

## **Gender Separation: Ideology against Practice**

The dichotomy between theory and practice shows its face in all aspects of humanity—from science to belief systems. This fact is quite apparent in any study of Islam and Muslims. Muslims oftentimes fail to live up to the standards set by the prophet Muhammad as demonstrated in the Qur'an and hadith corpus; Islam is the theory and Muslims are the practice. Perhaps the most apparent example of Muslims failing to live up to Islamic tradition is gender separation between Muslim men and women, Muslim men and non-Muslim women, and Muslim women and non-Muslim men. In traditional views and interpretations through the Sunni school of thought the rules regarding gender separation are fairly strict and may even vary from madhab (school of thought) to madhab. However, with the basic regulations, the major madhabs of Sunni thought are in agreement with one another.

As applied to interactions between men and women in general, it is narrated in Malik's Muwatta that, "It is disapproved of for a woman to be alone with a man when there is no relationship between them by blood, marriage or suckling that would prevent him marrying her"<sup>1</sup>. The first rule the researcher can derive from this hadith, graded authentic, is that a man and woman outside the specific bonds of direct relation such as brother/sister, mother/father, son/daughter, etc. and a few other cases, may not be left alone with one another. If they are mahram (of the aforementioned bonds) it is no problem, but strangers, for example, may not be left alone together. Surat an-Nur, verses thirty and thirty-one states "And tell believing men [and women] to lower their gaze, away from what is not lawful for them to look at"<sup>2</sup>. Interpretation of the meaning says, "meaning, from that which Allah has forbidden them to look at, apart from their husbands. [Some]

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<sup>1</sup> Malik's Muwatta Book 49, Section 10, Hadith 35

<sup>2</sup> The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an 24:30-31, pp. 873

scholars said that it is permissible for women to look at non-Mahram men without desire, as it was recorded in the Sahih that the Messenger of Allah was watching the Ethiopians playing with spears in the Masjid on the day of `Id, and `A'ishah the Mother of the believers was watching them from behind him and he was concealing her from them, until she got bored and went away”<sup>3</sup>. Women are not required to lower their gaze, but only on the condition they do not look on with lustful intent. Additionally, there is precedent for the woman interacting with men: “When Abu Usaid As-Sa’idi got married, he invited the Prophet and his companions. None prepared the food for them and brought it to them but his wife. She soaked some dates in water in a stone pot overnight, and when the Prophet had finished his food, she provided him with that drink (of soaked dates)”<sup>4</sup>. This shows women did interact with men, but not alone. Finally, men (and women) are not allowed to touch one another if they do not have a mahram relationship: “It was narrated that Ma’qil ibn Yassar said: the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: “For one of you to be stabbed in the head with an iron needle is better for him than that he should touch a woman who is not permissible for him”<sup>5</sup>. The rules regarding gender separation is not as strict as the modern practices such as in Taliban controlled Afghanistan or most parts of Saudi Arabia. Listed below are the rules established based on sahih (strong) hadith and Qur’an previously mentioned:

1. Non-Mahram men and women cannot be left alone together
2. Men are not to look at women; they are to lower their gaze
3. A woman may look at men, but only if she can guarantee only pure intentions

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<sup>3</sup> Tafsir Ibn Kathir— An-Nur: The Rulings of Hijab, pp. 68

<sup>4</sup> Sahih al-Bukhari volume 7, book 62, hadith 111, pp. 79

<sup>5</sup> Saheeh al-Jaami’ 5045

4. Women are not segregated, but expected to be modest and guard their chastity; men are equally responsible for guarding their own chastity.

5. Men and women may not touch one another if they are outside the mahram relationship

The rules are in place to prevent zina (fornication). The Qur'an states "And do not approach unlawful sexual intercourse. Indeed, it is ever an immorality and is evil as a way"<sup>6</sup>. Clearly Islamic belief regards zina as reprehensible and uses the preceding rules to regulate gender interactions in order to minimize this risk of fornication and adultery.

As this project is not a discussion of Islamic beliefs, but rather a comparison between the theory and practice: to what extent Muslims practice the ideals of their religion. Specifically the research seeks to analyze the dichotomy, if applicable, between Islamic theory and Muslim practice on the University of Illinois Campus. Through the use of ethnographies conducted solely through personal interviews, the researcher seeks to determine to what extent the Islamic rules of gender interaction are observed by Muslims on this campus. Additionally, the researcher seeks to draw out the implications from these interviews. How do Muslim men and women act toward one another as opposed to the opposite gender? Why does this occur? What does this say about Muslims? The Institutional Review Board (IRB) sanctioned interviews through the Ethnography of the University Initiative (EUI) seek to answer these questions.

The interviews were fairly straightforward. The researcher identified several research subjects, both Muslim and non-Muslim, in an attempt to understand Muslims and how they relate to one another and to non-Muslims. The researcher picked Muslims for obvious reasons: the focus of the research is the analysis of relationships amongst Muslims. Non-Muslims were selected based on their acquaintance with Muslims, as the reader will learn from the data, because it is likely if they treat non-Muslims differently they will be hesitant to relate this to the Muslim

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<sup>6</sup> The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an 17:32, pp. 682

researcher. By interviewing non-Muslims the researcher seeks to determine how they feel they are treated by Muslims through their eyes, bypassing the filters that may be imposed on the answers by Muslims. The researcher interviewed a total of eight subjects: five Muslims and three non-Muslims. The Muslims varied in religious observance to a great extent; some were quite religiously observant while others were not as observant and this is reflected in their answers. The non-Muslims provided insight on the Muslims they deal with because of their interactions. Two sets of questions were asked: one set to Muslims, and one set to non-Muslims. Obviously because of different life experiences and upbringings the questions asked to each respective party had to be different. Though these questions existed, they are more of a guideline; other questions arose as a result of the dynamic, unique interactions with each individual. Each individual prompted different questions that stemmed from the core questions below.

Questions asked to Muslims:

1. How often do you interact with the opposite gender in a professional setting (work, school, etc)? Why?
2. If someone of the opposite gender offers his or her hand for a handshake or a high-five would you take it? Why?
3. What is an average conversation with a non-Muslim or the opposite gender? A Muslim? What are the contexts of these conversations?
4. Do you have any close friends of the opposite gender? What makes them a close friend?
5. What are your parents' thoughts on gender interaction? Why?
6. Would you ever marry a non-Muslim? Why or why not?

Questions asked to non-Muslims:

1. How often do you interact with Muslims? Why?

2. Are you in any way intimidated to approach a Muslim? Why?
3. What is an average conversation with a Muslim? What is the context?
4. Do you approach people of the opposite gender? Is it easy to approach a Muslim of the opposite gender?
5. What is an average conversation with the opposite gender? A Muslim of the opposite gender? Why? What is the context?
6. What are the Islamic rules regarding gender interaction?
7. Would you ever marry a Muslim?

Some of the questions asked exclusively to Muslims did overlap and were asked to non-Muslims and vice versa. An example of which is “what are the Islamic rules regarding gender interaction?” Some difficulties arose during research and affected the answers the subjects related.

Throughout the research process there were several difficulties that posed problems. For example the researcher is relatively well known among the Muslim community of Champaign-Urbana and the Muslim Student Association as a relatively conservative and practicing Muslim. As such those research subjects related to or affiliated with these organizations appeared biased and hesitant to release information to the researcher initially. Those who were not affiliated with those groups were also hesitant to interact because of the physical appearance of the researcher; he looks “Muslim.” Of South Asian descent, he has a relatively noticeable, untrimmed beard characteristic of some conservative groups. The researcher has no doubt his questions were not entirely answered fully and truthfully. The non-Muslims seemed to be much more forthcoming and open as compared to the Muslims. The likely reason is the subjects did not want to be judged by the researcher. Because of this, interviewing non-Muslims is essential because it gave insights into Muslim life that could not have been gleaned from interviews with Muslims.

Additional complications came about with the diversity of the interviewees. There was one Muslim male of South Asian descent who grew up in Fiji, two Muslim women of Egyptian descent, one Muslim man of mixed Egyptian and British descent, and one male Malaysian born Muslim. This group could have been more diverse rather than mostly South Asian and Egyptian. It would have been beneficial to interview a convert to Islam and some African or African-American Muslims or Muslims from more diverse backgrounds. One of the Egyptians moved here when she was very young, and the Malaysian student is on exchange here so the representation is fairly ideal in this regard. The non-Muslims are more diverse relative to their numbers. One is a male Bulgarian immigrant who follows Eastern Orthodox Christianity; another is an American-born male who does not identify with any religious group; and a mixed American-Lebanese Mormon female. Ideally it would be best to have more faiths represented as these are relatively outlier faiths as compared to the United States and the campus as a whole. Overall there are deficiencies in demographics, but these are people the researcher was able to find easily: they are at the forefront of organizations such as the Muslim Student Association and Students for Justice in Palestine, and one is majoring in Middle Eastern Studies, groups representative of many Muslims on this campus.

The first subject will be referred to as "Tabrez." He is the South Asian and Tabrez most definitely falls on the conservative end of the spectrum. He does not frequently interact with non-mahrams at all. His exposure to women is severely limited mostly due to his major or aviation; there are few women instructors and students and friendships between him and women, Muslim and non-Muslim alike, are non-existent. He adheres to a strict interpretation of gender separation in that he does not at all attempt to socialize with women other than his own mother. He cites religious reasons for these self imposed restrictions. Because these socializations are limited he

would never run into an opportunity to shake a woman's hand if it was offered to him. Should this situation even arise he would politely refuse and cite religious reasons. He does interact with non-Muslims a great deal as he is the only Muslim he knows about in his major. He is often pressured to engage in acts forbidden to mainstream Sunni Muslims such as drinking and fornication because these are the habits of his fellow pilots in training. He avoids this at all costs, though, based on the vagueness on this topic it can be reasonably inferred he has at least spent time in a bar-like setting in the past; he has been tempted. If so the researcher doubts he spent a great deal of time there, likely leaving after a couple of hours. What leads one to this conclusion is his statement that "[he] was not as adherent as his is now." He has become stricter because he realizes the wrongdoing that can occur from these situations another point guiding the researcher to the assumption he at one time engaged in such activity. His parents, specifically his mother, do not really care about Tabrez interacting with women, though she asks he do it in a public setting. His self imposed restrictions let the researcher know he truly cares about his religion and wants to adhere to it as strictly as possible. The reason for this is the possibility of some past experience that jarred him into being more observant. If he "absolutely had to" speak to a woman, he would lower his gaze and be as brief as possible. He says he is only allowed to speak to women in a very controlled, public environment. "Ideally," he says, "I should be speaking to her behind a screen," citing Surah thirty-three, verse fifty-three. This verse is actually, according to all translations the researcher referenced, referring to Prophet Muhammad's wives only. It is possible he is trying to find scriptural evidence to support his conservatism, likely to escape that past incident or incidents.

The next subject will be referred to as "Deena." Deena is the Egyptian-American who grew up in America. She falls on the moderate to conservative side of the spectrum. Deena interacts with the opposite gender several times a day; many of those times are socially with

Muslims both of the same and opposite genders. She is hesitant of physical contact with the opposite gender; if a hand is offered to her from a non-Muslim she is more likely to take it than a Muslim because she, in her family's real estate business, has to do this all the time. She typically will not interact deeply on a social level with the opposite gender as it is "weird to her." Her conversations with people in general are largely reserved as she is a shy person by nature. She does feel she is more awkward around Muslims as opposed to non-Muslims. She does have two close friends that are the opposite gender, though the rest of Deena's close friends are women. Typically the average Muslim male of her age, twenty, she says is "an idiot, incapable of deep conversations. Something [she] needs for a close friendship." Often she will close off to certain people, even if they are friendly. She feels this initial pleasantness is false and forced which makes her close off. The researcher suspects she has had some issues with people in the past causing her to close off to people in general, likely with a Muslim male based on her comments about them. Her mother disapproves of her friendships, though she tolerates it given the potential for marriage. Her mother is suspicious as she believes men always want something, even if it is marriage. Deena understands her mother's view, however. Her mother refuses to allow her to spend time with any men unless her brothers are around, though she is fine with Deena interacting with men at school unsupervised. She clearly loves and respects her mother, which seems to be the main reason she does not interact with men.

The next subject is the Malaysian male on exchange. For this purpose, he shall be referred to as Hussam. He is a bit more liberal than most, but still is guarded. He interacts with women on a daily basis in a professional setting, but they are rarely Muslim. Non-professionally he interacts with Muslim women about four times a week and most of his female friends are in fact Muslim. If a woman offers her hand for a handshake he will likely take it, Muslim and non-Muslim alike. He



just wants to be accommodating to American norms so as not to stick out. However this is not to say he acts completely differently around Americans as opposed to how he acts around Malaysians. His family comes from a mixed religious background; he has family married to Christians, indigenous believers, etc. Because he comes from this mixed background he is accustomed to social practices foreign to traditional Islamic practice. As such he does not see anything inherently wrong with touching a woman. Because of his family's background and his life experiences he does not treat Muslim women and non-Muslim women any differently. For Hussam's particular case it is difficult to verify this because he does not spend time with non-Muslim women outside of class. This does say something, however. He, likely because he is a transfer student who only knows Malaysian Muslims, only spends time socially with Muslim women. Even then his interactions are guarded; he does not have any close female friends. In general he feels guarded with Muslims, much like how Deena feels. The only ones he truly feels comfortable with are Malaysians because of his experiences being in a land that is not truly his home. With the Malaysians he has more in common, so he tends to stick with them, but he is guarded and not particularly close with the Malaysian Muslim women. Conversations with them are brief and to the point in general. It does not seem he treats Muslim women differently from how he treats non-Muslim women. In general he is guarded toward women and does not divulge a great deal of himself to them. His care for religion is likely the reason for this.

Suleiman is the next subject. He is a half British half Egyptian male. His mother is a convert and his father is quite religious; his grandfather was a scholar in Egypt, so he actually came from a relatively religious background. However he himself is quite liberal. He works at a bar, something prohibited in Islam, but he did say he does not like it so there is likely some guilt associated with the job. It is possible it is an economic necessity. Based on his responses it seems

he is likely to approach a woman he does not know only if they are non-Muslim. He is guarded with Muslim women; he does not know how comfortable they would be with him approaching them especially if they wear a head scarf. One thing he mentioned when I asked him what a typical conversation with a non-Muslim woman is like versus with a Muslim woman was interesting to note: he said he may talk with a Muslim woman he knows about a resume or small talk—very brief—but with a non-Muslim woman he is more likely to speak about different things, such as movies or life—a different range of topics that are geared toward establishing a relationship, friendship and otherwise. He treats Muslim women differently from non-Muslims. He thinks this is because he is young, born in America, and a product of his environment, that being the United States. The biggest influence seems to be his mother whom he sees as being very open and nonchalant about his interaction with women as opposed to his father who is more restrictive. His father likely was not around as much as his mother, as in many families. This influence the mother has is instrumental in how one acts socially.

The final Muslim I interviewed will be referred to as “Fatimah.” She interacts with the opposite gender daily, though she did not always. When she was younger she avoided all contact with the opposite gender. This was self imposed to a certain extent. Though her father is all for any sort of friendship in the interests of Fatimah’s mental health, her mother is “bipolar” according to Fatimah. Her mother changes her mind on the issue quite frequently but Fatimah feels this is because her mother just wants what is best for her daughter. Often times this oscillates between liberal and conservative because of the confliction between her mother’s concern for her mental health and concern for her propriety. Most importantly Fatimah’s mother does not want people talking about her behind her back. When she speaks to Muslims Fatimah is guarded, she says. Speaking with non-Muslims is much easier for her as they are not as “judgmental.” She feels she

can be more open with non-Muslims and she stays away from Muslims who oftentimes judge her. She has had negative experiences with Arabs from Chicago—these Arabs essentially judged her and made life difficult for her. In general, though Muslim, she stays away from Muslims except the few she really trusts, which are few relative to the close non-Muslims. She wants to marry a Muslim man, but she is mostly disgusted by them. She finds them immature and “shady.” Muslim men are immature and she feels they only talk to non-Muslim women because they have the potential to “get some action” from them, which is something a Muslim woman would be less likely to do. Clearly her life experiences have made her who she is.

The data garnered from non-Muslims will be condensed into the following paragraph. In general the non-Muslims interviewed felt Muslims tend to keep to themselves and are not particularly inclusive when it comes to non-Muslims. One interviewee, “John,” felt that a Muslim woman, even if they were acquaintances, would not ever be close because Muslim women keep their distance emotionally and physically, regardless of how conservative or liberal they tend to be. Muslim women in general do not interact often with non-Muslim men on anything more than a superficial level. “Elise” felt the distance between herself and her male Muslim friends; being half Lebanese, though Mormon, she knew many Muslims, but never grew close to them in any way. She feels she can form better friendships with men in general, but there seems to be a wall between Muslim men and her. The final non-Muslim had a different perspective of Muslims. He finds no barriers between himself and them as he lives with one and has gotten to know two others through the architecture program as they end up spending a lot of time with each other. Several conclusions can be reached from this: Muslim men are not actually as open to non-Muslim women as Muslim women think, Muslim women generally are closed off socially to non-Muslim men, yet being Muslim or non-Muslim does not preclude one from forming close bonds to a Muslim.

Perceptions of Muslims by one another tend to be mistrustful and suspicious ones. In general, especially among the women, they are afraid people will judge them if they speak to a non-Muslim male or a Muslim male for that matter. This statement is derived from Fatemah and Deena's interviews. Muslims tend to be closed off to one another; though there are constant reminders at mosques worldwide every Friday to be closer to fellow Muslims, this plea goes unnoticed in everyday life; Muslims are suspicious of one another. As a result, they tend to be more open to non-Muslims about things, as evidenced by Fatemah and Suleiman. However, it seems Muslims are even guarded to non-Muslims as well. As evidenced by John's statements, he knows a Muslim woman would never become involved romantically with him because of the attachment they have to their people. It seems Muslims hate each other but at the same time have a loyalty to their own people.

Perhaps the most influential thing in a person's environment is his or her mother. Suleiman, Deena, Fatemah, and Tabrez all mentioned how their mother affects their worldview. The mother has much control and it instrumental in instilling the values people base judgments and actions on well after they have left the house. Though Deena still lives at home, she has much autonomy as she attends the university.

Additionally past experiences dictate how one will act. Nowhere is this more apparent than Tabrez. He has most likely has some past experiences that have influenced his conservativeness. Additionally this applies to Hussam as well; the interactions he has had with his family dictate how he acts today. This is true for Fatemah, Suleiman, and Deena as well. Each of the Muslims polled had some moments that stuck out in their minds that have influenced their interaction with the opposite gender.

Muslim men tend not to speak to Muslim women on a close and personal level. As shown by Suleiman some seem to be closer to non-Muslim women. This likely is because of environmental factors such as upbringing. Hussam came from a multi-religious background and as such has incorporated these relatively accepting and open views into his worldview. He is fine with shaking a woman's hand if she offers it but also knows not to just do it outright; he takes hints and treats people accordingly. Muslim men do not often approach Muslim women not just out of fear of judgment, but also out of respect for them and their limits as shown by Hussam. All of the Muslim men to one extent or another mentioned how they would not approach, speak to, or shake the hand of a Muslim woman unless she offered first. This shows they are fine with speaking to them, with the exception of Tabrez, and interacting with them, but it is essential they receive consent first. Muslim women have an unfavorable view of Muslim men for this reason; Fatemah views them as "shady," implying an unknown factor. She does not realize Muslim men not approaching Muslim women is not totally out of fear or disdain but often out of respect. The Muslim women never expressed hesitance in speaking to someone. The only issue is how close and open they wish to be with someone. If Muslim men knew Muslim women are open to conversation, the community would benefit. However, many of the respondents would disagree with this as there are societal pressures to keep very strict gender separation. Additionally most of them care not to get too close because of Islamic rules. To a certain extent these rules and judgments are self imposed, and relationships between Muslims seem to suffer from them.

Many of the conclusions derived from the study of Muslims around the UIUC campus can be attributed to students in general. The major factor is family, especially the mother. The other major factor is the air of judgment, unique to Muslims and characteristic of their society; this is the most significant finding from these results. In a way this judgment is used to keep those practicing

Muslims from making poor decisions relative to Islamic ideology. Overall Muslim society is very tight knit, which is why Muslims care so much about what others do and how they act. Because the main point of any gender separation and rules governing gender interaction is preservation of chastity of those unmarried and prevention of adultery for those married, strict gender separation as observed by Tabrez does accomplish this goal but it adds to the rules dictated by Qur'an and hadith—it is innovation in the religion, bid'ah. The rules mentioned at the beginning of the paper are violated in most every case; many of them have spent time alone with the opposite gender, both look at one another, and do not fit the traditional definitions of “modest,” mostly through clothing. The reason for these violations is because of the environment: living and, in most cases, being brought up in the United States. The environment is everything.

Bearing in mind the various factors—environment the most basic categorization of all the factors—one can deduce that Muslims on the UIUC campus are subject to their environment. The community is tight knit as a result of internal environmental pressures, such as peer pressure, that are used to protect the Muslim community. Muslim men should not be afraid to greet a Muslim woman as long as their intentions are pure. However, all parties must be willing to be less judgmental of one another. Until that day the judgmental factors are eased through proliferation of knowledge about the original Islamic guidelines, the Muslim community of UIUC will continue to feel burdened by the crushing air of guilt and suffer accordingly.

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### **Appendix: Interviews**

#### **Tabrez**

How often do you interact with the opposite gender in a professional setting (work, school, etc)? Why?

*Not frequently; I don't have to because of my major of Aviation where there are mostly men. If I did I would have to be behind a screen.*

If someone of the opposite gender offers his or her hand for a handshake or a high-five would you take it? Why?

*Absolutely not-Islam forbids it.*

What is an average conversation with a non-Muslim or the opposite gender? A Muslim? What are the contexts of these conversations?

*Never have these conversations because of Islam for Muslims and non-Muslims.*

Do you have any close friends of the opposite gender? What makes them a close friend?

*No friends of the opposite gender at all.*

What are your parents' thoughts on gender interaction? Why?

*My mother does not really care that much, but I do. She trusts me, but I would have to be in a public setting. I was not as adherent, but I realized that it is a bad thing because of the emotions that are aroused at a result of natural desire.*

Would you ever marry a non-Muslim? Why or why not?

*Probably not, but I would not rule it out.*

## **Deena**

How often do you interact with the opposite gender in a professional setting (work, school, etc)? Why?

*Pretty often, all the time because of work. It is pretty rare I socialize with the opposite gender.*

If someone of the opposite gender offers his or her hand for a handshake or a high-five would you take it? Why?



*Probably not if they are Muslim, but I would a non-Muslim because my family's real estate business forces me to.*

What is an average conversation with a non-Muslim or the opposite gender? A Muslim?

What are the contexts of these conversations?

*The conversations are usually about business.*

Do you have any close friends of the opposite gender? What makes them a close friend?

*Only two, one Muslim, one non-Muslim. They are close because they are not awkward like Muslims guys are. I'm usually reserved but if someone has commonalities I am interested enough to have a friendship with them. Muslim guys are idiots I can't relate to and I need deep conversation for a good friendship. Muslim guys tend to ignore girls out of fear of judgment. A Muslim girl more or less treats everyone normally.*

What are your parents' thoughts on gender interaction? Why?

*Mother is not really comfortable, but she tolerates it because she sees potential for marriage.*

Would you ever marry a non-Muslim? Why or why not?

*No my religion forbids it.*

## **Hussam**

How often do you interact with the opposite gender in a professional setting (work, school, etc)? Why?

*Daily, during school. In a non-professional setting they maybe four times a week. Most of the time social visits are with Muslims while professional ones are with non-Muslims.*

If someone of the opposite gender offers his or her hand for a handshake or a high-five would you take it? Why?

*Yes because it would be rude not to because we need to be accommodating to Americans, but this only applies to non-Muslims. If she is Muslim I would take cues from her first.*

What is an average conversation with a non-Muslim or the opposite gender? A Muslim? What are the contexts of these conversations?

*School and group work for non-Muslims in person. One the phones with Muslims—usually talking about inane things.*

Do you have any close friends of the opposite gender? What makes them a close friend?

*Mostly Malaysians, but I am guarded with the opposite gender because of my Islamic beliefs.*

*They are close because they are Malaysians and we share a common background.*

What are your parents' thoughts on gender interaction? Why?

*Parents are more conservative but coming from a mixed religious background they are relatively more open than would be expected.*

Would you ever marry a non-Muslim? Why or why not?

*It is a real possibility given the mixed religious background I come from. More likely a Christian or Jew as opposed to pagan.*

### **Suleiman**

How often do you interact with the opposite gender in a professional setting (work, school, etc)? Why?

*Daily, but I never see Muslims because I work in a bar. Socially I really do not spend time with Muslims.*

If someone of the opposite gender offers his or her hand for a handshake or a high-five would you take it? Why?

*I would take the hand. It's wrong not to. There's really no difference to me if they are Muslim or not. If they offer a hand there is not reason not to.*

What is an average conversation with a non-Muslim or the opposite gender? A Muslim? What are the contexts of these conversations?

*With a non-Muslim I would probably talk about movies, television, life, etc. It would be at the gym probably. A Muslim I would ask for advice on a resume or something like that. My Muslim friends are at home.*

Do you have any close friends of the opposite gender? What makes them a close friend?

*My best friends are guys, so no.*

What are your parents' thoughts on gender interaction? Why?

*My mom is open, but my dad is conservative. He would never want me alone with someone of the opposite gender. My grandfather is a sheikh, so that's why my dad is conservative.*

Would you ever marry a non-Muslim? Why or why not?

*It's possible. Religion is not the deciding factor, just an aspect. They need to be a good person overall and religion is not the end all be all.*

### **Fatemah**

How often do you interact with the opposite gender in a professional setting (work, school, etc)? Why?

*Daily, a couple times a day.*

If someone of the opposite gender offers his or her hand for a handshake or a high-five would you take it? Why?

*Absolutely; it would be rude not to. Desis are more conservative, so no. Arabs and Egyptians probably. It's very cultural.*

What is an average conversation with a non-Muslim or the opposite gender? A Muslim? What are the contexts of these conversations?

*Jokes, easy conversation. I avoid anything too deep so I'm not judged. I talk to non-Muslims more because I won't have that problem. I have had some problems with Arabs in Chicago when I lived there.*

Do you have any close friends of the opposite gender? What makes them a close friend?

*I did; he was going through some stuff so I helped him. He was non-Muslim.*

What are your parents' thoughts on gender interaction? Why?

*My mom is bipolar, but she has my best interests at heart. Sometimes she cares, other times she does not. My dad just wants me to be happy.*

Would you ever marry a non-Muslim? Why or why not?

*No. I would need a Muslim, but I'm not there yet. In terms of socialization I don't think there are really boundaries, just don't sleep with 'em.*

## **John**

How often do you interact with Muslims? Why?

*Almost every day; I am in Arabic and the teacher is Muslim along with fellow students.*

Are you in any way intimidated to approach a Muslim? Why?

*Not really. I interact with Muslims all the time as a result of being in SJP and when I was in Jordan. I was in small villages in Jordan, so I knew not to outright approach a woman, but I in fact don't really see a problem with approaching a Muslim woman if she seems comfortable with it. I am a naturally shy person so I would not.*

What is an average conversation with a Muslim? What is the context?

*Usually business, but sometimes social. I'm not that sociable so I wouldn't really diverge from SJP or Arabic related things.*

Do you approach people of the opposite gender? Is it easy to approach a Muslim of the opposite gender?

*Not me personally, but I don't see a problem. With Muslims I know to take cues.*

What is an average conversation with the opposite gender? A Muslim of the opposite gender?

Why? What is the context?

*Business.*

What are the Islamic rules regarding gender interaction?

*Officially I do not really know, but based on my observations there is not set standard.*

Would you ever marry a Muslim?

*I wouldn't oppose it, but I know they wouldn't want to. They stick to Muslim guys, so they would never go for me.*

## **Kurt**

How often do you interact with Muslims? Why?

*Daily, I live with one and I have two good friends who are with me in the architecture program.*

Are you in any way intimidated to approach a Muslim? Why?

*Some—I knew one who was weird and intimidating. It did not really register that he was Muslim, I just thought he was weird. I don't care if they're Muslim. I'm cautious with covered Muslim women, but out of respect because I don't know what their limits are.*

What is an average conversation with a Muslim? What is the context?

*Architecture stuff, everyday things, it depends on who I'm talking to. At home or at architecture building.*

Do you approach people of the opposite gender? Is it easy to approach a Muslim of the opposite gender?

*No I have no problems talking to girls.*

What is an average conversation with the opposite gender? A Muslim of the opposite gender? Why? What is the context?

*It depends. One of my Muslim friends is liberal and has a boyfriend so I'll talk about parties and stuff. It usually happens at [architecture] studio so architecture stuff.*

What are the Islamic rules regarding gender interaction?

*I don't know; I don't have any hardcore religious friends, so I have not real idea.*

Would you ever marry a Muslim?

*Yeah, but she needs to be a good person, because that's the most important part.*

### **Elise**

How often do you interact with Muslims? Why?

*About four days a week, usually just in Arabic class.*

Are you in any way intimidated to approach a Muslim? Why?

*No not really. I may be hesitant, but it's just because I don't know them.*

What is an average conversation with a Muslim? What is the context?

*Arabic stuff in class.*

Do you approach people of the opposite gender? Is it easy to approach a Muslim of the opposite gender?

*Yeah, but my closest friends are my sisters. I think a woman can be closer to a guy, but that hasn't really happened for me yet. I think it's easier to form a long term relationship with a guy because they're more chill.*

What is an average conversation with the opposite gender? A Muslim of the opposite gender?

Why? What is the context?

*Life stuff. Maybe over the phone or hanging out. I don't really have male Muslim friends, so we don't talk about much other than Arabic stuff or stuff from my religious studies class.*

What are the Islamic rules regarding gender interaction?

*Guys have to lower their gaze and can't really talk to women, Muslim or non-Muslim at all. I tend to be more open with Muslim women than men just because they all seem more conservative.*

Would you ever marry a Muslim?

*Yeah, but he has to be a good person; that's the most important thing. Religion is not a dealbreaker.*