremely lacking, the data derived from this study is a potentially invaluable source of baseline information for community members interested in program development.

Procedures

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may leave unanswered any questions you do not wish to answer and may end your participation at any time. **This survey is anonymous. Please do not place your name on the survey form or the envelope.** When you have completed the survey, please return it promptly via the mail using the stamped envelope supplied, or to Sister Nadia Abdullah. Thank you for your time. Your participation in this survey is greatly appreciated.

Demographics

- 1) How old are you?___
- 2) Are you married? yes___ no___
- 3) Are you a citizen of the United States? Yes___ no___, if no what country are you from?_____
- 4) What is your annual household income?_____
- 5) What is your gender? male___ female___
- 6) What is the name of the Muslim community or organization that you attend and/or are a member of? If more than one please indicate names of all_____
- 7) Are you currently employed? Yes___ no___
- 8) Please circle the highest grade completed and degree earned: 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20
 earned hs diploma yes___ no___, earned bachelors degree yes___ no___, earned masters degree yes___ no___, earned Ph.D. yes___ no___
- 9) How many children do you have?___

Spousal Abuse Questionnaire

10) Do you think that physical abuse (any physical act of aggression such as pushing, hitting, whipping, biting, holding down, throwing, slapping, spanking, choking, hair pulling, shooting, burning, stabbing) of Muslim women is a problem in your community? yes___ no___ don't know___
 Please explain_____

11) Do you think that emotional abuse (threats to personal safety, control of victim's activities, attacks on self esteem, cursing, blaming, manipulation, humiliation, and deprivation) of Muslim women is a problem in your community? Yes___ no___ don't know___
 Please explain_____

12) Do you think that sexual abuse (forced sexual activity) is a problem in your Muslim community? yes___ no___ don't know___
 Please explain_____

13) Do you think neglect of Muslim women is a problem in our community? yes___
no___ don't know___ Please explain and define the meaning of neglect as you see
it_____

14) What services does your Muslim community currently offer for abused
women?_____

15) What services are needed? (circle options you feel are needed). 1) support groups, 2)
shelter, 3) marriage counseling, 4) children's services
please specify_____

5) other_____

16) Are the following non-Muslim services satisfactory for use by abused Muslim
women?

Battered women's shelters, yes___ no___ don't know___

Please explain_____

911 emergency service, yes___ no___ don't know___

Please explain_____

food banks, yes___ no___ don't know___ Please explain_____

welfare/food stamps/medicaid, yes___ no___ don't know___

Please explain_____

restraining orders, yes___ no___ don't know___

Please explain_____

counseling/support groups, yes___ no___ don't know___

Please explain_____

Men skip questions 17 and 18, go to question 19

17) Have you ever experienced any of the forms of abuse as a Muslim woman?
physical? yes___ no___

emotional? yes___ no___

sexual? yes___ no___

verbal? yes___ no___

destruction of personal property or pets? yes___ no___

If yes please describe_____

18) Are you currently experiencing any of the types of abuse mentioned above?
Yes___ no___ If yes please describe_____

19) Do you believe that it is appropriate under any circumstances for a Muslim husband to hit his wife? yes___ no___ Please explain_____

20) Do you believe that it is unIslamic for a Muslim woman to obtain a restraining order? yes___ no___ Please explain_____

21) Do you believe that it is unIslamic for a Muslim woman to call the police if she is being abused? yes___ no___ Please explain_____

22) Have your children ever witnessed abuse in your family? yes___ no___ Please describe_____

24) What other services should the Muslim community make available for Muslim women? Please list in order of importance:

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____
- 4) _____
- 5) _____

25) Is there any information you would like to add not included in this survey form?
yes___ no___, If yes what?_____

Appendix B
Results of Community Assessment Survey

Table 1.

Demographics n = 15

<u>gender</u>	<u>age</u>	<u>marital status</u>	<u>education</u>	<u>annual income</u>	<u># of kids</u>
<u>women = 73%</u>	<u>mean = 34.8 yrs.</u>	<u>73% married</u>	<u>mean = 15 yrs.</u>	<u>mean = 36, 181k</u>	<u>mean = 2,33</u>

Table 2.

% Female Respondents Reporting Current or Past Abuse n = 12

<u>Physical</u>	<u>Emotional</u>	<u>Sexual</u>	<u>Verbal</u>
<u>50%</u>	<u>75%</u>	<u>25%</u>	<u>58%</u>

Table 3.

% of All Respondents Perceptions About Abuse as a Community Problem n = 15

<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>
<u>73.33%</u>	<u>.06%</u>	<u>20%</u>

Table 4.

of Respondents Identifying Culturally Specific Issues Salient to Abuse in qualitative responses = 87% n = 15

<u>Men Manipulate the Religion to Abuse</u>	<u>20%</u>
<u>Women are Hidden/ Silenced/Devalued</u>	<u>47%</u>
<u>Muslims Have Unique Perspective that Is Often Misunderstood</u>	<u>20%</u>
<u>Inadequate non-Muslim Health Services</u>	<u>33%</u>

Appendix C Overview of Pilot Study

Sampling: Network sampling was utilized to obtain a small group of three women. The researcher invited an American Muslim woman previously known to the researcher to participate in the pilot interview. This woman, in turn invited the remaining two participants to participate in the pilot interview.

Interview Content: Participants were informed that the purpose of the interview was to obtain information about the lived experiences of American Muslim women with regard to the issues of emotional, physical, and sexual abuse. Participants were then asked to relate stories or accounts of experiences of abuse, including a description of events, feelings, actions taken, and the context within which the stories took place. Participants discussed their experiences and the experiences of other American Muslim women who have experienced abuse. The researcher listened to the accounts, asking questions at times to clarify ambiguous meanings. Finally, questions were asked to investigate further areas salient to the cultural aspects of the phenomenon.

Data Analysis: The following steps were taken to analyze the text generated by the interview:

- 1) Initial impressions of the common themes embedded in the text were captured on paper and analyzed along with supporting data. This initial impression paper provided a springboard for development of themes as well as an overall picture of what the phenomenon looks like.
- 2) A list of descriptors was constructed by going through the text and briefly summarizing actions, feelings, events, and contexts related in the text. These descriptors were collapsed into major themes. Themes did not emerge from all of the descriptors. This may be due to the small amount of data the analysis relied on (see list below, numbers refer to line numbers in transcript.).
- 3) A story included in the text was analyzed by a group of qualitative researchers for emerging themes. These recommendations were incorporated into the development and refinement of themes.
- 4) The entire text was reviewed by Dan Sheridan, a researcher who specializes in the field of domestic violence. His overall perceptions of the text and the importance of specific cultural issues, assisted the researcher in synthesizing the unique cultural aspects of American Muslim women's experiences with abuse.
- 5) All of the above steps culminated in the development of themes which were defined and described. These themes were related to specific data bits and exemplars (see list after descriptors)..

List of Descriptors and Line Numbers:

1. Abuse affects children's views of the faith: 924-939.

2. Abuse tolerated: 738-743.
3. Abused women disappear from community: 107-114, 2997-3004.
4. Abused woman ostracized: 652-655.
5. Abused women feel threatened in community: 304-311.
6. Abuser accepted: 304-322, 119-124, 16-19, 141-143, 656.
7. Abuser arrested: 119-121, 3088-3093.
8. Abusers blame women for problems: 2219-2224, 2695-2707.
9. Abusers project religious image: 496-503, 1049-1080.
10. Abuser supported: 1931-1935, 2010-2011..
11. Abusers resistant to education: 1625-1632.
12. Abusers use religion used to oppress: 503-508.
13. African-American Culture: 436-438, 988-1003, 1585-1589.
14. Angry at reconciliations: 770-775.
15. Arab women expect abuse: 1574-1578.
16. Authoritarianism no longer effective: 685-713.
17. Call for help: 2479-2498, 2502-2507, 2644-2645.
18. Change for the good for the children: 2302-2305, 2364-2383.
19. Community is central: all throughout text.
20. Community helps abuser: 148-154, 654-656, 157-160.
21. Community history: 394-405.
22. Community response needed: 52-55.
23. Conflict between extended family and religion: 539-553, 557-566.
24. Consequence of physical abuse: 32-47
25. Drugs: 48-51. 1041-1042, 1984-2005.
26. Emotional abuse: 1708-1719, 1866-1904, 1940-1943, 1963-1965, 2051-2054, 2655-2662, 2675-2693.
27. Extended family against Islam: 527-539, 567-575.
28. Family role to vouch for potential spouse: 2154-2160, 2167-2171.
29. Fear of breaking God's law used to control: 1062-1085.
30. Fear of kidnapping: 2033-2040.
31. Gap between outward image, behavior at home: 1446-1555.
32. Help from community: 62-65, 85-91, 98-104.
33. Help from outside community: 227-302, 311-322.
34. Husband is responsible to educate wife: 1761- 1774.
35. Husband should take care of wife: 1044-1049.
36. Impediments to divorce: 3252-3262.

37. Islamic rules not observed by men with divorces/separations: 3186-3213.
38. Keeping women ignorant: 1139-1143, 2390-2407.
39. Lack of communication between community organizers: 2560-2586.
40. Lack of knowledge about abuse: 671-675, 678-684.
41. Lack of religious knowledge dangerous: 486-494.
42. Leaders not dealing with women's issues: 412-420, 425-431, 442-445, 646-648, 2780-2786.
43. Loss of possessions: 791, 800-812.
44. Men afraid of knowledgeable women: 1796-1799.
45. Men do not want women to be liberal: 1850-1852, 3322-3324.
46. Men do not accept wives' knowledge: 1664-1672, 2079-2080, 2084-2086.
47. Men do not share knowledge: 1775-1779.
48. Men only have to satisfy other men: 2207-2212.
49. Men's shelter proposed: 3151-3164.
50. Men's social relationships exclude create network supporting all men above women: 1780-1783, 1937-1938, 2017-2027.
51. Men show off religious image: 1556-1557.
52. Men with partial knowledge use religion to dominate: 1120-1136, 1143-1146, 2094-2118.
53. Mixing old behavior with religion: 972-978.
54. Money and abuse: 2664-2674.
55. Multiple reconciliations: 171-183, 3127-3130.
56. Muslim women sheltered in regard to male/ female relationships: 1923-1928.
57. Need abuse education along with religious education: 715-724.
58. Need to change community/ stop endorsing wrong: 2295-2305.
59. Need education , emphasis on family issues: 1614-1620, 2225-2230, 2719-2735.
60. Need group of knowledgeable women who are truth tellers: 1635-1652.
61. Need individual counseling services: 2244-2251.
62. Need policy: 744-750.
63. Need powerful group of women: 1660-1665.
64. Need public vigilance: 2508-2524.
65. Need self-esteem to rely on own judgment: 1666-1688
66. Need standard of well being for women: 858-860.
67. Need to take abusers out of positions: 2535-2557.
68. Neglect: 1751-1757.
69. No community policy: 78-81, 327-332.

70. No real solutions implemented: 2614-2617.
71. NOI men given privileges including wives based on outward appearances: 2140-2154.
72. NOI period of corruption: 1007-1025.
73. Non-Muslim counseling stigmatized/ avoided: 1853-1860, 2255-2259.
74. Past influences still present: 1216-1332.
75. Physical abuse: 1955-1961, 2644-2647, 3085-3092.
76. Polygamy: 1028-1048.
77. Protection of Abuser: 3093-3102.
78. Protection needed from protectors: 891-895, 943-950.
79. Raised Muslim women sheltered in regard to male female relationships: 1923-1928.
80. Religious knowledge is respected: 2833-2857.
81. Religion used to deprive women of their rights: 921-922.
82. Same old problems, patterns keep repeating: 2940-2953
83. Search for policy: 82-85, 127-130, 185-189, 2431-2478, 2526-2534.
84. Secrecy of abuse: 56-59, 761-764, 897-899, 1599-1604, 1668-1678, 2587-2602, 2958-2971, 3074-3078.
85. Shelter use: 125-126, 782-783, 793-798.
86. Should be able to take Islam pure without cultural baggage: 1202-1216.
87. Shura committee's role unclear: 753-760, 836-841, 192-223.
88. Stereotyping of Muslims: 576-612.
89. Why stay: 796-799, 1720-1747.
90. Women angry: 134, 143, 162-169.
91. Women bonding/ growing stronger: 675-677, 449-456, 460-462.
92. Women's concerns silenced/ ignored: 638-648, 656-662, 681-670.
93. Women discouraged: 170.
94. Women disappointed: 942-950.
95. Women do not perceive community as supporting them: 2638-2642.
96. Women do not trust community: 224-227, 315-322.
97. Women feel devalued: 850-851, 2626-2637.
98. Women feel frightened: 848.
99. Women gaining sense of power and responsibility: 1565-1568.
100. Woman goes to extended family for help: 104-107, 139-141, 555-556.
101. Women's involvement in community requires husbands' involvement: 3308-3315.

102. Women lack own financial resources: 901-907, 909-917, 3252-3262.
103. Woman leaves home instead of abuser: 785-789, 800-912.
104. Women loyal to Muslims: 420-423.
105. Women need a place to go: 3167-3185.
106. Women need religious knowledge to protect themselves: 1056-1060, 1082-1085,
107. Women need to support each other: 3045-3058.
108. Women not aware of community leaders decisions: 2820-2833.
109. Women not valued in the community: 3275-3281.
110. Women political outsiders: 2875-2901, 3287-3321.
111. Women question self/ ability to choose spouse: 2063-2067, 2178-2190, 2202-2203.
112. Women should take charge: 430-432, 442-446, 447-448, 886-890.
113. Women talk to Imam: 145-149, 649-655.
114. Women want to make excuses for men's behavior: 1661-1663, 2081-2083.
115. Women want problem addressed: 670-674.
116. Women who are aggressive/ confrontational are socially unacceptable: 1800-1826.
117. Victim blaming: 48-50, 3022-3035? 3036-3044?
118. Victim not responsible for abuse: 2193-2200.

List of Categories Defined and Described:

Alienation defined: An abused Muslim woman's experience of estrangement and withdrawal from persons, groups, community, and/or society at large. The experience of not belonging due to a lack of acceptance and understanding.

Description: Abused Muslim women experience layers of alienation which influence their relationships with others including family and community. Lack of acceptance of Muslim women in general by society at large is exemplified by the women's common perception that the media stereotypes Muslims. Additionally, the women felt that many uninformed members of society, ignorant of Islam and its tenets, perceived them as members of a cult.

The next layer of alienation was experienced only by abused Muslim women whose extended families were non-Muslim. In these cases, extended families blamed the abuse on Islam. Women whose only refuge was non-Muslim extended family, experienced pressure to choose between their families and their religion.

Finally, abused Muslim women who chose to leave their abusers were commonly described as experiencing alienation from the Muslim community. When an abused Muslim woman was alienated by the Muslim community she had no choice but to turn to critical relatives or other non-Muslim support systems such as battered women's shelters for help and assistance.

Supporting data:

alienation from society, descriptor 88:

P3: they go with the stereotypes.

P2: It's kind of like, in their minds, it's kind of like the cult kind of thing... and so when they are speaking, they are speaking with very much a lack of knowledge, because they don't have any knowledge of it at all, see so they ...

P3: Except what they see through the media.

P2: Uhuh.

alienation from family, descriptors 23, 27:

X was struggling with that with her family because she was saying, you know, she was in this abusive situation, she had just accepted Islam and you know, married this Muslim supposedly, and then she was abused like that and her mother blamed it on the religion. So it was very hard for her, especially at her age, because she was eighteen then I think, you know, her mother would say "well it's this religion that's doing this," and X didn't have the knowledge or experience to argue with her and say "no, it's not the religion it's this creepy person." And that's a problem. I mean, if your family's not supportive of your religion in the first place, and then it looks like this religion has put you in an abusive situation, it could be very hard...

alienation from the Muslim community, descriptors 3.4.5.20, 95, 96:

...I've noticed that the women don't seem to trust the community. When they have a problem like that they look outside the community for help and they withdraw from the community ... because they feel threatened, they see that the community is supporting the men.

Forced to rely on non-Muslim support systems, descriptors 17, 83, 105:

Here we are with these women who end up in shelters, or back in with relatives who are not supporting what they are doing ... even if they don't want to be there they have no where else to go.

Angry Women defined: An emotional reaction to the experience of witnessing the community's support for abusers, its concomitant disregard for the victims of abuse, and the male leadership's unwillingness to deal with the issue effectively.

Description: Realization that the Muslim community does not support abused women, but instead often supports the abuser created a feeling of anger among the women in the group.

This feeling was compounded by the male leadership's unwillingness to deal with issues of abuse.

Supporting data :

anger at community's support for the abuser, descriptor 90:

...she was hiding from him... and he was coming around the community business as usual and it was, at that time it made me angry and I spoke to the imam at length about it, and told him that there was just no way that should be happening ... and then to see it happen again where X's husband was certainly in evidence and no X in sight .. I mean for one thing it made me angry but it was also very discouraging!

anger at community's refusal to deal with women's issues, descriptor 43:

And as far as I can say, over the past twenty-two years women's affairs have not been dealt with very effectively at all. They have always been swept up under the rug (angry). ... We're going to have to find some way to scare these men to let them know if they keep on abusing they're going to have us to deal with ... I hate to turn into a vigilante but I am sick and tired of it, for the last two years that's all I've dealt with.

anger at proposed male shelter, descriptor 49:

I was so offended on Sunday when the Imam started talking about a building for men, where men could go when they needed help ... oh yeah, for the young men getting out of prison, or they needed help, or they needed support. I was really offended by that, I'm sorry, the men! ... There has never been any question about anywhere for the [abused] women to go. And I see that the women have a hundred times more need than the men have to have somewhere to go.

Silenced and Ignored defined: The experience of being denied a voice.

Description: The women described experiences of being silenced and ignored by the male leadership as they attempted to voice their concerns over the issue of abuse. It was commonly perceived that the men would not deal with the issue of abuse, nor would they address the women's concerns.

Supporting data :

silenced, descriptor 92:

The other problem is how is it presented. If the woman comes to me or I hear of the situation and then I complain about it as the mouthpiece, then instead of the situation

being dealt with my report is discredited. And I'm under fire. Because they feel like they only have to deal with you personally and don't have to really deal with the issue. ignored, descriptors 43, 92:

I actually called the Imam when X was having her troubles at first, and I told him my feelings ... and he basically gave up excuses about how, well, they couldn't have know this, and they couldn't have know that and what could they do and kind of dealt with me as this hysterical female... And that was that. Nothing happened.

Secrecy and Loyalty defined: Concealment through silence related to a perceived need to be protective and loyal.

Description: Abuse was frequently described as unknown by others in the community. Further, those women who did seek counsel from the Imam or another woman often were described as confiding in confidence. A hesitancy to portray Muslims in a negative light, accompanied by a perceived need by some women to protect their abusers, are evidence of a loyalty factor. Silence and loyalty are part of the experience of being abused in the Muslim community.

Supporting data:

protecting the abuser through silence, descriptor 84:

P1: It seems like there should have been some kind of community response.

Although, I guess if she didn't say anything at the time...

P2: Well I think she was trying to protect him as such so that was one of the reasons why she didn't say anything at the time.

confiding in confidence, descriptor 84:

The people complain bitterly to the Imam if they complain in confidence there's really nothing that can come out of it...

silence expected by abuser, descriptor 84:

They talk about protection, and when they talk about protection they're talking about things like, you can't go out after dark. Which is not protection... You can't go out after dark, but don't you ever tell anybody what I do to you in this house.

community silence, descriptor 84:

...there was a lot of silence, a lot more than I am seeing here. Although it may be that there is silence here too, the women who are having the problems may be not coming forward...

hadith, descriptor 84:

...you can take something like uh, the hadith that say that you're not supposed to talk about your husband's business and stuff and tell other people ... and so you'll have

husbands who will say “well you’re not putting my business out there in the street, you can’t talk about, you know, what goes on in the home.” But if it’s abusive you are allowed to go and tell people and get help.

secrecy, descriptor 84:

I only heard about X by accident and then I pursued it and I said “tell me about X, tell me what about X.” Otherwise I would have never heard these things ... when I do hear about them, I don’t usually hear about them in such a way that I can bring it up [in shura committee] because I’m not really supposed to hear about them.

loyalty, descriptor 84:

And nothing in the terms of cooperation and really effective means have been dealt with uh, in terms of women’s affairs. And I’m not speaking negatively about the Muslims...

Strength and Connection defined: The experience of women as a powerful and connected group with strong bonds.

Description: As women come together, they have increasingly communicated their thoughts and ideas to one another. The women experienced a sense of bonding accompanied by a growing sense of power and responsibility for themselves. This feeling of increasing strength and connectedness was part of their experience and perception that strong women were needed, and that women should be a source of education and support for one another.

Supporting data:

women are getting stronger, descriptor 91:

I think what’s happening in our community ...is a sense, a feeling, that the women are becoming stronger within their own. You know within their own peers.

women bonding, descriptor 91:

I think that they’re starting to see that bonding, if that’s the right word...

women communicating more, descriptor 91:

And right now the women... want it addressed. The women are communicating a lot more, I think.

women gaining sense of power and responsibility, descriptor 99:

...what I see here is that women are gaining a sense of ah, power as women, and responsibility for themselves...

need band of influential women, descriptors 60, 63:

...but we just have to have ... a band of women like that and they have to exert their influence, they have to ...call these men to account, for the religion just like they do in the home.

women need to educate and support each other, descriptor 107:

And it seems like a job for really the women to educate and support each other and to get to a point where you day "look, it happened once, it happened twice, it's gonna happen three times..."

Protective Factors defined: Factors that safeguard Muslim women from being abused, and/or enable abused Muslim women to defend themselves against abuse.

Description: The women perceived religious knowledge as a protective factor against abuse. Women who know what is Islam and what is not can set limits on abusive behavior. As one participant said, "she doesn't have to accept the abuse."

In addition to knowledge, self-esteem was mentioned as a protective factor. Much like religious knowledge, self-esteem was perceived by the women as an important element in a woman's ability to decide for herself what she will accept. The ability to disregard a religious teaching that may not apply in instances of abuse was linked to self-esteem.

Economic independence was also cited as a factor that enabled women (or with the lack thereof to disable) to leave their abusers. Role expectations and unequal decision making power with regard to finances were described as part of Muslim women's experience.

Finally, the existence of a Muslim extended family to rely on for help and support was described as being of the utmost importance. Without a Muslim extended family to fall back on, one woman felt that she would simply be "stuck" in an abusive relationship.

Supporting data:knowledge is protective, descriptors 41, 106:

I: It sounds like, that maybe that men are taking bits and pieces to support what they are doing, but then if the woman were to respond "but this and this and this," then even if women were educated perhaps they are not willing to hear that part of it.

P3: But at least the educated woman can establish a parameter of behavior.

P1: She doesn't have to accept the abuse.

P3: That's right she's able to defend herself with the religion.

extended family is important, descriptors 36, 75, 100, 105:

And then again, I have an extended family to turn to because traditionally a woman would go back to her family. We don't have families we can go back to. We don't. And we don't have provisions of our own to take ourselves out of bad situations.

need self esteem, descriptor 65:

I think they have to have a certain level of self-esteem too ... So, even though you might have knowledge of that hadith, and he knows that hadith, if you don't have that certain level of self-esteem that says no no no no there's a line that's been drawn, you might say to yourself ..."I just have to take it, I just have to accept it..."

need financial independence, descriptors 54, 102:

So what do they tell you? They tell you you can't work, you need money, you can't get welfare, and you can't work. Okay so there's no income...and if he does leave the house he's not going to pay the bills...

Powerful Male Others defined: Experiencing men are a powerful group, distinctly separate from women.

Description: The women's experiences reflected an awareness that men dominated the community's power structure. Participant's repeatedly referred to men as "the men," or "they," as though they were speaking of a powerful separate entity. "They" were perceived as maintaining a status quo which kept women on the outside of community decision making and policy. Additionally, "the men" were perceived as a traditional group who did not want the women "to become to liberal." Muslim women's experience of a powerful male other is particularly salient to abused Muslim women. Community support for abusers takes place through powerful male others.

Supporting data:

"they," "the men": lines 94-109, 153-154, 157-160, 646-660, 690-671, 787-789, 819-820, 886-895, 903-905, 942-950, 973-975, 1175-1191, 1556-1557, 1793-1797, 1823-1826, 1850-1852, 1935-1939, 2010-2020, 2147-2153, 2207-2212, 2213-2224, 2725-2740, 2841-2843, 3120-3121, 3151-3164 example: you're too liberal, they don't want anyone to be too liberal I think but they want us to ...

women as outsiders, descriptors 108, 110:

P3: Yeah sisters don't understand whatever's being done or said or done. And we allow it to happen. We're still allowing it to happen.

P1: ...the thing is on the, I also feel like sometimes on the shura committee the women are the outsiders.

men traditional, descriptor 45:

I think they're basically traditional. I think traditionally ...the men were the one's out in front and the women were kind of in the background kind of raising the children...

women becoming too liberal, descriptor 45:

I think in Islam, I think in the community, they think that we're becoming too liberal...

Islamic Expectations Disappointed defined: Women's expectations that men will follow religious proscriptions regarding the rights of women and the duties of husbands are not met.

Description: The women believed that their faith should be taken pure, without cultural contaminants. Islam, taken in its pure form, offers them a perfect model of family life. Protection and support are among the rights that women are granted as Muslims. The failure of many Muslim men to act according to the true tenets of the faith, caused women's expectations of how things should be, to be disappointed. Instead they were faced with the knowledge that their rights are often violated, in essence often requiring them to seek protection from their protectors.

Supporting data:take Islam pure: descriptor, 86:

Even though as African-American people in this country, we really shouldn't be having a problem with cultural things. Because we didn't come from different countries and have to bring that whole cultural baggage. I believe that's why Allah has fashioned the American Muslim that way...we should just be able to take the religion pure. And practice it in a pure way without all of those influences.

Islamic rules not observed by men in cases of divorce and separation, descriptors 37, 54, 89, 103:

Her daughter said she had been taken away to a shelter. She stayed with a woman for about a week and then eventually said, look, you know, I don't want to have to start my life over again, because they don't follow...the man doesn't leave like he's supposed to. The woman gets thrown out.

right of protection skewed/misused, descriptor 78:

I think there's a real, on my part, disappointment. When you hear the men keep talking about, you know, "men are the protectors and maintainers of women, and the men have to protect the women," and yet in order to get protection from the men the women have to band together.

polygamy abused, descriptor 76:

I was married to a brother, and then he proposed marriage to my sister, who was my ward, she was living with me...and uh...me not knowing anything about where he was coming from with that, my own common sense told me that that wasn't going to work. That I had to get rid of him, cause he was not going to marry my sister. Didn't have nothing to do with the Koran. Later on I found out that a man, a man can't marry two sisters at the same time.

Loss defined: The experience of being deprived something valued.

Description: Abused Muslim women who left their abusers were described as experiencing many losses. Losses described included the following: home, possessions, community belonging, as well as the loss of the religious benefits of marriage. Other potential losses may be the loss of a child due to the threat of child abduction, and the loss of respect from others. Divorce was reported by one woman to be very stigmatizing and embarrassing.

Supporting data:**loss of home and possessions, descriptors 43, 103:**

The woman gets thrown out. When she's got everything in there that's hers and then she goes into this shelter system, she stays in the shelter systems two or three months, she could be in there three or four months before they find her housing, then she has to start all over again. X said "I don't want to start all over again."

religious benefits of marriage, descriptor 36:

P2: Marriage in Islam is half the religion right?

P1: Divorce is the most hated thing...

loss of respect, descriptor 26:

It's a difficult situation, and actually my husband kind of throws it in my face sometimes, "oh you couldn't last four months with your first husband."

potential loss of child, descriptor 30:

It's kind of sad because X has been asking "how come I can't see my real father?" And I told her well the reason he hasn't seen you before is because he doesn't know where we live ... and I was afraid that he would steal you away from me...

Religion as a Mask defined: Religion as a facade. The use of religion to project an image that is used to gain advantages and wield power over others.

Description: The women talked about how many men used the religion to oppress and enslave women. By projecting an image of piety, certain men were able to gain social privilege while simultaneously manipulating their wives into submission.

Supporting data:

men granted privileges based on image, descriptors 48, 50, 71:

If he learned all the things that made him presentable and acceptable to other men, all he had to do was charade and act out and he was given a position of auth, of respect. And the other things were added to him based on how well he satisfied the, the criteria that they had, which had nothing to do with Islam. And then he was given a wife, and he was given this, and he was loaned that...

gap between outward image/ behavior at home, descriptors 9, 31, 51:

P1: ...what about the men who come home and turn on Black Entertainment Television... to me that kind of shows ... there's a real gap ... here I am this upright Muslim with this long beard at Juma but at home, I'm just like anybody else.

P3: They got to shake their tail feathers.

religion used to deprive women of their rights, descriptor 81:

The religion is used to deprive people of their rights... and I think that's the worst case. Is when women who are coming into Islam are taken in, men who quote think they know Islam and they use the religion against them to enslave them

men use religion to dominate, descriptor 52:

P2:...and the sister don't know anything, and so she's like "on no!" you know, "what am I supposed to do" and he says you know, "you got to do this, you got to, you supposed to do that," and so he's telling her what he knows or what he thinks he knows, and she doesn't know anything else so .. she's submissive to him.

P3: ...and the brother presented and used the knowledge of the religion to present themselves, as you know, a saint, or a hero, and then when they get into it and find out that they've been misled...

Assaulting the Body: Acts of physical aggression, including hitting, beating, spitting, choking, use of objects as weapons, and forced imprisonment.

Description: The women described incidents of physical abuse that included all of the acts delineated in the definition above. Physical abuse was a commonly described experience of abused Muslim women.

Supporting data:physical abuse, descriptors 24, 75:

...a woman whose twins died... at the time everyone assumed that it was a miscarriage, they died at five...months gestation. And we found out ...that one of the twins was born bruised. And that she had actually been severely beaten.

I: what happened to X?

P3: He picked up a chair and she called 911 and they took him away for three or four days I think...

Assaulting the Heart and Mind defined: An attack aimed at destroying emotional well being. Assaulting the heart and mind may be overt or insidious in nature and may include: verbal attacks, threats, control tactics, emotional cruelty, and character assassination.

Description: Abuse involving assaults on the heart and mind were common experiences reported by the participants. Emotional abuse it was felt was even more common than physical abuse and more difficult to label as abuse.

Supporting data:emotional abuse hard to say when to draw the line, descriptor 26:

And a lot of emotional abuse. And even when you know what abuse is it's still hard to, when it's happening to you it's hard to say, ok, this is too much now. If you're not being physically injured then when do you say, "OK I've had it." I mean is it when you've broken a dish and you're hiding the pieces so that nobody will say anything to you? Is that too much? Or I mean what is it? Where, where is that line drawn?

emotional abuse/ control, descriptor 26:

It was a very emotionally abusive and controlling situation. Well, I mean it was to the point where my ex-husband made up lies like "I called your job today and they said you weren't there" ... well I finally figured out what happened is, I figured out a faster way to go to work, longer but faster, so I turned right instead of left at the end of the block, and he had been watching me and figured I had gone somewhere else. Or he would make up lies like "the men at the masjid say that you have been sleeping around" it was very disappointing and very heartbreaking, as well as very threatening...and the worst part of it was that, he had the support of the Muslim community.

Isolation, descriptor 26:

...and then his whole thing was trying to like cut off, cut me off from all my family and friends.

emotional abuse common, descriptor 26:

...or emotional abuse, I think there's a lot of that to where you actually are being abused but it's not physical...

cruelty, descriptor 26:

well, I think also just very cruel treatment. I mean it's cruel when you speak in a cold tone of voice. When you never have anything nice to say and you have plenty of criticism...when there's no physical affection, that's kind of, that's abusive.

intimidation/ blaming, descriptor 26:

Like I was saying before when, I broke a bowl and I found myself hiding the pieces in the waste basket so that he wouldn't see them. Because I knew he would have something awful to say to me about it. But if he broke a bowl it would be my fault. Like he left a pan on the burner and didn't turn it off, and took out his burger and ate his burger and left the house. And when he came back of course there was a smell in the house of something having burned well it was my fault, because I didn't notice it soon enough.

Knowledge is Powerful defined: Experiencing knowledge as a path to personal and religious enlightenment and empowerment. The power of knowledge can be used both to influence others and to decrease the vulnerability of individuals to manipulation from others.

Description: The women revealed the importance of knowledge, particularly, religious knowledge, as they talked about their experiences. Knowledge could empower Muslim women reject abusive behavior. Conversely, men used knowledge to maintain power and control over women. Knowledge as a power base becomes even more evident when the women talk about the men being afraid of women with knowledge. The women experienced true knowledge as a shield and partial or skewed knowledge as a weapon used against them. Finally, knowledge, like any other source of power, was perceived as being hoarded. It seemed as though sharing knowledge translated into an increased prospect of sharing authority.

Supporting data:lack of religious knowledge dangerous, descriptors 41, 52:

It has escalated to my way of thinking things are escalated. And young women who are just becoming Muslims are not even getting the chance to learn the religion and

practice before being pressed into violent situations, and taken advantage of because they did not have the knowledge.

women need religious knowledge to protect themselves from manipulation/ abuse, descriptors 12, 81, 106:

It's very powerful...when you have a system of faith...where you're told by someone..."well you do this and you do that or else, you're not a Muslim you don't believe in Allah."...I mean that's a scary thing to be told..."if you don't believe this, if you don't believe that I have the right to beat you, then you're not a Muslim"...and...what can you say, at that point, you know, because Islam also teaches you if you're a Muslim and you decide not to be a Muslim you go straight to hell. And you're kind of in a situation where you're...trapped. If you don't know better.

need group of knowledgeable women, descriptors 60, 63:

...And just like it was in the time of the prophet Mohammed salalahai ailaahi wa salem (peace be on him) that his wives, were...there for the women in the community. And their level of knowledge...it just seems like a Muslim community cannot function well unless it has a group of knowledgeable women. Young women, old women, but women who will tell you the truth about things, real truth tellers...

men do not share knowledge, descriptors 38, 47:

And he doesn't teach her...they don't share. They don't share the knowledge.

men afraid of knowledgeable women, descriptor 44:

But they're actually afraid of women who have knowledge ...

Women as Worth Less defined: The experience of being devalued because of being female.

Description: The community's pattern of supporting abusers, ostracizing victims, silencing and ignoring women's concerns, and excluding women from the community power structure all created feelings among the participants that they were devalued as women.

Supporting data:

women not valued in the community, descriptors 108, 109, 110:

it...translates into ...not making a contribution to the community life. Because ...if the women are not valued ...they don't contribute from a knowledge base toward the community life...

women feel devalued, descriptor 97:

It makes one feel really valueless because I sat there ...and X's husband walked in and he sat down and all the men shook his hand and salamu-alliakum and he made his

little announcement about the boy scouts and everything. And I just sat there and I thought he's worth more than I am. He's worth more than X. X's afraid and he's just there smiling.

A Search for Answers defined: The desire for community based solutions to the problem of abuse among American Muslim women.

Description: Throughout the text women talked about a need for policy, the need for a community response that would support the victim of abuse and penalize the abuser. The women want the problem of abuse addressed. However, the complexity of the issue does not lend itself to easy solutions. Thus, part of Muslim women's experiences as a whole is a searching for answers.

Supporting data:

community response needed, descriptor 22:

It just seems like there should have been some community response...

no community policy exists, descriptor 69:

I: so it's like there's a lack of trust. Why is that?

P2: I think because there really ...hasn't been any real set guidelines...

P1: Right. And when you don't have a procedure you just do what's easiest. And what's easiest is to let the victim be a victim and let the abuser be an abuser

searching for policy, descriptors 62, 83:

P1: ...I'd go to the shura committee, they'd say to me "OK what do you want us to do?"

P2: Follow these guidelines that ...the community has established that we want done.

P1: Well what are the guidelines? That's the first thing.

shura committee's role unclear, descriptor 87:

P2: ...I would think the shura committee would be the one's that would know any follow up on issues of that nature.

P1: No. We never heard anything about it there. Nothing.

women want the problem addressed, descriptor 115:

Well I think probably one of the things that's happening...is that we realized now that we've got a big problem on our hands. And right now the women aren't going to take it anymore and they want it addressed.

need to change community's pattern, descriptors 58, 67:

Well Inshallah (God willing) we have a long way to go in structuring the community properly so that people's needs can be met...and at the same time not endorsing things that protect the positions that we already have that are wrong.

need public vigilance, descriptor # 64:

Well we need to let them know that...we are going to be calling you and we are going to be checking...that we are going to try not to go more than two or three days without seeing or hearing from you and then if we find out that you're in this neglectful, abusive situation, then ...we're going to let somebody know, we're not going to just absorb it...

no solutions implemented as yet, descriptor 70:

...the least amount of faith is to detest it in your heart. We're not even doing that. I think we're just absorbing it along with everyone else but not coming up with any real solutions.

Initial Findings:

The text contained many descriptions of complex and often interrelated phenomenon that shape American Muslim women's lived experiences with abuse. In an effort to present many aspects of the phenomenon a paradigm case is presented along with some of the themes developed through the process of data analysis. For the sake of brevity not all of the fifteen themes are presented.

This account describes the abuse experience of a recent convert to Islam who was abused by her husband the community's boy scout leader. The story is told by all of the participants:

I: What was X's situation?

P3: X's situation was where he actually jumped on her and started beating on her and she called 911, he had his hands around her throat and choked off her air to the point where she was almost unconscious, at that time fortunately, the police arrived and took him to jail. And then she told her father and her father came to her rescue and threatened to come to the community and do him in if he showed up there for prayer. So then the Muslim men had to surround the mosque, surround our center, to make sure he didn't try to come in and avenge his daughter there in the center while we were having juma prayer

X's experiences of abuse necessitated that she turn to her non-Muslim family for help. This proved difficult since her family subscribed to negative societal views about Muslims. These negative views were heightened by X's abusive experience:

P1 X was struggling with her family because she was in this abusive situation, she had just accepted Islam and married this Muslim (supposedly), and then she was abused like that and her mother blamed it on the religion. So it was very hard for X, especially at her age, because she was, she was eighteen then ... her mother would say "well it's this religion that's doing this." And X didn't have the knowledge or the experience to argue with her and say "no it's not

the religion it's this creepy person." And that's a problem. I mean, If you're not, if you're family's not supportive of your religion in the first place, and then it looks like this religion has put you in an abusive situation, it could be very hard. You have to decide do you want to hold onto your religion or do you want to hold onto your family? Now your family won't help your situation sometimes unless you give up the religion. But I think that was X's struggle for quite a while.

In addition to struggling with the alienating effects of stigma from within her own extended family network, X also experienced alienation from the Muslim community itself. The feelings of anger and betrayal felt by the participants at the men's acceptance of abuse is evident in this part of X's story:

P1 I guess it was about a year ago that her husband was arrested for physically assaulting her she was hiding from him, I guess staying with her mother or some other relative, and he was coming around the community business as usual and it was at that time that I spoke at length to the Imam about it, and told him that there was just no way that should be happening, that the community owed support to the woman who had been the victim and owed it to her not go and bail her husband out of jail... ..

P2: Did the community bail him out?

P1: Yes they did! Yes they did, they went and got him out of jail...

The women's outrage over the male leadership's actions were not taken seriously. As usual, women who challenged the status quo that prefers abusers over victims were silenced and ignored:

I actually called the Imam when she was having her troubles at first, and I told him my feelings about how she had been ostracized by community and her husband was bailed out of jail. And accepted right into the community. And he basically gave up excuses about how, well, they couldn't have known this and they couldn't have known that and what could they do and kind of dealt with me as this hysterical female. And that was that. Nothing happened.

This story incorporates themes common to many of the narratives in the text. The interpretive analysis of this paradigm case includes a description of several themes which are grouped into three broad categories: 1) contextual aspects of American Muslim women's experiences with abuse; 2) American Muslim women's perceptions of abuse; and 3) the nature of the abuse experiences by American Muslim women.

Alienated and Worth Less

Contextual aspects of the lived experiences of abused American Muslim women include abused women's alienation from their family members as was described in the paradigm case, as well as alienation from the Muslim community itself. This alienation stems from a general lack of trust by women of the male power structure within the community:

P1: I've noticed that the women don't seem to trust the community. When they have a problem like that they look outside the community for help and they withdraw from the community...

I: Why do you think women withdraw?

P: Probably because they feel threatened, they see that the community is supporting the men. If it were to happen to me, I've seen it three times now, where the men continue to be accepted in the community and the women don't come around, because they feel threatened. I don't think I would keep coming around a community where if my husband attacked me and he was still going to juma. I wouldn't be at juma! I don't think I would be feeling in a position where I really wanted to go to the Imam or the shura committee and say, "look, I need you to help me," and all this when obviously they're still buddy buddy with the person who attacked me. No I wouldn't trust that.

Women feel distrustful of the men in the community fearing that they are in effect allies of their abusers. This was certainly true in the paradigm case where the abuser was bailed out of jail by the men in the Muslim community, thus compromising the safety of the victim. This lack of community support is disempowering to the victims of abuse and sends a signal to Muslim women in the community that they are worth less than their male counterparts. One participant talked about how this became very clear to her at the Friday prayer (juma):

It makes one feel really valueless because I sat there and, Friday at juma, and this Saturday at the meeting, X's husband walked in and he sat down and all the men shook his hand and salamu-alaikum and he made his little social announcement about the boy scouts and everything. And I just sat there and I thought he's worth more than I am. He's worth more than X. X's afraid and he's just sitting there smiling.

Once again this was exemplified in the paradigm case where all of the community efforts that were expended in that situation were not helpful to the victim, but instead were helpful to the abuser. The old axiom actions speak louder than words is very salient here as Muslim women observe abused women become community outsiders while abusers are accepted and supported time and time again.

Knowledge is Powerful and Religion as a Mask

The women's perceptions of abuse were interwoven with their perceptions of their faith. As exemplified in the telling of the paradigm case, the participants do not view their faith as responsible in any way for the abuse that occurs in their community. In fact, it is religious knowledge that can protect a woman from abuse because too often abusers attempt to twist the faith to justify their actions. Knowledge of the faith it is perceived, allows a woman to discern really what is Islam (which is protective) and what is simply a manipulation of the true faith:

P2: I think a lot of times ... for a man, or for a person to identify themselves as a Muslim, it kinda gives them the perception of being one way but yet they're another.

P3: Yeah, it says, "back off, I have a religious catechism I'm going through here." And if you're not knowledgeable, you don't know how to look into it and deem whether it is really, is

this really what you have or are you just trying to manipulate.

P1: I think it's very powerful when you have a system, where, a system of faith, where you're told by somebody who you are seeing in a position of authority, "well you do that or else, you're not a Muslim you don't believe in Allah."

P3: Yeah that's right.

P1: Well, it's just OK you know you do this because I say so, you do this or you're not really Muslim. I mean that's a scary thing to be told well you know, "if you don't believe this, if you don't believe that I have the right to beat you, then you're not a Muslim," you're not accepting part of the Koran, you know, you're not a Muslim. And that's ... you know, what can you say, at that point, you know, because then, Islam teaches you if you're a Muslim and you decide not to be a Muslim you go straight to hell. And you're kind of in a situation where you're, you can be trapped. If you don't know better.

This exemplar illustrates the participant's perception that men use the religion to maintain power and control over their victims. Abusers use religion as a mask to lure women into marriage and also to maintain their social positions within the community:

the brother presented and used the knowledge of the religion to present themselves, as you know, a saint, or hero, and then when they get into it [women] and find out that they've been misled, and that this person really doesn't pray, and you know, and all of these things come about ... And I think that's the worst case. Is when women coming into Islam are taken in, men who quote think they know Islam and they use the religion to enslave them. That's my worst thing.

The participant's use of the phrase "as you know" indicates that she feels what she is relating is common knowledge. It can be said to be commonly understood that there are a number of men who exploit the religion using it as a front to gain social status and power. This certainly was true in the paradigm case where the abuser was the community boy scout leader.

Assaulting the Body, Assaulting the Heart, Mind and Spirit

The nature of the abuse experienced by American Muslim women includes assaults on the body and assaults on the heart, mind and spirit. The paradigm case included a description of an assault on the body, but did not include much detail on the other forms of assault that surfaced in the text as a whole.

The exemplar above that describes the threat of hell fire for women who question the religious assertions of their abusers can be said to have experienced spiritual assault. Spiritual assault is exemplified by abusers continued attempts to use the faith as a tool to maintain power and control over their victims who rely on this very same faith to guide them as they live their lives.

Emotional abuse or assault of the heart and mind were frequently described by the participants:

I was married to a brother and then he proposed marriage to my sister who was my ward, she was living with me and ... I had to get rid of him because he was not going to marry my sister (tears). Didn't have nothing to do with the Koran. Later on I found out that a man can't marry two sisters at the same time.

This exemplar illustrates how abusers use the polygamy to disempower and emotionally abuse their wives. Using religion to emotionally abuse was a common theme:

It's a power thing ... He want's to tell me. He doesn't want me to have anything to say. Because I went and voted on election day. And a few days later ... and I know he doesn't think Muslims should vote, he said "you have some explaining to do" and stupid me I thought he wanted me to explain my position on voting ... so I started to explain. And every time I would open my mouth he would cut me off .. his voice getting louder and louder ... repeating the same thing "you're not telling me anything Islamic."

The abuse that was described in the text occurred within the framework of a unique cultural context. Within this context, the experiences of physical and emotional abuse occur with regularity, wreaking havoc upon the lives of victims in a multitude of ways.

Summary

This interpretive account reveals some of the many cultural nuances that pervade American Muslim women's experiences with abuse. The community's acceptance and support of abusers is extreme, forcing victims out of the Muslim social network. The systematic devaluation of women through this process, as well as through the male power structure's refusal to hear women's voices places American Muslim women in a particularly disempowered position. Despite the context of disempowerment which the Muslim community perpetuates for women, American Muslim women remain devoted to Islam. This devotion may at times leave them vulnerable to abusers who use the religion to justify abusive behaviors. Ultimately, for those women who do experience abuse and seek an end to it, ostracism from the community is very real possibility. All of these factors and others make American Muslim women's lived experiences with abuse complex and dangerous. These results are preliminary findings and are not intended to present an exhaustive description of the lived experiences of American Muslim women with regard to the issue of abuse. Finally, further exploration of these themes is required before a greater understanding of their adequacy can be determined.

Table 1.
Thematic Conceptual Matrix:
American Muslim Women's Experiences with
Abuse

<u>Contextual factors</u>	<u>Perceptions</u>	<u>Nature of the Abuse</u>
<p>Alienation: alienation from society, non-Muslim extended family, and the Muslim community itself as abusers are supported and victims are ostracized.*</p>	<p>Anger: women 's reaction to the realization that the Muslim community does not support abused women but instead supports the abuser.*</p>	<p>Silenced and Ignored: the experience of being denied a voice.</p>
<p>Secrecy and Loyalty: these issues are part of the experience of abuse for American Muslim women as they struggle to remain loyal to their group and avoid stigma.</p>	<p>Powerful Male Others: women's perception of men as a powerful separate entity</p>	<p>Loss: describes the experiences of women who have left their abusers. Loss of home, possessions, social network, and reputation were mentioned.</p>
<p>Religion as a Mask: men use the religion To oppress and enslave women. By projecting an image of piety, abusers are able to gain social privilege while simultaneously manipulating their wives into submission.*</p>	<p>Abusers UnIslamic: the women's perception that taken its pure form, Islam provided them with the prefect model of family life. Abuse is the result of unIslamic behavior.*</p>	<p>Assaulting the body: consists of such acts as hitting, beating, spitting on, choking, use of objects as weapons, and forced imprisonment.*</p>
<p>Women are worth less: refers to the community's pattern of supporting abusers and ostracizing victims.</p>	<p>Knowledge is Powerful: the women's perception that religious knowledge empowers them to reject abusive behavior.*</p>	<p>Assaulting the Heart Mind and Spirit: includes such acts blaming, intimidation, threats, cruelty, attempts to control, character assassination, spiritual terror, silencing, and exclusion of women from family and community decisions.*</p>

<p>A Search for Answers: women perceived a need for answers, a policy, and a community response that would be supportive of victims not abusers.</p>

*Signifies data excerpt in table 2.

Table 2. Data Excerpts

<u>Contextual Factors</u>	<u>Perceptions</u>	<u>Nature of the Abuse</u>
<p><u>Alienation from Family:</u> ... she was in this abusive situation, she had just accepted Islam and ... married this Muslim ...and then her mother blamed it [the abuse] on the religion. So it was very hard for her because she was only eighteen then ... and her mother would say "well it's this religion that's doing this" ... And that's a problem, I mean it could be very hard you have to decide do you want to hold onto your religion, do you want to your family? Now, your family won't help you sometimes unless you give up the religion.</p> <p><u>Alienation from Community:</u> I've noticed that the women don't seem to trust the community. When they have a problem they look outside the community for help and they withdraw from the community ... because they ... see that the community is supporting the men. If it were to happen to me I don't think I ... would be feeling in a position where I really wanted to talk to the Imam or shura committee ... when obviously they are all buddy buddy with the person who attacked me. No I wouldn't trust that.</p> <p><u>Religion as a Mask:</u> ... in the Nation of Islam when a man learned certain things that made him presentable and acceptable to the other men, all he had to do was charade and he was given a position of ...respect ... and then he was given a wife. ...And the brothers used the knowledge of the religion to present themselves... as a saint, or a hero, and ... I think that's the worst case is when women who are coming into Islam are taken in, men who quote think they know Islam and they use the religion against them to enslave them.</p>	<p><u>Anger:</u> ...she was hiding from him ... and he was coming around the community business as usual and ..at that time it made me angry and I spoke to the Imam at length about it, and told him that there was just no way that should be happening, that the community owed support to the woman who had been the victim and owed it to her not to go bail her husband out of jail! I was offended ... when the Imam started talking about a building for men ..oh yeah for the young men getting out of prison...I was really offended by that. I'm sorry. The men! Because here we are with these women who end up in shelters ..or back in with relatives who a not Muslims and are not supporting what they are doing ... and I see that the women have a hundred times more need than the men have to have somewhere to go.</p> <p><u>Abusers UnIslamic:</u> Well I think there's a real disappointment on my part when you hear the men keep talking about ... "men are the protectors and maintainers of women" ... and yet in order to get protection from the men the women have to band together ... they talk about protection and when they talk about protection there talking about things like, you can't go out after dark .. you can't go out after dark, but don't you ever tell anybody what I do to you in this house.</p> <p><u>Knowledge Is Powerful:</u> It's very powerful when you're told "...if you don't believe I have the right to beat you, then you're not a Muslim,"... because Islam also teaches you if you're a Muslim and you decide not to be a Muslim you go straight to hell...you're in a situation where if you don't know better you're trapped.</p>	<p><u>Assaulting the Heart Mind and Spirit:</u> I was married to a brother and then he proposed marriage to my sister who was my ward, she was living with me and ... I had to get rid of him because he was not going to marry my sister (tears). Didn't have nothing to do with the Koran. Later on I found out that a man can't marry two sisters at the same time. ... It's a power thing ... He wants to tell me. He doesn't want me to have anything to say. Because I went and voted on election day. And a few days later... and I know he doesn't think Muslims should vote, he said "you have some explaining to do" and stupid me, I thought ...he wanted me to explain my position on voting ...so I started to explain. And every time I would open my mouth he would cut me off ... his voice getting louder and louder...repeating the same thing "You're not telling me anything Islamic."</p> <p><u>Assaulting the Body:</u> ...we were just talking...about that woman whose twins died ... they died at five or four months gestation ...and as we found out ... one of the twins was born bruised and she had been severely beaten. ... X's situation was where he jumped on her and started beating on her and she called 911 ... he got his hands around her throat and choked off her air to the point where she was unconscious. At that time ...the police arrived and took him...to jail... she told her father and her father threatened to come to the community and do W in if he showed up there for prayer... then the Muslim men had to surround our center to make sure he didn't come and avenge his daughter while we were having ...prayer.</p>