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Title: The Effect of Gender on the Experience of Second Generation Muslims

About the Author:

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Abstract: Although Islam clearly recognizes the independence and equality of women, gender roles as defined by culture are often blended with those of religious teachings. The experience of Muslim women therefore is distinct from that of Muslim men on many different levels including familial relationships. Are second generation Muslim females more adherent to the Islamic faith than second generation Muslim males? Are women Muslims more prone to the pressures of their religion as they not only attempt to maintain their family's cultural and religious identity but also adopt an American distinctiveness? Do these two processes contradict and cause a Muslim female to become alienated from her family? These are the questions I will be asking as I investigate how gender affects a second generation female Muslim's unique process of adaptation and assimilation.

In order to further investigate these interactions a set of semi-structured qualitative interviews were conducted involving male and female second generation Muslim students. Non-Muslim children of Muslim immigrants were also included in order to examine the intrafamilial influence of the Islamic faith. Beginning with a few Muslim friends, my research expanded as they introduced me to their extended friends. Analysis of these interviews revealed the distinctive experience of being female and second generation Muslim. Understanding the interaction between Islamic traditions and twenty-first century American ideals through the eyes of a second generation female will add to the knowledge we have of second generation Muslims.

Question: How does gender specifically affect the experience of a second generation Muslim as they interact with their families, display their religious adherence and incorporate American culture into their lives?

Data (Field Notes): Interview with Saniya 4/16 6-7p.m.:

Saniya: My parents met in college, my dad just left Pakistan when he was seventeen and I guess he got into school early because he is super smart. And he met my mom and I don't know if my mom was the first person that he dated or not but they started dating and dated for a long time and he, my mom told me that they were never actually engaged, they didn't really do the whole romantic thing, he just went to Pakistan to ask his dad if he could marry my mom and that was pretty much it and then they got married.

ME: Did his family have any problems with it?

Well, I've tried to ask that, to try and get the family secret and they always tell me "no it wasn't that big of a deal" but I think actually it was more, because my dad was probably the most sensible of the brothers so I guess they pretty much trusted his instincts or whatever. Um, and kind of let him do his thing. But my mom's parents were really concerned, especially my mom's dad, he really didn't like him with her.

ME: Was it more the Muslim or the Pakistani issue?

Saniya: Well, my mom's parents weren't that religious, probably Irish Catholic. He actually more had a problem, he thought it would be really hard on the kids and I don't know if it had more to do with one or the other, probably both.

ME: Why did they move to the U.S.?

Saniya: Right, ok so he was an engineering student and he got a job in Canada like right after school and then my mom went with him and they lived in Canada for like 10 years and that's where me and my sisters were born. And then I just came to U of I from moving around and getting pretty good grades in high school.

ME: How was your high school experience? Did you realize your "other" status?

Saniya: Um, I think middle school was really tough for me because I went to a catholic school and I think at that age you are obsessed with not being different than your friends, you want to fit in, and I went to a school in which everyone had blonde hair and freckles and I was, my family and I were the only ones who were darker than kaki or whatever the expression is. Um, so I felt

really different especially at mass when everyone would get up and get their communion and I would have to stay sitting down and I remember there was one other person who was Lutheran and he didn't go up for mass and I always had a special bond with Edward. And other than that I felt really different, middle school catholic school, everything was really great and I had friends but when I went to public school I was kind of an outcast at first and I didn't know if it was because of my family and being Muslim or if it was me dressing like a loser and not being very girly and boy crazy.

ME: Where you aware at that time that your dad was Muslim? Was he an active Muslim?

Saniya: No, my dad has never been religious but I was always really self-conscious of it and I didn't want people to know, like my little secret, it was something I had to hide and in middle school I was convinced that that's why I was not cool, but really, people couldn't tell by looking at me so much as my sisters who are darker, I mean, that sucks that that's why, because of my skin color is lighter. But, high school it was kind of the same thing, if I ever felt out of place I would always think that it was because of my being half Pakistani or something, even though a lot of people didn't know. But when September 11th happened, everyday I was like freaking out on the inside that someone would say something awful to me or I would overhear someone bashing on Muslims and that was really awful and I did over hear a lot of things. And somebody who did know that my family was Muslim would ask me stupid questions like "Did I know Osama bin laden?"

ME: Was he serious about that?

Saniya: No, I mean obviously not, he was just like trying to make me feel bad, or in a way like if you are in a frat and someone fucks up and vandalizes some shit and you say that something to another frat member who had nothing to do with it.

ME: When did they vandalize your family's car?

Saniya: Um, yea, that happened a couple of years after we moved to southern Illinois. We only celebrate Eeds because I think my dad feels guilty that he isn't attached to his religion at all anymore so we celebrate it if we are all in town at the same time. So, we

went to prayer in the morning and we were leaving and, I guess it was cold outside, and someone had written on the foggy windows "Go home and die" or something and, um, I don't know sometimes when you write stuff on the windows it doesn't go away for awhile, you know what I mean? And it kind of stayed there for a long time and I had to keep looking at it and it was really awful and ah it just sucks so much cause I didn't even want to go in the first place like I wasn't terribly religious and I felt like I had to explain that, like I didn't deserve this cause I'm not even that religious.

ME: Where did you go to prayer at?

Saniya: Um, they opened up this little room at this like hall at the college buildings, so they just rented it out. I used to go to Sunday school and it was in like a high school cafeteria when we would pray, it's just always been random places that we could find.

ME: Was there other Muslims at your school?

Saniya: No, my class was like 525 students in my class, gosh, I never at Muslim friends at the same school as me, never.

ME: Did you have Muslim friends from other schools or anything?

Saniya: When I used to live in Pennsylvania we used to go to the Mosque every Friday and Sunday but just purely for social reasons and I had a lot of really close friends there but they just went to schools around the area, never the same school as me.

ME: Did they have any hate crimes committed against them?

Saniya: Actually yea, when we would all get together on Sundays or whenever we were all at the Mosque, everyone would have a story about something stupid that somebody had said to them like my close friend, Sahla who is half Bengali and half white and you would never tell, just really dark hair and eastern eyes, anyways, she never really got the butt of things but I had a lot of friends who wore hijab and they would get stupid comments and it's weird how we would bond, like I know some people go to church or synagogue and I'm sure they have better things to talk about instead of all the awful things that they hear, but.

ME: Did your dad ever put any pressure on you to follow Islam more closely? Like wear Hijab or anything like that?

Saniya: Um, no, my dad never did, EVER, I think he finds, he's just very um very critical of his own culture and he has seen, like he has never gone back to Pakistan except to ask his dad if he could marry my mom and I think he was glad to leave, actually that's a pretty bold statement, I'm not sure exactly why, I know he doesn't, he's like very rational, not that religion is irrational but he never has really gotten into it, he has always seen it as a nice reminder of his culture and he has always taken us for the social aspects but he has never been really into religion. If it was anyone it was my grandpa who would make me read all of these stories and go through the Quran with me.

ME: How often do you see your extended family? Do they live in the U.S.?

Saniya: Yea, they all live in Texas right now. My grandpa and my aunt and uncle and cousins and they are definitely very traditional compared to my immediate family.

ME: How many brothers or sisters does your dad have?

Saniya: I have three uncles, My uncle Kafi who has a family and is married through an arranged marriage, my uncle Aasim is just getting married at the end of this month, he is getting an arranged marriage and my uncle Omair who had a love marriage, he is actually disowned from the family, not because of that but I guess he was a giant jerk to the family growing up and my dad, um, something happened and my dad lost all respect for him and now we never talk to him.

ME: Do their wives wear hijab and other attire?

Saniya: Well, my uncle Omair, his wife doesn't, she is just like some Texan lady and my uncle Kafi with the family, his wife didn't wear hijab before she came here but now she does, like she was always religious, more so than my uncle cause my uncle was more like my dad when it came to religion, just like whatever.

ME: Does your extended Muslim family ever make comments to you about the clothes you wear?

Saniya: Well, it's really interesting seeing them, obviously I love my family but I feel very different from them and I can't wear some things around them, like I would never wear this T-Shirt around them (*as she is wearing jeans, a green v neck t-shirt with a zip up jacket over it, tennis shoes and something to hold back her hair*), like it's too low cut and like, I would always dress a lot more modestly around them, I just try and respect their whole schpeel, I mean cause it's just kind of uncomfortable if I wear something else, shorts, like oh my God, never. Once I remember that I sneezed and nobody said anything so I was like "Oh, God bless you Saniya" just joking around and my little cousin Maisa (Maha and Majeeda) said "No it's Alhamdulillah" and I was like, whoops, and my oldest cousin, who is like 9 now said "Maisa, Saniya can say whatever she wants, some people say 'God bless you' and some people say 'Alhamdulillah'" and I thought it was so sweet that she said that and she can recognize the difference and gage how that would make some people feel.

ME: How old are they?

Saniya: Maha is the oldest, she is nine, Maisa is six I think and Majeeda is like two years now I think.

ME: Have you ever felt alienated from your extended family as a result of this American identity that you have through your dad marrying an English woman and coming to the U.S. not really following Islam?

Saniya: Yea, definitely, and I think that I make a lot of it up in my head and I'm really self-conscious about it, the same way that in middle school I was convinced that people, if there was any kind of problem it would be because of who I am, but I love my family to death and I know they love me to death and they would never think less of me because of who my mom is or because I have this American identity, but it still makes me feel pretty alienated...they are considering moving back to Pakistan and I can't help but think like o they are probably doing that cause they don't want their kids to grow up like my sisters and I, like they don't want their kids going to middle school and high school here because apparently that's when all of the bad stuff happens, and I remember there was this one time when my aunt/auntie, the one hijabi who lives in Texas, she was in Pennsylvania and this was when I was in middle school and I had this huge poster of Tom

Cruise on my wall cause I had such a big crush on him, and he had no shirt on, he was like shirtless and so hot, and my aunt like freaked out and apparently was like telling my dad that I was a really bad, that that's no way for a Muslim girl to act, blah blah blah and my dad never said anything to me cause he doesn't care, but my mom was like laughing at my that auntie had seen that and I was like heartbroken, oh my God she thinks I'm less of a person because of this, like who am I, I should not do this, I didn't think that I should be more like this or less like that but it was just so disrespectful for her to see or something.

ME: How did your extended family get along with your mom?

Saniya: Fine, um yea, fine, I mean on the outside it might seem problematic to have this kind of family situation set up, but when its actually happening to your family of course everyone is going to put everything aside and be cool with it, and my, sometimes it really funny to see my cousins hanging around my mom, speaking another language, these super Muslim girls wearing swimsuits that somehow cover their whole bodies and being like "auntie!" And this big tall white woman coming up and being like "Hi Girls" it's kind of funny but nobody really minds, nobody makes them feel weird or out of place.

ME: Coming to U of I did you feel that your cultural/Muslim identity came out more or did you feel that it tended to collide and clash with your American identity even more than it had in high school?

Saniya: Um, I think that when I first came here it was weird, I kind of stopped worrying about it as much, I guess because it is a bigger student body and more diverse and I didn't feel ashamed to say that I came from a Muslim family, all of a sudden it was a kind of interesting fact about me instead of something that I had to pretend, "o I guess I'm kind of Muslim" I mean I still wouldn't classify myself as religious or anything but I still am very, like if I see something on the news about Muslims or South Asia I feel very attached to it and I get very like emotional about sad news coming from there, but still, also I did go to the mosque a couple times with my older sister cause I did like having Muslim friends a couple, it's nice, um...

ME: Why do you think it's nice?

Saniya: Um, I like, I mean, I only have one, my dad's obviously the South Asian parent and it's kind of comforting to talk with other Muslim children about our parents because it's a different breed of parenting, it's like "I love you, but you have to get like amazing grades" not that you have to but...

ME: Why do you think that difference in parenting exists?

Saniya: Well I mean I have definitely met the same type of parents with my white friends obviously...why it happens more often with South Asian parents is because they had to work so hard to get here, my parents, I know some people's parents have been here longer but my dad like his college experience was seriously studying every night and working, working, working and having to prove himself and I kind of I don't know, whenever I'm slacking off I try and remember that I don't know, well I think that it is such their mentality that my mom has to remind my dad that there are other things to do with your life other than science and being a doctor or something. Like he can't literally grasp it, I don't know why but...

ME: How did you dad feel when you switched out of the sciences to study the arts?

Saniya: Um, he was like really, well the thing about my dad is that he never yells, and he just says like "Please think about this", he has a way of saying things where I'm like "Oh my God I don't want to let my dad down," like "Uh I don't want to disappoint him."

ME: Is it more from your dad than from your mom?

Saniya: Um, yea it's definitely more from my dad than from my mom, but the thing is he'll say these things to me like Saniya please do this and don't leave it till the last second, but if I get upset and like say "Dad, I can't do this" he is so nice and will be like "Saniya, take your time I love you no matter what" and even though I know whatever I do he'll be supportive, I still feel this obligation, I don't know, I don't want to disappoint him. But I think it's mainly that I know what he went through to get here and I feel lazy if I don't work as hard as he did.

ME: Did he ever experience any racist actions or anti-Muslim sentiments?

Saniya: Yea, definitely I don't know how my dad keeps his cool, I'm sure he totally saw that thing on our van but he didn't say anything, like he doesn't get mad he just keeps it all in and kind of just gets it and he just doesn't get upset about it, when he was on a business trip in the Czech Republic he almost got beat up at a restaurant and I guess it was at night and some guys came in and just saw him and threatened to beat him up and other people had to hold this guy back and my dad was just sitting there, like with this guy with all of this rage and my dad is just like the nicest guy.

ME: Were the guy's statements more about your dad's culture/nationality or more about his religion?

Saniya: I think people see a brown person and clump it all together and don't see the difference between Arabs and South Asians and whatever so they'll call someone from Pakistan a towel head or something, so I'm sure they were probably saying something like that, like camel jockey or something.

ME: Has your Muslim background or cultural background functioned to integrate you or segregate you coming to campus?

Saniya: I guess it has kind of helped to integrate me more, um, it's kind of cool but at the same time it kind of bugs me how, like I kind of hate talking about it sometimes, when people are like "Oh you look so interesting, what does this mean?" and I'm like "Yea my dad's from Pakistan" and they are like "Oh my God that is so cool!" "Wow" Like I hate how it can be so interesting and almost impressive, something I had no control over, like I have more of a right to be at those cultural houses or whatever, and like ok cool I was born in Canada and this happened but there are a lot of other cool things going on and like this other person is interesting too, it's just really silly. But yea when I meet other South Asians, I don't know, people are always just really intrigued but it and I'm intrigued by other people as well, it's not a bad thing, but I like being in Hindi class and my name on the list with everyone else looks pretty normal, um, but there was one time when I went to, my friend Sahib invited my to come to a MSA dinner, so I went over and he was running late so I was ok, no big

deal, I'll just go in by myself, no biggie and I was wearing like this, like jeans and a long sleeve shirt pulled up to here (points to her collar bone) and I walked in and he wasn't there yet but I thought that I could do just fine but everyone starred at me, like, oh my god is this girl lost, and in my head, again, I'm just like freaking out like thinking they think I don't belong, that I'm just some tan white girl who accidently walked into the wrong house, so I freaked out and I left and I cried and I called my dad, I was like "Dad I felt so weird all these girls were dressed so nice and they all had their nails done and heavy make-up and some fancy, you know, dainty shirt, and like they were all beautiful and the guys were on the other side and like everyone knew what they were doing" I don't know, I just felt really silly.

ME: Do you feel as if Muslim women on campus are more feminine than you?

Saniya: Um, oh my gosh, yea, like even when I went to, when I had more exposure to Muslim female ladies was when I went to the Sunday school in Pennsylvania all the time when I had a lot of good friends and even there I was probably one of the only girls involved in sports, like my mom would sign me up or every sport under the sun, like one morning she would be like, "What are you doing you have lacrosse practice" or "I signed you up for field hockey and it starts tomorrow" so I was always doing sports and I think I can make this assumption that, um, I've never really seen a lot of Muslim girls being into sports and stuff they are usually more serious, not serious, I guess what I'm trying to say is that they are more feminine, whatever the definition of feminine is.

ME: Would you say that they are more feminine than other females of different religions?

Saniya: I would say, um, in school I feel like they are very serious, I have never met a Muslim girl who like slacks off, well I know this one girl, Faatina, I'm sure she does well in school but like she is like this crazy partier.

ME: Do you think that one gender is more adherent to Islam?

Saniya: I think there is always a bit more leniency with the males, like when I used to go to the mosque it bugged me so much that the guys could wear t-shirts and shorts when it was hot out and I

used to say to my dad “Why can’t we wear shorts, it’s so hot right now!?!?” and I couldn’t stand the guys at my mosque, granted I was really young and they were just being boys but I always felt that they could run around and be crazy and yell and wear shorts and, you know, we couldn’t do those things. I think nowadays, there is always a bit more leniency, like when I was in India that’s how it was. I mean, it was a different religion where I was staying, Hindu, but like the city was also very Muslim too, um, but like still when I would go out in India, to the bars, um, it was really, it can’t explain how weird this was, during the day everyone you see is in the traditional clothing, all the women that is, the men would wear whatever they wanted, western clothes, um so they would wear like just a button up shirt, some jeans and some sneakers, but the women would always wear the saris or jeans with just the saura, but when we are out at the clubs women would wear short skirts and you know whatever you would wear here, and the guys would still wear whatever they wanted, um, but then women who would party too much would always get, I see things online about this all the time, um it’s just improper for them to do that, I saw so many drunk guys doing inappropriate stuff and that’s fine but if you were a woman out wearing a t-shirt and skirt it was like big trouble, I never wore a skirt but like I never would, I would expect some one to say something, they would just assume that you were like slut.

ME: Do you get that same feeling from any of your Indian or Muslim friends here?

Saniya: I think because we are here, I never feel like really, cause I think that the people who really would care about that wouldn’t be out in the first place, so if I see some Indian girls or Pakistani girls out, um, I never feel like that here because, you know, we are here and people somehow balance the two better, I feel like religion is a lot more intertwined with everything in India.

ME: What type of gender role did you take on when you were in India? What was the male role there and how did they treat the females?

Saniya: It was really interesting when we first got there, they had a maid who would serve us food, it was so uncomfortable for us, we were like “Don’t worry, I can do that, I can take my plate in the kitchen” so that was weird, I guess in a lot of ways we were

treated very differently because we were the guests and I never had to take on whatever gender role would be assigned to me had I been there under some other circumstances, but the husband, well sometimes he would cook, they were a pretty progressive family, they lived in the states for a while, like a couple of years, um, cause the father is a professor and he was doing something here and the mom's a teacher, she doesn't cook anymore, the maid would cook and we would help out the maid sometimes cooking, but being there in general, I kind of didn't like it at first, guys would open the doors and make sure everything was ok, they didn't want you to worry yourself, when I could obviously do all the things they were doing for me, and at first it really bugged me but it was kind of nice, I was like "alright I'll sit back and let you do it" I'm sure feminists are cringing everywhere, they would take care of any issue that I had, like if I had to get a ticket or run an errand that would be a hassle, and a lot of that has to do with it being so busy and chaotic there, if I needed to get something fixed they would have to get some one else to do it, you have to have connections otherwise it would take hours and hours and hours, but yea I didn't really take on any strong gender roles.

ME: Did you get that impression that women were oppressed in their roles or was it just a misunderstanding dealing with chivalry?

Saniya: Um, I have mixed feelings on that, cause I know how awful it looks to people and they'll jump at the chance to say stuff like "How can you women have no say at all in this?" but like I have a lot of friends or friends sisters who wear hijab and they are totally cool with it, it is their choice, but that's not to excuse, obviously there are asshole relationships everywhere, it is a really jarring experience, one time I was sitting next to this woman on a bus who was wearing a burka and I was found myself being like "Oh my god, I wonder if she is happy, I hope everything is ok" and this other time I was on this bus with this woman who was wearing a burka and we both got off at the University and as soon as she got through the gate she started taking off her burka and she was wearing normal clothes, nothing flashy but, I don't know enough about it to like say too much.

ME: How do the people that you know on campus feel about wearing hijab?

Saniya: The people who I have known that have worn hijab have been totally cool with it, and they would be the ones telling me all these things that people have said to them, misunderstandings and things, and they could take off the hijab if they wanted and they knew that if they were to take it off people would probably stop giving them such a hard time.

ME: Do you feel like your experience as a child of someone of Muslim faith is unique as compared to those of other religions?

Saniya: Even though I'm not religious I feel like the culture always has a big impact on me, like it's always there, religion still has its impact on me.

ME: Do you feel like religion has become a part of the culture?

Saniya: Yea, they are like one, especially in Pakistan, like the whole freaking place was invented for Muslims, um, but I guess what makes it unique is that I know what is appropriate or inappropriate to do, I mean, it would be inappropriate for anybody, and if you respect yourself enough as a person you aren't going to do anything ridiculous, and I think I kind of forget that and I just assume that it's religion.

ME: How did your sister come out about her sexual orientation?

Saniya: I don't know, I felt kind of bad about it because we were really close my sister and I and I literally had like NO idea, um, until she came out and I was like "Oh" she came out to her friend Ben, and then Neal and then me. My other sister didn't believe it for awhile, she is really conservative I think, she's very prudent, besides the times she has gotten like super drunk and made out with people.

ME: How did she come out to your parents and what were their reactions?

Saniya: Well she told me mom, who cried I think, um and kind of said something like "I guess I always knew" but my mom still doesn't believe it, she'll be like "It's just a phase right Saniya?" and my dad still doesn't know, and I have no idea what he's going to do, actually I know exactly what my dad will do, he'll just kind of looked stunned, say nothing and never talk about it again, yea that's my dad. I'm kind of scared at what my extended family

would do, they would never tamper with our personal lives, they would never think to set us up with anybody, so it would be weird whether it would make a difference but I think it would still be a big deal. I'm sure it would be considered taboo.

Interview with Sahib 4/22 4-45p.m.:

Sahib: I was born and raised in Chicago; both of my parents are from Pakistan, the northern part, Punjab, and I grew up in a smaller town outside of Chicago until I was thirteen, I went to a private Muslim elementary school until freshman year when I went to a public high school.

ME: What kind of groups and organizations are you involved in on campus?

Sahib: Um, I guess I'm loosely affiliated with MSA; I go when there is free food essentially.

ME: Do you have any friends on campus that are involved in MSA?

Sahib: Yea and they annoy me, it's because of the way they approach religion, quite legalizing and they try and are very strict, they make religion not so easy when it doesn't have to be.

ME: Do you feel that you are more religious than other female Muslims that you know?

Sahib: Um, considering what you call the standard of Islam, it is looked at in many different ways, and compared to my other Muslim female friends, I wouldn't say that I'm more or less religious than anybody that I know but if I had to quantify it I would say that I'm more religious than average people, that's because I try to my utmost to follow what my religion says.

ME: Do your female friends wear hijab?

Sahib: Some do and some don't, my own sister doesn't so it's not like blasphemous if they don't.

ME: Do you think that the women who wear hijab try to follow Islam more closely?

Sahib: I feel like its more of an outward expression than an inward expression, I feel they're more contradicting themselves than anything, my own sister who doesn't wear hijab, I feel like she is more adherent than most of the girls who I know that wear hijab, so I feel like they are just trying to appease their parents or appease the society thing, I'm a good Muslim because I wear hijab, like don't talk to me or look at me.

ME: Are your stricter friends looking for a Muslim female who is more adherent to Islam?

Sahib: Yea, most definitely, um because my stricter friends usually don't know or talk to anyone outside of the Muslim community, they find it strange that I have friends who are Jewish and Christian and White, ha ha, so when they ask me to come over I ask if I can bring one of my female Christian friends with me and they get very paranoid and say that it might not be a very good idea. My guess is because I was brought up in this kind of atmosphere, so they would more or less uncomfortable with the fact that she is there because she may not be as modest as most girls who wear hijab, or she doesn't look like she is from Saudi Arabia or something like that. But what you have to understand is, the way I was raised, going to a private Muslim school is that they suffocate male and female relations, they are segregated, like I got detention for talking to my sister in the hallway, even my own sister and I got that you shouldn't be talking to females, I was like this is my blood sister, same mama, you know? So, I feel that people are socially inept in that kind of atmosphere, I know I was for a long time until I finally went to a public high school I wasn't as uncomfortable as I was now that I'm in college, I'm completely comfortable with all that stuff and I don't hesitate to talk to a girl and uh, most of friends haven't broken some of those religious shells. I usually don't associate that closely within; most of friends are more or less not like me.

ME: Do your strict female friends tend to explore outside their religion more than the males?

Sahib: My strict female friends rarely have male friends, I mean I have one or two but there is a level of intimacy that you can't go beyond, so I feel if anything that the females are way more sociable and more approachable than males.

ME: Do you feel that it's easier for you to have an American identity being male as opposed to being female?

Sahib: Uh, I guess it would be easier for a male to be Americanized because the American culture emphasizes physical appearance more than anything and there is a lot of stress placed on women to dress sexy or attractive and Muslim women tend to be more modest, I mean I don't know how often men are looking at hijab but you try and look beyond that.

ME: Have you ever felt alienated from your family as a result of the friends you have or the way in which you are expressing your American identity?

Sahib: Um, fortunately my parents are quite open and accepting of everything, so, uh, when I come home with one of my best friends who is Jamaican they definitely have no problem with it, they are very accepting of everybody, even with females, I mean there was a time when they didn't like that I have female friends but they were like well I guess if you are going to be getting married you might as well be talking to girls right?

ME: Do your parents have any specific requirements in your future spouse?

Sahib: Yea, they do, my dad has narrowed it down to almost the city where she should come from, so yea Paki, Punjabi and from Lahore, she should probably have a college degree of some sort and I tell my dad that I'm from here so I'll probably pick a girl from here, and definitely not arranged, and of course some one who my parents would approve of, I wouldn't go and do it without their blessing.

ME: What do you think that would do if you wanted to marry a non-Muslim girl?

Sahib: My parents, um, well through some personal experiences, I have a girlfriend who was Christian and you know they were very opposed to that and after a 4 and a half year relationship we had to end things on their account, like her family, blah blah blah, after witnessing that scenario, they opened up and said "As long as she is Muslim we don't care where she is from" It was kind of like taking it to an extreme and having them move up from there,

so now it's just religion more than nationality.

ME: What prompted you to tell your parents about your girlfriend?

Sahib: Um, it was a mutual thing between me and her, first off I have this huge guilty conscience when keeping anything from my parents, it's probably not a good thing to have, I didn't want to be dishonest so I told them about a year into it, I mean they kind of had an idea when I was hanging out with the same girl all the time, but it was also because she didn't my family getting the wrong impression of her because she was a secret. And it kind of blew up in our faces. My parents didn't really blame anybody because they understood that we are young and that we fell in love and they kind of describe it like a Bollywood movie, and so they were like just be more honest and more careful about whom you chose and I couldn't really argue with them.

ME: Do you feel that your Muslim identity or cultural identity contradicts your American identity? Did the transition to U of I make it easier to compliment each other?

Sahib: Well, uh, it definitely compliments it, it doesn't in anyway take away from it, because I'm an American Pakistani, I have an American culture but I know my language and the heritage and culture that my parents taught me, I grew up knowing three languages so I feel that through being American and being Pakistani, knowing the cultures and languages of both it has helped my both academically and socially.

ME: Do you identify and sympathize with both cultures?

Sahib: Yea I definitely do, like, I'm pretty big on following the news, so I'm always looking at Pakistani newspapers and BBC and what they have to say, and of course the American news is always on TV.

ME: How do you feel that your Islamic faith functions in your life? Is it a coping mechanism or a source of empowerment?

Sahib: It's actually all of those up to a certain extent, um, I guess you could say that it was thrust upon me cause I was born into the religion and I didn't have a choice about which school to go to, my parents sent me to a private Muslim school, so we were brought up in that school for 10 years and I already had this

Muslim identity, all my friends were Muslim, so I guess in the sense I didn't have the choice and this was actually a turning point when I had the girlfriend who was Christian and she was teaching me all about Christianity and I was teaching her all about the Quran and you know, there was a point in there when I was thinking, "Am I following the right religion?" I would see her and it was kind of a thing of interest, but I realized through being with her that I truly am Muslim and, so there is a group of Muslims called Sufi Muslims and I ended up becoming a Sufi Muslim, it's just a more spiritual thing, it's not a sect like Sunni or Shia, it's just a way of thought and how you approach the religion and since I've become more spiritual or more Sufi-oriented, um, religion is like what I use to make decision and to avoid the wrong decisions, it guides how I approach people and view people and speak, so I guess I'm living my religion.

ME: Are you an avid reader of Islam literature?

Sahib: Yea, definitely I've read several books by Muslim authors like Karen Armstrong, she's written a couple of good books on Islam, but not just Islam, I've read other books about other religions as well including Christianity, I've read C.S. Lewis, knowledge is power right? If you don't know what you are talking about then you should just shut up.

ME: Coming to campus has your Islamic faith functioned to integrate or segregate you?

Sahib: It's funny because I feel more integrated with non-Muslims than with Muslims on campus, and that's partly to do with the fact that I am Sufi because, uh, the majority of Muslims don't like Sufi's, that is the majority of Muslims in American don't like Sufi's, and that's primarily to do with the Islamic sect called Wahabbism and they are funded with Saudi oil money and it's a very degenerate and corrupted form on Islam in my opinion and most sane people I would think, but the sad part is that most Muslims on campus are Wahabbi and the mosque on campus is run by Wahabbi administration, so when I say Wahabbi I mean that their idea are very narrow and they are very strict and unyielding or conforming to more modern ideas or accepting of other people, I mean they have their open houses on campus but they after the event it's not really taught that Muslims should approach these people of different faiths, you know, talk with

other students and create relationships, they don't emphasize that like they should. Sufism doesn't look at people by what they believe, it looks at people by how they treat others and so like, a Sufi scholar once asked this traveling person what religion he belonged to and the man threw his hands up in the air and said I don't know and the Sufi scholar told him that this was good, that the world is your scripture and that God resides in the world and he is also in your heart, so it's like kind of confusing but it means that you use your life on earth to find truth, like everyone you meet is your teacher and you teach everyone something also, just because someone isn't Muslim or someone isn't Christian you shouldn't short change them cause in the end, whether you believe it or not there is only one reality and one truth and I mean it's up to you, if you want to find it you will, if you don't want to find it you won't, so Sufism in that sense is more philosophical, because often times my friends will see someone and just automatically judge who this person is and what they must be all about but they could be completely wrong it's just that image that they hold and that's completely wrong in my opinion, I mean, I say don't judge a book until you read a few pages into it and get to know the person.

ME: Do you attend the mosque here on campus?

Sahib: Yea, well just because I don't agree with what the people say doesn't mean that I'm not going to go to the mosque, I go every Friday for prayer and I go as often as possible for one of the daily prayers, like, I usually go almost everyday just to pray there and see my friends and talk to them and then go back to studying.

ME: How do you think that a female Muslim's outward expression of religious adherence affects their experience in the U.S.?

Sahib: Uh, I think if you want to hear an example, when my family and I were traveling to Switzerland and we were at O'Hare, my mom and my sister were wearing hijab and we were in line like everybody else and the security guard comes up to us and was like you guys have been selected for a random search or screening and we went in and they patted us down for like 20 twenty minutes, stripped us down to our boxers or whatever and they took us behind a special curtain and did whatever they had to do, needless to say my mom and sister no longer wear their

hijab at the airport and they make sure they don't wear it and I make sure I go clean shaven, so.

ME: Is there anything you would like to add about how gender affects adherence to Islam?

Sahib: Um, so I guess what I have experienced it really isn't a gender thing when it comes to Islam or to religion especially in America, it's more enforced in Muslim countries the religion issue, but even then it's more lax than what is portrayed in the media, um, here though it's a country of freedom and everyone has their own choice about what they want to do and how they want to do it and my parents definitely, I would honestly say that my sister and I are more religious than our parents, actually our parents, in turn, have become more religious because of us and it's not because of anything other than the fact that we feel a certain attachment and certain peace about being the way that we are, cause religion makes life easy and who doesn't want an easy life and that's really how I look at my religion.

ME: Most people would think that Islam would make life more difficult living in the U.S.

Sahib: For me it makes it very easy, I know when I was distanced from my faith life was quite terrible, the closer I got to it the happier I became cause I realized that with certain things I need to just go with the flow and roll with the punches, if you accept that there really isn't control or let go of the illusion of control you actually become in control, it's kind of a deep thing, I don't know. You were referring to being Muslim as making life more difficult as far as people's stereotypes, I mean I have been called Osama bin Laden before and was told to go back to my own country but I just yelled back "Where is your basement" cause, you know, I was born here, but if people are going to be ignorant let them be ignorant, I don't need to respond and if I do it's probably with sarcasm anyways.

ME: Do you think that has more to do with Sufism than Islam in general?

Sahib: I would say so, um, I know a lot of friends that have been offended like terribly offended like you were attacking their mom or something, but I think ignorance is just another issue that we

have to attack, really. But if someone is ignorant about how I am it's my fault, and if they are willing to take the time to get to know me then I should be willing to give them the time to get to know me, so if you are going to act negatively to negative acts it doesn't make it positive at all, so, I mean if someone says something bad to you just take it with a light heart and accept the fact that they don't know you and it's probably out of ignorance, you shouldn't be upset with them and if they are willing to learn something about you, you should be willing to teach them, knowledge is power, the power you know about people and the more they know about you the better we can coexist happily, if not power it's just a willingness to get rid of your ego and pride to accept such things.

ME: What kind of sex appeal do you have as a result of your outward appearance/faith?

Sahib: I'm looked at like exotic, but I'm from America, I don't know how that makes me exotic, just because of my skin color, but, very seriously mostly Jewish girls come up to me, it's like I'm forbidden fruit or something, yea but uh, I've been hit on by many girls, I usually don't know it at the time, I think it's a blessing though cause I might of said something stupid anyway, but I tell people that I don't try to attract girls they just are, more non-brown girls are attracted to me than brown girls, yea.

Interview with Santoshi and Safa 4/22 8:00 p.m.:

Safa: My mom came to the U.S. from Pakistan when she was eleven and my biological dad came when he was around 22 or something like that and I was born here. I came to Illinois when I was six after my parents divorce.

Santoshi: I'm 22, my parents came here from India, my mom was, I think 18, this is back in 1978, 1979 and my dad came a year later, um, and I was born in Chicago.

ME: In what ways do you guys express your religious adherence on campus?

Safa: I went to the mosque during the holy month of Ramadan and during that month I, um, they have meals when you break the fast, for the community and whoever wants to come and so I helped organize with that and served people and cleaned up

afterwards, aside from that I like doing my prayers at home and not necessarily going to the mosque, I'm not really into praying with people, going there and all that jazz, so I just went during that month to help out, aside from that I go to the mosque for MSA Think Tank, which is, there is always a group presenting some interesting topic and they have a presentation and we have a discussion on it and I've even presented, for example, once my presentation was on, um, Islam and how to deal with inter-personal injustices and all that jazz, so we have interesting topics every now and then.

Santoshi: In terms of religion, I'm still in the process of converting, so I went to the mosque once during Islam awareness week because I know outsiders were welcome, other than that I don't really go to the mosque cause I'm not really sure how to pray just yet, and I'm still working on it, and in terms of groups I'm not part of any cause I recently made the decision to convert in January so, it's been a short time, so, no I don't go very often.

I just read up on a lot of stuff at home.

ME: What prompted you to convert from Hinduism to Islam?

Santoshi: Well, within Hinduism, I was really dissatisfied because I have a lot of questions, and they people who you turn to are your parents and my mom could never really answer my questions, she would be like "Oh I don't know ask your grandparents" and I would always ask my grandmother and even after she would give me answers to my questions they didn't really make sense cause it's some what of a polytheistic religion and it's more based on like stories and mythology, so I had a hard time believing it let alone basing an entire religion and your faith on it, so, I was dissatisfied and more I learned about Islam and talked to my friends about it the more it made sense to me, so I decided I wanted to stick with that religion.

ME: What types of religious or cultural pressures have your families placed on you?

Santoshi: Well for me it's basically, one of the biggest cultural things is they always tell you don't have boyfriends and stuff like that and if you do make sure nobody knows about it and stuff like that, the typical good girl, respect your parents, do everything for

you parents and, um, we have a family business at home, so it's like you should be working and helping out your parents and stuff, be respectful, just all of those things, so as soon as they see you acting out, like wearing too much make-up or hanging out with your friends too much it's like oh you're adapting too much to American culture and so that's the only thing I really deal with, like it's a struggle whenever I want to go out with my friends and stuff like that I do stay out late at night and so because that I'm sure my dad has a lot of problems with it but he doesn't say anything, but mom's always like be sure you come home at a certain time and I usually don't make that curfew, ha ha. Cause I'm used to being down here at U of I and stuff and not having to answer to anybody so when you come home it's really difficult to deal with a curfew or stuff like that or have someone to answer to.

ME: Do you feel that they look down on you because of that?

Santoshi: I think so, like, if we were to get into an argument or something like that, I know it would come up, it's one of the points that they against me, if they ever have to bring it up it is like their ammunition against me that oh she stays out late or oh she wears too much make-up or something like that, so, but other than that I don't think they have a lot of reasons to complain.

ME: Are they ever like, "Don't be like those American girls"?

Uh, yea, like my parents never say that, but like people on my dad's side of the family are like really big on gossiping and everything and so they are all traditional they all came from India, their kids are all so first-generation cause they were all born in India as well so when they compare us there is a huge culture difference between them and my sisters and I cause we were born here, so yea they do say that we have become more "Americanized" than them and they tell us not to be like American girls, so yea, it's true.

Safa: Yea, so while she was giving her perspective on like her parents trying to differentiate between their Indian culture and their American, and with mine it's kind of similar with culture just being a huge part of their expectations of us and I think that a lot of things they say that "oh well based on our religion they can or whatever, whatever" but I think that it's definitely culture that

takes precedence, um, I think that the majority of the time they are thinking about culture but say that they are talking about religion but I rarely believe them, um, they will say things like we are not allowed to do this or that but when I try to think about it in a religious context like “well according to the Quran and Islam it says…” and she’ll be like “no! it’s just not that” so basically I think that, um, culture holds a lot more importance, like Pakistani culture and what the societal standards are, as opposed to the religion, a lot of times the Quran is supposed to be a text that can be, they say it’s timeless which means that you can look at the verse and interpret it in your time and it will basically give you a clear set of guidelines of how you are supposed to live and how you are supposed to function and so you are supposed to, it’s not supposed to be something that is stagnant and people are saying that “no that’s not in our culture” or “my grandparents did this and my parents did this, for generations we have been doing this” and they will give that as an excuse, because we can always change with the times and you can always interpret the text, I think, further, and better to answer a question that might not of been asked before, just because no one has asked to question you shouldn’t just say no, well that’s just not done, maybe that question wasn’t asked back then, some one should look at it and look at the Hadith and the Quran and see what’s, what the prophet says, but I don’t think people really do that since they just want to go along with what they have been doing, one example is the whole marriage and boyfriend thing, ok, if you don’t want us to date around then what do you want us to do? How do you want us to find a suitor? Oh, you just get to know someone, you are friends with them, and then they ask you to marry them, ok, I don’t see that happening and I don’t have any suitors, do you want to propose any suitors? Well, you look for people, you’re in college, how am I supposed to look for people, you know, no one is really going to answer these questions, um.

Santoshi: Wouldn’t that be considered dating, you know, getting to know them, etc.

Safa: Basically, everything without any sort of intimacy, um,

Santoshi: It’s like G rated dating, ha.

Safa: Mm-hmm.

Santoshi: Dating according to Disney.

Safa: Right. Well I don't know.

ME: Do you think that coming to U of I has helped to integrate you?

Safa: No, um, I think that you definitely are exposed to, basically all this, going to college gives you is freedom, freedom to make mistakes and correct them and learn from them, so I guess through that you grow as a person, I don't know, making mistakes never worked too well for me so.

Santoshi: Well coming to school here, like she said, the only thing that really changed was having a lot more freedom, it's like if your parents are expecting you to move back home they expect you to, um, live under the same roof that you did in high school and stuff

Safa: It sucks.

Santoshi: It does suck, because you are used to being independent and like I said not having anyone to answer to and to go back to that is just like, it sucks there is no other way to describe it.

Safa: It's going to be horrible.

ME: Do you think being male makes this any easier? Do parents give them less hard of a time?

Santoshi: I think for males it might be easier, I mean, obviously when it comes to parents and daughters they have a lot more to worry about, like a guy can basically screw around and nothing will come of it but if a girl gets sexually involved before marriage and she gets pregnant, obviously you know there is a lot more to deal with, a lot more baggage having a daughter than having a son, especially you'll have to cover that up, you know, and they say that the girls carry on the family respect, is that the right word? The honor of the family is basically in your hands so when you go out you have to represent your family, so if you are out dating guys, in a club or engaging in activities that are not Islamically correct they are more likely to tell your parents about it and hold it over your head as opposed to a guy doing that, I think

people would be less inclined to gossip about him with the rest of the family, but if it's a girl it leads to a lot more complications later, so I think it would be easier to be a Muslim male than a Muslim female.

Safa: Also, yea, even within my own family I can think of certain guys that were dating certain girls and it wasn't a big deal but those same guys will tell their sisters that when they go out they can't do this and they can't talk to guys, um and eventually like now they are engaged to the girls and getting married to girls that they were dating and everything is fine and dandy but you know obviously it wasn't really a big deal, like guys do that but if girls do that it's something else, it's different.

ME: Do you think this double standard happens just in Islam?

Safa: Yea, I don't think this is like a Muslim dilemma nor do I think this is a Pakistani, I'm Pakistani and she is Indian, or an Indian dilemma, I think it's just a societal problem where we have the same, even in American culture and stuff, guys are allowed to get away with A LOT more, just with their anatomy and if they get in trouble it's not going to show up but if the girl gets in trouble...three months later, it will show, also, um, girls can't necessarily, like if they dress a certain way, too slutty or too skanky, guys you don't really have that like just because exteriors are different I think these different things come into play, it's just a societal problem that you find within a lot of different cultures, it translates over.

Santoshi: It just means that girls have to be a lot modest when they dress cause you know guys are more likely to holler a girls whenever they are walking down the street but how often do you see like a girl screaming at a guy like "o hey you look good, come take a ride in my car" or whatever.

ME: Do you feel the same way with your family?

Santoshi: Um, yea, kind of, obviously because the Hindu families are not as religiously strict there is a lot more freedom for girls you can pretty much dress however you want, as long as you don't like walk out of the house completely naked like I feel a lot of girls get away with everything, like wearing a lot of make-up, you know, not wearing hijab, that's not our religion, wearing short

shorts, going out to clubs, cleavages, showing your legs, coming home intoxicated, it almost has become a norm in my culture, it so sad, where when I look at a Muslim family none of that would be accepted because obviously it's wrong to drink, you have to dress modestly, so there is that huge difference, I think that Indian girls who are Hindu can get away with a lot more than Muslim girls can.

ME: I think a lot of the time people have this stereotype of all Asian cultures

Santoshi: Yea, I used to think that too, that Muslim girls can't basically do anything, but the more I am learning more about the religion and adapting my life to it I realize that it's not that huge of a change, it's just yea I used to go out but now when I go out I know not to go out and yea I would wear scandalous clothing but now it's more like I'm getting to an age wear I shouldn't be going out and wearing short shorts, just like small changes but it's nothing that major for me, their culture isn't that much different from mine.

ME: How do you go about converting?

Santoshi: Well the first basic principle is believing in one God and that Mohammed was his prophet and then you have to learn Arabic and stuff and read the Quran and stuff like that because Quran in Arabic is like in its perfect form

Safa: But you don't have to, essentially, um the only thing that you have to do to convert to become a Muslim is to read the Shahada which is that there is no other god but thee God and that Mohammed is his prophet and having that declaration is your proclamation that you are Muslim but beyond that, whatever you do, decides if you are a good Muslim or not, if you perform Haj, if you fast during the holy month of Ramadan, if you give alms to the poor, if you follow those five pillars is just if you are a good Muslim or not but after that, I mean, that's the only thing you have to do is make that proclamation.

ME: What happens if you are a bad Muslim?

Santoshi: Keep in mind that after you die is the Day of Judgment.

Safa: To each her own, you have to be held accountable for you

deeds, you know what you have done or you'll have to pay for it and you'll reap the benefits of good deeds.

Santoshi: Cause basically your life here is a test obviously being in a world of temptation and constantly having the little devil whispering in your ear to go out and drink, go out and get a boyfriend, be promiscuous and stuff, how you respond to these challenges is basically a test of your faith and after you die you have your day of judgment and you figure out your good deeds and your bad deeds and that determines if you go to heaven or to hell.

ME: You had mentioned before (addressing Safa) that you had felt alienated from your family, how did you feel this way and at what times?

Safa: Um, well, ok, American identity and culture, well my mom has been here since she was eleven and my dad has been here since, basically for his engineering career and I live with my mom and my parents are divorced and mom is pretty lenient and so she understands, she grew up in American schools too she knows what's up, her dad was pretty strict and they weren't really allowed to go to parties and all that stuff, talk to boys, but you know her and her brother were still trouble makers and getting suspended for getting into fights and all that, you know your typical American kids getting into trouble and all that, skipping school to go to Burger King and she's pretty lenient in the sense that she'll let guys come over to our house for a birthday party or to hang out with us she understand that with society you go to a co-ed school and that in life, males and females are going to interact, she's lenient in that manner and even with prom we are allowed to go to prom as long as you're not juking up on some guy and drinking vodka or something, but she's strict in the sense that if I tried to push it somewhere further than where she has already allowed to do then I get into trouble, basically whatever she's allowed she's allowing but beyond that nothing, no room for discussion so for example, um, you can wear a belly bearing top if it is a Pakistani outfit which is like a big long skirt and a little top and then you have a scarf thing coming over or if when I'm wearing the Sari, but what's the difference when I'm wearing American clothing and my belly is showing, what? This doesn't make sense, and they just say that you can't but it just doesn't make any sense whatsoever, so I can wear a fake belly ring when

I wear my Sari but I can't get my belly pierced, what why can't I get my belly pierced? "because back in the day the prophets had their nose pierced and their ears pierced, you can get those things done but you can't get your belly pierce, that doesn't make any sense, doesn't it make more sense to not get our nose and ears pierced because this body is basically, you aren't supposed to cause any harm to it whatsoever, that's why we can't get tattoos or cutting is forbidden, it's not supposed to cause any pain and even though it's a little isn't getting your ears and nose pierced causing pain? "No, no, no" it isn't talked about

Santoshi: That's the culture and religion thing

Safa: And the moment you say "what are you talking about" it's like "back in my day my parents, if I talked like that to my mother that would never happen"

Santoshi: That's when culture comes into it and the whole conversation goes out the window.

Safa: My mom says that Islam says to respect your parents and if you don't you won't get into heaven and I'm like mom, I respect you, I'm just trying to have a conversation and talk about, I'm asking you a question... (she expands on the differing views of herself and her mother when it comes to using black magic or bad luck, going to those that are closer to God like a mullana, she believes it to be a hoax in most cases, she believes that there should be no intercession between herself and God)

Safa: And I get yelled at and I'm disrespect and I have an attitude problem, o and then you get this thing, and my sister who is in med school has had this, "this is why I am sending you to college" "so this is what college teaches you?" No! College doesn't teach me how to argue I'm just trying to have a conversation here, you're thinking this is disrespect but it's not, so basically you aren't allowed to have an opinion, I'm supposed to be a thinking being, if I'm not thinking or questioning, your not growing and that's it you're done.

ME: Is this just with females?

Safa: No, everybody.

Santoshi: You are supposed to continue to seek knowledge cause

you'll never get to a point where you know everything, you are constantly learning in your lifetime so it's encouraged to continue to seek knowledge.

Safa: But then your parents are like, if you ask questions they don't want to talk about it or like if you have a different opinion than them then you can't have that opinion and it's like wait a second we are supposed to be thinking.

Santoshi: As long as you're having that discussion and you're not defying that religion then I think that it should be ok, like you know it says in Islam that you are supposed to respect your parents, so you know as long as you are not like screaming at them then you are entitled to have an opinion and a good Islamic discussion.

ME: Do you think it's easier for guys to approach their parents and ask them questions?

Safa: No, no, guys wouldn't be asking these questions, let's be real now, no they won't, they aren't talking to their parents they aren't communicating, most guys don't talk to their parents but then if they do, I've talked to some of the guys that I know and this is what they'll do, well my main responsibility is to stay on top of my grades cause I know that I'm going to have to marry someone and take care of that female and I'll possibly have to take care of my parents as well, so at least financially I have to be on top of my shit and as long as I'm doing that my parents are good with it, and in most cases that's true, as long as they are doing their homework they don't really have much discussions or conversations.

ME: Do you think that girls have a harder time because they actually do approach their parents with questions?

Safa: No, I don't think that girls really approach their parents either, nobody really talks to their parents these days, I just think it is me, I was trying to, I should know by now, I've always asked questions and raised my hand "mom, mom, mom!" It's just that I want to know.

ME: Does your mother ever attribute that to an American influence?

Safa: No it's just that she likes to throw the whole college thing in my face.

Santoshi: Some families are like that and some families are different.

Safa: Yea and you'll see from your ethnography that you won't be able to make any generalizations.

Santoshi: Yea, cause like one of my Indian guy friends is Muslim and he talks to his parents all the time whenever he has any religious questions he'll have, like, discussions with them and talk about it and it's usually in a good manner like, his mom doesn't usually get upset or offended I think they just kind of go back and forth with it and see where his discrepancies or her discrepancies and what the Quran says and stuff like that, basically try and increase their knowledge and get a better understanding of things, like if he has a question about what the Quran says about investing money, like is it haram or frowned upon, so they'll like have a conversation about it based on their individual knowledge and then try and find a verse in the Quran that will back up what they are saying. So it's a lot healthier of a conversation that what she would have.

Safa: Like we don't have a bad relationship, it's not really about relationships.

Santoshi: Yea, but in terms of discussing the religion.

Santoshi: So what was your research question, like what did you expect to find?

ME: I expected to find more differences between the genders that women would be more proactively displaying their religion or defying the any restrictions on them, but I'm kind of finding the opposite.

Santoshi: Yea it all varies from family to family, like some families will be like that, like well at least he has his grades up and is doing this that and the other so they kind of shut their eyes to it whereas with a female they might be more aggressive with her and stuff and there are certain families where they are like no, either way you are a Muslim and you shouldn't be this, so it goes beyond gender and they look at the fact that as a Muslim this is

your responsibility and you are not fulfilling it, so, there is always different sides of the story.

Notes on Interview with Mustafa 4/29 2:30 p.m.:

- Parents are from northern India
- He has a many aunts and uncles
- Went to numerous schools growing up (India, New York, Chicago, suburbs of Chicago)
- If he could pick a place in the world to go to he would either go to Saudi Arabia (the center of his religion) or Spain
- Says he is very open-minded, has taken many comparative religion courses and has had numerous conversations with others of different faiths, from these conversations he often finds a common ground and appreciates the differences in religious teachings
- Plans for the future include staying close with his family and “take care of them like they took care of me”
- Claims that the more you understand your religion the more you appreciate it and learn to love it
- In reference to his own religious adherence: he feels that he is “inadequate” and is not doing everything he knows that he should, there is still a lot that he needs to do
- He finds self contentment with his religion through asking questions and finding satisfactory answers, understanding is key
- He prays 5 times a day and views it as his chance to converse with God, a chance to wind down
- He fasts when he is supposed to, has good manners and tries to help those that need it, it’s important in his religion to be selfless and to be one with a good character
- He also adheres to the dietary restrictions (zabiha), doesn’t eat pork, eats kosher
- He goes to the local mosque at least once a day (on good days he goes 2–3 times) but at home he goes four times a day to pray
- Some people he only sees while at the mosque, it’s a nice communal and social time
- He feels that younger Muslims tend to have a high political awareness and social activism, after 9/11 he feels that outward expression of Islam has risen
- He doesn’t feel as if Muslim females struggle that much

more with adherence to Islam, sometimes he feels self-conscious about his beard and views this to be similar to wearing hijab

- The separation between the sexes isn't viewed to be a form of inequality, everyone adheres to Islam in a special form
- When asked about the sex appeal with being "brown" he says that this phenomenon has only recently been called to his attention and hasn't experienced much of this first hand

Findings:

- **Lack of a disparity:** Both the male and female participants denied the existence of a large inequality between the sexes. Despite the traditional physical separation of the two, neither was said to be a more trying/difficult position than the other. It was mentioned, however, that women who were hijab may have a more difficult time blending in due to the American societal standards of dress. Neither sex was viewed to be more adherent than the other.
- **Lack of distinction between culture and religion:** "That's the way it is" was a phrase frequently referred to by the participants. Often, the line between cultural tradition and religious practice was blurred and, in effect, the two became one oppositional force against inappropriate "American" activities.
- **Absence of a contradiction:** Although the participants' families would often disallow or frown upon American activities, the contradiction was not viewed to exist between American and Muslim but between the out dated traditional beliefs of their parents and their new age understanding of Islam. Familial pressures existed but with a clear blending of culture and religion.
- **Possible alienation:** While some families are closer than others, alienation did occur in some of the cases of the females. This alienation included a distancing between the individual and her extended family as well as a more typical alienation between a mother and daughter due to a lack of effective communication.
- **Search for knowledge:** Rather than a rebellious nature, the participants seemed to exhibit a thirst for knowledge. For example, one of the participants was Sufi and therefore was self-encouraged to meet and talk with others of different religions and belief systems. In addition, the other

participants were eager to learn about the teachings of the Quran and how Islamic law can be applied in today's world.

- **Adaptation and understanding:** Some examples were given in which the Muslim parents became more understanding of the American lifestyle, allowing friends of different sexes to come over to the house and accepting interracial dating. In this way, Muslim parents were not completely closed minded but were adapting as well.
- **Strange other v. Exotic danger:** The "otherness" of some of the Muslim participants was seen as exotic and mysterious by some of their fellow students. The male, for example, mentioned that white Jewish girls were extremely attracted to him as a sort of "forbidden fruit." This seemed to only occur on campus. A few of the interviewees mentioned feeling like an outsider or self-conscious about their "Muslim appearances".

General Conclusion: The experience of Muslim females cannot be generalized but must be understood through the unique context and history that surrounds that individual. Muslim women (or Muslims as a whole) cannot be clumped or grouped together. As in other religions, each person has their own form of adherence, their own interpretations of the Quran, their own opinions about Islamic law and the cultures of Muslim states.

Discuss The Effect of Gender on the Experience of Second Generation
(Final Muslims
Paper):

With countless portrayals of oppressed Muslim women in today's media, I was inclined to further investigate the experiences of Muslim females on the University's campus. It struck me as strange that Islam clearly recognizes the independence and equality of women, but this idea rarely permeates into the public sphere of knowledge. Additionally, Muslim families seemed to treat their daughters differently as the gender roles defined by culture became blurred with those of religious teachings. It has become increasingly clear that the experience of Muslim women is distinct from that of Muslim men on many different and complicated levels.

My research question, therefore, became focused on how gender

specifically affected the experience of a second-generation Muslim. Among many things, the interviewees were questioned about their level of religious adherence. Are second generation Muslim females more adherent to the Islamic faith than second generation Muslim males? Does a disparity exist between the experiences of Muslim women and Muslim men? How has their faith functioned in their lives? More importantly, I wanted to see how American culture and the assimilation process had affected their lives. Are women more prone to the pressures of their religion as they not only attempt to maintain their Muslim identity but also adopt an American distinctiveness? Do these two identities contradict and cause a second generation Muslim to become alienated from her family? In order to investigate these interactions a set of semi-structured qualitative interviews were conducted on campus involving male and female second generation Muslim students. Non-Muslim children of Muslim immigrants were also included in order to examine the intrafamilial influence of the Islamic faith.

The findings from this study speak to the many complexities that exist between religion, culture and gender. This small set of interviews provided insight into the experiences of second generation Muslims on campus and their perceptions of Islam and South Asian culture. Culture became a very important variable as it functioned to manipulate the basis of good Islamic living and most interviewees were quite aware of its presence. Contrary to my original predictions, the students whom I interviewed appeared to be extremely educated about Islam, its teachings and its restrictions. They were not passive instruments of their families but rather appeared to have a great amount of control over their lives and beliefs. Female Muslims, especially, displayed a strength and extensive knowledge of their religion and their unique position in the world.

To begin with, the responses of the participants failed to support the existence of a disparity between male and female Muslims. The separation between the two sexes was viewed as a mandatory part of the religion rather than an oppressive practice designed to create an inequality. Moreover, the female level of religious adherence did not appear to substantially differ from that of the male Muslims. Safa, while participating in MSA Think Tank, preferred to perform her prayers at home and rarely visited the local mosque except during the hold month of Ramadan. Mustafa,

on the other hand, goes to the mosque at least once a day if not two to three times a day. Sahib, for example, felt that he was more religious than the average person but could not claim a considerable difference between himself and his female friends. He believes that each individual's level of religious adherence could not be measured by forms of outward expression such as wearing hijab. When commenting of females who wear hijab he says:

"I feel they're more contradicting themselves than anything, my own sister who doesn't wear hijab, I feel like she is more adherent than most of the girls who I know that wear hijab, so I feel like they are just trying to appease their parents or appease the society thing, 'I'm a good Muslim because I wear hijab, like don't talk to me or look at me.'"

He did, however, mention that due to American culture and its emphasis on physical appearance Muslim women might have a harder time becoming "Americanized" than Muslim males. Typical dress of American women, for example, tends to be more revealing than the modesty of Islam would allow. Saniya, the non-Muslim daughter, also commented on this difference in apparel, "like when I used to go to the mosque it bugged me so much that the guys could wear t-shirts and shorts when it was hot out." Despite these differences in attire, neither gender was identified as having a more difficult time than the other. Mustafa and Sahib both stated that their beards and dark features attract just as much attention in public spaces than wearing hijab. For instance, Sahib says that his mother and sister no longer wear hijab to the airport and he always makes an effort to go clean shaven.

During the interview with Safa and Santoshi, it became clear that the differences that existed between the genders did not originate in Islam but rather in society at large. Santoshi, for one thing, felt that parents probably gave their sons less of a hard time due to their anatomy and the baggage associated with sexual relations before marriage. She also claimed that the honor of the family basically rested in the hands of the females with families being less inclined to gossip about a male Muslim's indiscretions. Safa agreed with this and said that, "I can think of certain guys that were dating certain girls and it wasn't a big deal but those same guys will tell their sisters that when they go out they can't do this and they can't talk to guys." Continuing on, they attributed this

double standard to society in general and not specifically Islam. Safa, for example, stated that “it’s just a societal problem where we have the same, even in American culture and stuff, guys are allowed to get away with a lot more…you find [this problem] within a lot of different cultures, it translates over.” Obviously, Islam is not viewed by the interviewees to create a strong inequality between males and females despite their physical separation.

Often times, confusion occurred over whether religion truly disallowed certain actions or practices. The interviewees frequently felt that their elders confused religion with culture. Similar to the double standard discussed above, culture appeared to account for the assigned gender roles within South Asian families. Saniya, in particular, viewed religion to be extremely intertwined with culture. During her stay in India, she noticed that women weren’t allowed to party and drink in the same fashion that the men did. If women were out wearing the same types of Western clothes that the men did, it was assumed that she was a slut. Safa addressed this problem head on and states:

“I think that a lot of things they say that ‘Oh, well, based on our religion they can or whatever, whatever’ but… I think that the majority of the time they are thinking about culture but say that they are talking about religion, but I rarely believe them…so basically I think that, um, culture holds a lot more importance, like Pakistani culture and what the societal standards are, as opposed to religion.”

She continues to refer to this blending of culture and religion when she addresses the issue of piercings and tattoos. Safa’s mother, while not allowing her to get her belly button pierced, approves of piercings in the ears and the nose. Safa attributes her reluctance to tradition and what has always been done rather than the true teachings of the prophet and the Quran.

While there are conflicting ideas that exist between American culture and Islam, the majority of the respondents felt that their Muslim identity complimented their American identity. Sahib, for instance, feels that his attachments to both cultures and knowledge of the languages have helped him both academically and socially. He sympathizes with both nations while welcoming an American Pakistani identity. For him, Islam makes life in the U.S.

easier rather than more difficult. He says the following:

“For me it makes it very easy, I know when I was distanced from my faith life was quite terrible, the closer I got to it the happier I became cause I realized that with certain things I need to just go with the flow and roll with the punches, if you accept that there really isn't control or let go of the illusion of control you actually become in control, it's kind of a deep thing, I don't know.”

Saniya also feels that her Muslim identity has grown to compliment her overall uniqueness. As she struggled with the increased attention that her South Asian background brought, her Muslim heritage became an interesting factor to all those whom she met. Even walking into her Hindi class, Saniya felt more normal than she did in her high school classes in which paranoia about her otherness flooded her thoughts. Even though Santoshi mentioned that her family often warned against adapting too much to American culture, she merely viewed this as her family's fears of assimilation rather than her own. It stems from this that any contradiction that existed was between the outdated traditional beliefs of the parents and the second generation's understanding of Islam. Although the participants' families would often disallow or frown upon American activities, this was never viewed as a true contradiction between the teachings of Islam and American life. A certain level of modesty and respect was expected, but a complete denouncing of American culture was never seen in the responses of the interviewees. Tradition, rather than Islam, appeared to be the source of the problem.

Along the same lines, the Muslim students whom I interviewed rarely claimed that they had ever felt alienated from their families as a result of their American identity. Sahib, in particular, felt fortunate that his parents have been so open and accepting. They allowed friends of different backgrounds, religions and genders to visit his house. Safa also feels as if her mother is fairly lenient having grown up in the U.S. and understanding that a certain amount of co-ed functions and events is normal. Unlike other Muslim females, she was allowed to attend co-ed parties and prom as long as she behaved in a respectable manner. Any amount of alienation that was found between themselves and their parents occurred as a result of ineffective communication. Safa found it extremely difficult to question and probe her mother about their religion. She describes her mother as, “strict in the

sense that if I tried to push it somewhere further than where she has already allowed me to do then I get into trouble...beyond that nothing, no room for discussion.” If Safa attempted to have a conversation with her mother about religion and why certain restrictions existed, she would be accused of being disrespectful. College would often be blamed for her supposed defiance and disrespect.

Another example of feelings of alienation comes from the experiences of Saniya with her extended Muslim family. Due to the fact that Saniya is not a practicing Muslim she often feels distanced from her extended family and very self-conscious about how they view her and her immediate family. She often can't help but think that her aunts and uncles are considering moving back to Pakistan because they don't want their kids to grow up like her and her sisters. She even describes one incident in which her auntie saw a shirtless poster of Tom Cruise on Saniya's bedroom wall. After her aunt became very upset and condemned the poster Saniya was “heartbroken” and thought that her aunt thought less of her because of it. Despite all of her paranoia, Saniya states that, “I love my family to death and I know they love me to death and they would never think less of me because of who my mom is or because I have this American identity.”

An additional issue that was brought up throughout the interviews was familial pressures experienced by both males and females. While the students whom I interviewed rarely felt alienated from their families as a result of their American activities, it was frequently said that they received a great deal of pressure to adhere to Islamic traditions. Sahib, for example, quickly identified a list of attributes that his parents desired in his future spouse. While his father's requirements were seen as unrealistic, Sahib admits that he wouldn't marry anyone without his parents' blessing. Differing from Sahib, Saniya has received a lot of pressure from her Muslim father to excel in academics. She finds comfort in discussing these types of pressures with other South Asian Muslim students as they can relate to her situation. Saniya attributes her father's exceedingly high expectations to his own work ethic and experiences overcoming adversity.

Santoshi also describes some of the pressures her family places on her. Even though she comes from a Hindu family, the cultural

pressures to behave a certain way mirror those seen in Muslim families. For example, she receives a great amount of pressure to stay away from boys and retain a “typical good girl” status. Santoshi is also pressured to always respect her parents and help with the family business. Her experience only reiterates the blending of culture with religion. While Muslim women and men receive a great deal of pressure to lead an Islamic life, the respondents often questioned whether Islamic principles were really the guiding force behind their parents’ strictness.

After looking at the various types of cultural and religious pressures that second generation Muslims experience, it is surprising to find that, rather than a rebellious nature, the participants seemed to exhibit a thirst for knowledge. Their goal in questioning their parents about their religion is not to act disrespectful or unruly but to investigate the principles that guide their everyday lives. Instead of readily accepting everything that their families teach them, these students are inspired to seek out knowledge for themselves. Santoshi argues that, “You are supposed to continue to seek knowledge because you’ll never get to a point where you know everything, you are constantly learning in your lifetime.” Safa also asserts that, “I’m supposed to be a thinking being, if I’m not thinking or questioning, you’re not growing and that’s it, you’re done.” For instance, Safa was adamant about the fluid nature of the Quran and its ability to mold its principles according to the times.

Female Muslims were not the only ones questioning the true teachings of Islam. Mustafa also stated that he finds self contentment with his religion through asking questions and finding satisfactory answers. He claims that understanding is key. In fact, this was one of the main reasons why Santoshi was driven to being the conversion to Islam. She felt dissatisfied with her parents’ and grandparents’ answers that were based on “stories and mythology.” With an investigation into the teachings of Islam, it made more sense to her.

Sahib, a Sufi Muslim, exemplified this line of reasoning. Knowledge to him was power. He read all kinds of literature written by Muslim and non-Muslim authors, from Karen Armstrong to C.S. Lewis. He explained his philosophical outlook using a Sufi parable:

“A Sufi scholar once asked this traveling person what religion he belonged to and the man threw his hands up in the air and said, ‘I don’t know’ and the Sufi scholar told him that this was good, that the world is your scripture and that God resides in the world and he is also in your heart, so it’s like kind of confusing but it means that you use your life on earth to find truth, like everyone you meet is your teacher and you teach everyone something also, just because someone isn’t Muslim or someone isn’t Christian you shouldn’t short change them cause in the end, whether you believe it or not there is only one reality and one truth and I mean it’s up to you if you want to find it you will, if you don’t want to find it you won’t.”

It is because of this belief that Sahib is self-motivated to meet and talk with others of different religions and belief systems. In fact, he felt that coming to this campus he became more integrated with non-Muslims rather than Muslims.

With such a high focus on knowledge and learning it should follow that a level of adaptation occurs within many Muslim families. The second generation Muslims of this study commonly stated that their families had an increased level of understanding the realities of being Muslim and residing in the U.S. Sahib’s parents were very open to visiting friends, even accepting the fact that he spoke to numerous girls of varying faiths. Safa’s mother also was open and accepting of co-ed events, allowing her children to attend prom. Saniya’s little cousins are a prime example of how early awareness of religious and cultural differences can take place. She explains:

“Once I remember that I sneezed and nobody said anything so I was like ‘Oh, God bless you Saniya’ just joking around and my little cousin Maisa said ‘No, it’s Alhamdulillah’ and…my oldest cousin, who is like 9 now, said ‘Maisa, Saniya can say whatever she wants, some people say ‘God bless you’ and some people say ‘Alhamdulillah’ and I thought it was so sweet that she said that and she can recognize the difference and gage how that would make some people feel”

In this way, Muslim parents and families were not completely close-minded about American culture but were adapting as well.

Although it is commonly assumed that South Asians and Muslims

are viewed as dangerous others, the results from these interviews suggest that the cultural and religious backgrounds of both female and male Muslims give them a certain exoticism. Even though Saniya often felt like an outsider while she attended Catholic elementary school, coming to campus helped her outsider status developed into an exotic attribute. Attending events at the cultural houses or even going to a random apartment party, she found that looks denoted a degree of mystery. Sahib also felt like he was looked at as exotic even though he was born in the U.S. He adds that, “very seriously, mostly Jewish girls come up to me, it’s like I’m forbidden fruit or something.” Curiously, the sex appeal associated with being “brown” was only recently brought to Mustafa’s attention, claiming that he hasn’t experienced much of this first-hand.

The general conclusion from my study is that the experience of Muslim females cannot be generalized but must be understood through the unique context and history that surrounds that individual. Saniya, for example, was not a practicing Muslim and her father, who married an English woman, was not actively adherent to Islam either. Safa’s mother had spent the majority of her life in the U.S. and, therefore, was probably more lenient about American customs than most Muslim mothers. Sahib was a practicing Sufi Muslim making his experiences and thoughts distinctive from those of his fellow Muslim students. Muslim women and Muslims as a whole cannot be clumped together. It is through generalizing their beliefs, ideas and experiences that the majority of stereotypes and misconceptions are formed. As in other religions, each follower of Islam has his or her own form of adherence. Their interpretations of the Quran, their opinions about Islamic law and their views on South Asian culture are as vast as one would expect of one of the fastest growing religions in the U.S.