

American Muslim Women's Experiences of Abuse:

A Narrative Study of Life, Meaning, and Culture

By


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ABSTRACT

TITLE: American Muslim Women's Experiences of Abuse: A Narrative Study of Life, Meaning, and Culture

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The researcher examined the lived experiences of American Muslim women with incidences of emotional, physical, and/or sexual abuse. Using an adaptation of interpretive phenomenology, data were collected from 17 American Muslim women from diverse ethnic backgrounds. Three group and 17 individual unstructured interviews were performed over 6 months. The interviews focused on abuse experiences framed within the contexts of biography, culture, and meaning. The goal of analysis was to uncover themes of commonality and difference and to place emergent themes in a larger social context. Analysis consisted of an iterative process of refinement and review of textual interpretation. Results indicate that Muslim culture profoundly shapes abused American Muslim women's experiences. Bound by cultural dictates, abused American Muslim women face many complex barriers, both internal and external, as they struggle to end abuse in their lives. Understanding the barriers abused American Muslim women face is a necessary prerequisite to the provision of culturally competent care to this population. Ultimately, effective intervention requires challenging oppressive social

arrangements that disempower American Muslim women, both within and outside of Muslim communities, over time.

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CHAPTER ONE:

INTRODUCTION AND STUDY AIMS

Abuse of women is a devastating social, legal, and health problem (Campbell, J. 1998; Fishwick, 1998; Jones, 1994; Sampsel, et al. 1992; Tift, 1993). A recent national random survey estimated that 4.4 million women experience intimate partner abuse every year (Plichta, 1997). Because battered women are stigmatized, and because they may fear reprisals, the problem of battering is likely to be significantly under-reported. Given these considerations, the actual incidence of domestic violence may approach 50% for all intimate couples (Tilden & Shepard, 1987).

Muslims, whose numbers have been estimated to be between 2 (Kosmin & Lachman, 1993) and 6 million in the United States (Afranji, 1995; Goodwin, 1994; Power, 1998), are not immune to this devastating phenomenon (Alkhateeb, 1998; Jilani, 1998). Despite the growing presence of Muslims in the U.S. (Stone, 1991), experiences of abuse that may occur within American Muslim communities remain largely undocumented. Indeed, there are no published studies that address the problem of intimate partner abuse in the context of American Muslim communities to date.

Recognition that battering of women is a sociocultural phenomenon, and not only an intra-personal and inter-personal problem, has surfaced in the US only in the last 20 years (Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Greenblat, 1985; Tift, 1993). Acknowledging that existing hierarchies sexism, classism, and other forms of systematic

oppression—regularly generate, legitimize, and reinforce battering requires that challenges to existing social relations through theory, practice, and research occur (Crenshaw, 1995; Phillips, 1998; Sampelle, et al. 1992; Tift, 1993). Research approaches that include study of the sociocultural contexts of abuse are necessary in order to address the problem, since abuse occurs in and is mediated by a multiplicity of cultural contexts (American Nurses Association, 1998). Ignoring sociocultural contexts means denial of the significance of culture with regard to the problem of woman abuse. The purpose of this research was to examine American Muslim women's lived experiences with physical, emotional, and/or sexual abuse, using a culturally grounded approach. Understanding of the unique sociocultural influences which shape American Muslim women's experiences of abuse grounds effective intervention with this group of women.

AIMS OF THE STUDY

In this research I examined the lived experiences of American Muslim women with regard to incidences of physical, emotional, and/or sexual abuse. There is ample evidence that abused American Muslim women are a marginalized group who are differentially subjected to the harsh effects of multiple systems of oppression, including gender, racial, and class oppressions (Alkhateeb, 1998; Ba-Yunus, 1995; Haddad, 1991; Memon, 1993; Phillips, 1995; Phillips 1998; Power, 1998; Toulon, 1995). These multiple systems of oppression interface with American Muslim women's specific cultural systems, shaping their experiences of abuse in ways that are culturally specific

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 the nursing literature (ANA, 1998; Bohn, D., 1998; Campbell & Gary, 1998; Leininger, 1999; Meleis, 1999; Rodriguez, 1998; Torres, 1998), American Muslim women's experiences of health and illness remain largely unexplored by researchers. Thus the specific aims for this research were to: (a) describe American Muslim women's lived experiences with abuse, (b) identify culturally specific phenomena which shape American Muslim women's experiences and perceptions of abuse in the context of a larger social background, and (c) describe women's interpretation and background meanings with regard to their experiences with abuse.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Muslim Women's Experiences of Abuse: A Global Perspective

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. The need for attention to culture in domestic violence research has been underscored in a recent publication, *Culturally Competent Assessment for Family Violence* (American Nurses Association, 1998). In this publication, the American Nurses Association (1998) lamented the lack of research on family violence that addresses issues of culture, making the development of culturally relevant practice guidelines difficult.

Muslim women, like women from all over the world, experience abuse within families. Worldwide, common religious cultural influences play a powerful role in shaping abuse experiences for this group of women (Abu-Odeh, 1996; El-Saadawi, 1980; Haj-Yahia, 1998a; Haj-Yahia, 1998b; Phillips, 1995; Shaaban, 1991). This assertion is not intended to imply that Muslim women who are abused have “cultural” problems. Clearly, woman abuse is not culture specific. However, the influence of culture in shaping women’s abuse experiences and their understandings of these experiences is significant, and therefore worthy of the attention of researchers and service providers concerned about the problem of woman abuse in diverse cultural settings.

Violence Against Muslim Women is a Global Problem

The significance of religious cultural influences on Muslim women as interpreted by the societies in which they live cannot be overemphasized. Recently there has been a fundamentalist backlash in the Middle East and in parts of Asia, resulting in violence against Muslim women in their homes and in public space (Bennoune, 1995; Hassan, 1999a; Kirshenbaum, 1997; Morgan, 1996; Nightline, 2/15-16, 1999; Sarwar, 1999). Women are being beaten in the streets and are being viciously murdered by family

members all in the name of Islam. The dire affects of Taliban-style¹ fundamentalism in Pakistan exemplify this problem:

Islamic tribesmen . . . killed a teenage girl who had been raped because they believed the rape brought shame on their community. The girl was taken to a field near her house and executed by a firing squad Less than one month later a similar murder occurred. This time 29-year-old Samia Sarwar was killed by a hit man hired by her family. They said she dishonored the community by seeking a divorce from her abusive husband. The killing took place in Lahore, the cultural and intellectual capital of the country . . . (Sarwar, 1999, p. 16).

Women continue to be the targets of the most serious human rights violations that occur in so-called Muslim nations (Hassan, 1999a). The subjugation and murder of women by their husbands and other male relatives (Baker, Gregware & Cassidy, 1999; Hassan, 1999; Jehl, 1999; Nightline 2/15-16, 1999; Ruggi, 1999), and the problem of female genital mutilation (Morris, 1996; Taylor, 1998), pose serious threats to Muslim women's health worldwide.

While many Muslims vehemently condemn such practices as un-Islamic, the fact that perpetrators use Islam to justify violence against women, individually and collectively, shapes Muslim women's abuse experiences. Muslim women in the United

¹ The Taliban are an Islamic fundamentalist faction in Afghanistan that seized control of the country, ending 18 years of war, while at the same time beginning a new era of repression for Afghani women. The Taliban have banned women from working outside of the home, closed schools for girls and women, and mandated shrouding of women from head to toe in public space. Those who have failed to comply have been beaten in the streets by members of the Taliban militia.

States are no exception to this rule. The gap between ideal Islam and actual practice is vast: “Woman and man created by God and standing equal in the sight of God, have become very unequal in Muslim societies” (Hassan, 1999a, p. 9).

To a large degree, the inequalities Muslim women are subjected to in Muslim societies stem from misogynist interpretations of Islam. A recent documentary on honor killings provided an example of the dire effects such interpretations have on the safety of women. Here, a Pakistani man is quoted. He claimed to have seen his wife speaking to another man, and had murdered both:

I killed them. We are Muslims. Our *Sharia* tells us if you see them kill them.

We cannot spare them. If we see them. It says so in the *Sharia* and in the Koran.

Even the Mullahs say it. And we are Muslims aren't we? (Nightline, 2/15-16, 1993)

The ghastly effects of misogynist interpretations of Islam on Muslim women in communities abroad have received recent media attention; however, the plight of Muslim women in America has been largely ignored. This is true, despite the fact that American Muslim women share a common religious culture with Muslims living across the globe.

American Muslim Women's Perceptions of Abuse

Islamic Worldview

In a study of practicing Muslims in America, Hermansen (1991) (using participant observation methods) concluded that Muslim women in America have a

shared world of experience and communication, despite the diversity of their backgrounds. This shared world is derived from a common Muslim culture. Because human perceptions are filtered through the lens of culture (Saleebey, 1994; Unger, 1993), American Muslim women's perceptions of experiences of abuse are necessarily culturally mediated. Providing culturally competent care to abused American Muslim women requires an understanding of and sensitivity to this cultural lens. For the purposes of this research, the term Muslim culture refers to the culture of Muslim communities that governs daily life and shapes human perceptions and understandings of the world. Muslim culture is not identified with Islam itself, but instead is a cultural system that has been shaped by common interpretations of Islam by various ethnic groups.

For Muslims, Islamic traditions permeate daily life. Prescriptions 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 (Ahmed, 1992).

Importance of Family Life

According to religious tradition the Prophet Mohammed said "Marriage is my *sunna* [example or custom]. Whosoever keeps away from it is not from me" and "When a man marries, he has fulfilled half of his religion, so let him fear Allah regarding the remaining half" (Rahman, 1999, pp. 1-2). Thus, marriage for Muslim women is an act that pleases God. This total commitment to the family as a way of life is particularly ingrained among Arab-American Muslim women whose Arab culture emphasizes motherhood as an avenue to increased power and status within family structures (Meleis, 1991, Meleis, Arruda, Lane, & Bernal, 1994). Additionally, despite the differences in culture between Arab-American and African-American women in general, it may be that one of the strong attractions for African-American converts to Islam is the image of a secure family life framed around clearly delineated gender roles (Kosmin & Lachman, 1993). Certainly Muslim women from both of these ethnic groups are strongly influenced by the Islamic emphasis on marriage and motherhood as a means toward obtaining spiritual rewards both in this life and the after-life. Because of this emphasis on the family, some American Muslim women perceive themselves as bound by duty to God and family not to leave their abusers (Memon, 1993; Phillips, 1995). Finally, because of the environment created by the manipulation of religious text, abused Muslim

women in America, like abused Muslim women abroad, may believe abusers' claims that their acts are justified by God-given authority.

Contextual Aspects of American Muslim Women's Experiences with Abuse

Spiritual Abuse

Religious traditions provide the underpinnings of social norms within religious cultures (Bohn, 1985). Bohn, (1985) theorized that the use of violence against women by men is simply an extension of men's ownership of women promulgated by patriarchal religions. In Muslim communities, abusers often invoke the authority of God, interpreting Islam to legitimize abusive behaviors (Alkhateeb, 1998; Memon, 1993; Phillips, 1995). By invoking religious text to justify and uphold abusive behavior, American Muslim abusers use their victims' own spirituality as a weapon against them. Through this manipulation of religious text, abusers attempt to maintain power and control over their wives, culminating in emotional and/or physical assault (Alkhateeb, 1998; Phillips, 1995). This problem is further compounded when Muslim religious leaders instruct women seeking help to pray harder and be more obedient to abusive husbands (Jilani, 1998).

Absence of Social Support

In addition to the use of religious text to disempower Muslim women, a lack of social support for victims exacerbates the problem of abuse among American Muslim women. 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 may be lacking. These women risk being ostracized by Muslim communities, often their only source of connection (Memon, 1993). This is significant in view of 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 can be lacking within Muslim communities, many abused American Muslim women are eventually forced to look to non-Muslims 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 (Ba-Yunus, 1995; Haddad, 1991; Hall, Stevens, & Meleis, 1994; Stevens, 1993; Toulon, 1995). Pervasive negative stereotyping of Muslims reinforces the fear harbored by many American Muslims that non-Muslim service providers lack sensitivity to and understanding of Muslims’ unique cultural beliefs (Memon, 1993). This negative stereotyping, accompanied by a paucity of information about American Muslim women in the literature, leaves nurses and other health care providers unprepared to effectively provide care to this population.

SUMMARY

In summary, American Muslim women, like Muslim women abroad, are vulnerable to abuse in ways that are culturally constructed. Because of the importance of family and religion in the daily life of Muslim women, they are vulnerable to spiritual manipulation by abusers. This vulnerability is compounded by an absence of social support for Muslim women in the United States who are victims of abuse in families. The influence of systems of oppression and pervasive negative stereotyping are additional concerns for this population. Effective intervention with abused American Muslim women requires an understanding of the meanings and contexts which shape abuse experiences. This understanding is crucial in view of the vulnerability of the group, and nursing's commitment to provide culturally competent care to diverse populations.

It is my hope that this work will help foster an understanding of American Muslim women's experiences. Chapter two provides an overview of domestic violence research literature along disciplinary and academic boundaries. Highlighted in this chapter are particular foci, strengths, and shortcomings of psychological, sociological/structural, feminist, and health approaches. Also included is a brief overview of culturally focused domestic violence research among Muslims and/or Arabs.

Chapter three provides background information about Islam, its theology, history, and texts. This chapter also includes an outline of Muslim feminist discourse and of

twentieth century influences on Islam. Literature addressing the experiences of African-American and Arab-American Muslim women completes the third chapter.

Chapter four describes the philosophy of science and methods that comprise the study's methodology. I chose to call this approach counter-hegemonic, because this research is intended to challenge hegemonic processes that support violence against women and marginalize Muslims in American culture and society. While the primary mode of investigation has been hermeneutic, both critical and post-modern philosophical perspectives shaped my understandings of the research process.

Chapter five delineates marriage themes, the first of four results chapters. Marriage is a culturally prescribed practice that was central to the lives of participants.

Chapter six describes divorce themes. Divorce was a particularly difficult experience for participants since divorced women often found themselves isolated and alone. Women sometimes had difficulty obtaining Islamic divorces, and when they were divorced, more often than not they faced social stigma.

Chapter seven describes Muslim community themes. Community, like marriage, was a central part of Muslim women's stories. It provided a sense of identity, meaning, and connection in their lives. This chapter describes Muslim community structure, norms, and responses to abuse.

Chapter eight focuses on the actual abuse experiences of participants. Emotional, physical, and sexual abuse, the cultural norms surrounding abuse, and the sequela of abuse are all addressed in this chapter.

Finally, chapter nine is a summary chapter that synthesizes findings and highlights implications for practice and research.

CHAPTER TWO:

REVIEW OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE RESEARCH

Research on violence against women over the past 30 years has significantly shaped our understanding of this phenomenon. Despite the complexity of domestic violence, however, violence against women has largely been studied within the confines of disciplinary and/or academic boundaries. In particular, psychology, sociology, criminology, health, and feminist approaches to the study of violence against women predominate. Accordingly, this review presents selected domestic violence research literature in four broad categories. The review concludes by examining recent research literature that addresses the problem of domestic violence in specific cultural settings.

In psychological studies, the psychopathology of abusers, victims, dyads, and families of origin has been of particular interest to researchers. In sociological/structural studies, abuse of women has been conceptualized as a socially patterned phenomenon. This approach attempts to explain how the “. . . organizational features of married life contribute to domestic violence and does not attempt to explain the behavior of individual family members” (Bagarozzi & Giddings, 1983, p. 4). Feminist approaches have sought to link patriarchy and the subordination of women in general to abuse of women in families specifically. This approach has conceptualized domestic violence as part of a wider repertoire of power and control tactics used by men to maintain positions of socially ordained dominance over women (Dutton, 1995). In health research

approaches, domestic violence has been conceptualized as a health problem requiring intervention (Barnett, Miller-Perrin, & Perrin, 1997). Assessment and intervention strategies for use in health care settings have been the focus of health research. Additionally, public health research has commonly focused on the epidemiology of violence against women. Finally, culturally focused research approaches to the study of domestic violence is an emerging area. As researchers increasingly realize the importance of culture in shaping domestic violence perceptions, experiences, and responses, more attention is being paid to this important aspect of the phenomenon. While there is also a large body of criminology and legal research conducted in the field of domestic violence, these perspectives are beyond the scope of this review. Criminological approaches have focused on domestic violence as a crime, amassing crime statistics, examining perpetrator characteristics, and exploring the effectiveness of criminal/legal intervention.

The vast majority of single-factor theoretical approaches is consistent with one of the aforementioned broad categories. Within each of these categories, researchers have sought to find the cause and extent of domestic violence, and to identify factors associated with the phenomenon. While research that emphasizes the importance of context in shaping abused women's lives is becoming increasingly common (Antonopoulou, 1999; Corsi, 1999; Horne, 1999; Kozu, 1999; Valencia & Van Hoorne, 1999), this review highlights the paucity of such approaches overall.

Finally, the plethora of terminology around the subject of violence against women along with the heated debate that has accompanied the use of various terms deserves some brief attention. The use of the term domestic violence has been criticized as a “. . . euphemistic abstraction that keeps us at a dispassionate distance far removed from the repugnant spectacle of human beings in pain” (Jones, 1994, p. 81). Furthermore, many women’s advocates have rejected the term victim, preferring instead to use the term survivor. However, I have chosen to use the term victim in this work when appropriate, to reflect the influences of culture and history on each woman as an individual. Also, for the purposes of this work the terms domestic violence, woman abuse, and intimate partner violence are used interchangeably.

PSYCHOLOGICAL RESEARCH

Psychological research on domestic violence is often predicated on the assumption that abusers are abnormal because they abuse their loved-ones and that victims are abnormal because they are abused (victims’ proposed abnormality is conceptualized as either a precursor to, or sequela of abuse). A second assumption of psychological research has been that abnormal abusers and victims are the products of abnormal families of origin. Thus, psychopathology has been the focus of domestic violence research and intervention in the field of psychology.

Unfortunately, the focus of psychological research on the psychopathology associated with domestic violence historically has resulted in the pathologizing of victims. Pre-Freudian psychiatry condemned both victims and perpetrators as social and

genetic inferiors. Subsequently, Freudian influences promulgated misogynist images of “. . . the seductive daughter, the nagging wife, and the lying hysteric” (Pleck, 1987, p. 146). While Freud later renounced his seduction theory he replaced it with a new interpretation of violence against women which posed no threat to the existing social order. Abused women and girls, Freud argued, had an unconscious wish for such treatment (Pleck, 1987). Thus early psychiatrists confronted with the reality of domestic violence labeled battered women as masochistic, a belief that set a precedent for future work (Pleck, 1987). The popularity of the theory of learned helplessness in the 1970s (Walker, 1977-78), and its broad application to all battered women, contributed to the common perception that battered women are psychologically paralyzed and helpless. While researchers’ eagerness to document battered women’s psychopathology has recently come under attack, the legacy of victim-blaming remains (Jones, 1994). The question “why do women stay?” has yet to be replaced on a grand scale by the question “why do we allow battering to continue in our society?”

Individuals and Dyads

Psychological research that focuses on individuals and dyads has examined the psychopathology of abusers. In addition, studies investigating wife responses and/or clinical recommendations involving both abusers and victims are common. Multiple associations between battering behavior and individual psychopathology have been demonstrated.

Abusers' hostility toward victims was examined by Holtzworth-Munroe 17 Smutzler (1996) using a quasi-experimental design. Violent and non-violent men were exposed to wife-behaviors via written descriptions and videotaped depictions. Consistent with what one might expect, violent men were less likely to be supportive, caring, sympathetic, and communicative toward wives than were non-violent men. In addition, violent men were more likely to verbalize hostility, and were more likely to be irritated by wives than were non-violent men. The researchers speculated that these group differences were the result of a skills deficit in social interactions of violent men. Similarly, Eckhardt, Barbour, and Davison (1998) studied correlates of anger arousal among batterers in a community-based sample of married men. Participants were rated for irrational beliefs, biases, hostility, and anger-control statements as they listened to anger-arousing audio-tapes. Again, the investigators identified skills deficits among violent men. Violent men lacked anger controlling pro-social coping strategies and tended to be entrenched in aversive communication patterns that involved escalating anger, contempt, and belligerence toward wives. These studies highlight the importance of social skills for non-violent communication and interaction, explaining, from the perspective of the authors, why some men batter and others do not.

Like Eckhardt and colleagues (1998), Yelsma (1996) also studied communication deficits in abusive marriages, for both abusers and victims. Yelsma (1996) compared affective orientations among abusers, victims, and non-violent couples. Findings revealed that violent couples in the study were significantly less able to express

emotions using words than were non-violent couples. In addition, violent couples, both abusers and victims, were significantly less aware of their feelings than were same-sex controls. Expression of positive emotions was significantly less for victims than for control females. Finally, deficits in positive affect were noted to be significant indicators of physical abuse. Based on these findings, Yelsma (1996) suggested that both abusers and victims had deficits in their ability to express and be aware of their own affective states.

Yelsma's (1996) study highlights the problematic nature of research that focuses on pathologic states of women in abusive relationships. While abnormal characteristics were identified among victims in this study, the temporal relationship between battering and the emergence of abnormal affective states was not addressed. The unfortunate implication, that victims are somehow responsible for their pain as a result of their own psychosocial pathology, calls attention to the need for more thoughtful and sensitive approaches in this area of research.

Jones (1994), in her book *Next Time She'll be Dead*, addressed the problem of victim-blaming in domestic violence research. By studying the characteristics of battered women, researchers have attempted to find something about this group to explain why they are battered and why they stay. According to Jones (1994), too often research has framed the problem of intimate partner violence as one rooted in victim pathology, instead of conceptualizing battering as a problem of male violence:

The experts have examined the personalities of women, their education, their family history, their previous experience with violence, their physical health, their mental health, their employment record, their use of alcohol and drugs, their sexual history and attitudes, their religious beliefs, their child-rearing practices, their veracity, their verbal skills, their problem-solving skills, their 'interpersonal tactics' (which means mostly what they do when a man hits them), and—endlessly—their self-esteem . . . Gender bias oozes from the very methods of the academics: quantitative, statistical, "objective," and as distant as possible from the real experiences of real women (Jones, 1994, pp. 143-154).

The tendency to pathologize victims, and ultimately, to blame victims for their suffering, has a long history in the field of domestic violence research (Pleck, 1987). Feminist criticism has been an important impetus for change in this arena (Jones, 1994).

Similar to Yelsma's (1996) interest in affective states and domestic violence, Vivian and Malone (1997) examined the association between depressive symptomatology and husbands' marital violence. Findings revealed that severe physical abuse was associated with decreased marital and communicative satisfaction, increased verbal and spouse-specific aggression, increased dysfunctional marital cognitions, and increased levels of depressive symptomatology. Despite the authors' emphasis on battering as a ". . . couple dynamic related to interactional and communication based problems in both spouses" (Vivian & Maline, 1997, p. 14), readers are cautioned by the authors of the study against the view that both spouses ". . . are responsible for escalation

processes likely to end in violence” (Vivian & Malone, 1997, p. 14). Studies by both Yelsma (1996) and Vivian and Malone (1997) highlight the association between battering and the affective states of both batterers and victims, with depression and diminished self-awareness being particularly problematic.

In addition to pathologic affective states and interpersonal skills deficits, other psychological correlates of battering have been examined. Hanson, Cadsky, Harris, and Lalonde (1997) determined that batterers were likely to have experienced violence in childhood, to have anti-social personality disorders, to be distressed, to have attitudes that were tolerant of wife assault, and to experience marital maladjustment. In addition, batterers were more likely to display a range of impulsive behaviors in comparison to non-violent men. In another study examining the relationship between psychopathology and violent behavior Hamberger, Lohr, Bonge, and Tolin (1996) tested a theoretical model delineating three main personality types: non-pathological, antisocial, and passive-aggressive-dependent. Findings indicated that non-pathological men had the lowest severity and frequency of violence. Non-pathological men restricted their violence primarily to intimate relationships and had the fewest police contacts of all groups. In contrast, anti-social men were the most generally violent and had the most police contacts. Passive-aggressive dependent men had the highest frequency of violence of all groups.

In another study examining the psychopathology of abusers, Byrne and Riggs (1996) discovered a correlation between post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and

battering. Their findings indicated that PTSD symptomatology placed Vietnam veterans at increased risk of battering, regardless of the amount of their actual combat exposure. The research of Hanson, et al. (1997), Hamberger, et al. (1996), and Byrne and Riggs (1996) highlight the increased likelihood of battering behavior among men with antisocial personality disorder, passive-aggressive personality disorder and PTSD. While these studies provide important and useful information about the subset of men who suffer from these psychiatric illnesses, they do not address the problematic behavior of the so-called 'normal' men who comprise the majority of abusers in society.

Moving beyond the limitations of individual and dyad focused research, Dutton and Starzomski (1997) added the social context of gender oppression to their investigation of battering behavior. In recognition of the gendered aspects of battering behavior, eight components of the Minnesota Power and Control Wheel (coercion, intimidation, emotional abuse, isolation, minimizing and blaming, using children, male privilege, and economic abuse) were measured along with personality characteristics using the Propensity to Abuse Scale (PAS) (Dutton, 1995). Intercorrelations were found among all eight components of the Minnesota Power and Control Wheel (MPCW) (Pence, 1989), indicating that these components comprised a cohesive set of actions found among batterers. Violent men were determined to display more controlling tactics than non-violent men for four of the eight components. Strong differences between groups were found in PAS scores and many intercorrelations between the PAS and MPCW were noted. Interestingly, general measures of personality disorders did not

correlate with the Minnesota Power and Control Wheel. The findings suggested that “. . . the empirically derived PAS, constructed for use in this specific context, appears to measure the forms of psychological dysfunction most related to male/female intimate violence better than measures of more generic personality disturbance . . .” (Dutton & Starzomski, 1997, p. 76). In addition, Dutton and Starzomski (1997) noted the importance of “social factors as precursors to abusiveness” (Dutton & Starzomski, 1997, p. 78). They hypothesized that personality features interacted with male sex-role socialization, producing “variabilities in male sense of entitlement, power orientation in intimate relationships, emotional accessibility, and expression” (Dutton & Starzomski, 1997 p. 78). A mix of misogynist cultural values and personality disturbances were offered as an explanation for the heterogeneity of male abusers indicating a need for diverse treatment approaches with abusive men.

While studies examining individual and dyad psychology and interaction patterns provide important information about the characteristics of some abusers and some victims, psychological research has failed to identify any consistent pattern of individual psychopathology in men who batter or in women who are abused (Raj, Silverman, Wingood, & Diclemente, 1999). Psychological approaches to the study of domestic violence have been widely criticized by feminists and battered women’s advocates. Dobash and Dobash (1992) have argued that these approaches perpetuate:

. . . unsubstantiated yet damaging theories about the problem, its victims, perpetrators and solutions implicitly assume that this is strictly an individual

problem suffered by deviants needing psychiatric care rather than a social problem in need of wider remedies (Dobash & Dobash, 1992, p. 32).

Likewise, Bograd (1988) criticized the focus on individual psychology because it suggests that intimate partner violence is a problem of a few sick men and at times implicates victims in the problem of battering. Psychological approaches that leave unexamined power and gender relations in families and society are not without value, but they are of limited value because they completely exclude the social context within which abuse in families takes place. The research of Dutton and Starzomski (1997) cited above exemplifies efforts in the field of psychology to move in that direction.

Family of Origin

In addition to individual and dyad psychopathology, the psychopathology of families of origin has been a subject of investigation. The intergenerational transmission of woman abuse has been widely studied by domestic violence researchers. Family of origin research seeks to identify associations between child abuse and child witnessing of spousal abuse with skills deficits, psychiatric illness, and violent behavior in adulthood.

Choice, Lamke, and Pittman (1995) examined the mediating effects both of men's ineffective conflict resolution strategies and of marital distress on the intergenerational transmission of woman abuse. Choice, et al. (1995), theorized that social learning theory and social cognitive theory explained the link "between boys' witnessing of interparental violence and their later perpetration of violence against their wives" (Choice, et al. 1995,

p. 107). In essence, boys learned problem-solving skills from their parental role models. When boys' parents suffered from problem-solving deficits, Choice, et al. (1995) hypothesized that these deficits were learned and carried over into intimate partner relationships in adulthood. The findings indicated that parents' use of ineffective conflict resolution strategies increased men's likelihood of experiencing marital distress and engaging in battering behavior. Like Choice, et al. (1995), Magdol, Moffit, Caspi, and Silva (1998a) sought to identify antecedents to battering behavior. Magdol, et al. (1998a) used a prospective longitudinal study design to measure four domains, including socioeconomic resources, family relations, educational achievements, and problem behaviors. The sample was comprised of a complete cohort of births between April 1, 1972, and March 31, 1973, in Dunedin, New Zealand. Variables were measured in early and middle childhood and in adolescence. Partner abuse outcomes were measured when the cohort was age 21. The most consistent predictor of abuse was the presence of early problem behaviors; however, antecedents of abuse included risk factors from all four domains.

Unlike the studies cited above, which sought to identify antecedents to battering, other family of origin studies have focused on the long-term sequela of witnessing interparental violence. Henning, Leitenberg, Coffey, Turner, and Bennett (1996) studied the long-term psychological and social impact on females of witnessing parental conflict. Their findings indicated that women who had witnessed husband-to-wife spousal violence were more likely to suffer from psychological distress and decreased

levels of social adjustment as adults. No psychological differences from comparisons controls were identified among women who had witnessed only wife-to-husband violence during childhood. In contrast, Fergusson and Horwood (1998) studied psychosocial maladjustment and exposure to interparental violence in 18-year-olds and identified harmful effects on men and women who witnessed both husband-wife and wife-husband perpetrated violence during childhood. This study determined that exposure to interparental violence increased the likelihood of mental health problems, substance abuse, and juvenile crime in their cohort of 18-year-olds. There was a clear relationship between exposure to interparental violence and interparental abuse severity, with young adults from the most violent families having the greatest likelihood for maladjustment. Similarly, McNeal and Amato (1998), in their study examining the long term consequences of witnessing interparental violence, found patterns of maladjustment in their sample of young adults. Using data from a 12-year longitudinal study of marital instability, McNeal and Amato (1998) determined that witnessing of interparental violence adversely affected young adults' parental relationships and psychological well-being. Additionally this study replicated other study findings (Cappell & Heiner, 1990; Carter, Stacey, & Shupe, 1988) by identifying an association between witnessing interparental violence and later involvement in intimate partner violence either as perpetrator or victim of abuse.

Family of origin research clearly demonstrates that witnessing interparental violence during childhood places children at risk for future abuse either as perpetrators

or as victims. Additionally, witnessing interparental violence also places children at risk for psychosocial maladjustment in adulthood. Still, the complexity of long term psychological damage to children growing up in violent homes continues to be only partially understood at best.

SOCIOLOGICAL/STRUCTURAL RESEARCH

Unlike psychological approaches, sociological/structural approaches to understanding violence against women do not involve an assumption that battering is associated with psychopathology. Instead, power relationships within families and society at large are examined. Also race, class, gender, employment, and other sociological variables are of interest to sociological/structural researchers.

Sociological research in the field of domestic violence often has incorporated large, nationally representative samples. Perhaps most notable among these studies has been the work of Straus and Gelles (1986). Using large nationally representative samples, sociological/structural researchers have amassed a great wealth of information (Straus, 1990b). In particular, statistics regarding the incidence and prevalence rates of domestic violence in the United States, and many associated social risk factors, abound. Inherent in the quantitative, sociological/structural emphasis on nationally representative samples has been an interest in developing and refining reliable and valid measurement tools. The Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS) (Straus, 1979), a controversial yet widely used instrument, was designed for use in domestic violence research. Further development and refinement of this tool has continued to be an area of interest in the field (Straus,

1990a). Unfortunately, qualitative research approaches which provide important contextual information around the phenomenon of abuse continue to be underutilized.

Incidence and Prevalence Rates

Research examining the incidence and prevalence of domestic violence has yielded wide variations in estimates. These variations have been largely attributed to differences in sampling and measurement approaches. Despite the lack of uniformity of studies examining incidence and prevalence of domestic violence, the information available has been useful for researchers and policy makers alike. Currently, studies of incidence and prevalence have been used to examine specific subsets of the population for the purpose of identifying segments of society at greater risk of experiencing violence in the context of intimate partnerships.

Because the majority of domestic violence research has specifically addressed the problem as it occurs among married women, Magdol, Moffitt, Caspi, and Silva (1998b) sought to examine intimate partner violence among cohabiting couples. Using a representative sample of young adults who were age 21 between 1993 and 1994, Magdol, et al. (1998b) compared rates and levels of partner abuse among cohabiting and dating couples. During a 50-minute standardized interview, part of the Conflict Tactics Scale (Straus, 1979), and 4 items from Margolin's Domestic Conflict Index (Margolin, et al. 1990, as cited by Magdol et al. 1998b), were administered. In addition, 13 other measures were administered investigating individual, relationship, and social factors. Findings indicated that cohabiters were significantly more likely than daters to report

having abused their partners (men and women both). About half (52%) of the cohabiting participants in the study reported that they had behaved abusively toward their partners compared to about one fourth of the daters (27%). Significant differences between daters and cohabiters were found even after controlling for several covariates. This study identified cohabiting couples as a population at increased risk of domestic violence in comparison to dating couples.

Like cohabiting couples, lesbian and gay couples have largely been ignored by researchers studying intimate partner violence. In response to this gap, Waldner-Haugrud, Gratch, and Magruder (1997) explored domestic violence among lesbian and gay couples using a snowball sample of 283 subjects. Using a modified version of the Conflict Tactics Scale (Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980), respondents indicated whether they had been threatened, pushed, slapped, punched, struck with an object, or had a weapon used against them in the context of an intimate same-sex relationship. Items were weighted to assess the severity of victimization. The same modified Conflict Tactics Scale was used to assess rates of perpetration. The following three questions were addressed:

1. Is the classification of victim or perpetrator related to gender?
2. Does the number of different tactics (experienced by victims or perpetrated by abusers) differ by gender?
3. Is the severity of violence (either experienced or perpetrated) related to gender?

The findings indicated that 47.5% of lesbians and 29.7% of gays reported past or current domestic violence experiences in same sex relationships. In addition, 38% of lesbians and 21.8% of gays reported having used violence against their partners. No significant differences were found regarding the severity of violence experienced by victims or perpetrated by abusers. Waldner-Haugrud, et al. (1997) theorized that greater levels of dependency in lesbian relationships, gender-role socialization consistent with a "victim" role, alcohol abuse, power and status inequality between partners, childhood victimization experiences, and personality disorders were potential explanations for the greater incidence of lesbian battering identified by this study. No contextual data were collected to further elucidate these findings.

In another study intended to identify rates of domestic violence in a specific population, Romkens (1997) combined qualitative and quantitative methods to ascertain the prevalence of wife-abuse in the Netherlands. Romkens (1997) developed a semi-structured interview schedule for conducting face-to-face interviews. Data were collected from a random sample of 1,016 women between ages of 20 and 60. Face-to-face interviews lasted between 1 and 9 hours with an average of 2 hours for victimized women. Findings indicated that 20.3% of the women sampled experienced unilateral violence by a male partner. A small minority of one in five within this group used defensive violence. Two-thirds of all abused women sustained injury, and 50% sought medical treatment. One in five injured women suffered permanent physical injury. Unilateral violence against men was reported to occur in 10.6% of the sample.

Injuries in this male group were fewer and less severe overall. Within the legally divorced group, 43% of women reported physical violence (40% of which was reported as severe) from their previous husbands. Many of the divorced women stated they would not have divulged this information had they still been married to their abusers. When all violence reports were counted, almost 40% of all of the respondents had been engaged in some form of spousal violence. In almost two thirds of these cases, women were unilaterally the victim, and often had been physically injured. Mutual violence occurred in less than one fifth of all violence reported. The difference in these findings in comparison to earlier survey findings by other researchers is attributed to the use of "... a specific measurement for investigating mutual and unilateral violence and ... sexual force" (Romkens, 1997, p. 118).

Measurement

As mentioned previously, there is a fair amount of attention paid by sociological/structural researchers to measurement issues in domestic violence research. In particular, measurement of the rate of intimate violence is of interest. Bohannon, Dosser, and Lindley (1995) replicated earlier work which suggested that higher rates of domestic violence reporting are obtained when both spouses' reports of violence are measured. Using the Conflict Tactics scale (Straus, 1979), they obtained couple aggregate data. Findings indicated that violence rates reported in other studies may be serious underestimates. Thus, Bohannon, et al. (1995) suggested that "... only data

collected from both spouses can give a complete estimate of the rate of violence within couples” (Bohannon, et al. 1995, p. 140).

Like Bohannon et al. (1995), Morse (1995) used the Conflict Tactics Scale (Straus, 1979) to investigate rates of domestic assault. The purpose of Morse’s study was to address the controversial finding of other studies that assault of husbands by wives is just as commonplace as assaults of wives by husbands. Using additional measures, the investigators obtained data regarding physical injury, including, for example, who initiated conflict, whether both partners engaged in violence, and who initiated the progression to violence. Findings indicated that while both men and women engaged in violent acts toward their intimate partners, men were more likely than women to initiate violence, were more likely to repeatedly ‘beat-up’ their partners, and were more likely to inflict physical injury on their partners than were women. This study provided important information for understanding increasingly common claims that men are victims of domestic violence in the same way that women are, thus narrowing the gap between research and practice.

Measurement of rates of intimate partner assault was also the focus of Hamby, Poindexter, and Gray-Little’s (1996) study of four measures of partner violence. To ascertain whether differences in prevalence rates obtained with different measures of violence were due to random or systematic measurement error, the authors examined the variation and consistency of four measures. They compared the Conflict Tactics Scale (Straus, 1979), the Judges’ Severity Rating of Description of Worst Incident (Judges’

Severity) (Hamby, et al. 1996), the Self-Report Severity Rating of the Worst Incident (Self-Report Severity) (Hamby, et al. 1996), and the Self-Report Aggregate Frequency Question (Aggregate Frequency) (Hamby, et al. 1996). The four measures examined were strongly intercorrelated with one another, and they yielded relatively similar prevalence rates. However, even though the overall prevalence rates obtained were similar among the four measures, confirmatory factor-analysis indicated that the measures did not equally represent the construct 'partner violence.' Frequency measures were more strongly associated with the construct partner violence than were severity measures. There was some systematic variation across measures, with participants reporting milder and more infrequent abuse being classified most inconsistently. Hamby et al. (1996) questioned research approaches that "... perceive violence as an all-or-nothing phenomenon" since this tends to oversimplifies women's experiences (Hamby, et al. 1996, p. 137), and the logic that places "... individuals who have experienced a single push or one grab in the same category as those who have experienced repeated and severe beatings" (Hamby, et al. 1996, p. 137). The data suggested that "... dichotomous prevalence rates based on single measures may be relatively unstable ..." (Hamby, et al. 1996, p. 137). This study underscored the importance of using multiple measures to assess partner violence.

As mentioned previously, sociological/structural approaches to domestic violence research often measure the incidence and prevalence of abuse, and attempt to identify social risk factors associated with abuse. While such quantitative approaches provide

important statistical information about the problem of domestic violence, this approach provides no information about the context of abuse. As with the work of Waldner-Haugrud, et al. (1997), such approaches leave researchers with findings that have no social meaning beyond the recognition that some groups may suffer higher rates of domestic violence than others. The absence of contextual data within which statistical data can be placed for interpretation, sometimes tempts researchers to speculate as to the meaning of the information they have amassed. Such speculation is hard to resist, since just knowing that certain groups have higher rates of abuse than others does not tell us why this is so, or what the processes that shape such differences are. The meaning of such differences in incidence and prevalence are lost to us without this knowledge of context. Unfortunately, speculation without important information regarding the sociocultural context of the phenomenon is sometimes harmful. For example, speculating that lesbians have greater levels of dependency, childhood victimization, and so on, than other groups, again without reference to the larger social context, is not useful. Rather, this serves only to pathologize this already marginalized group.

While the development of reliable and valid instruments and the gathering of incidence and prevalence data are important and useful endeavors, caution must be exercised in interpreting statistics. Greater efforts to collect contextual data to enhance our understanding of statistical data are needed. Given the large discrepancies in incidence and prevalence rates which can be found from study to study (depending on which data collection methods and instruments are used), findings which suggest that

some groups suffer higher rates of domestic violence than others also should be interpreted with caution.

FEMINIST RESEARCH

Feminist research is a small but significant body of research in the field of domestic violence (Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Yllo & Straus, 1990). Indeed, it is grassroots feminist movements that identified intimate violence as a widespread social problem (Gelles, 1993; Jones, 1994). According to feminist perspectives, patriarchal cultural influences legitimize male authority within families and society. Men assume both the right and responsibility to discipline women as governors within families. Conversely, women's roles within patriarchal cultures are those of subordinates, who selflessly serve home and family (Smith, 1997). Because of the pervasiveness of patriarchal influences in society, the applicability of feminist perspectives to the study of domestic violence has been broad in scope. Cultural, legal, educational, social, and health research pertaining to domestic violence all have been conducted using a feminist lens.

Early feminist research on domestic violence has provided a foundation for continuing efforts. The work of Dobash and Dobash (1979) has been an important springboard for feminist research in the field. In their work, Dobash and Dobash (1979) reviewed historical and contemporary documents in legal, religious, and cultural spheres that supported marital hierarchy and violence against wives, thus documenting the legacy of patriarchy and its influence on wife-beating. In addition, they reported on the

prevalence and predominance of wife-beating and presented research findings from their work in Scotland. This research reported high rates of wife-beating and identified firm associations with domination, control, and chastisement of women in their positions as wives. Dobash and Dobash (1979) showed how the legacy of patriarchy has shaped the problem of wife-beating for centuries as they pointed out that the ideologies and social arrangements that have supported wife-beating over time are still in existence and are inextricably intertwined with contemporary legal, religious, political, and economic practices. Also of importance has been the work of Greenblat (1983, 1985). Greenblat (1985) sought to elucidate the degree to which normative support for wife-beating existed. A sample of college students completed various measures of sex role orientation, moral values, and attitudes about physical force and family violence. Findings indicated that while the use of physical force by husbands was widely condemned, there were a number of legitimating circumstances that led to approval of such force. In addition, the level of condemnation varied depending on perceptions of wives's behavior and husbands' motivations. Greenblat (1985) emphasized that the most important specific finding of this research was the consistent strength of traditional sex-role orientations in differentiating between those with low and high approval and tolerance of physical force by husbands. Traditional participants in this study were more likely to approve of wives being slapped or beaten by husbands even when the aggressive husband was believed to be wrong. This finding supported feminist

arguments that normative support for the use of force against women stems from patriarchal worldviews.

More recent feminist research continues to examine the influence of patriarchy on domestic violence in societies. Rigakos (1995) explored the influence of patriarchal culture on police subcultures. Specifically, the influence of patriarchy on police subculture and individual attitudes toward the enforcement of protection orders for battered women was explored. Rigakos (1995), using in-depth face-to face interviews with police officers and justice officials in Canada, obtained contextualized accounts. Four major themes emerged: First, justice officials and police officers felt that they were doing everything they could to ameliorate the suffering of women but that other institutions were impeding them. Second, the respondents demonstrated conservative attitudes toward marriage and violence in the home. These attitudes tended to focus on explanations of this phenomenon that excused violent men's abuse of their intimate partners. Third, this orientation deflected attention onto the actions of battered women and constructed them as 'unreliable.' Finally, when these constructions were examined further, Rigikaos (1995) discovered that officers were making generalizations that were easily buttressed by existing ideologies of women but were not supported by official court records (Rigakos, 1995). This study revealed the ways in which macro-level theorizing about patriarchal relations can be applied to individual and small group daily practices and decision-making processes.

Like Rigakos (1995), Saunders (1995) studied attitudes and perceptions of police officers and the problem of victim arrests. It was hypothesized that police officers holding negative and stereotypical views toward victims and toward women in general would be likely to arrest victims and justify acts of violence by male perpetrators. Findings indicated that officers who were most likely to arrest victims believed that, in some cases, domestic violence was justifiable and that victims stayed in relationships with abusers for psychological reasons. In addition, these officers were reportedly less comfortable conversing with victims than were officers who did not hold such stereotypical views. Links to sex-role stereotypes were not identified.

Some sociological researchers, in recognition of the strength of feminist perspectives in addressing issues of gender oppression, have begun to integrate this perspective into their work. Anderson (1997) reviewed feminist and sociological literature and theorized that feminist and structural theories of domestic violence were compatible. The compatibility of feminist and sociological perspective was examined in a study of the relationships between socio-demographic variables, gender, status, and domestic assaults. Results indicated that elements of the structural environment—“... age, race, cohabitation, and educational and income resources—are associated with domestic violence” (Anderson, 1997, p. 667). However, many of these same structural characteristics interact with gender. In particular, gender interacts with structures of “race, marital status, and socioeconomic status to influence power within relationships and propensities for domestic violence” (Anderson, 1997, p. 667). The findings

suggested that structural and feminist insights were compatible and complementary, together providing an enhanced understanding of domestic violence.

As this review has demonstrated, feminist research is broad in scope. In addition, consistent with its critical roots, it has provided the field of domestic violence with a critique of patriarchy at all levels. Feminism's emphasis on examining patriarchal social attitudes and institutional arrangements suggests need for intervention at both the individual and sociocultural levels. However, as is the case with all domestic violence research to date, and as is evidenced by this review, more attention to the abuse experiences of women of color and other marginalized groups is needed.

HEALTH RESEARCH

Nursing, medicine, dentistry, and social work all have contributed to the field of domestic violence research (Campbell & Campbell, 1996; Campbell & Soeken, 1999; Caralis & Musialowski, 1997; El-Bayoumi, Borum, & Haywood, 1998; Harry & Zimmerschied, 1997; McDowell & Miller, 1996; McFarlane, Greenberg, Weltge, & Watson, 1995; Parker & McFarlane, 1991; Rivara, et al. 1997; Short, Tiedemann, & Rose, 1997; Sleutel, 1998). The contribution of nursing is highlighted in the following section. Following in part the structure of Campbell's (1992) review of nursing research on battering, this review highlights nursing research in the following areas: (a) research aimed at identifying battered women in the health care system, (b) battering during pregnancy, and (c) women's responses to battering.

Identification of Battered Women in the Health Care System

Nursing research has been a major contributor to the development of screening tools for use in clinical settings. In addition, the nursing literature has emphasized the importance of screening for domestic violence in all health care settings.

McFarlane, et al. (1995) tested the effectiveness of a two-question, nurse-administered screening tool to detect physical abuse. A convenience sample of 416 ethnically diverse women who came to two public and one private emergency department, with primary symptoms of vaginal bleeding, were screened for physical abuse. A two-question abuse screen and 14-question Danger Assessment (DA) (Campbell, 1986) questionnaire were administered to each woman and responses were recorded. The women were asked "Have you ever been hit, slapped, kicked, or otherwise physically hurt by your male partner?" and "Have you ever been forced to have sexual activities?" (McFarlane, et al. 1995, p. 392). Affirmative answers were followed up with inquiries regarding the date of the most recent episode of abuse. Women who answered either question yes were categorized as abused.

The DA is a 14 item scale developed to assess a woman's risk of homicide. The DA was administered and scores were analyzed. Of the 416 women in the sample, 38% reported a history of abuse. Among abused women, 27% reported both physical and sexual abuse, 61% reported physical abuse only, and 10% reported sexual abuse only. Not surprisingly, abused women scored higher than non-abused women on the DA. Compared with adult women, higher percentages of teenagers reported risk factors for

homicide and increased frequency of violence. In addition, teenagers were more likely to report the presence of a gun in the home. The authors concluded that the two-question assessment tool is effective and that the assessment of abused women's levels of personal danger is important. They cited the emergency room visit as a potential window of opportunity for identification and assessment of abuse, and for the implementation of intervention in the form of abuse protocols.

While the development of effective screening tools has continued to evolve, finding ways to get clinicians to use them has not. In a study of nurse practitioner performance, Gagan (1998) set out to answer three questions:

1. What was the performance accuracy for ANPs and FNPs in formulating accurate diagnoses and acceptable interventions for suspected cases of domestic violence?
2. What was the relationship between ANP and FNP characteristics to diagnosis and intervention performance accuracy in potential cases of domestic violence?
3. What are the barriers to ANPs and FNPs domestic violence diagnosis and intervention performance?

Gagan (1998) used a cross-sectional descriptive correlational design and mailed surveys. One hundred eighteen nurse practitioners responded. Of these 118, 22 participated in follow-up telephone interviews for the purposes of providing greater detail about practice settings. Improved diagnostic and intervention performances were identified among nurse practitioners who had had previous college course work addressing

domestic violence, had a personal interest in domestic violence, and who were less experienced as nurses. Barriers to performance identified were time constraints, clients' reluctance to disclose, insufficient referral resources, lack of peer support, lack of continuity of care, and fear of upsetting a client by asking about domestic violence. Gagan (1998) suggested that identification of correlates of domestic violence diagnosis and intervention performance should be continued and replicated in future research.

Identification of battered women in health care settings requires the presence of effective screening tools and qualified clinicians who use them. Nursing has contributed to both with the Abuse Assessment Screen (Parker & McFarlane, 1991; Soeken, McFarlane, Parker, & Lominack, 1998) and the Danger Assessment (Campbell, 1986). Efforts to raise awareness of the need for screening is ongoing in health care settings, and nursing has continued to do its part both in practice and research in this area of specialization.

Battering During Pregnancy

Nursing research investigating battering during pregnancy has continued to evolve. A review of several recent studies indicates that cultural differences are beginning to be addressed in this body of literature.

To describe the timing and severity of abuse before and during pregnancy for African-American, Hispanic, and white Anglo American women, McFarlane, Parker, Soeken, Silva, and Reel (1999) studied a sample of 199 poor, abused women recruited from public health clinics. Study findings indicated that women who were abused both

before and during pregnancy reported greater severity of abuse than did women who were abused only before pregnancy or only during pregnancy. The timing and severity of abuse did not differ according to ethnic group. In another study examining severity of abuse during pregnancy, Wiist 17 McFarlane (1998) assessed the severity of intimate male partner abuse to Hispanic pregnant women receiving prenatal care at an urban public health department. In all, 30% of the abused women had been threatened with death, 18% had been threatened with a knife or gun, 80% had been shaken or roughly handled, 71% pushed or shoved, and 64% slapped on the face and head. This study documented the severity of abuse that this sample of abused pregnant Hispanic women experienced. This abuse was of sufficient severity to pose a risk to maternal and child health. These studies underscored the need for universal screening of all women during each health visit.

In addition to examining severity and timing of abuse during pregnancy, nursing researchers have sought to identify effective intervention strategies for use with this population. McFarlane, Soeken, Reel, Parker and Silva (1997) investigated resource use by pregnant abused women following an intervention program. Using a prospective design and an ethnically stratified sample, they followed an intervention group of pregnant abused women and a comparison group of postpartum abused women, for a total sample of 199. Women in the control group were offered a wallet-sized card with information on community resources for abuse. The intervention group received three intervention sessions evenly spaced throughout pregnancy. These sessions stressed how

to access essential community resources offering emergency shelter, legal protection, law enforcement, and counseling for women, abusers, and their children. The use of police and other resources were subsequently analyzed. Using logistic regression, they compared resource use between the intervention and control groups. Resource use was determined to be related to severity of abuse, not the study intervention. There were no significant differences between the intervention and comparison group with regard to resource use at 12 months. Women who suffered severe abuse persistently contacted a variety of helping sources. However, despite women's persistent efforts, their abuse did not end, implying a system failure to adequately assist abused women in crisis.

In another intervention study, Parker, McFarlane, Soeken, Silva, 17 Reel (1999) sought to identify the effectiveness of a counseling program for pregnant abused women. In this study, 132 pregnant women recruited from a public health clinic received three counseling sessions. These sessions were individual face-to-face interviews conducted by master's or doctorally prepared nurses who had received a minimum of 4 hours training with the investigators, including observation during an investigator-conducted interview. Interviewers reviewed safety planning, markers of increased danger, general domestic violence and community resource information. The control group received wallet sized cards listing community resources for abuse. Findings supported the effectiveness of the intervention at both 6 and 12 months postpartum. Significantly less violence was reported by women in the intervention group than by controls. While intervention does not appear to influence resource use by abused pregnant women, it

may enhance women's ability to respond to abusive and/or threatening behavior thereby reducing frequency and severity of violence over time. These studies support the need for domestic violence counseling of abused women in health care settings.

Women's Responses to Battering

Wuest and Merritt-Gray (1999) used a feminist grounded theory approach to examine the ways in which abused women who have left relationships sustain separation from abusers over time. Wuest and Merritt-Gray (1999) interviewed 15 survivors of abusive conjugal relationships using unstructured interview techniques. They gathered additional data in focus groups to explore the sociocultural influences on woman abuse. The investigators coded the data while listening to interview audio-tapes. Using the constant comparative method of grounded theory, Wuest and Merritt-Gray (1999) identified concepts and took the emerging framework back to some participants for discussion and clarification in follow-up interviews. The investigators identified reclaiming self as the basic social psychological process of leaving (Merritt-Gray & Wuest, 1995). Reclaiming self was a prolonged iterative process of reinstatement of self within the larger context of family and community beliefs, norms, resources, and services. Part of reclaiming self was the theme of not going back. Not going back was an important part of the process of leaving because it involved the process of securing boundaries for the protection of women's personal space in order to prevent revictimization and sustain separation from abusers. Focusing on not going back, Wuest & Merritt-Gray (1999) described two subprocesses within this theme, claiming and

maintaining territory, and relentless justifying. Claiming and maintaining territory was the process of establishing and maintaining a safe place. Relentless justifying was the tortuous process participants went through of continually explaining their situations both to themselves and others. The findings of this research highlight the need for continuing intervention with formerly abused women. Understanding the processes of not going back can facilitate health care providers' support of formerly abused women as they struggle to reconstruct their lives.

Draucker (1997) brought to light abused women's strengths in a study describing the influence of violence in the lives of women. This study was part of a larger study which tested a causal model designed to explain the relationships among early family life experiences, including childhood abuse; cognitive coping mechanisms; social support; and victimization in the lives of women. A total of 883 survey packets was distributed to interested participants who were recruited via media and poster announcements. The survey included an open-ended question inviting participants to describe how being exposed to violence had influenced their lives. Of the 883 survey packets mailed, 495 were returned with answers to the open-ended question. Responses were analyzed using content analysis and two major themes were identified. Regardless of the type of violence encountered, participants frequently discussed how violence restricted either their interpersonal experiences, due to an inability to trust others, or their everyday activities, due to attempts to structure their environment to enhance safety. Also, participants frequently mentioned a resolve to end or prevent violence for

themselves, for their children, and for other women (Draucker, 1997). The two themes identified by Draucker (1997) were restriction and resolve. Restriction, as noted above, was evident in interpersonal relationships (an inability to trust), social activities (isolation), and daily life routines (concern with safety). Resolve to limit the influence of violence was also noted. "The experience of actively and consciously attempting to prevent violence was frequently described by the participants" (Draucker, 1997, p. 583). The study findings indicated that violence affects the lives of women in complex ways. Nurses and other professionals are advised to explore the impact of violence on the lives of women who seek mental health services.

Humphreys (1995) investigated battered women's worries about their children and their responses to those worries. The sample was comprised of 25 women recruited from a battered women's shelter. Humphreys (1995) and a research associate collected data using ethnographic interviewing and participant observation. The research sought to answer the following questions:

1. What worries do battered women have about their children?
2. What are the responses of battered women to worries about their children?

(Humphreys, 1995, p. 131). The investigator analyzed data following the Developmental Research Sequence (described by Spradely, 1979, 1980, as cited by Humphreys 1995). Results revealed two themes: (a) keeping your children safe, and (b) creating order out of disorder. These themes reflect the work of worrying, that is, the constant and energy-depleting nature of this difficult and vitally important process. It is

via the work of worrying that battered women attempt to protect their children and create a positive environment within the severe constraints of their lives (Humphreys, 1995). These themes remained constant across the experiences of all battered women in the study. The results suggest that nurses working with battered women should promote discussion of worries and acknowledge the difficulty of worrying in a world saturated with violence. Finally, Humphreys (1995) emphasized the complexity of the problem of violence and the need for intervention at all levels.

In another study, Langford (1998) described the context of women's relationships with battering men. Thirty women participated in semi-structured small group interviews. Interviews were organized around two general questions:

1. What characteristics do women use as indicators of the degree of danger?
2. How do women in battering relationships manage their perceptions of danger?

Theoretical sampling unique to grounded theory revealed a central theme of social chaos. Women reported that their daily lives were unpredictable, irrational, and filled with intermittent violence. Contributing to the context of chaos was the emotional abuse women endured. The disparity between very positive and very negative experiences led women to join their partners in blaming themselves for the violence. Characteristics of chaos included undefined rules, unbalancing (unpredictable) behaviors, contradictions, impaired senses, and secrecy. Langford (1998) noted that understanding the concept of social chaos as the context of violence is important for advocates, health care professionals, friends, and family members as they counsel battered women over time.

As this review has demonstrated, nursing research has contributed much to our knowledge base regarding the phenomenon of domestic violence. In particular, nursing's contribution to the research literature on abuse during pregnancy has been unexcelled. Also encouraging, is the emergence of a greater number of qualitative studies which provide much needed information regarding the context of abuse experiences. Unfortunately, while a greater awareness has been generated among health care providers regarding the need to screen for abuse in health care settings, the inadequacy of intervention strategies available remains a serious problem. In some cases health care providers are unwilling to screen for abuse since there is often little time, and precious few resources available to address the problem of abuse once it has been uncovered (K. Lutz, personal communication, March, 15, 1998). While there are no legal ramifications for failure to screen for abuse among adult women, this failure is seen by many as below the standard of care abused women deserve. In part, a greater understanding of the cultural contexts which shape abuse experiences will enhance the ability of health care providers to intervene effectively with diverse populations. Ultimately, though, the problem of inadequate allocation of resources to address abuse will require an organized political response on the part of nursing.

CULTURALLY FOCUSED RESEARCH

Research that examines the phenomenon of domestic violence as it occurs within specific cultural groups is an emerging area of interest. While there continues to be a paucity of research addressing issues of culture, the increasing number of studies

conducted within the past 5 years in this area reveals that this is a growing area of interest to researchers (Antonopoulou, 1999; Fawcett, Heise, Isita-Espejel, & Pick, 1999; Gabler, Stern, & Miserandino, 1998; Haj-Yahia, 1997, 1998a, 1998b; Maitra, 1996; Perilla, Bakeman, & Norris, 1994; Williams & Becker, 1994; Steiner, 1999; Ucko, 1994; Walker, 1999). Because this research addresses the experiences of American Muslim women, abuse literature conducted with Arab populations will be highlighted. While Arabs and Muslims are two distinct groups, the influence of Islam on Arab culture cannot be disputed. Likewise, the influence of Arab culture on many American Muslims of other ethnic cultures is often significant.

Haj-Yahia recently published several studies on wife-beating among Palestinian populations (Haj-Yahia, 1997, 1998a, 1998b). In one study Haj-Yahia (1997) investigated perceptions of wife-beating among engaged Arab men in Israel. Haj-Yahia (1997) measured attitudes about sex-roles, women, marriage, and wife-beating, as well as engaged men's experiences and witnessing of violence, communication skills, empathic understanding skills, assertiveness, and social desirability. Haj-Yahia (1997) performed this study using quantitative measures developed in the United States and adapted and piloted among Arabs in Israel. Predictors among men for the tendency to justify wife-beating, for the perception that wives benefit from beating, and for perceptions about helping battered wives were identified. These predictors were presence of: (a) masculine sex-role stereotypes, (b) traditional and negative attitudes toward women, (c) patriarchal expectations of marriage, (d) witnessing of violence in

their families of origin, (e) relatively poor communication and empathic skills, and (f) low levels of assertiveness. The strongest predictor for justification of wife-beating was patriarchal expectations of marital roles.

In another study, Haj-Yahia (1998b) examined beliefs about wife beating among Palestinian women. A random sample of women from the West Bank and Gaza Strip completed a self-administered questionnaire. The results indicated that although one third of the women believed there was no excuse for a man to beat his wife, a substantial percentage still justified wife-beating under several conditions. These conditions included sexual infidelity, and/or challenging the manhood of husbands. In addition, while the majority of participants held abusive men responsible for their violent acts, a substantial number of women did not. Adherence to patriarchal belief systems explained a significant amount of the variance in participants' beliefs about wife-beating.

In a third study, Haj-Yahia (1998b) examined beliefs about wife-beating among Palestinian men from the West Bank and Gaza strip. Through this work Haj-Yahia (1998b) discussed the significant impact of Islam on gender roles in Palestinian society:

The majority of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza strip are Sunni Muslims, and only 4% are Christian Islam, therefore, has the most significant impact on the definition of gender roles in that society Women are placed under male control to safeguard them and ensure that they adhere to moral standards. The woman is still expected to fulfill the main role of mother and wife, and any

violation of this expectation, as consistent with this role, is “asking to be beaten” (Haj-Yahia, 1998b, p. 598).

Haj-Yahia (1998b) determined that patriarchal beliefs correlated significantly with justifying wife-beating and with blaming wives for violence against them. In addition, patriarchal beliefs increased the likelihood that participants would excuse battering behavior. All of these studies indicated that tolerance for abuse in Palestinian society was related to firmly ingrained patriarchal structures. In turn these patriarchal structures interacted with Islamic influences, culminating in an Arab Muslim culture that supported wife-beating under certain circumstances at relatively high levels.

In another study of Arabs, Kulwicki and Miller (1999) used critical theory to assess and provide community interventions for victims of domestic violence in an Arab-American immigrant population in the Midwest. The authors administered a survey tool for assessing domestic violence to 202 Arab American immigrants. Following completion of the survey tool, the Arabic data collector conducted an open discussion. The authors alluded to the influence of religion on cultural norms:

In the Middle East domestic violence is treated as a family issue and not as a serious public health threat or a political-legal issue. As a result, little attention is given to crimes committed against women and to the reporting of such crimes. Furthermore, sociocultural norms, including legal and religious practices create obstacles to the investigation and reporting of such crimes. Arab immigrants to the United States bring with them these norms, creating barriers for victims to

seek help outside family and hindering efforts by law enforcement agencies and health professionals to combat this health threat within the Arab American community (Kulwicki & Miller, 1999, p. 200).

Consistent with the work of Haj-Yahia (1997, 1998a, 1998b), Kulwicki and Miller (1999) found that attitudes toward domestic violence were surprisingly tolerant among both men and women. The results indicated that 58% of women and 59% of men approved of a man slapping his wife if she hit him first in an argument, and 4% of respondents believed that a wife striking her husband was grounds for a husband to actually murder his wife. In addition, 48% of women and 23% of men approved of a man slapping his wife if he learned she had been unfaithful, and 18% of women reportedly believed that this was grounds for femicide. Finally, physical confrontation during conflict between spouses was accepted by almost half of respondents, particularly if the wife was insubordinate or unfaithful. Following the survey, community intervention began. A mass media campaign, dissemination of written materials, and twenty-two bilingual workshops were conducted. As a result of this community intervention identification of Arab-American victims of domestic violence dramatically increased in the locale where this study was conducted.

The work of both Haj-Yahia (1997, 1998a, 1998b) and Kulwicki and Miller (1999) emphasized the importance of culture with regard to the problem of domestic violence in communities. Both Palestinian Arabs and Arab Americans in these studies subscribed to patriarchal worldviews and had alarmingly high levels of tolerance for

domestic violence and femicide. These important works underscore the need for assessment and intervention among Arab populations and hint at the need to explore further the influence of Muslim culture on the phenomenon of violence against women in both in the United States and abroad.

METHODOLOGICAL CRITIQUES OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE LITERATURE

While research investigating domestic violence using psychological, sociological/structural, feminist, and/or health approaches has provided important and useful information, and the emergence of culturally focused research is an encouraging development, there is still much room for improvement. The majority of domestic violence research has incorporated cross-sectional non-experimental quantitative designs (Gelles, 1993). Qualitative research designs that can uncover the contextual aspects of the phenomenon of woman abuse are increasing, however, they still comprise a comparatively small number of studies overall. In addition, the widespread use of the Conflict Tactics Scale (Straus, 1979), an instrument which does not account for gender differences, context, and extent of violence, has been problematic. As result, methodological critiques have surfaced:

. . . methods are highly skewed in the direction of quantitative empirical research techniques. They are also misleading in that they isolate acts of physical violence from the interpersonal biographies of the participants and from the specific relational contexts in which battering occurs - relational contexts that have their own emergence, history, duration, and meaning . . . Inasmuch as this research

has simply counted acts of physical violence, it has failed to recognize the power context and the real differences in meaning, action sequence, intent, and effects that “similar behaviors” may have for different persons (e.g., those who batter, those who are battered) during an episode of battering . . . In addition, those researchers using the Physical Aggression Subscale of the Conflict Tactics Scale count as equivalent the act of a woman pushing a man once in the chest during a single episode, causing no physical injury, and the act of a man pushing a woman many times during a single episode that resulted in serious physical injury—they both pushed their partner “once” within the previous year (Tift, 1993, p. 6).

Such decontextualized approaches have minimized the importance of society and culture in understanding abuse phenomena. Contextual approaches to the study of woman abuse allow for 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).

SUMMARY

This review of selected domestic violence literature highlights the need for a greater balance between qualitative and quantitative approaches in the field of domestic violence research. The need for attention to issues of culture when investigating the phenomenon of abuse is underscored. The abuse experiences of American Muslim women which occur in unique cultural contexts illustrates the need for such research approaches. While the psychological, sociological/structural, feminist, and health

literatures have provided us with important knowledge about the phenomenon of abuse as it occurs at both the individual and sociocultural levels, generic research approaches that are blind to culture are not adequate to combat abuse in diverse cultural settings.

CHAPTER THREE:

ISLAM

The religion of Islam shapes the meaning of life for approximately 1 billion people worldwide (Clarke, 1993). It provides Muslims across diverse ethnic cultures a common identity, spirituality, and way of life. Largely a religion of colonized groups, Islam provides an identity outside the western sphere, one of proud origins, heritage, and traditions (Hourani, 1991).

Islam is a monotheistic faith that was revealed to the Prophet Mohammad (peace be upon him, p.b.h.) in stages. Mohammad (p.b.h.) was born in Mecca in 570 AD, a time when the Arab people were overshadowed by the powerful Roman and Persian empires. These great empires had created from among the people of the Middle East, vassal states, which defended their interests and extended their spheres of influence. As a result, tribal Arab kingdoms were often at war, destroying each other at the prompting of their powerful rulers (Mersinssi, 1987). The emergence of Islam provided a force that offered power and unity for a people who had previously been occupied and divided.

Mohammad (p.b.h.) received his first revelation at the age of 40, and in 22 years united the Arab world through faith. Integral to this faith is a sense of social and economic justice (Rahman, 1979). It was a movement of social reform that was gradual and consistent, continuing until the Prophet's (p.b.h.) death. Reforms addressing the status of women and slaves were perhaps most significant of all the reforms introduced,

resulting in a progressive movement toward surprisingly egalitarian social relations in the context of seventh century Arabia (Rahman, 1979). This spirit of gender and racial equality grounded in a monotheistic faith, continues to attract countless converts, particularly in the West.

Soon after the death of the Prophet (p.b.h.), however, Islam quickly lost its progressive spirit. Co-opted by patriarchal cultural elements, Islam has been dominated by men resulting in a form of gender oppression that invades the minds and spirits of Muslim women in multiple and complex ways. It is this patriarchal interpretation of Islam that abusers use to justify violence against women and that communities use to marginalize women from within. The devastating effects of patriarchy on Muslim women are amply detailed in study participants' stories. Given that this research has sought abuse stories, which by their very nature exemplify women's oppression, this chapter is offered to provide some background within which to frame these accounts. Hopefully, this background information will provide some balance and insight into the religion of Islam, the tensions extant within it, and the roots of modern political forces which have shaped Islamic discourse in the twentieth century.

SACRED TEXTS

The Qur'an is the single most important text in Islam. This holy book is divided into 114 chapters or *suras* of varying length. The Prophet Mohammad (p.b.h.) received his first revelation in the year 610 AD through the angel Gabriel. The angel Gabriel came to Mohammad (p.b.h.) and advised him that he had been chosen by God to be the

Prophet (p.b.h.) and receive through oral recitation God's message (Mernissi, 1992).

The first verses revealed to the Prophet (p.b.h.) enjoined learning. He was commanded to read:

Read: in the name of the Lord who created

Created mankind from a clot.

Read: And the Lord is the Most Bountiful.

Who teaches by the pen

Teaches mankind that which he knew not (Qur'an, 96:1).²

Subsequent to receiving his first divine revelation, the Prophet (p.b.h.) continued to receive revelations for more than 20 years until the time of his death in 632 AD.

According to Al-Bukhari, (as cited by Ali, n.d.), an original standardized copy of the Qur'an was continually being written during the time of the Prophet (p.b.h.) under his supervision. However, copies of the Qur'an were not made until the time of the third Caliph Uthman who ruled from 644-655 AD. It is this version of the Qur'an that is accepted by Muslims today (Mernissi, 1992).

The *sunna* or *ahadith* (*ahadith* plural, *hadith* singular) is the second, and clearly a secondary source from which Islamic teachings are drawn. The *sunna* are the actions of the Prophet (p.b.h.), while the *ahadith* are sayings of the Prophet (p.b.h.) as reported by

² Due to the many different sources that reference Qur'anic verses included in this work, and because the content of these verses is more or less the same from one translation to the next, no specific Qur'anic translation is cited in this work. Readers should be able to easily access *suras* and *iyats* cited in any Qur'anic translation using the *sura* and *iyat* numbers provided in the text.

his companions (essentially they are the same in that they are related the Prophet's (p.b.h.) example). The *ahadith* were collected and subjected to a process of verification. *Ahadith* were considered strong by collectors if they could withstand the process of methodological verification, or weak if their transmission chains and/or narrators failed to meet methodological requirements. Verification of *ahadith* was a very involved process, but basically, *ahadith* were required to be consistent with historical fact and Islamic logic. In addition, the circumstances around the narration of *ahadith* and the reputation of narrators were required to be above reproach (Ali, n.d.). The importance of the *ahadith* relative to the Qur'an is clearly communicated by the following *ahadith*:

The Prophet said: "When I order you anything respecting religion receive it, and when I order anything about the affairs of the world, I am no more than a man," and "My sayings do not abrogate the word of Allah, but the word of Allah can abrogate my sayings" (Robson, 1964, 1: 6i-iii).³

The Qur'an thus holds precedence over the *ahadith*, and *ahadith* which are not consonant with the Qur'an should be rejected.

Because Muslims are enjoined to follow the example of the Prophet Mohammad (p.b.h.), the *ahadith* serve as important sources of guidance in Muslims' daily life.

There are so many *ahadith* that there is at least one *hadith* to address almost any common life practice or situation. Thus, the *ahadith* represent a system of values firmly

³ References to Al-Bukhari, Abu-Dawud, Miskhat-al-Mashabih, and Sahih-Muslim do not follow APA format. Rather they are cited according to collection, volume number, and *hadith* number consistent with the way *ahadith* are typically cited in Islamic literature.

ingrained in Muslim culture. There are some *ahadith* that are particularly well known and have been quoted for generations. As such, *ahadith* have constituted many of the cultural mores underlying human relations extant in Muslim cultures.

THE *SHARI'AH*

At the heart of the Muslim conception of law is the idea that law is inherently religious. That is why from the very beginning of Islamic history, law has been regarded as flowing from the *Shari'ah* (Rahman, 1979). The *Shari'ah* is the canonical law of Islam put forth in the Qur'an and the *sunnah* as interpreted by the four orthodox schools of thought. These schools of thought are named after the Imams who founded them and they are: (a) the Shafii, (b) Hanbali, (c) Hanafi, and (d) Maliki schools (Glassé, 1989).

The *usul al-fiqh* (roots of jurisprudence) are the basis of Islamic law among the *Sunnis*. These roots include: (a) the Qur'an, *ahadith*, and *sunnah*, (b) analogy, (c) popular consensus, and (d) *ijtihad* (exercise of judgement for the purposes of extrapolating these principles to specific cases) (Glassé, 1989). The *usul al-fiqh* clearly are vulnerable to cultural influences, since they are in essence all acts of interpretation. This is problematic since among the *Sunni* Muslims *ijtihad* is now considered to be closed (Glassé, 1989), leaving modern day Muslims stuck with the law as it is delineated in the four orthodox schools of thought mentioned above, systems of jurisprudence that emerged during the 700's AD in the context of Middle Eastern culture (Āli, n.d.). Ancient Middle Eastern cultural influences are necessarily inherent in the *Shari'ah*,

including patriarchal and misogynist influences that plague women living under Muslim laws:

The interlocking of religion with law and customs has profound repercussions for women, affecting them negatively and disproportionately in comparison to men (Shaheed, 1994, p. 1002).

In Muslim countries, the laws governing personal and family matters are regulated almost universally by the *Shari'ah*, disempowering women in cases of abuse, infidelity, and divorce.

THE PROPHETS

Faith in divine revelation is an inherent aspect of Islam. This revelation comes to humankind through the Prophets (peace be upon them, p.b.t.). Belief in the Prophets (p.b.t.) is thus part and parcel of what God commands:

It is not righteousness that you turn your faces towards East and West;
But it is righteousness to believe in God and the last day, and the angels,
And the Book, and the messengers; To spend of your substance, out of love for
Him for your kin, for orphans, for the needy, for the wayfarer, for those who ask,
and for the ransom of slaves; To be steadfast in prayer, and practice regular
charity; To fulfil contracts which you have made; And to be firm and patient,
In pain (or suffering) and adversity, and throughout all periods of panic. Such are
the people of truth, the God-fearing (Qur'an, 2:177).

This passage places belief in the Prophets (p.b.t.) among many other attributes of the faithful.

While, the Qur'an mentions only 25 Prophets (p.b.t.) by name, there is a *hadith* which states there have been 124,000 prophets (p.b.t.) of God (Ali, n.d.). While Ali (n.d.) assumes that “. . . The reformation or transformation of man can only be accomplished through a man prophet” (Ali, n.d., p. 220), and it is true that with the exception of Mary, the Qur'an does not mention any women who have received divine revelation by name, this in my mind does not preclude the possibility that there have been women messengers of God. Ali (n.d.) cites this Qur'anic passage as the basis for his assumption:

Before you also, the messengers We sent were but men, to whom We granted inspiration (Qur'an, 21:7).

Throughout the Qur'an the word man is often used synonymously with mankind or humankind. There is no reason to assume that this passage is any different. While it should be noted that the idea of women as messengers of God is not a mainstream Muslim belief, the presence of minority views like my own are notable and worthy of mention.

THE FIVE PILLARS OF ISLAM

Islam in its simplest form is described as comprised of five pillars. These are:

(a) faith, (b) prayer, (c) fasting, (d) charity, and (e) pilgrimage (Ali, n.d.; Clarke, 1993; Glasse, 1989; Nasr, 1993).

Faith (*Iman*)

The first pillar, faith, is exemplified by the *shadada*, which is the declaration of faith central to Islam. This declaration is as follows: "I bear witness that there is no god but Allah and I bear witness that Mohammad is the messenger of Allah" (Glassé, 1989, p. 359). Faith is also associated with good works. The Prophet (p.b.h.) is reported to have said: "*Iman* has over seventy branches, and modesty is a branch of faith" (Al-Bukhari, 1984, 2:3). In another *hadith*, the Prophet (p.b.h.) reportedly said: "*Iman* has over seventy branches, the highest of which is the belief that nothing deserves to be worshiped except God, and the lowest of which is the removal from the way of that which might cause injury to any one" (Sahih Muslim, 1987, 1:12). Yet a third *hadith* applicable to *Iman* is as follows: "One of you has no faith unless he loves for his brother what he loves for himself" (Al-Bukhari, 1984, 2:8). Thus, *Iman* is comprised of both belief and good works.

Prayer (*Salat*)

The second pillar of Islam is prayer or *salat*. Muslims are required to pray five daily prayers using a ritual format as exemplified by the Prophet Mohammad (p.b.h.). Facing Mecca, Muslims from all over the world prostrate themselves in prayer, making contact with the divine at regular intervals throughout the day. *Salat* is a means of self-development for individuals, and a means of community development for all. There is a special emphasis on congregational prayers in Islam. Standing shoulder to shoulder and

forming a series of rows, Muslims make contact with each other and with God during congregational prayers.

Fasting (*Saum*)

The third pillar of Islam is Fasting or *saum*. This is required of all Muslims excluding pregnant and lactating women, the sick, and those who travel long distances. During the Arabic calendar month of Rammadan, Muslims fast from sunrise to sunset, abstaining from food, drink, and sexual relations during those hours. Fasting is an exercise in self-discipline and promotes an awareness of God in daily life. As an institution, fasting not only provides a structured time and mechanism through which Muslims seek spiritual and moral discipline, but it also serves as a unifying force for Muslims who fast together worldwide.

Charity-Tax (*Zakat*)

The fourth pillar of Islam is charity-tax. Charity-tax or *zakat* is a requirement for all Muslims who possess wealth. The redistribution of wealth among Muslims occurs through the levying of a tax (*zakat*) which is utilized to assist poorer and less economically privileged segments of society. Zakat is payable on accumulated wealth. Capital used in daily life (such as a home and furnishings) or to sustain a business (such as an office or machinery) is exempt from Zakat (Ali, n.d.). This tax is equal to one fortieth of a Muslim's wealth annually. Other forms of *zakat* include the *eid-al-fitr* tax (collected prior to the end of *Rammadan*) and voluntary charity which is encouraged.

Pilgrimage (*Hajj*)

The fifth and last pillar of Islam is pilgrimage to Mecca or *Hajj*. Performing *Hajj* is required for those Muslims who are both physically and financially able, at least once in a lifetime. The *Ka'bah* is a rectangular building located in Mecca believed by Muslims to be the first house of worship for humankind, rebuilt by the Prophet Abraham centuries ago. The *Hajj* is attended by Muslims from all over the world, exemplifying the unity of Muslims and their diversity. During the ritual pilgrimage Muslims put on the simplest of clothing, withdraw from the comforts of life, and meditate in the company of others.

Summary

These five pillars reflect the significance of spirituality not only for the individual but for the whole of the *umma* (Muslim nation) in Islam. Faith is an individual choice, but the ways in which faith is exercised are largely communal. Communal prayers are preferred over individual prayers, fasting is a group experience since all Muslims endure hunger and thirst together during the month of *Rammadan*, and *zakat* serves as a reminder that there is a community responsibility to care for the needy. Finally, *Hajj* symbolizes the unity of humankind gathering together in the name of a common faith. These five pillars reveal the ways in which spirituality and community are intertwined in Islam and in the daily lives of Muslims.

EARLY ISLAMIC HISTORY

The Qur'an completed the revelations given to earlier messengers of God, and created a new religion, Islam, distinct from both Judaism and Christianity (Hourani, 1991). Understanding the life of the Prophet Mohammad (p.b.h.) and its historical context, is an important key to understanding the Qur'an and its message.

As a young man, Mohammad (p.b.h.) married Khadija, a widowed businesswoman. Khadija believed in and supported Mohammad's (p.b.h.) prophetic revelations before anyone else. Gradually there gathered around Mohammad (p.b.h.) a small group of believers. As Mohammad's (p.b.h.) following grew, his relationship with the leaders of Mecca were strained:

'O Abu Talib,' they said to his uncle, who was his protector among them,
'your nephew has cursed our gods, insulted our religion, mocked our way of life,
and accused our forefathers of error' (Hourani, 1991, p. 17).

As Mohammad's (p.b.h.) teaching progressed, the differences between accepted beliefs and Islam became evident. Mohammad (p.b.h.) denounced idols as false gods, established new forms of worship (in particular communal prayer), and encouraged new kinds of good works (Hourani, 1991). Eventually the strain of difference was too much and Mohammad (p.b.h.) was forced to flee Mecca, settling in Medina in the year 622 AD.

In Medina, Mohammad's (p.b.h.) power grew and he was soon drawn into an armed struggle with the Meccan tribes. It was during this period of expansion and

struggle that Islamic teachings were finalized. The parts of the Qu'ran revealed during this period revealed greater concern with defining the ritual observances of religion, social justice, and offered a practical model for Islamic community life (Hourani, 1991).

When the Prophet (p.b.h.) arrived in Medina he was faced with the decision of where to stay without offending anyone or being accused of favoritism. The solution employed by the Prophet (p.b.h.) was to allow his camel to walk freely. The location at which the Prophet's (p.b.h.) camel stopped, became the building site of the mosque and of the Prophet's (p.b.h.) living quarters. There were nine apartments for the Prophet's (p.b.h.) wives and they were adjoined to the mosque. The Prophet (p.b.h.) lived in simplicity in the midst of the community. This community was a combination of migrants and Jews, and those native to Medina, thus there were differences and rivalries as well as clashes in customs and culture that had to be dealt with. This was the backdrop from which the Prophet (p.b.h.) introduced social reform and mediated and advised the early Muslims. The Prophet's (p.b.h.) success relied heavily on his military success as well as his skill in diplomacy. Thus, from the very early beginnings of Islam, tensions existed which shaped the faith as it emerged.

Over time, relations with Mecca improved and in 629 AD the Muslims were permitted to go to Mecca for pilgrimage where the holy house of the *Ka'bah* is located. The *Ka'bah* is a large cubic stone structure covered with black cloth originally founded, according to tradition, by Adam, and subsequently rebuilt by Seth, then Abraham, then Noah, and several others over generations (Glasse, 1993). The next year the city of

Mecca was surrendered to Mohammad (p.b.h.) and a new order was pronounced: “every claim of privilege or blood or property is abolished by me except the custody of the temple and the watering of the pilgrims” (Hourani, 1991, p. 19).

Even after the conquest of Mecca, Medina remained the capital. After the death of his wife Khadija, Mohammad (p.b.h.) exercised authority and entered several more marriages. These marriages, and particularly Mohammad’s (p.b.h.) marriage to Aisha, have served as examples of family life for Muslims. In 632 AD Mohammad (p.b.h.) made his last visit to Mecca and gave his farewell speech. Later that year he died leaving a legacy for Muslims to emulate. The image of Mohammad (p.b.h.) and the community he founded has been held up as an example for individual, family, and community life for Muslims over time. Unfortunately the transitional period after the prophets (p.b.h.) death saw the emergence of restrictive and misogynist elements which were soon codified into law (Ahmed, 1992).

Social Reforms Introduced by Islam in the Context of Seventh Century Arabia

The Qur’an is a book of religious and moral principles and also of social, economic, and legal proclamations which were introduced through a gradual process of reform. These reforms were introduced in response to the social conditions existent during the time in which the Qur’an was revealed.

The process of economic reform during the early Islamic period was incremental. Prior to the move to Medina, alms-giving, while highly encouraged, was voluntary. After the move to Medina however, the *zakat* (charity-tax) was ordained. Later, a ban on

usury (paying and charging interest) came through a series of pronouncements (Rahman, 1979). These changes had profound influences on the plight of the poor, similar in some ways to the changes in the United States when welfare, social security, medicare, and medicaid programs were enacted.

Similarly, the ban on consumption of alcohol was imposed gradually. The use of alcohol was unrestricted in the early years of Islam (Rahman, 1979). After a while, offering prayers while under the influence of alcohol was prohibited. Later, this verse was revealed:

They ask you about alcohol and gambling.

Say: in these there is great harm and also some good for people

but their harm far outweighs their good (Qur'an, 2:19).

Finally a complete ban on alcohol was introduced in sura 5: 90-91 of the Qur'an.

Perhaps the most significant reforms introduced by the Qur'an were on the subject of women and slavery. Some prevailing practices in seventh century Arabia had "... to be prohibited explicitly and immediately: infanticide, sexual abuse of slave girls, denial of inheritance to women, *zihar*, to name a few of the most common" (Wadud-Muhsin, 1992, p. 9). Infanticide was confined to girls and involved the immediate live burial of newborn girls. The Qur'anic verses condemning infanticide reveal the shame and contempt that the pre-Islamic Arabs held for females:

When news is brought to one of them of (the birth of) a female (child), his face

darkens and he is filled with inward grief! With shame does he hide himself from

his people because of the bad news he has had! Shall he retain the child on (sufferance and contempt), or bury it in the dust? Ah what an evil (choice) they decide on (Qur'an, 16:58-59).

This verse clearly demonstrates the extent to which misogyny was firmly ingrained in seventh century Arabian culture, predating Islam by centuries.

The reforms Islam introduced were relevant to specific cultural practices extant in seventh century Arabia. *Zihar* is an example of a practice banned during the time of the Prophet (p.b.h.). *Zihar* was practice of stating that one's wife was 'as the back of my mother.' This practice in effect ended the marriage without leaving women free to remarry. One of the Muslims, Aus Ibn Amit, treated his wife, Khaula, in this manner, and the wronged woman reportedly came to the Prophet for help. The Prophet (p.b.h.) told Khaula that he could not interfere and Khaula left disappointed (Ali, n.d.). Soon after Khaula left the Prophet (p.b.h.), he received this revelation:

God indeed knows the plea of her who pleads with you about her husband and complains to God, and God knows the contentions of both of you; surely God is Hearing, Seeing. As for those of you who put away their wives by likening them to the backs of their mothers, they are not their mothers; their mothers are none other than those who gave them birth; and surely they utter a hateful word and a falsehood (Qur'an, 58:1-2).

This verse essentially banned the practice of *zihar*.

With regard to inheritance, the Qu'ran set out specific injunctions as to the percentages of inheritance women and girls were entitled to. This was a dramatic change for the time, since in pre-Islamic Arabia, women were not assured the right of inheritance. Indeed, women were often inherited along with material wealth, an object to be claimed by male heirs (Mernissi, 1987). Islam's insistence on women's right to inheritance and accordingly, the prohibition of men's inheriting of women, was met with resistance by the male population of Medina. Not only would their inherited goods be diminished, since women could no longer be inherited, but they would also have to share what remained with women, thus further diminishing male economic privilege. In patriarchal Arab cultures past and present, women and girls were under the protection and guardianship of their male relatives. The Qur'an protected women from being inherited by their husbands' heirs and also protected fatherless girls from abuse and exploitation:

The idea that an ugly fatherless girl—ugly in the opinion of the chief of the clan—could inherit was a shocking thought to many. Jabir Ibn Abdallah had a blind girl cousin who was ugly and who had inherited a large fortune from her father. Jabir had no intention of marrying her, but he opposed letting her marry anyone else, not wishing her husband to get his hands on her fortune. He consulted the Prophet on the question, and he was not the only one to do so. Many men like Jabir, who were responsible for fatherless girls, did not see why Muhammad wanted to change the order of things. "Does an ugly young girl who

is blind have the right to inherit?" He exclaimed in front of the Prophet. The

Prophet replied "Yes, absolutely." (Mernissi, 1987, p. 125).

In addition to the changes mentioned above, other prevailing practices were modified:

"polygamy, unconstrained divorce, conjugal violence, and concubinage" (Wadud-

Muhsin, 1992, p. 9) are some examples. Prior to the advent of Islam, unlimited

polygamy was practiced. The Qur'an limited men to four wives with the provision that

if a man could not be completely just and equitable between wives than he should marry

only one wife. To all this was added a general principle that "you shall never be able to

do justice among wives no matter how desirous you are (to do so)" (Qur'an, 4, 3, 128).

Based on this pronouncement, some Muslims have concluded that polygamy is

prohibited (Rahman, 1979).

Unconstrained divorce refers to men's ability to unilaterally repudiate their wives,

a power that men had in seventh century Arabia prior to the advent of Islam. The Qur'an

placed limits on this practice, emphasizing harmonious reconciliation instead:

It is no sin for the two of them if they make terms of peace between themselves.

Peace is better (4:128). Either take them back on equitable terms or set them free

on equitable terms, do not take them back or injure them, or take unfair advantage

(Qur'an, 2:231).

Closely related to the emphasis on marital peace and reconciliation is the way in which

Islam dealt with the problem of conjugal violence. There is evidence that severe

violence against women was common among the Arabs at the time of the Prophet

(Wadud-Muhsin, 1992). Violence against women was discouraged and strict limitations were placed on this practice:

As for those for women who you fear disruption of marital harmony, admonish them, banish them to beds apart, and scourge them. Then, if they obey seek not a way against them (Qur'an 4: 34).

The word scourge in this passage is often translated as 'to strike.' It stems from the Arabic word *daraba* which has more than one meaning. It can be translated as 'to strike,' however it can also be translated 'to set' as an example (Wadud-Muhsin, 1992). While by contemporary standards this passage as it is commonly translated (to strike), appears to sanction violence against women, and indeed it is used by abusers to justify their actions, violence against women is clearly against the spirit inherent in Islam. This passage set limits on violence against women in the context of seventh century Arabia where women were subject to extreme abuse, but that does not mean that it is applicable today. Such a literal interpretation is inconsistent with the Qur'an's consistent emphasis on kindness, patience and good works. Finally, such a literal interpretation is directly contrary to the verse below:

Oh humankind, reverence your Guardian Lord, who created you from a single person, created of like nature, its mate from them scattered countless men and women; Reverence God through whom you demand your mutual rights, And reverence the wombs that bore you: for God ever watches over you (Qur'an, 4:1).

Reverence for women and mutual rights of both men and women are not consistent with conjugal violence. The use of this verse to justify conjugal violence is nothing more than a patriarchal manipulation of the text, narrowly focusing on the literal meaning which was particular to seventh century Arabia. This patriarchal reading ensures the continued acceptance of male privilege in the name of religion at the expense of the greater message of the Qur'an which emphasizes the equality of humankind, patience, kindness, and compassion throughout its 6,000 verses.

Additional references to husbands' chastisement of wives can be found in *ahadith*. These *ahadith* generally are intended to shame perpetrators and/or set limits on the extent of violence against wives. The use of a toothstick (*miswak*) is mentioned in one *hadith* as the only instrument husbands can legitimately use to lightly strike wives. While use of a toothstick to lightly strike another person may seem absurd, it is an idea that is firmly entrenched within Muslim culture. Many women in this study made reference to toothsticks as they discussed abuse of women in Muslim culture.

As with all reforms, the Qur'an addressed the problem of slavery gradually. Slavery was ingrained in the structure of seventh century Arabia. Thus, slavery was not prohibited but was discouraged and the freeing of slaves emphasized as a good deed:

And what will explain to thee the path that is steep?

It is the freeing of the slave

Or the giving of food during times of privation

To the orphan with claims of relationship

Or to the indigent down in the dust (Qur'an, 90: 12-16).

In addition to encouraging the freeing of slaves, the Qur'an required slave-owners to make arrangements for their slaves to buy their freedom if the slaves desired, and set limits on the commonly accepted abusive treatment of female slaves:

And those of your slaves who wish to enter into freedom-purchasing contracts, accept their proposals if you think they are any good and give to them of the wealth that God has given you. And do not compel your slave-girls to resort to a foul life when they want to be chaste, seeking thereby petty gains in life; but if they act under sheer compulsion God is forgiving and merciful (Qur'an, 24:33).

These limits on slavery were significant reforms in the context of a society where the institution of slavery was firmly entrenched and had been for centuries.

Since slavery is now largely a practice of the past, the literal interpretation of Qur'anic edicts with regard to slavery is a non-issue, and it seems unlikely that many Muslims could be found today who would insist on a return to slavery simply because it is not expressly forbidden in the Qur'an. Oddly, when it comes to women's affairs however, the progressive spirit of Islam has been left behind. The actual legislation of the Qur'an was introduced in the context of a misogynist society. The specifics of these reforms were thereby particular to that context. The literal interpretation of Qur'anic edicts regarding women outside of that context is not consistent with the progressive spirit of Islam (Rahman, 1979).

EGALITARIANISM AND HIERARCHY

The marriage structure instituted by Islam is patriarchal by most interpretations. This form of gender hierarchy exists in tension with the egalitarian ethical concept of gender inherent in Islam. Egalitarianism is a consistent message articulated throughout the Qur'an (Ahmed, 1992). Indeed, unlike other monotheistic scriptures women are specifically addressed in the Qur'an:

For Muslim men and women,
 For believing men and women,
 For devout men and women,
 For true men and women,
 For men and women who are patient and constant,
 For men and women who humble themselves,
 For men and women who give in charity,
 For men and women who fast (and deny themselves)
 For men and women who guard their chastity, and
 For men and women who engage much in God's praise,
 For them has God prepared
 Forgiveness and a great reward (Qur'an, 33:35).

By prescribing the same moral behavior, as well as accompanying rewards, for both men and women, this passage makes a clear statement about the human moral condition, a condition which is identical for all humans regardless of gender (Ahmed, 1992).

The good works of men and women are also of equal worth:

I suffer not the good deeds of any to go to waste, be he man or woman: The one of you is of the other (Qur'an, 3:195).

In addition to the equality of the works of men and women, there exists in both Qur'an and *hadith* an egalitarian view of human conception. Contrary to the Hebrew tradition which forbids the spilling of male seed, in Islam semen is not held to be superior to the 'fluid' secreted by women (Ahmed, 1992).

The egalitarian vision inherent in Islam is evident to many. It is this vision that Muslim women take to heart when they insist that Islam is not sexist. Such women legitimately read a message of gender equality in sacred text. However, the message of gender equality within Islam exists in tension with the patriarchal family structure it upholds. Perhaps in an attempt to make sense of this tension, contemporary women scholars have looked upon the topic of women in Islam with new eyes.

FEMINIST INTERPRETATIONS

Feminist interpretations of Islam are not mainstream views, and in fact are rejected by the majority of Muslims. Still, there are a few feminist scholars studying Islam and this is an emerging field with much promise. Here two works will be considered as examples of feminist analyses: (a) Amina Wadud-Muhsin's (1992) *Women in Qur'an* which is an attempt "... to make a 'reading' of the Qur'an that would be meaningful to women living in the modern era (Wadud-Muhsin, 1992, p. 1)," and

(b) Fatima Mernissi's (1987) *The Veil and the Male Elite—A Feminist Interpretation of Women's Rights in Islam*.

Amina Wadud-Muhsin (1992) used a hermeneutic model to re-interpret Qur'anic verses regarding women, paying close attention to the context in which they were revealed, the grammatical composition of the text, and the worldview of the text as a whole.

Wadud-Muhsin (1992) begins with the story of creation:

And from His signs (is this) that He created you (humankind) from a single self (nafs), and created of the same type its spouse, and from these two He spread (through the earth) countless men and women (Qur'an, 4:1).

Wadud-Muhsin (1992) notes that the reference in this verse to the single self (nafs) in this verse is gender neutral and there is no evidence to support the idea that Adam was created before Eve.

With regard to the event in the Garden of Eden, this verse is cited:

And verily We made a covenant of old with Adam, but he forgot and We found no constancy in him . . . And the devil whispered to him saying: 'Oh Adam! Shall I show you the tree of immortality and power that does not waste away?' Then the two of them (Adam and his wife) ate of the fruit (of the forbidden tree) . . . And Adam disobeyed his Lord, so went astray (Qur'an, 20:115-21).

Here Wadud-Muhsin (1992) notes that Adam and not Eve is singled out as the one who first was led astray in the garden. This is in contrast to Biblical versions of the story where Eve is singled out.

Having established the equality of men and women from the time of creation, distinctions between individuals are then explored:

We created you male and female and have made you nations and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed the most noble of you from God's perspective is whoever (he or she) has the most piety (Qur'an, 49:13).

This verse establishes that the only true distinction among humans is our level of piety. Race, gender, class, and other differences are not relevant for distinguishing among individuals.

Finally, Wadud-Muhsin (1992) addresses the controversial issues of Qur'anic verses which are commonly interpreted as placing women in subservient roles within the family:

Men are the protectors and maintainers of women the basis of that God has preferred some of them over others, and on the basis of what they spend of their property (for the support of women), so good women are obedient, guarding in secret that which God has guarded. As for those from whom you fear marital disharmony admonish them, banish them to beds apart, and scourge them. Then if they obey you, seek not a way against them (Qur'an, IV:34).

Wahdud-Muhsin (1992) suggests that men's status as protectors and maintainers of women is conditional and limited to the area of finance. Men, are given preference over women to make financial decisions because they are responsible for the material needs of families. Thus men are only protectors and maintainers of women in financial matters. In cases where women contribute to the financial upkeep of families, husbands cannot claim to be protectors and maintainers of wives (Wahdud-Muhsin, 1992). Next, Wahdud-Muhsin (1992) discussed the word *qanitat* translated as obedient. The Arabic word *qanitat* ". . . is too often falsely translated to mean 'obedient,' and then assumed to mean 'obedient to the husband'" (Wadud-Muhsin, 1992, p. 74). Wadud-Muhsin (1992), suggested that this word should be translated as good not obedient. In addition, given that the words marital disharmony refer to situations involving both husbands and wives, Wadud-Muhsin (1992) suggested that this verse does not demand that a wife obey her husband, but instead seeks a way to resolve marital strife:

With regard to marital harmony, the following points need to be raised. First, the Qur'an gives precedence to the state of order and emphasizes the importance of regaining it. In other words, it is not a disciplinary measure to be used for disagreement between spouses. Second, if the steps are followed in the sequential manner suggested by the Qur'an, it would seem possible to regain order before the final step. Third, even if the third solution is reached, the nature of the 'scourge' cannot be such as to create conjugal violence or struggle between the couple because that is 'unIslamic' (Wadud-Muhsin, 1992, p. 75).

Wahdud-Muhsin (1992) also addressed the use of the word scourge and suggested that there is more than one possible translation (to set an example). Finally, Wadud-Muhsin (1992) notes that this verse should be taken as a prohibition against unrestrained violence against women, not as permission to be violent. Wahdud-Muhsin (1992) sums up with the conclusion that the Qur'an does not order women to obey their husbands, nor does it sanction violence against women. Instead of focusing on the specifics of marriage in seventh century Arabia, Muslims are better served applying the underlying principles of this verse, namely, the significance of marital harmony and the family as a unit of mutual support.

While Amina Wadud-Muhsin (1992) relied heavily on exploring alternative translations and interpretations of Qur'an. Fatima Mernissi (1987) explored the cultural and political contexts in which Islam's vision of women emerged. Mernissi (1987) began by strongly stating that "... if women's rights are a problem for some modern Muslim men, it is neither because of the Koran, nor the Prophet, nor the Islamic tradition, but simply because those rights conflict with the interests of the male elite. The elite faction is trying to convince us that their egotistic, highly subjective, and mediocre view of culture and society has a sacred bias" (Mernissi, 1987, p. ix).

Mernissi (1987) initially examined the source and context of misogynist *hadith* often quoted to women's detriment, noting that their continued and frequent use is exemplary of an infantile regression into an ancient past. This problem began with the subjugation of the Arab world under colonial rule from the late eighteenth century

through the middle twentieth century (Hourani, 1991) and subsequent to that, the emergence of new Arab states after World War II (Hourani, 1991). All at once the Arabs were forced to redefine themselves, and in so doing, grant citizenship to men and women both. This dramatic change called into question social, political, and sexual inequalities all at the same time—an overwhelming combination. The desire to return to the past is a comforting reversion to the way things ‘should be,’ re-establishing order and tranquility (Merniss, 1987).

As previously mentioned, the *hadith* are sayings of the Prophet Mohammad (p.b.h) as reported by his companions and recorded by scholars. Al-Bukhari was one such scholar whose collection of *ahadith* are considered sound by the majority of *Sunni* Muslims. Born in 870 AD he traveled across Islamic lands in search of knowledge and collecting hadith. Al-Bukhari interviewed 1,080 persons and collected 600,000 *hadith*. Next he began a methodological process to ensure the authenticity of this collection. Once Al-Bukhari’s method of verification was perfected, the number of *hadith* deemed sound was 7,257 (Mernissi, 1987). Political and economic interests contributed to the recitation of false *ahadith* over time, resulting in the inflated number Al-Bukhari originally collected. It is this context of competing political, social, and economic, interests which Mernissi (1987) calls attention to when exploring misogynist *ahadith* and their validity.

“Those who entrust their affairs to a woman will never know prosperity.” This is the first *hadith* Mernissi (1987) examines. The transmitter of this *hadith* was Abu

Bakra, a companion of the Prophet (p.b.h.). He reported this *hadith* 25 years after the death of the Prophet (p.b.h.) following the defeat of Aisha (one of the prophet's p.b.h wives) in the Battle of the Camel. After this defeat, Aisha was politically devastated and those who had supported her, as well as those who had remained neutral, feared repercussions from the victor. Abu Bakra who had remained neutral, reportedly lived through several days of worry following Aisha's defeat. It was convenient that he remembered at that moment a *hadith* that suggested an order not to support a war led by a woman.

Abu Bakra is noted to have remembered other *hadith* at critical moments, always conveniently in support of whomever was in power at the time. But this is not all. Mernissi (1987) showed that by Al-Bukhari's own criteria, Abu Bakra's recitation of *ahadith* should never have been accepted as sound. This is because people who were fabricators were rejected as transmitters of *ahadith*, and Abu Bakra's biographies reveal that he was publicly flogged for false testimony against a woman (he accused her of adultery falsely). Having demonstrated the weakness of Abu Bakra's *ahadith*, Mernissi (1987) goes on to investigate other misogynist *ahadith* in the same manner casting doubt on their authenticity.

Next, Mernissi (1987) turns her attention to the veil. Sura 33 verses 53 and 54 are widely regarded as the basis for the institution of the hijab (covering):

O you who believe! Enter not the Prophet's houses, -

Until leave is given you, -

For a meal, (and then)
 Not (so early as) to wait
 For its preparation: but when
 You are invited, enter;
 And when you have taken your meal, disperse,
 Without seeking familiar talk.
 Such (behavior) annoys the Prophet: he is ashamed
 To dismiss you, but God is not ashamed (to tell you) the truth.
 And when you ask (his ladies) For anything you want
 Ask them from before a screen: that makes for greater purity for
 Your hearts and for theirs (Qur'an, 33:53-5).

This verse was revealed on the Prophet's (p.b.h.) wedding night when he was impatient to be alone with his bride. On that night, guests remained talking until the late hours precipitating the revelation of this verse. As the Prophet (p.b.h.) recited this verse he drew a curtain between himself and a male visitor. Mernissi (1987) viewed this verse as "... God's answer to a community with boorish manners whose lack of delicacy offended a Prophet (p.b.h.) whose politeness bordered on timidity" (Mernissi, 1987, p. 86). In essence, Mernissi (1987) read this verse as a reminder for people to be tactful. Mernissi's (1987) interpretation of this verse called into question the overwhelming response to this verse by ancient male scholars—the segregation of the sexes.

In addition, verse 59 of sura 33, also used to support the requirement of veiling is as follows:

O Prophet! Tell your wives and your daughters and the women of the believers to draw their cloaks close around them (when they go abroad). That will be better, so that they may be recognized and not annoyed (Qur'an, 33: 59).

This verse was revealed at a time when women were being harassed on the streets of Medina. When those men who were harassing women (often referred to as the hypocrites) were questioned, they justified their actions, stating that they had mistaken the women for slaves. Thus, Muslim women were ordered to draw their cloaks around them, allowing them to be recognized. Mernissi (1987) viewed this sequence of events as a triumph for the hypocrites:

The veil represents the triumph of the Hypocrites. Slaves would continue to be harassed and attacked in the streets. The female Muslim population would henceforth be divided by a *hijab* into two categories: free women, against whom violence is forbidden, and women slaves toward whom ta'arrud [sexual harassment] is permitted (Mernissi, 1987, p. 187).

In her analysis, Mernissi (1987) likened the veil to the triumph of tribal power over individual self-restraint and reasoning, a triumph that would quickly overshadow Islam's progressive spirit over time.

Amina Wadud-Muhsin's (1992) and Fatima Mernissi's (1987) works stand in stark contrast to the proliferation of texts written by ancient male scholars calling for the

complete subjugation and segregation of women in Islamic society. The battle over women's rights and women's rightful place in Islamic society can be traced to the time of the Prophet (p.b.h.) and continues today.

MORE FEMINIST READINGS

While Wadud-Muhsin (1992) to a large degree, and Fatima Mernissi (1987) to a lesser degree, strive to give verses in the Qur'an which seem harmful to women a meaning which is less pejorative, it is clear that by today's standards the Qur'an infantilizes women by placing them under the care, protection, and disciplinary authority of their husbands. The Qur'anic regulations over matters significantly affecting women's lives (marriage, divorce, child custody) unquestionably discriminate against women when taken at face value (Karmi, 1996). Men can marry up to four wives, while women can marry only one husband at a time. Men can unilaterally divorce their wives simply by stating 'I divorce you' three times, while women have limited access to divorce. Men are entitled to twice the share of inheritance that women are entitled to. And finally, many Muslims believe that when a couple divorces, child custody goes to the father when a male child reaches the age of 7 and when a female child reaches the age of 9. Should a woman remarry before her children reach the ages of 7 or 9, then her period of legal custody is immediately revoked.

There are explanations for these laws which are rooted in the social and historical realities of seventh century Arabia. The laws concerning polygamy are understandable when one considers there was a continuing surplus of women in early Islamic times due

to frequent inter-tribal wars. At that time, the booty of war was a significant source of revenue, and men who fought in wars, enjoyed significantly more economic power than did women (Mernissi, 1987). It seems logical then that men, who were responsible for the support of their families, would receive a greater share of inheritance than women, and that the custody of children would be awarded to fathers who had the means to provide for them. The inter-relatedness of these laws with the social mores of early seventh century Arabia is abundantly clear (Karmi, 1996). Why do these laws then continue to be upheld to the detriment of Muslim women across the globe centuries later since they are clearly incongruent with the realities of our time?

Many Muslims would respond to this question by stating that these are God's laws and are therefore immutable and unchanging over time. This answer seems plausible until one examines the fate of other Islamic laws not applicable to women in modern times. Despite the fact that the Qur'an does not forbid, and indeed regulates, the institution of slavery, there are no Muslims calling for the re-institution of slavery and its laws. Despite the fact that Islamic law dictates the *hadd* punishments of beheading and amputation of limbs for certain crimes, these punishments are being withdrawn or reformed in many Muslim countries (Karmi, 1996), and there are no doubt many Muslims who find these punishments antiquated and harsh by today's standards. Despite the fact that the Prophet Mohammad (p.b.h.) (whom Muslims are supposed to emulate) married his wife Aisha as a child, there are few Muslims in urban areas today who would agree that this practice is appropriate. It seems that sticking to the literal

interpretation of Qur'anic verses which address legislation particular to seventh century Arabia, is not deemed necessary in all cases. It is only when it comes to the verses which apply to women's rights, that Islamic society has firmly resisted change. This is not surprising considering that Arab society is and has been for centuries rigidly patriarchal.

The Qur'an is comprised of 6,000 verses. Of these 6,000 verses, fewer than 700 address legislation and only 200 of these concern the regulation of society. The remainder are dedicated to the regulation of worship (Karmi, 1996). It appears that the bulk of the Qur'an does not concern itself with the particulars of women's roles, but instead with more universal human concerns, such as faith, contact with the divine, charity, kindness, patience, human equality, and caring for others. Thus, I agree with Karmi's (1996) assertion that with the Qur'an are portions that are eternal and unchanging, and other portions that are conditional and adjusted to social circumstances.

FEAR OF INDIVIDUALISM

The meaning of the word Islam is submission, implying a relationship of submission between the believer and his/her God. This submission to one God was the message that the Prophet (p.b.h.) brought to seventh century Arabia, challenging the arrogant individualism of the *jahiliya* (time of ignorance) Arabs.

During the *jahiliya*, there was a multiplicity of gods, all of whom were subject to the whims of those who worshiped them. If a god did not bring the desired state of affairs, it was not unusual for an Arab to throw stones at the god, insulting it and even

destroying it on some occasions. When the Prophet Mohammad (p.b.h.) conquered Mecca, the truce required that the Meccans renounce this *shirk*, this freedom to think and choose their own gods. In return, God guaranteed peace in a city that had been plagued by violence. *Shirk* (freedom of opinion) then can be viewed as the opposite of Islam which creates an orderly compassionate earth (Mernissi, 1992).

Islam triumphed in 630 AD because it succeeded in establishing a compassionate order, where there had once been an array of pluralism besieged by violence. Thus, Islam promises a community peace, but this comes only at the price of individual sacrifice. Individual desires, considered to be the root cause of dissension and ultimately of bloodshed, must be suppressed for the common good.

Challenging the consensus of the community is thus viewed as a deviation from the correct path:

The splitting of Islam into Sunni and Shi'a is the historical proof that divergence of opinion is seen as a weakening of the group, and that it is better to cast out the disputing group and let it pursue its own course if it is strong enough. Opposition is seen as traumatic, a frightening situation because it recalls the violence of Mecca before the triumph of the One (Mernissi, 1992, p.100).

This fear of individual thought has thus become an ingrained cultural value within Islamic societies, silencing alternative readings of Islam such as the ones presented above.

Because of the emphasis on individual rights and freedoms inherent in Western culture, clashes with the West have strengthened Muslims' fear of freedom and individualism. During the Gulf War, religious language was often used by the U.S. President. God Bless America, the synonymous use of the words God and freedom, and may God bless our troops are examples of the use of religious language by Mr. Bush during that time. Fatima Mernissi (1992) amply described the confusion the use of such language led to among the Arab masses:

The alleyways of the medinas were all agog. America, which the Muslim world thought viscerally materialistic, was fighting for its God” The winds of change are with us now. The forces of freedom are united. We move toward the next century, more confident than ever that we have the will at home and abroad to do what must be done, the hard work of freedom.” The people were doubly confused: “Is democracy a religion?” the concierge of my building asked me the next day (Mernissi, 1992, p. 102).

The blending of religious language with the words freedom and democracy interspersed with the unrelenting bombing of the people of Baghdad confused the Arab masses who understandably saw this war as a religious war. Mr. Bush was frequently depicted in cartoons as a pharaonic despot during the Gulf War (Mernissi, 1992). Because the attacks on civilian populations were reminiscent of the brutality of pharaoh, the defense of democracy and freedom were lost, and Muslim fears of individual freedom were reinforced.

TWENTIETH CENTURY INFLUENCES

Arab culture, history, and politics have been intertwined with the ways in which Islam has been interpreted. Given this, events in the Middle East during the twentieth century have implications for the ways in which Islam has been interpreted in modern times. In particular, colonialism and cultural resistance movements that developed over time in response to colonial occupation have had been significant contemporary influences on Muslim cultures. The purpose of this section is to explicate the connection between colonialism and the recent Islamic fundamentalist backlash against women.

The challenge of the West was brought home to the Arabs at the turn of the century through the brutality of European colonial occupation. In the aftermath of World War I, the political structure within which most Arabs had lived for four centuries, namely, the Ottoman empire, was falling apart. The dynasty that had been regarded by many as the paladin of what was left of the power and independence of *Sunni* Islam was gone. In its place, European colonial rule emerged. By 1918 military control of Britain and France in the Middle East and Northern Africa was stronger than ever before (Hourani, 1991). Of all the Arab countries, only parts of the Arabian peninsula (Saudi Arabia and Yemen) remained free from colonial rule. However, without known resources, with few connections to other nations, and enveloped on all sides by British power, even these sovereign nations could be independent only within limits. In the former Ottoman territories, only Turkey emerged as a truly independent state (Hourani, 1991).

The spread of European colonialism in the Middle East and Northern African described above was encouraged by a European mindset that viewed Arabs and Muslims as inherently deficient. Europeans justified colonial occupation on the basis that their mission was a civilizing one (Ghandi, 1998). The imperialist mindset operated under the assumptions inherent in Orientalism (Said, 1978). Orientalist thought is a drastically polarized perception of the world—one that is divided into two unequal parts, the Orient and the Occident. Subspecialties of Orientalist scholars include Arabists and Islamologists. The integral relationship between Arab ethnicity and Islam in Orientalism feeds stereotypes about Muslims as Arab extremists, and in turn, about Arabs as barbarous heretics. Stereotypical views of both Arabs and Muslims became firmly ingrained when learned European scholars studying the Orient perpetuated them under the guise of empiric observation Said (1978). Said (1978) summarized the dogmas inherent in Orientalist thought thusly:

. . . the principal dogmas of Orientalism exist in their purest form today in studies of Arabs and Islam. Let us recapitulate them here: one is the absolute and systematic difference between the West, which is rational, developed, humane, superior, and the Orient which is aberrant, underdeveloped, inferior. Another dogma is that abstractions about the Orient, particularly those based on texts representing a “classical” Oriental civilization, are always preferable to direct evidence drawn from modern Oriental realities. A third dogma is that the Orient is eternal, uniform, and incapable of defining itself; therefore it is assumed that a

highly generalized and systematic vocabulary for describing the Orient from a Western standpoint is inevitable and even scientifically “objective.” A fourth dogma is that the Orient is at bottom something either to be feared (the Yellow Peril, the Mongol hordes, the brown dominions) or to be controlled (by pacification, research and development, outright occupation whenever possible) (Said, 1978, p. 300-101).

These dogmas permeated European colonial occupation strengthened by the work of scholars who wrote prolifically about the perceived deficiencies of Arabs, their culture, and their religion. Thus, European rulers perceived their civilizing mission as a necessary one that would eventually improve the condition of the Arabs through the dissemination of so-called superior Western values. These values would be inculcated through a system of educational endeavors founded by Christian missionaries, with curricula emphasizing the glory of Western achievements, and ridiculing Islamic family law, particularly as it applied to women’s roles (Haddad, 1985).

As colonial administrators and Christian missionaries defined their civilizing mission as one that involved the reform of sexual mores and family traditions of Muslims, women and family became symbols of cultural resistance—the sacrosanct repository of Muslim identity (Taraki, 1995). As the language of women’s liberation was co-opted and manipulated by colonialists, feminism erroneously became equated with cultural imperialism and Muslims who attempted to change the position of Muslim women were viewed as “. . . tainted with cultural inauthenticity if not outright betrayal”

(Taraki, 1995, p. 646). In disseminating their attack on Islamic family mores, colonialists used the language of feminism, stating that Islam is “. . . innately and immutably oppressive to women, that the veil and segregation epitomized that oppression, and that these customs were the fundamental reasons for the general and comprehensive backwardness of Islamic societies” (Ahmed, 1992, p. 152). As imperialists used the custom of veiling and the position of women in Muslim societies as proof of the inferiority of Islam and as justification for colonial occupation, Islamic revolutionaries now invert the premises of this thesis by emphasizing the importance of veiling and the return to indigenous practices as a form of cultural resistance (Ahmed, 1992; Taraki, 1995). It should be noted that European colonial occupation of the Arabs was rooted in Orientalist, not feminist, thought. Feminism challenges the patriarchal elements extant in Arab societies as it does worldwide. However, feminism does not support imperialist expansion or the racist ideology inherent within it. Thus, colonialists’ use of feminism was in fact a corruption and manipulation of women’s liberation—one that would be damaging to Muslim women’s progress over time.

Following forays into nationalist and socialist thought in the 1950's, and the failure on the part of the Arabs to defeat Israel both in 1948 and 1967,⁴ the tide turned toward Islamic revolution. Islamic revolutionaries have advocated the use of Islam as a unifying political and cultural force in the Middle East, one that stands in opposition to the cultural hegemony of the West. As was noted above, the colonial civilizing

⁴ See Said, E. (1979), *The Question of Palestine* for more information on the Arab-Israeli conflict.

mission's condemnation of the position of Muslim women in society engendered a resistance narrative on the part of Muslim societies (Ahmed, 1992). The Islamic revolutionary movement has accordingly viewed women's liberation as a movement introduced by the West for the purposes of undermining Islam, and has further called attention to the failure of the American model as depraved (Haddad, 1985).

The assumption that a fundamental connection exists between women and culture has resulted in the idea that Muslim women's adherence to the precepts of Islam is essential to the survival of Islamic society. The alternative, living in a society like the West, is viewed by Islamists as the decadent end result of the abandonment of Islamic law. Held up as a society drowning in moral corruption, the West is exemplified by the epidemic problems of drug and alcohol addiction, lawlessness, pornography, and sexually transmitted disease (Haddad, 1985). From the Islamic revolutionary point of view, undermining Islamic law and the strict regulation of women's roles in Islamic societies can only result in the eventual downfall of Islamic society. Recovering from colonial occupation while simultaneously facing the challenges inherent in rapid technological change, Islamic revolutionaries' emphasis on controlling women in both public and private space plays on the fears and anxieties of people suffering from the direct impact of foreign economic, political, and cultural hegemony (Mernissi, 1992; Taraki, 1995). This scenario places the discussion of Muslim women's rights in the middle of the struggle of the Arab people to retain their culture and proud heritage in the face of the ever-expanding influence of the West.

In summary, the attack on Arab women's status during European colonial encounters in the Middle East, and the subsequent enmeshment of women's rights issues with cultural resistance narratives, has made feminist readings of Islam subject to hostile opposition, thus hampering Muslim women's progress across the globe. This is not due to any inherent gender oppression extant in Islam itself, since as has been demonstrated here, there are many possible readings of Islam which exclude patriarchal elements. While it is clear that Islam has been exploited by patriarchal societies to legitimize women's oppression, Islam itself is not the root cause of such oppression. Indeed, despite the manipulation it has been subjected to, the Islamic heritage continues to have an extraordinary richness. Within Islam are the seeds of hope for the faithful who suffer under the weight of oppression, offering them a sense of identity and the power to resist injustice in their lives.

MUSLIM WOMEN IN AMERICA

Islam is believed to be the fastest growing religion in the United States today (Stone, 1991). As the population of Muslims in America has grown they have developed distinctive institutions across the country. These include more than 600 mosques/Islamic centers, a few Islamic colleges, scores of parochial day schools, hundreds of weekend schools, women's organizations, youth groups, and professional and civic organizations (Haddad, 1991). This growing infrastructure supports Muslim culture and identity in the context of predominantly Christian America.

Muslims in America are a diverse group comprised of first generation immigrants from Asia, Africa, the Middle East, Sub-Sahara, the Caribbean and Eastern Europe. In addition, American born Muslims include three groups: (a) descendants of immigrant populations, (b) Anglo-Americans, and (c) African-Americans (Hermansen, 1991; Stone, 1991). African-Americans are the single largest group of American Muslims, comprising approximately forty percent of the total population (Kosmin & Lachman, 1993). While Muslims share a common religious culture and within that culture shared worlds of experience (Hermansen, 1991), issues salient to specific ethnic groups are important contextual aspects of Muslim women's experiences in America. The experiences of women belonging to the two largest ethnic groups, African-American and Arab-American, are highlighted for the purposes of providing background information relevant to study results.

African-American Women

McCloud (1991), in a qualitative study of African-American women who converted to Islam, described a typology of African-American converters comprised of four general categories. The first type were women who came from environments in which each day was lived as if there would be no tomorrow. These were poorly educated adults often on welfare who spent their days in despair as they coped with racism and poverty in their daily lives. To assuage their pain they often turned to drugs or exorbitant partying. In their efforts to improve their lives they investigated Islam, often upon the recommendation of African-American Muslim men. Muslim women

they were told, were given the highest respect by their good Muslim husbands. Drawn to Islam in search of instant husbands and “somebodiness,” they soon converted to Islam. The first changes made were changes in dress:

Befo’ I could ketch my breath, they was tellin’ me about all the layers of clothes I had to wear so nobody could lust after me. When did anybody ever lust after me? What is lust? They said that the men cain’t control themselves when they see the woman’s form so I have to be modest and look plain, wear black (McCloud, 1991, p. 180).

Soon, these women began a “self-hypnosis” (McCloud, 1991, p. 180), that transformed thought patterns. The West, its system, and its values, were rejected. Welfare became a source of power rather than degradation—telling welfare the truth was not necessary since welfare case-workers and the system they worked for were non-Muslim:

I felt like I was somebody, lookin’ down on sin and evil, a reminder of chastity and modesty to a naked, immoral woman. I felt good. America ain’t nothin’ and all of them will burn. They owe me (McCloud, 1991, p. 180).

Soon, however, other realities surfaced. The most pressing demands in the eyes of the Muslim community were that these women dress Islamically and that they marry. Seeking the perceived respectability of marriage, they were faced with the problem of having to decide on husbands without the consultation of persons who had known and loved them. They had to mimic Muslim cultural processes regarding marriage which they knew little about: “. . . she performs some self-hypnosis and becomes the woman

who will marry someone whom she does not know and whose past is erased with conversion” (McCloud, 1991, p. 180). Trusting that God would lead them to the right husband, women married often several times before giving up on it altogether. For many of these women, Islamic married life was very similar to the abusive pre-Islamic live-in arrangements they had experienced—with one exceptional difference. The threat of polygamy created anxiety and strife, reminiscent of pre-Islamic fights over other women. This unfortunate situation engendered hostility toward single women and acceptance of a certain amount of abuse within marriages.

The second category of women were those who shared an interest and support of so-called Third World perspectives. Their new Muslim names gave them voices, the embodiment of somebodiness. Soon, however, they came to realize that the larger society did not recognize African-American voices. Changes in clothing precipitated harassment at places of employment, ultimately leading to unemployment and welfare dependency. The exception, was women who found new jobs and took off their Islamic clothing, donning this garb only for special occasions. During special occasions they remained aloof from other Muslim women. Because they no longer consistently conformed to prescribed Islamic dress codes they were not considered “good Muslim women” anymore and tended to be treated badly by other Muslims in their communities (McCloud, 1991, p. 183).

The third category of women were those who were on the road to assimilation as they strived to achieve success typically in male-dominated professions. Over time they

became tired of living up to the super-woman image and they were drawn to Islam which they were taught would put an end to their turmoil. In Islam they would be real women—“. . . expected to be dependent but coveted for their dependency” (McCloud, 1991, p. 182). As these women changed their outward appearances they were subjected to the same harassment in place of employment previously described and tended to follow the same path over time as did women in the second category. The women in the second and third groups typically did not fare well. Their communities did not encourage either education or ambition:

Music is *haram* (forbidden); reading literature other than Islamic literature is *haram*; singing, dancing, professions that entail contact with men are *haram*; and so on. They generally find themselves being forced into nothingness (McCloud, 1991, p. 182).

The women in the second and third categories tended to find themselves raising children without community support, divorced and alone.

Finally, the fourth category of women were distinguished by their quest for religious understanding. They typically grew up in families that were avid churchgoers and as adults found themselves without any special professional ambitions. They were, however, in love with knowledge—in essence they were truth-seekers. They valued collectivity, affiliation, obedience to authority, spirituality and had a respect for history. Brief forays into the center of Muslim community affairs tended to go badly and this

group of women typically were satisfied participating on the outskirts of community life. Overall, their lives in Islam tended to be pleasant and satisfying.

McCloud (1991) found that Islam satisfied an inner hunger of the women she interviewed to be acknowledged as human in the context of a white racist society. As Muslims, African-American women became part of a larger world, one that was greater than white America. The African-American women in McCloud's (1991) study believed that Islam could provide them with a better life. As Muslims they gained a feeling of somebodiness and they were brought closer to their roles as wives and mothers. Still these benefits did not come without a price. The assurance of finding God was paired with the despair of trying to create new and primarily foreign ways of life in place of old familiar ones.

Arab-American Women

The vast majority of Arabs in the Middle East are Muslims, however, the majority of Arabs living in the United States are Christian (Kosmin & Lachman, 1993). Thus, it should not be assumed that Arab women encountered in health care settings are Muslims.

Cultural values relevant to the phenomenon of domestic violence among Arab-American populations include male authority, acceptance of corporal punishment, and the perceived connection between family honor and women's sexuality. In addition, poverty, social isolation, and the intergenerational transmission of violence have been cited as risk factors for violence for this population (Kulwicki & Miller, 1999). Also of

note is the pervasive discrimination and even outright hatred of Arabs and of Muslims in America (Haddad, 1991; Sehaefar, 1996). In a survey of attitudes, the National Conference of Christians and Jews (1993) found that over forty percent of Americans view Muslims as supporting terrorism and as oppressive toward women. These perceptions have crystalized as the Arab population in the United States has grown, because many Americans do not distinguish between Arabs and Muslims, seeing them often as one and the same (Sehaefar, 1996).

Immigration from the Arab world to the United States began around 1880 and continues today (Haddad, 1991). American foreign policy in the Middle East beginning with the recognition of the state of Israel by President Truman has been a source of pain and confusion for Arabs in general and Arab-Americans in particular. The conflicting interests of Arab-Americans and American foreign policy have resulted in distress and discrimination, over time. In the 1970s a plan known as Operation Boulder placed Arab-Americans under FBI surveillance. Prejudicial statements from government leaders were open and severe. The public accusation by Gerald Ford during his tenure in Congress that Arab-Americans were agents of Communist China is a case in point (Haddad, 1991). When President Reagan came into office on the heels of the Iran hostage crisis, things became very grim indeed for Arab-Americans as the press blamed Islam and Muslims for everything "... contrary to the interests of America" (Haddad, 1991, p. 221). In an interview in *Time* magazine in November 1980, Reagan was quoted as saying that Muslims believe the way to heaven is to lose their lives fighting Christians

and Jews. Objections of American Muslims to Reagan's statement went unheeded (Council of Masajid, 1981). Antagonism toward Arab-Americans inherent in the Reagan Administration's policies became abundantly clear when a declassified FBI report revealed that Reagan had been renovating camps in the South as a contingency plan for possible internment of Arabs and Iranians during his tenure (Haddad, 1991).

The oppressive, and at times, genocidal tendencies of Israel toward the Palestinians (Said, 1979), coupled with America's support for Israel and seeming lack of recognition of the humanity of the Palestinian people has shaped the experiences of Arab populations in America. By refusing to recognize the humanity of Arabs overseas, America has made its position clear with regard to Arabs, in general. For Arab-American women, overt discrimination and hatred toward Arab people in America have limited their ability to openly condemn patriarchal cultural elements extant in Arab culture. Defense of their humanity as Arabs, and also in many cases as Muslims, has superceded concerns around gender oppression. When issues of gender oppression remain unchallenged, women in patriarchal family structures continue to be disempowered. Unfortunately, women's disempowerment and the gender role socialization processes that underpin it have been linked to domestic violence across cultures (Levinson, 1989)..

SUMMARY

Islam is a growing religion that offers inner peace, social order, and a sense of identity for its adherents. Muslim women in America are primarily influenced by

mainstream (orthodox) interpretations of Islam, although feminist interpretations have become increasingly prevalent over time. Unfortunately, the legacies of colonialism in the Middle East, and slavery in the United States, have engendered hostility toward the West, and by association, also somewhat toward feminism, thus impeding women's progress toward empowerment and equality. Ethnic, cultural, and biographical influences also shape women's experiences and perceptions, influencing the meaning of Islam for women in the context of a shared religious culture.

A review of Islamic history reveals that patriarchy and misogyny predated Islam and that Islam in fact introduced a series of reforms favoring the position of women in seventh century Arabia. The progressive spirit of these reforms has been lost over time, through literalist interpretations made in the context of patriarchal Arab societies. The tradition of the Prophet Mohammad (p.b.h.) has continued to shape Muslim culture over time creating a richness in history and culture shared by Muslims across the globe. The perpetuation of misogynist *ahadith*, however, has been a serious obstacle for women as they struggle to understand themselves in the context of patriarchy both within and outside of Muslim communities. Holding on to Islam, culture, and identity, while at the same time coming to terms with issues of gender oppression, created tensions and contradictions in women's lives.

Of concern to many Muslims is the perception that discussions of gender oppression and/or domestic violence will create the illusion that these problems are caused and/or supported by Islamic teachings. Even the most cursory of glances at

literature on Muslim women written by Muslims reveals that there is a heavy emphasis on the claim that Islam is a champion of women's rights, offering them more protection and greater status than any Western conceptions of feminism ever can (Badawi, 1995; Chaudhry, 1991). Often times the automatic response received by those concerned about the problem of domestic violence among Muslims has been "but that is not Islam" (Nadia Abdullah, personal communication, June 15, 1999; Sharifa Alkhateeb, personal communication, June 14, 1999). I want to clearly state here that this research is not an attempt to vindicate nor to vilify Islam, nor is it an attempt to claim that abuse is caused by Islam. This research reflects the real-life experiences of Muslim women with abuse and the cultural context surrounding those experiences. The culture itself is not Islam, since Islam can be interpreted very differently from person to person; however, the culture is a manifestation of common interpretations of Islam and of the mixing of these interpretations with other ethnic cultural values. Concern about the image of Islam is understandable in the context of American society where stigma and stereotyping about Muslims is rampant. However, in order to address the problem of woman abuse in American Muslim communities, concern for abused women must take precedence over worries about image. Dealing with the problem of abuse has nothing to do with what Islam is—it has to do with women's suffering in the context of Muslim community cultures. Keeping this in mind, I implore Muslim readers of this research to focus on the women's experiences described in this work and to consider how and why their suffering has gone unchecked in our communities over time.

CHAPTER FOUR:

METHODOLOGY

COUNTER-HEGEMONIC RESEARCH

Counter-hegemonic research seeks to challenge the status-quo through an analysis of existing social relations as they appear in the particularities of everyday lived experience. The field of cultural studies informs counter-hegemonic research through theoretical perspectives on the inter-relationships between hegemony, marginalization, and culture.

American Muslim communities are influenced by political and economic forces both within the United States and abroad. In addition, American Muslims are influenced by hegemonic processes both internal and external, which saturate social consciousness. Particularly salient to the lived experiences of American Muslim women are stereotypes of Muslims existent in dominant American culture, normalized visions of gender within Muslim communities, and the influences of colonialism and white supremacy on Muslim communities. Counter-hegemonic research calls attention to all of these contextual factors for the purposes of foregrounding and contextualizing narratives obtained via hermeneutic interviewing.

Hermeneutic interviewing provides access to everyday lived experience. The hermeneutic model is simply a refined version of our understanding of other people in everyday life (Inglis, 1993). The ethos and tone of culture become accessible through

local knowledge (Geertz, 1983), at the same time that the concrete manifestations of hegemonic social processes come to light. Also evident in lived experience are the daily practices of resilience and resistance women engage in on an everyday basis.

Hermeneutics provides a window of understanding for the careful listener.

In nursing, the work of Benner (1994a, 1994b) has been most influential in introducing hermeneutics (also termed interpretive phenomenology) as a methodology for nursing science. Benner's (1994a) work posits:

. . . that understanding is more powerful than explanation for prediction in the human sciences because it stands more fully in the human world of self-understandings, meanings, skills, and tradition . . . The understanding sought in interpretive phenomenology considers historical change, transformations, gains, losses, temporality, and context (Benner, 1994a, p. xv).

In her work, Benner (1994b) provided a detailed description of how to conduct an interpretive study. An adaptation of Benner's approach (1994b) constituted the mode of investigation for this study.

Philosophical Underpinnings

The philosophical perspective that guided this inquiry was informed by the work of nurses, critical theorists, affirmative post-modernists, hermeneuticists and writers in the field of cultural studies (Benner, 1994b; Gadamer, 1976; Hall, Stevens & Meleis, 1994; Inglis, 1993; Kendall, 1992; Lather, 1993; Ortner 1994; Rosenau, 1992). I will describe the notions of hegemony, marginalization, and cultural studies and present a list

of philosophical assumptions deemed useful for research among marginalized populations. These concepts and assumptions informed my work during the conceptual and analytical phases of this study and will continue to guide my understanding of this work over time. Because this study relied on narrative reports, the problem of representation arises. To address this concern on a philosophical level, I will discuss issues inherent in the crisis of representation often highlighted by postmodern theorists. To foreground this discussion, it is necessary to delineate core concepts and briefly review interpretive, critical and postmodern philosophical paradigms.

Values

Consistent with the philosophical perspective presented here, I would like to describe the values that influenced the course of this study. First, counter-hegemonic nursing research challenges stereotypical and pathological views of peoples belonging to marginalized cultures at the same time it interrogates issues of domination and power. Holding this value presented challenges as I attempted to explicate the oppressive power of patriarchy in abused Muslim women's lives while simultaneously feeling uneasy about presenting data that could potentially lead to further stigma and stereotyping of American Muslims. This was a tight-rope walk, one that I am not sure I successfully managed.

Second, counter-hegemonic nursing research is collaborative. Participants are involved in all stages of research to the greatest extent possible. Participants in this study

had the opportunity to offer information they felt was salient and they had the opportunity to review and contest my interpretations of their words.

Third, domination of research by researchers not belonging to or closely affiliated with the groups under study is unacceptable. Intellectual elites are not privileged interpreters of marginalized cultures. As an American Muslim woman who is a survivor of abuse I believe that I am not an outsider describing Muslims as Others. However, my affiliation with the Muslim community since the end of my abusive marriage has become more and more distant. To ensure that an insider perspective was included in the analyses of data, a Muslim woman knowledgeable about the problem of abuse in Muslim communities was consulted regarding interpretation and cultural background issues.

Fourth and finally, counter-hegemonic nursing research seeks to inform and improve nursing practice with marginalized populations. Dissemination of study results for the purposes of improving the practice of health care providers as they intervene with abused American Muslim women is an important priority of this work.

Hegemony

Hegemony is defined by Webster (1989) as “leadership or predominant influence exercised by one state over others” (Webster, 1989, p. 657). This concept has been applied much more broadly by scholars in the field of cultural studies (Giroux, 1997; Grossberg, 1996; Williams, 1977). Hegemony encompasses the “concrete processes by which ideology enters into larger and more complex relations of power” (Grossberg,

1996, p. 161). Thus, hegemony can be conceptualized as a saturation of lived experience, not limited to the political, economic, and social, aspects of life but including the “. . . whole substance of lived identities and relationships, to such a depth that the pressures and limits of what can ultimately be seen as a specific economic, political, and cultural system seem to most of us the pressures and limits of simple experience and common sense” (Williams, 1977, p. 110). Hegemony includes not only ideology and its various forms of control (e.g. manipulation and indoctrination), but it encompasses “. . . the whole body of practice and expectations, over the whole of living: our senses and assignments of energy, or shaping perceptions of ourselves and our world” (Williams, 1977, p. 110). The successful saturation of the consciousness of society with a view of life which suits the bourgeoisie is key to the process of maintaining existing social relations (Inglis, 1993). A complex interlocking of cultural institutions including education, schools, and various forms of media is involved in this process, (Inglis, 1993). Given the pervasive nature of hegemony, recognition of the influence of hegemonic social processes on human phenomena is an important first step in conducting counter-hegemonic science.

Counter-hegemonic science seeks to challenge the status-quo of existing social relations by exposing hegemonic processes which stratify humans on the basis of race, class, and gender. The hegemony of empiricism in research (and subsequently in knowledge production) serves as a useful example to illustrate the concept of hegemony. Consider the ways in which the hegemony of empiricism influences how researchers

approach issues of race and ethnicity. In the dominant quantitative mainstream, attention to cultural biases in the construction of instruments and the manipulation of data is lacking (Stanfield, 1993). The cultural hegemony which maintains and legitimizes research that ignores issues of cultural bias can be linked to the exclusionary practices of academic sciences along racial lines. The exclusion of people of color both as researchers and as participants from involvement in significant decision-making in research projects allows for the continued dominance of white patriarchal cultural hegemony found in academia today (Stanfield, 1993).

The hegemony of empiricism is closely linked to the hegemony of the culture of positivism (Giroux, 1997). The culture of positivism as discussed by Giroux (1997), is distinct from the specific philosophical movement known as positivism. The culture of positivism is theorized as a form of cultural hegemony which permeates our schools. As the United States inequitably distributes not only economic goods and services but also “. . . meanings, abilities, language forms, and tastes that are directly and indirectly defined by dominant groups as socially legitimate” (Giroux, 1997, p. 6), the cultural hegemony of dominant groups is ensured. Giroux (1997) asserted the cultural hegemony of positivism works by promulgating the notion of objectivity. The concept of objectivity is used to separate knowledge from values, erase the salience of history, and deny the social construction of knowledge. Objectivism is the cornerstone of the culture of positivism in public education. Adulating ‘facts’ and empirically based discourse, positivist rationality provides no basis for acknowledging its own historically contingent

character. As such, it represents not only an assault on critical thinking, but it also grounds itself in the politics of "what is" (Giroux, 1997, p.20). In grounding itself in what is, the culture of positivism affirms the status-quo as reasonable, just, and sound. Thus, public education reproduces the culture of positivism under the guise of objectivity, while simultaneously contributing to the maintenance of the status-quo of existing social relations.

Hegemony need not depend on consensus or consent to any particular ideology for its existence. Rather, hegemonic processes need only to contain the limits of popular consciousness to thrive (Grossberg, 1996). Through media (in the United States) popular consciousness is shaped by the conditions of capitalism, mass communication, and culture. Consider the results of a survey which found that survey respondents' perceptions of reality were shaped by television (Schor, 1999). The television world of wealth, hemorrhoids, acid indigestion, and so on, influenced study respondents' beliefs about such phenomena in the world. The more television respondents consumed, the more likely they were to perceive that the proportion of images viewed on television mirrored reality. This same study revealed that Americans' spending increases (and their savings decrease) as their hours of consumption of television increases (Schor, 1999). Add to the capitalist influence on popular culture, the pervasive manipulation of images of humans based on race, class, and gender, and the containment of popular consciousness becomes apparent (Ehrenreich, 1995; Hall, 1995; Seiter, 1995; Kilbourne, 1995; Bodroghkozy, 1995).

Hegemonic social processes are not simply abstract concepts useful for intellectual analyses and critique. They are also a whole body of practices and expectations, a lived system of meanings and values which constitute a sense of reality for most people in society. Hegemonic processes form and are formed by the whole of lived experience (Williams, 1977).

Marginalization

The concept of marginality was first introduced by Park (1928), and has been adopted and expanded by authors from numerous disciplines. In sociology the term marginality refers to “the status of being between two cultures” (Sehaefer, 1996, p. 35), experienced by those marginalized as “being perceived differently in different environments, with varying expectations” (Sehaefer, 1996, p. 35). In the family, “. . . the marginal person’s ethnic heritage is clear, but in the workplace, a different label may be used to identify this person” (Sehaefer, 1996, p. 35).

Feminist bell hooks (1984) elucidated the concepts of margin and center, and in so doing, influenced the use of the term marginality among feminists and others. She described living at the margins in this way:

To be in the margin is to be part of the whole but outside the main body. As black Americans living in a small Kentucky town, the railroad tracks were a daily reminder of our marginality. We could enter that world but we could not live there (Hooks, 1984, Preface).

In subsequent work, Hooks (1990) described the margin as a location of radical possibility. The margin is a space where people resist hegemony in their daily lives. The margins, then, are more than sites of deprivation but are also sites of creativity and power. In Hooks' (1990) work, the term marginality also took on the potentialities of sites of resistance.

In nursing, the term marginalization is often used to refer to the status of oppressed groups. Hall, Stevens, and Meleis (1994) defined marginalization as "... the process through which persons are peripheralized on the basis of their identities, associations, experiences, and environments" (Hall, Stevens, & Meleis, 1994, p. 25). Being marginalized means being excluded from power and resources, and often incorporates the experiences of oppression, alienation, and stigma. The concept of marginalization has been linked to the concept of vulnerability and carries important implications for the health and well-being of humans (Hall, Stevens, & Meleis, 1994).

Stevens' (1993) work investigating marginalized women's access to health care revealed the complex ways in which class, sexuality, ethnicity, and culture intersect to create unique client locations which our health care system does not acknowledge, address, or respect. Stevens' study identified "... structural and interactional barriers to access that ... added up to anxiety, avoidance of care, and decreased attentiveness to symptoms" (Stevens, 1993, p. 54). Ultimately, for marginalized peoples, access to health care, nutrition, housing, employment, education, and justice are disproportionately located at the center (Crenshaw, 1995; Stevens, 1993), while people

at the margins are systematically denied access to the resources of the center. Their lives are filled with struggles that those at the center do not experience.

Cultural Studies

Cultural studies is an academic discipline that critically examines social phenomena. At its best, cultural studies offers insight into social struggle by challenging dominant representations and ideologies of class, gender, race, ethnicity and nationality in cultural texts (Kellner, 1995). It serves as an intervention, where space is made for academic and intellectual post-Colonial discourse (Hooks, 1990). At its worst, cultural studies is a privileged “chic” discipline where scholars engage in discussion around ‘Otherness’ in ways that further marginalize people of difference (Hooks, 1990).

Hegemony and marginalization are central concepts in the field of cultural studies. This field has much to offer nurse scholars interested in the study of culture, and the social relations and systems that produce and consume culture. Proponents of cultural studies argue that the study of human phenomena requires attention to the contextual elements of hegemony, politics, economics, society, and culture (Kellner, 1995). Largely defined through its analyses of the interrelationships between power, culture, and values, cultural studies explores the interface between the structural conditions which shape human social experience and the various modes of lived experience existent within them. This is achieved through the careful study and use of texts (Fiske, 1994; Giroux, 1997; Inglis, 1993). Informed by a broad range of academic disciplines, cultural studies crosses rigid academic borders allowing for a more enriched

understanding of complex sociocultural phenomena. This enriched understanding emerges as information and theory are shared across disciplines, providing access to a multiple academic perspectives. Cultural studies is inherently critical and political in nature. An infusion of cultural studies into health research for marginalized peoples carries with it the possibility of engendering a counter-hegemonic influence.

A Review of Research Paradigms

Co-mingling counter-hegemonic cultural studies with health research requires a reconfiguration of traditional paradigmatic approaches. Research paradigms that inform this philosophical discussion include the interpretive tradition, critical theory, and postmodernism. Those aspects of these paradigms most useful for researching lived experience at the margins are incorporated in the approach to inquiry used for this study. Other aspects seen as not useful have been left behind. To familiarize the reader with the basic ideas central to the interpretive, critical, and post-modern traditions, a brief overview is offered.

Interpretive Traditions

The interpretive tradition, often also termed hermeneutics, originated as Biblical exegesis. More recently, Gadamer, a German philosopher, asserted the fundamental nature of hermeneutics for human understanding in the world:

Philosophical hermeneutics takes as its task the opening up of the hermeneutic dimension in its full scope, showing its fundamental significance for our entire understanding of the world and thus for all the various forms in which this

understanding manifests itself: from interhuman communication to manipulation of society; from personal experience by the individual in society to the way in which he encounters society; and from the tradition as it is built of religions and law, art, and philosophy, to the revolutionary consciousness that unhinges the tradition through emancipatory reflection (Gadamer, 1976, p. 18).

Thus, within the interpretive tradition, interpretation is integral to all human understanding, meaning, and being in the world.

In their work *The Primacy of Caring*, Benner and Wrubel (1989) introduced the assumptions of the interpretive tradition to nurses, challenging the assumptions of empiricism, Cartesianism, cognitivism, and behaviorism, and asserting a phenomenologic view of the person as a self-interpreting being. A “person does not come into the world predefined but becomes defined in the course of living a life” (Benner & Wrubel, 1989, p. 41). Drawing on the work of Heidegger, Benner and Wrubel (1989) described people as having “an effortless and non-reflective understanding of the self in the world . . . because they are always situated in a meaningful context and because they grasp meaning directly” (p. 41). While persons have the ability to think abstractly and conceptually, the everydayness of life is largely non-theoretical. Humans know their worlds through their experiences of being.

Over the last 10 years, the interpretive tradition has been recognized as an important paradigm for nursing science (Benner, 1994a, 1994b; Koch, 1995; Lowenberg, 1993; Tanner, Benner, Chesla, & Gordon, 1993; Thompson, 1990). More

recently, the hermeneutic concept, the fusion of horizons, has been highlighted as an invaluable tools for cross-cultural understanding, and has been heralded as a potential solution to the problems inherent in the stance of cultural relativism:

Gadamer argued that to understand a cultural "other," one must adopt a fundamentally open stance and listen to the other's claims. In seeking avenues for interpreting these claims, one exposes oneself to errors created by one's own preconceptions. Thus Gadamer saw in such dialogue the possibility for a fusion of horizons, in which there is a meeting of the contextual understandings that transforms and enriches the perspectives of both participants (Baker, 1997, p. 10).

Thus, hermeneutic inquiry, as an interpretive process, holds tremendous promise for promoting dialogue across cultures, allowing for the emergence of new understandings about ourselves and others in the world.

Critical Theory

Like hermeneutics, critical theory has much to offer nursing science. Critical theory is a diverse body of theory with a central unifying emancipatory ideal. Often associated with the work of the Frankfurt School founded in 1923, the roots of critical theory can be traced to Marxism (Pusey, 1993). Over time, many well known critical theorists have emerged, perhaps most notably Habermas (1984, 1993) and Freire (1968, 1969).

[Critical theory] detects and illuminates crucial social problems, conflicts, and contradictions, and points towards possible resolution of these problems and

progressive social transformation. Critical theory analyzes fundamental relations of domination and exploitation, and the ways that hierarchy, inequality, and oppression are built into social relations and practices (Best & Kellner, 1991, p. 264).

As this passage suggests, critical social theory highlights oppressive power relations in society and proposes the initiation of emancipatory projects. Ideology, critique, and dialectical thought form much of the basis for such work (Giroux, 1997). Today, feminist theory, Marxism, critical ethnography, critical modernism (including critical hermeneutics) and post-modernism, critical pedagogy, and critical race theory co-exist in the maelstrom that is critical theory. This multiplicity of theory has informed cultural studies to a great degree and is consistent with many of the interests of cultural studies theorists.

In nursing, critical theory has not achieved the degree of recognition afforded to hermeneutics. Still, some nurse researchers have used critical theory in their efforts to produce science which calls attention to oppressive social structures influencing health (Allen, 1985; Kendall, 1992; Stevens, 1989). Kendall's (1992) work introduced a model of emancipatory nursing action, offering insight into the processes of critical awareness:

This model of emancipatory nursing action can be used to visualize progress of an entire society as it progresses toward a new social system or, on a smaller scale, a new health care system Nurses are beginning to become aware of the limitations to our thinking and its effect on the well-being and health of the

population. Increased social activism and civil disobedience will occur as people become more critically aware of the effect of oppression on health (Kendall, 1992, p. 13).

Drawing on the work of Freire (1968), Kendall (1992) called on nurses to promote emancipation and freedom for oppressed groups. While it is clear that modernist emancipatory visions, like Kendall's (1992), offer nursing an essential awareness of social domination and its implications for health, postmodern critiques of rationality challenge many of the underlying assumptions of such work. Thus, while critical theory has much to offer nursing, postmodernism reminds us of the limitations of this paradigm, calling attention to the problems inherent in modernist conceptions of the rational human subject, social coherence, notions of causality, representation, foundationalism, and universalizing and totalizing knowledge claims (Best & Kellner, 1991).

Postmodern Divisions

Postmodernism is a reaction to and critique of enlightenment modernist thinking (Schwandt, 1997). Postmodern theories, "... can be used to attack or defend modernity, to reconstruct radical politics or declare their impossibility, to enhance Marxian theory or to denounce it, to bolster feminist critiques or to undermine them" (Best & Kellner, 1991, p. 256). Postmodernism can be applied in divergent ways because of the heterogeneity of postmodern thought. It is said that there are as many postmodernisms as there are postmodernists.

In an attempt to make sense of the divergent and contradictory stances within postmodernism, Rosenau (1992) made a useful distinction between skeptical post-modernism and affirmative post-modernism. Skeptical post-modernists are the post-modernists of despair. Skeptics, offer a “. . . pessimistic, negative, gloomy assessment, argue that the postmodern age is one of fragmentation, disintegration, malaise, meaninglessness, a vagueness or even absence of moral parameters and societal chaos . . .” (Rosenau, 1992, p. 15). According to this worldview, there is no truth, no subject, no author, there is only word play. While affirmative postmodernists agree with the skeptics’ critique of modernity, affirmative post-modernists have a hopeful outlook for the postmodern era. Affirmative post-modernists are process-oriented. They seek “. . . philosophical and ontological intellectual practice that is nondogmatic, tentative, and nonideological . . .” (Rosenau, 1992, p. 15). The affirmatives do not shy away from “. . . affirming an ethic, making normative choices, and striving to build issue-specific political coalitions . . .” (Rosenau, 1992, p. 15). Many affirmative post-modernists argue that some values are superior to others, in effect advocating for the enactment of moral choice. Emphasis on the margins, third world politics, everyday life, local narrative, and a modified subject are all integral aspects of the affirmative post-modern project. It is affirmative post-modernism that informs this work.

Philosophic Assumptions

The discussion up to this point has foregrounded a set of philosophical assumptions that were used to guide this research. The study of culture and society and

the interplay between “. . . representations and ideologies of class, gender, race, ethnicity and nationality . . . ” (Kellner, 1995, p. 6) are central concerns within these assumptions.

The assumptions are intended to guard against the conduct of research which commodifies, stigmatizes, and pathologizes marginalized people. In addition, the assumptions call into question glib modernist emancipatory and representational practices by highlighting the complexity of human lives and social phenomena. Finally, these assumptions call for the end of covert ideological positioning with an eye toward promoting counter-hegemonic research products.

Science is an Ideological Practice

From critical theory comes the idea that science is an ideological social practice (Lather, 1991). Consider the following questions. Who is deemed eligible to conduct science? How are scientists educated? What questions are deemed worthy and acceptable for investigation? What methods of investigation are promulgated in research settings? Which research findings are deemed pertinent and truthful? And finally, what is the characteristic course of action or inaction that follow research findings once they are presented? When considering these questions one can see that science is a culturally determined practice. Dominant cultural mores privilege the knowledge claims of some groups over others, and deem some areas of investigation important and others unimportant (or even taboo). Once the link between ideology and culture is understood, an open ideological stance in the conduct of human science becomes possible.

All science is, ideological, either overtly or covertly. Those who argue in favor of a science/ideology dichotomy, fail to recognize that all knowledge is a product of social relations, and that there are human interests inherent in all knowledge claims (Giroux, 1997). This is precisely why science is and always is an ideological practice. Critical science takes an open ideological stance which rejects existing relations of social dominance. In a critical vein, new Marxist, feminist, anti-racist, or other counter-hegemonic perspectives can contribute to ideological textual analysis. Such analyses offer oppositional readings which call attention to relations of dominance and challenge the status-quo.

Opposition to patriarchal subjugation of women that results in abuse and oppression of Muslim women within communities was the basic underlying ideological premise of this research. I am hopeful that these research findings will in some small way challenge the status-quo of existing social relations both inside and outside Muslim communities that contribute to the continued abuse of Muslim women in families and communities.

Science is Cultural Production

The production of knowledge and its dissemination permeate culture. As scientific findings find their way into our classrooms and into various forms of media, they become part of the cultural landscape. Historically, claims regarding racial inferiority and women's hysteria have been wrapped in the authenticity of science (Allison & Roberts, 1994; Holt, 1995; Veith, 1965). Stereotypes about the poor and the

fat continue to be enshrined in science (Hausman, 1981; Schorr & Schorr, 1988). Our daily lives are literally saturated by science.

Eating, having sex, parenting, relating, exercising, learning, intelligence, and the list goes on, are all imbued with scientific ideas. These ideas become reality for many. Defining reality is a circular process: culture informs and shapes science which in turn again informs and shapes culture. Hopefully, this process can work not only to legitimize and uphold dominant social relations, but also can be used for the purposes of resisting hegemonic certainties. As the knowledge, creativity, and resistance of the margins both within and outside of communities is transmitted via counter-hegemonic research, dominant discourses can be influenced. Because scientific findings are elements of cultural production, counter-hegemonic research efforts can challenge oppressive systems in an incremental fashion.

Knowledge is Provisional and Partial

There is no final knowledge because all knowledge is provisional and partial. Life is translation. Thus, the nature of knowledge becomes as transient a practice as interpretation (Geertz, 1983). The contingency and historicity of our interpretations make all knowledge claims “. . . contested, temporal, and emergent . . .” (Clifford & Marcus, 1986, p. 19). Recognition of the temporal nature of knowledge guards against depictions of marginalized people in totalizing ways. Movement toward an uncertain and partial scholarship encourages the development of new ideas while simultaneously discouraging authoritarianism in research.

Finding universal truths appears challenging at best. If science cannot offer us the truth, then what can be hoped for instead are accounts of reality which are less false (Harding, 1986). Constructing accounts of reality that are closer to the truth, in essence “less false” than other versions of the truth, is what science can offer. Thus, I make no claim that the results of this study present a complete and unchanging picture of abuse as it occurs among Muslims in American. Alternate perspectives, the passage of time, and differences between geographic sites ensure that the account presented here of abuse among American Muslim women is indeed partial and provisional in nature.

Critical Consciousness

Constructing accounts of realities requires a critical awareness of complex social processes, including the realities of racism, classism, sexism, heterosexism, and numerous other “isms” which perpetuate social domination. The absence of a critical awareness has been termed false-consciousness. False-consciousness is described as a form of self-imposed coercion and self-delusion (Geuss, 1981). It is asserted here that false-consciousness is not a useful concept for use with peoples of marginalized cultures since when used incorrectly it has the potential to compound existing stigmas marginalized people often face. Instead, the concept of critical consciousness (conscientizaco) is preferred. Conscientizaco involves learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality (Freire, 1968). It “. . . represents the development of the awakening of critical awareness . . .” (Freire, 1969, p. 19). This Freirian concept involves education as

the practice of freedom, allowing for enlightenment notions of progress while avoiding elitist notions of the oppressed as deluded masses unaware of their own interests. Such an approach recognizes the influence of hegemonic social relations on all people, encouraging researchers to recognize the limitations of their own thinking while listening with respect to the experiences of the marginalized. I am hopeful that dissemination of study findings will contribute to the development of critical consciousness concerning the problem of abuse among Muslims in America.

Relative Relativism

Relativism is the doctrine that there are no universal truths. Radical relativism asserts that “. . . any interpretation, value, and so forth is as good as any other; or, in a phrase, ‘anything goes’” (Schwandt, 1997, p. 137). I argue here that relativism should be used as a tool for gaining understanding, not as a worldview.

Relativism underpins the vast majority of cultural work in nursing (Baker, 1997). Cultural relativism refers to “. . . the perspective that the behaviors of individuals should be judged only from the context of their own cultural system . . .” (Baker, 1997, p. 3). Critics of cultural relativism condemn this approach as nihilistic, fearing this stance will lead to an anything goes approach to social existence (Geertz, 1984). The ability to take moral and ethical stands hinges on the acceptance at some level of an anti-relativist approach. This means that there are some universal rights and wrongs. Some universal wrongs, using some extreme examples, would include genocide, rape, and torture.

In nursing, sensitivity to cultural norms and values is necessary for the provision of culturally competent care. Such sensitive approaches require the use of a relativist, nonjudgmental approach to interviewing and nursing assessment. Sensitive relativist approaches increase the likelihood that cultural contexts around phenomena will be recognized by nurses, and ethnocentrism is less likely to run amok. Once a nonjudgmental approach has been utilized to gain understanding of other cultures, however, nurses will be compelled to turn toward a system of values to frame their understandings. The violation of human rights should be rejected in all contexts, however, what counts as human rights will not be unanimously agreed upon given the diversity of values extant among nurses who necessarily who do not perceive all violent/violating acts in the same way. Still, looking to international agreements such as the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights can provide common ground for nursing concerned about human rights violations both at home and abroad. Thus, by using a relativist approach to gain understanding and subsequently a non-relativist approach to frame this understanding, the use of relativism is limited to instrumental use for the purposes of gaining understanding, and is not embraced as a world view.

The Philosophic Human

Gaining understanding through instrumental relativism calls attention to human ways of being and understanding in the world. Central to understanding human ways of being in the world is the notion of what it means to be human.

Human science, intent on understanding the thoughts, feelings, behaviors and problems of humans, implicitly or explicitly rests on some philosophical (be it modern or postmodern) view of humankind. Having a clear conception of what it means to be human is important in human science because it influences how researchers, participants, and consumers of research understand each other, and in turn how they understand human narrative. In order to familiarize the reader with extant views, a brief review of modern and postmodern conceptions of being human follows.

Modernism's conception of humans is an essential element of hermeneutic and critical theoretical approaches to science. The modern human subject can be described as hardworking, disciplined, and responsible (Rosenau, 1992).

S/he is constrained by 'effort' and has a self-image of 'trying hard' and doing his/her 'best.' S/he has no personal idiosyncrasies, or at least s/he does not dwell on such issues. S/he plans ahead, is organized, and defers gratification (Rosenau, 1992, p. 43).

The modern human subject may become involved in political and ideological movements (Rosenau, 1992).

S/he may believe in free will and personal autonomy, but s/he will follow majority opinion (or the party line) once the vote has been taken and a decision is made. The modern human subject is, in other words, willing to subordinate her/his own interests for the good of the collective (Rosenau, 1992, p. 43).

In addition, the modern human subject respects reasonable rules, social proprieties, and established standards that seem just. "S/he searches, in good faith, for truth and expects that ultimately such a quest will not be fruitless" (Rosenau, 1992, p. 43). In summary, the modern human subject is a unified knowledgeable agent, with a set identity that values reason and rationality, placing these ahead of emotion. Within modernist thought there is an underlying belief in the future of humankind and the possibility of progress.

In marked contrast, skeptical post-modernists have announced the death of the human subject. An alternative to the modern human subject is the proposed post-modern individual. The post-modern individual "... is relaxed and flexible, oriented toward feelings and emotions, interiorization, and holding a 'be-yourself' attitude ... S/he is contented with a 'live and let live' (in the present) attitude ... " (Rosenau, 1992, p. 53).

This philosophical perspective seeks to find a middle-ground. Blending modern and postmodern views, this philosophical perspective asserts that there is no monolithic, completely rational, self-determined, self-knowing, unified and fixed human; nor is there a monolithic completely irrational and emotive subject. Instead, all humans are unique and each can be viewed as a mix of rational, affective, and unconscious forces. Humans make use of all of these forces while striving to make sense of the world as they experience it.

Human Categories are Arbitrary Social Constructions

While attention to the nature of the philosophical human subject is an important area of concern, perhaps even more important for research among marginalized people is recognition that the categorization of humans is a social construction. Categories such as race, class, and gender are used by societies as tools for the systematic oppression of humans placed in non-dominant positions (Rothenberg, 1998). The arbitrariness of human categories by skin color, hair texture, or genitalia is becoming acknowledged (Lorber, 1998; Omi & Winant, 1998; Rothenberg, 1998). Despite the arbitrary nature of such constructions, however, to say that categories such as race, class, or gender are socially constructed is not to say that these categories have no significance. On the contrary, a major intellectual project for marginalized people is thinking about the ways in which power is distributed along the lines of these categories (either for the benefit of, or against socially constructed groups). I have used this intellectual project to examine closely the processes of subordination at the same time paying attention to the numerous ways in which those same processes privilege others. The categories of race, class, and gender have meaning and clear social consequences (Crenshaw, 1995).

In summary, postmodern challenges to totalizing meta-narratives have revealed how American constructions of race, class, and gender, have suppressed difference, heterogeneity, and multiplicity, for the purposes of maintaining hegemonic relations of power (Giroux, 1993). The construct of gender in Muslim culture was particularly

salient to this research, shaping women's lived experiences through community norms and expectations.

Humans are Unique

Closely related to the idea that social human categories are arbitrary constructions is the recognition that all humans are unique. To some degree, the uniqueness of every human being is widely acknowledged. Despite this acknowledgment, totalizing categories of humans which ignore individual differences flourish in science. The emphasis on commonalties and shared meanings (which, like difference, is also pervasive among humans) has overshadowed the significance of difference. The tendency to lump humans into categories has served to marginalize human difference while simultaneously glossing over the heterogeneity of humanity. In recognition of the uniqueness of humankind, this philosophical perspective suggests an equal emphasis on commonalties and differences in the investigation of human phenomena. Acknowledging difference among Muslim populations was an important part of data analyses in this study. Differences in age, ethnicity, and religious interpretation significantly shaped abuse experiences of women in this study.

Postmodern Issues in Lived Experience Research: The Crisis of Representation

The postmodern turn has brought with it an assault on modernist confidence in authentic representation. Representation is being widely critiqued as fraudulent, artificial, deceptive, incomplete, misleading, and insufficient (Rosenau, 1992). Modernist assumptions underlying representation assume that "... something out there

is true and valid enough to be re-presented . . .” (Rosenau, 1992, p. 95). This view of representation asserts that interpreters can accurately capture and communicate a pre-existing phenomenon. Postmodernist critique suggests that claims to authentic representation are inherently flawed.

Postmodern critiques of representation have wreaked havoc across disciplines. In the realm of lived experience research, researchers’ ability to directly grasp lived experience has been imploded. As texts are created, lived experience is first interpreted by the subject, next reinterpreted by the author, and finally reinterpreted once again by the reader (perhaps many times) (Denzin, 1997). Thus, representation assumes the validity of a simulacrum, a copy of a copy. Postmodernists question claims to validity of such representations, and assert that rather than represent a pre-existing reality, representations create the truth they supposedly reflect (Rosenau, 1992).

There is no easy answer to the problems inherent in representation highlighted by postmodern critiques. Skeptical postmodernists have called for a complete abandonment of the use of texts (Rosenau, 1992). This drastic approach would decimate science, leaving only the use of fiction intact. While some postmodernists assert that all work is in essence fiction anyway, it is the business of science to attempt to make some distinction between pure fiction and serious attempts at representing reality. In response to this dilemma, it seems reasonable to create and consume text cautiously. Thus, the notion of any “. . . final, accurate representation . . .” must be rejected (Denzin, 1997, p. 5). The authority of any given text is limited, and it is understood that texts do not

represent truth, but instead versions of reality which are less false. This approach limits the authority of any text over time.

While claims to textual authority are limited in nature, the use of texts in the conduct of health research continues to require the use of an organizational framework in order to ensure that the production and analysis of texts is scholarly and rigorous. Such approaches are rooted in philosophical worldviews, such as the one presented above, and with careful attention to procedural techniques to ensure the credibility of accounts. The design and methods used in the conduct of this research consisted of an adaptation of interpretive phenomenology. A description of design and methods follows.

DESIGN AND METHODS

Lived experience research provides access to the particularities of social phenomena. By examining the everyday experiences of this sample of American Muslim women with incidences of emotional, physical, and sexual abuse, the cultural, social and ideological realities they lived everyday were examined.

Interpretive Phenomenology

Interpretive phenomenology examines the nature of meaning of everyday experiences (Van Manen, 1990). Interpretive phenomenological research methods are described by Van Manen (1990) as a dynamic interplay among six research activities: (a) turning to a phenomenon which seriously interests us and commits us to the world, (b) investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it, (c) reflecting on the essential themes which characterize the phenomenon; (d) describing

the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting, (e) maintaining a strong and oriented pedagogical relation to the phenomenon, and (f) balancing the research context by considering parts and whole (Van Manen, 1990, p. 30-31).

As an adaptation of this design, the following activities were also put to use: (a) exploring and unfolding the relations between lived experience and the broader social forces which determine it (Smith, 1990), and (b) problematizing the everyday local practices and activities which are organized by systems oppression and hegemonic processes (Smith, 1990). While the inquiry was informed in a preliminary way by the concepts of hegemony, marginalization, and culture, the inquiry moved from these preliminary formulations during the course of the investigation. The discovery of what American Muslim women were actually doing and what the relations co-ordering those activities were examined. The above-mentioned research activities were used as guidelines and not as a cookbook. Still, these guidelines provided useful and practical approaches for this research.

Study Participants

American Muslim women who had personal experiences with abuse were the population of interest for this study. However, two groups of women were included as study participants: (a) American Muslim women who were self identified as having experienced abuse in the past, and (b) American Muslim women who had not personally experienced abuse but were aware of the phenomenon within their communities through knowledge of the abuse experiences of American Muslim friends, family, or

acquaintances. For the purposes of this study American Muslim women were defined as women who self identified as Muslims and were citizens or permanent residents of the United States.

In addition to American Muslim women, some individual interviews with American Muslim men who were key informants were conducted. Two men and 1 woman in leadership positions were interviewed, each individually. These interviews were conducted solely for the purposes of gathering data to bolster understandings of the context in which American Muslim women experienced abuse. The data from these interviews were used as background information to assist with analyses of women's narrative accounts.

A Muslim community contact assisted in recruitment of study participants using network sampling. This contact served as a consultant throughout the study, providing an important insider perspective. The consultant was selected based on her interest and knowledge of both domestic violence and her ability to articulate cultural knowledge effectively.

A total of 17 Muslim women between the ages of 20-59 participated in this research. Sixteen of the women had been married between one and five times, and 1 was unmarried. There were 9 African-American, 3 Euro-American, 2 Arab-American, 2 Afghani-American, and 1 Indonesian woman in the study sample. The absence of women from Eastern Europe, Sub-Sahara, and Africa are notable limitations of the sample, since together they comprise a significant portion of Muslims in the United

States (Stone, 1991). There were 10 Muslim converts and the remainder were born Muslims. Educational attainment of the sample ranged from high school through doctoral levels. Women with conservative, moderate, and liberal interpretations of Islam were included. Muslim husbands were involved in the abuse of 13 of the 16 married study participants.

The data were collected in more than one location. Due to the interconnectedness of Muslim communities in the United States, the geographical locations from which data were collected are not disclosed. This will decrease the likelihood that the stories of participants will be recognized within their respective community settings.

Data

Unstructured Interviews

Individual and group, in-depth, face-to-face unstructured interviews were performed for the purposes of capturing American Muslim women's experiences. The voices of the women themselves guided inquiry in meaningful and culturally unique ways.

According to Benner (1994b) unstructured interviews are “. . . an effective way to set up a familiar communicative context and dialogue” (Benner, 1994b, p. 108). Benner's (1994b) guidelines for interpretive phenomenological interviewing were followed during the course of data collection:

1. Unstructured interviews were conducted in the home of the study consultant, or in cases where participants preferred, in the homes of participants. Interviews often

were embedded in the context of all day visits. Food and socializing followed interviews on several occasions. Conversational language that encouraged participants to talk about their experiences using their own natural language allowed for the emergence of cultural nuances.

2. In group interviews, I asked participants to talk directly to one another rather than talking down or up to me. This approach attempted to minimize the anxiety of the participants at the same time that it encouraged a familiar context in which to generate narrative accounts.

3. Narrative accounts were explicated employing a story-telling approach structured by the participants themselves. Participants were instructed that narrative accounts which included descriptions of "events, situations, feelings, and actions" were desired (Benner, 1994b, p. 108).

4. During interviews, I attempted to serve as an active listener, interrupting the stories as infrequently as possible. Consistent with the philosophical perspective guiding this research, I attempted to use instrumental relativism, taking a non-judgmental stance during all interviews.

5. Finally, during the interviews, I clarified and paraphrased the accounts. I attempted to avoid asking leading questions that might skew the meaning of accounts. This strategy encouraged the sharing of narrative accounts that were more than just facts and opinions, allowing for the production of text rich in the details of everyday concerns and practical knowledge (Benner, 1994b). Following Benner's (1994b) approach, I was

able to obtain rich narrative accounts that provided a window into the everyday lived experiences of American Muslim women with regard to the issue of abuse. This approach was augmented by the use of biographical narratives obtained during individual interviews. Biographical narratives were useful in that they provided important background information to aid in understandings of narrative accounts.

Procedures

Women were contacted and informed of the study by the study consultant. Those who were interested in participating were subsequently screened for physical abuse by either myself or the consultant. Participation in the study required that women no longer be partnered to men who had physically abused them. There were, however, some women who were in emotionally abusive relationships during their participation in the study. Once a woman agreed to participate in the study, the study consultant arranged a time and place for interviews. Participants were given the option of participating in individual or group interviews, or in both. The majority of participants participated in individual interviews, primarily for the sake of convenience.

As noted above, the interview procedures combined life history interviewing and focused interviewing approaches. Areas of interest for focused life histories were:

1. Tell me about your early family and community life experiences. For those of you who were Muslims as children, can you tell me what it was like to be a Muslim as a young girl?
2. What were your family relationships like?

3. Growing up were you ever aware of abuse within the Muslim community?
4. For those of you who became Muslims in adulthood what was that process like?
5. What are your family relationships like now?
6. Tell me about your life as a Muslim woman. What other aspects of your identity are important?

Once a focused life history was obtained, details of abuse experiences were placed in context. The next component of the interviews were the details of experiences of past abuse. This part of the interview focused on the concrete details of abuse victims' past experiences of abuse and the abuse experiences of Muslim friends or acquaintances not present during the interview (commonly known situations and events). Probes for the details of abuse experiences included these questions:

1. If you have experienced past abuse, or if you know of someone in the community who has or is experiencing abuse, can you tell me about that?
2. What occurred?
3. Was help sought?
4. If you sought help, what was that like?
5. If you did not seek help what were some of the constraints you faced?
6. What was the response of the Muslim community to the abuse?
7. Tell me about experiences in the health care and/or legal systems?

8. Is there any part of your religious culture which has helped or hindered your ability to leave behind abuse in your life?

After focused life histories and details of abuse experiences were obtained, the participants were asked to reflect on the meaning of their experiences. The idea of meaning "is not one of satisfaction or reward, although such issues may play a part in the participants' thinking. Rather, it addresses the intellectual and emotional connections" (Seidman, 1991, p. 12) between participants' abuse experiences and their lives. Probes for the meaning component of interviews included these questions:

1. Reflecting back on your life and past abuse experiences, can you tell me what kinds of meaning you have found in those experiences? What sense have you made of them?

2. How do you make sense of the abuse problem in Muslim families and the community response today?

3. How have your experiences of abuse influenced where and who you are today?

Through the particularities of lived experience, the contexts and processes which shaped these American Muslim women's experiences with abuse emerged. I conducted all interviews often times accompanied by the study consultant. After obtaining informed consent, interviews were audiotaped and transcribed for analysis.

Data Collection

Data were collected over a period of 6 months. Three group interviews (with between 3 and 6 participants per group) and 17 individual interviews were conducted over three phases. Interviews lasted from 1 to 5 hours. The average interview time was approximately 2 hours.

Phase One

During phase one, interviews with the first wave of participants ($n = 6$) were conducted. Biographical narratives were solicited followed by stories of abuse and its social context, as noted in the interview guides above. The majority of initial interviews in phase one were followed up with a second, and in some cases, with a third interview. The second and third interviews with the first wave of participants followed up on: (a) areas of concern that participants wanted to address, (b) clarification from previous narrative accounts, and (c) probing of initial themes emerging from ongoing analyses.

Phase Two

During phase two, the second wave of participants ($n = 7$) was interviewed. The interviews with these participants also included biographical narratives followed by stories of abuse and its social context. However, these interviews were also used to follow-up on themes derived from interviews conducted with the first wave of participants. Interviews with the second wave of participants were not followed-up with second interviews in all cases, and there were no third follow-up interviews with the second wave of participants. The volume of data obtained from the first wave of

interviews precluded the need for such extensive follow-up at this stage of data collection.

Phase Three

The third wave of participants ($n = 4$) were few. They were interviewed once during the final phase of data collection. Interviews with these participants were conducted in the same manner as were phase two interviews, incorporating themes introduced during waves one and two as the analyses moved toward completion. During the third phase of interviewing all of the remaining follow-up interviews were performed and all participants were contacted to provide them with the opportunity to meet and discuss interpretations of their stories.

ANALYSIS

Interpretive Phenomenologic Analysis

The goal of data analysis was to uncover themes of commonality and difference among American Muslim women with regard to their lived experiences with abuse, and ultimately to place emerging themes in a larger social context. The lived experiences of American Muslim women with regard to the issue of abuse, as captured in unstructured interview transcripts was extracted using these strategies: (a) thematic analysis, (b) biography, (c) comparison with key informant data, (d) paradigm cases, and (e) exemplars.

Thematic Analysis

Data analysis occurred concurrently with data collection. Analyses were refined using data from follow-up interviews. First, each interview text was read in its entirety for the purpose of obtaining a global understanding of each narrative. Open coding of narratives using pencil and paper began shortly thereafter. These preliminary codes were then examined for areas of commonality and difference. An initial draft of emerging themes and important differences was completed early in the data collection phase of the study. Subsequent to this early thematic analysis, the data were arranged using the three concepts, culture, marginalization, and hegemony. These concepts helped me to see the larger picture of social processes extant across cases. This broader picture helped in creating a hierarchical coding scheme for use with the data management computer software Nonnumerical, Unstructured Data Indexing, Searching and Theorizing (NUDIST).

At this point I began to leave behind my relativist stance as I explored the structure and meaning of systems of oppression in participants' lives. Consistent with the ideological stance of this research, gender and ethnic oppressions were of particular interest as were the cultural constructions of gender and ethnicity embedded in the texts and the ways in which these constructs shaped meanings of abuse experiences. Next, I imported narratives into NUDIST and began coding. All narratives were coded in NUDIST, further refining existing preliminary codes obtained with pencil and paper open coding techniques. Using NUDIST, I continually refined codes for a final total of

92 codes. My thoughts and ideas were entered into NUDIST as I worked using the coding and memoing functions of this software. Finally, codes and the corresponding data bits were printed out on hard copies. I then performed line by line coding, further refining themes to create sub-themes fitting within previously identified larger themes. This process allowed an analytical structure of themes and sub-themes to emerge.

Biography

As I attempted to comprehend stories, participants' biographical narratives aided significantly in my ability to understand attitudes, perceptions, and meanings embedded in the texts. Many participants had been severely abused as children. Brutality was ongoing for some women from childhood on—it was all they knew. This information enriched my understanding of their lives in ways that would otherwise have been impossible. In addition, growing up in chaos was a notable finding in some biographies. Women who converted to Islam often times found the order and stability Islamic life offered comforting. Still, for others who had grown up as Muslims and had witnessed abuse and patriarchy in their families and communities, feminist leanings were emerging. By understanding where women had come from, I was better able to comprehend their perceptions of Islam and of the abuse they suffered. Thus, biographies framed lived experience narratives by contextualizing locale, identity, and personal history.

Key Informant Data

Interviews with key informants were compared to women's narratives to aid in my understanding of community functioning and norms.⁵ Three key informants who were in leadership positions in Muslim communities were interviewed. The interviews focused on leadership roles in Muslim communities, in general, and with regard to domestic violence, in particular. In many cases, community leaders' perspectives clashed with those of participants. Women looked to their *Imams* for leadership, support, and counsel. Typically they did not receive this assistance to the extent needed. One *Imam* interviewed felt strongly that women should utilize existing non-Muslim resources when seeking help. This perspective stood in sharp contrast to attitudes reflected in stories where 'keeping the *kafirs* out' of Muslim family and community affairs seemed to be a strong cultural norm. In general, interviews with key informants provided important context for women's stories. Male community leaders' lack of knowledge, interest, and understanding of the problem of woman abuse was evident in interviews with key informants and the women's stories of community interaction and help-seeking reflected this reality.

Paradigm Cases

Data analyses resulted in the creation of four large over-arching categories. These were: (a) community, (b) abuse experiences, (c) marriage, and (d) divorce. Paradigm

⁵To protect the identity of key informants, I used data from key informants solely to aid in the analysis of primary data sources and did not cite from these interviews directly.

cases are strong stories that enhance understanding of lived experience (Benner, 1994b). I used paradigm cases as a perceptual strategy to aid in understanding and recognizing how sub-themes extant within each category were interrelated. Paradigm cases are strong instances. The paradigm cases were ultimately used as strategies for presenting data, allowing for enhanced understanding of the totality of themes embedded in stories. Paradigm cases were selected based on the presence of important commonalities and differences with other stories. Finally, selection of paradigm cases was contingent upon each story's ability to provide a lucid and powerful picture of the themes they represented.

Exemplars

Once categories, themes, and sub-themes were in place, I began to search the text for exemplars that provided clear and powerful pictures of each theme. Exemplars were selected based on the following criteria: (a) logical fit with categories and themes, (b) clarity and power, (c) diversity of speakers, (d) ability to reflect differing nuances of themes, and (e) previous use (I tried to avoid using exemplars more than once). As I interpreted exemplars, I looked back to the entirety of the texts from which they came, and also compared them with other exemplars in each category. Finally, to enhance my understanding of exemplars, I placed them in the context of existing background knowledge including cultural, biographical, and key informant perspectives.

To summarize, the following steps outline the procedures for data analysis in the conduct of this research:

1. Reading of the texts to obtain a global understanding.
2. Constructing biographical stories for each participant.
3. Examining the texts for emerging themes of commonality and difference.
- 4 Examining the texts for background meanings.
5. Identifying emerging patterns of culture.
6. Examining the texts with an eye toward identifying the concrete manifestations of hegemonic processes and marginalization in lived experience.
7. Nesting emerging themes in biographical contexts.
8. Nesting emerging themes in social contexts.
9. Moving back and forth between the parts and the whole of the text to identify meaningful connections.
10. Extracting paradigm cases and exemplars from the text to illustrate important themes nested in their biographical and social contexts.

The process of analysis required that I draw on my own personal knowledge of Muslim culture and the cultural knowledge of the study consultant, while at the same time trying to stay true to the meanings embedded in the texts. In addition, I attempted to maintain an awareness of the philosophical assumptions underlying this research, reminding myself that this work is partial and provisional—it does not represent this phenomenon in its entirety. This awareness was somewhat comforting to me. I realized that this work, while it should be scholarly and accurate, does not, nor should it, represent the last word on this topic.

As mentioned before, I was also concerned about the ugliness of the topic and the ways in this research could be used to further stigmatize Muslims. This concern was counterbalanced by my commitment to a critical stance rooted in an ideological worldview that emphasizes women's empowerment. Ultimately, my belief that woman abuse is wrong and that it must be fought in all cultural contexts has been the driving force underlying this work.

PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS

Confidentiality procedures were discussed in detail with the study consultant and during group interviews with all participants. I emphasized the absolute necessity of maintaining the anonymity of all potential and actual participants at all times. I found participants open to and respectful of the need to maintain the confidentiality of group members and I am unaware of any breaches of confidentiality among group members to date. There were no identifiers on transcribed interviews that could be linked with consent forms. Consent forms were stored in locations separate from the data. All data in my possession—including data stored on disc, audio-tapes, hard copy notes, and signed consents—have been kept in a locked file that only I have access to.

Because of the sensitive nature of the subject, participants in groups were encouraged to promote a supportive environment that was comfortable for all participants. One group interview was cut short because it appeared to me that 1 participant was uncomfortable in this context. This participant was later interviewed individually, and that group was not reconvened. The second group was comprised of

women who were very supportive, comfortable, and interactive with each other. This group participated in an initial and a follow-up interview quite successfully.

Because participants were formerly abused women no longer partnered to those who had physically abused them, safety concerns were not as prominent in this study as they would have been had participants been in physically abusive relationships during their involvement in the study. Still, safety of the participants was a primary consideration. Safety issues in this research included the following measures: (a) contact with all participants were made via a study consultant to prevent alerting emotional abusers to the study; (b) interviews took place in locations that were safe, private, and comfortable for participants; and (c) procedures to protect confidentiality (Parker, et al. 1990) were maintained during the study. Measures to protect confidentiality continued beyond the completion of the study. I identified paradigm cases and exemplars that could pose potential breaches in confidentiality upon completion of data collection and analysis. Subsequent to this, identifying information was removed to the extent possible without altering the content and meaning of narratives. Finally, I obtained permission from participants to use paradigm cases and exemplars distinctive in nature prior to including them in this written document.

CREDIBILITY OF THE ACCOUNT

As noted earlier, postmodernism has cast the project of epistemological justification into question. The problems inherent in authoritative claims to representation, along with raging debates around the nature of truth, have called into

question the usefulness of any set of epistemic criteria in evaluating science (Schwandt, 1997). In the midst of this turmoil, however, for those who continue to believe in the merits of research, the belief that research must be held to some standard of quality remains. Thus, evaluation of this research will focus on the credibility of the narratives and their interpretation.

Credibility of the Narratives

The credibility of the narratives is examined with regard to the likelihood that women told their stories truthfully—that they shared their stories more or less completely and accurately (as they remembered them), not withholding or distorting information out of fear or malice. The claim that the narratives obtained for analysis are credible should not be mistaken for a claim that they represent a monolithic truth or reality of *what happened*. Rather, it is a claim that the stories as told by participants, were communicated honestly, openly, and in good faith.

Prolonged Engagement

Prolonged engagement is a means of obtaining credible accounts in qualitative research:

Prolonged engagement and *persistent observation* in the field include building trust with participants, learning the culture, and checking misinformation that stems from distortions introduced by the researcher or informants (Creswell, 1998, p. 201).

As a Muslim woman working with a Muslim woman consultant, insider knowledge of Muslim culture was strongly in place. Building trust with participants was less

problematic than it would have been for an outsider. Many of the women knew both me and the study consultant. If not, they were introduced to us through a common acquaintance. In particular, the study consultant had been previously active in the area of domestic violence and many women had trusted her with their stories well before the initiation of the study. Thus, women were telling their stories to fellow Muslims, at least one of whom they knew well and trusted. This sense of trust was further enhanced by the familiar and even social context in which data were collected, creating a safe and comfortable environment for participants to tell their stories. Finally, because many of the women participated in follow-up interviews, the opportunity for clarification and further exploration of themes was always possible. Questions around possible misinformation were easily addressed during follow-up interviews as well as through discussions with the study consultant.

Credibility of the Interpretation

The credibility of the interpretation of accounts is examined with regard to the elements of bias and reason. There is no doubt that my interpretations were mediated by my own lens of experience and values. However, the interpretation of accounts should represent the interplay between my interpretive lens and the content of all narrative accounts—not simply my personal opinion. Evaluating the credibility of interpretation requires that the account be, on the whole, reasonable to others, and that adequate safeguards to protect against discernible biases were in place during the conduct of this research.

The four procedures used to enhance the credibility of interpretation were:

(a) triangulation, (b) peer review, (c) member checks, and (d) external audits. Each of these is briefly discussed.

Triangulation

Data triangulation is the use of multiple and different sources to provide corroborating evidence (Creswell, 1998). The use of key informant data provided background information and corroborating evidence for women's narratives. The implicit and explicit attitudes and assumptions in key informant accounts supported women's stories of help-seeking and of Muslim community responses to abuse.

Peer Review

Peer review provides an external audit of the research process, helping to keep the researcher honest and on track (Creswell, 1998). The dissertation committee served this purpose well. Each committee member had access to all narrative accounts, and discussion of the research process was ongoing. Verbal and written questions around the methods, meanings, and interpretations provided corrective guidance and useful insight during the data collection and analysis phases of the study.

Member Checks

Member checking involves taking analysis and interpretations back to participants so that they can consider the accuracy and credibility of the account (Creswell, 1998). Efforts to contact participants for the purposes of providing them with the opportunity to review paradigm cases and exemplars derived from their own experiences were made up

to three times for each participant with a known current address and/or telephone number. All members whose stories contained highly sensitive information were contacted to provide them with the opportunity to review and change interpretations of their stories if desired.

External Audits

External audits involve the use of an external consultant “. . . to examine both the processes and the product of the account, assessing their accuracy” (Creswell, 1998, p. 203). The study consultant provided an insider perspective throughout the study. She had access to all narratives, codes, emerging themes, interpretations, and conclusions. Her input provided an important source of guidance during the research process.

SUMMARY

In summary, the credibility of the narratives and interpretation are supported by the procedures described above. Creswell (1998) recommends the use of at least two verification procedures in any given study. This study exceeds this recommendation, using five procedures in total to ensure the credibility of the account. This account does not claim to be an authoritative representation of American Muslim women's experiences of abuse. Rather, it claims to be a credible account that represents a partial and provisional view of this experience based on the stories of 17 women.

CHAPTER FIVE:

COMMUNITY

The community, referred to by participants in this study almost like as an entity in and of itself, was central to many of the themes in this research. The concept of the *ummah* among Muslims is relevant to this analysis. *Ummah* means a people or a nation. In particular, it means the community of Islam which transcends ethnic or political definition (Glassé, 1989).

The Muslim world is divided into two major parts: *Sunnis* and *Shiites*. *Sunnis*, the followers of the tradition of the Prophet Mohammad, form the vast majority of Muslims in the world. *Shiites*, followers of Ali, hold that only descendants of Ali can be true Imams. This division occurred when *Shiites* broke away from mainstream Islam after the death of the Prophet Mohammad during the reign of Ali as fourth caliph. Although the *Shiites* are divided into numerous sects, the *Sunnis* are not (Clarke, 1993). Perhaps this is because among the *Sunnis*, the consensus of the *ummah* is a legitimizing principle in the interpretation and application of Islamic law (Glassé, 1989).

The vast majority of participants in this study identified themselves as *Sunni* Muslims. The *Sunni* emphasis on group consensus was evident in the data since group thinking and conforming to established norms made the difference between belonging and ostracism for abused study participants, receiving help during crisis or receiving none. *Sunni* Muslims all over the world see themselves as part of a larger nation of

Muslims. This nation values group consensus and stresses the importance of maintaining a Muslim identity. The Muslims in North America are no exception. Thus, this research does not directly address the experiences of women from other Muslim communities in America such as the *Shiite* and Nation of Islam communities.

THE MEANING OF COMMUNITY

Participants in this sample described community as an integral part of being Muslim. In essence being Muslim meant being part of a community, sharing ties of faith, friendship, and identity.

Social Structure

Being part of the Muslim community provided a tight social network for women who lived their lives in accordance with expected Muslim community behavioral norms. Segregation of the sexes is typical in Muslim communities (sometimes complete segregation occurs, particularly in very conservative communities). Segregation occurs via the use of barriers, screens, or simply by dividing space in a room between men and women. In addition, social taboos prohibiting mixing of men and women serve as a deterrent to gender integration. Thus, familiarity between the sexes in public space is unlikely to occur. This arrangement fosters bonds among women in Muslim communities as they turn to each other for fulfillment of their social, emotional, and intellectual human needs.

In addition, Muslim communities tend to be insular in nature. Marginalized from dominant American culture and aware of their difference, Muslims make Muslim

communities central to their lives. As a result, Muslim women are propelled even closer together, a group of women separate to some extent from men and separate in many ways from America at large. Their difference from non-Muslims and segregation from men within Muslim communities drew the lines of affiliation tightly, and many Muslim women in the sample had comfortably looked to each other exclusively for outlets of social expression.

The structure that we had in the Nation of Islam brought me into a tightly controlled group, and gave me a social life that I did not have before. And connected me with families which I did not have before. And made me part of something that was very important. And it gave me an identity that I had never had before.

I think we really loved each other it was like we were friends. We visited each other, we ate together, we watched each other's kids, we were just all at each other's houses. And we shared information.

The connection and feeling of belonging these exemplars describe was an important part of the lives of participants. However, these connections relied on sameness. When women violated norms of expected behavior in any way, when they no longer fit in, they lost this social network, finding themselves excluded either immediately or over time. The next exemplar comes from a woman who was raising her children alone after divorce. While Muslim community life had previously been central to their lives, they found themselves gradually excluded:

It just seemed like I did not really count—I did not matter and my kids felt the same way. I got a call from a rather influential person. And in his tactless china shop sort of way he was trying to imply—I mean I knew he was trying to find out why I was not covering, he wanted the low down on it. And I did not get to that with him. And he is going “how is everything sister?” And I am like “fine.” And it is like I was so mad, you know, once again the only time I hear from you people

is in your official capacity when your numbers are down at your gatherings or you are starting to feel a little guilty because Rammadan is coming up and they have not seen you for a long time. I do not need your financial contributions, I do not need your pity. I need connections to people and so do my children. I know there are brothers in this town who could take my son to a basketball game or come and take him to a Friday night gathering.

Although she had previously been insulated within the comfortable confines of Muslim community life, this woman, subsequent to her divorce, found herself no longer fitting in. Consequently, she and her children lost the close social network they once had. The Muslim community that had once been a source of comfort and belonging had now become a source of tension and pain.

Identity

Participants in this sample talked about having a Muslim identity. This sense of identity came from being part of a community—part of the greater *ummah*. For many participants, being Muslim was part of who they were. It was part of their basic sense of self. Accordingly, participants who grew up Muslim and/or raised their children Muslim had a sense of being different from non-Muslims. They felt as though the only place they fit in was in Muslim communities. Raised Muslim in the context of a Muslim community, this woman talked about how being Muslim growing up affected her sense of identity and belonging:

Participant: *I always felt different from everyone else. So I felt like in a way like a minority or someone who is really kind of out.*

Interviewer: *You felt different when you were growing up?*

Participant: *Yes, very different. I guess because there just was not any group to really fit into or identify with unless you go to the mosque. But a lot of your social life is centered around school so there were not any Muslims at school. So I felt really self conscious about that.*

As an adult, this woman felt as though she was different from non-Muslims although she chose not to be an active member of the Muslim community.

Participants who grew up Muslim, learned from other Muslims, the importance of being distinct from non-Muslims. The next exemplar describes one woman's struggle to understand what it means and to maintain her Muslim identity while at the same time questioning childhood teachings:

There is a very distinct split between Muslim and non-Muslim. I have heard comments in my childhood and in my adulthood like "Muslims are not part of the melting pot, they do not melt in they always remain distinct." Or actually hadith about not behaving like the unbelievers—always remaining distinct . . . there is a big emphasis on not being like other religious groups and not mixing in with the society at large to the point where a lot of Muslims believe that cannot even vote and you cannot take part in any kind of American political process that Muslims have to remain completely separate in their social systems even though they live among other people. Not take part in the larger society.

Learning from an early age or soon after conversion that they are distinct, that they are different from non-Muslims, participants described an identity forged in difference.

Being Muslim meant being part of the *ummah* and being different in belief, appearance, and behavior from non-Muslims.

Being Muslim was the single most important aspect of this woman's identity:

Islam is the focus of my being. I define myself first as a Muslim, second as a woman, and third as a certain ethnic group . . . To me first of all when things emanate from me, they emanate through an Islamic perspective. For instance if we are at a seminar and we sit down and we say "who are you?" If we were to

go around in a circle and say "who are you?" There are some women who would say I am Joe Bloe's wife. And that is how they are defining themselves in terms of a man, or I am Mohammad's mother. They define themselves in terms of—or I am a lawyer. And when I think of who I am, I think first of myself as a Muslim. It is closer to me.

Being Muslim was the single most important aspect of many participants' identities.

Forging this Muslim identity came at some point in their lives from being part of a Muslim community.

The Story of Selwa

A paradigm case is a story that reflects many of the common themes found in other narrative accounts. Selection of a paradigm case should be made with clarity of understanding concerning the similarities and differences between cases (Benner, 1994b). The paradigm case of Selwa reflects the intricacies of community involvement in domestic violence. Selwa is an African-American convert who has been in several abusive marriages. Selwa is different from the rest of the sample in that she has maintained close ties to non-Muslims and that she did not involve the Muslim community in her decisions to marry or divorce. This difference may have been the reason, in part, that her Muslim community failed to support her during her most recent abuse experiences. As her marriage ended, Selwa's abuser terrorized her. Selwa turned to her Muslim community hoping for help when she found herself in crisis. The community responded, not by assisting her, but instead by isolating and criticizing Selwa.

We got married in the Southwest and then we moved to California. I had known him for twelve years and I always liked him. He was a very nice person— as long

and as you did not get him upset he was not violent. And actually I do not think he is a woman beater. I think he has a bad anger management problem. Like for, example, the other guys only beat women. But he will fight anybody. He fights the police, he fights other people when he gets upset. So anyway I married him and he was fine he was sweet as heck, you know, flowers, diamonds the whole bit . . .

Like many abused women, Selwa did not experience abuse immediately. However, when the honeymoon period was over the abuse soon started.

He did things like scare people . . . he is kind of tall you know. He would walk me in a corner and get real close and say you know you are really pissing me off. You are pushing my buttons kind of thing. And I knew what that meant . . .

During the course of her marriage, Selwa endured repeated threats and assaults at the hands of her drug-addicted husband. Eventually the marriage spiraled to an end.

Participant: *When we were breaking up . . . he vandalized my property . . . And he attacked me one day and stole my pocket book that had all my money orders and money and took that . . . And then I was getting harassing phone calls at work everyday. He was calling and hanging up. I got caller ID and I found out who it was. And in between all that I had talked to the community in California and called the Imam in so the whole world knew this man was terrorizing me.*

Interviewer: *Now during this period when you had talked to the Imam did you feel like you got any support from the Muslims or not?*

Participant: *Honestly not really. I want to be fair. Maybe they did not help because I went back and forth so much and the Imam said now you know how many times has there been a divorce? Are you all still married? Even he did not know. I lost track. Living here I think we got divorced every other year. I mean it was always a struggle. I was always throwing him out because of the violence and the drug addiction thing. So I guess the Imam was not sure what we were. And then maybe people did not want to get involved. Maybe they did not know me well enough. I had heard a rumor, someone had heard a rumor that I was using drugs too, that I was a drug addict which was not true. Maybe they thought*

we were both on drugs and they did not want to get involved. I do not know why. But no one called me and said you know how are you doing are you okay? I got more support from the non-Muslims—they are the ones that gave me money. They were the ones that gave me a place to stay and called to check on me.

Since Selwa had maintained ties to non-Muslims she was able to draw on this support network as the abuse escalated. Her efforts to obtain help from her Muslim community failed, leaving her feeling isolated and disconnected from her community of faith.

Interviewer: *Did you feel there was any disapproval from the Muslims or did you feel like it was more just indifference?*

Participant: *I felt that I was less than them. They had that kind of attitude. They were better than me. Because I was involved in the domestic violence thing And that meeting about my situation—that was not even about support That never ended right They threw me off guard. I was already emotionally out of it from all that I was going through plus I had all of these things getting around unintended being not attacked but it was the same thing it was really not good. I think since that the relationship I have with them has never been the same.*

Instead of offering Selwa support, the community chastised her for complaining about the lack of help, leaving her isolated from the Muslim community and without any Muslim support and/or assistance.

Selwa's case highlights the ostracism, criticism, and labeling that abused Muslim women in this study experienced when they failed to conform to their Muslim communities' expectations. While specific community expectations varied depending upon ethnic cultural influences such as the concept of family honor extant in Middle Eastern cultures, the significance of adhering to community norms was consistently present in all narratives obtained for analysis.

MUSLIM COMMUNITY IN THE UNITED STATES

Stereotyping of Muslims as terrorists, oil sheikhs, and/or black militants is prevalent in the United States today. Among the American populace there is a general lack of understanding and even basic comprehension about who Muslims are and what they believe. This stereotyping and prejudice confront American Muslims in their daily lives, compounding the effects of other existing systems of oppression. As a group, Muslims are very cognizant of this stereotyping and many respond by further insulating themselves within Muslim communities. Marginalization of Muslims and Muslim communities in the United States frames their existence and is therefore salient to any analysis of American Muslims' daily lives (Al-Shingiety, 1991; Haddad, 1991; Phillips, 1995).

Concerning abuse, awareness of stereotyping among participants sometimes contributed to a hesitance to disclose abuse to health care providers. The first exemplar illustrates how prejudicial attitudes toward Muslims may influence an abused woman's willingness to disclose in health care settings:

I was not telling doctors or anybody because they are going to think that is Islam and it is not Islam . . . Because they already have enough preconceived notions about Muslims—Muslims are this or that and women are oppressed which they are not if you are following Islam properly.

This participant, like many others, was protective of the image of Muslims, and therefore was unwilling to reveal the ugliness of her abuse to outsiders. Protecting the Muslim

community was therefore an integral part of this woman's interactions with the health care system.

Also salient to the problem of abuse was the hurdle of discrimination against Muslim women seeking employment. Economic disempowerment is yet another barrier for women seeking to escape abusive relationships. Women in this sample who wore head scarves did experience employment discrimination:

Participant #1: *She just finished a medical assistant program and has been looking for work but can't get work due to—she thinks a lot of it has to do with because she is covered.*

Participant #2: *I think so too.*

Participant #3: *So she is really frustrated. She is just like, why did I go spend all this money and all this dedication and now nobody is going to hire me?*

Participant #2: *The second time I went for orientation they asked me are you going to wear that to work just like that? Well I wore it back and I had a nice white one [scarf]. They asked me well are you going to wear that and I said oh yes it is part of my religion . . . and then they physically told me that we cannot hire you like that.*

Facing employment discrimination and widespread stereotyping by non-Muslims, Muslim women in this sample relied heavily on their Muslim communities for connection and support. Sadly, in many cases, abuse and divorce wreaked havoc on these important ties, disrupting abuse victims' most important social connections. Marginalized as Muslims by dominant American culture, these women found themselves further marginalized within their Muslim communities. A sense of not fitting in anywhere or with any group emerged.

COMMUNITY PATTERNS

Highlights of the themes most prominent in the data follow with the understanding that this is not, nor is it intended to be, a representation of what Muslim community life is. Rather, themes extracted from this sample's experiences of abuse relating to community life are what this research has to offer.

Diversity

American Muslim (*Sunni*) communities tend to be diverse and are comprised primarily of people of color. While there are clusters of communities formed along racial and ethnic lines, these tend to be subcommunities extant within the larger Muslim community in any given geographical area. Diversity occurs along a range, with some communities more diverse than others, but diversity is the rule, overall. Muslims comprise sizable majorities and minorities in several so called second and third world nations. In the United States, African-Americans comprise the single largest ethnic group among Muslims. While the study sample falls short of representing the tremendous diversity extant among American Muslims, data relevant to ethnic cultural differences among Muslims was present in the stories of participants.

Arab-American

Second-generation Arab-American women and Euro-American women who had been married to Arabs described Arab cultural influences on their family and community lives. Discrimination and gender roles were prominent themes in the data pertaining to Arab culture.

Abusers who were Arabs often had difficulty coping with the realization that they were part of a marginalized group in America. In the next exemplar, a participant describes her ex-husband's parenting style. His response to marginalization was to assert himself as superior and to encourage separateness from Euro-American non-Muslims:

The kids in our neighborhood were not good enough because they were not Muslim, they were American. And the constant subtle put downs even though he would be nice to the kids and try to be like the neighborhood hero. Oh see how good I am because I am an Arab Muslim man . . . He would say yeah your friend is going to grow up to be president of the United States and you will just be a brown Muslim in this country—you just wait and see how he treats you then. Stuff like that to seven and eight year olds.

Similarly this same woman perceived that her ex-husband and the Arab-Muslims as a whole in her community looked down on Euro-American women, even their own wives:

As American women we are never going to measure up . . . I think it goes back to that underlying precept that you are not as valued, you are not as worthy because you are an American. You may have a past. You are not good enough. You will never measure up.

Imperialism, and more recently, the West's support of Israel and the Gulf War, have influenced some Arabs' attitudes toward the United States negatively. This negative perception sometimes surfaced in the marriages of Arab men married to Euro-American women:

About the time I became pregnant the third time he became involved with the PLO and what the PLO did was they fostered a sense of guilt. They really made the people feel guilty because all the suffering the Palestinian people had—and how dare someone be an American and be comfortable when the Palestinian people were suffering, and we really have to hate Americans because Truman did

this to us. We have to hate the Jews and it was—he was emotionally unstable. He had come from a very abusive childhood himself and this just tipped him over the edge and he started hitting me. Usually just a sharp slap on the bottom but not a swat. It was like a vertical slap, so it was extremely painful and would bruise and I would say “why are you doing that?” And he would say “because you are the only American I can get my hands on.”

This woman's Palestinian husband felt rage at his displacement and at the suffering of his people. This rage, along with his subsequent marginalization in the United States, influenced the meaning of this abuser's marriage to a Euro-American women. This story was consistent with other narratives from Euro-American women who had been married to Arabs. These participants perceived that their ex-husbands experienced inner turmoil as they attempted to balance conflicting loyalties and struggled to maintain their identities as Arabs and as Muslims in America. Ultimately, these women felt their husbands used them as scapegoats in their marriages.

In addition to the influence of discrimination, participants talked about the infusion of elements of Arab culture into Muslim communities that were more or less Arab dominated. Embedded within the data were examples of Arab cultural attitudes pertaining to marriage, abuse, and divorce. The next exemplar describes how important fathers were in arranging marriages. Being without a father complicated this second-generation Arab-American Muslim woman's life:

I had been wanting to get married for a long time but it was hard because my parents were divorced and in this kind of Arab-based Muslim community it was the fathers who did all the arranging of marriages. And I did not have a father so I was pretty much a non-entity in terms of getting married.

When this same woman married an abusive Egyptian man and subsequently sought a divorce, Arab culture once again shaped family and community responses:

Well when I was first separated from my ex-husband one of his friends called me and he was Egyptian. One of his friends went on and on about how I should not get divorced because then I would just be shamed and I would never be able to get married again no one would ever want me and I would have no life after this.

The importance of family involvement in marriage and divorce decisions, an emphasis on virginity, and the shamefulness of divorce were common themes in the data descriptive of Arab cultural influences. These data come not only from the stories of second-generation Arab-American participants, but also from the stories of Euro-American participants who had been married to Arabs. The Euro-American participants attempted to adapt to and in many cases adopt Arab culture as their own during their marriages.

African-American

African-American participants shared a common Muslim culture with Muslims of other ethnic backgrounds. However, African-American culture and history also shaped African-American participants' abuse experiences.⁶ This was particularly true for participants whose Muslim communities were predominantly African-American. Like their Euro-American peers, African-American participants who married outside of

⁶ One African-American participant during the member check, commented that she believed African-American Muslims should be referred to as indigenous Muslims. To prevent confusion with Native-Americans (as indigenous to the U.S.), and to state clearly which ethnic culture is referred to, I have chosen not to use this term. Still, it is important to note that many African-American participants view themselves as indigenous Muslims as compared to immigrant Muslim populations in America.

their ethnic group and who were primarily involved with communities dominated by Arabs were more likely to be influenced by both African-American and Arab culture. The mixing of cultures among Muslims was a common pattern observed in the data.

In particular, African-American participants talked about the legacy of slavery on the self and on family life:

The chattel slavery for African-American people would produce a matriarchal system because the men would be systematically destroyed—economically, politically, socially, spiritually—by chattel slavery. And the women would be allowed to survive because of their tenacity for survival. Because they had to care for the young they would be allowed to survive . . . you can have various forms of servitude, and human beings can be trafficked back and forth but if they are stripped of their language, their culture, they are stripped of their names, they cannot do anything to free themselves. They do not have the tools to assist them in their own freedom . . . We suffered a kind of slavery that never existed before and those effects are still with us. And Islam is the only solution. It is the only solution that will take apart the mind from chattel slavery—that fears authority, that is destructive to family life.

In this woman's view, Islam is the tool African-Americans need to improve their health and the health of their families in the aftermath of slavery. The meaning of Islam for her is not just spiritual, but it also represents a freeing of the mind from bondage inflicted by racist America.

The next exemplar also addresses the legacy of slavery and its effects on African-American family life:

Slavery influences how we define our family and what constitutes a family for us. And so the whole idea of men taking care of women, be strict or whatever, that is not an easy thing because we have lived in a culture where it has been a legacy that African-American women have been at the head of the household, so now when you have an interpretation of the religion that now says well no we are going to turn this around, Allah says men are supposed to take care of women, and the woman is supposed to be subservient—that goes against the grain.

For this woman, obedience was particularly problematic for her in the context of her African-American heritage. This particular participant had been divorced three times by the time she was in her early 20s. Of the 9 African-American participants, 4 had been married three or more times.

Consistent with the first exemplar, the following exemplar comes from an African-American woman, who saw Islam as a means for African-Americans to free their minds:

I just recently finished a workshop called undoing institutional racism where they talked a lot about internalized oppression and you know, that comes out in different ways and with the internalized oppression and when a lot of Muslims, African-Americans become Muslim, it is like this freeing of the self because you know, you are living in a society where you are not part of the dominant culture and you are considered a minority. Minority I do not mean numbers, but I mean minority of worth, and Islam frees you from that. It gives you a sense of being.

The data suggest that African-American participants tended to see Islam as a re-making of the self—a healing force in the context of racism. As Muslims, African-American women adopted Islamic teachings and became part of the common Islamic culture. They tended to change their views regarding dating, to enter arranged marriages, and to emphasize the importance of being married, consistent with other Muslim study participants. However, the shame associated with divorce was more or less absent among African-American participants, and they were less likely to accept abuse in families than were their Middle Eastern, and Eastern counterparts.

Afghani-American

There were 2 participants who were originally from Afghanistan in the study sample. These 2 women were quite different from each other, one being from an urban setting with well-educated parents, and the other from a rural mountain setting with parents who had little or no education. Given the differences in their experiences they might have been from two different countries.

The woman from an urban setting described attitudes toward divorce in her family thusly:

Participant: *I was living in Kabul and my sister married an Afghan and she got a divorce.*

Interviewer: *And your family was okay with that?*

Participant: *Yes. You do not like people to get divorced but if they are not happy it is better than staying in the relationship.*

This relative acceptance of divorce contrasts sharply with the experiences of the second participant from rural Afghanistan who suffered severe abuse in her arranged marriage to an Afghani:

I do not have a relationship with my family . . . Because one of my brothers told me "you know what? If you divorce this man I will never ever walk in the door of your house and you have divorced your brothers. You have divorced your family."

It is clear from the contrast between these 2 participants from Afghanistan, that the differences extant within a given ethnic group can have powerful influences on abuse experiences. Just as Muslim culture is not monolithic, neither are the ethnic cultures that intermix with it. For abused American Muslim women, common cultural experiences do

exist and they are important to understand. However, recognizing the significance of difference is essential to any understanding of American Muslim women's lives.

Hybrid Cultures

There is a mixing of religious and ethnic culture wherever Muslims live. One participant, originally from Indonesia, described the overlap of Islam and Indonesian culture:

In Indonesia we are in a Muslim country so the religious culture is so into Indonesian culture that I do not know where the division is.

The influence of ethnic culture on Muslim culture is sometimes difficult to discern. The lines of culture blur as ethnicity and religion intertwine. Practices that are attributed to Islam are often times ethnic in origin. More often, parts of Islam mix with parts of ethnic culture producing practices rooted in both.

Converts

Because Islam is growing so rapidly in the United States (Powers, 1998), within Muslim communities in America there are almost always converts. Ten of the 17 participants in this study were converts. Women who converted to Islam overwhelmingly were attracted to the concept of monotheism. They expressed that Islam was what they had always secretly believed:

The Libyan guy in another state sent us boxes of stuff mainly in English. You know a Qur'an and a lot of different Islamic books and I just thought yeah right. Because of the Khomeini stuff. But then months later I started reading them and thought wow here it is this is what I have always believed to be the truth about the creator and God. Not this stuff I had heard in church all these years.

The first time I heard Islam taught and I learned what Islam was and I met people that actually practiced Islam, practiced the behaviors and the character, and I was so impressed and it was what I had always believed. I was really attracted to Islam intellectually having grown up as a Christian and I could never reconcile the Trinity and mathematically, intellectually, I could never reconcile that and so Islam was really—the unity was really the attraction for me.

Attracted to monotheism, these women gradually accepted all aspects of Islam and became active in their Muslim communities over time. After experiencing abuse and getting divorced, their community relationships and in some cases, their beliefs, changed. Despite the abuse and the changes they have gone through, they continue to hang on to Islam and persist in raising their children as Muslims often in the face of adversity.

ISLAM IS PERFECT

The belief that Islam is perfect and that it embodies the perfect way of life for those who follow it accurately and sincerely was evident in the data. The oppressive power of this belief saturated community life and influenced individual and group behavior.

The notion that Islam is perfect is a Muslim value present in Islamic literature:

... The great world prophet whose message was so perfect that it met the requirements not only of all contemporary nations but of all future generations as well. This is plainly claimed by the Holy Qur'an, a claim not put forward by any other heavenly book or any other religion: "This day have I perfected for you your religion and completed on you My blessing" (5:3). ... Religion being made

perfect, and prophethood being made complete, there remained no need for another religion after Islam or for another prophet after the Holy Prophet Muhammad (Ali, n.d, p. 260).

This belief constrains innovation (*bid'ah*) and encourages conformity within Muslim communities. *Bid'ah* (innovation) refers to any practice or belief which was not present in Islam as it was revealed in the Qur'an, and established by the *sunnah* on the basis of prophetic traditions. For some Muslims, *bid'ah* includes any practice that was not present at the time of early Islam. However for the majority of Muslims, the introduction of something new is *bid'ah* only when it contradicts the spirit of Islam (Glassé, 1989). Making changes to a perfect system is discouraged. Emulating perfection is a logical course of action.

Adhering strictly to the Qur'an and sunna, that's what I am trying to do. To the pure Islam, okay I am not saying somebody else who does not cover her face is not adhering to the pure Islam but I am trying to do the best I can. I have had a chance to study for so many years now and I am still studying of course. I am trying to follow exactly as the prophet (peace be upon him) would try to teach us to behave and how we should feel how we should do—because Islam is the perfect way.

Striving to live exactly as the companions of the Prophet Mohammad did in seventh century Arabia is a difficult task. The challenge inherent in this aspiration and the literalism that underlies it sometimes left these women open to self-doubt and self-reproach during abusive marriages:

We have been misinformed on how you actually can and should obtain our rights. I in essence gave away all my rights and I have seen so many women do the same thing. Because you are a good Muslim and because he is a good Muslim that he must be right and this is the way we are. Islam is perfect so I

must be the bad party here. There must be something wrong with me. I should work harder at being a good Muslim.

The belief that Islam is perfect promises the perfect marriage, provided both parties are good Muslims and follow Islam correctly. When an abuser, who by all outward appearances is a good Muslim, abuses a good Muslim woman, this less than perfect arrangement conflicts with prescribed expectations. Criticism of the self, as well as community criticism of Muslims who are perceived to have gone astray from the perfect path, was a common experience among the study sample. The self-doubt participants experienced in some cases resulted in renewed efforts to be a better Muslim in accordance with community expectations. Some women continued in that pattern while others began to question. Despite their questioning, however, they continued to believe in Islam as a perfect system:

Participant: *I think Islam is perfect but I think people's interpretations of it are flawed. I mean really if you are calling Islam submission to your husband that shoots at the very core of the whole thing of putting Allah at the center of your life. Instead you are putting a man at the center of your life.*

Interviewer: *What is the influence of this idea on a group that they are living the perfect life? How does this influence their behavior?*

Participant: *It tends to make some arrogant. You know because we have a group here that thinks everybody that is not practicing Islam like them are kafirs. And they take great pride in pointing out who they think is kafir. Kafir this and kafir that. And it gives them this sense of arrogance where they feel obligated to define who is in the perfect group and who is not.*

Because Islam is perfect, straying from established behavioral norms meant risking being excluded from community life, or in some cases, as the above exemplar attests,

being labeled *kafir*. Because of community members' desires to be good Muslims and to maintain an affiliation with Muslim communities, they strived to emulate the one perfect way. This pursuit led to a kind of group conformity which significantly influenced abuse experiences in participants' Muslim communities.

UNITY AND CONFORMITY

Participants described being part of the community as essential for practicing Muslims. They described the presence of a kind of group-think embedded in Muslim community culture.

I heard somebody say at a lecture or someplace that Muslims should think more about the community as opposed to the American ideal of individualism. That the individual is not important to the Muslim way of thinking. That the community is everything and that you really cannot be a Muslim unless you have a community. Which is also very emphasized in the Qur'an that the Muslims have to stick together, they have to be united, they have to be an ummah, a nation, all Muslims pray the same way, pray in the same direction, greet each other the same way, particular identifying characteristics—it is really important to be identified as a Muslim.

The exemplar above describes the inter-relatedness of unity, being part of the *ummah*, and practicing Islam in accordance with group norms in Muslim community life. Being part of a Muslim community means following Islam as the community perceives it:

I think that yeah Islam is probably perfect but not as we understand it that is for sure . . . but you are not free to think about those things if you are living in that little subculture. You do not dare allow yourself to think those things . . . because you will get booted out if you do not agree. If you do not fit the mold there is something wrong with you.

Women's risk of exclusion from Muslim community life varied, depending on their individual communities, with some communities being more tolerant of divorced women

than others. The next exemplar tells a story about a woman who was blacklisted from her conservative Arab dominated community simply for trying to arrange festivities for women without the approval or involvement of the male dominated leadership:

Participant: *They had a problem with her because she wanted to have something for Eid [religious holiday] for women. They always have for men at that masjid. She said why not women? Why should not women have something? And then when she started that then the mosque started saying bad things and the people from the mosque would not even go to her house. And they did not want her to go to the mosque after that.*

Interviewer: *Because she wanted to have an Eid party for women? They always have an Eid party for women don't they?*

Participant: *They wanted it to be regulated by the mosque. She did not want it because at the mosque they have a small room that all the women and kids go to and they cannot play or do anything and it gets so hot in there. She wanted a better place to rent like at the University. Yes she wanted to have people come there and decorate it so they can have room to sit and talk. But they did not want that. Now she is on the blacklist now.*

As this exemplar illustrates, community enforcement of group norms occurs at the group level. Individuals perceived as straying from community norms are social outcasts. In cases of abuse, group norms become pivotal in women's experiences. Community values concerning submission of wives to husbands, abuse, and divorce were of paramount importance for abused participants seeking help.

Facades

The importance of conformity in community life elevates the significance of outward appearances as a means for assessing compliance with established norms. For men, coming to Juma prayer, growing a beard, and wearing certain clothing facilitated

their acceptance as good Muslims. For women wearing hijab, avoiding contact with men, being obedient to husbands, and avoiding loud and/or bold behavior were preferred. These appearances, unfortunately, often were façades. This was particularly problematic for women in this study who married men based on their reputation for piety and then found out later these men were not good Muslims, in fact they were abusive. Compounding this problem further was the community response to women's dilemmas. The community was more likely to believe the stories of men who gave the appearance of being good Muslims than they were to believe the stories of women.

How many alhamdulillahs [praise be to God] you have in your sentences—that makes you a good Muslim. Yeah he is a good Muslim. He comes to the mosque, he has a thobe, he has a turban, he has a beard therefore they will tell you he is going to make you a good husband. You better get married to him sister. Or they will say he can't be beating you up because he does all of those things. It is very easy to give the façade of being a Muslim if you consider Islam a way of life and not a state of being. They have not developed any of the spiritual aspects and characteristics of a Muslim but they are doing all the outward things. They are praying in the mosque. They are thickering [repetition of religious phrases following prayer, sort of a form of meditation] very loudly, you know. They have this criteria of what to be, and in the mosque—yeah, if you show up and you have got the buzz words, then you are a good Muslim.

The façade of being a good Muslim was what attracted the woman in the next exemplar to her now ex-husband:

I thought I was going to have such a great life with a Muslim leader . . . I wanted a nice Islamic life and learning. That was not what happened. I was treated so unjustly . . . and other people who are supposedly religious have done bad things. Like my ex-husband with the long beard.

Like the woman in the above exemplar, the outer conduct and appearances of their ex-husbands before marriage fooled many participants who had experienced abuse. In a

search for meaning, the woman in this next exemplar rejected the emphasis on outward appearances:

The Islamic identity that my kids had is what I also had which is a fictitious façade of you are a good Muslim if you do this, this, and this. Following rules, these outer conducts and appearances. That is not being a good Muslim and that is what I have told my kids. . . . I am much more concerned that they maintain their values of integrity, honesty, helping other people, kindness, not stealing, not lying, learning to provide for themselves. You know kind of some universal truths that I think unfortunately a lot of Muslims have forgotten, or that they think we already know.

As the woman in the first exemplar stated—it is easy to project the façade of a pious Muslim. Likewise, it is easy for abusers who batter their wives, emotionally, physically, sexually and/or spiritually behind closed doors, to give the façade of being good Muslims. This façade confuses victims and community members who have trouble reconciling the reality of abuse perpetrated by men who appear on the surface to be good practicing Muslims.

KEEP THE *KAFIRS* OUT OF IT

Participants in this study described their communities as insular, avoiding outside influences as much as possible. The desire to stay on the perfect path, to avoid innovation (*bid'ah*), and to maintain Muslim identity and unity all reinforced this insular existence. Muslims' marginalized status in America further supported their tendency to be insular, since prejudice and discrimination are barriers to understanding and open cultural exchange. This insular existence influenced the abuse experiences of participants since the community often discouraged seeking help from outsiders.

A few participants described a distrust of counseling services provided by non-Muslims. The fear that therapists would not understand the Muslim lifestyle and in cases of abuse, would recommend divorce, were mentioned. The tendency to go for help within the community was prevalent, despite the recognition by participants that community members tended to be untrained and often ill equipped to help:

Interviewer: *What made you decide to go to the Imam?*

Participant: *I just wanted help dealing with our problems in Islamic ways and wanted support from an Islamic viewpoint. I wanted to go to counseling a lot too, but he did not. He always said he did not want to go to counseling because with therapists who were not Muslims—they could not understand. He always said that and so we went to the Imam.*

In addition, to being wary of non-Muslim therapists, condemnation of police involvement in family violence was present in some communities:

Participant: *I remember being older, 16, or 17, and calling the police because my dad was hitting and kicking my mom. And I remember lot of negative feedback from the Muslim community members over that incident.*

Interviewer: *What kind of negative feedback?*

Participant: *Oh saying I should not have done that, I was wrong.*

Interviewer: *Why were you wrong?*

Participant: *Because I was defying my father and I was kind of labeled, actually forever after that by certain people as the one who had called the police on her father. But in spite of that I never felt that I had done the wrong thing . . . And I remember an incident similar to my own in which a girl's father actually broke her arm and the support of the community went to the father, because he had been put in jail, and that she was ostracized and criticized for reporting the abuse.*

The preceding exemplar comes from a second generation Arab-American woman, and the story she recounted about the child abuse also involved a second generation Arab-American girl. The community she grew up in was an Arab dominated group and she perceived that the community's strong negative reactions both to her and the girl she remembered were likely influenced by Arab culture to a some degree which is highly patriarchal. But here again, the interwovenness of religious and ethnic culture were apparent making the separation of Arab cultural influences from Muslim cultural influences difficult at best.

The last exemplar describes the community mindset regarding seeking help from non-Muslims. This participant reported that women are at risk for being labeled if they dare to venture outside of the community seeking legal assistance:

I think if someone is brave enough to go outside of their house usually they are going to go to a friend . . . and then you have the dimension of you are brining non-Muslims in to this if you call 911 or if you go to a lawyer. I mean I experienced that with my divorce. You know leave the kafirs out of it. You know, we will just deal with it in the community. You know, how can you take the non-Muslim's advice over a Muslim's advice. And then they bring in that dynamic which is also used for manipulation, bring in that dynamic of Muslims versus non-Muslims so that if you try to seek outside help, then you are looked on as even—you are double bad because you are bad because you left a Muslim and then you are double bad because you have gone to the non-Muslims.

Since community is so important for Muslims and since group norms are rigidly enforced, seeking outside help was a last resort for many participants who experienced abuse. Going to the *kafirs* seemed to occur when there were no other options.

THE MUSLIM COMMUNITY AND WOMAN ABUSE

The importance of community as a source of connection, identity, faith, and prescribed norms provides the background information necessary for understanding the abuse experiences of study participants. The communities described by participants provided connection, identity, and spiritual direction at the same time that they rigidly enforced group norms, prompted by the overlying belief that Islam is perfect. A kind of group conformity with an emphasis on outward conduct and appearance consistent with prescribed norms was evident. In addition, these communities tended to be insular, discouraging meaningful contact with non-Muslims. Putting all of these elements together provides a glimmer of understanding of the web of constraints abused participants found themselves facing. It is important to take into account this web of constraints when contemplating abuse stories generated by this research.

Muslim Communities Are Unprepared to Deal with the Problem of Abuse

Any examination of the responses of Muslim communities to abuse as described by participants should include the recognition that Muslims in the United States are small in number and tend to live in isolation. As participants in this study noted, Muslim communities lack the resources necessary to effectively deal with abuse:

I could not try to get help in the marriage. Well I will say I tried to talk to people but we did not have any resources. I mean the Muslim community, one, does not want to hear about it, or two, they want to be helpful but they have no idea what to do. Three . . . I think we are at a disadvantage because we are isolated. Like that sister I knew whose husband would not even buy groceries. Well they lived three or four miles from any Muslim neighbors. Who is going to keep an eye on

her? Who is going to enforce her rights? Nobody. Overseas at least you have those little networks of friends, neighbors, families, that kind of look out for you even though they are still denying that anything is going on.

Absence of extended family networks and neighborhood support compounds existing isolation of Muslim women in America. Even when women were able to reach out for help, help was often lacking or ineffectual. Since the communities described by this sample often tended to be insular, and community members preferred to try to solve problems within the community, resources extant within communities were of primary importance. Unfortunately, these resources were typically absent:

It is not really organized. There are not any set steps. If there is a marriage contract being broken there is no religious court here. Maybe in some other cities it is more organized but because we have no Islamic courts. It is all so secular, we can use the Islamic contract but we cannot do anything else here. And one person cannot do all the things, the marriages, when somebody dies, the janaza, the sermons, we do not have the income. We do not have the resources. And we do not have the staff like psychologists, marriage counselors, people who are really knowledgeable about family life in the religion here. And a lot of divorce if we had these resources could have been avoided.

Leaders who responded to requests for help tended to lack the skills necessary to deal with abuse effectively. Leaders tended to believe men's stories over women's, to encourage women to stay in abusive marriages, and/or to be overextended and lack the time needed to really make a difference.

The lack of resources reported was not limited only to human resources, but also to physical resources:

Well I think what we really are dealing with here is a lack of resources in the community. We need the resources to get together. Look at that building. It is so small. How can we offer community workshops and get together without the facility?

Because of their small numbers in the United States, American Muslims tended to have very limited funds for building a Muslim infrastructure. When communities were able to obtain large sums of money, they tended to come from overseas, often introducing conservative Middle Eastern influences.

A Code of Silence

In addition to lacking resources, participants' communities also tended to encourage a code of silence around the issue of abuse. Don't ask about abuse and don't tell. This woman believed that this code of silence served a purpose—to maintain the integrity of the marriage:

You do not go telling your friends, the people at the coffee shop, your neighbors, your mom even. You do not tell anybody, you keep it and try to solve it. A person is supposed to try and solve it at home because the more people know there is embarrassment and it will be harder for people to get back together.

Despite this woman's belief in silence, when her abuse became severe enough she wanted to confide in family and community members. However, her belief in being obedient to her husband prevented her from doing so since he ordered her not to tell anyone.

The code of silence was so strong in the next participant's community that even when friends of the family witnessed an assault on her in her home no one spoke of it:

Participant: *He made some threat about taking the kids and I lost my temper and actually slapped him on the neck with an open hand and I think he would have killed me but fortunately the teenage daughter of one of our friends was home, so he was kicking around the floor and he had picked up a wooden chair and was*

going to smash it over my head, she just grabbed it from behind and unbalanced him the other way and pulled the chair backwards instead of its going forward.

Interviewer: *So at that point you had witnesses to your abuse.*

Participant: *Yes that was the first time.*

Interviewer: *And did you find that you received help and support from your Muslim friends after that, after the abuse became known?*

Participant: *Not in that instance. I did not ask for any either though.*

Interviewer: *They were aware of what had occurred?*

Participant: *Oh yeah.*

Interviewer: *What was their response?*

Participant: *We did not discuss it. I did not seek help. It was not brought up. It was not discussed.*

Interviewer: *You did not find it odd that their daughter was a witness of an assault in your home and they did not even talk to you about it?*

Participant: *No. I mean it was a rather embarrassing thing.*

Despite the fact that the woman in the above exemplar had known the parents of the girl who witnessed her assault for many years and considered them close friends, she did not discuss her abuse with them, nor did they with her. This was true despite the participant's statement that she believed her abuser would have killed her that time if had there not been intervention.

Finally, the code of silence surrounding abuse extends also to Muslim health care providers. This participant was a health care provider who cared for several Muslim

women clients in her area. Despite her status as a Muslim woman and as a health care provider, abuse intervention and disclosure were very limited in her practice:

Interviewer: *How do you approach abuse in your practice? What kind of things should health care providers be sensitive to culturally do you think for Muslim women when they are trying to help them?*

Participant: *I do not do anything about that because they are adults. If they are abused they should do something.*

Interviewer: *But you can offer them some information.*

Participant: *They know. This one woman, a while ago she told me that some of the neighbors called the police and the police came and they said that some abuse was going on, the neighbors reported it and she said no there was nothing going on. I said was there any abuse? She said no. She said they are moving out because there is somebody who is reporting things falsely to the police. And then I saw her a couple of weeks ago and she said she got divorced. I said how come? She said her husband was very abusive, and I said was that the last time that you said the police came and they reported that he was beating you? She said yes. She said she was the one who was telling the police there was no abuse.*

Interviewer: *She would not even tell you about it when it was happening another Muslim woman?*

Participant: *No . . . I do not know why.*

Like many other health care providers, this participant did not routinely screen for abuse in her practice, nor did her clients disclose abuse to her. The code of silence regarding abuse was strong in the women's accounts. The silence was broken only after divorce in many cases.

Muslim Community Response to Abuse

As noted previously, participants who suffered abuse sought help from within their families and/or Muslim communities before seeking assistance from non-Muslim sources. The help women received, when there was any, consisted of advice, listening and support, housing, very small monetary donations, and mediation. However, out of the 11 women in the sample who reported past abuse, 9 also reported that the response of their Muslim communities overall, had been harmful rather than helpful. Of those 9 women, some received no help or support at all, while others received sporadic support that was often conditional upon marital reconciliation.

Leadership Responses

Leadership in Muslim communities typically consists of an *Imam* and in some cases of a group of advisors (*shura*) either elected or appointed. The *Imam* is the central leadership figure in American Muslim communities. The title of *Imam* refers to a man who leads prayers by standing in front of the rows of worshipers. Additionally, the title refers to someone who is the head of a community or group. The selection of an *Imam* should be based on knowledge of the Qur'an and *sunnah* (Glasse, 1991). In background interviews with Muslim leaders conducted for this research, there was unanimous agreement that *Imams* as prescribed by Islam must be men.

Two men who were in leadership positions were interviewed as well as 1 woman who was in an advisory position to the *Imam* of her community. There were divergent perspectives among the three interviewed regarding the problem of abuse in Muslim

communities. One *Imam* was strongly in favor of Muslims using existing (non-Muslim) resources and seemed frustrated that community members failed to do so. He placed responsibility for getting free from abuse primarily on the victims of abuse. The second man interviewed was a leader in an educational organization which hosted a series of lectures and provided Islamic weekend school services to the community. He described examples of situations in which members of his organization had attempted mediation for couples and in some cases had resorted to methods of intimidation to discourage abusive behavior. His vision of the solution implied an approach within the community, although he did not expressly condemn use of non-Muslim resources by victims. The third and final background interview with a woman in an advisory position offered yet another perspective on community leadership and woman abuse. This informant believed that she had little voice on the advisory panel in general. Specifically concerning the problem of abuse, her suggestions for community intervention eventually withered, due to neglect and indifference on the part of the leaders who were primarily male. These background interviews are consistent with participant narratives in that they reveal the following: (a) Muslim community leaders lack awareness and knowledge about issues of abuse; (b) the system of leadership in Muslim communities is patriarchal; and (c) the problem of abuse is received with indifference and/or is approached simplistically, thus failing to address the complexity of the problem in women's lives.

The patriarchal system extant in Muslim communities, in some cases, tended to make leaders view men as more valuable community members than women:

Participant #1: *I went to him on many different occasions to go and talk to him about problems and . . . he would say okay we are going to try and address the problem, but we do not want to run the brother away from the community. Remember that?*

Participant #2: *So the brothers presence in the community was more important than your abuse?*

Participant #1: *Yeah exactly, and like different brothers in-between would see what this person was doing, but you know, they would not say anything, you know, oh we have got to respect the brother.*

Interviewer: *So that was a Muslim leader that you went to or?*

Participant #1: *It was the Imam.*

Participant #2: *This person was the Imam or should I say the amir of the mosque?*

Participant #1: *It was the Imam but it also happened with the amir.*

The woman in the above exemplar, herself, eventually became distant from her community. The community failed to assist her, despite her repeated requests. Over time, her community labeled her as a troublemaker and ostracized her from their ranks. Similarly, the woman in the next exemplar sought assistance from her *Imam*. The *Imam's* attempts at mediation failed and he eventually disowned the problem.

Apparently this participant's repeated attempts to get help were an annoyance to him and he subsequently distanced himself from her. Instead of receiving support, this woman was treated coldly:

Interviewer: *Have you received any support or assistance in your current situation?*

Participant: *None.*

Interviewer: *Have you sought out help or?*

Participant: *Repeatedly.*

Interviewer: *From who?*

Participant: *From the Imam. The leader of the community, and it got to the point, he gave a little superficial help at first, just came over and gave my husband a little pep talk about marriage once or twice, which did absolutely no good. When I was asking for deeper help than that I got none, and it actually got to the point where he gave me the cold shoulder and began preaching in the community at the Friday prayers that people were not to come to him and ask him for any help. And he was so cold to me for years.*

The *Imam* in the above exemplar lacked knowledge of abuse, and that lack of knowledge prevented him from seeing the negative impact of his actions. He took a ‘blame the victim’ stance, a harmful approach that left this abused woman without support from her community.

The next exemplar reveals once again the problem of *Imam*’s complete lack of knowledge around abuse issues:

It was clear to me that a lot of people in the Muslim community had not experience with people like my ex-husband. The Imam that we had back then said “well why don’t you just leave town sister?” We can find you somewhere to go.” I said “No. This is my town. This is where my family lives, I do not know anybody anywhere else. I have a job. I am not leaving town.” I mean he just wished I would go away because he did not know what to do. And I understood that very early on it became very clear to me that people had no idea what to do in situations like this.

Constrained by the commonly held belief that Muslims should keep the *kafirs* out of their problems and by the fear of being misunderstood and stigmatized by non-Muslims, abused women in this sample turned to their leaders for assistance. Sadly, the leaders of

the Muslim communities described by this sample lacked the knowledge and skills to address the problem constructively. Indeed, in many cases, the male leadership made things worse for women, contributing to their isolation and feelings of despair.

Support for Victims

Consistent with the data regarding leadership responses, the majority of study participants reported that support for victims was typically less forthcoming than was support for abusers in communities. The support described by women primarily involved listening and providing emotional support.

Listening

Women in the sample were fortunate if they could find non-judgmental Muslim friends to confide in:

I mentioned a couple of things to one sister I stayed with and told them I had been hit in the face. She was my age, in her fifties. And she has Muslim children in the Middle East so she is not abused but she is understanding and I could confide in her.

The woman quoted in the next exemplar found strength to leave her abuser after talking with a Muslim woman friend:

Interviewer: *Then what was the point where you decided you could not take it anymore?*

Participant: *I do not know if you know sister Kareema? Do you know her? She was the one that gave me—the only support that I got was from another family friend of ours.*

Interviewer: *Did you confide in her?*

Participant: *Yes. She was the one that—she was my wings that is all I can say.*

Interviewer: *You talked to your sister-in-law and you talked to Kareema?*

Participant: *Yes because in my family no one was listening to me. So finally Kareema said what is going on, why are you like this you are not the same person anymore. And I was just like this is what is going on what do I do? Every way I turn they are going to call me bad anyway. She said well I cannot make up your mind for you but I know your daughter should not be raised in a family like this. If you cannot do it for yourself than do it for your child. And that is what really woke me up.*

While women friends were those most likely to extend sympathy and support to abused women than the community at large, in cases where the abuser failed to conform to community expectations by violating behavioral norms women did receive temporary assistance from their communities:

The community was supportive because I think at that point in time I had the reputation and he did not. I had worked pretty hard to be active in the community even though he was not. And even then you know, I mean I really thank Allah for the people that were supportive and did listen to me at midnight you know, sobbing and being all upset. And that is a debt I am trying to repay with other sisters that come along you know what I mean? But nobody knew what to do. There was no way to make a guy behave at that point.

Shelter

In addition to listening, 2 women reported receiving help from Muslims in the form of temporary shelter:

After he was gone I took all my—not all, but I took some clothing and some belongings and went to a Muslim co-worker's house and stayed there and from there went to my mother's house, and I never moved back into that apartment. I stayed with those people for a few days and then it became kind of unsafe because he was calling there and harassing them. So I went and stayed with another family, a Libyan family . . . and they were in such an influential position in the Libyan community that they knew they were safe he was not going to harass them.

Both of these women had good reputations within their communities. The woman in the first exemplar reported that the support she received was fleeting and that the community soon turned its back on her. Her husband was a community member in good standing and her refusal to consider reconciling with this so-called good Muslim put an end to any help from her community. The woman in the second exemplar continued to receive support over time. In this case, the abuser had a drug problem and was clearly outside of the boundaries of accepted Muslim community behavioral norms.

Mediation

Efforts at mediation involved counseling of couples by authority figures within communities as well as the forging of contracts. These efforts were often ineffective in stopping abusive behavior:

When I was 18 or 19, women would come to our house to talk about what happened outside of their houses . . . because nine times out of ten my dad knew their husbands, so my dad would talk to them or speak o hem or find out their story, because there is always two sides to any story, and of course the women would think whatever my husband told you, here is my story, this is what really happened, so you know, my dad would try to be a mediator and then after a while it would work, but then after a while it would not, you know, it would just continue and my dad could not do much, and then they would just come to our house just to relax, stay a day or two and then go. And then after a while my dad started taking them to shaikhs and then the shaikhs started writing things down. Maybe they could get an agreement going, okay you know, do this, do that, X, Y, and Z. Well that was not working.

The idea that men will stop abusing their wives if someone tells them they should not do that, or if they sign a contract, revealed a certain level of naivete among Muslims described by this sample. This naivete, was perhaps preferable, however, to the absolute indifference described in the next exemplar:

I kept asking for help and a good friend of my ex-husband's father and a long time family friend talked to my ex-husband a few times. Later I found out that rather than really helping he was kind of dismissive of the whole problem and thought we should just work it out on our own.

Once again, women's efforts to get help met with indifference or as is the case in the next exemplar well-intentioned ignorance:

My mom had went to the mosque and talked with someone who was supposed to be, I forgot his name, but he was supposed to be the guy who talks to people when they are having relationship problems. She asked him to come to our house and he came and talked to us and he just—I do not know—he had just kind of a weird view to me on things. I could not even relate. I do not know, he just did not have any good ideas or anything.

Support for victims was present, but it was scant and typically ineffective. The most significant and meaningful avenues of assistance came from women friends who were non-judgmental and who listened with a caring supportive attitude. These women were rare in the communities described by participants.

Support for Abusers

Support for abusers varied depending on the ethnic background of the community. Communities dominated by Middle Eastern immigrants tended to provide substantial support to abusers, while African-American dominated communities tended to overlook or ignore abusive behavior among community members.

The woman in this exemplar came from an abusive household and reported that herself and her sisters eventually became involved in abusive marriages in adulthood. In her sister's case, the community provided significant support to the abuser:

My sister was involved in a very abusive situation and the community put their support behind her ex-husband, bailing him out of jail and writing letters to the

court attesting to his excellent character even though there had been several incidents of violence which the community knew about prior to that.

The assault described above was an attempted homicide. Despite the severity of the assault, the victim received no support. This case, resembled in many ways, an attempted honor killing, wherein a male family member suspects sexual indiscretion on the part of their female relative. In order to maintain the family honor, the woman is murdered, her life relatively worthless in comparison with the significance of honor and the need to maintain tightly controlled social control over women's sexuality (Nightline, 2/15-16/1999).

The ability of murderers or attempted murderers to garner support is also evident in the next exemplar. The abuser described below was jailed for domestic violence charges and was bailed out by the *Shiite* community. When he subsequently murdered his ex-wife, he was able to garner support from the *Shiite* community once again by labeling her a prostitute:

Participant: *The shiite community bailed him out of jail because they were not his immediate community [they did not know his real character]. . . . and after the murder there were only one or two brothers that sided with him. Unfortunately they were the ones who were willing to write letters, they were the ones who were able to get on the Internet. They are the ones that sent the articles to the newspapers in Iran.*

Interviewer: *I did not know about the articles what was that?*

Participant: *They wrote articles asking for money when he was jailed after the murder. Because he portrayed himself as being a political prisoner. That he was being unjustly accused. And that his former wife was actually a prostitute. So therefore he said*

someone else killed her. And he was being blamed for it and that was the lie that he would tell.

To the credit of the *Sunni* community the murderer had originally belonged to, they did not take part in efforts to support him in any way. Still, the fact that a murderer was able to garner the kind of support he did from any Muslim community is disturbing.

Finally, this exemplar describes the assistance offered to an abuser. While this man had never tried to kill his wife, he had severely abused her. Despite this, the community offered him shelter and sympathy:

Participant: *He was trying to get the sympathy from the Muslim community like it was her fault. You know, he was living in the mosque now. He is not doing well. He looks disturbed. He looks sad because the marriage you know, because she is the one that asked for the divorce. She is the one that asked for the separation, so they are trying to say, you know, now look it is really her fault he is looking this way. He is so famished looking you know. He does not look physically right.*

Interviewer: *Despite the severity of the abuse?*

Participant: *Right, right, and now all those other times that she was not looking right and not feeling right and you know, no one said anything about her, but now they are looking at him. These are their brothers, so you know, look at him. He is not doing well. He is in the mosque.*

The type and level of support for abusers was at times significant and disturbing.

Participants' stories and the stories of other women that participants knew, reveal a certain level of tolerance for abuse in some communities.

SUMMARY

For women in this sample, the Muslim community served broadly as a source of guidance, connection, and identity in the context of the primarily Christian United States. In cases of abuse, the community also served as a source of pain and victimization. Marginalized by dominant American culture, and fearful of reinforcing existing negative stereotypes about Muslims, abused women did not seek assistance outside of the Muslim community except as a last resort. Thus, they found themselves facing a web of constraints as they combated abuse in their lives.

The strength and importance of the Muslim community in American Muslims' lives shines through in these accounts. The community provides Muslims with important bonds with people that they perhaps simply cannot find elsewhere. However, despite the strength of Muslim communities, the ignorance and in some cases tolerance of woman abuse within them was a destructive force which marginalized victims, leaving them ostracized and alone.

CHAPTER SIX:

ABUSE EXPERIENCES

The abuse experienced by participants included emotional, physical, and sexual abuse. The nature of the abuse was not, in and of itself, different from the abuse women from many other cultures experience. What was specific to the study sample, however, was the ways in which Muslim culture mediated abuse experiences. The beliefs embedded in Muslim culture concerning the rights and duties of husbands and wives, as reported by participants, shaped abuse experiences. In addition, the ways in which participants described the interaction of spirituality and abuse was significant. The sequela of abuse reported included depression, suicidal ideation, pelvic pain, and spiritual crisis.

The following paradigm case reflects some of the themes evident in other participants' narrative accounts, particularly concerning emotional abuse in the context of Muslim culture. This is the story of Aisha, a second generation Arab-American woman who did not believe that she was required to obey her husband, or obtain his permission to leave the house. While Aisha did not believe that good wives are obedient, her husband did:

My first marriage was short . . . That marriage from the beginning was about power and control, with my ex-husband making up lies in order to control my behavior. For example, we had been married maybe three days, or less, I cannot remember exactly, but he then said that people in the mosque had told him not to marry me because I had boyfriends and had been sleeping around. And of

course, I was very hurt and very upset and felt betrayed by the community because my ex-husband had moved to the community where I grew up, and we were living there, so I felt people I had known all my life had betrayed me. Later on I realized that he was lying, that nobody had said that. But he had done that to control me.

Aisha interpreted her husband's lying about what the community was saying about her as an effort to separate her from her support system and to tear down her self-image.

Aisha perceived these emotional assaults as continuing efforts to weaken her ability to resist her husband's efforts to exert power and control over her. Her husband had told Aisha that he should be the center of her life. She thought his efforts to weaken her ties with others was his way of ensuring that he would be the center of her life since by process of elimination there would be no one else for her to turn to.

In addition to his systematic efforts to weaken her ability to resist his efforts to exert power and control over her life, Aisha's husband vigilantly monitored her whereabouts. She reported that anytime she was not in his presence he felt threatened about where she might be or what she might be doing:

He constantly accused me of not being where I said I was going to be. He pretended to call my job once when I found an easier route to work so I made a left turn instead of a right turn at the end of our block. So that day when I got home from work he said that he had called work and I was not there. And I asked him who answered the phone and he had some pretty evasive answers and it was not until later that I realized that he had just seen me make a different turn and so assumed that I was going somewhere else. That man I can honestly say made the five months we were together just hell for me. Not by physically doing anything to me but just by his constant harping on anything I did. Where were you, what were you doing, making up lies.

Aisha's husband had told her that he believed that all American women had sex with their boyfriends. His demeaning view of American women may have influenced his view of Aisha who was second generation Arab-American. She had been born and raised in the United States. His lack of trust in her was incomprehensible to Aisha who had never give him reason to suspect her of anything. He had told Aisha that she should ask his permission to leave the house. She felt this was ludicrous and declined to do so. Her independence and lack of obedience may have felt threatening to her husband, since he clearly felt that he had the absolute right to exert power and control over her at all times.

I never knew when I walked through the door at the end of the day coming home from work whether he was going to be friendly or icy and cold. Always, I used to always actually find myself praying on the way home from work—can I just get home pleasantly . . . I remember when it finally came to an end. I was crying in the car on the way home because I hated going home so much. I was about two months pregnant at the time. On the way home from work I remember just praying, saying, you know, just whatever is going to happen, it has to happen now, please, because I cannot take it anymore.

As the abuse continued to escalate, Aisha found she was at a breaking point. She felt she could not tolerate his abuse much longer:

Participant: *And then the next morning he was going to go to Juma prayer because it was Friday. So we got up and I forget what the argument was, it was always something trivial. He said he was going to call someone and see about divorcing me. Well I was immensely relieved. I said, good, please, make the call. Right now. Well, unfortunately, the guy was bluffing. He was not going to call anybody. But he picked up the phone and acted like he was and I guess he thought I was bluffing too. But I do not bluff.*

Interviewer: *What was the reason you felt you needed him to make the call. If you felt you really wanted a divorce why couldn't you initiate it on your own?*

Participant: *I do not know. I guess I thought you had to try as hard as you could to make something work. And I had tried everything. I mean calling in people to help me and everything and nothing was working, so I guess I felt like if he made the call then it would not be my fault.*

Socialized to believe that as an Arab-American virgin woman who wore hijab she was a valuable commodity, she perceived that by having lost her virginity her value had automatically plummeted. Aisha reported that while she realized this loss of status would occur regardless of whether she or her husband initiated divorce. However, she felt that if he divorced her then her loss of status would not be her fault—the failure would be on his shoulders not hers and she would then take on the role of victim.

Participant: *So then, I had to go to work that morning, so I was trying to get ready to go to work and leave. But he was telling me I could not leave and I do not remember why he did not want me to leave but he blocked the bedroom doorway so that I could not get past him. I was trying to use the phone to call somebody. So he blocked the bedroom doorway so that I could not get out. And I would have struggled with him but I was pregnant, and I was afraid to. So I tried to get past him and he would not let me. And he ordered me to sit down on a corner of the bed and not move. And I did that. . . . So he proceeded for the next several hours to spit at me, say all kinds of derogatory things about myself and my family, and about how I had married him because his family was so wonderful, which even during that horrible time I was laughing on the inside because I did not know anything about his family before I married him. And he just continued berating me in every way, telling me I as not pretty, and that nobody would ever want me and on and on. And he was not hitting me, but he was kind of doing something in my face with his hand, kind of, I do not know you could not call it a hit, it was not meant for injury, but it was meant for extreme insult—I do not know how to describe it.*

Interviewer: *Trying to intimidate or?*

Participant: *Yes definitely. And all I did was just sat on the edge of the bed and recited a verse from the Qur'an over and over again. It was ayat-al-kursi, which is something you say when you want protection. And I just kept that going through my head over and over again. I do not really think that I believed that it was going to protect me so much as I needed my brain to be busy with something because I could not do anything and this was so terrible.*

Trapped and under emotional and physical assault, Aisha used Qur'anic recitation as a means of mental escape. This use of Qur'an was consistent with other cases where women recited religious quotations as a means gaining comfort and/or mental stability in the face of extreme cruelty.

So finally after several hours, there was a knock at the door and it was a co-worker and my mother. And the co-worker had called my mother because I did not show up for work and I did not call, which was very unusual for me. Then they both came over and saw that my car was in the driveway and they realized something was wrong. So my husband told me to answer the door and I did, but somehow we wound up with him standing in front of me and I was behind. And they asked was everything okay. And he said yes, everything was fine, and I was standing behind him and I shook my head "no." And I do not know why I did not speak up and say no it is not fine but at that point I was so intimidated. And he had made threats to me about my mother, saying if she came in he was going to throw her down the stairs and all this kind of stuff. So they both came in the house and said they were not leaving and it was time for him to go to Juma prayer, so he left. After he was gone I took some of my clothing and some belongings and went to the co-workers house and stayed there and from there went to my mother's house, and I never moved back into that apartment.

After she left, Aisha's husband came to her mother's home, trying to get Aisha to return to the marriage. She stated she would only do so provided he agree to couples counseling with a particular social worker who had been recommended to her by a friend. Because this social worker, was non-Muslim her husband refused and the marriage soon ended in divorce.

NORMATIVE BELIEFS IN MUSLIM CULTURE

There were several beliefs pertinent to the subject of abuse evident in the fabric of narrative accounts of participants. These beliefs are rooted in Muslim culture and common religious interpretations of sacred texts. In particular, the rights of husbands to discipline wives in a clearly specified manner were noted. Some participants interpreted verses in the Qur'an and *ahadith* relevant to wife-beating differently from others. However, regardless of individual differences in interpretation, common orthodox interpretations shaped the experiences of all participants. Similarly, *hadith* pertinent to the subject of sexual intercourse within marriage permeated Muslim culture, influencing the experiences of all. This was true despite vigorous resistance by some participants to the idea that wives do not have the right to deny husbands sex. Also significant were descriptions of women's lives. Many participants reported that socialization processes within Muslim families and communities encouraged women to accept hardships, and in some cases, abuse, within marriage. Some of the underlying beliefs about husbands and wives reported by participants as common within Muslim culture made it especially difficult for women to combat abuse in their lives. Still, there was a unanimous and consistent insistence among participants that abuse is unIslamic. In the eyes of the women who participated in this study, regardless of where they were on the continuum between conservative and liberal interpretations of Islam, and regardless of ethnicity, they perceived abuse of women to be unacceptable.

Symbolic Beatings

There is a textual basis for the perception in Muslim culture described by participants that husbands have the right to chastise wives. In particular, this verse in the Qur'an specifically addresses how husbands should chastise wives. This provides a basis for common cultural beliefs in Muslim culture on the subject of wife-beating:

As to those women on whose part you fear disloyalty and ill-conduct,
Admonish them (first),
(Next), refuse to share their beds,
(And last) beat them (lightly);
But if they return to obedience
Seek not against them a (means of annoyance)
For Allah is Most High,
Great (above you all) (Qur'an, 4:34).

This translation is commonly accepted among Muslims (Ali, n.d.; Badawi, 1995, Chaudhry, 1991); however, there are a small number (Karmi, 1996; Wahdud-Muhsin, 1992), including some study participants, who translate this verse very differently than the translation cited above. These alternative translations provide a meaning that does not insist on wifely obedience and does not support the right of husbands to physically chastise wives.

The Qur'anic verse cited above, advising husbands to "beat" wives lightly is modified by *hadith* and the interpretations of early Muslim jurists:

As defined by hadith it is **not permissible to strike anyone's face, cause any bodily harm or even be harsh**. What the hadith qualified as *dharban ghayra mubarrih*, or light striking, was interpreted by early jurists as a (symbolic) use of *miswak* (a small natural toothbrush)! They further qualified permissible "striking" as that which leaves no mark on the body (Badawi, 1995 p. 53).

This textual interpretation influenced Muslim cultural beliefs described by participants regarding wife-beating as evidenced by references to symbolic beatings with toothsticks (*mishwak*) present in several narrative accounts. Participants who accepted mainstream and traditional Muslim translations of the Qur'an 4:34 felt that by setting limits on physical assault, Islam protected women from severe physical cruelty. Those who rejected the mainstream translation of that verse cited alternative meanings of the word *daraba* (translated above as to beat or to strike). The latter group believed that husbands chastising wives was not consistent with other Islamic teachings which emphasize the equality of men and women in the sight of God.

Commonly accepted and published translations of the Qur'an, 4:34, describe step by step measures for husbands to take in cases of *nushuz* (the rising of the wife against the husband, or hating or deserting the husband) which may culminate in "slight corporal punishment" (Ali, n.d., p. 651; Badawi, 1995). Regardless of individual differences among participants, all were influenced by this dominant reading of the Qur'an.

Fear that others would perceive the problem of abuse among Muslims as a phenomenon that is actually caused by Islam was evident in this participant's comments.

She took care to defend the faith citing that Islam addresses the physical chastisement of wives straightforwardly:

Participant: *You are going to find abuse among Muslims just as you would in any other population. I think that abuse among Muslims is addressed straightforwardly in the religion as it is not in Christianity and in other religions. Where it says if your wife displeases you, admonish her. If she continues to be really lewd and horrible, withdraw from her bed, and as a last resort, you may beat her with nothing larger than a toothstick, which is a twig about three inches long. Smaller than your little finger, which could not do any harm, and the whole part of that hadith is to show that you should not harm your wife. And you know it is not even mentioned in Christianity. Have you ever heard a preacher stand up and say now do not hurt your wife?*

Interviewer: *Do you feel like that is a common interpretation of that?*

Participant: *Yes I do. So I am not saying there are not Muslim men who hit their wives, and incidentally again it is forbidden to hit another Muslim in the face, man or woman, for any reason. But I am sure, I know there are Muslim men who hit their wives in the face contradicting two things in Islam. I mean obviously you are not allowed to injure them and that does, and secondly it is in the face. That does not mean that Islam teaches that. That means that men have temper problems. They may have witnessed that themselves when they were young, just like American abusers, just like Christian or Jewish abusers. There is no difference.*

Like the preceding exemplar, the participant quoted below specifically praised the limitations placed on wife-beating in Islam and made reference to symbolic beatings using a toothstick:

Islam is probably one of the strictest religions against even harming the woman, hitting on the face and the head the rules—I mean in no other religion I do not think are there such specifics about how not to leave a mark. It is just supposed to be like a little toothstick lightly as a symbolic beating. In the Qur'an it says scold them, then sleep apart from them and talk to them, then give them a light beating. This is a symbolic thing, it is not like to hurt her, you are not allowed to

leave a mark, you are not allowed to harm her. You are not allowed to hit her on the face and the head. Other religions do not have this. Islam is the only religion that has these rules. So when they are broken it is like so terrible . . . Some of the men can do this here I can beat my wife it is in the Qur'an. They do not see the real meaning of it. It is just symbolic.

The idea that the way in which Islam spells out what is permissible concerning wife-beating is a good thing, was evident in both exemplars above. This belief echoes the words of the well-known Islamic scholar Jamal Badawi (1995):

By definition a "permissible" act is neither required, encouraged, or forbidden. In fact it may be better to spell out the extent of permissibility . . . rather than leaving it unrestricted and unqualified, or ignoring it altogether. In the absence of strict qualifiers, persons may interpret the matter in their own way, which can lead to excesses and real abuse (Badawi, 1995, p. 54).

The logic in this position may be accepted or disputed depending on one's viewpoint. However, it is clear that references to husbands chastising wives extant in Muslim culture influenced the abuse experiences of participants. These influences included widespread perception in communities that husbands are disciplinarians and that wives are potentially seditious.

In contrast to the exemplars above, the following exemplar quotes a group of women who were critical of interpretations favoring the right of husbands to chastise wives:

Participant #1: *There are also different interpretations about beat her lightly with a toothstick.*

Participant #2: *A miswak.*

Participant #3: *You should see those Afghan miswak's okay?*

Participant #1: *Those are tree trunks I know.*

Participant #4: *Those Afghan husbands have big teeth huh? Laughter*

This group interview included an Afghani-American woman who had suffered severe physical abuse at the hands of her husband. Opposed to husbands acting as disciplinarians of wives, the women used humor to critique this common practice. This group perceived that the limitations placed on Muslim men concerning wife-beating were unimportant. What they perceived to be important was that women's accountability should be to themselves and to God—not to their husbands. By placing husbands in disciplinary roles, these women perceived that husband-wife relationships became akin to parent-child relationships, with women taking on child-like roles in families.

While women in the sample had different interpretations and opinions about symbolic beatings, all were aware of mainstream beliefs on this issue. Participants described a common and pervasive belief extant in their communities that when circumstances are right, husbands have the God-given right to physically chastise wives by beating them lightly (using a toothstick).

Sex—Perilous and Pleasing

While study participants often did not discuss their sex lives, there was enough abstract discussion of sex to allow for existing Muslim cultural beliefs among participants to emerge. Again there were differences in interpretation, but all

participants were aware of mainstream, traditional views relevant to sex. Here again well-known *ahadith* shaped experiences and perceptions among participants.

Sex As a Moral Threat

Participants described beliefs extant among Muslims that sexual desire is a potential threat to the stability and morality of individuals. By extension, men and women who are not relatives should avoid contact with each other to avoid potential illicit sexual desire and/or activity. This belief is consistent with teachings found in Islamic literature:

The great object of Islam is to raise the moral status of society and to minimize the chances of illicit sexual relations growing between sexes, so that the home may be a haven of peace for the husband, the wife, and the children (Ali, n.d, p. 661).

One participant cited a well-known *hadith* that prohibits an unrelated man and woman from being alone together. According to this *hadith*, when an unrelated man and woman are alone together the third one in the room will be Satan (Marriage in Islam, 5/9/1999).

In the case described below, friendships forged with unrelated men caused this participant's husband and family to become suspicious of her. This suspicion contributed to the escalating abuse she suffered over time:

Participant: *The only people that did understand me were family friends but they were men. They would understand and they would help.*

Interviewer: *So your husband was jealous?*

Participant: *He was so jealous that these people were calling to talk to me. But these people were like my own brothers. I know there is no such thing as a man and a woman in Islam but those were the*

only kind of people that I could confide in. And they were two very close people to me. So then he kept on saying to my family she is doing this she is doing that. But my own family did not understand that I was involved [platonically] with this young man who was not married. They thought of course something has to be going on between us. So then my family got upset and all of that. . . . My brother said we know that you are in love and that is why you want to go. But that is not true. He said that my husband had told him if he would kill this man . . . He thought that I was in love with him and I was going to divorce my husband and marry this idiot.

Interviewer: *And they thought that was not your choice even if you had wanted to do that?*

Participant: *No. Exactly.*

Interviewer: *Would you say culturally they assume that the only relationship between a man and a woman who are not relatives is a sexual relationship?*

Participant: *Exactly that is the only way that I understand it. That was it. If you sit with a man by yourself they are just going to assume something is happening.*

Interviewer: *Well there is that hadith. The third one in the room . . .*

Participant: *That is it. The when a man and a woman are alone in a room the third one in the room is shayton (the devil). So that is what happened . . . and when I came back to my family's house they did not believe me and my brother, the whole living room is cement. He threw me on my head, you know, you pick up a child and you just throw them down.*

Interviewer: *That was your brother?*

Participant: *That was my brother. And that was it right there. I was gone. Two hours later I woke up.*

The belief that both men and women had within them unbridled sexual desires, desires that could potentially corrupt them, provided the underpinnings for the

assumption that the only relationship between an unrelated man and woman is a sexual one:

Interviewer: *The concern about people having sex when they are not married. Do you think this is a big factor in women being pressured to get married?*

Participant: *Well this is where I am at. If the young woman or young man can handle their desires for sex through fasting, through prayers, through pious conduct, that is fine. They can actually buy time. But if they are having overtly sexual behavior, where their sexual needs need to be satisfied right away—and it is particularly offensive among women, where the women openly display their sensual need, and they display it any and all men, then yes. And myself as a parent of teenager girls, and my one daughter is in her early twenties, I really felt the pressure to try and help my daughter find someone because I did not want her to fornicate.*

The solution to the problem of unbridled sexual desire as described by participants, was marriage. Thus, participants implied implicitly and explicitly that their culture prescribed satisfaction of sexual needs as both rights and duties of husbands and wives.

Sex—Rights and Duties

Sex within marriage in Islam is viewed as natural, chaste, and desirable:

He said: Has not Allah made things for you to give away in charity? Truly every *tasbiha* [praising God as perfect] is a charity, every *takbira* [to say God is great] is a charity, every *tahmida* [saying praise be to God] is a charity; to enjoin a good action is a charity, and in the sexual act of each of you there is a charity.

They said: O Messenger of Allah, when one of us fulfills his sexual desire, will behave some reward for that? He said: Do you [not] think that were he to act

upon it unlawfully he would be sinning? Likewise, if he has acted upon it lawfully he will have a reward (An-Nawis, 1976, p. 85-86).

Given that Muslim culture tends to view sex as a potential moral threat outside of marriage, and as a charitable righteous act within marriage, access to sexual relations in marriage is important. Accordingly, this well-known *hadith* enjoins wives not to refuse husbands sex:

Abu Hurraira reported that the Prophet said: If a man invites his wife to sleep with him and she refuses to come to him, then the angels send their curses on her until morning (Al-Bukhari 1984, volume 7:62:121).

These *ahadith* shaped the sexual mores of participants' Muslim communities:

Participant #1: *The man gets fulfilled sexually and she is there to fulfill him, so her sexual satisfaction is not a factor in the act . . . the whole thing is that the man gets his satisfaction and the woman is a means.*

Participant #2: *And you do not have an option to say no. If you say no, then you are cursed or something like that . The angels curse you.*

Interviewer: *So does that mean that marital rape does not exist for Muslims?*

Participant #2: *I hear on a lecture tape a shaikh say, no a man does not rape his wife. That is not rape.*

Participant #1: *I think a lot of Muslims believe that they can't rape their wives because this is their right, you know, regardless of how painful or how uncomfortable or how negative an experience for her . . . It is so anti-Islam. In the Qur'an it says you are garments for each other.*

Interviewer: *So what are your own beliefs then about marital rape. Do you agree with the shaikh that there is no such thing as that?*

Participant #3: *Absolutely not.*

Participant #1: *There is definitely marital rape.*

Participant #4: *It depends on who you ask. The men or the women.*

Participant #5: *If a woman says no, that is it Islamically. The angels will curse her and then that is on her. He will just go to the couch and sleep and deal with it. She will be cursed.*

Participant #2: *The woman should not have the guilt on her of being cursed until the next morning simply because she did not want to comply with his sexual . . .*

Participant #1: *Yes. See this is another hadith that is used against women. I think it is used to control. That is not substantiated in Qur'an.*

Participant #2: *I had that happen to me with my ex. The fool said oh that was sadaqa (charity).*

Participant #1: *laughter. Yes, yes because there is another hadith that says if you sleep with your wife this is sadaqa.*

Participant #2: *For who the wife?*

Participant #1: *For him, so he is giving sadaqa to you.*

Because wives, according to mainstream interpretations, must allow husbands access to their bodies for sex as part of their religious duty, marital rape was a controversial topic:

Interviewer: *What about rape in the context of marriage?*

Participant: *Very common. Very, very common. If the wife withholds herself, then I have warned them, look if you are angry with this man and you withhold yourself what are you going to do if he rapes you? Because that is surely what is going to happen. And if he is going to force himself, take his right, and you are not willing to report that or deal with what the cause is, why can't you just have some kind of mutual sexual relations with him. You know, saying no is not the answer. You really need to work this and find an answer. And there is rape or they are forced, then nothing*

is ever really solved and the woman's resentment deepens, the man's resentment deepens, and if the woman is raped you cannot repair the relationship. No matter what you do.

The participant cited above acknowledged that rape as unwanted sexual intercourse did in fact exist in the context of marriage. However, in her mind this did not change the reality that husbands have the right to sexual intercourse. Thus, she perceived the problem of rape as something that is harmful to marriage. Given that rape is inconsistent with marital harmony, she concluded, wives should not refuse husbands sex.

In this next exemplar, a participant described how husbands' rights to sex were exploited and manipulated by her friend's ex-husband who misused Islam to maintain power and control over his soon to be ex-wife:

Her husband was saying okay we are separated but you still have to come over and have sex with me whenever I want you to because you are my wife. And she even came and asked me about that once when they were separated. She asked me about that saying well do I have to go over there anytime he wants? And I told her of course not. You know. But that that would even be a question is amazing to me and definitely pertains to the whole male control Oh I can have sex with you whenever I say so and you do not have anything to say about it kind of thing.

As these exemplars demonstrate, sex as a right and a duty within marriage created conflicts for women. Perceived cultural and religious obligations to satisfy husbands' sexual needs were sometimes discordant with women's own needs, wants, and desires. Despite this conflict on a personal level, however, it seems clear that on a broader cultural level, there exists an underlying belief that husbands have the right to unlimited sex from wives. Thus, the existence of marital rape as perceived by many Muslims then is likely to be questionable. Even in cases where women perceive unwanted sexual

intercourse in their own marriages as rape, because of the belief that husbands have the right to sex, men are likely to justify their behavior to themselves and others. Finally, when women are confused about the issue of marital rape it may be difficult for them to know where consensual sex ends and rape begins.

Abuse is UnIslamic

All study participants agreed that cruel treatment and inflicting harm on wives was unacceptable, and that abuse of wives was unIslamic. Women necessarily perceived their abuse through the Islamic cultural lens because that was their worldview. According to this worldview, prescribed rules of conduct are parts of religious practice. Violation of these rules of conduct in any way, including abusive behavior, was perceived as religious in nature.

Participant: *If someone shares with you the ties of religion and they are treating you with respect—you have this tie. . . . But if you are being abused which is unIslamic this is something hard.*

Interviewer: *When you were saying women would come and confide in you, did you offer them advice?*

Participant: *Definitely. I would tell them Muslim women are not allowed to be hit. They are not allowed to be hurt. They are not allowed to be called bad names. . . . They asked me about you know hitting the kids, him staying out late, not being with her, he stays out late with his friends and does not give her any emotional comfort that she needs. And treating her like nothing, or like a servant, or whatever, being hit, being cursed.*

Participants viewed support for abuse in communities as hypocritical and inconsistent with the true spirit of the faith:

Interviewer: *One of the contradictions that has arisen from this research is the idea that abuse is unIslamic juxtaposed against the idea that abuse is tacitly accepted within many Muslim communities. Does anybody have any response?*

Participant #1: *I think it is. I think it is kind of say one thing do another. People say what they think sounds right, but when you get down to the actions of it, it is completely opposite.*

Participant #2: *Part of this is going back to the idea that Islam is perfect and for all time. It is the path for spiritual peace, and everything that you do is to take you to a greater level of peace and a greater level of God consciousness in the self, in the family, in the society, in the universe. If that is your worldview, and that is your perspective, everything should be coming from there. And that is what Islam is. It is truth. And when you say that then you say abuse is unIslamic.*

Participants' differing interpretations of sacred text pertaining to symbolic beatings influenced the ways they made sense of the belief that abuse is unIslamic. All participants were aware of Islamic teachings encouraging kindness and respect for women in families and perceived these teachings as evidence that abuse was *haram* (forbidden). However, those participants who rejected mainstream interpretations of Islam were more likely to perceive that traditional interpretations influenced Muslim culture in ways that tacitly supported abuse in communities.

Unlike others in the sample attempting to re-interpret traditional teachings, this participant discounted parts of sacred text which she viewed as misogynist:

Interviewer: *The other thing that came up in this research is that women think that abuse is unIslamic. Would you agree with that?*

Participant: *Yes. Well, yeah, but when you think about those texts it kind of seems like some of those texts make it easier to abuse maybe.*

Interviewer: *And what is your response to that?*

Participant: *I just tried to think that those verses in the Qur'an were like translated wrong or something.*

Interviewer: *So your individual way of dealing with this has been to say those parts of the text are not valid?*

Participant: *Basically that is it.*

Because abuse was perceived as unIslamic, some women looked to religion as a means for correcting abusive behaviors. Many women quoted scripture to convince their husbands that their abusive behavior was wrong. Others sought intervention through religious leaders, family, and/or friends. These efforts were never successful since participants reported that their abusers were not interested in aspects of Islam that set limits on their behavior towards wives. These men took full advantage of rules that granted them power and control in marriages at the same time they ignored sacred text which prescribes kind treatment of wives by husbands. One participant stated that "God is on the side of the oppressed." This was the only comfort many participants who experienced abuse had. Women who knew that God was on their side were able to face abuse knowing that in the eyes of God they were in the right—regardless of what others might say.

This is Your Life as A Woman

While the belief that abuse is unIslamic appeared consistently across narrative accounts, this belief did not uniformly result in support for wives leaving abusers. In fact, several participants reported support for abusers within Muslim communities. This

apparent contradiction may perhaps be rooted in the idea that abuse is one of the things that women just put up with in their lives. This belief, however, was influenced by ethnic culture and Muslim culture.

The belief that abuse is just part of the life of a woman was virtually absent among those African-American participants who came from Muslim communities where African-American cultural influences were predominant. Conversely, participants of Arab, Afghan, and Indonesian descent, as well as others in the sample who had had extensive involvement with immigrant Muslim populations, all had encountered this belief. Because of the trauma of past abuse experiences, some participants confronted this belief and subsequently rejected it. Others continued to minimize abuse in women's lives as seemingly unimportant.

African-American women from African-American Muslim communities reported receiving more support from women peers than did any other group of women in the sample:

In Detroit I knew about other families that had abuse and most of the wives would divorce their husbands. And most of the sisters were happy for them. And I do not remember anyone ever saying you know, you should pray more or fast or make duwa and try and hang on. It was like girl the brother is sick get out of there. This is not Islam. So the sisters always had—maybe because these were African-American women, American Muslims, and I think maybe culturally speaking for African-American women, we are already used to holding our own for whatever reason to survive. You know I did take the abuse, I never felt like this is a cultural thing where you know like in the Middle East you know your husband can beat you.

In addition to reports of peer support among African-American participants in cases of abuse, the taboo surrounding divorce was seemingly absent:

Interviewer: *Some women I have interviewed were discouraged from getting divorced. Is this something you have seen?*

Participant: *Well, not so much in this community. If a woman was abused and she told the whole story of her abuse, I have seen women encouraged to, you know, try to get out of the marriage and find some amicable way to leave the marriage. Can I tell you what I tell women? I tell them they can have as many husbands as they want to if it is just only one at a time. That is my advice after all these years because I hate to see them stay in marriages where they are really miserable.*

The exemplars above do not communicate a belief that women should put up with abuse without complaint. The particular African-American Muslim communities, women were in fact supportive of those seeking to end abusive relationships. In contrast to this perspective, however, was the idea that abuse is just one of the things women deal with. The exemplars below were narrated by participants of Afghani, African, Arab, European, and Indonesian descent, all of whom had been influenced by or were from immigrant Muslim cultures.

A Euro-American woman who had been married to an Arab and immersed in Arab cultural influences remembers feeling duty-bound to accept her husband's abusive behavior:

Participant: *There was a lot of emotional and mental abuse. I was always told that I was wrong, I was always told that he knew what I was thinking, you know that I was malicious, I was manipulative, I was out to get him. I can remember one time I took my kids to the zoo with a bunch of Libyan sisters and an American sister. We were fifteen minutes late getting home. And he was ready to pack my bags. And it just came out of the blue. I had no idea where this was coming from. It was like what is your problem? Because I was very well trained. I always called him. I had limited times out of the house. I knew when I had to be back, I*

never went anywhere without asking, I played by all the rules. . . . And I think I thought I would just try to change it or put up with it the way women do.

Interviewer: *Did you feel that was kind of something that women have to deal with?*

Participant: *I think so. I think that I thought that especially as Muslim women we thought that was our duty.*

Thinking that emotional abuse is something that women just have to deal with was a common finding across cases. Pervasive acceptance of emotional abuse led to the perception that for many women emotional abuse is understood as normal:

Interviewer: *Do you think Muslim women experience emotional and sexual abuse?*

Participant: *Yes but they do not even call that abuse. Emotional abuse they do not call it abuse.*

Interviewer: *Would you call it abuse?*

Participant: *Neglect or abuse, yes. But they do not call it.*

Interviewer: *Because why not do you think?*

Participant: *They do not think of it. They do not think it is a big deal.*

Interviewer: *They think it is normal?*

Participant: *Yes.*

Interviewer: *What would you consider to be emotional abuse?*

Participant: *Like not treating them well.*

The normalcy of emotional abuse made it invisible:

Participant #1: *We never talked about abuse. I probably did not even recognize it as abuse, you know, when it was going on.*

Interviewer: *Why do you think that might be?*

Participant #1: *I am thinking of one particular instance when I witnessed something that I would have definitely called emotional, psychological abuse, and I just kind said, he is rude isn't he. Or you know, what a jerk he is; and I never interpreted it as abuse . . . I think part of that is that the whole concept of, of abuse was not prevalent to us. It was just oh, that is what women deal with.*

Interviewer: *There is no abuse in the Indonesian community?*

Participant #2: *Not abuse, like physical, that I know. It is more . . .*

Participant #1: *Psychological?*

Participant #2: *Not even that unless I am really sheltered which I think I am, but otherwise it is more like if they are, if the women are frustrated it is more of an accepted thing that they have to give in to their husbands.*

Participant #3: *Needs or something?*

Participant #2: *Power you know. Like if they want to do something we have to accept, say yes, smile on our heads, serve them, and then if we complain it is not right.*

Participant #1: *That is your life.*

Participant #2: *That is our life.*

This is your life as a woman means that for many women, abuse is part of daily life at some level. As the data have demonstrated, ethnic cultural influences combined with Muslim culture created differing perceptions of women's lives. Immigrant cultural influences socialized women in this sample to overlook and/or accept abuse, particularly emotional abuse. Some women challenged patriarchal cultural influences later in life in response to many years of ongoing abuse.

Symbolic beatings, beliefs about sex, and about abuse in general, were all important cultural influences which mediated the abuse experiences of study participants. While these beliefs did not necessarily change the nature of abuse inflicted, they did shape understandings and responses to abuse on the part of women, families, and Muslim communities.

SPIRITUALITY AND ABUSE: VULNERABILITY AND COMFORT

Closely related to Muslim cultural beliefs relevant to abuse experiences were women's spiritual beliefs and the ways these beliefs created both vulnerability and comfort in their lives.

This Life Does Not Matter

Participants' spiritual belief in an after-life influenced abuse experiences. The idea that this life does not matter and that God will reward women who suffer as they strive to keep families intact emerged from narrative accounts:

Participant #1: *They say we will get our rewards later.*

Participant #2: *Right.*

Participant #1: *You know we can put up with him.*

Participant #2: *Exactly.*

Participant #1: *Then, you know, there is heaven waiting for us. I mean that is our job is to take care of them and the children and so we cannot complain about the kids and I am really tired and what about my life? Well they say that is what we are supposed to do.*

Heaven is a powerful incentive for believers. The idea that women who put up with abuse, thus keeping families together, can look forward to rewards in heaven, was noted across cases, regardless of ethnic background. This African-American woman perceived the idea that this life does not matter as analogous to slavery:

Participant: *I have seen it presented that if you suffer at the hands of your husband that you will receive ajars (rewards) from God for doing so, so do not help him reform, do not get counseling, do not try to seek a better way. Just accept his abuse and Allah will bless you for it.*

Interviewer: *That was something that was mentioned was that you will get your reward later?*

Participant: *Yes. That is right. And this was also what happened to us during slavery, where we were told, you know, to accept the oppression because when you died you would go to heaven. Never mind asking for your just reward as a human being in this life—give up.*

Some participants described being a good wife in the face of adversity as a form of righteousness. This woman remembers thinking that if she just perfected her religious practice her marriage would improve. And even if this did not work her approach was still sound because she would be rewarded in the next life for her efforts:

You try to structure your life so that it will not happen. If I follow my religious duties, if I perfect my cooking techniques, if I do this or that, if I make my house a place of harmony, if I meet his every need, and put him first, his psychological well being and happiness, if he has had a bad day, believe me I lived it I did it, it will not happen. Everything will be okay. We will reach that harmonious state. But obviously it does not. I mean I think that we have added that religious component to it and it is even more engulfing. You have gotten yourself so entangled in it that you cannot really see separate from it. And I think there is another level to that. It does not matter in this life. It does not matter in this life. I will put up with torture. I will put up with all this because I am fulfilling my duties as a wife. I am being a good wife and I am being a good Muslim because I

am patient. Give me subr (patience) Allah. I am going to be patient and then I will be rewarded in the next life. I think that is another big one. And I think that that is probably universal for Muslim women no matter what background you have.

The belief that staying with an abuser may be the path to heaven was reinforced by women's spirituality and religious devotion. Being a good Muslim was central to their understanding of abuse because being a good Muslim was all that mattered, and this, in turn, meant being a good wife and mother. Even when women did not hold this belief themselves, they encountered it among other Muslims when they sought counsel or were considering divorce. This indicates that for this sample and the communities they were involved with, the belief that abuse may be the way to heaven was not uncommon. It is important to keep in mind that this belief system may represent an unseen barrier for abused Muslim women contemplating leaving abusive relationships. Worry that breaking up the family might mean the loss of heaven in the after-life is a powerful disincentive for women considering leaving abusers.

Finding Comfort in Prayer

Many of the narrative accounts made reference to prayer as a coping mechanism during times of crisis.

I used to listen a lot to the holy scriptures on the tape player. It is good for me and makes me feel better and I trust God. His words were healing and the direct words how they were revealed from angel Gabriel. I had this feeling of desperation. Of course I was isolated. My children were in another city and I was not allowed to have a phone for several months. I was left alone several months. It was like—it is really hard to think about right now. God was the only one who was saving me.

God often was the only comfort in abused women's lives, the only one that abused women could appeal to. Having come from a chaotic abusive background prior to her conversion, this participant strongly believed that God has the power to change women's lives:

Islam to me is the only solution that helps you even think that you can overcome that kind of trauma. Because Allah can remake you in your being. Remake you in your form. And you can be so determined that you can overcome anything. You can be so determined you can exert your will to create another life for yourself and Allah will give it to you . . . I feel like there is a lot more that we can do for ourselves. With the access that Allah has given us through our prayers, through the nafl prayers, through the late night prayers, the tarawih in which the spirit of Allah descends to seven heavens and listens to those who plead. Also the hajir prayer, that comes in an hour before fajr, that if we plead with Allah, in the sajda (prostration), that Allah will answer our prayers, ease our condition.

For those women whose spirituality was unaffected by abuse, God was always there. They believed God would listen to their appeals, thus easing their pain:

Interviewer: *Did your religion help or hinder you in any way to cope with the difficulties that you encountered?*

Participant: *It was an appeal, not so much comfort, as God is somebody that I could appeal to and there was no one else to appeal to that I felt.*

For many participants, their relationship with God was an important means of support during times of suffering. Ritual prayers, the musical rhythmic quality of Qur'anic recitation, and the belief that God heard them helped many women to get through even the most traumatic abuse experiences.

Manipulating Islam

While participants' spirituality served as a source of support during times of crisis, it was also often used by abusers as a weapon against them. Manipulation of religious text and Muslim communities by abusers was present across cases. In particular, participants spoke of issues of obedience and divorce as problematic.

The following exemplar is an example of a husband abusing and manipulating his right to divorce. In this case the woman saw through this manipulation, but still found herself unable to combat it:

Here is this man who is very knowledgeable in religion telling me all this crap like "oh yeah well I divorced you in secret when you were sick." I had a lengthy illness that was never diagnosed. They thought it was lymphoma. And here I am recovering from that and he goes "yeah I divorced you in secret and then I took you back." I am going "really and where did you find that in Islam that is a new one." And he knew that I knew, I mean I was pretty knowledgeable. But you know knowledge does not really matter if you do not have a way to enforce it. You can be as knowledgeable, you can spout hadith right and left to somebody but what are you going to do to make a man behave himself? And follow what he says he believes. Yeah what are you going to do?

Like the preceding story, the next exemplar illustrates a husband's manipulation of Islamic divorce. In this case, the abuser successfully manipulated his wife, thus complicating and compounding her abuse experience. Because his wife was a new convert and did not know what Islam taught regarding divorce, the abuser used the name of Islam for his own benefit, claiming religious rights that were non-existent. The abuser later murdered the woman described in this story:

Participant: *The other issue which I think pertains to the murder is this whole manipulation of the divorce thing by him. Him saying you are*

divorced well no we are not divorced, well okay we are separated but you still have to come over and have sex with me whenever I want you to because you are my wife.

Interviewer: *So he was manipulating her using false representations of Islam?*

Interviewer: *Right. He was also using the community mindedness of the Muslims because first he was in one Muslim community where he married her and where they lived for a while, but then he decided to join another Muslim community which was a shiite community and so very separate from this one. And he just kind of used the separateness of the Muslims and used the community mindedness of the Muslims to his own advantage so that he could abuse her and manipulate her however he wanted and not have to suffer consequences.*

Using Islam as a tool to oppress wives and to maintain power and control was central to abusers' use of spirituality as a weapon, according to study participants' accounts.

Abusers manipulated Islam, claiming religious support for their abusive acts. Islam in many cases became whatever abusers wanted it to be:

Participant: *There were certain things he did which he said he did because he was Muslim. yet there were things that he really did not do. Like the whole thing about, like, we were not married until after I was pregnant. And the whole thing was that oh well it is okay because if you are intended then you can have sexual relations. And later I found out that is not true.*

Interviewer: *So whatever was convenient at the time sort of?*

Participant: *Yes exactly. It just seemed like if for that guy Islam can be anything that you want, you can simply manipulate and say this is like right by Allah. That was Islam.*

Oftentimes abusers sought to justify abusive acts in the name of religion. Having faith used against them was a means of further victimizing women in this sample. For women

whose abusive husbands introduced them to Islam, this problem was particularly concerning. These women were more likely to accept abusers' demands as part of the whole religious package. This changed over time as these women began to learn that their abusers were misleading them. By that time often it was too late, and these women found themselves caught in abusive marriages often economically dependent and with small children.

Narrative accounts clearly demonstrate the significance of spirituality in the abuse experiences of participants. Believing that this life does not matter, turning to God for comfort and support, and having religion used as a weapon by abusers were influences that shaped abuse experiences and responses for these women. Thus, spirituality created positions of both vulnerability and strength for these Muslim women.

ABUSE IN FAMILIES

Documenting the nature of actual abuse experiences among American Muslim women is an integral part of the study aims. Thus, narratives describing abuse follow.

Emotional/Psychological Abuse

Emotional/psychological abuse described by participants included destruction of property, isolation, threats, humiliation, insults, cursing, abandonment, false accusations, intimidation, attacks on self-esteem, constant criticism and blame, stealing, pervasive domination, and lying with the intent to harm.

Participants were threatened and humiliation in front of their children:

He would always accuse me of having a look on my face. I remember one time at the dinner table, you know it is like being a little kid. He said "get that look off

your face or I am going to put this dinner plate in it." He said that in front of my kids. And I did not want my kids growing up thinking that was okay.

The participant quoted above was constantly trying to repair the damage her husband's abusive behavior had on their children. His emotionally abusive behavior worsened over time and continued even after the marriage dissolved, leaving her children emotionally scarred.

The participant quoted below was in a severely physically abusive marriage. The emotional abuse she suffered included assaults on her self-esteem and isolation. These tactics were clearly attempts to cut her off from potential sources of support:

I do not hate him but I hate what he does. It is so disgusting. So terrible. He called me filthy names . . . and the treatment was so unjust . . . in my situation, he threatened to harm many in the community. It was like a revenge thing. I have been worried. Like he would say "all of the men on the committee at the mosque, I am going to rape all their wives." . . . He said if you talk to the amir or the other leader, I am going to drive the car and back it into the amir's house. When I see these things here I feel I cannot talk to anybody. These kind of things stay in a person's mind. It is really another kind of abuse. It stays in your mind even if it does not happen. And I know he can do things he says he is going to do so, it is really like a fear.

Maintaining power and control through fear and intimidation was a common pattern among violent abusers:

He used to tell me. Well you know you think you are all that . . . so he would say, you know people think you are so organized but the house is fucked up and you can't clean and your kids are all dysfunctional . . . He was not physically violent. He did things like scare people. I said I was going to leave him one time and he pulled a knife and said he was going to kill himself. He took my car keys and went out and took the distributor cap off the car so I could not leave the house. I could not drive, could not do anything. That kind of mental stuff.

Thirteen of the 17 study participants reported having experienced some form of emotional abuse. These experiences were often severe and debilitating. Abusers' attempts to maintain all of the power and control in marriages took multiple forms. The exemplars cited above illustrate the ubiquity of assaults on women's self-esteem in these situations. By tearing down women's self-esteem, abusers weakened their ability to resist abusive. Additionally, isolation and fear tactics were also evident in the exemplars cited above. By cutting women off from sources of support and by playing on their fears, abusers attempted to keep victims under their control. Given abusers' efforts to destroy women's ability to resist abuse, the fact that participants were able to combat abuse at all speaks to the resilience and strength of these women.

Physical Abuse

Of the 13 participants who reported having experienced emotional abuse, 8 women also reported physical abuse. Physical abuse personally experienced and/or observed by participants among Muslims included slapping, hitting, kicking, choking, burning, grabbing, biting, hair pulling, and shoving. In addition, being stepped on, threatened with a weapon, cut, urinated on, confined, battered with objects, deprived of sleep, and homicide were also reported.

This participant endured the rage of her ex-husband on multiple occasions. His violence was extreme:

My husband was so angry. He was so angry. He even bit me. A great big bite on my arm. He hit the window of the car. He was just so violent . . . He used to harm me, it me, kick me, kicking with boots that was one of the worst things. My back and my legs are still hurting and I have a real bad pain.

Women who had children reported the involvement of their children in abusive households. As noted previously, both women and children often endured emotional abuse in families. Likewise, some participants reported that their children were the targets of physical abuse:

Interviewer: *What happened when you called 911?*

Participant: *He said make me tea. He had just come from tarawih (special evening prayers during Rammadan), this was in Rammadan. He came from tarawih and he said make me tea. I had just made tea for him and put it in the thermos. And the thermos was right in front of me and when he hit my daughter she went and hit the wall and then from the wall she bounced right back and hit the side of the table. And that is when I said something about cursing his mother. Do not ever do that. If you say something bad about their mother, Oh God! He picked up the thermos and the thermos hit my ear and the water just went all over.*

Attempting to protect their children from physical harm, the women in the second and third exemplars intervened in situations of child abuse:

My husband's problem was that if people idolized him it was fine, and little kids you know, do idolize their parents usually. But when the girls got old enough that they did not idolize him and they started questioning him or started having opposing views, he could not handle that. So he was frequently violent and that is when I started getting hurt . . . I remember vividly one time when my daughter said something, I do not know what it was. But her bedroom was at the dead end of the hall and he started after her, but she did not know that because she was just walking to her room, and I stepped in the way and he told me to get out of the way and I would not because I was protecting my child and I did get beat up that time because I would not move.

While protecting their children physically, these women endured beatings at the same time that their children suffered emotionally. As the above exemplars reveal, child witnessing of physical abuse was common in families where wife-beating took place.

Also of note, were the characteristics of those abusers who were the most violent. These men had lived through and/or fought in wars, were refugees, or had experienced political persecution of some kind. Thus, in cases of severe abuse, global violence shaped the face of family violence for some participants in this study.

Sexual Abuse

Given the private nature of people's sex lives, several participants did not talk about sex in a personal way, but rather in a more abstract sense. This abstract discussion allowed for an understanding of common cultural values around sex to emerge as was previously noted. However, the data are scant regarding actual experiences of sexual abuse within marriage. 2 participants reported sexual abuse within marriage.

Forced sex after a beating was reported by 1 participant:

Participant: *He started choking me, slapping me, I remember I had just had my daughter, she was probably three weeks old and she was in my arms. I made him mad and he slapped me so hard that my head almost went through the glass. I remember trying to hold her to keep her from getting hit and then afterwards he wanted to have sex.*

Interviewer: *Did he force you to have sex?*

Participant: *More or less.*

A kind of sexual torture was reported by the second participant:

If you are being humiliated and insulted by the one who is supposed to protect a person, then you do not want to share and feel. I will not even let myself feel those good feelings. I would not even be able to enjoy sexual relations. It is like disgusting to think of. I do not even want him to touch me because I am just so upset. . . . They said many women who have been abused have spasms down in the pelvic area. Then you cannot enjoy sex because everything is tightened all the time. Because of being hurt and threatened. Like somebody is going to stick a knife in you and tear you up or like a gun, just take a gun and shoot you all the way up. I picture these things in my mind even though he did not do it he threatened to do it and he took a knife one time. I am going to counseling and I am so exhausted. I am sorry.

Rape, and threats of harm to the sexual organs were the forms of sexual abuse reported.

It seems probable from the more abstract discussion of sex among participants that pressure to have sex without regard for the needs of wives may be a problem bordering on sexual abuse in some Muslim marriages. It is clear that given the scant amount of data on sexual abuse obtained from study participants, this problem requires further exploration. This may be difficult to do given the highly sensitive and private nature of the topic.

SEQUELA OF ABUSE

Abuse is harmful to the health of women. Physical injury, pelvic pain, and homicide were among the sequela of abuse reported by this sample. Other sequela reported were depression, suicidal ideation, symptoms of post-traumatic stress, and spiritual crisis. The following exemplars will address the psychological and spiritual sequela of abuse as reported by participants.

Depression

Despite the fact that questions about depression and suicidal ideation were not included in the interview format, 4 participants specifically reported experiencing these sequela.

I think probably I am just getting out of my depression. It took about three years. Because now that I am living by myself I am so happy, I am so at peace. I give my kids more time. I have a video that we did after my son was born seven years ago, and we were looking at it and I looked at myself and I was like. First I was in bed. I am hardly ever in bed unless I am upset. So I was in bed in the afternoon. And in the video I can hear the kids downstairs. I could hear someone say Amina get off the stove. She was only six. And she was down there messing with the stove and I am in bed not even caring. And then when the kids come in with the video camera, I stand up and I read like this depressing poem about love and forgiveness which had to do with my ex-husband. He had not been home in days. He had a drug problem . . . So I guess my son was just born and he had not come home in three days and I was like so upset I was in bed like depressed and this whole thing.

I never experienced any physical abuse, but I allowed myself to get into a pattern of psychological and emotional abuse, you know, you can turn it off, but I turned off and went into a deep, deep depression and that is not healthy because again you are not dealing with the situation.

Suicidal Ideation

The 2 participants who described being suicidal felt trapped in their abusive marriages. In the first exemplar the participant felt trapped because she believed she could not leave the house to get help. In the second exemplar, the participant felt trapped because she perceived that divorce was not an option.

I was not supposed to tell my children. They are grown and married. I was not supposed to tell anybody. I could not go to anybody—the authorities or anybody because you just do not go out. A couple of times I thought of throwing myself out of the window. We were upstairs. I am a person when I read this verse in the Qur'an several years ago that Allah will not give a burden on you more than you

can bear—that has kept me from killing myself. One of the things. Of course I do not want to go to hell, but when you are depressed you are feeling there is no way out, you do not think about heaven and hell. You are just not at that stage. I mean you are just not thinking, you are desperate . . . I was like very suicidal. I mean I was not trying to kill myself, but I was having the thought in my mind and here I had a conflict with my beliefs in God. I would just say “I take refuge in God from the accursed satan.” I used to say that automatically. I was stuck in that place.

Our marriage had deteriorated to the point that whenever he would come home, I would always try to be in another room and try to avoid him because if I was for instance, standing in a door and he wanted to go through, he would just shove me and roughly out of the way and bounce me against the door frame as he went through, and he never had anything nice to say. I was suicidal by that time. I was like, I was like—it was horrible and I could not think of any way to get out of other than divorce which was to me still unthinkable, and I thought the only way to get out of it would be to be dead.

Depression and suicidal ideation are common sequela among battered women in the general population (Stark & Filtcraft, 1995). The findings from this study indicate that abused Muslim women also suffer in this way. Feeling trapped and seeing no way out of abusive relationships were precursors to depression reported by this sample.

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

One participant who had experienced severe physical abuse reported experiencing flashbacks and poor concentration afterward.

One of the doctors told me “you are paralyzed with fear.” I mean I cannot do anything. I do not want to say I was scared because I trust God. If I am going to die—but it is like I cannot concentrate because of the stress. I cannot think. I cannot remember. I cannot even do things at home. I just never knew when he was going to blow up and break things. I still get flashbacks. It is something I have to get healed from.

Many of the 13 participants who reported some form of abuse within marriage, also reported childhood abuse. Out of the 4 participants that reported psychological

sequela from abuse, 3 also reported experiencing childhood abuse. A lifetime of abuse took its toll on these women.

Spiritual Crisis

When family and/or community supported abusers this sometimes resulted in spiritual crisis. Feeling distanced from and betrayed by God, and worrying that God was not pleased with them were some of the ways this crisis manifested itself.

The main thing I had thought about was the issue of the affects of this abuse and patriarchal system on my spirituality and I remember saying at the end of the last interview that I had been having more or less a crisis in faith . . . because there are some very specific promises made in the Qur'an about wives who ask Allah for help in their marriage situations and that it is promised to happen. And I felt basically that I had been lied to at that point because I did not see any help coming for me at all. I also felt that I had wound up in these bad situations and that I was not any less deserving of a good marriage than anybody else would be and yet I was having all these terrible problems. And so after my divorce . . . I just felt really blank spiritually like I just did not feel the presence of God anywhere. Certainly not through any of the usual Islamic avenues, through prayer, fasting, or anything like that I did not feel any spirituality. Even though I really wanted to. I wanted myself to feel that but I did not feel it. It was not there.

The participant cited above had difficulty coming to terms with her abuse. She prayed for protection, but continued to suffer abuse nevertheless, and as a result felt abandoned and betrayed by God. This participant's feeling that God had abandoned her precipitated a spiritual crisis—one that she had not completely worked through at the time of the study.

The next exemplar reflects the ways in which opposition to divorce from family members can influence abused women spiritually:

In the middle of the night I wake up and you know what they say, if your parents do not forgive you how can Allah forgive you? You know Allah has not forgiven you? I always think about that. Even when I am praying in sajda (prostrate on the floor) I say you know, is my prayer going to be accepted when my mother feels like this? So again you are stuck.

Rather than finding comfort in faith, this woman feared God's wrath. Her belief that God might not accept her prayers (because her mother was displeased with her) tormented her daily.

Given that Islam is a central part of Muslim women's lives, a crisis in faith is a painful and challenging problem. Making sense of what has happened to them may directly conflict with previous beliefs about God, fate, and prayer. Worry, disillusionment, and emptiness take their toll on the mind, body, and spirit. Thus, of all the sequela of abuse, spiritual crisis may be the most significant of all.

SUMMARY

Abuse experiences reported by this sample were extensive and sometimes severe. The underlying cultural beliefs surrounding abuse provided both confusion and clarity for women. The idea of symbolic beatings, which specifically delineate the extent to which a husband may physically chastise his wife, set a limit in the minds of participants. Men who went beyond symbolic beatings were wrong and their behavior was unIslamic. Participants did not blame themselves for the abuse, since their husbands were clearly crossing the line of what Islam allows. In the case of emotional abuse, however, what Islam allows in this arena was less clear. How much power and control it was reasonable for husbands to exert of wives was not clear for those

participants who believed that good wives should be obedient. Still, other forms of abuse such as insults, cursing, threats, humiliation, abandonment, false accusations, and attacks on self-esteem were unanimously regarded as unIslamic. Women experiencing these forms of emotional abuse also held their husbands responsible for their abusive behavior and did not blame themselves.

Concerning sexual abuse, the line between abuse and religious rights and duties began to blur. Because of the common belief that husbands have the right to unlimited sexual access from wives, marital rape was controversial among many participants. Despite women's acknowledgment that abuse is unIslamic, there still remained a pervasive tolerance, particularly toward emotional abuse and marital rape. This tolerance stemmed from the hegemony of gender oppression evident across ethnic cultures and in patriarchal interpretations of Islam itself.

Religious faith was central to participants' abuse experiences. Providing comfort and strength, spirituality often times served as a guidepost for women. It helped them to make sense of their experiences and in some cases kept women from suicide. At the same time spirituality provided both strength and a comfort, it also had the potential to compound women's vulnerability to abuse. By manipulating Islam, abusers were able to prey on their victims using their own spirituality against them. Even when women were aware that abusers use of Islam against them was wrong, they were often powerless to combat this spiritual assault. The idea that this life does not matter further complicated this picture, since women were encouraged by community members to tolerate abuse

with the assurance that they would be rewarded in the after-life for their patience and suffering.

Actual abuse experiences of this sample included a spectrum of abuse with multiple forms and levels of severity. In this small sample of women, insidious abuse which sought to undermine women's self-esteem and autonomy, and severe physical abuse resulting in hospitalization were found. Consistent with reports in the literature concerning the sequela of abuse in the general population, this sample suffered the same debilitating aftereffects. Participants reported physical injury, sexual dysfunction, depression, suicidal ideation, and symptoms of post-traumatic stress following abuse over time. Of note also were reports of spiritual crisis stemming from abuse experiences. This crisis left women whose faith had always been central to their lives feeling empty and anxious.

These American Muslim women's experiences of abuse varied, however the cultural beliefs and spiritual elements involved were common and pervasive. Understanding the unique challenges faced by Muslim women is essential for effective intervention with this population. Recognizing the importance of Muslim culture at the same time understanding that Muslim women are a diverse group who are influenced by a variety of ethnic cultures and by varying interpretations of Islam is an important aspect of this work.

CHAPTER SEVEN:

MARRIAGE

Examining abuse as it occurs among American Muslim women quickly leads to the recognition that marriage is central to this phenomenon. Responses to abuse reported by participants cannot be separated from their understanding of marriage and its significance in their lives. Data suggested that marriage is an institution prescribed by Islam associated with gender-specific rights and responsibilities. Through marriage, participants aspired to an Islamic ideal, one that, in cases of abuse, their marriages failed to live up to. Thus, in order to interpret abuse experiences of study participants, it is necessary to examine their understanding of marriage within Muslim culture predicated on Islamic standards of conduct. This chapter presents an overview of common themes around marriage, all of which are salient to the phenomenon of abuse as described by study participants.

The paradigm case of Fatima represents many of the themes around marriage. Her story is similar to other stories in that it reflects the ways in which faith and culture intertwine with abuse experiences. Fatima's story reflects attitudes towards several aspects of marriage, including polygamy, arranged marriages, and marriage in general, shared by the common culture. Fatima was among the one third of participants who held onto conservative interpretations of Islam, accepting male authority in family and community life, despite the trauma of her abuse experiences. Conversely, another third

of participants changed their interpretations of Islam over time. This change in interpretation tended to move away from dominant male readings of Islam, rejecting male authority over women in family and community life as human aberration. The remaining third of the sample fell in-between, possessing a mix of conservative and more liberal interpretations of the faith.

Fatima was a European-American who converted to Islam almost 30 years ago while in college. Since that time, she had been in a series of abusive marriages with Arab Muslim men. Conservative in her religious practice, she had aligned herself with Arab dominated conservative Muslim communities. In this excerpt, Fatima talks about her marriage to her third husband, an Egyptian man who was at least outwardly devoutly religious. This was a polygamous marriage, which ended in divorce.

Fatima's understanding of her marriage moved between her expectations of Islamic ideals and the reality of her abuse. Ideally, in polygamous marriages, wives should receive equal treatment. Because Fatima's husband gave the appearance of being a devout Muslim, she expected he would live up to Islamic ideals. He did not:

I am just in shock from what happened. You think somebody who is very religious supposedly is going to fear Allah, fear God, and they are going to give you your rights. He wanted to give me one or two days a week. He said he would see me whenever, not every other day as he was supposed to. And I said no I do not agree . . . I used to bring verses from the Qur'an on this, and it still did not do any good. I was confused. How could he have memorized the entire Qur'an and still act like this? I thought our marriage was going to be Islamic . . . I thought I was going to have such a great life with a Muslim leader, even if I am giving up having my husband to myself. . .

Despite her husband's failure to live up to Islamic expectations in marriage, she continued to try to live up to her perceived Islamic duties. This included obedience to her abusive husband. She continued to obey despite her suspicion that he was only using her to gain residency in the United States:

I used to cry "Ya Allah" that means 'Oh God, Oh God.' I used to cry, and cry and I could not stop. I think he really just wanted to get the green card from me. I mean how can they use people? I do not know. I was trying to obey and be good and he used that. He took advantage of this —that the wife should obey the husband unless it is something against her health or her faith. Somebody has to be the head of the house and I do not think that is a form of control that is wrong when there is consultation and kindness. The Prophet, peace be upon him, said "the best of you are those who are best to their families."

The Islamic ideal of men being kind to their families helped Fatima make sense of the patriarchal family structure that enjoined wives' obedience to husbands. However, Fatima found herself in a difficult position. She was unwilling to abdicate her perceived Islamic duty of obedience, making resistance to abuse challenging at best. Unfortunately, her husband freely abdicated his Islamic responsibilities, treating her with cruelty throughout the marriage. This cycle of abuse soon took its toll on Fatima:

It got to the point where I was suicidal. I mean I was not trying to kill myself, but I was having the thought in my mind and here I had a conflict with my beliefs in God. I would just say "I take refuge in God and from the accursed Satan." I used to say that automatically. I was stuck in that place . . . My prayers were the only reason I did not go completely crazy. I really believe that because I kept praying all the time . . . I asked for a full Islamic separation. He said no you can't have it. He did not want me to take a hakam, somebody to represent me. The Qur'an says to take somebody to represent her and somebody to represent him and then try to solve things. He would not let me do that. Nobody was supposed to know. Everything that was supposed to be Islamic was closed . . .

Forbidden to speak of her abuse or to seek counsel, Fatima found comfort only in her faith. This was the one arena in her life her abuser could not control.

The abuse continued over time and the marriage ended in divorce. Her abuser did not follow Islamic law in the divorce proceedings and again she was surprised that his behavior strayed from established Islamic standards of conduct:

Later on we were still having problems. He was being so unjust nothing was being solved. He was leaving on a trip and I did not shake hands with him or kiss him goodbye and stuff like that and he went out and then the other wife came and I said "tell him our marriage is finished." I did not ask for the Islamic divorce or anything . . . I was surprised later on when the other wife told me your waiting period is finished. I said waiting period from what, my divorce? She said yes. And I was like in mental shock. I did not ask for a divorce. What I had said was in anger . . . Then I went to scholars and asked can I be divorced when I did not ask for it? Then the scholar said "if he says you are divorced then you are not married to him." Okay so then I knew I was divorced . . .

After her divorce, Fatima immediately prayed to God to give her a husband. This is consistent with the importance of marriage to Muslim women described in this sample.

Fatima cited a well-known *hadith* about marriage as a way of making sense of her decision to remarry:

I went and borrowed some money and I got an apartment and just tried to start my life again . . . I got the divorce papers and I prayed to God, I said "if he is good for me guide him and we will get back together. If he is not, give me somebody better." I really believed in that because the last ten days of fasting are very good times to pray at night and so it was a very good time to make what we call duwah which is a special prayer . . . So I said this prayer in my heart to myself, and the next day one of the sisters called me. An Arab sister. She said "there is a brother that wants to marry you." Well of course I am thinking this is God's will . . . Marriage is a good thing in our religion, it is half of our religion. When you marry this is half of your religion and the rest is fear God and try to behave properly.

The often-quoted hadith, marriage is half of religion and the rest is fear God, underscores the meaning of marriage to participants. It is half of their faith—a prescribed religious duty.

Fatima followed Muslim community norms when considering remarriage. She did not date and was never alone with her prospective husband before the marriage:

So I said "I am not ready." I said "tell him to pray tonight and I am going to pray before we talk." What we usually do when sisters want to marry and when brothers want to marry is have them go to somebody's house. They sit like on two different couches. They sit in the room chaperoned, but with the people in the next room. You can sit and talk and ask questions . . . but they should not meet along because Satan can come. When you are sitting alone in a room then Satan is the third one . . . it is a normal feeling for man and woman to be attracted to each other physically. If you are alone the chance to sin comes easier than if you are not. So anyway I met him. . . . I went to the family's house and I we talked for about fifteen minutes I met with him another time, like an hour and people were saying "he is becoming religious now." After his family said okay, we did the marriage contract . . . we did the Islamic contract. We didn't register it in court or anything.

Muslims following tradition marry via the enactment of a marriage contract.

Participants described the marriage contract as a way of setting marital ground rules and of protecting the rights of women. It was not long after the honeymoon was over that the abuse began:

We were very happy in the beginning and we used to go to the mosque. He used to pray. He used to go to work. I would go to work and come back and fix dinner When my ex-husband wanted me to go through with the residency application for him that is when the abuse started. My husband said "you are not going to go to immigration and make a complaint against him?" I said "I'll go and tell them I am not married to him but I am not going to file a complaint." I thought that was wrong in Islam. I should not do that. I still had this feeling that I want to do what is right toward my husband and at the same time I don't want to be unjust to anyone. This is my belief and my feeling. He slapped me real hard and he used to shout at me . . . So he said "if you don't go and do it

tomorrow" he said he was going to kill me. He stepped on my head. He had heavy work boots. They have metal in the toes. He hit me openhanded. I am not saying with his fist, but he is very strong. I mean it is unbelievable how hard he hits. Okay and he threw things, pushed dishes off the table . . . He would shout and scream in a violent rage, just unbelievable . . .

Fatima disobeyed her husband's wishes because she believed what he was asking her to do was morally wrong. Although her ex-husband's insistence that his application for residency proceed was indeed fraudulent, Fatima believed that filing a formal complaint against him would be wrong. In her mind, simply telling the INS that she was no longer married to this man would suffice. Despite the fact that her ex-husband's plan for achieving residency was illegal, he received the support of the Muslim community, and Fatima did not. This set of circumstances placed a great deal of stress on her new marriage and her new husband responded violently. The physical abuse she sustained was severe:

I used to pray and say "I testify there is no God but Allah and Mohammad is His messenger." It is good to say that before you die. I used to say that and I used to say prayers. And if I said yes to any of his questions he would hit me and if I said no to any of his questions he would hit me so I just tried to be quiet. There was nothing I could do to stop those rages . . .

Fatima interpreted her husband's rage as a response to outside stresses, which he was ill equipped to deal with. Like some other abusers in the sample, Fatima's husband grew up surrounded by war, violence, and injustice. She believed he had post-traumatic stress disorder, and made sense of his responses accordingly. As she endured the abuse from her "sick" husband, Fatima turned to her faith as a means of coping. This was consistent

with other accounts where women recited Qur'an and/or said special prayers to comfort themselves during times of crisis.

In addition to physical abuse, Fatima also experienced repeated emotional trauma in the form of verbal abuse, destruction of property, and intimidation:

I used to be very active with the Muslim women. I used to have to call them when we had activities or tea, and then he used to say "you are always on the phone." It was like he was jealous of me even talking on the phone to sisters. He would even break the phone, literally stomp on it. I have had at least fifteen or more phones broken . . . very violent things. Throwing things which was a way of scaring me like I was going to be next. One of the worst things that happened was the cursing. Though he knew I was true, he said "you are going to bed with your ex-husband." He called me a bitch. He called me a whore. He called me filthy names . . .

As the abuse escalated, Fatima turned to non-Muslim sources of help. She took this step as a last resort. Her Muslim community had been of little help, previously siding with her ex-husband in his illegal attempts to gain residency. In addition, her abuser was clearly out of control and he intimidated members of the community. Consequently, Fatima had no other option than to seek assistance from non-Muslims when her abuse became so severe that she was seriously injured:

I got a restraining order. Even after the restraining order he called me and like pouted and just kept going. I have always obeyed. I never left home. Only twice I left. Once on the night he was saying "call 911 go ahead and call 911" and that is what I did. I went to the shelter when I had a sprained neck and was kicked so badly. When I went out he had been beating me the whole night, and then I went out and ran over to this Muslim's house and then I hid out there. I hid in their van and they took me to a small convenience store and then I called the crisis line and then the police came and they got me to a place of shelter . . . A few people told me that one of the American Muslim leaders gave a ruling, a fatwa, an Islamic ruling that it is haram, forbidden, to go to the domestic violence shelters. And he used this as evidence that I was doing something

wrong . . . How can this be wrong? . . . I was innocent and was not the cause of all of the problems. His behavior was wrong.

Even when beaten severely, Fatima felt it necessary to explain why she had left the house to go to a battered women's shelter. This is because an obedient wife would not leave her home without her husband's permission. Criticism of Fatima for going to a shelter while in crisis, underscores the difficulties women in this sample faced in trying to keep themselves safe while at the same time attempting to conform to community norms.

Fatima's story exemplifies the ways in which faith intertwines with marriage in Muslim culture, and by extension, with Muslim women's abuse experiences. Marriage is a prescribed religious practice, and the only socially sanctioned intimate relationship extant among Muslims. As wives, participants described their lives as driven by Islamic standards of conduct, including the traditional belief that good wives are obedient. While not all participants shared Fatima's beliefs about marriage and obedience, and some had distanced themselves from their Muslim communities over time, the underlying cultural beliefs evident in Fatima's story surfaced across cases. Because these beliefs are rooted in the culture, they influenced women's lives whether they shared them or not.

An exploration of each step in the process of marriage as it occurred across cases follows. Recognizing and understanding the significance and meaning of marriage for Muslim women provides essential background information fundamental to a larger understanding of American Muslim women's lived experiences of emotional, physical, and/or sexual abuse.

MARRIAGE IS HALF OF FAITH AND THE REST IS FEAR ALLAH

For the participants of this study, talk of marriage permeated all accounts. The significance of marriage for these Muslim women was extensive. Not only was marriage an important interpersonal relationship, but it was a practical way of life and a part of their religious faith with associated rights and responsibilities. Thus, for these Muslim women, marriage had profound social and spiritual dimensions dictated by Muslim culture and by their own individual religious interpretations. The following data excerpts exemplify the significance and meaning of marriage for study participants:

In Islam marriage is the basis of the society, we don't have boyfriends, we don't have dating. Marriage is half your religion and the rest is fear Allah. So this is a priority. Of course it is natural to be married. In Islam we don't have monks and nuns who are celibate. You are supposed to have that natural thing, you want that, so that is why you stick to the marriage no matter what . . . It is not just an emotional thing "Oh I love him." No. It is a commitment because we believe so strongly in pleasing our creator . . . There are more things with reputable scholars coming out. In the next 5-10 years we'll hear a lot more about rights and responsibilities in marriage. Before it was the traditional thing she has the right to her food, her clothing, if he gets new clothes she gets new clothes, things like that. Also wives rights and what her responsibilities are: obeying her husband and not using from his wealth without his permission, and taking care of his wealth when he is gone, and not letting anybody into the house that he does not approve of. Certain rights and responsibilities like this . . . marriage is supposed to be for the protection of society, for the male, for the female, it is supposed to be a good thing not a bad thing.

The exemplar above provides a nice description of this participant's view of marriage—a view that was rooted in Muslim culture as described across cases. This view characterizes marriage as the basis of Islamic society and as the only sanctioned sexual relationship between men and women, with prescribed rights and responsibilities.

In the next exemplar, the participant describes marriage as an inherently religious practice. Women marry to gain religious knowledge, to be able to practice Islam, and to provide good Islamic role models for their children:

Muslim women, depending on the age, can marry for different things. Some women marry to learn the religion, the man's scholarship. Or what he has learned of the religion and what he applied of the religion can make him very desirable as a mate. Because you have the opportunity to practice—some women want nothing more than to practice the religion. That is all they want. They want the prayers 5 times a day, they want all the etiquettes of the religion, they want the Hajj, they want the umra, and they have that. Other women marry for financial support. Other women marry because they want role models for their children.

For many women in this sample, practicing Islam was central to their lives.

Thus, marriage, a prescribed religious practice also became central:

Interviewer: *Is it better to marry or to stay single?*

Participant: *I was taught that half of your faith is when you are married.*

Given that marriage is half of faith, marriage has tremendous religious and cultural significance for Muslim women. These exemplars illustrate that marriage for this sample was an important part of religious practice. In turn, religious practice was the key to creating a moral society. Thus, for many of the women in this sample, living single was simply not an option.

GETTING MARRIED

Early Marriage Talk

Participants who were Muslim during their childhood and/or adolescence within Muslim communities, often were exposed to the idea of getting married at a young age.

Two of the participants actually married at the age of 15. There is a basis in Islamic history for this practice, since the Prophet's wife Aisha was only 6 or 7 years old at the time of her engagement (Glassé, 1989). This marriage has been the basis for *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) which recognizes the marriage of minors when there is the consent of a lawful (male) guardian (Ali, n.d.).

There are many stories about Aisha and her marriage to the Prophet (p.b.h.) to the extent that the Prophet's (p.b.h.) interactions with this wife comprise significant portions of the *sunnah*. The following data excerpts illustrate the ways in which early talk of marriage shaped participants expectations regarding marriage. This participant explained that her mother had taught her she had to have a husband, since this was normative behavior:

Participant: *I felt like I learned—I was given the message from my mother that there was something wrong with you—that you needed to have a husband. Kind of like that is what there is to life.*

Interviewer: *Do you feel like this is something you learned early on?*

Participant: *I think the message was always kind of there. Probably the way my mom treated men better than women. That influenced me.*

Interviewer: *What about other Muslims that you knew growing up? Did you get that message from there as well?*

Participant: *My friend Camelia who was about sixteen at the time would tell me about these offers of marriage for her. And I remember once a guy called my house and said he was looking for someone to marry. First he wanted to talk to my mom, but then he said he wanted to marry me. I was like twelve years old. Plus the fact that you were not supposed to have a boyfriend. Some of the girls did but it was a big secret. It was better to be married.*

Interviewer: *When this guy called did you know him at all or what?*

Participant: *No, he said he got the phone number from someone who knew my mom. Someone from the community gave him our phone number. He lived in Texas or something. The lady who gave him the number told him my mother and older sister were unmarried and they were each looking for someone to marry. But they were not home so he started talking to me. He asked me how old I was and I said twelve. He started talking about how he knew a friend of his who married an eleven year old girl, and his friend took care of her and he was saying Islamically it was a good thing. I was kind of saying eleven years old is too young.*

While marriage of very young women is not common in America, the marriage of young women when it does occur, shapes the expectation of others. Eleven and 12-year-old girls receiving marriage proposals set the stage for consideration of marriage early in life.

Hearing talk of marriage and receiving proposals at a young age, groomed young women for marriage early on. Marriage was expected, and as the next exemplar illustrates receiving marriage proposals was a measure of desirability that young women were well aware of:

I knew a friend of mine as I was growing up who received a marriage proposal at the age of twelve. And she was quite outraged and disgusted on the surface but I think she was secretly pleased and flattered. And I remember being a little bit older than she was and feeling ashamed that I had never had anyone be interested in me at all. I was probably two years older than she was. And marriage proposals for some girls—it seemed like collecting marriage proposals was a sign of how attractive you were.

Talk of marriage became part of young women's social world. In addition, they knew that marriage was the only culturally sanctioned form of intimacy. Moreover, in some cases, particularly for young women from immigrant families, young women were

socialized to believe that marriage was the only way they could leave their family homes and have a home of their own. Thus, marriage was linked to independence from one's parents and adult status for young women:

Participant: *I was fourteen and I was overseas for about a year. And we knew this family that my brother had known for years. And that family was always coming and going and I had no idea of why they were coming and going. I didn't know that much about my culture because I was raised in the United States. And the mother of that family—she had like five or six sons—she was asking for me to get married to her son. And she was coming for a whole year. And finally then my brothers I guess agreed and said okay this is a good family it is time for her to get married.*

Interviewer: *They did not talk to you about it?*

Participant: *Then after they decided, all the brothers, they decided. Then they came and asked me is this okay? But yes, I did say yes, but it was like something like you know I am going to get out of this jail I am going to be free. I just wanted to get out of that house that I was in. So the only way that I could get out was by marrying of course and that was the simple way to do it.*

At the age of 15, girls may lack the insight and maturity prudent for such an important life decision as marriage. The woman in the exemplar above relied on her family for guidance. In her case, this was disastrous since her marriage was severely abusive and her family refused to consider divorce as an honorable option for her.

Early talk of marriage, the prohibition of dating, the link between marriage and adult status, and the significance of marriage for Muslims socialized participants to expect to marry, and they did sometimes, very young.

Pressure to Marry

Inherent in the socialization of girls concerning marriage, was the expectation that they would marry. This expectation resulted in pressure that was both internally and externally derived. External sources of pressure to marry included family, friends, and the Muslim community. The following section describes the ways in which participants experienced and perceived the pressure to marry within their Muslim communities.

Because of the importance of marriage in the lives of participants, many women described themselves as having been eager to marry. This eagerness to marry made women vulnerable to men who sought marriage primarily for the purposes of gaining United States residency. The participant in this exemplar suspected that her first husband had married her for the purposes of gaining residency. She perceived that pressure to marry had conditioned her and other women like her to marry and marry quickly, thus making her vulnerable to exploitation:

Participant: *As far as the green card issue, it is probably easier to get a Muslim woman to marry you than a non-Muslim, because Muslim women are conditioned to think they can't go through the normal dating and meeting someone process —that they need to find somebody and just get married.*

Interviewer: *So women feel like there is some pervasive expectation that they need to be married?*

Participant: *As soon as they become Muslim they start looking for a husband. Or somebody starts looking for a husband for them. They are told marriage is half of faith, everybody needs to be married . . . In my situation, this person came along who was introduced to me as someone who was wonderful and a good Muslim, and of good character, and all the things that you want to hear. And we met a few times and I felt like there was some pressure on me to*

get married, from my mother, although she later on denied it and said there was not.

The pressure to marry was learned and internalized:

Interviewer: *You felt pressured to marry?*

Participant: *It was an internal pressure, like internally you can't be seeing him, you have to get married. That is what you should do. I don't think it was real conscious for me but I thought you are supposed to get married and have children this is a part of life and I felt like I had to do it. I mean I liked him but, I mean I liked him but it is just like I felt like I had to.*

The second exemplar above illustrates how socialization processes emphasizing marriage, led to an expectation that marriage is mandatory. Consequently, being single may not be a viable option for adult women.

The following exemplar describes pressure from the community for this new convert to marry a Muslim man soon after her divorce:

The other thing is, you've probably discovered this already, there is extreme pressure in the Muslim community to marry women off in a hurry. Especially the new sisters. And I think at that point I needed that, I thought that is what I should do, everybody was telling me "Oh we'll get you married" and I did remarry by the time my daughter was eight weeks old.

As these data excerpts demonstrate, the pressure to marry is common and pervasive and it stems from internal, familial, and community sources.

FINDING A HUSBAND

Having been socialized, and in many cases, pressured, to marry, participants described the process of finding a husband. Family and/or friends often introduced single men and women within Muslim communities, although some participants

reported selecting their husbands without community involvement. To some extent, the background of potential mates was investigated by family and/or friends. Once a couple expressed interests in each other, they met with a chaperone present. Many participants reported that hurriedly arranged marriages were the endpoint of this process.

A Euro-American participant talked about the process she went through when she married her second husband, after converting to Islam:

Participant: *I met my second husband through mutual friends. And he had quite the reputation for being a very pious, strict person. You know, minding his own business, working hard at three jobs, going to school. Very upright, very studious, and that is what I wanted . . . So it was a quick courtship, it was too quick but . . . he was everything that somebody would want in a husband, stable, strong, extremely strong—what people would think was great.*

Interviewer: *Did you know him well at all?*

Participant: *No, no, no, everything was chaperoned. As soon as he knew my divorce was final he proposed.*

The process the woman in the exemplar above went through to get married was typical across cases. Family or friends introduced a couple to each other and they then began a short courtship, which was chaperoned at all times.

Women found their husbands through family or friends, and consequently had to rely on the judgment of others about this important life decision:

I had been wanting to get married for a long time, but it was hard because my parents were divorced and in this kind of Arab-based community it was the fathers who did all the arranging of marriages. And I didn't have a father, so I was pretty much a nonentity in terms of getting married. So I met a few people, kind of through the mail here and there or just these kind of people who came along and say well okay we've met, let's get married. But I didn't want to marry

any of those people. So finally a long-time family friend that I trusted had helped me. He said he was going to find someone, and he sent this person over who was the son of one of his friends that he had known from birth and was some great family in his opinion, that family, although I don't think he really knew the son. So I met the son, but before I met this person who was helping me had said, you know, you are being too picky. And after I met this man I was not particularly impressed but there was so much pressure for me to like him that I finally accepted him anyway after just meeting him for a few days.

Without a father to arrange a marriage for her, the participant in the preceding exemplar had to rely on a male friend of the family to assist her in selecting a husband. His advice to her, that she was too picky, seemed to imply that she should just get married and not be so particular about who she selected as a life-long partner. Not surprisingly, the marriage turned out to be abusive and soon ended in divorce.

The next exemplar describes the process an Afghani-American woman went through in getting married. In her case, her male relatives were involved in arranging the marriage:

I never met him before the wedding. I saw him when his family would come to our house, I knew that one of the brothers was going to be my husband. But I never met him. The Eid [religious holiday] before I got married, I was married between the two Eids, he came to our house with his brothers and then finally between the curtains my sister showed me which one of the brothers that I was marrying. That I was engaged to. But then he had a second brother that looked exactly like him. And on my wedding day my husband was standing to my left and my brother-in-law to my right. And I was wondering whether it was going to be this one or that one. They were both wearing white.

This woman's marriage to a man she had never met required that she rely entirely on her family's judgment in selecting a husband. Again, as with the previous exemplar, this marriage was abusive and ended in divorce.

While the majority of participants reported family and/or community involvement in selecting a husband, this African-American participant did not fit the pattern:

Interviewer: *How did you get into these marriages, was it like the community helping you to select a husband or?*

Participant: *No I did not give them a chance. I was married on my own. I never went and asked people, you know, do you know this brother, what do you think. I was sitting on the steps waiting for the Imam. Because a brother had promised to marry me and he didn't marry me, so I was sitting there waiting for the Imam to come in to tell him that this brother is not going to marry me, because I was upset. And then this other brother comes along and asked me why I was sitting out so late at night. So we started talking and I said well fine I will just marry him. So because I still had this thing from the previous marriage that you know, you just get married like that (snaps her fingers). So we got married two days later.*

Despite the fact that this woman did not rely on family or friends to arrange her marriage, she still followed the pattern of a quick courtship noted in all other cases where Muslim women married. This was likely due to proscriptions against dating extant within the common religious culture.

Deciding whom to marry is a crucial decision. Having friends and family involved in this decision could potentially add to women's abilities to make informed and prudent decisions. However, as the exemplars illustrate, for the women in this sample, family and/or friends were sometimes more involved than the women themselves were in this process. While the decision to marry or not to marry is supposed to be in the hands of women, limitations on dating made it difficult for women

to make informed choices. These limits were particularly concerning, considering the pattern of marrying quickly observed across cases.

It is important to note that women in this sample who entered arranged marriages were not the only ones who were abused. Women who violated the taboo on dating and women who dated before conversion also experienced abuse. However, the group of women who had entered arranged marriages made sense of how they ended up in abusive marriages differently from those who had chosen their husbands independently. They had a sense of regret in their stories. They regretted giving up their voices during the process of deciding to marry and they felt that those they had relied upon to help select good husbands had let them down.

MARRIAGE CONTRACTS

Once a couple agrees to marry, they devise a marriage contract. Signing the marriage contract before witnesses constitutes the act of marriage:

It is really easy to get married in Islam. Two witnesses, somebody represents the woman if she does not have a male guardian, and they ask her do you agree for him to represent you and this amount of dowry? How much does she want for the dowry, \$500, or to teach her twenty verses of Qur'an, or whatever she agrees to. Do you agree? Yes. Any other conditions on his side or her side. They both agree, they sign it and then they are married. There is nothing else to do. Even to register your marriage in court is not required to be Islamically married.

During marriage, there is an expectation that both parties will abide by the terms of the marriage contract. While there is typically only one contract drawn up at the start of a marriage, several participants described attempts to solve marital problems and end abusive behavior by re-negotiating marriage contracts. Across the board, the husbands

and former husbands of study participants flagrantly violated marriage contracts. In short, marriage contracts were ineffective and were not protective of participants at any level.

In the next exemplar, the participant expressed disappointment in the guidance she received from others regarding the marriage process, in particular, concerning her marriage contract:

Participant: *From just the first few days of the marriage it was terrible.*

Interviewer: *Did you have a marriage contract?*

Participant: *Yes.*

Interviewer: *Did you have any special stipulations?*

Participant: *No, I did not because I did not have any guidance at all. I had no experience with men and I had never been told that I should put stipulations in a marriage contract. Even though I was not young, I was really inexperienced and naive. And I trusted people that did not after all turn out to have my best interests in mind. And so even financially I did not have any stipulations because I was told that I lived in a community property state so I didn't need any. And then I was very hurt to find out later that this man who had advised me had had a long set of stipulations for the marriage contract of his daughter who was one of my friends.*

While the participant quoted above failed to specify what many women perceived to be protective stipulations in her contract, the participant in the next exemplar did just that.

Still this failed to protect her later in the marriage when she pondered divorce:

Participant: *See when we got married we had a contract. In the contract I put that if we got divorced I am going to have the child if we have any children I am going to have them. And then he said okay that*

is reasonable because children are happier with mom anyway. But now when I tell him he says no.

Interviewer: *He does not want to stick to the contract?*

Participant: *No. he says because if he divorced me than I can have my child but if I ask for the divorce then I can't.*

Interviewer: *Does the contract say that?*

Participant: *I don't know I don't have the contract.*

Interviewer: *Does he have it?*

Participant: *I don't know if he has it or not. I don't have it.*

Interviewer: *That must be really upsetting. Because the contract is supposed to protect you. And it does not seem to have helped at all in your case.*

Participant: *That is another thing about men—they lie a lot. All the men. Not just Muslim men.*

Interviewer: *Do you think so?*

Participant: *I think so yes. They lie for things they want and you don't even know they are lying because they say it in a way that you believe them.*

Interviewer: *Have you observed this in your daily life?*

Participant: *I have observed it with my husband.*

Interviewer: *You think he is not honest with you most of the time?*

Participant: *No like with this contract.*

The sense of betrayal present in the preceding exemplars is clear. Islamic ideals regarding the protection of women via marriage contracts were not realized. Instead,

through poor representation and/or men's flagrant disregard for contract terms, these women found themselves unprotected.

Also of interest was the number of participants who reported re-negotiating contracts in an effort to stop the abuse:

Participant: *My family made us swear by the Qur'an that we would not do this to each other any more. I said fine. Okay.*

Interviewer: *So they thought that was going to fix it?*

Participant: *Yes that that was going to fix it. And I spent eight months overseas because my family had said we are going to support you if you come here and all that. And I went. I took my child with me. And a month later they were like no. No matter what happens you are going to stay with him.*

Interviewer: *Did they ever talk about contracts, making new contracts?*

Participant: *Yes the contracts were so bold. There were so many contracts that you forgot which contract was which.*

The re-negotiated contracts failed in all cases. Husbands who mistreated their wives did not feel compelled to abide by the rules of Islamic conduct and no contract was able to change that. Still women tried, again acting in accordance with Islamic ideals:

I was kicked and then kicked he could go for hours calling me bad names and finally we got kicked out of that complex and then we got the Islamic separation from the wife's side. Then I got a new apartment in my name. Then he says "oh I am gong to be good. I am not going to hit you. I am not going to do anything." All the things he said "you can go to the sisters' meetings. I'm going to stop smoking. I'm going to put it all in a contract" because we had an Islamic divorce from the wife. So we did a contract and had not just two but five witnesses. And he wrote it. He promised he is not gong to pinch me or hit me or kick me. I have a copy of it here . . . The conditions of the wife: He must keep promises made in the first marriage contract. And (1) I am allowed to go out to work with women and/or children. (2) I am allowed to go to the sisters meetings and their other activities and for dawah, like telling people about Islam. (3) I

can have my own business like that is selling, for example selling jilbabs, which are long coats, selling kitchen items. (4) He will quit smoking and will not start again. (5) He will go to anger management classes and the program for batterers starting this week and will continue until he finishes the program. (6) He will not hit me, will not curse me, he will not accuse me of bad things, will not threaten to kill me, will not kick me, spit on me, urinate on me, or do anything to insult or harm me, and (7) If he does not keep and follow these conditions I am not responsible to give him his rights and I have the right to divorce if I request it. And then I have all these witnesses.

This participant's belief that this new contract would protect her was utterly false. Her abuse continued. Despite the fact that she had an Islamic contract with witnesses, and despite the fact that the abuse continued even after the re-negotiated marriage contract, her *Imam* refused to grant a divorce. In this case, not only did this participant's abuser fail to live up to the terms of the contract but so also did her community leader. This occurrence which was completely discordant with Islamic ideals, resulted in confusion on the part of this participant. She could not understand how this could have happened. Ultimately she concluded that her case must be unusual. To conclude otherwise would have shattered yet another Islamic ideal—that women enjoyed respectful, kind, and just treatment in the context of her Muslim community.

Reliance on re-negotiated marriage contracts in cases of abuse revealed that women and/others involved in making new contracts were not dealing with the reality of these relationships. Coming to terms with the ineffectiveness of contracts was difficult since it meant acknowledging that Islam did not necessarily offer a solution to the complex problem of intimate partner abuse in the context of American Muslim communities.

LOVE WILL GROW

Since many women in the study sample were married after a short chaperoned courtship and thus did not know their husbands well before marriage, many of them were not in love at the beginning of their relationships. There was a common expectation described by participants that love would grow over time. When women experienced abuse, love often did not grow, and in many cases, participants did not love their husbands.

You don't fall in love with someone in a week or a day or even a month. And you don't find people in the Muslim community, you know getting married to each other out of love, it is almost always an arrangement kind of thing . . . I think that love is expected to come later. I hear that a lot. That you know we arrange these marriages and then love comes later. In my experience that is not necessarily true and as a matter of fact it is rarely true. I think if you don't care for somebody from the outset you probably won't develop that. It will just deteriorate actually the relationship because if you don't have that loving feeling for someone and then you are pushed into a marriage relationship where one person is oppressed and it goes against the grain of that person, especially American women are not as easily, or don't as easily accept the oppression I think without anger. Because they are not raised in a society where they don't see anything else. You get a deterioration for feelings for each other. Anger builds up.

The participant in the above exemplar had been married twice, and she did not love either of her husbands. In turn, she perceived that they did not love her. Because both of her marriages had been arranged and abusive, she was angry. The Islamic ideal of marriage had eluded her. This was true despite the fact that she was a devout Muslim and had complied with religious and cultural expectations. She had played by the rules without reward.

The next exemplar reflects the Islamic ideal of marriage seen through the eyes of this Euro-American convert:

... love grows because of that respect, that belief in the creator and following what He says is the path. The Prophet peace be upon him, said "go and have a look at her and see her so love can start to grow."

While an absence of love for abusers was not uniformly present throughout the study sample, there were a substantial number of participants who did not love their husbands. Religious and cultural ties played a much more significant role in these women's marriages than did love on an interpersonal level. This is consistent with the meaning of marriage implicit for the majority of participants—that of marriage as an integral part of an Islamic lifestyle.

POLYGAMY

Polygamy in Islam is restricted to the practice of polygyny, which is defined as "the practice or condition of having more than one wife at one time" (Webster, 1989, p. 1115). This practice is based on the following Koranic verses:

O mankind! Reverence your Guardian Lord
Who created you from a single person,
Created of like nature, his mate, and from them twain
scattered (like seeds) countless men and women—
fear Allah, through whom ye demand your mutual (rights),
And (reverence) the wombs (that bore you): for Allah
Ever watches over you.

To orphans restore their property
 (when they reach their age),
 Nor substitute (your) worthless things
 For (their) good ones; and devour not
 Their substance (by mixing it up)
 With your own. For this is Indeed a great sin.
 If ye fear that ye shall not be able to deal justly
 With the orphans, marry women of your choice,
 Two, or three, or four;
 But if ye fear that ye shall not be able to deal
 Justly (with them), then only one, or (a captive)
 That your right hands possess.
 That will be more suitable,
 To prevent you from doing injustice.
 (Qur'an, 4:1-3).

This verse is clearly set in the context of the topic of orphans and their proper treatment. This was a problem in seventh century Arabia since tribal warfare was commonplace, and so, accordingly, were orphans. Some would argue that polygyny then, is only appropriate in the context of war, creating a situation where there are numerous widows and orphans without any means of support. Conversely, many argue that men's right to marry up to four wives is eternal and is not context dependent. These differences in

interpretation around the issue of polygyny were reflected in the narrative accounts of participants.

While none of the participants was in a polygynous marriage during the data collection phase of this study, more than half of participants had had some personal experiences with polygyny in their lives. Experiences with polygyny took the form of husbands threats, near misses, or with husbands actually taking additional wives. Threats consisted of husbands' telling their wives that that they would like to, or were going to, take other wives. Near misses occurred when husbands actually took action to marry other wives, but for various reasons the marriages never transpired. Narrative accounts which told stories of polygyny mostly involved two wives and all of the actual polygynous marriages described first hand ultimately ended in divorce for one or both wives. Two participants gave examples of other people's relationships which they perceived to be "good" polygyny, however none of the first hand accounts of polygyny were without abusive elements. This may be reflective of the study sample which consisted primarily of Muslim women who had experienced abuse. Still the surprisingly high number of participants who had had some experience with polygyny indicates that this phenomenon may not be as rare as many Muslims perceive it to be in the United States, particularly among abused Muslim women.

Good Polygyny

In an attempt to present a balanced picture, descriptions of polygyny, that exemplify "good" polygyny follow:

I know so many people who were in polygamous marriages—if the first wife is ill and she has the children to raise. And I have a Kuwaiti friend, the two wives, they each had children and they each had half of the apartment, and the other one would babysit for her when she would go out with her, with the husband, you know if they went out to the mosque, to Eid, whatever. And they would take turns like that. And even one of them would buy the other one sexy clothes, lingerie for sleeping you know. And buy nice things and give it to her co-wife, and they were really like sisters, like friends, they had the companionship when the husband was not home, the kids played together, they were like sisters and friends at the same time helping each other out, and they really cared about each other. She even chose that person. A lot of women will even choose somebody for their husband. But you have to have the commitment, have to be true in Islam. He is going to be fair, he is going to give each one their rights and their time, and the love in his heart, like the Prophet peace be upon him said, the love in his heart you can't control that. But he has to be really committed to being fair. The Koran says if you can't be fair then only one.

The companionship of a co-wife, someone in the family to provide additional support, was the description of polygyny depicted by the above participant. Her view of the polygynous marriages of others diverged from the reality of her own polygynous marriage where the first wife clearly disliked her and resented her presence. Again in the next exemplar, an example of a polygynous marriage that was at least outwardly successful is described second hand:

Interviewer: *One of the things that has come up during this research that really surprised me was the polygamy. I always thought it was very rare.*

Participant: *Yes that is what I thought.*

Interviewer: *I have found in this sample that it is not rare, many of the women have had some experience with it. Have you observed any polygamous marriages here?*

Participant: *I know of one. The Egyptian guy that has two wives. He has a Korean wife and another Asian wife.*

- Interviewer: *The wives agree with that or?*
- Participant: *Yes the wives agree with that and they have separate apartments. They live in the same complex. But each wife has a separate apartment.*
- Interviewer: *He married them here?*
- Participant: *Yes he married them here but I am sure that he does not say that. It is not legal here except if you live in Utah.*
- Interviewer: *It is not legal there either. So as far as you know they are happy in their situation?*
- Participant: *I have not talked to them but I think so. I think the wives are like friends. But that is not always the case. Most of the wives don't like the husband to get married.*

The key to these descriptions appears to be friendship and solidarity between co-wives. Unfortunately co-wife relationships experienced by participants first hand were hostile and resentful and stressful for all of the women involved.

Secrets and Lies

Analysis of participants' actual polygynous experiences revealed the common theme of secrets and lies. In several cases, husbands married, or claimed to have married, another wife without informing the other wife/wives and/or lied to one or all women.

- Participant: *I found out that he had this secret relationship ongoing. I mean he had violated so many different things.*
- Interviewer: *He did not consider polygamy?*
- Participant: *Oh well he said that she was his wife.*
- Interviewer: *He did?*

Participant: *But it was secret. I was never informed, and speaking to her later, no they did not have a contract. Her brother and mother had been there and her kids, and two of his friends who were from out of town and still to this day kind of deny it. And yet I know they have tried in their own way to make reparations. I think they thought he was going to sow his wild oats and then come to his senses. Yeah, it is just that she did not have a contract and I was never informed . . . But then we went the actual polygamy route for about six weeks, and then at the end of that he said I am going to divorce you.*

Interviewer: *So you accepted the polygamy route for a while?*

Participant: *I did because I thought he was going to come to his senses and that it was more a sense of him being busted. Like he is the kind of person that is never going to say "I am wrong." When he gets backed into a corner he needs to come out on his own. I thought this might be a way to allow him an out.*

Interviewer: *One of the persons I interviewed that with regard to polygamy that there was no requirement that the husband inform the wife that he is married. Is that something you have heard before?*

Participant: *I have heard that. I believe that one school of thought, I can't remember which one says that. In fact when a group of brothers and sisters came to my house to ask my ex-husband to leave that was one of my complaints. And one of the brothers who was very knowledgeable said I believe that one or two schools of thought—actually that is what the scholars have said. Well wait a minute, wait a minute. That just does not make sense at all. I mean you do not have to inform me that you went out for lunch with your co-workers and spent ten dollars extra. But this is a major life change. Wait a minute you are not going to be home half of the time? And your income has not increased but you are going to support this other household. But I have found very often in polygamy situations in this country the second wife is not being supported. She has agreed to go along with it because she has been misinformed.*

The participant in the above exemplar expressed outrage at her ex-husband's behavior. She found the idea that husbands could take new wives without the

knowledge of their wives and families to be unfathomable. This outrage, however, was absent from the following two exemplars:

He used to talk to a woman on the phone. I could hear her voice and one time I pushed redial, and she is the one who answered and I knew her voice because she used to call when we were in Saudi Arabia asking questions. The first wife, she has suspicions, oh maybe he is married and he says no. He swore that he was not and I always told him if you want to marry somebody else just like I married you, like the first wife agreed, and she knew me and everything, the same, I do not care. And she has money. She has these apartments and these things and I do not know, God knows, if he was using her. He is still married to her I guess using her because she could help him. But it is not common for Muslims to use people, but it happens there are some and I have had a bad deal.

The participant quoted above did not believe her husband was required to inform her of his marriage to a third wife and thus accepted the situation when the marriage came to light.

Despite her husband's neglect of her and their children, the participant in this next exemplar did not express any anger toward her husband:

He went overseas . . . I did not hear from him for months and I was really worried because he had left us with very little money, and I had borrowed money from my father to finish the down payment on the house that he was buying as an investment. And I could not imagine what had happened to him. And finally I had a friend who was in Kuwait at the time. Her husband was working there and that is how I got his number. And I called his number and he was not there. Someone else answered, some man, I think it was a nephew, someone I had never met, and I explained who I was and that I was his wife, and he said, well he sounded funny and he said I want you to call this number. So I called and my husband answered and he was very angry at my calling and he said how did you get this number. I said well I called your number and you were not there and they gave me this number but I have really been worried about you. I thought maybe you were in prison or something because you have not answered my letters and I wanted to let you know that I borrowed the money from my father for your down payment on the house. That we do not have any money and what is going on? And he was just angry because I had called that number and I found out later that that number was the number of his new wife.

The polygyny in the last preceding exemplar was a manifestation of her husband's desire for divorce. Shortly after her husband took another wife, he declared his intention to divorce her, despite her pleas for him to remain in the marriage.

While secrets and lies did not occur in all narrative accounts of polygyny, they did occur often, creating feelings of insecurity, mistrust, and confusion on the part of wives.

Suffering

Participants who were in polygynous marriages described their situations as unhappy. Polygyny took its toll on these women, predisposing toward a unique kind of emotional abuse:

I found out he had been lying to her. She thought he had been divorced for three and a half years. He did, when I found out, try the polygamy route, telling me he had been married to her. And that lasted about six weeks and both women were nervous wrecks.

The suffering in these accounts seemed to stem from a sense of betrayal, of loss, and of fear of an uncertain future:

We are in the process of getting divorced now. Islamically we are but legally it should be about another three weeks. But never had any physical abuse in that marriage. I would say more verbal and emotional abuse. Because in 1995 my ex-husband decided to take another wife and she was non-Muslim and that union lasted twenty-seven months and that was a hard thing to deal with and I never want to do it again . . . In 1998 he told me that he had divorced her and that her waiting period would be up in June so I thought maybe there was a chance to rebuild. . . . So I said okay we should try and rebuild our marriage I said otherwise if you do not think we can rebuild we can get divorced. I said because I do not ever want to go through this again. I said I do not want another wife, I do not want to go through that again. I let him know. I told him I said I do not care if the bridegroom has a billion dollars or will offer me five palaces of a fleet

of luxury cars, a private jet, I do not want it. I just do not want it. I said maybe for the man it is a good thing to have two or three wives, but it is no fun for the woman.

While the participant quoted above felt strongly that polygyny had its place in Islam, she recognized that polygyny was not for her. Indeed, she perceived that polygyny in general was not favorable to women. The way she made sense of this was through interpretation. She perceived that men exploited polygyny for their own selfish purposes, ignoring “. . . the beauty that Allah intended.” Polygyny, according to this participant was reserved for special situations (such as a surplus of widows during wartime) and not for everyday practice.

Because according to mainstream interpretations Islam does allow polygyny, these women had to make sense of their suffering by coming to terms with polygyny in the context of their faith. They knew that Islam allowed polygyny, but they also knew that it was supposed to be just. Participants viewed the failure of husbands to be just toward wives as a personal failing on the part of husbands, not as a cultural weakness. The religious culture itself for many participants was beyond reproach. Despite their defense of religious dictates regarding polygyny, many participants viewed it as a threat. Polygyny was a threat to women because it symbolized a loss of status, exclusivity, and security.

Considering the suffering these women went through, the question arises—why did they stay married to men who had taken second wives? In answering this question,

it is important to keep in mind the religious and cultural significance of marriage as described by this sample of Muslim women.

Keeping the Family Together

Many of the participants whose husbands took second wives had been married for several years and had one or more children. They described their decision to stay married despite their husbands' polygyny as being rooted in a desire to keep the family together.

I was really shocked when he told me that he had been having lunch with one of his co-workers and he was sure he wanted to marry this person and sure she would become Muslim. And none of that ever happened of course. And I wanted to keep my marriage intact because I guess anybody that gets married expects to be married for life.

The participant quoted above had been married and a homemaker for several years. She had a young son and did not want to divorce. In addition, she cited the second wife's potential conversion to Islam as an incentive for going along with the polygyny, indicating that her decision making was influenced both by personal and religious considerations.

Again, in this next exemplar, keeping the family together was of primary importance:

Participant #1: *This week I just met a woman who came to register her child and she was saying how her husband got a second wife and so I said oh are you okay with that? And she said well not really but what can you do? This and that and that and this. And I do not want my children growing up without their natural father.*

Participant #2: *Well I would rather have them come from a broken home.*

Participant #1: *And she was saying well men are very weak, and he had gone to another country, and it is something that had just happened. And she said besides that it takes a long time to train a man. I do not want to have to train another one.*

A sense of not wanting to start all over again emerges from this exemplar. She made sense of her husband's polygyny by asserting that all men are weak (vulnerable to sexual temptation). In view of this belief her decision to stay married makes sense.

Why start over when all men are weak anyway? Because marriage is normative and has religious significance, remaining single was likely not an appealing alternative either.

Despite their resolve to keep their families together, all of the participants whose husbands actually did take second or third wives (as opposed to those who only threatened and/or considered polygyny) were eventually divorced, some of them after many years of marriage. Husbands in all cases initiated the divorces. In this sample, polygyny appears to have often been a manifestation of husbands' marital dissatisfaction.

Unjust Treatment

All of the participants whose narratives provided first hand accounts of polygyny described unjust treatment. Since equitable treatment of wives is a requirement of polygyny in Islam, women were aware that the unjust treatment they experienced was unIslamic and abusive.

Interviewer: *How was he unfair?*

Participant: *Because he did more recreational activities with her. My things were just like the mosque, maybe there was a lecture at the mosque we would go to that.*

While the participant quoted above complained of unfair treatment, so too did her co-wife. In this particular case, the non-Muslim co-wife was required to work and support herself while the first wife was not. Thus, both wives were unhappy for different reasons. This difference in perception highlights the subjective nature of 'fairness.'

Feeling like she was 'nobody' in her marriage, the participant in the next exemplar made distinctions between what Islam taught and what had actually happened to her. This distinction was important to her throughout her interviews for two reasons. First, she wanted to be sure that by sharing her abuse experiences she did not denigrate the public image of Islam. Second, this distinction allowed her to remain comfortable with mainstream Islamic interpretations while at the same time making sense of her abuse experiences.

On my day I asked him to hang his thobes [clothing], like a long white thing they can wear when they go out and then they wear like a T-shirt and pants, long pants, underneath and then put this over. I said "hang this in my apartment" and he said "oh I can't" . . . None of his clothes or things were allowed in my apartment. It was all in her apartment. Nothing was allowed to be in my apartment. Even when he left the country, she knew he was leaving for good and I did not know it. There was a comb or something and they came and got it from the bathroom. It was just like I am nobody, which is not Islam, it is completely the opposite.

The next exemplar is the only one in which the idea of polygyny originated with the first wife and not with her husband:

Kind of an acquaintance of mine whose husband had been abusive to her came to live with us, and she kind of put in my mind that it would be a good situation when you have two wives, so I suggested that to my husband, thinking great, then he can be mean to two of us and he will spread it around a little bit. Well he

thought that was a great idea too, but during the interim he was very, very nice to her, could not do enough for her and he spent most of the time talking with her, slamming the door in my face. Well that was not what I had in mind. I had more in mind a big happy family so I was really upset. I was really unhappy. I told this to my friend and she was gracious enough to leave. He then forbade me to ever have anything to do with her again.

Already in an abusive marriage, this woman perceived that a second wife might serve as an ally. Her suggestion that her husband take a second wife in essence was a response to ongoing abuse. It was only when it became clear that this arrangement would not be helpful to her that she changed her mind.

Participants tended to view the unfair treatment they experienced, not the polygyny itself as abusive and emotionally destructive. This attitude revealed a certain amount of acceptance of the institution of polygyny, among the study sample. While there were certainly several participants who felt polygyny was not for them personally, there were few that felt this practice should be banned entirely. It was not the polygyny itself, that the majority of participants saw as problematic, but instead the behavior of husbands. Husbands had failed in their marital obligations and in doing so, failed in their duty towards God.

Co-Wife Abuse

Adding another wife adds complexity to the family structure. In cases where emotional, physical, and/or sexual abuse is ongoing, co-wives sometimes became combatants. In these cases, participants described abuse, not only from husbands, but from co-wives also.

Interviewer: *When you said there was some verbal and emotional abuse, can you describe what that was?*

Participant: *Again back to the polygamy . . . He would want us to get together and meet and it always ended up like a big cat fight. Well last time you did this no last time you did that. And shouting and getting obscene and so that was a lot of the verbal abuse. She and I had. We had a lot.*

Interviewer: *So was it more from her not from him?*

Participant: *More from her. More from her though.*

The participant in the exemplar above described her interactions with the second wife (usually conversations related to scheduling time with the husband), as being like a ‘cat fight.’ This participant perceived that her husband had put both wives in demeaning positions and viewed this as a form of emotional abuse. She believed that it was her husband’s responsibility to be fair and negotiate time arrangements, not hers. After all, as she said, she had not asked her husband to take a second wife—she had accepted the situation with a heavy heart.

In some instances, the acrimony between wives lead to physical assault:

Participant: *One night I fixed dinner for him and his guests and then for the other wife. . . . I made the dinner and everything and then we were going to pray. We were sitting around together in the living room and then I went out of the room to wash my hands or something and then I came back into the room and she turned her face like laughing like she was making fun of me or something like that and I said go ahead and laugh. And when we were praying I started to cry. I had tears. I could not stop. After that I had tears but I did not say anything. The other people were not laughing it was just her. I felt bad you know what is she trying to make fun of. She use to make little sarcastic remarks and things in front of me.*

- Interviewer: *Was she the wife before you?*
- Participant: *Yes.*
- Interviewer: *But she did agree to the marriage?*
- Participant: *Yes.*
- Interviewer: *Maybe there was some resentment or something it sounds like.*
- Participant: *But anyway whatever she did did not matter to me so much as how he reacted. Because he was the one that was supposed to be fair. He is the one that is supposed to be religious, I mean the leader of the family and he was the one that was responsible. I did not marry her. I married him and I expected him to behave properly in Islam. And if she did something, okay, I was not going to try to do anything to make him take away her rights. I did not want to show any jealousy or anything. I wanted to be fair and not have any sin by trying to make my husband be unjust to her or anything. . . . So she went to go, because she had her period so she did not have prayer so the boys and I prayed with the dad and then tears were coming on my face and I could not stop. When the kids went he went to say goodnight to her. It was his night to stay with me and I went and changed my clothes and put a nightgown on . . . so he came back I there and we were sitting and . . . he said to me "you act as if we are your enemies" . . . I cried and then he said "I am going out." And then I said "don't go" and I took a hold of the door. I said "do not go out and I will sleep in one room and you sleep in the other room." She came. She started saying things to me, pushing, pulling at me. And she hit me with her fist here on the side. She hit me twice. He did not say anything to her. He did not even say stop. He did not say anything back to her. It was very bad like I was the one that was wrong.*

This exemplar highlights the severity of the problems that can be present between co-wives in polygynous marriages and the complexity that can occur in the context of polygyny. Despite the fact that the offensive behavior came from the co-wife, this woman looked to her husband for a solution. Like the woman in the preceding

exemplar, this participant perceived that her husband was responsible for managing relations between co-wives. This arrangement left women completely dependent on husbands for problem solving, making the role of husband even more central to family life than it otherwise would have been.

Intimate Partner Abuse in the Context of Polygyny

While co-wives sometimes abused each other, husbands were abusive in all polygynous marriages described by participants first hand (there were some second hand stories of polygyny participants shared that were not their own experiences but instead were about the experiences of women they knew). This was likely due to purposive sampling that selected primarily abused Muslim women for participation in this study. The following are stories of emotional and physical abuse within polygynous marriages.

Participant: *We had one brother, a Palestinian brother, perform the service here. Here in this house. And which I was misinformed. He said that I had to be a witness which is the most horrible thing I think a person can ever go through.*

Interviewer: *A brother told you that you had to witness your husband's wedding?*

Participant: *Yes and he was wrong. The three people who were here as witnesses said you know she did not have to be present. Because how am I supposed to feel, hey this is the man I have been married to for 13 years, two weeks ago, bam there is this woman at work . . . and I want to marry her. And then they are going to get married in my house. Right here up in the front with the witnesses. Introductions because my son's father introduced us all before the thing and her father came . . . and her teenage children came. Because they wanted to meet the woman who was going to let her husband marry their mother. And the first question was like what country are you from? And you know, I*

am an American, I am from this country. My ancestors some four hundred years ago came from Africa, but I was born and raised in American. And they could not believe that. They thought I must be from another country.

This participant felt violated by having to witness her husband's marriage to a second wife and by having this marriage take place in her own home. She never shared what happened with her non-Muslim family because she was ashamed and embarrassed. In retrospect, she felt like going along with her husband's second marriage may have been a mistake—that perhaps she should have asserted herself more. Still, her compliance also comforted her in some ways. She felt that she had gone beyond what was reasonable to try to save her marriage, in accordance with Muslim community expectations.

In the next exemplar, the participant talks about how during an episode of abuse, she ran to her co-wife for assistance. She did this, despite their ongoing dislike for one another. The co-wife did not intervene:

When we were downstairs he hit me with his fist right here in my eye and he hit me on my arm with the other one like this. He said "I was not trying to hit you. I was trying to hit the wall." But it was not it was me. He hit me first with his right hand then the left hand. Many times he had clenched his fist. He had done this many times before that so I was like intimidated. But that time he did hit me and I ran upstairs to the other wife and I said "he hit me in the eye" like this and I was crying and the kids all heard. I had guests the next day and I put the scarf so it did not show.

Unlike the exemplar above, the co-wives in the next exemplar did not appear to dislike one another. Still they did not intervene when abuse occurred:

I went and stayed with my sister for a month. And every time her husband would come either the house is not organized or something, or if a dish is broken he just

needed something to trigger him—very little things. And I remember they had an old fashioned heater. Behind the heater he would have a stick waiting. And she knew the minute he came home, both of the wives they would look at each other and they would go into their rooms . . . And he would hit my sister and hit her up to the point where she would just like, you could hear like the bird, you would just hear like a tiny noise coming out of her mouth. And when he would leave the house I would come out and lift her head to see if she is okay or not.

The abuse experiences of participants within polygynous marriages occurred with the knowledge of co-wives. Despite the presence of another adult in the household, the violence of abusers progressed unchecked in polygynous marriages, indicating that co-wives felt powerless or simply chose not to intervene.

Family Trauma

For the participants in this study, polygyny was often associated with secrets and lies, suffering, abuse, and later divorce. All of these processes not only took their toll on wives but also on children.

This woman vividly recounted her father's attempt to marry a second wife:

My father was going to take a second wife and it was only through my younger sister's intervention, and she must have been about eleven, at the time, something around there, speaking on my mother's behalf that the marriage did not take place. And that was a big trauma in my family.

This event influenced a participant in several ways. She reported that her mother had a pattern of submissive behavior in response to her father's ongoing abusive behavior. In this instance, her mother relied on the children to intervene. Contempt for women was the message that emerged during childhood, a message that this participant has actively resisted internally in her adult life.

The next exemplar describes a mother's perception of how her husband's polygynous second marriage affected their young son:

Participant: *He set a date . . . so I had two weeks. I said are you sure you want to—you know that is so quick and he said yes. I want to get married and they got married and the roller coaster started. It is just because I was used to having someone here for so many years and then I had to get used to one day he is here and one day he is not.*

Interviewer: *How did this affect your son?*

Participant: *He did not like it at all. He did not like it at all. He wished he was in one place. He would wish his father did not have to go there. He could not understand it and his father never really sat down and I had to tell him because he would ask me why does he have to go over there? I said well you know he married her just like he married me, he married her. And it was kind of confusing for him.*

In the context of a dominant culture in which polygamy is illegal, polygamy may be confusing to children and families. In the presence of polygamy, family lives change drastically and it was difficult for family members to make sense of this change, since they are unlikely to have peers in similar situations.

Men's abuse of polygyny is sometimes subtle. In this case it was blatant:

Participant: *I actually divorced him when he tried to marry my sister who was my ward. And she was thirteen. And he told me that . . . this would be really good because my sister liked him. But she liked him because, you know, it was not a sexual or romantic thing.*

Interviewer: *She was a child.*

Participant: *She was a child, and he had been, you know, he had all the flash and all the dazzle. So. But when he asked about marrying her, then I started to plot to get rid of him. Because I knew then that I would never allow him to marry my sister—to touch my sister.*

Marrying two sisters at the same time is *haram* (forbidden) in Islam. This woman's ex-husband pushed the limits in this case, something that she could not tolerate or allow.

This research clearly indicates that for this sample, in cases where polygyny was unwanted by wives and/or children, it increased family stress and traumatized family members. In the United States where polygamy is illegal and where women often are distant from their extended family support networks, polygamy, and especially polygyny, have the potential to set women and children up for abuse and neglect in multiple and complex ways

GOOD WIVES ARE OBEDIENT

The Koranic verse which provides the basis for the common belief among Muslims that good wives are obedient to husbands is commonly translated as follows:

Men are the protectors and maintainers of women,
because God has given the one more strength than the other,
and because they support them from their means.

Therefore the righteous women are devoutly obedient, and
guard in their husband's absence what God would have them
guard (Qur'an, 4:34).

Participants who did not believe that wives should obey husbands interpreted this verse differently from the majority of Muslims, and/or sought alternate translations. Whether a woman agreed or disagreed with the belief that a wife must obey her husband, the belief itself was reported by participants to be so widespread that it influenced the lives

of all study participants. In cases of abuse, abusers sometimes justified their actions by citing wives' lack of obedience. Moreover, the common belief that wives should submit to husbands influenced women's responses to abuse.

Attitudes and Experiences

The following data excerpts exemplify the different attitudes and experiences of participants about the belief that good Muslim wives are obedient:

Interviewer: *Did you believe you could not leave the house without your husband's permission?*

Participant: *That is correct. I was told that that is the way to be Islamically, and I did that for many years and then it kind of eased up because it was impossible for him to maintain . . . I have a friend who has basically rebuilt the house. I mean she has crawled under the foundation and that stuff because her husband has made her, and she is not permitted to go anywhere. She lives in a town where there are no other Muslim families. So she took it upon herself once or twice to take the car out and go fabric shopping because he had taken it upon himself to get her some more jobs sewing for people when she was already over committed. And I think she went to the library too. She did not have a TV. Well she got found out. And of course she was wrong. And she said she was wrong. She disobeyed.*

The idea that being obedient is the way women are supposed to be was pervasive, although not uniformly agreed upon. The practice of obedience existed in marriages in varying degrees depending upon the dynamics of the couple involved.

Women complied with the expectation that they obey their husbands when they believed it was a religious duty:

Participant #1: *I remember one girl came to me who had become Muslim, I mean joined that community and everything and fell into that thing, and when she started getting ready for marriage, I said now*

make sure that this fellow is not of that mentality. She said "oh no he's not." And of course a month later she's phoning me up and saying, you know, he said that if a husband asks his wife to get up at two o'clock in the morning and get a glass of water, she has to because she has to obey him, so anything that he says, she has to do regardless of what it is . . . This is presented you understand as part of your religion. They come and say, you are supposed to submit. This is a Muslim woman's duty is to submit to her husband.

Participant #2: *It is part of your dean [religion].*

Participant #1: *It is part of you dean. Yes, your husband is your Imam [leader].*

Participant #2: *Oh you know what they quote all the time?*

Participant #1: *What?*

Participant #2: *That if Allah had made a . . .*

Participant #1: *Yes, if Allah had asked a human being to worship anything except Him, it would have been a wife to her husband.*

Participant #2: *That is what they quote all the time.*

The powerful position of husbands in families described above, puts women in abusive marriages at a disadvantage. In abusive situations, women must come to terms not only with the abuse they experience, but also with their perceived religious duty to obey in the context of this abuse. When husbands abused their authority, exerting power and control in ways that were harmful to women, a conflict between faith and self-determination arose for study participants.

Interpretations

This participant, having left a very controlling marriage, sought alternative interpretations of the Qur'anic verse designating men as protectors and maintainers of women cited above:

I think it is because the Qur'an and hadith have been interpreted by men and men will interpret those iyas [verses] about women and those hadiths about women to their perspective. And if a man who is basically misogynous then that is how his interpretation is going to be. If you don't have a person whose worldview includes everyone as equal then that is going to be reflected in the interpretation and so traditionally, those verses have been interpreted that way. And the word Kawimoon has been interpreted as overseer, you know overseer, which when you think about it that is a word we use for slavery. And Kanut, which talks about obedience to Allah, has been used to mean obedience to men. So a lot of times these twists on the meaning is because it has been interpreted through a man's perspective and a man who probably has not got that worldview of equality of genders and so you start with that.

Likening marriages where husbands act as overseers of wives to the institution of slavery occurred in more than one interview with African-American participants. Their perception of gender oppression evolved as they challenged traditional interpretations of Islam and sought new meaning—a meaning that placed men and women on equal footing.

The effort to seek alternative interpretations concerning gender equality in families is growing among Muslim women (Ahmed, 1992; Karmi, 1996; Mernissi, 1987; Wahdud-Muhsin, 1992). The following excerpt, however, exemplifies the more common view:

Interviewer: *Can you talk a little about how Muslim women understand marriage in their lives? There may be some differences between Muslim and non-Muslim women.*

Participant: *If I wanted my husband to do something when I was not Muslim I said okay if he wanted to have sex or something then I would say no you have got to do this first. I could control my husband a little bit. Well Muslim women can still do the same thing they can say "oh please do this" but they not say no you can't have relations, but sweet talk and baby him and try to get your way other ways. The husband is so respected, he is put in such a high place, which is good he should be. He is the head of the house, he is the Imam of the house, he is the leader. That is why if the leader is hurting . . . We should try to please him. He should try to please us also.*

The idea that a woman cannot refuse sexual access to her body, and that she should respect and please her husband, may be problematic to some and not others. However, this arrangement clearly does become problematic in cases of abuse. Forced respect and compliance toward an abusive authority figure is harmful. Women made sense of this harmful situation in two ways: (a) the problem was caused by abusive men's unIslamic behavior when abuse was unprovoked by a good and obedient wife, or (b) the problem was caused by cultural dictates which give men power over women in families and communities. These differing perceptions stemmed from different interpretations of Islam and of the meaning of gender equality in family life.

Obedience and Abuse Experiences

Rejecting the belief that good wives are obedient did not protect participants from abuse, nor did it appear to decrease the likelihood of abuse. However, as the following excerpt from a group interview shows, this belief did mediate abuse experiences in important and powerful ways:

Participant #1: *I think the misogyny is prevalent. I think it is almost practiced as part of the religion. I would go so far as to say that a lot of Muslim men believe that it is okay to discipline a woman physically, emotionally. He does not even think it is abuse. It is not abuse. It is his duty or his right.*

Participant #2: *And I think even beyond the men who do practice the physical abuse on their wives there is another whole group of men who think they are doing their wives a favor if they don't.*

Interviewer: *If they don't abuse them?*

Participant #1: *Right. Keeping her from the hellfire. It is just like that kind of mentality. Oh yeah women love this or need it.*

Participant #2: *Or even those who are not hitting their wives, they have that feeling, a lot of them have that feeling of entitlement so when they are not hitting their wives they feel smug in some way. I'm good. I am doing you a favor by not hitting you rather than just what I would think to be appropriate which is of course, I am not hitting you because I can't. It is not okay.*

Interviewer: *So how do you think this affects women who are experiencing abuse if there is some sort of tacit acceptance?*

Participant #1: *Of course they are less willing to come forward number one. Number two, I think that they become very confused because they kind of think okay, I want to be part of this religion, but yet the religion says that I can be abused. I mean they don't say it in those words, but it is really like Islam puts me in a position of subservience and vulnerability and their love for the Islam—somehow they don't make the connection that this can't be Islam because it has been told to them to submit to your husband, do this, do that. They don't come and say, dang this can't be the religion. They say okay I'll try to deal with it to be able to get all of the other stuff, to get the good part of the religion I will deal with this part.*

Participant #2: *If you came from a good childhood, not abusive, you know with a good example in your parents' relationship, what made you stay in an unequal marriage for so long before you got free?*

Participant #1: *Islam. Really because I was taught that to be a good Muslim I had to submit to my husband. And although it did not make sense to me I stayed because I rationalized okay 97% of Islam is good, so I can deal with this other 3%.*

Weighing the benefits of common interpretations of Islam against the detriment to women was the theme that emerged from this exemplar. Because Islam and Muslim community life had so much to offer these participants, they believed it was worth putting up with expectations of submission and subservience. This was especially the case for participant #1 quoted in the group interview above who remained in an emotionally abusive marriage for years. She finally left when she could no longer take her abuser's extremely controlling behavior. She reached a point where she realized her choice was either to leave or to die emotionally.

The following exemplar demonstrates the influence that the belief that wives should be obedient to husbands had on abusers:

Interviewer: *When you were married when any of your husbands would try to tell you that you had to be obedient, did that influence your behavior at all?*

Participant: *No.*

Interviewer: *So it was not a factor?*

Participant: *They could not stand me. I was not obedient, I was a problem.*

When wives failed to meet husbands' expectations of obedience, this set the stage for conflict and in some cases, abuse. The participant cited above accepted that being obedient was just not consistent with her personality. She did not blame herself, but recognized that this had been a problem in her marriages.

Finally, this exemplar reflects mainstream interpretations of Islam:

Because of the power of the man in the house, women do not leave the house, and do not let the problems be told outside. The women are still trying . . . They do not know they are not supposed to be hit on the head, on the face, and they do not know that it is not okay to be hit or spit on or called bad names, or lied to, or accused of bad things that are not true.

This participant explained that the problem of abuse is at least partially related to a lack of Islamic knowledge on the part of husbands and wives. In her view, if spouses knew that Islam forbids abusive behavior they would not perpetrate or accept it in their marriages. This view is rooted in the belief that Islam is perfect and has embedded in it the solution for every human problem. Thus, it follows according to this view, that ignorance of Islam is a likely cause problems like abuse in Muslim families.

Unfortunately, knowledge of Islam was not helpful in this participant's case. Although she was quite knowledgeable by her own report about Islamic teachings, she still suffered severe abuse in the context of more than one Muslim marriage.

As these exemplars demonstrate, the belief that good wives are obedient often intertwines with faith, resulting in inner conflict among abused women. The prescription to obey and the need to break free and resist abuse were in tension with one another.

It is important to recognize that women perceived by other Muslims to be disobedient often did not receive support from their Muslim communities in cases of abuse. This was particularly likely when abusers were Muslim community members in good standing. Thus Muslim women, because of the pervasiveness of the belief that

they should obey their husbands, faced unique challenges in their struggles to combat abuse in their lives.

Negation of the Self

The meaning of Islam is submission to God. For women who believed that part of submission to God was also almost complete submission to their husbands, there emerged a process which some were able to identify retrospectively as a negation of the self. In addition to submission to husbands, participants also identified submission to the will of the Muslim community as contributory to this process of negation. This retrospective analysis on the part of participants occurred among women who had at one time believed that good wives are obedient, but who over time came to reject this belief. These participants described a process through which they had become lost to themselves—a negation of self. By negating themselves, participants silenced their inner voices, instead accepting rigid limitations on their ability to think and care for themselves. Participants who identified this phenomenon perceived that negation of the self convinced women to tolerate what they would otherwise find intolerable, both for themselves and for other Muslim women.

There were participants who did not report this experience. Those who did not report undergoing a negation of the self belonged to two groups. The first group comprised women who continued to believe that good wives are obedient and never questioned the validity of this belief. The second group comprised women who had never felt compelled to make their will secondary to the will of their husbands and/or

communities. It is important to note that women who did not experience negation of the self still experienced abuse. Indeed, among some of the women who refused to submit to their husbands there were some participants who encountered severe abuse. The differences between women who experienced negation of the self and those who did not lay not in the risk or severity of abuse, but instead in their responses to abuse when it occurred and in the ways they made sense of their experiences over time:

Participant #1: *All of the things she had been telling them, you know, this man is abusing me. Physical abuse and all that. And it was kind of like oh no, no, no, you stay with him, don't shame the family and it can't be all that bad . . . And I don't know about [the response off] her sister-in-law who is an American doctor. But again, you know, even the fact that she is an American and an educated woman, there is something in there that happens that again—it is like it blinds you.*

Interviewer: *The sister-in-law is rejecting her?*

Participant #1: *That is what I am saying. The sister-in-law you would think, okay, she is American, she grew up in [American] society, she knows about abuse, she is educated, she is a medical doctor, . . . why can't she stand up to her husband and say no your sister is being abused by this man?*

Participant #2: *It is very overpowering.*

Participant #1: *Yes it is like when you saw that girl and she was a shell [of her former self]. Before she was an intelligent, articulate, vibrant personality and a year later, after living in this community, she can't even carry on a conversation with you. So what is this transformation?*

Participant #3: *What is it?*

Participant #1: *It is this negation of self. It is a negation of self. You allow someone else to define who you are and what you should be. You start living that and some women never pull out of it. I mean that*

is what I did. I allowed my husband to define who I was going to talk to, what I was going to wear, you know, if I could watch TV, if I could have friends over, if I could read a certain book . . . He felt that was his Islamic right to be able to dictate this to me and so I thought yes, as a Muslim woman I had to submit to my husband. I had to listen to him and so you inch further away from your being. From your nafs [self]. To the point where if abuse happens to somebody then I could probably overlook it, you know what I am saying?

The group identified negation of the self as the result of a process wherein others define who you are. This negation of self occurred over time as a gradual process. In these participants' view, negation of the self was what allowed women to accept abuse, and to witness abuse of other women without recognition or intervention.

The struggle against negation of self was difficult since individual interpretation of Qur'an and *ahadith* was reportedly discouraged among Muslims:

Participant: *There is no possibility of exploration on your own as Islam is set up in most traditional communities and taught to everybody and certainly taught to me as a child. You are not allowed to interpret on your own. There are even schools of thought that say that ijtiḥād which is making up your own mind about things is closed. That people are no longer allowed to do that and the only thing you are allowed to do is just follow what the ancient scholars of course being Middle Eastern and male, and very anti-woman in my point of view. So I mean I had, you know trying to reconcile this, I had even come to the point many times when I would say to myself well maybe I am just wrong and maybe I should just accept that women are second place and substandard to men, maybe I am going about this the wrong way by accepting my own conscience and my own feeling about what is true. And I should be accepting scripture not my own opinion . . . and if you do that it is very damaging.*

Interviewer: *How does that relate to the negation of self that was mentioned by other women?*

Participant: *I think it is related very directly because I think women are given the message implicitly and explicitly that they have to erase themselves, they have to erase any vestige of independence or self worth even in order to remain within this patriarchal system and then they are not given any option—you can't escape the patriarchal system without condemnation.*

Feeling trapped within a patriarchal marriage and community structure, the participant quoted in the preceding exemplar suffered from depression, and regretted many of the decisions she had made in life. It was only by naming and critiquing these patriarchal elements that she was able to begin to pull herself out of this process of negation of the self and move toward self-definition, self-expression, and individual spiritual exploration.

Negation of the self not only meant being defined by others but even living one's life through others:

Anything I like you can be sure it was going to be trashed. I can say I kind of gave my rights away. But I gave them away knowing they weren't going to be allowed anyway. He would say "so you want to rent a movie?" I would say "oh whatever you want." Because if I had something either he would not watch it or if he did he was going to trash the movie throughout. It was better to just watch Steven Segal. You know whatever you want. I think that is probably one of the accommodations that women make. And that is how you lose your identity. What you like does not matter. And I knew that eventually after moving probably fourteen times in eleven years and having six or seven different couches, a zillion different cars, that I was along for the ride. This was somebody else's life and I am along for the ride. And I accepted that—I mean I said that to myself. This is somebody else's life and I just was going along for the ride.

In essence, having given up her life as no longer her own, the woman in the above exemplar, endured abuse for many years. The abuse ended when her husband divorced her and moved overseas. It was only after her divorce and after she became

somewhat distant from the Muslim community that she was able to reclaim her self and her life as her own. This was painful since it required the loss of her marriage and community standing for this change to occur.

SUMMARY

The significance of marriage for study participants was rooted in Muslim culture. From an early age, or in the case of single converts, soon after conversion to Islam, talk of marriage began. The often-cited hadith, marriage is half of faith and the rest is fear God, is reflective of the almost prescriptive nature of marriage for Muslims.

Perhaps because of its significance, many participants reported feeling pressured to marry, often leading to quick arranged marriages for those women who abided by the normative Muslim proscription on dating. In many cases, abuse hampered the development of love after marriage. What kept many of the study participants in their abusive marriages was not love, but instead a commitment to keeping their families together, even sometimes in the face of unwanted polygyny. This commitment stemmed from faith, and a desire to do what was best for their children. This commitment was rooted in culture since it was in keeping with community expectations that Muslim women do everything in their power to avoid divorce.

Resisting abuse for Muslim women entailed special challenges. The belief that good wives are obedient shaped husbands', wives', and communities' responses to abuse. When abusers cited God-given authority to discipline wives, they were in effect manipulating Islam to maintain power and control. For women who believed they could

not leave the house without their husbands' permission, leaving an abusive situation seemed like an insurmountable obstacle. Further undermining women's ability to resist abuse was the process of negation of the self, wherein women lost the right to self-definition. Participants who experienced negation of the self allowed husbands and/or community members to dictate how they lived their lives. It may be that all participants experienced negation of the self to some degree, but some were more aware of this process than others. Ultimately, abusers who used women's faith against them as a means of maintaining power and control were perpetrators of an insidious form of spiritual abuse. This kind of abuse struck at the very hearts of these Muslim women, disabling their defenses and adding yet another layer of suffering to their lives.

CHAPTER EIGHT:

DIVORCE

Islam allows divorce. However, divorce is highly discouraged, and many Muslims consider refraining from divorce as a form of righteousness. Muslims, therefore are prescribed to face the difficulties of married life patiently and avoid disruption of families as long as possible before turning to divorce as a last resort (Ali, n.d.).

The Prophet (p.b.h.) said “never did Allah allow anything more hateful to him than divorce” (Abu Dawud, 1999, 13:3). Many participants of this study cited this well-known *hadith*, indicating that this belief is pervasive and common. Because marriage in Islam is a form of religious practice and it provides women within Muslim communities a certain status and position, the end of marriage has implications that reach far beyond the interpersonal level. Perhaps it is for these reasons that when women in this sample sought divorce, it was only at the point where it was a matter of survival. In the words of 1 participant it was “either leave or die.”

Divorces initiated by wives were slightly more common in the sample than were those initiated by husbands. Divorces initiated by husbands were more common in polygynous marriages than in monogamous marriages. All but 2 of the women who sought divorces felt the need to obtain Islamic divorces in addition to legal divorces, in cases where marriages were legally valid. Obtaining an Islamic divorce initiated by

wives (*khula*) required the involvement and approval of a Muslim leader or *Shaikh* in all cases. Women seeking divorces often faced family and/or community disapproval. This disapproval was often shared by leaders and *shaikhs* who were in positions to grant divorces, making obtaining an Islamic divorce initiated by the wife (*khula*) difficult. The perception that obtaining an Islamic divorce is necessary for divorce to occur represents a barrier to leaving abusive relationships which is specific to Muslim women in the United States.

Following divorce, women often became distant from the Muslim community. As divorced women, they no longer fit into the extant Muslim social structure and found themselves excluded over time. In addition, Muslim communities ostracized women who had been labeled as somehow 'bad' Muslims. Exclusion and ostracism were very painful since family and community were central to the lives of these women.

The following paradigm case illustrates many of the common themes regarding divorce found in participants' accounts. Amina's story is a powerful testament to the resilience and strength of the women in this sample. In a marriage arranged by her family at the age of 15, she suffered severe abuse for many years and made many gallant efforts to escape the abuse over time. Her family, originally from the mountains of Afghanistan, knew about the abuse, but despite this knowledge, blocked her efforts to get free at every turn. Their concern was for the family honor, a concern that took precedence over Amina and her child's health and well being:

I would tell my family I am not happy with him . . . and my family would take me back home for a couple of months and then they would send me back to the same

situationSo the last time they took me to Pakistan I went with the intention I was going to get a divorce And my husband said if she comes over here I know she is going to divorce me. So you cannot send her. My family said if your husband does not want you to come then you cannot go.

Amina's family was involved in her marriage from start to finish. She was never encouraged to be autonomous. On the contrary, they actively squelched her efforts to be autonomous. Her family expected her to be obedient both to them and to her husband. Accusing her of having "big mouth" and of being strong willed, they used everything in their power to weaken her resolve to file for divorce and free herself from her abusive marriage:

They took my ticket away. And the only money that I had on me was my gold. So I gathered my gold . . . and I said I am going to take the bus and I did not tell anybody in the family except one sister-in-law of mine. I said watch my child for me because I want to go and get my ticket, and tomorrow is my flight that they are going to cancel for me. So when I was going to get my ticket one of my brother's bodyguards saw me from the balcony and he told my brother. So everybody came after me. My brother said where were you going? I said to get my tickets to go. My husband had told them that I was in love with someone else and my brother said we know that you are in love with someone in the United States and that is why you want to go. I said that is not true. So when I came back to the house they did not believe me and my brother screamed to the bodyguards "the next time she leaves this house I want her legs to be cut." And another brother of mine threw me on the cement floor and I was gone right there. Two hours later I woke up.

In their efforts to control her, Amina's family abused her emotionally and physically. At that point, she felt her life was in danger. When Amina's child became seriously ill requiring medical attention beyond that available in Pakistan and Afghanistan, her family finally allowed her to return to the United States.

When I finally traveled back to the United States it was because my daughter was very sick. I went and I filed for divorce but I still had to live with him until my

family came back. They were coming back to sell their houses. When my family came they did not want to have anything to do with the divorce. But when I first got married my sister-in-law who is American said I am helping you get into this but whenever you need help getting out of it I will help you. I will be there for you. And so I said to her you promised me, where is that promise now? And then I guess she felt she had to stand up and say something and she told my brother that he had to go with me to the mosque and pronounce this divorce.

Despite the abuse she suffered, and the fact that she was in the process of obtaining a legal divorce, Amina obeyed her family's instructions. She continued to live with her abuser until her family returned to the United States 4 months later. In spite of her family's abuse toward her, she continued to obey them, patiently awaiting their return to the United States. During this period, Amina described herself as being beyond the point where anything could hurt her. She sensed that her survival was at stake. She was going to free herself or die trying.

My brother finally went along with it but at the end when he was leaving he said "you know what? I used to be a part of this masjid but now because of you I cannot even pray there." And I said "because of you I have all these scars on my heart. If Allah cannot accept your prayers in the mosque I do not think for all those eight years because of what I went through, even one of your prayers was accepted because you were watching me and knew what I was going through. And you are telling me you cannot bow down to Allah in the mosque? Then the hell with that mosque and the hell with your prayer. You saw what my life was like . . . okay the hell with my life. What about my child's life?" He did not say anything. He just left and since then my brother and I have not talked . . . And now the people in the Afghan community who used to be my friends, not all of them, they say oh my God do not let your daughters sit with her she will influence them . . . And my mother she told me I will not forgive you for the milk that I have given you until you go back to that man and bring him back to your house.

Struggling for a divorce, Amina reminded her sister-in-law that she had promised to help her get out of the marriage years before, should the need arise. Amina's years of unrelenting insistence on divorce and the grudging assistance of her sister-in-law finally

convinced her brother to help her obtain an Islamic divorce. When she was finally divorced, her brother blamed her for shaming the family. She continues to suffer stigma and alienation—all because she fought to save her life.

DIVORCE IS THE MOST HATED THING THAT ALLAH ALLOWS

For Muslims whose purpose in life is to submit to the will of God, displeasing Allah is a painful, even scary thing to consider. Fear of displeasing God was part of what participants went through when considering divorce. Perhaps at face value the belief that divorce is the most hated thing that Allah allows made sense, reinforcing the importance of marriage and of keeping families intact. However, in the face of abuse, this Islamic dictate no longer seemed so appropriate. In order to make sense of this contradiction, some participants re-evaluated the authenticity of this *hadith*, eventually discounted it as contrary to the spirit of the Qur'an.

The following exemplar comes from a woman whose husband divorced her after many years of marriage. During her marriage she was an orthodox Muslim. Since the divorce her life has completely changed. Faced with the challenges of poverty, single parenthood, and becoming increasingly distant from the Muslims, she began to re-think Islam and its meaning for her.

I think that the goal is to keep families together and people will often quote that about divorce is the most hated thing by Allah. Well I think Allah probably hates a lot of things equally. Injustice, oppression, abuse, basically harming somebody who is weaker and smaller than you.

This woman, aware of community attitudes toward divorce, tried to make sense of her own experiences of abuse, injustice, and oppression. In the end, she came to believe that God is on the side of the oppressed.

The next exemplar comes from a woman in the context of a group interview. She had been through a divorce and had re-evaluated some of the mainstream interpretations of Islam that she believed were harmful. When she brought up the *hadith*, divorce is the most hated thing in the sight of Allah that is allowed, all of the group participants immediately understood what she was talking about. This *hadith* was common knowledge.

This whole thing about divorce being shameful. It is better to suffer abuse than shame your family by getting a divorce, and so that whole thing you know of divorce being one of the worst things that you could possibly do, and this other hadith too which is another one, you know, divorce is the most hated thing in the sight of Allah that is allowed. That is not sahih (authentic) either. Again when you look at the Koran there is nothing that says that. It says part amicably. But people are saying I cannot get divorced, regardless of what happens, he is beating me to a pulp, he is beating the child, but you know we cannot get divorced. Because what will the family say? What will the community say?

In both preceding exemplars, this *hadith* and the influence it was perceived to have on prevailing Muslim community attitudes are central themes. There is implicit recognition embedded within the text that this *hadith* influences abused women negatively. Finally, also in both exemplars, the women challenged prevailing views, citing abuse as a bigger problem than divorce itself.

In contrast to the two exemplars above, the third exemplar comes from a woman who despite experiencing severe abuse in more than one marriage, continued to be very

conservative in her views. When I mentioned that some women were having difficulty obtaining *khula*, she replied:

Khula is a big thing. If a woman asks for *khula* and she does not really have a good reason, she is going to be cursed by Allah *subhannawataallah* [and Glory to God] and the angels.

This conservative view, specifically targeted towards women seeking divorce, is likely based on *hadith*. The following *hadith* seems to support her viewpoint:

The Prophet peace be upon him said, If any woman asks her husband for divorce without some strong reason, the odor of paradise will be forbidden to her (Abu Dawud, 1999, 12: 2172).

The belief expressed in this *hadith* may explain why participants in this sample waited to pursue divorce until it was a matter of life or death (spiritual, emotional, and/or physical). The perceived disapproval toward divorce in general, and toward women seeking divorce in particular, is evident in the women's words. These *ahadith* shaped the cultural context in which study participants lived, thus influencing their beliefs, perceptions, and meaning making around divorce. In coming to terms with these *ahadith*, which are in essence cultural values, some women had to re-think their interpretations of Islam. Others, rather than challenging these beliefs, chose to uphold them. Whatever their response, all study participants were influenced by these *ahadith* in some way prior to, during, and after divorce.

CONSIDERING DIVORCE

Given the profound negative cultural attitudes toward divorce reported by this sample of Muslim women, participants typically decided to pursue divorces only in extreme cases. When their lives were full of misery, and they perceived that it was either leave or die—spiritually, mentally, and/or physically—this is when women left. In some cases, this was a slow gradual process, which become increasingly intolerable. In others, crisis precipitated women's decisions to leave. Still in other cases, women never chose to leave, and husbands eventually ended these marriages.

This exemplar comes from a woman whose husband exerted extreme levels of power and control over her for years. He oversaw the minute details of her life, including what she could read, whom she could see, and what she could wear. Believing for a long time that she had to obey, she stayed married and eventually became seriously depressed. Only when it got to the point where she felt that her own psychological survival was at stake, which she termed "the point of saturation," did she act.

Interviewer: *Given the repercussions that a woman goes through when she gets to the point where she decides to get divorced what process does she go through?*

Participant: *I think she just gets to the point of saturation. I think you get to that point where you have to make a choice between yourself and everything else. I think really, most Muslim women wait until they get to that point where it is almost to the point of their existence. They are choosing between their very own life, not their happiness because they have already decided they can live without happiness, they can live without peace, they can live without things they want. But when it gets to the point where she is saying, if I do not change I am going to die—either physically, or emotionally, or spiritually—then she changes. She waits until*

that point. Some women to me just get overwhelmed and just go crazy before that point. Or they manifest some kind of illness in their body. I really believe that I lost my uterus because of all this. And because I internalized it. And that is where it went. And it was to the point where I felt like, is it going to be me or is it going to be the society and the family, and then mosque and everything else. Most women wait until they get to that point.

Surrounded by cultural values that characterize divorce as the most hated thing by God, women waited until they could not wait anymore. As they waited, they risked somatic and mental illness.

The next exemplar reiterates the same theme—survival versus everything else. These participants describe contemplating divorce as a choice between two evils. Stay and die in some way, or leave and be shunned.

Either she stands up for her rights or she takes it. She takes the abuse . . . Then what is the community going to think, what is my family going to think of me you know, here your hands are tied. Until you reach a point where you say am I going to save myself, my children, or am I going to save my community, or my family? And which ever choice you make you are going to be known as the bad one.

Given that Muslim women often do not love their abusers, it is clear that the reasons why many of them stay married go far beyond the interpersonal level. Pleasing God and maintaining family and/or community ties were also at stake. Weighing religion, family, and community against continued abuse is not a simple and straightforward equation. Ultimately, for some women in this sample, the realization that staying married would lead to their spiritual, psychological, and/or physical death, was a necessary prerequisite to their decision to leave abusers.

OBTAINING A DIVORCE—TALAQ AND KHULA

Talaq is the Arabic word for divorce. Women who made the decision to divorce faced many hardships. Reports of harassment and disapproval by family and/or community were common. Pursuing divorce all too often meant escalating abuse and community disapproval. Seeking *khula* was even more difficult for some, because the leaders and *shaikhs* who pronounced *khula* were often hesitant to do so and in most cases knew the abuser personally. Finally, child custody was a concern for many women, particularly those who had been married to immigrants. There was a fear that abusers would kidnap children by taking them overseas, out of their mother's reach.

Getting an Islamic Divorce

Marriage in Islam is terminated (a) by repudiation by the husband, (b) by mutual consent, or (c) by judicial decree upon the request of the wife. The first form of divorce (*talaq*) consists of a statement made by the husband in the presence of the wife to the effect of "I divorce you," and no judiciary involvement is necessary in these cases. Following a husband's repudiation of his wife, a waiting period for the duration of three menstrual cycles is required. During waiting period, husbands are required to continue to provide for wives and they may revoke their decision to divorce at any time. After the waiting period is over, remarriage is required for couples desirous of reconciliation.

Divorce of mutual consent requires only that both parties agree that the marriage should end. Again, in these cases no judiciary involvement is necessary. The third type of divorce, initiated by wives, is termed *khula*. This form of divorce does require a

judge's agreement. The grounds for divorce according to the four schools of thought,⁷ include impotence, apostasy, mental illness, or other marital shortcomings (Glassé, 1989).

Islamic divorce laws clearly favor husbands, since husbands are not required to obtain judiciary approval. This presents a problem in the United States, where there are no Islamic courts. Instead, women must rely on individual leaders and scholars, despite the fact that these people often are acquainted with the abusers personally. Several participants described difficulties in obtaining *khula* despite the fact their husbands were abusive toward them. One woman, who had herself had difficulty getting *khula*, justified the gender differences extant within Islamic divorce law in this way:

Women are more emotional than men. That is why it is not in their hands to say I divorce you to the husband. Because we are more emotional some times of the month, people have PMS, you know there are certain things physiologically that are true. There are some men that are more sensitive than women and vice versa. But still women are more emotional as a general rule because women do have this hormone problem and it does affect our nerves and our moods.

This particular woman remained conservative and never questioned orthodox Islamic views despite the tragic difficulties she faced getting *khula*. Although she suffered abuse severe enough to put her in the hospital, this woman decided to remarry her abuser. Their new marriage contract gave her the right to unilateral divorce if he abused her

⁷ See the section on the *Shariah* on page 42.

again. When he began to abuse her, she sought *khula*, which according to her contract she should have been granted.

If it happens they should take the woman's word that it did happen. Like my husband had said if you take the restraining order off I will give you a divorce, okay khula. I went and took the restraining order off and I went to the hakam the person who was representing me and I said alhamdulillah. Then he tells people I did not say that to her. And he swore that. What could I do? . . . the brothers were not supporting me even though I had in my contract if he does so and so I and if I request divorce they have to give it to me. They did not do it though.

Despite her contract and despite ongoing abuse, the *Imam* did not grant her *khula*. The key here seems to be that the *Imam* did not believe her. This was true also in the next story. In this case, the woman actually had to provide proof of spousal abuse in order to obtain *khula*.

Participant: *She said she got divorced through the mosque. She talked to the Imam and her husband was denying that he did anything. But in the past he had abused her and she would move away somewhere and then he would send her letters and say forgive me and things when she talked to the Imam, the husband said no I was not abusing her. I have never done that. And she said I have the letters I kept all the letters. She told the that I have proof. I have his handwriting. Have him write something. And then that is how the Imam knew she was telling the truth. He said no she is telling the truth so I have to do this divorce.*

Interviewer: *So if she did not have the letters. If she had not saved them?*

Participant: *Then the Imam would not have divorced her.*

Interviewer: *He would not believe her then?*

Participant: *No.*

Interviewer: *And she would have to stay married?*

Participant: *Yes.*

Interviewer: *So she probably would not have just gone and gotten divorced in the American courts?*

Participant: *No she wanted an Islamic divorce.*

This woman's need for proof of her divorce speaks to a problem at least in her particular community. Getting *khula* is very difficult even in cases of abuse. For women who perceive that an Islamic divorce is their only option, getting *khula* means the difference between being tied to an abusive relationship and getting free. In the next exemplar, the *Imam* of this community did grant this woman *khula*, however he did so only after pressuring her to stay.

When I tried to get a divorce and I did not put it in my contract that I had unilateral divorce, so I had to go and get khula and I heard war stories about, you know, women trying to get khula and nobody pronouncing it for them because they are afraid of retribution from the man. I have heard that some skaikhs stopped pronouncing khula because men would come and beat them up. But anyhow, so when I spoke with the Imam, I told him I wanted a divorce. And he wanted to make sure that all options had been exhausted before he dissolved the marriage. When I told him yes, that this thing was over there was no possibility of reconciliation possible, even then he still said why don't you stay? This could be your way to Jenna [heaven].

Intimidation of *Imams* and *shaikhs* to prevent them from granting *khula* presents an additional obstacle for women seeking Islamic divorce. Difficulties getting *khula*, and finding someone to believe them, made these women's abuse experiences even more painful and damaging. Knowing that their own community leaders would not help them get free, and indeed that leaders recommend women stay and be abused, sent a message that devalued women in these Muslim communities.

Child Custody

In addition to difficulty obtaining an Islamic divorce, many women expressed concern around custody issues. There are various opinions within Islam regarding child custody after a divorce. According to Jamal Badawi (1995) a well-known scholar in the United States, the priority for the custody of children goes to the mother until children reach the age of 7:

Priority for the **custody** of young children (up to the age of 7) is given to the **mother**. A child later may choose the mother or father as his or her custodian.

Custody questions are to be settled in a manner that balances the interests of both parents and the well-being of the child (Badawi, 1995, p. 26).

While the opinion cited above does not appear to favor fathers in matters of custody, it is common in Middle Eastern countries for the father to take sole custody of the children following divorce. Thus, the women who expressed the most concern about losing their children were women married to Arabs, illustrating the mixing of Arab cultural influences with these women's abuse experiences.

This exemplar comes from a woman who had been married to an Arab man:

If a woman considers leaving she is going to worry about losing her kids if her husband is from overseas. The fear of having them taken . . . In my case I just woke up one day and just said wait a minute, wait a minute. Why I have I been spending so many years trying to hang on to somebody who treats me so badly. And why am I not standing up for myself and for my kids. This is not in their best interest to have him show up at the door step anytime he feels like it and take them when they do not know if it going to be for a half hour or for twelve hours. This is not working this is not fair to them. And at that time I had previously agreed to joint custody and open visitation. But I said no, I want sole custody and I want a visitation schedule. Beyond that if you are agreeable and nothing is

going on in our lives you may have as much access to your children as you want. And that is a position I maintained until he went to Egypt and he was constantly talking about how controlling I was and interfering in his relationship with his kids. No—only when you are out of line.

This woman found the strength to stand up to her abuser, realizing that his behavior was not good for her children. Despite her strength, she too worried about the possibility that her ex-husband might kidnap their children. Providentially, he moved to Egypt and no longer poses a threat in this way. In contrast to her experience, others in the sample did not fare so well. One woman, unhappy in her marriage, did not pursue divorce because she was afraid her Arab husband would take their daughter. Another woman, a friend of a study participant, did lose her son. Her husband divorced her and took their son to Saudi Arabia. It was only after her ex-husband died that this woman was able to reclaim custody of her son.

While all women seeking divorce from an abuser are fearful when threats to take away their children are made, women in this sample who had been married to Arab men were particularly fearful of this. This fear is understandable since once a child has left the United States, efforts to regain custody will likely fail. Fear of losing their children presented yet another barrier to leaving abusive marriages for women in this sample, particularly those who had been married to Arab men.

Harassment by Abusers

Several study participants reported experiencing harassment during the process of divorce, regardless of whether they or their husbands initiated divorce proceedings. This consisted of efforts to maintain power and control and to exert revenge. The following

exemplar took place after this woman's first marriage, shortly after her conversion to Islam. She initiated the divorce while pregnant, due to her husband's abusive behavior and continued substance abuse.

He harassed everybody around me. My sister was getting phone calls, my parents. He was like showing up at work. One time he left this note with the secretary, this big long, convoluted letter. It said "come back to me baby our love is like a burning flame for Allah. If you do not come back I will kill you and the baby." And I was going oh my God. And shortly after that he blew up my friend's car—the people who had taken me in. He blamed them for everything.

New to Islam, this woman received some community support during her divorce. She stated that the help she received was at least partially due to community members' perceptions that her husband was a 'bad' Muslim since he was a substance abuser. The harassment that this woman and her family experienced was an attempt by the abuser to bring his wife back into the marriage. In contrast, his motivation for harassing the Muslims who took the woman in appears to have been revenge.

The next exemplar describes the experiences of a woman whose was divorced after several years of marriage. Her husband had been involved in a secret polygynous marriage and despite this transgression, she opted to stay in the marriage. Because of her husband's abusive behavior even before the polygyny, a non-Muslim friend had advised her to leave her husband. She felt that this was not an option, stating that if she divorced her husband the Muslim community would blame her and "I'll be screwed totally . . . If anybody leaves it has to be him." In the end, her husband divorced her.

I think he was looking for a way to put himself back in control. He had gone and filed for divorce civilly but he told me he was going to delay the Islamic divorce until we were legally divorced so that he could come and go out of the house as

he pleased. You know for a while I went along with it thinking, this cannot be happening, he is their father, I do care about him, he has been so messed up for so long. If he would just confront this you know, maybe there is hope. But then my attorney tried to get him to do the basic things that are required, file an affidavit of support, where his money comes from, what he spends it on. He refused . . . when he would not fill out the affidavit of support, and I was trying to figure out what my income would be and try to rebuild a life and survive—he said “well that depends.” I said “depends on what?” He said “your behavior.” I said “what do you mean it depends on my behavior? I mean I am going to be taking care of your kids.” He said “well if you mess with me I will break you financially and I will take those kids. I don’t know who is going to be sleeping in your bed in six months.”

This exemplar reveals the ways in which abusers used their economic power to threaten and intimidate their wives during the process of divorce. Threats to take away the children were also common. Despite his taking a second wife and despite the fact that he wanted the divorce the husband somehow felt that he should be able to maintain some control over this woman’s sexuality.

Spreading rumors, making false accusations, and inappropriate allusions to women’s sexual behavior following divorce were common. In all cases, harassment directed towards wives represented an escalation of abuse intended to force these women to succumb to the demands of abusers and the narratives indicate that the women knew that this was what was happening. They knew that their abusers were attempting to control them and they knew that this behavior was wrong.

Community Disapproval

The idea that divorce is the most hated thing that Allah allows is significant on a spiritual level for individuals who accept this belief to be true. However, perhaps most significant about this belief and other beliefs like it are the ways in which they shape

Muslim culture. The majority of women who had divorced their husbands in this sample experienced community repercussions. In addition, many women who did not divorce their husbands (their husbands divorced them) reported that they felt that divorce was not an option for them because of the familial and/or community repercussions involved. Many participants reported pressure from other Muslims not to divorce even in cases of severe abuse.

This exemplar comes from a group interview. The two women speaking had both been divorced and had during this process both faced disapproval.

Participant #1: *One person said how could you leave that big house? That is what people said to me. How could you leave that big house? It was like if I had a house like that I would have to put up with it.*

Participant #2: *That is what they told me you have a roof over your head, you have food in the house, how can you even complain? Haram (forbidden), astaghfallah (God forgive). How can you complain you have everything. You know what Allah is not pleased with you . . . you are giving up your jenna [heaven] if you divorce this man . . . and I remember one Friday I went to juma prayer and that same Friday I was due in court to go and file my papers and everything. And a couple of sisters came to me. "Oh sister you know you are so lucky for what kind of husband you have. We see him in the masjid [mosque] twenty-four hours a day. You should kiss his hands and his feet day and night." I told her "you know what I am in the process of going downtown. So he should be free in the next three months why don't you come and kiss him for me?"*

The retort above was met with a bout of laughter within the group, however the experience underlying it was anything but humorous. People's insensitivity to their suffering and willingness to ignore husbands' abusive behavior was hurtful to these

women. The community that they had once relied on for support now seemed blind to their pain and had turned against them.

Knowing that divorce would mean community disapproval, some participants who wanted to divorce their husbands did not. This participant considered leaving her husband during her marriage but decided the risk of community disapproval was too great:

Participant: *I knew that if I left him I would not have gotten any assistance, the would be going "what is wrong with you, he has got a great job, he is a wonderful father, you are allowed to stay home 24/7, you have got wonderful kids, why would you leave?"*

Interviewer: *How did you know people would respond that way?*

Participant: *I had seen it happen to other people. And I think the message is implied in different ways, you know, they will say "what did she do wrong?" . . . I can think of a friend who is married to a brother who is a convert from Korea, she was an American convert. Her husband would not even give her money for groceries. I mean he would bring home rotting fish from the store. And people would try to help but they kept telling her "well maybe if you did this or that, maybe if you clean your house more, maybe if you put on a dress, maybe if you just accept whatever he brings home." And I found myself saying that to her once myself. . . I mean you get so judgmental.*

Judgmental attitudes were described by this sample as common, leaving women seeking divorce with little or no community support.

This next exemplar comes from a woman who had entered a marriage arranged by community members. This marriage was from the start quite abusive and she left following an episode of escalating abuse. Despite the fact that this woman had known

members of her community for many years and her abuser had been a new arrival, the community's support went to the abuser.

After I left him and filed for divorce a lot of community members were saying that I was wrong to do that, that he was a wonderful person, and this and that.

This woman reported that her community's support for her abuser baffled her. Over time, however, she came to believe that the community response was a reflection of their valuing males over females. She perceived that the community valued him over her because he was male and because he was Arab. This experience sparked a process of questioning for her that continues today.

While support for participants who sought divorce was lacking, and community disapproval was often evident, when support was present it often came from other Muslim women. Having initiated a divorce herself, this woman was able to provide support to another Muslim woman who had experienced abuse.

I talked to a woman who was married to a Saudi who was very abusive to her and gave her lots of diseases and slept with lots of people and expected her to obey regardless of what he did. And the whole thing of blaming the victim, he would say it is your fault that I have to sleep with other women, and so now he has gone and married somebody else. And she told me you are the first Muslim I have spoken to that has been supportive of the fact that I want to divorce my husband. Even though all these things go down she still does not get any support.

While most Muslims may not consider polygyny to be grounds for divorce, many would say that adultery is. This exemplar reveals that in some cases, a husband's infidelity is not considered to be grounds for divorce. In the eyes of some, this is just something else that women should bear.

LIFE AFTER DIVORCE

After divorce, participants' lives changed in significant ways. Many considered remarriage or actually did remarry. Additionally, many found themselves becoming distant from their Muslim communities. For these women, the close connections and ties of faith inherent in community life slowly withered over time. These changes altered the structure of their lives. In cases where women did not remain an integral part of their Muslim communities, a spiritual re-configuration occurred. They began to seek new interpretations of Islam and developed fresh insights into their experiences over time.

Considering Remarriage

Because of the significance of marriage for Muslim women as reported by this sample, many divorced women considered remarriage. In fact, of the 17 women who participated in this study, 11 had been divorced at least once. Of those who had been divorced, 4 remained single but had considered remarriage or were in the process of looking for a husband, 2 had remarried once, and 5 had been married a total of three or more times. Since participants reported that marriage is the normal state of being for adult women, the high rate of remarriage in this sample is not surprising.

This first exemplar regarding remarriage comes from a single divorcee who has four children. Her thoughts about remarriage centered around her children.

Interviewer: *Did you look into remarriage early on?*

Participant: *Oh yes. Yes and actually I have talked to some very nice men. But for one reason or another it would not work out for a lot of*

different reasons. I am very cautious about what I would expose my kids to. I would love for my kids to see a healthy adult relationship between a man and a woman that is not the extreme we went through or the extreme that you see on Melrose place. I mean I would like them to see some normalcy. Whatever that could be. But that people do resolve conflicts. That people do have responsibility to behave with integrity towards each other. And they unfortunately have not seen that.

The perception that remarriage would benefit the children was expressed by the woman in the following exemplar also. This particular woman had been divorced Islamically but her legal divorce was not final at the time of the interview. Despite the fact that her legal divorce was not even final, she was sure that she wanted to remarry and was actively pursuing this course of action.

Participant: *I do want to get remarried and I am speaking to a brother now ...*

Interviewer: *What was it that made you think about remarrying so soon?*

Participant: *For me of course I like companionship and also for my son. Because he would tell me he said I wish I had a papa around here. And he has asked me if I am going to get married again and I wanted a strong male role model for him. And so that is what I thought, I thought okay well when I get divorced Islamically then I will start speaking to someone else.*

Providing a positive male role model for their children was an important consideration for the women in both exemplars. Other reasons mentioned in the sample for remarriage were intimacy and companionship, religious practice, and the belief that marriage is the normal state of being for adult Muslim women.

Distance From Family and Community

When a Muslim woman overcomes all of the barriers to divorce and successfully leaves an abusive relationship, there often are repercussions. Of the 11 participants in this study who had been divorced one or more times, 7 specifically reported significant changes in their family and/or community lives after divorce. The first exemplar comes from a woman whose social network and supports before her divorce had been almost exclusively limited to the Muslim community.

Participant: *I think that the last couple of years I have felt very isolated and very alone and some of that was intentional. I did some of it to myself because I needed that distance. But maybe I needed that distance because of the way I have been treated by people. It is really difficult to tell the way it goes around. I do not think I am an errant Muslim that is angry and bitter because she is divorced. I do not think that at all. I feel rather free and happy and even though my kids, their unhappiness is at a different level, I think they are in a sense relieved from the stuff they went through.*

Interviewer: *What was it you were saying you were treated badly by people? Was that just people leaving you out or was there more to it than that?*

Participant: *Well being left out because you are a divorced woman and you do not fit. Also, in Muslim society here and I have a feeling in other towns, there are certain social circles that you will never break into unless you are a carbon copy of the kind of people that they are looking for. And no matter how hard I have tried to be that I am not and I never will be and I now have chosen to never try to be that again. And initially it was oh we want you to come to this and that but then as time went on it became lip service. And it certainly was not anything I had said because I had not said anything. I was still externally playing the entire role with everybody. But I just was not part of the inner group.*

Interviewer: *So it was a gradual process of being excluded?*

Participant: *Yes. And once you have been excluded that much you do not care anymore . . . and maybe being excluded is a good thing because it is freeing me up to really examine things the way that I need to and what I found was not something that made me want to be part of the group anyway. But then what does that leave me with? Not a lot. And for myself in a way that is freeing but I worry about the kids. What does it mean for them to be Muslim? I do not know because the model we had was false in a lot of ways.*

Believing that the model of Islamic life she had tried to fit into was false, that the orthodox Islam she had believed in was, in essence, based on incorrect interpretations, this woman found herself without a group of Muslims she could identify with. Not fitting in and social exclusion were painful experiences that represented significant changes in the fabric of this woman and her children's lives after divorce. Still this distance provided this woman with the opportunity to re-examine her beliefs in ways that she would have been unable to do while still actively involved with the Muslim community.

The next exemplar comes from a woman who had been divorced more than once. Her Muslim community had not been supportive of her as she sought divorce from her last husband. This lack of support was perhaps even more painful because of the form it took. Largely due to the efforts of one formerly abused woman concerned about the problem of domestic violence, a series of meetings around this topic among women in this Muslim community had been ongoing. During one of these meetings the participant quoted below found herself under attack:

Participant: *That meeting was not even about support . . . That never even ended right . . . They threw me off guard . . . And it was not an*

attack but it was sort of the same thing so it really was not good. I think since then the relationship I have with them has never been the same.

Interviewer: *Since that meeting? You felt like you were under attack at that meeting?*

Participant: *Yes and I feel like I am very distant from them now. We say salamu-alaikum but there is no warmth . . . I was shocked, being beaten, half killed, and about to be killed and I am being attacked again.*

Losing their social networks and supports after divorce, these women felt that their communities and in some cases their own families did not value them. Muslim communities, neglected and in some cases, re-victimized formerly abused divorced women through social ostracism, and name calling, and condemnation.

Being Labeled

Perhaps related to distancing of divorced women from their Muslim communities, are the reports of labeling noted in women's narrative accounts. Labeling women as bad Muslims was an effective way for abusers to garner support for themselves within Muslim communities while simultaneously facilitating the ostracism of their victims from community life. Community members were all too ready to accept these accusations as truth, since these women, by virtue of the fact they were divorced, were already outside of the community norm.

The participant in the following exemplar refers to the idea that good Muslim women who are single should be virgins, and women who are married should be

obedient. Since divorced women meet neither of these criteria, community members often label them as bad Muslims.

Those two dynamics have to be present [submission and virginity]. They say okay $A=B=C=D$, you know these are not present therefore we can conclude that you are a bad woman. And you are going to be labeled.

The next exemplar describes the way a murderer slandered his victim prior to her death. This woman's abuser had spread rumors about her, calling her a prostitute and an unbeliever. He later killed her in a brutal stabbing and disposed of the body. While the victim's community of residence has refused to support the murderer, he was able to garner support from another Muslim community even after being charged with the crime:

I think there were some culturally unique things that surrounded her murder. She was being labeled a bad woman. She was being labeled as somebody who had strayed from Islam because people were talking about how she had maybe other boyfriends after her ex-husband divorced her. You know they were not sure whether or not she had still been Muslim and that was a big deal for some reason because people were talking about it a lot. And I do not see why because once someone has been murdered they have been murdered it should not matter whether or not they are still Muslim. But apparently it did matter because somehow it was an issue. Then the murderer also said he had done it because he did not want his son being raised by a kafir, an unbeliever.

This indicates that not only does labeling women 'bad' Muslims garner support for abusers within some communities, but it also may serve as a justification in the mind of the abusers for their actions. When Abusers believe they have the right to chastize or even murder women because they perceive them as immoral or somehow unclean, they tend to justify their behavior in as morally correct. Abusers in these cases present themselves as the ones who have been wronged, victimized first by immoral women

(wives who have shamed them), and second, in cases where the courts become involved, victimized by the United States legal system.

Finally, this last exemplar, describes the hurtful labeling from her own mother.

My mother is saying things. She thinks that I found someone. She thinks the reason why I divorced my husband is because you know I was getting married to somebody else. And so she calls me a slut.

Being labeled means being identified as the one at fault in cases of divorce. In order to maintain the appearance of good harmonious Muslim communities, Muslims make divorced women scapegoats. In doing so, the Muslim community can blame individual women for extant problems, and the community can assert itself as faultless.

When I was abused almost to the point of losing my life, the brothers identified me as the one with the problems. This was intensified when the abuse was highlighted in the media.

For Muslim women whose faith and community of faith are important to them, labeling is a mechanism of social control. Labeling women and ostracizing them serves as a reminder to others not to risk divorce, and it pressures women who are divorced or who are seeking divorce to fit themselves back into the community mold by reconciling with their abusers.

A Divorced Woman is an Anomaly

In addition to disapproval, distancing, and labeling, participants experienced a feeling of no longer fitting into the existing social structure of their Muslim communities. No longer under the protection of their fathers and or their former husbands, divorced women found that they had no place within Muslim society.

When it comes down to it a divorced woman in Islam is non-existent. In fact I had a sister tell me that. She said, "well a single woman in Islam is an anomaly." And I said, "what do you mean by that?" She said, "well you are either under the protection of your husband or your father." I said, "well I am under the protection of neither. And Allah in His infinite wisdom knows that and put me in this position. So how can you say that I am an anomaly?"

Attitudes that consider divorced women to be anomalous marginalize this group of women within communities. Once places of belonging, Muslim communities became places of suffering and confusion for many women in this study, causing women to re-examine and re-formulate the meaning of community in their lives.

The next exemplar points out how divorced women's marginality contributes to extant pressure to re-marry:

Interviewer: *What is the meaning of divorce for Muslim women?*

Participant: *It puts women in a kind of community limbo where she does not really have much of a role to play in the community anymore. And it puts her, I mean basically she is kind of like either married or looking for a husband.*

Marriage is a state of normalcy and divorced women simply go against the grain of Muslim culture. This cultural norm is most evident to women when they are violating it, prompting some to explore its meaning.

Because she got divorced she is ostracized. She is this loose woman hanging in the community, you know, if you are not attached to a man then you are not valid.

For this woman, and for others in the sample, abuse and crises within Muslim communities have contributed to the emergence of feminist awareness. While small in number, the number of feminist Muslim women is growing. This movement, both on an

individual and group level, has grown out of women's suffering. Women in this sample, often baffled by the treatment they received both from their husbands and from their communities, sought to make sense of their lives. Recognizing the gender oppression inherent in abuse and its cultural supports, fostered the development of new ways of thinking about and being Muslim for these women.

Spiritual Awakening—Reclaiming the Self

While community distancing and labeling of victims certainly were harmful, and in some cases progressed even to the point of abuse at the community level, these experiences for some women served as a bridge to a spiritual awakening.

This exemplar comes from a woman who had previously been an orthodox Muslim. She now is an independent thinker when it comes to matters of faith:

You know that fatalistic attitude that a lot of Muslims have, whatever is Allah's will, okay I went through that period but then it's at the point where now it is Allah's will but it is also up to me to determine now I am going to proceed with my life and my kids lives. And that whole process kind of freed me up in some ways. In some ways it was liberating and in some ways it was also kind of terrifying to have to start thinking about the bigger picture and then to realize and be able to separate myself and say, well is that really true and why did I believe it? A lot of the little things that looking back now it is almost hard to even conceptualize that I lived the way I did for so long and that my kids lived that way. I cannot say it was a bad way but I cannot say it was a good way either. But I had to be out of it to be able to see it. And I think in terms of how it influenced my spirituality it was a gradual process that I am really grateful I have had to go through and to me that is what you should go through. I think my big mistake was in believing like a lot of Muslim converts that I have accepted Islam, the past is over, the bad is over, it is all good, we are all perfect, Islam is perfect, you know go through the motions, follow the formula, and be guaranteed jenna and also have a really great social setting for yourself in this life. And that is not how it works. And anybody who believes that is in for a serious awakening when they find themselves in a trauma that cannot allow them to maintain that lifestyle. And so in that respect I am very grateful I had to go through it because

it has re-awakened my spirituality as to why I became Muslim in the first place. And what I would hope to have from a spiritual path and a belief system. It is not black and white and anybody who thinks that is again like I said very mistaken and you can spend a lot of time structuring it for yourself to make it fit that black and white and it works up to a point. But you invest so much time and energy I maintaining that I think it is unfortunate. I think you miss out on life.

This participant had talked about experiencing a negation of self during her abusive marriage. Trying to be obedient and live up to Muslim community ideals, she lost touch with her inner voice. Since her divorce, because of community distancing, she has been able to think through much of what she had previously accepted blindly in order to fit in. Outside of the community, the need to conform is absent, and she has been able to reclaim much of her inner voice.

After being excluded from and labeled by her Muslim community, this woman sought support from non-Muslim friends and family. Once she was away from the influences of Muslims she was able to contemplate her spiritual beliefs.

I think that my understanding of Islam came more so from having to run away from that particular community and be with the people who are quote unquote not Muslim. And then that is where I was able to look outside of that. I was able to see. I could do like comparison, well I like the idea of prayer, I like this idea of modesty . . . It was outside of that community and with people who are quote unquote not Muslim that I was able to gain a better understanding of it.

Being abused and then ostracized has a powerful influence on women. Some women internalize the effect of abusive behavior and become ill, while others are able to gain new insight and new meaning in their lives as a result. Gaining a different and more individually suited understanding of their faith was an important part of developing insight. Separating Muslims from Islam, and then asserting their right to interpret their

faith was part of a healing process—a process of reclaiming the self. The decision to interpret Islam independently meant that women no longer were controlled by others. Their thinking and spirituality became their own.

This last exemplar describes the process of separating the daily behavior of Muslims from a woman's own understanding of Islam.

I think when we were talking she understood that this cannot be Islam. This was not ordained by Allah. And I think that is when she broke away. Because she saw all these other Muslims in the same situation, yes they are getting abused, but she started to separate it I think. She started to say it seems like this is all from men this cannot be from Allah.

This woman was able to separate gender oppression and abuse from Islam. In doing so, she recognized that her abuse stemmed from the hegemony of gender oppression—not from God. Recognizing that this cannot be from Allah frees women to explore their faith individually, allowing for resistance to hegemonic patriarchal doctrine.

Some women, while grieving the loss of community and in some cases family, used this distance as a bridge to new understanding and meaning in their lives. They were able to re-think Islam in a journey over time. Sadly, when women did not enter this journey, they tended to internalize their oppression to the point where they were unable to acknowledge that gender oppression even existed among Muslims. While the women who were unable to change in the face of severe abuse and oppression were in the minority, their defense of patriarchy shaped their lives and influenced family members and friends over time.

SUMMARY

Cultural values, which consider marriage normative and which disparage divorce, make divorce challenging for Muslim women at best. Harassment, community disapproval, and fear of losing custody of children compound this challenge. When marriages did end, however, the majority of participants in this sample reported having gone through Islamic divorces. Gender differences in Islamic divorce often made obtaining divorce difficult for women, placing them at further disadvantage.

Life after divorce was also challenging for many study participants. Losing their social networks and in some cases, becoming, in essence, community outcasts, represented significant losses for participants. To make sense of communities' responses to their abuse, the majority of women were faced with the realization that they were simply not valued by the communities they had belonged to. This recognition, along with distance from Muslim communities, allowed for spiritual exploration and re-interpretations of Islam, the like of which they had previously been unable to pursue. When woman who suffered severe abuse internalized their oppression, they suffered, often becoming ill.

The data clearly demonstrate that divorce, as reported by this sample of Muslim women, was exceedingly difficult to pursue and obtain. The consequences of divorce for most of these women were escalating abuse, changes in their social status, and changes in their spirituality over time. Overcoming these obstacles occurred because for these women it was matter of survival, psychological, spiritual, and/or physical.

Struggling to survive, these women faced oppression which they had previously ignored in the context of their communities, and in doing so changed their lives.

CHAPTER NINE:

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

SYNOPSIS OF THE STUDY

Aims

This research was conducted to examine the cultural context and meaning of American Muslim women's lived experiences with incidences of emotional, physical, and/or sexual abuse. I was drawn to this topic as an American Muslim woman who experienced abuse both in childhood and early adulthood. Through personal experience, I became aware of how culture and community both enrich and marginalize Muslim women. In particular, I observed that abused Muslim women face many challenges as they struggle to make sense of and put an end to the abuse they experience. As an American Muslim woman, I have also personally experienced the sting of prejudice directed toward Muslims in the context of a dominant culture that is hostile to both Arabs and Muslims. Stereotyped as terrorists, or ignorantly labeled cult followers, Muslims face daily assaults on their dignity and identity on American soil. This marginalization, and the tendency of Muslim communities to be insular, create barriers to care for abused Muslim women.

The research goal was to sensitize service providers, both Muslim and non-Muslim, to the lived experiences of abused American Muslims. It is my hope that by illuminating these experiences, access to services will be improved, and hegemonic

notions of abused Muslim women extant both within and outside of Muslim communities will be challenged. The research aims of the study were: (a) to describe American Muslim women's lived experiences with abuse, and (b) to identify culturally specific phenomena which shape American Muslim women's experiences and perceptions of abuse in the context of a larger social background, and (c) to describe women's interpretation and background meanings with regard to their experiences with abuse.

Method

Hermeneutic interviewing was used to elicit stories of American Muslim women's lived experiences of abuse. The interviews focused on biography, culture, and meanings surrounding abuse experiences. Women participated in individual and/or group interviews. Participants were interviewed between one and three times. There were a total of 20 interviews completed, including three group and 17 individual interviews.

Study Sample

Seventeen women were recruited through Muslim community contacts. Participants' ages ranged from 20 to 59 years old. There were 9 African-American, 3 Euro-American, 2 Arab-American, 2 Afghani-American, and 1 Indonesian woman in the sample. The absence of women from Eastern Europe, Sub-Saharan, and Africa are notable limitations of the sample, since together they comprise a significant portion of Muslims in the United States (Stone, 1991). There were 10 converts and 7 women born

Muslim in the sample. Educational attainment of the sample ranged from high school through doctoral levels. Levels of conservatism in the sample covered a wide range of religious interpretation. Women with conservative, moderate, and liberal interpretations of Islam were included. Muslim husbands had abused 13 of the 16 married and/or previously married participants.

Analysis

The goal of data analysis was to uncover themes of commonality and difference among American Muslim women with regard to their lived experiences with abuse, and ultimately to place emerging themes in a larger social context. The lived experiences of American Muslim women with regard to the issue of abuse, as captured in unstructured interview transcripts, was extracted using these strategies: (a) thematic analysis, (b) biography, (c) comparison with key informant data, (d) paradigm cases, and (e) exemplars.

Analysis of narratives revealed four areas of major importance: community, abuse experiences, marriage and divorce.

Community

The Muslim community was a central focus for practicing Muslim women. The community was described as if it were a living entity, one that nourishes, shelters, and strengthens Muslims in the context of predominantly Christian America. While the community provided Muslim women with a sense of identity and connection, it also in cases of abuse, often responded in ways that were further damaging. The Muslim

community was described as being unprepared to deal with the problem of abuse. Despite this, Muslim women invariably turned to their communities for help and support. The Muslim community response to abuse significantly shaped women's experiences as they sought to end their suffering. It is only when the Muslim community could not or did not provide women with needed help that they turned to non-Muslim sources for support, shelter, and/or protection.

Abuse Experiences

The nature of the abuse Muslim women experienced was much like the abuse non-Muslim women experience. However, participants' interpretations of abuse were filtered through ethnic and Muslim cultural lenses, creating qualitatively different responses to similar abuse experiences.

Marriage

As a prescribed religious duty and the only socially sanctioned intimate male-female relationship, marriage was central to the lives of participants. Socialization processes that emphasized marriage, a dating taboo, and the belief that marriage is "half of faith" were powerful forces that shaped women's experiences. These cultural expectations resulted in pressure for women to marry, sometimes very young, often to men they hardly knew. In addition, the importance of marriage and the belief that wives should obey husbands tended to encourage women to stay married sometimes under even the most adverse of circumstances.

Divorce

Divorces were typically Islamic divorces, making women vulnerable to the whims of Muslim community leaders and *shaikhs* who could, if they were so inclined, refuse to grant women *khula*. In addition, divorced women's experiences were mediated by ethnic cultural influences. Women from immigrant cultures and women who had been socialized into immigrant cultures tended to become isolated from their Muslim communities over time. Divorced women in these cases were cruelly ostracized or gradually excluded from their social networks.

CONCLUSIONS

The five broad conclusions drawn from the research findings are:

1. **Islamic ideals govern Muslim women's responses.** Perceptions of Islamic ideals govern Muslim women's interpretations and responses to all life events including abuse. There is a constant tension between Islamic ideals and the actual practices of abusers and sometimes of entire communities. Islamic ideals that emphasize kindness, consultation, and respect for women exist in contradiction to abusive behavior that place women in positions of subservience, dependency, and suffering. Shock and disbelief related to abusers' disregard for Islamic ideals, and the hope that abusers will eventually change their behavior (if only they can understand what Islam expects of them) are part of Muslim women's abuse experiences.

Orthodox Islam prescribes behavior for Muslims in daily life. Practicing orthodox Muslim participants strove to conform to the rules set forth by Islamic teachings because this is what they believed was right and also because this was what was expected of them from other Muslims. The expectations governing marriage were no different. While many participants believed that wives should obey husbands, this power differential was ideally enacted by husbands with kindness, consultation, and respect for wives. When abusers claimed authority over wives, however, the qualities of kindness and so on, were absent. Furthermore, when abusers claimed disciplinary authority over wives, culminating in emotional, physical, and/or sexual assault, women were stunned with disbelief.

The answer to the problem of abuse in many participant's minds was to bring abusers back to Islam—back to the straight path, to, in effect, show them the error of their ways. Pointing out religious textual support for their positions, women were disappointed when abusers ignored reasoned arguments. At every turn, women looked to Islamic teachings to govern their own behavior and to interpret the behavior of others. Turning toward family, friends, and/or community leaders for help, women were often shocked to find themselves, good believing women, all too often without assistance from other Muslims.

Ideal Islam is the reference point for many Muslim women, shaping their understandings of how marriage and divorce should be. The belief that Islam is the solution for all of life's problems led abused participants to continue looking to Islam for

answers, even though abusers were typically intent on maintaining power and control at all costs. Coming to terms with the reality that despite their efforts, their marriages were not going to exemplify Islamic ideals, and that their communities often times were not going to either, required a paradigm shift for abused participants. This was a difficult change for women that sometimes resulted in depression and spiritual crisis. Ultimately, women emerged from this process clinging ever more tightly to orthodox Islamic principles, or conversely, by distancing themselves from patriarchal interpretations of the faith.

2. Islam gives women identity, connection, and order. Muslim culture provides women with a sense of identity, connection, and order. In cases of abuse, disapproval from family and/or community are powerful disincentives to leaving abusers since Muslim family and community life are central to women's lives.

Hermansen (1991) in a study of two-way acculturation of Muslim women in America found that Muslim women share common worlds of experience and communication. Further, Hermansen (1991) identified community as an important source of identity and social activity for American Muslim women. Hermansen's (1991) work corroborates the findings of this study, which also highlights the importance of connection to other Muslims, people who share the same beliefs and life practices, in American Muslim women's lives. This connection fosters Islamic identity—one that is distinctly different from any other. These social connections are part of the order of Islamic existence.

Because of the significance of community, one of the most painful experiences for abused participants was the loss of community affiliation, closeness, and connection. As women challenged abuse, they risked being labeled and/or accused of unIslamic behavior. Community pressure to stay married at all costs was common, particularly among groups dominated by immigrant cultures. Again, Hermansen's (1991) work corroborates this finding, stating that some Muslim women feel pressure "... because of the sentiment that 'if you don't stay married, you're not a good Muslim'" (Hermansen, 1991, p. 198). When participants resisted this pressure they tended to be ostracized by other Muslims—an intensely painful experience, since being Muslim is, in essence, for many women akin to being part of a collective.

Even participants whose husbands divorced them and behaved in ways clearly contrary to Muslim community norms, in some cases, found themselves distanced from community life slowly over time. This was particularly true for women who did not remarry, since divorced women simply did not fit well within Muslim community social structures. Hermansen (1991) also noted that single women lack acceptance in Muslim communities, citing fear and suspicion of single women as a common phenomenon.

Going from an orderly life with a strong sense of identity and connection, to a life of questioning, distance, and strife is a difficult and traumatic experience. By observing others who had gone through this experience, some participants knew that leaving abusers would culminate in the loss of community and as a result chose not to

leave. For some women, the benefits of community life outweighed the difficulties of living with emotionally or even physically abusive husbands.

3. Immigrant cultures mix with Muslim culture, creating cultural hybrids.

Ethnic influences mix with Muslim culture to create qualitatively different environments across communities. In communities that are dominated by some immigrant cultures, values relating to family honor limit marriage and divorce options even in cases of severe abuse.

Cultural influences are significant in shaping interpretations of Islam and attitudes toward marriage and divorce. Hermansen (1991) found that immigrant families attempt to keep their daughters within traditional norms and away from American practices such as dating. This is consistent with the findings of this study. Participants from immigrant cultures had less freedom to independently select husbands and to initiate divorces than participants who were not immersed in immigrant cultures.

Specifically with regard to woman abuse, Kulwicki and Miller (1991), in a study of domestic violence in the Arab-American population, found that Arab cultural influences significantly shape attitudes toward battering. A surprising number of men and women in Kulwicki and Miller's (1991) sample approved of wife beating under particular circumstances such as infidelity. This is consistent with the findings of this study. Families and communities dominated by immigrant cultures tended to exhibit greater tolerance for abusive behavior. In most cases support for abusers was high and for victims seeking divorce was low. In addition, the tendency to view women as

potential sources of dishonor and of divorce as shameful was more pronounced in these contexts, creating significant barriers to leaving abusers for women affiliated with immigrant cultures.

The creation of cultural hybrids reflects the intermixing of African-American, Euro-American, and immigrant cultural influences. McCloud's (1991) study of African-American Muslim women found that both African-American and immigrant cultural influences significantly shape African-American Muslim women's experiences. McCloud (1991) described qualitatively different life experiences among African-American Muslim women. This description is consistent with the findings of this study of American Muslim women's experiences of abuse. Participants from different cultural backgrounds reported subtle distinctions in their experiences. The most significant difference was the increased likelihood of African-American participants (not acculturated into immigrant cultures) to support women's decisions to leave abusive relationships.

4. The belief that inherent in gender are essential traits that are natural and immutable shapes abused Muslim women's experiences. Visions of gender shape women's abuse experiences. Beliefs about gender provide the underlying rationale for rules of behavior for both men and women in Muslim cultures.

The Muslim culture of participants promulgated clearly defined gender roles for men and women based on the underlying assumption that these roles are natural and immutable.

With regard to sexual behavior, the perception that men are driven by sexual drives justified limitations on participants' freedom and in some cases justified husbands' polygynous marriages. Furthermore, the perception that men's sexual needs must be satisfied in marriage (to prevent the downfall of moral society) created obligations for participants to provide husbands sex, blurring the lines around rape in the context of marriage.

Also important was the male role of head of household. Viewed as inherently suited to be protectors and maintainers of women, husbands within the culture had authority over wives. This authority was extended into the disciplinary realm, allowing for 'symbolic' beatings in extreme cases of marital disharmony (*nushuz*). Wives, on the other hand, were expected to obey husbands in all matters (unless their husbands requested that they behave immorally). For some, this expectation translated into the belief that they could not leave the house, or invite others over without the permission of their husbands, contributing to the problem of isolation in situations of abuse. Furthermore, husbands' demands that wives keep silent about abuse were bolstered by the expectation that good wives would obey this command. While some participants rejected these beliefs, all were affected by these common values in their Muslim communities. In cases of abuse, this patriarchal structure hampered participants' ability to resist cruel treatment. In particular, women who continued to obey despite their husbands' abuse of power found themselves disempowered, depressed, and in some

cases suicidal. The cultural mores surrounding gender roles shaped participants' interpretations of events and the meanings associated with them.

These findings are harmonious with research conducted among Arab (primarily Muslim) populations. In a study of beliefs about wife-beating among Palestinian women, Haj-Yahia (1998b), determined that rigid sex-role stereotypes, non-egalitarian expectations of marriage, traditional attitudes toward women, familial patriarchal beliefs, and religiosity, explained women's tendency to blame battered women for violence against them. Similar findings were reported by Haj-Yahia (1998b) in a study of beliefs about wife-beating among Palestinian men. Both Haj-Yahia's (1998a, 1998b) findings and the results of this study confirm the significance of rigid patriarchal visions of gender in shaping the interpretations and meanings of abuse among Muslim populations.

5. Muslims Are Distinct from non-Muslims. Distinctions between Muslims and non-Muslims are reinforced both within and outside of Muslim communities. Stereotyping of Muslims and prejudicial attitudes against people of color in the United States create barriers to social, legal, and health services for Muslims. Further compounding this problem are negative attitudes toward non-Muslims common among Muslim populations, resulting in Muslim communities that are largely closed systems.

As part of the *ummah*, participants had a sense of affiliation with other Muslims. Part of this bond was the knowledge that they were unlike non-Muslims, and they were like one another. Muslims' emphasis on being distinctly different from non-Muslims

tended to contribute to an us and them attitude in some participant communities. This attitude hampered abused women's ability to obtain assistance from non-Muslims, be they relatives, friends, or service providers.

Compounding this problem was pervasive stereotyping and even hatred of Muslims by non-Muslims. Discriminatory attitudes toward Muslims in American has been well documented (Haddad, 1991; National Conference of Christian and Jews, 1994). These attitudes no doubt reinforce fears that Muslims will be misunderstood by non-Muslim service providers. Among participants, this fear translated into avoidance of non-Muslim therapists in particular.

The differences between Muslims and non-Muslims, and the attitudes surrounding these differences by both groups, contributed to the tendency of abused participants to seek help from Muslims first and from non-Muslims only as a last resort. Unfortunately, being a small, relatively closed group, Muslim leaders and communities tended to be ill-equipped to deal with the problem of woman abuse in their midst, and participants seeking help reported receiving little or no assistance. In some cases, participants' help-seeking from other Muslims actually resulted in their being re-victimized as they were blamed, labeled, and their suffering was ignored.

IMPLICATIONS

Implications for Practice

It is important for nurses and other service providers not to assume that this research provides evidence that abused Muslim women have a cultural 'problem.' The

ideology underlying such a perspective is one that holds Muslims in contempt, constructing the problem of violence as one that happens only to alien 'Others' (Varcoe, 1997). Clearly, recognition that abuse of women is rampant across cultures is a necessary prerequisite to effective practice with victims of domestic violence from diverse cultural backgrounds.

What this research does offer nurses and other health care providers is knowledge and understanding of this sample of American Muslim women's lived experiences of abuse and the ways in which their Muslim cultures shaped these experiences. This knowledge should not be generalized to all American Muslim women, nor should it be assumed to apply only to the 17 women included in this study. Rather, the culturally grounded findings of this research should serve as background knowledge to frame clinical encounters with American Muslim women, with the understanding that all women are unique and may or may not share similar experiences with the women in the study sample.

Drawing on Women's Strengths

Muslim women's devotion to Islam is part of their strength. It provides them with a clear sense of right and wrong. Because women in this study unanimously agreed that abuse is unIslamic, the strength of their Islamic convictions also minimized self-blame. These women knew that their abusers were wrong to abuse them. This value provides a window of opportunity for nurses and other health care providers to intervene. By emphasizing that abuse is unIslamic and that God allows Muslims leeway

with regard to traditional boundaries when their survival is at stake, women who are abused can be encouraged to recognize that what is happening to them is wrong and that God is on their side. Acknowledging that they are being abused, that they are not to blame, and that resistance to abuse is morally correct are important steps for abused Muslim women to take. Muslim women resist Western cultural hegemony and marginalization in their daily lives. This strength and tenacity must somehow also be drawn on to motivate them to resist abuse and women's oppression extant in families and communities as well.

Another strength of Muslim women identified by this study was their sense of affiliation with one another. The strength of these bonds can be drawn on to encourage organizing around issues of domestic violence. As women organize they can create friendships, linkages, and resources within their Muslim communities that are sensitive to this issue. By bonding with one another in the context of anti-abuse forums, women can provide support and assistance to one another when the need arises. Finally, women's anti-abuse networking has the potential to introduce critical awareness of the problem of domestic violence in Muslim communities.

Exercising Caution

Participants in this study encouraged health care providers to approach intervention with Muslim women cautiously, and to be aware of the long term implications that resisting abuse and/or leaving abusers may have on the Muslim women they counsel. Distrust of non-Muslim service providers will likely increase in cases

where service providers make recommendations that are clearly ignorant of the social contexts that abused Muslim women face. Standard intervention strategies such as safety planning, calling law enforcement, obtaining a restraining order, seeking counseling and shelter, may need to be modified for Muslim women, particularly orthodox Muslim women whose religious interpretations lean toward conservatism.

In cases where a woman perceives that she cannot leave the house without her husband's permission, safety planning must address this issue first and foremost. Discussing the idea that women can and should leave the house if they perceive they are in danger, and that this is not incongruent with Islamic ideals, must be the first step in safety planning for such women. In addition, frank discussion around potentially negative family and/or community responses to women's use of non-Muslim services like law enforcement, counseling, and shelter can help women problem-solve and process these barriers. Listening to women's concerns about being misunderstood by non-Muslims and acknowledging the difficulties they face, will validate women in important ways, empowering them to think through potential problems and be better prepared to face them.

Exercising caution requires sensitive and respectful listening to abused Muslim women, acknowledging the challenges they face while simultaneously exploring areas of concern and potential barriers to care. In addition, exercising caution requires that nurses and other health care providers modify standard intervention strategies as needed,

keeping in mind the challenges and barriers that each woman faces in the context of family, community, ethnic, and religious cultures.

Building Community Linkages

Muslim women in this study made it clear that when abused Muslim women seek assistance they typically turn to Muslims first. Help from non-Muslim sources was often a last resort, something that women turned to when they had no other options available to them. Despite the tendency for women to seek help within Muslim communities first, their communities were typically unprepared to deal with the problem of abuse. Indeed, communities oftentimes made things worse for victims not better. Thus, remedying the problem of abuse among Muslim women, logically involves building community linkages between health care and social systems and Muslim communities and organizations.

Community linkages can foster community education and training programs for the purposes of building a base of support for abused women within their communities. By building linkages with Muslim communities, health care providers can train women's advocates, creating additional resources for referral and support. In addition, by building community linkages, health care providers can become familiar with community cultures, thus enhancing their ability to intervene effectively with women from these settings. Finally, educational materials directed toward Muslim women are a potentially important product of health care provider/Muslim alliances. By drawing on the knowledge of both groups, culturally relevant materials to raise awareness and

Estimates of incidence of prevalence of abuse among American Muslim populations are absent. Sharifa Alkhateeb surveyed 64 Muslim service providers and leaders, asking them to identify abuse rates in their communities (Sharifa Alkhateeb, personal communication, June 14, 1999). The incidence rate identified from this unpublished survey was 10%. This estimate unfortunately is unreliable since it used a small sample, and bypassed the reports of abused women themselves. The influence of social desirability in this sample was also undetermined. Still, this effort represents an important first step among Muslims to address the problem of abuse in their midst. Further efforts using large random samples and face-to-face interviewing strategies would provide more accurate estimates of the incidence and prevalence of abuse among American Muslim populations.

In addition to estimates of incidence and prevalence, other quantitative measures may be useful. Examining correlates of violence among Muslim populations including antecedents and sequela of violence in families would provide useful information for primary prevention and treatment strategies.

Finally, qualitative work examining ethnic cultural influences, geographical influences, and other unique aspects of the phenomenon such as the affect of abuse on Muslim women's spirituality are needed. Understanding the contexts of abuse is of primary importance among all populations of abused women, and Muslim women are no exception.

I am aware of efforts currently underway by formerly abused Muslim women to explore various aspects of abuse among populations of Muslim women in America. Their valiant efforts are ongoing despite the lack of encouragement and recognition they receive. I believe, however, that their efforts will ultimately make a difference in abused American Muslim women's lives. I am thankful for them and commend them for their patience and steadfast efforts.

LIMITATIONS

This qualitative study focused on contextual aspects of American Muslim women's experiences with abuse. As such, it cannot provide information regarding the incidence and prevalence of abuse or its sequela. In addition, given the design and the philosophical perspective underlying this research, the study results are not intended to be generalizable. Caution should be exercised in applying information from this study to American Muslim women as a group. Instead, attention to ethnic culture, locale, and individual biography should be maintained.

Because of the absence of African, Sub-Saharan, and various Asian women in the sample, the study findings may not necessarily apply to these groups of women despite the common religious culture they share with other Muslim women. Also of note is the relative paucity of data generated with regard to woman abuse and parenting. Further research is needed to elucidate the influence of abuse on American Muslim women's ability to parent. Finally, participants' hesitance to discuss their sex lives limited the analysis of sexual abuse. While cultural values regarding sex were freely discussed,

there were few women who shared personal experiences of sex-abuse in the context of their own Muslim marriages.

SUMMARY

Throughout this work I have been struck by the resilience of the women in this study some of whom have suffered abuse throughout their lives. Some women held on to the most conservative interpretations of Islam, believing that this was what God commanded of them. Others, perceiving the sting of gender oppression and abuse began to question traditional interpretations of Islam over time. All women, however, held a deep connection to their faith and were influenced by this connection throughout their lives as Muslims.

The overriding conclusion that can be drawn from this study is that the American Muslim women experience abuse in ways that are culturally mediated. Their attitudes, life meanings, and perceptions are filtered through an Islamic worldview, and this worldview is in turn shaped by the dominant interpretations of Islam within Muslim communities. Marriage and community are central aspects of their lives. Thus when abuse and divorce occur, these events are, for many, life shattering. Patriarchy and misogyny shape discourses around abuse within participants' Muslim communities, while racism, stereotyping, and anti-Muslim prejudice shape dominant American discourses without. Caught in a web of constraints, abused Muslim women often endure abuse for years before getting free.

The study findings clearly support the need to create alternatives for abused Muslim women in America who face so many barriers to receiving the help they so desperately need. The emergence of critical awareness among Muslims and non-Muslims alike is a necessary prerequisite for challenging the status-quo of existing social relations—relations that support men's ability to batter women while simultaneously hindering abused Muslim women's access to justice. It is hoped that this research had been truly counter-hegemonic by shedding light on a group of women's suffering that has up until now remained in the shadows. By exposing the social processes and ideologies that support Muslim men's ability to batter, and non-Muslim service providers' ability to further marginalize abused Muslim women, I hope to begin a process of change. For those Muslims who strive to challenge women's oppression despite the ridicule and condemnation they might receive, and to those service providers who seek the skills necessary to rise above the pettiness of ethnocentric judgment, I offer this study.

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APPENDIX:
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Oregon Health Sciences University IRB#5145

Consent Form

Title: American Muslim Culture: Abuse, Women, and Health.

Principal Investigator: Dena Phillips, RN, MS, doctoral student in the department of Family Nursing, Oregon Health Sciences University, is conducting this research under the guidance of Dr. C. Tanner, Professor of Nursing, Oregon Health Sciences University. The principal investigator can be reached at (503) 654-1276.

Purpose: You have been invited to participate in this research study because as an American Muslim you can help us to understand the problem of abuse in your community from a Muslim perspective. The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of American Muslim women with incidences of emotional, physical, and/or sexual abuse within the context of their Muslim culture. You will be asked to participate in up to three unstructured interviews over a 3 to 6-month period.

Procedures: You will be asked to participate in private interviews if you are still married to a man who formerly physically or sexually abused you. These interviews will take place at the home of a Muslim woman research consultant or at the home of the investigator. You will be asked to share your story and will be offered information about community resources to assist you if desired. If you have experienced past abuse and are no longer married to the man who abused you, or you have never experienced abuse, you may participate in either an individual or group interview (whichever you prefer) to talk about stories of emotional, physical, and/or sexual abuse that you have experienced as a Muslim woman, or that of other Muslim women you know have

experienced. Contact will be made through a study consultant from the Muslim community. The investigator will not contact you at your home without your permission. If you are currently involved in an abusive relationship, for your own safety, you are not eligible to participate in this study. Interviews will be audio-taped. A respectful and caring attitude toward all group members during group interviews is expected. Each interview will take place over a maximum time period of 3 hours. Each participant may be asked to participate in up to three interviews over a time period not to exceed 6 months. However, you have the option to end your participation in the study at any time. Access to these tapes will be restricted to the investigator. All of the data obtained will be destroyed 3 years from the time of completion of this study. Finally, you will not be required to discuss anything you do not wish to share during the interview and you may terminate the interview and your participation in the study at any time.

Risks and Discomforts: Discussing abuse experiences may make you feel sad or afraid. Additionally, you may be at an increased risk of emotional and/or physical abuse if you are currently in an abusive relationship and your abuser becomes aware of your participation in the study.

Benefits: You may or may not personally benefit from participating in the study. However, by serving as a subject, you may contribute new information which may benefit patients in the future.

Alternatives: You may choose not to participate in this study.

Confidentiality: This study is confidential. Neither your name nor your identity will be used for publication or publicity purposes. Participation in group interviews requires that all participants agree to maintain the confidentiality of all group members, their stories, and the location where the interviews take place. There will be a 5-10 minute discussion around issues of confidentiality preceding all group interviews. If you have any doubt that you may not be able to maintain confidentiality of you peers during group interviews you are asked to remove yourself from participation in this study. To enhance the safety and confidentiality of women remaining in formerly abusive relationships, discussion of abuse experiences will be restricted to individual interviews. While the confidentiality of all participants is of primary importance in this study, you should know that *According to Oregon law, suspected child or elder abuse must be reported to appropriate authorities.*

Costs: There are no costs to you for participating in this study other than your time. Although through participation in this study you may ask for and receive information about community resources to help you if you are experiencing abuse, the costs of such services are your responsibility. This study will not assist with the costs of any counseling or legal assistance you may choose to obtain.

Liability: It is not the policy of the National Institute of Nursing Research which is funding the project you are participating in to compensate or provide medical treatment for human subjects in the event the research results in physical injury. However, you have not waived your legal rights by signing this form.

The Oregon Health Sciences University, as a public corporation, is subject to the Oregon Tort Claims Act, and is self-insured for liability claims. If you suffer any injury from this research project, compensation would be offered to you only if you establish that the injury occurred through the fault of the University, its officers, or employees. If you have any further questions, please call the Medical Services Director or (503) 494-6020.

Participation: Dena Phillips (503) 654-1276 has offered to answer any questions you may have about this study. If you have any question about your rights as a research subject, you may contact the Oregon Health Sciences University Institutional Review Board at (503) 494-7887. Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate, or may withdraw from this study at any time without affecting your relationship with or treatment at the Oregon Health Sciences University. You may be removed from the study if you are unable to agree to maintain the confidentiality of group members or if your behavior within the group is deemed harmful to others at the discretion of the investigator. If you decide to participate, you will receive a copy of this consent form. *Your signature below indicates that you have read the foregoing and agree to participate in this study.*

Participant Signature

Date

Principal Investigator Signature

Date

Witness Signature

Date