I interviewed people and got their opinions regarding alcohol and premarital sex. I did an observation on what a typical weekend night is like.

**Question:** What are the differences in the way Muslim students live on college and most non-Muslims?

**Plan:**

**Data:** Each person’s culture greatly affects the way each person lives his or her life. There are many cultures that affect each person but to most people the most important to me is religion. That is because many people, especially religious minorities, understand the value of retaining their religion. Religion is important to most because many believe that religion is something that transcends all the material things in this world. Once your life is over, how much money you made or your social status will not matter. You will lose all your worldly things and religion is the thing that most people believe will be the only thing left. The differences in religion and my beliefs cause us to have different viewpoints on everyday activity that may seem strange to outsiders.

Our culture here is much different than the traditional college student. When a party is thrown, it is without alcohol or other drugs. When we hang out it is without the presence of the other gender. Every Friday night instead of going out and partying, The Muslim Student Association (MSA), reserves the Kenney
Gym for basketball. Two factors of my religion are prominent in context of being an American. First of all it is strictly forbidden to be in contact with alcohol. The Quran explicitly states that one should not drink, sell, transport, nor be in a situation where alcohol is provided. The reason is because alcohol causes one to lose their inhibitions. When one loses their inhibitions, they lose their control and temper and sudden desires can control you. Unfortunately for me alcohol is prominent in not just the university life, but many branches of society. When people go out to eat, celebrate, and just hang out, alcohol is very much involved. Since I am not able to be present at these occasions, it creates a unique situation with many of my friends. All my non-Muslim friends, many of which I have known since elementary schools, have grown up and have become accustomed to have alcohol anytime they get together. This means I can only be around them during class or early in the evening. I usually cannot be around them in the night anymore. This causes a gradual rift that cannot be fixed because of the different outlooks on alcohol. I knew before coming to college that many of my friends would be submersed in this culture and I knew that I would have to separate myself from them. It did not come into full view when one Friday night around 2A.M., I received a text message from a friend who said explicit things he would not send if he were sober. This event marked the moment when I knew that my relationship with all my non-Muslim friends had changed. I realized that my friendship with this person would only occur in the daytime. It would even be hard for me to celebrate his birthday with him.
As a member of the MSA, it benefits me greatly because it creates opportunities for me to socialize that is in a safe environment where certain things can be avoided. The mosque on campus is on Lincoln Avenue in between University Avenue and Green Street. The Mosque is called Central Illinois Mosque and Islamic Center (CIMIC). The Mosque not only acts as a place to pray but as a community center and hub where people come to meet each other and hold events. Whenever a community dinner, potluck, or a guest speaker arrives, they come to CIMIC. CIMIC also holds MSA sponsored barbecues and activities. In the MSA introductory pamphlet handed out on quad day earlier this fall, there was a whole section dedicated to discussing CIMIC, its history, and the continued role as a community center. They hold activities not just for students but for everyone else as well. They have weekend religious school that teaches the Muslim Religion, history, Arabic, and Quranic reading lessons. They even have a ping-pong table, a foosball table, and a wrestling mat that is used for karate lessons for the youth. Every weekend there is MSA sponsored basketball games at Kenney gym; football or volleyball games open to everyone as an alternate from going out and partying. All these diversions are meant to be entertaining but most importantly to build a community and a sense of brotherhood and sisterhood. They also promote activities that will keep people out the vices that plague many college campuses.

In an observation I did in an apartment building this past weekend, the environment was completely different than what most people expect a weekend should be. It was a Saturday night, and college basketball was being watched.
There was lots of junk food ranging from pizza to chips and salsa. The apartment
was crowded and many were not even watching the game. Many were just talking
and joking around. The conversations ranged from small talk about classes, to
telling funny stories. There were multiple television sets, so some other people
were playing guitar hero. Besides the guitar hero music, there was also music
being played on the sound system. But two things were distinct. The only drinks
there were water, coca cola, and Sunkist. The girls were probably in some other
apartment room having a good time on their own. Everyone was enjoying the
company of each other without the all the things that other people consider
necessary at parties.

In a conversation I had with a friend a couple months ago, who I have
known since middle school, alcohol has just recently been involved in his life. We
each have completely different views about the morality of drinking alcohol.

**Me:** What does your Friday and Saturday nights usually consist off?

**Him:** Usually we go to a party or go to a bar.

**Me:** So do you see drinking as something that is morally permissible?

**Him:** Yeah, We do it in Church, so how could it be a problem?

**Me:** Do you agree that binge drinking is a huge problem and that it can lead to
many more complicated difficulties in life?
**Him:** Yeah, but if you’re able to control yourself and you know your limit, it shouldn’t be a problem.

**Me:** You know the countless people who think that they can control themselves and continue to drink and drive, rape, start violence and do other stupid activities?

**Him:** Yeah, it’s a problem but I don’t have them.

**Me:** So you’re saying that when you’re drunk, you have complete control of what you are doing and you can remember everything?

**Him:** Yeah, I have only gotten pass-out drunk once and since then I have found my limit and have never gone past it.

**Me:** Do you believe that if you drink only a little at a time, it is not a danger to your health?

**Him:** No, it gets filtered out of your body and released through your waste.

**Me:** And you don’t think it’s bad for your liver?

**Him:** No, it treats it as it would any other toxin.

**Me:** So why don’t you do other drugs like marijuana?

**Him:** That is much worse for your health.

**Me:** Why, because the government has made that illegal and alcohol not?
**Him:** No, because it stays in your body longer.

My opinion was that alcohol harms the body and mind and he disagreed. Other than harming the body it also promotes crime, violence, and drunk driving. I stated to him my views about loss of control, and he accepted. But he reasoned that loss of control only occurred past a certain point. He said that if one drinks moderately and never drinks past their limit then he is fine. He also stated that your liver was meant to deal with toxins and to dispose of them accordingly. He believes that small doses of alcohol will no harm your liver at all. I was astonished, we both had the same public health education, grew up in the same class, and we both had the same culture because he was Indian and I was Pakistani. He is Christian and although many Christians choose to abstain from alcohol, many drink freely. The only reason we had different viewpoints was because of the different viewpoints our religion has on alcohol. But he was incorrect in thinking that getting drunk is permissible in Christianity. After doing some research, I found that drinking was not a problem but getting drunk is. As evident by Ephesians 5:18, “Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.” This passage and several others like it do not tolerate getting drunk. Drinking lightly to an occasion is permissible but drinking to get drunk, unfortunately what most kids want to do is not allowed. The allowance of alcohol has many to believe that it does not harm one’s body when in reality it does. It is true that the liver treats alcohol as a toxin, but it still has a toll on it. Heavy drinking can lead to cirrhosis while moderate drinking will still harm
Many people who are not Muslim choose to abstain from drinking as well. Many choose to do it for religious, health, or social reasons. More and more fraternities and sororities are springing up that are non-alcoholic. I see this as progress and the mainstream introduction of abstinence. These fraternities are non-alcoholic because of the health and social risks they give. These club members live a completely normal life but just do not drink. After their change to abstinence, many said that they were doing much better in school than before, they were feeling more healthy and invigorated, and most of all, had a less guilty conscience. Most major religions if looked into deeply are against binge drinking and getting drunk. In a study on college students, the more students got involved in their religion by being more involved and going to Church, the Mosque, Synagogue, Temple, etc. were found to be doing better in school and being less involved with drugs, sex, and alcohol. Unfortunately most people are actually losing touch with Religion. In a study done by UCLA, more and more freshmen are saying that upon coming to college away from home, their values are changing and they are losing their religion. They found that fewer are going to Church on Sundays than when they were living with their parents. It also showed how the lack of presence of parents gives kids the feeling of complete power because there is nobody there to tell you to study, to go to bed earlier, to go to class, and to come home earlier at night. I agree with this completely. But besides institutionalized religion, student organizations are also giving a helping hand. Many turn to peers of all faiths to
give advice on morality rather than a set code. These discussions are very open because there is no one person dictating everything. Many feel that they miss out on the college experience if they stay at home. While it is true that living away from home is a completely new experience, it should only be done if the student can manage himself properly. The kids, who do stay at home during college, usually end up getting better grades. Many people who cannot wait for college to start because they want to get away from home and the rigid structure of home are doing so for the wrong reasons. They come here and immediately start things they would never do while living at home. An example of this would be the friend that was discussed earlier. On a separate occasion I was with him and I noticed a dark spot on the front of his t-shirt. I asked him if he had been exercising earlier because it looked like sweat. He embarrassingly admitted that it was a stain from vomit from when he was drunk the first weekend he got on campus. This was days after the interview, so then it clicked that this is how he found his limit, through extreme activities the moment he got here.

Another aspect of my religion that is different from others is dating and sexuality. In my religion pre-marital sexual contact is forbidden. This encompasses sex, kissing, and dating. Because of this most friendships are made of the same gender and flirtation is kept to a minimum. This is something that many people also consider extremely odd. I had an interview with a Muslim friend of mine, and this is what he had to say.
Me: What are your viewpoints on pre-marital sexual relationships?

Him: I feel that they should not occur because they taint marriage. People should be monogamous because the respect for one another is greater. A lot of people always wanna know how many partners their girlfriend or boyfriend has had. If the expected respectful answer is the lowest possible, doesn’t it make sense to have none?

Me: So you’re saying that it ruins the marriage afterwards?

Him: Yeah, although divorce happens among Muslim couples, the average American rate is much higher. Isn’t it like forty percent get divorced?

Me: Do you sometimes feel left out of the dating scene?

Him: Yeah sometimes, but it’s worth it in the end.

For the reasons that he stated it is better to not have sexual relationships. In this way we are outsiders. Dating is something almost everyone does except for extremely traditional people. To many, we represent the old way of life, like the Puritans who were also very conservative. In fact, most non Westerners are very conservative when it comes to this issue. Dating does occur but it is not as volatile as it is in American culture. They take their relationships seriously and not something that they know will probably end in the next month or so. My friends reasoning that dating and pre-marital sex taints marriage is very true. Divorce rates are higher now than ever and do not look to be decreasing anytime soon. Many
celebrity couples and other wealthy people are focusing more on their prenuptial agreement than the actual ceremony. Although divorce is permitted in Islam, it should always be done as a last choice. Couples should always try to save their marriage whether through counseling or other solutions.

In terms of alcohol and premarital sexual relations, I feel parents could do a better job. They seem to have a pseudo “Don’t ask don’t tell” policy. They know their children are not saints and they have a suspicion of what they do because they are not around. But for some reason, they do not question it. Many parents know firsthand because they themselves were in fraternities but they either turn a blind eye, or accept it as a period in life that they will eventually grow out of. While most kids do eventually binge drink much less once done with college, many do not.

Every culture or religion has its own quirks. While some quirks make bigger headlines and get more scrutiny due to recent history, I think that these social differences are important as well. These social differences and cultural norms are sometimes the biggest hindrance to getting along. When people understand each other they coexist much more easily. All my non-Muslim friends know the restrictions that I have and they do their best to adapt to my needs. My older relatives used to always tell me how awkward it would be when after work, they would be invited to get a drink and they would kindly refuse. As kids I could not imagine this because all my friends were of my age. As I am getting older, I am realizing that I will have to be able to make that same kind refusal.