Being Muslim in 21st Century America: Does Living in America Create an Identity Crisis for the Generation X Muslim Woman?

Laila Uddin
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Being Muslim in 21st Century America: Does Living in America Create an Identity Crisis for the Generation X Muslim Woman?

By

Laila Uddin

Thesis Advisor:

Dr. Richard Dool

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Masters of Arts in Corporate and Public Communication Seton Hall University

2006
Abstract

Over the years, I've observed South Asian females and males alike struggling to fulfill religious and cultural obligations to their family while fitting in with the norms of society. I also learned of the term "ABCD" which stands for American Born Confused Desi. This refers to people of Desi or South Asian origin living in the United States. "Confused" refers to their confusion regarding their identity from either being born in America or living here since an early age and having been exposed to American culture more than their ancestral culture. That is when I realized that I was not the only one feeling like I was being "pulled" in two different directions.

In this thesis, I decided to focus specifically on Generation X Muslim women living in America to explore their experiences and to find out whether they also felt like they were being "pulled" in two different directions. This feeling of leading a "double life" is the cause of the identity crisis that many Muslim women experience living in America.
In Loving Memory

Of

My grandparents,
I know you are always watching over me

And

My uncle Shafiqur Rahman,
For always believing in me, I hope I've made you

proud
Acknowledgements

To my parents,

Thank you for all the love you've given me and making me who I am today.

To my brother and sister,

Thank you for blessing me with my nieces and nephews.

Dr. Richard Dool,

An eternal "thank you" for your support, patience, understanding and guidance as I wrote this thesis.

Audancie Constant,

Thank you for your endless guidance and support over the years... thank you for your friendship.

Lisa DeVirgilio and Brian "SBFF" Matthew

Thank you for all your time, help and support you have provided me during this process.

I'd also like to acknowledge the friends that have given me inspiration when I needed it most, thank you for keeping me going.

WE DID IT MATT!!
“We must be the change we wish to see in the world.”

...Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi
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I chose to write about being Muslim in 21st century America because I have experienced an identity crisis as a Muslim woman growing up in America, my home. I was born in the U.S., the youngest of three children to traditional Bangladeshi Sunni Muslim parents. I lived amongst other Bangladeshi people until I was about eight years old. Then, my family and I moved to another part of town with a smaller South Asian community.

Growing up in this new community, I was not given the same freedoms as I had when I was younger living near my fellow Desi friends in the South Asian community. The only friends I ever knew up until that point were Bangladeshi, so naturally in this new community I was seeking out Bangladeshi children to begin new friendships with. The only Bangladeshi children on my block at the time were all males, so that’s who my friends were. But by the time I entered my pre-teen years, the tomboy in me started to develop into a young lady and I wanted to have female friends that I could talk to and relate to as well. This is when I began to transition from having all Desi friends to having more American friends.

Then again, at thirteen my family and I moved into a town with a predominantly Catholic Italian-American community. We were one of three South Asian families in the town and one of two Muslim families in the neighborhood. I always lived in neighborhoods that were rich in cultures and ethnicities until this last move. I was beginning high school in a town where I was not able to relate to anyone and having both
siblings nine and ten years older than me, I felt like I had no direction or guidance. I felt like an only child left to make choices and decisions on my own.

As the years passed, my parents were disappointed and couldn’t understand why I didn’t associate with other Bangladeshi people. They would lecture about how important it was to have Bangladeshi friends and how being connected with my culture would keep me involved in my religion. They thought I was losing my culture thus somehow losing my religion. How did they expect me to keep ties with my Desi friends when we kept moving out of the Desi communities? How did they expect me to make new Desi friends when there were none to make? I felt pulled in two different directions. I was trying to make my parents happy but trying to live my life as well. I was taken out of my Desi shelter and began to experience my “identity crisis in America.”

Demographics of the American Muslim

Islam is the fastest growing religion in the world. It is also the second largest religion in the world. Some more facts are:

- The second largest social group of Muslim converts in America consists of Caucasian American women.
- The American Muslim Council reports that there are 80,000 American-born converts to Islam.
- In 1994, the U.S. military commissioned its first Muslim chaplain to advise the estimated 10,000 Muslims in the U.S. armed forces.
The market analysis of American Muslims shows:

**Four Even Quadrants National Average**

- African American 24%
- Arab Americans 26%
- South Asian 26%
- All Other 25%

Total 100%

- A sizable market with 8 million people
- 2.3 million households in North America
- Will double to 16 million by 2014
- Bigger than Norway, Finland, Denmark or Sweden
- Growth Factors: birth rates, conversions & immigration
- A younger, well-educated and affluent target market
- 25% larger family size than U.S. average
- 67% of adult American Muslims are under 40 years old
- Annual growth rate of 6% versus 0.9% for total U.S.²
- 67% of the adult American population is over 40 years old¹
- American Muslims are younger and the future of America
Due to the significant number of existing and growing Muslims in the U.S., it is necessary to conduct this study to convey the experiences that Muslim women face growing up in America that create an identity crisis.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of my study is to learn whether Generation X Muslim women living in America also struggle with the pressures of trying to balance “fitting in” with their friends and colleagues and fulfilling religious and cultural “responsibility.”

Research Question

This thesis will examine the following research question: “Does living in America create an identity crisis for the Generation X Muslim woman?” Through extensive research, it is my hypothesis that living in America does indeed create an identity crisis for the Generation X Muslim woman.
Limitations of the Study:
The focus of my thesis is on Muslim women in 21st-century America that are descendants of Muslim ancestors from Muslim countries. It will not discuss men or Muslim women from countries other than America. Finally, it will not discuss other timeframes outside of Generation X (ages 22-46).

Definition of Terms:

1. ABCD—“American Born Confused Desi” refers to people of Desi or South Asian origin living in the United States. “Confused” refers to their confusion regarding their identity from either being born in America or living here since an early age and having been exposed to American culture more than their ancestral culture. It is sometimes regarded as an ethnic slur, the flip side of the use of FOB (Fresh Off the Boat) for recent immigrants.
2. American—relating to the United States, or its people, languages, or cultures.
3. American Muslim— a Muslim either born in the U.S. or lived in the U.S. the majority of her life.
4. Convert— one who has adopted a different religion, beliefs, or opinions.
5. Culture—the beliefs, customs, practices, and social behavior of a particular nation or people; a group of people whose shared beliefs and practices identify the particular place, class, or time to which they belong.
6. Desi—a term used to describe South Asian people.
7. Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) or Female Circumcision—the practice of circumcision of adolescent women in some cultures that generally involves the surgical removal of the clitoris or the sewing up of the vaginal opening.

9. Hadith - the practices and sayings of the Prophet Mohammad.

10. Halal - an Islamic Arabic term meaning "permissible". In an English language context it is most frequently used to refer to food that is permissible according to Islamic law. In the Arabic language it refers to anything that is permissible under Islam.

11. Honor Killing - in some cultures, a practice of killing a female because of shame she caused to the family.

12. Identity Crisis - a period in the psychosocial development of an individual, generally occurring during adolescence, usually manifested by a loss of the sense of the sameness and historical continuity of one's self, confusion over values, or an inability to accept the role the individual perceives as being expected of him by society.

13. Imam - a recognized leader or a religious teacher. Among the Sunni the term refers to the leader in the Friday prayer at the mosque; any pious Muslim may function as imam.
14. Islam - a world religion based on the Quran. Islam is the second largest world religion and has recently become the third largest religious body in America. Islam is composed of two major divisions — the mainstream Sunni (about 90%) and the Shi'ites (about 10%). The mystical tradition of Sufism includes many Sunnis and some Shi'ites. The Arabic word *Islam* means "submission to the will of God" and a person who submits is called a *Muslim*.

15. Muslim - a person of the Islamic faith.

16. Mahr - commonly translated in English as dowry. This is a gift of money, possessions or property from the husband to the wife.

17. Prophet Muhammad - born in the 6th century. He is the last prophet of Islam and to whom the Quran was revealed.

18. Polygamy - having more than one spouse at the same time.

19. Quran - the record of the exact words revealed by Allah through the Angel Gabriel to the Prophet Muhammad. It was memorized by Muhammad and then dictated to his companions. The text of the Quran was cross-checked during the life of the Prophet. The 114 chapters of the Quran have remained unchanged through the centuries.

20. Religion - people's beliefs and opinions concerning the existence, nature, and worship of a deity or deities, and divine involvement in the universe and human life; an institutionalized or personal system of beliefs and practices relating to the divine.
21. Shi'i or Shi'a - the Muslim sect that believes Ali and the Imams are the rightful successors of Muhammad and the concealment and Messianic return of the last recognized Imam.

22. Sunni - the branch of Islam that accepts the first four caliphs as rightful successors of Muhammad.

23. 21st century - the period of time from January 1, 2001 through December 31, 2100.
Chapter 2: Identifying the Crisis

Introduction to Islam

The word "Islam" means "submission to the will of God" in Arabic. This word comes from the same root as the Arabic word "salaam", which means "peace". Islam is a monotheistic religion based on the Quran and was founded in the 7th century.

The religion of Islam teaches that in order to achieve true peace of mind and surety of heart, one must submit to God and live according to His Divinely revealed Law. The most important truth that God revealed to mankind is that there is nothing divine or worthy of being worshipped except for Almighty God, thus all human beings should submit to Him. The word "Muslim" means one who submits to the will of God, regardless of their race, nationality or ethnic background. Being a Muslim entails willful submission and active obedience to God, and living in accordance with His message. Some people mistakenly believe that Islam is just a religion for Arabs; but nothing could be further from the truth.

Not only are there converts to Islam in every corner of the world, especially in England and America, but by taking a look at the Muslim World from Bosnia to Nigeria, and from Indonesia to Morocco, one can clearly see that Muslims come from many various races, ethnic groups and nationalities.... (Kaka, Masters, and Squires, 1999, p.1)

There are two sects of Islam: Sunni and Shi‘ite or Shi’a. The word “Sunni” derives from the word “Sunnah” meaning the “way of the Prophet”. Sunni Muslims account for about 90% of the world’s Muslim population. Shi’a Muslims follow the
teachings of Ali, who was the cousin and son-in-law of Prophet Muhammad and accounts for about 10% of the world's Muslim population.

There are 5 pillars of Islam:

- The profession of faith called the "Shahadah."
- Prayer (Salat) - establishing of the five daily Prayers.
- Paying alms to the needy (Zakat) - which is generally 2.5% of the total savings for a rich man working in trade or industry, and 10% or 20% of the annual produce for agriculturists. This money or produce is distributed among the poor. Also, one may give 25% of found treasure such as money won in a non-gambling lottery. One must give to the needy.
- Fasting (Sawm) - refraining from eating, drinking or satisfying other needs from dawn to dusk in the month of Ramadan, the ninth month in the Islamic lunar calendar.
- The Pilgrimage to Mecca (Hajj) - this is done during the month of Zul Hijjah, and is compulsory once in a lifetime for one who has the ability to do it. If the Muslim is in ill health or in debt, he or she is not required to perform Hajj. (Wikipedia, 2006)
There are several topics that pertain to the issue of Islam and women, some of those topics will be introduced in this chapter.

Surely, men who submits themselves to God and women who submit themselves to Him, and believing men and believing women, and obedient men and obedient women, and truthful men and truthful women, and men steadfast in their faith and steadfast women, and men who are humble and women who are humble, and men who give alms and women who give alms, and men who fast and women who fast, and men who guard their chastity and women who guard their chastity and men who remember Allah much and women who remember Him-Allah has prepared for all of them forgiveness and a great reward. (Quran 33:36)

Many argue that this verse in the Quran shows that men and women are seen as equals in the eyes of God; they are praised equally and punished equally. If this is the case, then why are there so many injustices that women face in Islam?

Religion or Culture?

Perhaps that question can be answered in this chapter. What is the difference between religion and culture? Oftentimes, religion and culture are intertwined as one.

Should culture influence religion or should religion be a constant? Many people have a difficult time distinguishing between the two. The MSN Encarta Dictionary defines culture as the beliefs, customs, practices, and social behavior of a particular nation or people; a group of people whose shared beliefs and practices identify the particular place, class, or time to which they belong. It defines religion as people's beliefs and opinions concerning the existence, nature, and worship of a deity or deities, and divine
involvement in the universe and human life; an institutionalized or personal system of beliefs and practices relating to the divine. Can we have religion without cultural influence? It is quite possible to have religion without cultural influence because religion is a constant. Islam does not change nor does it adjust itself to accommodate the less religious or anyone that does not agree with a certain aspect of the religion.

**Female Genital Mutilation**

Islam does not change but Muslims have been observing the religion differently based on their cultural beliefs. These "cultural" practices are responsible for common misconceptions that lead many to believe that Islam oppresses and abuses women. One such cultural practice is female genital mutilation (FGM) or female circumcision.

Custom and tradition are by far the most frequently cited reasons for FGM. Along with other physical or behavioral characteristics, FGM defines who is in the group. This is most obvious where mutilation is carried out as part of the initiation into adulthood. (Amnesty International, 2004)

According to the U.S. Department of State, the table (Table 1) below shows which countries and ethnic groups practice FGM, as of 2001.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Prevalence of FGM</th>
<th>Type of FGM</th>
<th>Ethnic Group/Area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Benin</td>
<td>30%-50%</td>
<td>Type II</td>
<td>FGM widely practiced. The ethnic groups most affected - Bariba, Peul (Fulani), Boko, Baotonou, Wama, Nago. Found most in north in Alibori, Atacora, Borgou and Zou. Also occurs in south in Oueme.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>IAC 1992 survey is 30%, World Health Organization (WHO) estimates 50%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burkina</td>
<td>71.6% from 1999</td>
<td>Type II</td>
<td>All but a few of 50 ethnic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country</td>
<td>Demographic and Health Survey</td>
<td>Type of FGM</td>
<td>Practice Details</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faso</td>
<td>6,445 women nationally</td>
<td>Type I and Type II</td>
<td>Group practice FGM. Bella group and castes do not practice any form of FGM.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cameroon</td>
<td>Less than 5%-20% according to various estimates</td>
<td>Type I and Type II</td>
<td>FGM practiced in areas of far north, east and southeast. Practice found in 8 to 10 of 48 ethnic groups.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central African Republic</td>
<td>43.4% according to 1995 Demographic and Health Survey of 5,884 women nationally</td>
<td>Type II common in all parts of the country</td>
<td>In all areas of the country</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chad</td>
<td>60% according to 1995 UN report</td>
<td>Type II common in all parts of the country</td>
<td>Confined to eastern part of country in areas bordering Sudan. Frequency higher in rural areas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cote d'Ivoire</td>
<td>44.5% according to 1999 Demographic and Health Survey of 3,040 women nationally</td>
<td>Type II</td>
<td>Prevalent among Muslim women and rooted in Animist initiation rites in western, central and northern Cote d'Ivoire. Muslim groups practicing FGM include the northern Mande (Malian, Foul, Bambara, Dioula) and some members of the Voltaic groups of the north (Seulfo, Tagwana, Djimi, Lobi, Birifor, Koulango) and southern Mande of the west (Dan, Yacouba, Toura, Gouro), many of whom are not Muslim, the We from the Krou group and Baoule in some villages around city of Bouake.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democratic Republic of the Congo (formerly Zaire)</td>
<td>5% estimate</td>
<td>Type II</td>
<td>Practiced in ethnic groups living in the northern part of country above the equator.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>Type of FGM</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Djibouti</td>
<td>90%–98%</td>
<td>Type II and Type III</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egypt</td>
<td>78%–97%</td>
<td>Type II and Type I throughout country, Type III concentrated in a few ethnic groups in southern part of country.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eritrea</td>
<td>90% according to 1997 Demographic and Health Survey</td>
<td>Type I, Type II, Type III</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethiopia</td>
<td>72.7% according to a 1998 survey published on Traditional Practices in Ethiopia (NCTPE)</td>
<td>Type I and Type II. Type III in areas bordering Sudan and Somalia. Mariam Girz (Type IV) blood letting with a sharp needle practiced to lesser extent.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Djibouti, 90%–98% according to various estimates, Afars and Issa practice Type III. Girls of Yemeni extraction subjected to Type II. Practiced by both Muslims and Coptic Christians, across ethnic lines.

In Egypt, 78%–97%. 2000 Demographic and Health Survey of 15,648 women nationwide showed figure to be 97% among every married women aged 15-49 and 88% among daughters of the women surveyed aged 11-19.

In Eritrea, 90% according to 1997 Demographic and Health Survey of 5,054 women nationally.

In Ethiopia, 72.7% according to a 1998 survey published on Traditional Practices in Ethiopia (NCTPE). Type I practiced among Amharas, Tigrayans and Jeberti Muslims living in Tigray. Type II practiced by Gurages, some Tigrayans, Oromos, and Shankillas. Type III practiced among the Afar, the Somali and the Harari. Mariam Girz (Type IV) practiced in Gojam (the Amhara region). No form of FGM is practiced among Bengas of Wellga, the Azezo, the Dorze, the Bonke, the Shama and some population groups in Godole, Konso and Gojam. By region: Afar-94.5%; Harare-84.2%; Amhara-81.1%; Oromia-79.6%; Addis Ababa City-70.2%; Somali-69.7%; Beneshangul Gumuz-52.9%; Tigray-48.1%; Southern-46.3%.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Percentage and Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gambia</strong></td>
<td>60%-90% various estimates. BAFFROW estimates. Small percentage of women and girls. Also special &quot;sealing&quot; performed. Fulas, Mandikas, Hausas, and Jolas practice Type II. Mandikas, Hausas, and Jolas practice Type II.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghana</td>
<td>9%-15%. Various estimates. 1998 estimate by Gender Studies and Human Rights Documentation Center is 15%. Recent UNFPA-funded study by Rural Help Integrated estimates between 9 and 12% of women nationwide. Most common in remote parts of Upper East Region, Upper West Region and northern Volta Region. Also prevalent among migrants from these regions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Guinea</strong></td>
<td>98.6% according to 1999 Demographic and Health Survey of 6,753 women nationally. Kussasi, Frafra, Kassena, Nankanee, Bussauri, Moshie, Manprusie, Kantansi, Walas, Sissala, Grunshie, Dargati and Lobi. Fulas, Mbindikas, Peul practice one of these forms of FGM.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guinea-Bissau</td>
<td>70%-80% in Fula and Mandinka areas; 20%-30% in urban Bissau. Types I and Type II. Types I and Type II. Practice most common in remote parts of bordering countries in South America. Fulas, Mbindikas, Peul practice one of these forms of FGM.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>No national figures available. Study by University of Indonesia's Women's Research Graduate Program in 1998 in Central and West Java, North Sumatra, Aceh, South Sulawesi and on Madura Island. Types I and less invasive Type IV forms such as scraping or touching clitoris to draw drop of blood. Types I and Type II. Practiced on adolescent girls and babies as young as 4 months old. Practiced in parts of East, Central and West Java, North Sumatra, Aceh, South Sulawesi and on Madura Island.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kenya</td>
<td>Jakarta and West Java of 200 mothers, found most girls circumcised but often with less invasive procedures used. 37.6% according to 1998 Demographic and Health Survey of 7,881 women nationally.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberia</td>
<td>50% of females over 18-pre-civil war 1989 estimate. 80% estimate during civil war (1990-1996). Update unavailable.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mali</td>
<td>93.7% according to USAID-funded Demographic and Health Survey of 9,704 women aged 15-49. Commission for the Promotion of Women estimates 96% rural and 92%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
urban women have undergone this procedure.

Mauritania 25% according to 1997 June Afrique survey and 1996 UN Population Fund report.

Type I (more common among the Soninkes) and Type II (more common among Toucouleurs). Also symbolic Type IV using gum Arabic plant based product mixture to shrink the clitoris.

Niger 4.5% according to 1998 Demographic and Health Survey of 7,577 women nationally.

Type I, Type II and Type III throughout the country. Type III more predominant in the north. Type I and Type II more predominant in the south. Another Type IV form practiced to a lesser extent uses a corrosive substance on the female genitalia.

Nigeria 25.1% according to 1999 Demographic and Health Survey of 8,206 women nationally.

Most prevalent in the Tillaberi and Dosso areas; along the Niger river and among Arab communities in the Diffa region. Community and ethnic groups practicing FGM are Arabs (known locally as "Shoua"), Kanuris and Zarma-Sonrhais. Also by the Peul, Songhai, Kourtey and Wago.

Senegal 5%-20%, 20% according to 1988

Type II and Type III

Practiced across ethnic groups and religions. Practiced by almost all ethnic groups. Among the largest ethnic groups that practice some form of FGM are the Yoruba, Ibo, Ijaw, Hausa, and Kanuri. The Fulanis do not practice any form. Practice among states of Nigeria varies from 0%-4% in Yobe to 90%-100% in Benue and 90%-98% in Ondo.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Type II</th>
<th>Type III</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Environmental Development Action in the Third World study. Various other estimates range as low as 5%.

Mandé, Diolas (mostly rural), Mandingos (mostly rural) and the Tenda practice one of these forms. It is not practiced among the Wolof plurality-43% and the Serer-15% and most Christians, regardless of ethnicity. Minority Halpularen, Puel and Toucouleur in rural areas of eastern and southern Senegal-88%. Urban Halpularen-20%.

Becoming less common in urban areas. All ethnic and religious groups except Krios practice FGM.

Sierra Leone | 80%-90% Various estimates. | Type II | Most if not all ethnic groups. Type I mainly in coastal towns of Mogadishu, Brava, Merca and Kismayu. |

Somalia | 90-98% UNICEF estimates 90%. Other estimates are 96-98%. 1999 CARE International survey estimates 100% for Somaliland (northwest Somalia). 89% according to 1991 Demographic and Health Survey of 5,860 women nationally. 87% urban -91% rural of northern Sudanese women and girls according to survey conducted from 1996 to April 2000 by Sudan National Committee on Traditional Practices (SNCTP) and Save the Children Sweden. |

Sudan (northern) | Type III predominates. Some are switching to Type I or Type II. | Type III | All ethnic and religious groups practice one of these forms throughout the northern, northeastern and northwestern regions. |

Tanzania | 17.9% according to 1996 Demographic and Health Survey of 20 of country's 130 main ethnic groups. Government | Type II and Type III | Practiced in approximately 20 of country's 130 main ethnic groups. Government |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Type I and Type II Prevalence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Uganda</td>
<td>Less than 5% of female population. Numbers of girls undergoing Type I or Type II in recent years are: 1990-971 girls; 1992-903 girls; 1994-854 girls; 1996-544 girls; 1998-965 girls; 2000-742 girls. Initiation ceremonies take place in December of even numbered years on girls between ages of 14 and 16.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Togo</td>
<td>Cotocoli, Tchamba, Peul, Mossi, Yanga, Moba, Gourma, and Akposso-Akebou do not practice any form. According to U.S. funded 1996 research, highest regional incidence is the Central Region at 33%, home of the Cotocoli and Tchamba. By religion: Muslim-63.9%; Christian-32.2%; Animists-6.1%; other-10%.</td>
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<td>Uganda</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kenya</td>
<td>Prevalent in rural district of the Upe live in the country. Initiation ceremonies take place in December of even numbered years on girls between ages of 14 and 16.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Yemeni women, Republic of Yemen, 23% of women who have ever been married, according to a USAID funded 1997 Demographic and Maternal and Child Health Survey. Type II. Type III. Practiced only among small community of East African immigrants and refugees. Primarily women living in coastal areas, but also practiced to lesser extent in the mountainous region and in the plateau and desert region. In the Tihama region along Red Sea coast, 69% of women were circumcised; 15% of women in highlands; 5% in central plateau and desert regions to the east.

Ministry of Public Health survey in five governorates. Results show over 96% of women in Hodeidah, Hadramaut and Al-Maharah had been circumcised. In Aden it was 82% and in Sana'a City 45.

According to Caroline Ryan of BBC News (2003, para. 7), there are three main types of female circumcision:

- The removal of the tip of the clitoris;
- Total removal of the clitoris and surrounding labia;
- The removal of the clitoris and labia and the sewing up of the vagina, leaving only a small opening for urine and menstrual blood - a process known as infibulation.

**Honor Killing**

Another disturbing case of cultural practice is honor killing. Honor killing is described as killing a female because of shame she caused to the family, such as premarital sex. The murder is committed by a male member of the victim's family.
In various countries throughout the world, particularly in the Middle East and parts of South Asia, women who bring dishonor to their families because of sexual indiscretions are forced to pay a terrible price at the hands of male family members. Attempted murder and other forms of corporal punishment have been reported. Clearly, the prevailing view that devalues and belittles women is derived from sociocultural factors that are justified by a distorted and erroneous interpretation of religion, especially of Islam. (Muslim Women’s League, 1999, para. 1)

Although the Arab woman has made great advances in the academic and professional fields during the last forty years, she still faces social discrimination, especially in traditional rural communities. In those societies, the woman is still treated in a traditional manner, with negligence to her basic rights. She is regarded as being inferior to man, and not deserving to enjoy the same rights. This belief is based and built upon a long series of customs and traditions. (The Palestinian Human Rights Monitor, 1992, p.1)

Marriage and Wife’s Property

Some cultures practice arranged marriages. This is another cultural practice and should not be associated with religion.

Before marriage, a woman has the right to choose her husband. Islamic law is very strict regarding the necessity of having the woman’s consent for marriage. She keeps her own family name, rather than taking her husband’s. As
a wife, a woman has the right to be supported by her husband even if she is already rich. She also has the right to seek divorce and custody of young children. (Islamic Society of Britain, n.d., p.16)

Prophet Muhammad said, "The most perfect in faith amongst believers is he who is best in manner and kindest to his wife." (Council on American-Islamic Relations [CAIR], n.d., p.1) Islam requires that husbands treat their wives with respect and it prohibits any form of physical or emotional abuse. The Quran requires that spouses treat each other with love and mercy. (Quran 30:21)

Moreover, the Quran repeatedly warns against the use of injurious statements by a husband against his wife. (Quran 58: 2-4)

"And give women (on marriage) their dower as a free gift; but if they, of their own good pleasure, remit any part of it to you, take it and enjoy it with right good cheer." (Azeem, 2005, p.10) Islamic law requires that a groom present the bride with a mahr, also known in the Quran as sadaqah. This mahr, which is commonly translated in English as dowry, is a gift of money, possessions or property. Mahr is a woman's right and is her exclusive property; neither the bride's family nor groom can take control over this property unless it is offered by the bride. If the wife and husband later divorce, this mahr is hers to keep for life. Also, any earnings that the wife makes, is her own. The husband is required to provide for his wife and children.
Female Inheritance

Many religions do not acknowledge females as inheritors. The Biblical attitude has been succinctly described by Rabbi Epstein: "The continuous and unbroken tradition since the Biblical days gives the female members of the household, wife and daughters, no right of succession to the family estate. In the more primitive scheme of succession, the female members of the family were considered part of the estate and as remote from the legal personality of an heir as the slave.... They are owned --before marriage, by the father, after marriage, by the husband." (Azeem, 2005, p.13)

Islam allows for women to inherit from family and relatives. "From what is left by parents and those nearest related there is a share for men and a share for women, whether the property be small or large --a determinate share." (Quran 4:7)

Female Education

The topic of female education and religion is quite shocking. Although many Islamic cultures in poverty stricken countries don't put great emphasis on education (for females or males) for economic reasons; it should not be confused with the common perception that education for Muslim females is forbidden. Other religions have a similar predisposition on female education. In fact, it was St. Paul in the New Testament that stated:

As in all the congregations of the saints, women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission as the law says. If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands.
Similarly, according to the Talmud, a collection of Jewish laws and traditions, “Let the words of Torah rather be destroyed by fire than imparted to women” and “Whoever teaches his daughter Torah is as though he taught her obscenity.” (Azeem, 2005, p.5)

In regards to female education in Islam, Imam Hendi states:

The role of women in Islam is also misunderstood. Islam teaches both men and women to lower their gaze and guard their modesty, and women have the right to an education and career, among other privileges. Marriage is a partnership, Hendi said, not a relationship between a superior and a subordinate. (Jacobson, 2005, p.1)

There are some cultures in Islamic countries that prevent women from obtaining an education. However, Prophet Muhammad said: “Seeking knowledge is mandatory for every Muslim.” (Badawi, 2002, The Social Aspect, para. 3)

**Polygamy**

The topic of polygamy in Islam has always been a misunderstood topic in many non-Islamic countries. Polygamy is defined as having more than one spouse at the same time. Polygamy exists in three specific forms: polygyny, polyandry and group marriage. Polygyny is one man having multiple wives; polyandry is one woman having multiple husbands; group marriage is some combination of polygyny and polyandry. Historically, all three practices have been found, but polygyny is by far the most common. (Wikipedia, 2006)
Until recently, with the premiere of HBO's controversial show "Big Love" portraying a Mormon family in present day Utah practicing polygamy, the practice was mostly associated with Islam. In fact, there are many religions and cultures other than Islamic ones that have and currently do practice polygamy. The table (Table 2) below gives the locations, religions and cultures.

Table 2

|------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
One at a time."

"Concubinage (a form of polygamy) has been outlawed in Hong Kong since 1970, but it has metamorphosed into a more familiar creature. Concubines are now called mistresses, but are still publicly displayed as concubines were—as status symbols. One Hong Kong millionaire pays care for his five mistresses according to their rank: the first mistress has a Rolls-Royce, the second a Mercedes, and so on. The older generation of men who took concubines before the new law took effect are allowed to keep them, and their children are recognized and have legal rights to an estate."

"DIVORCE: the dissolution of marriage. Of all the world religions... .More FUNDAMENTALIST groups usually totally deny the practice on Biblical grounds. One complicating factor is deciding exactly what constitutes a marriage. At the time of Jesus the JEWS practiced POLYGAMY thus undermining many of the more literalist interpretations of marriage as a sexual act."

"Membership of the WCC rose to a record 339 churches as the Assembly welcomed eight more. There are now 306 churches in full membership and 33 in associate membership. Appropriately for the Assembly’s venue, six of the new churches are African; the United Church of Christ in Zimbabwe, etc. A request for membership by the Celestial Church of Christ in Nigeria was delayed after delegates expressed concern that the church still has polygamous clergy. A later vote ran into a legal problem and the application will now be considered by the new Central Committee."
fairly common among the Reindeer people. Many rich reindeer breeders who have several herds will keep a wife—and prospective bridegrooms of daughters—with each herd. There are also men with only one herd who will keep several wives in the same camp. In this case the man tries to keep them in separate tents, or at least in separate sleeping places under one tent."

"Although one-third of Tanzanians are said to be Christians, many continue to practice traditional religions at the same time... Some African Christians have more than one wife because that works better in their society."

"Polygamy was a doctrine of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints until 1890, when it was officially abandoned. But an estimated 30,000 to 40,000 people in several Western states have continued the principle despite their ostracization and excommunication by the LDS Church."

Adherents.com (2006)

Many have argued that it is unfair to Muslim women that some Muslim men marry multiple wives. Many believe that polygamy is practiced by some Muslim men for their personal pleasure. Actually, polygamy was put in place during Prophet Muhammad’s time. After the battle of Uhud in the 7th century, a significant number of Muslim men were killed. As a result of the deaths, women were widowed, many children became orphans and single women lacked men to marry. This depletion of Muslim men affected women and children tremendously. This socio-economic tragedy brought forth the practice of polygamy. Polygamy had specific restrictions on the practice. The Quran states:
If you fear that you shall not be able to deal justly with the orphans, marry women of your choice, two or three or four; but if you fear that you shall not be able to deal justly with them, then only one. (Quran 4:3)

Certain cultures have abused the true practice of polygamy for necessary reasons and moved towards a cultural and personal practice. According to the chart above, we can see that Christian churches in East Africa adapted to the practice of polygamy due to cultural acceptance despite their religious beliefs. Author and Director of Black World Studies at Ohio Wesleyan University, Dr. Emmanuel K. Twesigye (1997) states that the reasons for polygamy in Africa are:

- A man's wealth was measured by the number of his wives as well as the number of his children and cattle or livestock.
- It was prestigious to have many wives. For instance, the Kabaka Mutesa I of Buganda resisted Christian baptism because he was asked to divorce his many wives and "wed" with one! The queen mother said that it was unheard of for a king to have one wife like just the poorest commoner.
- In political terms the more wives one had, the more political alliances one could form, and therefore, become a very powerful power blocker and effective politician or tribal leader, chief or king.
- In agricultural societies, human labour was essential and therefore, polygamy provided more hands to work in the fields and produce more food, or more cash crops for sale. Thus, polygamy produced wealth, at least for the man as well as the whole group which the patriarch supported.
• Women and children were safer in larger households where they were better protected from aggressors. Pride was associated with a larger family and shame and low self-esteem were associated with small families which were symbolic of poverty.

• Men also preferred polygamy because it gave them sexual gratification and diversity in mates! In some societies, it is taboo for the couple to engage in sexual intercourse during the menstrual period and pregnancy. In that case, polygamy provided a solution to this dilemma.

• Polygamy also provided a form of birth control, in the sense that it would allow the spacing of children by virtue of the sexual taboos attached to sex during breastfeeding.

• Polygamy insured that most marriageable girls were married off. Women tended to outnumber men because men naturally die in larger numbers and earlier than women. Women are genetically tougher than men! Moreover, men also tended to engage in dangerous or fatal activities such as wars, hunting and fighting one another in drunken quarrels.

• In most of traditional Africa, there was a custom of levirate or widow inheritance. A brother's wives passed on to the father or another brother on his death! That was designed to ensure that no widows or orphans would be left with provision and family or tender care.

• In modern times when some workers live in the city, they may prefer to have two wives and two families; one in the city and the other in the rural area on the ancestral land.
Interestingly, Helen Fisher, a Rutgers University anthropologist and author of *Anatomy of Love*, wrote that "only 16% of cultures on record actually prescribe monogamy; in most, polygamy is sought after by men as a sign of power." (Cloud, 1999, para. 9)

**Islam in America**

**The Veil**

One of the most ongoing controversial topics of Islam in America is the topic of the veil. The "veil" is a general term for the headscarf that some Muslim women choose to wear to cover their hair. This signifies a sign of modesty. The most common term used in America to describe the veil is the "hijab". The term "hijab" on a larger scale, refers to the principle of dressing modestly.

"O Prophet, tell your wives and daughters and the believing women that they should cast their outer garments over their bodies (when abroad) so that they should be known and not molested." (Quran 33:59) Many scholars argue that this verse from the Quran simply is referring to the Muslim woman to dress modestly so that she is not harassed. "Almost all interpreters agreed that women should not veil their faces and their hands and anyone who advocated that women should cover all their bodies including their faces could not face his argument on any religious text." (Syed, 2003, para. 21)

If this is the case, then why don't we see uniformity with the veil? Why do we see some Muslim women dressing modestly with no head covering while others are engulfed in their cloaks? There are several versions of the veil; some as simple as just covering the head such as the "dupatta" and others as complicated as covering the entire...
body and barely revealing the eyes through a net grille such as the full "burqa". The different types worn differ again, by culture alone, while religion remains the constant **History of the veil**

Despite the popular belief that the veil is only associated with Islam, it is not. Until about 1175, Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Norman women wore veils that completely covered their hair. (Wikipedia, 2006) The veil served as a type of headdress and as this headdress evolved, we saw it in different forms such as hats, scarves, caps and do rags, among some of the many types. Evidently, Islamic women are not the only women that choose to veil.

The Islamic principle of dressing modestly also applies to Muslim men. In some Muslim cultures, men also wear a veil.

As a whole, women veil more, but in some societies, men veil as well. For example, the men of the Taureg tribe in North Africa veil as a marker of their status; the more covered up a Taureg man is, the higher in rank he is. (Barr, Clark, and Marsh, n.d., Misconception: only women wear veils, para. 1)

According to Rabbi Dr. Menachem M. Brayer "it was the custom of Jewish women to go out in public with a head covering which, sometimes, even covered the whole face leaving one eye free." Rabbi Brayer also quotes some famous ancient Rabbi saying, "It is not like the daughters of Israel to walk out with heads uncovered" and Cursed be the man who lets the hair of his wife be seen...a woman who exposes her hair for self-adornment brings poverty." Rabbinic law forbids the recitation of blessings or prayers in the presence of a bareheaded married woman since uncovering the woman's hair is considered "nudity". (IslamiCity, 2004, p. 1)
Amish women are not only required to wear a bonnet or cap over their head, but have specific rules for how their clothes are to be made. (Aurand, 1938)

Hindu women also wear a veil. “Traditional and orthodox Hindu women, such as this one, will cover their heads and at least partly obscure their faces in the company of unrelated adult males.” (The Seattle Times, 2003)

In Christianity, Nun’s are required to wear a veil also. In Eastern Orthodoxy, nuns and monks both wear a veil called an epanokamelavkion. (Wikipedia, 2006) This type of headdress is more conservative in comparison to the hijab worn by Muslim women in America.

In Book of I Corinthians in the New Testament, St. Paul declares,

Now I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God. Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head. And every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head it is just as though her head were shaved. If a woman does not cover her head, she should have her hair cut off, and if it is a disgrace for a woman to have her hair cut or shaved off, she should cover her head. A man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man... (E. and R. Beltz, n.d.)
Islamic Women in America

Oppression or Liberation?

Are Muslim women that choose to veil oppressed or liberated? MSN Encarta Dictionary defines oppression as subjecting a person or a people to a harsh or cruel form of domination. It defines liberation as setting somebody free from traditional socially imposed constraints such as those arising from stereotyping by gender or age.

It can be seen that several cultures and religions require some type of veil or headdress for women. As mentioned earlier, “O Prophet, tell your wives and daughters and the believing women that they should cast their outer garments over their bodies (when abroad) so that they should be known and not molested.” (Quran 33:59) Although this verse from the Quran does not mention a veil over the head but rather dressing modestly, some Islamic cultures choose to do so regardless. But what is it about the hijab that makes it so different from the bonnet the Amish women are required to wear or the requirement of a nun’s veil? Since a nun is required to wear a habit, does that make her oppressed?

Post 9/11, the “hijab” has been under more scrutiny than ever before. Some women, including Muslim women, feel that the veil is a sign of oppression and it masks a woman’s identity. On the other hand, some argue that the Quran has liberated women from being viewed as sex objects (Syed, 2003). Could it be that the hijab or principle of dressing modestly actually empowers women rather than make them subservient? Could it be that the same veil that oppresses some, liberates others? “Contrary to popular belief, the covering of the Muslim woman is not oppression but a liberation from the shackles of
male scrutiny and the standards of attractiveness.” (Chopra, n.d., para. 2) If the Muslim woman that chooses to wear a veil is not oppressed, so then, what is oppression?

We learned that MSN Encarta Dictionary defines oppression as subjecting a person or a people to a harsh or cruel form of domination. Author Kim Chemin writes, "If we place pornography and the tyranny of slenderness alongside one another we have the two most significant obsessions of our culture, and both of them focused upon a woman’s body." (Lightstone, n.d., para. 1)

Today in America you can be whatever you want to be - any dream can be accomplished as long as you pursue it. We have economic security and we live in a peaceful and prosperous nation! We live in the land of opportunity, rich with culture and diversity, the land of the free! 'Is America the land of the free, especially for women?' With all the freedom and prosperity we enjoy women still remain prisoners.... Women are enslaved to a beauty myth, chained to the false belief that our value is based on our appearance alone. (Hartline, n.d., para. 1)

In a society where thin is "not good enough," where eating disorders prevail, where diet pills are taken like vitamins, where a "new you" can be obtained during your lunch break, where a woman feels naked to leave the house without makeup, where millions tune in every year to watch the Miss America pageant and then feel even worse about their own self image, where we have not only hair extensions but eye lash extensions as well, where we have "permanent" make up and fake nails, where we are enthralled by shows like "Extreme Makeover" that allow viewers to think that plastic surgery will make their "dreams come true" so that they will feel more socially accepted,
where we give and get breast implants "just because I love you," where the Brazilian bikini wax is "a must do," where "At the rate things are changing, it'll be 50 years before women's paychecks equal men's, and nearly a full century before women hold half the seats in Congress..." could it be that this is what oppression is?

Generation X Muslim Women

Muslim women living in America today have the power to change the future of Islam from the typical cultural practices and moving towards authentic Islamic practices. As discussed earlier in this chapter, you were able to see how Islam differs from culture to culture and how some ultra conservative cultures impose very strict codes of conduct for women such as mandating the wear of the full burqa during Taliban's ruling in Afghanistan or how women in Saudi Arabia are prohibited from driving a car. These are just some of the many injustices women face in the "name of religion," or is it the laws of the patriarchal society that are oppressing women?

On Friday, March 18, 2005, Dr. Amina Wadud, was the first woman to lead a public, mixed-gender Friday prayer in our society. Dr. Wadud is a professor of Islamic studies at Virginia Commonwealth University.

There has been much controversy over whether this is permitted according to the Quran or not. Whether this is actually religiously "acceptable" or not, Dr. Wadud is an example for Generation X Muslim women to have a voice and be heard. Is it up to Generation X Muslim women now to diminish cultural stereotypes and make a difference?
Beginning in the homes, parents need to nurture their children by encouraging them that they can have both worlds and that they can be successful in their career and marriage. Muslim women can have a huge impact on the future by modeling the multi-faceted woman of Islam to their children.

Therefore, when their daughters grow up, they will aspire to be women of excellence and ambition. Additionally, when their sons become men, their expectations and views of a suitable wife will include a partnership with an intelligent and successful Muslim woman. With further education and communication, men and women can understand and respect one another's roles in society and in the home, which will ultimately benefit future generations of Muslims. (Ezzeldine, n.d., para. 16)

Identity Crisis

"As we begin the twenty-first century, one of the most interesting topics within the study of Islam and women concerns Muslim women's identity formation." (Wadud, n.d., p.179)

Identity crisis is defined by Dorland's Medical Dictionary as a period in the psychosocial development of an individual, generally occurring during adolescence, usually manifested by a loss of the sense of the sameness and historical continuity of one's self, confusion over values, or an inability to accept the role the individual perceives as being expected of him by society. (2004)
As pressures from society force Generation X Muslim women to try to "fit in" with their friends and colleagues, for many, trying to balance societal culture and religious responsibility creates an identity crisis. There are many factors that can lead to the Generation X Muslim woman to experience an identity crisis.

In a society where “happy hour” is the thing to do after work but drinking alcohol is against the religion, making eye contact is considered “assertive” and sought after by employees but we are taught to be respectful and modest and “lower our gaze,” there’s nothing wrong with having dinner after work with your colleagues but if you do, you might miss one of the five mandatory prayer times or you won’t find anything on the menu to eat because it’s “not halal,” women in media displaying themselves because “if you’ve got it, flaunt it” but we are to dress modestly, can’t go to that great party at the new restaurant your friends are going to because you’re fasting for Ramadan, or can you miss one fast “just this one time,” premarital sex is against the religion but accepted by our peers and society, wearing that silk Gucci scarf is considered “classy” but wearing a hijab is considered “oppression” so where do Muslim women fit in? How do Muslim women “fit in” with friends and colleagues and still be a “good Muslim girl”? “The peer pressure of participating in Western culture raises its ugly head during the teen years,” (Anderson, n.d.) so how do Muslim women living in America find that balance?

Another factor that contributes to the experience of an identity crisis is the lack of tolerance and acceptance Muslim women face as a result of 9/11 for choosing to wear a veil. For many Muslims and non-Muslims alike, when they think about Islam the first thought is of 9/11. They can distinctly remember what they were doing when they found out about the crash of the Twin Towers. “All Americans have been affected by
September 11 and its aftermath. However, Muslim Americans, in particular, have suffered the ongoing effects of the legislative and social responses that followed that tragic day." (Peek, 2005, 194)

We live in tumultuous times. With the heinous and distrastrous events of 9/11, Muslim women in America have undergone much scrutiny. Some have been targeted by their veils and discriminated against and some that don't veil simply live in fear. This fear empowers some to be more involved in educating the public about Islam but suppresses others. In an interview of a Muslim female for her dissertation, Dr. Lori Peek learned that:

"You know how before 9/11, how much work we did as Muslims to establish a good image? After 9/11, all of it went to waste. It is going to take a very long time to put up a good image and to make people over here feel comfortable around us again. That is one of the reasons I want to be a professor. You know when you're in college, you're learning. I can tell students, this is what we're doing. I want to educate people about my religion and my culture, my identity. I know it sounds selfish, but when people look at me I don't want them to feel I'm oppressed.' (Peek, 2005, 191)

"Muslim Americans, like other minority groups, have long faced problems with discrimination, but following the September 11 attacks, this pattern became more intense, frequent, and widespread." (Peek, 2005, 196-197)

In 2004, the Council on American-Islamic Relations (2005: 41) processed a grand total of 1,522 incident reports involving claims of harassment, ethnic and
Total Number of Anti-Muslim Bias Incident Reports by Year

Figure 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Incidents</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Peek, 2005, p197)

Some Muslim women were stereotyped because of their decision to publicly display their Muslim identity. (Peek, 2005) "These young women were well aware of the negative views of Muslims and Islam held by many Americans." (Peek, 2005, 183-184)
In another interview with a Muslim female, Peek was told:

'I definitely want to do something more. In terms of wanting a career, I feel like it's my duty as a Muslim woman in America to be out there mingling with people, just to show them that I'm a Muslim woman and I can be free and I'm doing something. So I feel like my life isn't just for me any more. There's more of a duty.' (Peck, 2005, 192)

Are Muslim women succumbing to the responsibilities that they think they have to the public to prove a point? Whose dream would they be living if they were choosing a path "...just to show them... So I feel like my life isn't just for me any more." Are Muslim women choosing responsibility to public over responsibility to self? Could this be the beginning of an identity crisis?
This research will be conducted via an online survey sent to Generation X Muslim women in the U.S. A significant amount of the sources used were published after 9/11, to portray an accurate view of Islam today.

The survey consists of 20 questions. They are “yes/no” and multiple choice. The questions in the survey are designed to examine how involved the subjects are in their Islamic communities, how much culture has been retained and whether living in America influenced their perception of the religion.

The contents of the survey will answer the research question “Does living in America create an identity crisis for the Generation X Muslim woman?”

The survey will target Generation X Muslim women born in the USA or lived here for at least ten years, with ancestry from Islamic countries.

The survey method was selected due to simplicity and to reach the most participants possible. The desired rate of response is 100 subjects. Partial answers will not be accepted for the final data analysis. All responses and identities will remain anonymous.

The survey will be available online via a web based survey service called Zoomerang. Participating via Zoomerang enables accumulating the desired number of participants, allows for anonymity, provides a simple and convenient method for participants to complete the survey and supplies the author with a precise method to collecting and analyzing the data.

The survey will be available to participants for a determined number of days. Then all completed responses will be collected and results will be provided to the author.
The author expects the research to provide evidence that living in America creates an identity crisis for the Generation X Muslim woman and that Muslim women living in America face obstacles regarding religion and culture.
Review of the Research Question

At the beginning of this thesis, I presented a research question. "Does living in America create an identity crisis for the Generation X Muslim woman?" It was my hypothesis that through extensive research, I would be able to prove that living in America does indeed cause the Generation X Muslim woman to experience an identity crisis.

Survey Methodology

In order to prove my hypothesis, I decided to conduct an online survey via Zoomerang, a web based survey service. Zoomerang proved to be a simple yet effective way to gather the data I needed in the fastest mode possible.

Once my survey questions were completed and approved by the Institutional Review Board, it was launched on Zoomerang for a total of 50 days to ensure that I received 100 responses.

My survey consisted of 20 short questions that took roughly ten minutes to complete. Because of the very specific topic, I had four criteria that needed to be met before a participant would be eligible to take the survey.

The four criteria were:
1. You are a Muslim woman that was born or lived in the USA for at least 10 years and currently live here
2. You are between the ages of 22 and 46 (Generation X)
3. Both parents were born in a country outside of the USA where Islam is the major religion.

4. You and your parents were born into Islam/not converted

Because of the specifics of the requirement, I had a very difficult time getting eligible participants. Luckily, about a month into the launch, the numbers increased dramatically and I was able to get a significant amount of completed responses. Unfortunately some of the questions were skipped, which made my completed responses range from 98-100. There were also some inconsistencies in the results. This will be introduced in more detail in this chapter.
Survey Analysis

Question 1: What is your age group?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>22-26</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27-31</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32-36</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37-41</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42-46</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A total of 99 participants answered this question. The ages indicated in this question make up the Generation X age ranges of 22–46. An overwhelming 70% of women fell into the 22–26 range and 21% in the 27–31 range. Each bracket has a range of five years so I can have a better understanding of how well the participants taking this survey relate to each other. It might also help me to find any consistencies or inconsistencies of the results.
Question 2: Of what descent are your parents?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) South Asian</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) Southeast Asian</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) Arabic/Middle Eastern</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d) African</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e) European</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f) Another not mentioned above but where Islam is a major religion</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Out of 100 participants that answered this question, a majority of 61% are South Asian. The countries typically associated with South Asia are Bangladesh, India and Pakistan. Currently, South Asians account for the largest ethnicity of Muslims in the U.S.

I decided to have Southeast Asia as a separate choice because Indonesia, which has the highest Muslim population in the world, is located in that area.

I felt this question was vital for consistency because as I mentioned in chapter 2, each culture has come to observe the religion differently.
Question 3: How long have you lived in the USA?

Out of the 99 participants that answered this question, 51% were born in the U.S. and 49% lived in the U.S. for 10+ years. This is a good balance of exposure to American culture and their native culture, since the participants not born in the U.S. have ancestry in a country where Islam is the major religion (refer to question 2).
Question 4: Since your parents were born outside of the USA in a country where Islam is a major religion, do they know how to speak that country's major language?

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>98%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Out of 100 participants that answered this question, 98% stated that their parents spoke their native language.

A person's native language is a big component of their culture. Since we found evidence in chapter 2 that Islam has been drastically influenced by culture, I asked this question to identify how much of the native culture was captured and retained by the parents.
Question 5: If yes, do you know how to speak that language?

| a) Yes | 93 | 93% |
| b) No | 7 | 7% |
| c) Answered "No" to question 4 | 0 | 0% |

Out of 100 participants who answered this question, 93% of participants stated they knew how to speak their parents’ native language.

I asked this question to learn how important it was for parents to pass down their native language to their children. Also, to see how much of the culture has been adopted by their children, Generation X Muslim women.
Question 6: If yes, do you speak that language at home with parents or relatives?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Answered &quot;No&quot; to question 4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Out of 100 participants that answered this question, 84% stated that they speak their parents' native language at home and/or with relatives.

I asked this question to figure out what percentage, if any, of Generation X Muslim women have not only accepted their ancestral culture but currently choose to practice it while living in the U.S.
Question 7: About what percentage of your friends are Muslim?

- a) 0-10% 31 31%
- b) 25% 16 16%
- c) 50% 14 14%
- d) More than 50% 39 39%

Out of 100 participants that answered this question, 39% stated that more than 50% of their friends were Muslim. Interestingly, a close 31% stated that 0-10% of their friends were Muslim.

I asked this question to know how involved Generation X Muslim women were in the Muslim community.
Question 8: Do you wear a veil/hijab?

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Out of 100 participants that answered this question, 75% stated that they did not wear a veil. The next question is a follow up question however, the results are inconsistent.
**Question 9: If no, why not?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) You are uncomfortable or embarrassed due to social reasons in America</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) You simply do not want to wear one</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) Your friends or family don’t wear one</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d) You feel that it oppresses Muslim women</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e) Other reason not listed</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>76</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Out of the 75 participants that stated that they do not wear a veil/hijab in the previous question, 76 participants gave reasons why they choose not to wear one. See summary section for explanation of inconsistency.

Interestingly, 7% of Generation X Muslim women surveyed feel that the veil is a sign of oppression.
Question 10: On average, how many times a day do you pray (salat)?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) 0</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) 1-2</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) 3-5</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d) Usually during religious days/holidays, only</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As mentioned in chapter 2, one of the 5 pillars of Islam is to observe the five daily prayers. Out of 100 participants that answered this question, 51% stated that they prayed 3-5 times a day; 34% stated they did not pray at all or only during holidays; and 16% stated that they prayed 1-2 times a day.
Question 11: Do you think that you would be more comfortable practicing Islam if you lived in a country where Islam is the major religion?

Out of 99 participants that answered this question, an astonishing 63% stated that in fact, they would feel more comfortable practicing Islam if they lived in a country where Islam was the prominent religion.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>62</th>
<th>63%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total | 100%

Out of 99 participants that answered this question, an astonishing 63% stated that in fact, they would feel more comfortable practicing Islam if they lived in a country where Islam was the prominent religion.
Question 12: As a Muslim female, do you believe sex before marriage is acceptable?

Out of 100 participants that answered this question, 77 stated that they did not believe premarital sex was acceptable. However, almost a quarter of the total, 23 stated that they believe that it is acceptable.

It can be safe to say that premarital sex is against every major religion. With that in mind, I asked this question to figure out how many, if any, Generation X Muslim women believed premarital sex was acceptable to them. The follow up question below asks why they chose "No" to this question, if they did.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>23</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Out of 100 participants that answered this question, 77% stated that they did not believe premarital sex was acceptable. However, almost a quarter of the total, 23% stated that they believe that it is acceptable.
Question 13: If no, why not? Please choose one that's most important to you.

- a) Religious Beliefs 61 72%
- b) Cultural Beliefs 2 2%
- c) Personal Beliefs 15 18%
- d) Other reason not listed 7 8%
- Total 100%

I'd like to point out that in the previous question, 100 participants answered whether they thought premarital sex was acceptable. 77 chose “No” but when asking those 77 participants why they chose “No,” 85 responded. See summary section for explanation of inconsistency.
Question 14: When or if you are married, would you agree to live with your in-laws and/or relatives of your husband?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Out of 99 participants that answered this question, 56% stated that they would not agree to live with their husband's family. This is actually a cultural and not a religious practice that is mostly found amongst South Asian families. Please note that according to Question 2, the majority of the participants of this survey are South Asian. I expected that living in America, the tradition of living with in-laws would be less tolerated and dramatically decreased. Surprisingly, 44% of Generation X Muslim women surveyed stated that they would live with their husband's family after marriage.</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Question 15: After the September 11, 2001 attacks, have you ever tried to hide your identity as a Muslim in any way?

Out of the 100 participants that answered this question, 81% stated that they did not try to hide their identity as a Muslim in any way after 9/11.

It should be noted that in regards to hiding identity, 75% of participants stated that they did not wear a veil/hijab (Question 8), which is the most prevalent way to identify a Muslim woman. In other words, 25% stated they wear a veil/hijab and 19% stated that they did not try to hide their identity post 9/11.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>61</th>
<th>61%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Total | 100% |

**Question 16:** Have you or your family faced any type of discrimination due to religion or culture after the September 11, 2001 attacks?

**Question 17:** Are you comfortable letting new people you meet or colleagues know that you are Muslim?
Questions 16 and 17 were asked to see if there is any correlation between experiencing discrimination as a result of 9/11 and trying to hide identity post 9/11. In question 16, out of 100 participants that answered this question, 61% stated that they and/or their family have experienced discrimination after 9/11.

In question 17, out of 98 participants that answered this question, 93% stated that they are comfortable letting new people or colleagues know that they are Muslim.

There is inconsistency because 100 participants answered the first question and only 98 participants answered the second. However, an overwhelming 93% of participants stated that they are comfortable letting new people or colleagues know that they are Muslim.
Question 18: Would you prefer that your daughter(s) wear a veil/hijab one day?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) Yes</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) No</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) I will support my daughter's decision to choose</td>
<td>66</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Out of 98 participants that answered this question, 67% stated that they will support their daughters' decision to wear or not wear a veil.

It is interesting that out of 75 women that previously stated they did not wear a veil, only 10 participants answered that they would prefer their daughter(s) not wear a veil.
Question 19: Would you prefer to send your children to public schools or Islamic schools?

a) Public
   23
   23%

b) Islamic
   19
   19%

c) A combination of both
   50
   51%

d) Doesn’t matter
   6
   6%

Total
98
100%

Out of 98 participants that answered this question, 51% stated that they would prefer their children attend both public and Islamic schools and about a quarter of the total, 23%, stated that they would prefer their children attend public schools only.
Question 20: How religious do you consider yourself?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) Less than moderate</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) Moderate</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) More than moderate</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d) I am not a practicing Muslim at this time</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total 98 100%

Out of 98 participants that answered this question, 68% stated that they consider themselves to be moderate Generation X Muslim women. 19% claimed to be more than moderate and 12% identified themselves as less than moderate or non-practicing.
Participant Comments

At the end of my survey, I left the option for participants to leave a comment. I was very pleased to see that my participants found this survey important enough to take the time and write a comment. Please note that some comments were very long and truncated by the author and others were not used. There were 31 comments in total.

"I feel that your family background and your cultural upbringing are the major causes that lead to "identity crisis" for many Generation X Muslim Women. The oppression of women doesn't come from Islam but from what our culture and family have taught us to believe..."

"...I think Islam is misunderstood by most including the Muslims. Islam liberates people especially women and instills values & respect for people. Islam has turned murderers & drug users, prostitutes & pimps into decent human beings. The problem is most people refuse to see the good in Islam & ALL of it is good. Muslims are expected to turn the other cheek and that is not practical nor is humanly natural. Islam is the religion of justice, and that is what sets it apart from the rest."

"...life as a Muslim woman - all I have to say is accept me for who I am, if one is too biased and prejudiced against me on the basis of what they hear and see in the media - well it's their loss because my religion is beautiful and misinterpreted in the worst possible way - ignorance is sad - education is the only light in a world of darkness and hatred."

"With France forbidding women to practice the veil and now England, I'm fearful that the US will impose such rules"
“Although I feel that it is more difficult to practice Islam where the majority of the people do not understand it, I feel that religion is more valuable for those who do practice it in America since it usually stems from one's own desire to become more "Muslim" rather than because of social or cultural pressures.”

“Growing up in America and also overseas opens your eyes to different religions & cultures. I think religion is something very personal & spiritual; & I think nowadays more & more of our generation is trying to differentiate between what their heritage promotes of religion & what they have been nurtured to practice while living in the U.S.”

“...well I used to wear hijab and a few months or so after September 11th I stopped due to the harassment and fear I felt from other non-Muslims. At that time I was also looking for employment and I felt that it was hindering my opportunities in this country. I was not proud of taking off my hijab but it did make my life easier.”

“Practicing Islam is the way a Muslim should live their life... yet at the same time, one shouldn’t feel forced or stressed doing it. It should simply happen... I feel that religion is more believing than practicing. What you do in your heart means more than what people can see... it’s something that is truly between you and God.”

“As a first generation American woman of Pakistani descent I am often frustrated with the hateful mixed messages in Hollywood and the media. I am a journalist and working at newspapers has become increasingly difficult since the September 11 attacks.”

“Before college I didn’t know much about Islamic ways of life. I was really educated in college by taking Islamic courses, Muslim associations and from Muslim friends of different cultures in college. Since then I’ve been practicing a lot more with my
own will. As for the veil part we do have a lot of ignorant people around where you live. It's not so safe and you get discriminated so I am hoping one day I will.”

“The hardest thing about being a Muslim woman is being able to balance the freedom of America while still keeping the values you believe are still important. For example, not wanting an arranged marriage but not wanting to date or have pre-marital sex... most Muslim and non-Muslim don't understand the middle of the line people like me.”
Summary of the Survey Findings

Inconsistencies and Cross Tabulation

After reviewing the survey results, I found many inconsistencies due to partial completion of the survey questions. This led me to cross tabulate some of the questions to get a more detailed view of the inconsistencies. This process gave me the ability to compare the results of two or more questions.

Questions 4, 5 and 6:

Out of 100 women that answered all three questions, 98 stated their parents knew their native language and 2 stated their parents did not.

2 answered "No" to question 4 but continued to answer the next question incorrectly by not choosing answer "c".

1 stated "Yes" to question 4 but then for question 6 chose to say that she answered "No" to question 4.
Questions 8 and 9:

Out of 75 participants that stated they did not wear a veil/hijab, 76 chose a reason why they do not wear a veil/hijab. This means that 1 woman that stated she were a veil/hijab then answered question 9 which is directed toward women that stated they do not wear a veil/hijab.

Questions 12 and 13:

Out of 77 participants that stated that premarital sex is not acceptable, 85 women gave reasons why they do not find it acceptable. Analyzing the data from the chart, this means that out of 77 women that think premarital sex is unacceptable, only 75 answered
question 13 to state why they don't find it acceptable. Out of 23 women that felt that premarital sex is acceptable, 10 out of those 23 answered question 13, which is only directed towards women that chose "No" for question 12.

After cross tabulating some of the questions, I learned that the participants did not answer the questions as per the instructions. There could be several reasons why this has occurred. Some possibilities I think that might explain the situation are that the participant did not read all the choices before choosing an answer, the participant did not fully understand the questions or the participant could not decide on an answer.

Although there seems to be evidence that Generation X Muslim women do experience an identity crisis living in America, because of the inconsistent results, at this time, my hypothesis is inconclusive.
As I thought about topics to write my thesis on, this was not my first. While I was in the library conducting research for my original topic, it dawned on me that there was something else that I was much more passionate about. About a month and a half into the semester and after several hours of research, I decided that I had an obligation to myself to write about something that has always been important to me, something I was truly passionate about.

When I decided to write a thesis on my topic, I didn't realize the task I was taking on. I've always had a passion for women's issues, especially relating to Islam so it was only natural that I chose to write about Muslim women in 21st century America.

Before I started the research on my new topic, I was sure I would not be able to find a great deal of information on Generation X Muslim women and their experiences in America simply due to the specificity of the topic. To my surprise, I was both elated and overwhelmed with the amount of information I was able to find.

As you learned in chapter 2, unfortunately culture has an enormous impact on the way religion is practiced, thereby changing something that is supposed to remain a constant. As a result, my survey was devised to ask questions that were both religion oriented and culture oriented. A total of 20 questions were asked: 3 questions were for demographic purposes; 6 questions were religion based; 6 questions were culture based; 3 questions were a combination of religion and culture and 2 questions were a follow up from religion based questions.
I was surprised to discover that more than half, about 70% of the participants were ages 22-26 and only about 21% were ages 27-31. I was hoping to get the majority of the responses from the 27-31 age range which I belong to, as I thought that bracket would be better able to relate to my experiences. The traditional timeframe for Generation-Xers has been said to be 1961-1981 by sociologists, which would make Generation-Xers between the ages of 25-45, today. However, other timeframes used by sociologists are: 1960-1970; 1965-1975; 1965-1977; 1964-1982; 1970-1983 and 1961-1984. When combining all of the timeframes proposed (1960-1984), that would make Generation-Xers somewhere between the ages of 22-46 today. This is the timeframe I referred to when conducting my survey.

According to the traditional timeframe (1961-1981), that would make the youngest Generation-Xer age 25 today. I strongly believe that the results of this survey would be dramatically different if I used the traditional timeframe versus the combined timeframe, thus making my youngest participant age 25 instead of age 22, especially the answers for questions regarding 9/11. In essence, the age bracket 22-26, which gave me the highest response rate of about 70%, were roughly between the ages of 17-21 during the horrific events of 9/11. These are typical college years. On the other hand, if I used the traditional timeframe, that same age bracket would have been between the ages of 25-29 today, making the participants ages 20-24 during 9/11. In the latter bracket, even though some of the participants would still be in college during 9/11, some would have already graduated and acquired jobs.
The consequences of 9/11 affected all of America drastically but differently. "All Americans have been affected by September 11 and its aftermath. However, Muslim Americans, in particular, have suffered the ongoing effects of the legislative and social responses that followed that tragic day." (Peek, 2005, 194) I believe the experiences and discrimination that Muslim women underwent still in college were different than the experiences and discrimination of Muslim women that were out of college and in the "real world" working and living a different perspective. For that reason, I believe the results of the survey would have been different had I used the traditional timeframe.

Also, because of some partial answers received in the survey, I realized that conducting interviews along with the survey would have been more effective in obtaining guaranteed and complete responses.

In chapter 4, I mentioned that although there seems to be evidence that Generation X Muslim women do experience an identity crisis living in America, because of the inconsistent results, at this time my hypothesis is inconclusive. Question 16 of the survey asked "Have you or your family faced any type of discrimination due to religion or culture after the September 11, 2001 attacks?" Out of 100 women that answered this question, 61% stated that indeed they or their family have faced discrimination post 9/11. Question 11 of the survey asked "Do you think that you would be more comfortable practicing Islam if you lived in a country where Islam is the major religion?" Out of 99 women that answered the question, 63% said yes. Perhaps 63% of Generation X Muslim women feel uncomfortable practicing their religion in America because they are
experiencing an identity crisis and feel that they need to be amongst people similar to them in order to be understood and simply, "fit in."

As I sit here writing the conclusion to my thesis, I can't help but reflect on the past few months. As difficult as my life has been the last few months as I struggled to balance a full time job, class, this thesis and just - life, I realized that there was never one single moment that I regretted changing my original topic to write about this one. There was never a moment I wanted to give up. All the stress and sleepless nights are minimal in comparison to what I've learned.

I've learned how much culture really impacts the world, not just America. I've learned how so many Muslim women are making a difference in this world. In contrast, I've learned about very disturbing and horrific trends some Islamic countries observe such as genital mutilation and "honor" killing, thereby oppressing Muslim women due to their cultural beliefs. We need to be able to separate the culture from the religion and bring Islam back to basics. In order to do this, we must start with a change in ourselves. We have an obligation to ourselves as Muslim women to become independent thinkers and stand up for what we believe in. Let education be our savior, let us make that change.
References


Council on American-Islamic Relations. (n.d.) *Explore the Life of Muhammad*.


