

https://dspace.org/

Muslim women's perceptions of gender dynamics in Islam.

Mansoor, Sumayya

2010-03-08T07:31:20Z
http://hdl.handle.net/10539/7637

Downloaded from a DSpace repository. https://dspace.org/

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTORY CHAPTER

1.1 Introduction

Islam is the second largest religion in Europe (Giddens, 1989). The religion of Islam stands for belief in one God and in all the prophets of God, the last and most influential of whom was Muhammad (Ahmad & Azzam, 1976). Muslims, who are followers of Islam, believe in Abraham, Moses and Jesus, understanding that as prophets they too spread the message from God to mankind. It was through Prophet Muhammad though that the final revelation came, which is known as Islam and which is preserved in the Holy Qur'an (Ahmad & Azzam, 1976).

In recent years, events in the Islamic world have captured the attention of the general public throughout the world. Media coverage of these events, central among which has been the events of 9/11, has served to stimulate widespread interest in Islam as a religion. This increasing interest in the religion has not been comforting for Muslims around the globe. However a more long standing interest in the religion centers on the visibility of gendered roles in the religion and has created many questions surrounding the rights of women in Islam.

Society is moving towards the superiority of modern values and may therefore consider the social position of Muslim women as inferior on the basis of Islamic teachings concerning guardianship in marriage, polygamy, divorce and dress (Jameelah, 1976). The physiological and biological differences between men and women and some gender-specific roles are acknowledged within the religion of Islam, however such exceptions are not made on the basis of discrimination (Hussain, 2006). What this implies is that Islam acknowledges that men and women differ in their creation, and therefore assigns

different roles to each gender. Jameelah (1976) is therefore arguing that these different roles are not based on discrimination but purely on the differences of the genders. The common understanding is that the teachings of equality among men and women should direct the Muslim behavior and attitude, and therefore the roles that men and women play in society are not to be dominated by either gender (Hussain, 2006).

However, by observing the way Islam is practiced, it would be easy to think that Islamic gender relations are based on the authority given to the husbands over their wives (Rafia, 2006). This type of control is part of a larger power dynamic that also places all financial responsibility and support for all female relatives on the males in the family (Rafia, 2006). It serves to emphasize the massive responsibility that Muslim men have to bear, of supporting his wife and family financially. The Islamic culture however could also be viewed as giving women the role of dependent beings that need to be protected rather than entrusted with economic responsibility, which could be why many Muslim women stay at home and tend to the family and house rather than work (Rafia, 2006).

Equality in South Africa is enshrined in the constitution, post 1994. South Africa is not an Islamic country, it is a secular state. Women and men are encouraged to be equal. This raises questions, how are South African Muslim women dealing with all these changing gender relations in South Africa? This study aims to explore changing gender relations with respect to Muslim women. In doing so, the study will focus on the perceptions of Muslim women regarding gender relations in their religion. Do they perceive it as fair, or unequal, and if so why?

1.2 Rationale and Aim of Study

The research delves into gender differences, which are especially important in religion. Religion promotes spirituality and provides a space that could potentially be progressive or very oppressive (Galanter, 2009). The religion of Islam was chosen because of the

increasing visibility of gendered roles, which makes the differences between the genders quite distinct. For example there is a big difference in the way Muslim men and women dress. On the one hand, women are required to wear long loose fitting outfits which cover all parts of their body, with the exception of their faces, hands and feet. On the other hand, men are required to cover their bodies from the navel to the knee (Rahman, 2007). Therefore the rationale of this study is to uncover how Muslim women view simple acts, such as dressing, in the religion. As well as to discover if Muslim women view this in a just and positive light or find it to be oppressive.

An important aspect of the Islamic religion is the status it attributes to women. The Islamic holy book, known as the Qur'an, attributes a high status to women, in which women should be protected and honored (Haddad & Esposito, 1998). The religion teaches that heaven lies under the feet of the mother, emphasizing the importance of being respectful towards women (Haddad & Esposito, 1998). It is important therefore to explore if Muslim women acknowledge that they are treated with honor and respect or if society's norms and values over-ride these religious teachings and makes it impossible for women to achieve their status.

This study will focus on the Muslim women's perceptions of the gender dynamics within the religion. It is important to consider how these women perceive their religion, because their observations and interpretations of their religion should yield important information about how the Islamic faith treats Muslim women. Research on different aspects of gender has been conducted before. This research study aims to add to the existing body of knowledge. The researcher focuses this study on the Muslim women's perceptions, thereby getting women to reflect on their position in society. There is currently a lack of research on Muslim women in South Africa. This study aims to fill that gap.

The study also looks at how Muslim women negotiate different subjective positions in the family and society. Dahl (1997), explains that a Muslim woman is considered successful if she is married, has a good husband and has children. This raises the concern

that a woman's success is reduced to her family life and not to her personal achievements. There are however many Muslim women who work and are successful business women today. How do they then negotiate these different identities considering the pressure on them to conform?

1.3 Research Aims

Therefore the research aims are:

a. To explore how Muslim women view their religion and how they feel about the different roles that men and women are given in Islam.
b. To investigate how Muslim women perceive gender dynamics in the practice of the Islamic faith.

1.3 Research Questions

The research questions are,

a. What are the gender dynamics in Islam, according to Muslim women?

b. How do Muslim women view the different roles that men and women are given in Islam?

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter provides a theoretical background to the research topic. Discussion is generated around particular topics that contribute to a better understanding of the gender dynamics in Islam. A feminist standpoint is taken in the discussion in an attempt to empower women; however a true understanding of Islam is sought to ascertain whether Islam is oppressive to women. In doing so, Qur'anic texts as well as *hadith* (sayings of the Prophet Muhammad) are identified to generate an explanation around women's status in Islam. Aspects such as Islamic dress, polygamy and patriarchy are looked at in terms of their contribution towards the subordination of Muslim women. A significant contribution to this discussion centers around the topic of culture as opposed to religion and more specifically, whether certain cultural practices which are oppressive to women, originate from Islam or not. In starting of this discussion it is essential to address the topic of gender and more particularly gender dynamics as experienced in society.

2.1 Gender Dynamics

In everyday life gender is often taken for granted. People are instantly recognized as either a man or a woman and activities are arranged around this distinction (Connell, 2002). These differences have become so familiar that it is simply a natural part of life. When people go against the norm, for instance when a woman runs for president in a patriarchal society it becomes difficult to accept (Connell, 2002). Connell (2002, p.10) says that, "gender concerns the way human society deals with human bodies and the many consequences of that dealing in our personal lives and our collective fate". Gender

roles are acquired by socialization and there are many agents of socialization, such as, the family, school and media (Connell, 2002).

It is through this process of socialization, that individuals learn the culture of the society that they live in, that people identify themselves as either masculine or feminine with regard to appearance, behaviors and characteristics (Pilcher & Whelehan, 2004). It is through the child's interaction with adults that the primary stage of socialization occurs, and from here socialization becomes a life long process (Pilcher & Whelehan, 2004). Giddens (1989) agrees by explaining that gender socialization starts from before a child can accurately identify themselves as a boy or girl. Is Giddens implying then that adults, such as parents or care givers, are actually responsible for the emergence of gender stereotypes? Pilcher and Whelehan (2004), acknowledge this assumption by explaining that it is through the system of rewards and punishment enforced by adults that children learn how to behave gender appropriately (Pilcher & Whelehan, 2004). Even though a child's family is considered the most important influence in gender socialization, the education systems as well as the media are considered key influential agencies due to the stereotypical messages they convey (Pilcher & Whelehan, 2004).

Chodorow (1998) believes that human beings are not born with perceptions of gender, but rather these emerge developmentally. Here Chodorow agrees with the points made earlier by Giddens and Pilcher and Whelehan. "The gender order is a patterned system of ideological and material practice, performed by individuals in a society, through which power relations between women and men are made, and remade, as meaningful. It is through the gender order of a society that forms or codes of masculinities and femininities are created and recreated, and relations between them are organized" (Pilcher & Whelehan, 2004, p.61). In other words it is through the thoughts and actions of individual people in a society that the power dynamic between men and women is created, and through this, masculine and feminine attributes are ascribed to each respective gender.

Every society distinguishes between men and women in some way, through dress, and roles assigned to each gender, etc (Pilcher & Whelehan, 2004). It is here that the concept of socialization fits in; making it clear for society that women need to behave in a certain manner and men need to behave in a certain manner. Chodorow (1998) believes that it is due to the primary role that women play in the early development and socialization of children, that women therefore define themselves mainly in terms of relationships. Where does that leave men then? It is believed that men tend to repress their needs for relationships, and rather express a more manipulative attitude toward the world (Chodorow, 1998). This explanation paints a picture of women as soft, nurturing and passive beings, whereas men are thought of as hard, aggressive and goal oriented. Through religious and cultural values people are socialized into there respective gender categories. According to Pilcher and Whelehan (2004), it is therefore not logical for gender orders to be hierarchical or oppressive in nature. This idea implies that one gender should not be given more power than the other.

However our gender order seems to be one of unequal power. Male dominance in our society takes various forms, from the positions of formal and informal power men hold in the division of labor to the attention and prestige attached to male activities (Chodorow, 1998). Culturally children are taught that boys will grow up to be great men with great jobs, and lots of power, while girls are taught to be well mannered and trained in domestic duties. The female stereotype describes women as weak, dependant and passive, while the male stereotype speaks to qualities of bravery, confidence and strength (Chodorow, 1998). The work environment plays a big role in shaping and reinforcing socially appropriate roles for men and women (Lester, 2008). Tedrow and Rhoades (1999) explain this by arguing that women are shown early in their careers that traditional male traits are expected in senior roles, implying then that promotion depends on a women's ability to act like a man.

2.2 Taking a Feminist Standpoint

Gender differences have become part of every day life and the gender dynamics that exist in society become more evident when women become the butt of jokes which are based on contempt for women's triviality and stupidity (Connell, 2002). Women have undoubtedly had to suffer various forms of discrimination, and it is only recently in the twentieth century that there has been an upsurge of women's movements, or a more common term, known by many as feminism. There are critical elements in feminist scholarship, one of which is that feminism is based on a belief that women continue to be devalued and oppressed (Sollie & Leslie, 1994).

Another critical element characterizes an activist framework which challenges the status quo. In this view empowering women is at the core of feminist research (Sollie & Leslie, 1994). Therefore this research, taking a feminist stand point, delves into the study of gender differences in religion, sometimes men and women are not given equal rights in religion. However, it is also important to consider that sometimes these differences between the genders are welcomed by the women of that religion (Jameelah, 1976). So what does taking a feminist standpoint mean in this context?

Taking a feminist standpoint involves exploring the challenges of creating relationships between knowledge and power, while at the same time sharing better stories about gendered lives (Ramazonoglu & Holland, 2002). The Qur'an says, "*Knowledge is Power*", implying that to educate oneself is of extreme importance in Islam, because with knowledge comes understanding and with understanding comes power. However the point that Ramazonoglu and Holland make is that there is a certain amount of challenge in creating a relationship between knowledge and power. While Islam seems to place the two together, society suggests that power does not necessarily go to the most knowledgeable, but rather power is used as a tool to control and maybe even prevent the acquisition of knowledge (Lester, 2008). Feminism therefore works to correct societies thinking by empowering the marginalized.

Taking a feminist standpoint also includes taking into account all aspects of women's experience, including their emotions, and understanding the diversity in women's experiences (Ramazonoglu & Holland, 2002). In order to fully understand all aspects of a women's experience, there must be an opportunity to give a voice to women, as well as to take the time to listen to their voices (Bui, 2007). Every woman who is oppressed has a different story to tell. Their reactions, emotions and thoughts differ in some way. Considering this, it then becomes important to give as many women as possible a chance to share their stories.

It is important though when considering a feminist standpoint to acknowledge that the knowledge generated from such a standpoint is always partial in the sense that it cannot be assumed to be 'generally' true or true for all women (Ramazonoglu & Holland, 2002). What this means in the context of this research is that it cannot be assumed that all Muslim women are oppressed. As Van Wormer (2009) elaborates that, in taking a feminist standpoint, a voice is being given to marginalized people. Adopting a feminist standpoint allows the revealing of gender oppression as unjust, and therefore assumes a liberatory role (Ramazonoglu & Holland, 2002).

In explaining why feminism is the most suited standpoint for this research it is also essential to explore the criticisms leveled against feminism. Firstly, feminism has been criticized for its inability to bring forward knowledge that is considered adequately rational, scientific or unbiased (Ramazonoglu & Holland, 2002). This implies that feminists are not taken seriously because their knowledge of gender relations is based on assumption rather than valid knowledge, and that this knowledge is extremely biased towards women. Secondly, feminism has been criticized for its focus mainly on women's oppression as a result of patriarchal power, sexuality and reproduction without much consideration given to other sources such as racism, nationalism and heterosexism (Ramazonoglu & Holland, 2002).

This argument suggests that all women are placed into one category and their varied experiences are not taken into account. The last critique leveled against feminism centers around the notion that women are taken for granted and that feminism treats 'women' and 'gender' as products of ideas rather than of embodiment (Ramazonoglu & Holland, 2002). This criticism argues that there is more to women and women's experiences than to be used simply as a tool to make a point. However, Kiguwa (2004, p.279) argues against this criticism, saying that the idea of 'sisterhood', which she defines as "the idea that all women share some kind of kindred interest", was what made up the original feminist idea, and that now feminism has come to mean different things to different women and therefore cannot be seen as singular, but rather as multiple feminist perspectives. Kiguwa's argument certainly explains that feminism was created to protect and empower women and certainly not to use them.

The feminist standpoint approach focuses on gender differences in society, and in doing so it is defined by 'giving voice' to women who live in oppressive circumstances (Bui, 2007). Therefore this approach provides a vantage point from which to view women's social reality (Swigonski, 1994). Taking a feminist standpoint in this research will therefore allow both the researcher and reader to view the Muslim women's social reality from the motive of caring for everyone's needs, in an attempt to produce a more valuable representation rather than ways of knowing informed by the interests of hierarchy and domination (Hartsock, 1987).

Kiguwa (2004, p.279) argues that feminism is often misunderstood, and it does not just concern itself with gender and gender relations, but it is also about taking action and trying to change those constructs that are viewed as 'reinforcing women's subordination to men'. According to van Wormer (2009, p.5), "of special relevance to women's victimization are the following feminist values: reliance on the woman's personal narrative for truth telling; acceptance of a holistic, nondichotomized view of reality including a merging of the personal and political; a focus on choice and options; an understanding of the gendered nature of power relations in the society; and an emphasis

on personal empowerment and respect for one's personal dignity". Therefore the ultimate goal in any feminist work, would be empowerment, empowering the opressed. In trying to better understand the Muslim women's reality in terms of gender opression, it is important for the researcher to share unbiased knowledge that will empower Muslim women. Empowerment refers to helping individuals "increase their personal, interpersonal, socioeconomic, and political strength and develop influence toward improving their circumstances" (Barker, 2003, p.142).

Taking a feminist standpoint begins with the idea that less powerful members of society, in the case of this research, Muslim women, 'experience a different reality as a consequence of their oppression' (van Wormer, 2009, p.5). In combining a feminist standpoint with the Muslim women's perception of the gender dynamics in Islam, focus must be placed on forming an understanding from the Qur'an. In doing so a comparison must be made between the teachings from the Qur'an and patriarchal readings, in an attempt to uncover Islam's and not men's view on women.

2.3 Oppression of Religious Women

The status of women in society is neither a new nor is it a fully settled one. Feminists argue that society continues to devalue and oppress women and therefore feminism works to empower women (Solly & Leslie, 1994). In taking a feminist stance, one should understand that inequality is not limited to Muslim women. It is a universal phenomenon. However, does religion and culture play a big role in reducing the value of women? In Hindu scriptures, the description of a good wife is as follows: "a woman, whose mind, speech and body are kept in subjection, acquires high renown in this world, and, in the next, the same abode with her husband." (Badawi, 2008, p.2). This implies that for a Hindu woman to attain happiness in her after life, she is required to live in a state of subjection in her current life. Worshiping her husband as her Lord and therefore giving herself over to him as a believer would to her creator.

In ancient civilization, Athenian women were not better of than their Indian counterparts. "Athenian women were always minors, subject to some male – to their father, to their brother, or to some of their male kin. Her consent in marriage was not generally thought to be necessary and she was obliged to submit to the wishes of her parents, and receive from them her husband and her Lord, even though he was a stranger to her." (Badawi, 2008, p.2). This is another example of how women from different cultures were placed in a position of subjectivity and were required to worship a man as though he were her God.

Many may believe that Islam is no different in its approach to women. Society has a conception that Muslim women are oppressed. To gain a better understanding of the gender dynamics in Islam it would be important to go to the root of Islam, the Qur'an and *hadith* (Prophet Muhammad's sayings).

> "*O mankind, keep your duty to your Lord who created you from a single soul and from it created its mate (of same kind) and from them twain has spread a multitude of men and women"* (Qur'an 4:1).

This verse taken from the Qur'an highlights the equality of men and women in Islam. However the understandings of Qu'ranic verses are subject to interpretation. For example the Qur'an also says,

> "*And they (women) have rights similar to those (of men) over them, and men are a degree above them"* (Qur'an 2:228).

Badawi (2008) chooses to interpret this by explaining that women as the weaker sex are entitled to protection, but are seen as equal to men before the law. Feminists may very well understand this as disempowering for women to be seen as a degree below men and that women are not necessarily weak and in need of protection.

This certainly is true when one looks toward the stories of the Prophet's life and more particularly the life of one of his wives, Aisha. Aisha is said to have been young, beautiful and intelligent (Dahl, 1997). She was only 18 years old at the time of Prophet Muhammad's death (Dahl, 1997). Aisha took an active part in public life and was considered as one of the basic authorities in Islam (Dahl, 1997). But what stands out in her life as very empowering for Muslim women is that Aisha was the first Muslim woman to go to war, an act that was associated only to men (Dahl, 1997). Being a Muslim woman and more importantly being the wife of the Prophet, Aisha through her actions became and still is a role model for many Muslim women. Her knowledge, her strength and her power as a woman speaks volumes to the rights that Muslim women have, as well as the sense of empowerment that comes with it.

However these rights are not always enforced. Studies of gender divisions in Muslim countries like Pakistan show that cultural norms highly impact women's lives (Elliot, 1996). For example, while these Muslim women may enter the labor market, their labor force activity is limited by Islamic norms which do not allow women to work with men who are not related to them (Elliot, 1996). Economic necessity is therefore overridden by cultural norms (Elliot, 1996). Gender inequalities are usually acknowledged in terms of women's lack of resources as compared to men's (Connell, 2002). In a study conducted by Shaw and Afshar, (1996) on Pakistani communities living in London, it was found that these Muslim women have accepted that they are bound to home based segregated work, while at the same time they are committed to motherhood and family life (Elliot, 1996).

These studies show that even the few women who are able to work are subjected to cheap labor costs and their salaries are controlled by their husbands (Elliot, 1996). It also appears that these women take it for granted that their salaries contribute toward the family and not even a portion is spent on themselves (Elliot, 1996). However it is important to note that even though most Muslim women are confined to the domestic

domain, male control over women's movements has lessened over time (Khoury & Moghadam, 1995).

Studies have shown that young Asians have a stronger sense of family life and values as compared to their western peers and that Muslim women identify with their culture and take on their family responsibilities after leaving school (Elliot, 1996). It seems that these values are instilled in girls from a young age. This represents a socialization whereby women are encouraged to stay at home and do all the household chores while men should go out and work to support their families. This is the general perception of how Muslim women are oppressed.

2.4 The Feeling of Empowerment among Muslim Women

Ashraf (2008), Jameelah, (1976) and Sollie and Leslie, (1994) challenge this perception. These researchers argue that many Muslim women feel quite empowered by Islam. According to Ashraf (2008), Muslim women have a sense of empowerment due to the simple fact that Islam allows women to retain their own surnames after marriage. Regardless of how many times a woman marries, she will always have a name and legal personality of her own. The significance of this is that as a woman she does not compromise on her identity, which happens so often in the western world, where a woman is known only in relation to her husband. Jameelah, (1976) describes the Islamic role of a woman to centre on the maintenance of her home and family. While men perform a more public role of going to work, women are given the important task of being their helpers concealed from the public gaze, a less exciting but more humble role which is considered to be as essential for the preservation of the Islamic faith (Jameelah, 1976).

This humble role that Muslim women are given in Islam also involves women's acquisition of Islamic knowledge, which is considered essential to develop a "pious self"

(Jouili & Moazami, 2006). Developing a pious self not only allows women the opportunity to assume the role as teachers to their children but is also seen as central for self understanding (Jouili & Moazami, 2006). Muslim women attain a sense of empowerment in their efforts to acquire and circulate knowledge, because this places on them the responsibility of helping to develop a virtuous community, by aiming to educate the next generation, as well as attempting to transmit knowledge and Islamic values to the wider Muslim community (Jouili & Moazami, 2006).

This type of responsibility placed on the shoulders of Muslim women implies that women are then responsible for educating the future generation of Muslims; this is surely a powerful position to be in. The involvement of Muslim women in transmitting Islamic knowledge on both an informal and an institutional level certainly suggests a shift in the traditional patriarchal structure (Jouili & Moazami, 2006). Bazarangi (2006) argues that Muslim women attain a sense of empowerment when they actively identify and engage with the Qur'an and *hadith* (Prophet Muhammad's sayings). Awde (2004, p.95) highlights the Prophet as saying: "Treat women with kindness, for woman has been created from a rib, and truly the most curved part of a rib is the upper part, and should you attempt to straighten it, you will break it – but if you leave it as is, it will remain curved. So treat women with kindness!"

This certainly provides evidence that Islam provides women with a high status, a status that provides Muslim women with power and not oppression. Therefore in becoming familiar with Islamic text and empowering themselves with Islamic knowledge, women will no longer be seen as 'passive receptors of learning', but will rather create new interpretations of Qur'anic teachings that reflect a women's circumstance as told by women, instead of men (Bazarangi, 2006).

2.5 Duties and Rights of a Muslim Woman

Today, the extent to which religion influences women's roles and rights varies from one country to another (Abusharaf, 2006). Thousands of Muslim women, for example, live under extremely conservative regimes that embrace Islamic law (Abusharaf, 2006). These countries include Iran, Sudan, and the Zamfara state in northern Nigeria (Abusharaf, 2006). In these countries, the strict application of Islamic laws reinforces a status classified by Western discourse as second class citizenship (Abusharaf, 2006). Others live in countries like Iraq, Tunisia, Morocco, and Turkey where Islamic law is not strictly enforced, or where it is marginal to the legal system, like Kenya, Ghana, Sri Lanka and the Philippines (Abusharaf, 2006). Still others live in countries like Egypt, where the legal system has become the battleground between traditional Islamists and progressive reformists (Abusharaf, 2006).

Haddad and Esposito (1998), provide an example of the oppression of Muslim women in India, explaining that it is only recently in the twentieth century that Muslim women have had access to power in India. Muslim women in India faced an uphill battle against the extreme restrictions placed on them regarding their activities. Women were forced into wearing the veil, had no rights and were not allowed an education (Haddad & Esposito, 1998). It was the subsequent formation of the Muslim League in the 1900s that provided a victory for women in banishing the oppressive laws under which they were forced to exist (Haddad & Esposito, 1998). The same experience holds true for the women of Iran. Their freedom and rights were taken away by the government simply because they were women (Shahidian, 2002). Muslim women were victims of both public and private patriarchy, where in both situations, men where the direct oppressors and benefited from sexual inequality in their roles as officers of the law, fathers or husbands (Shahidian, 2002).

Dahl (1997), believes that the Muslim marriage is not based on equality of status, but rather on inequality and complimentarity. Both men and women are given rights and duties in Islam, and therefore the males set of duties corresponds with the women's set of rights and vice versa (Dahl, 1997). For example the man's duty to support his family is

reflected in the woman's right to be maintained. These duties that are placed on men and women in Islam are religious duties of strong moral value (Dahl, 1997). However the common view of Islam is that women have more duties and men more rights. Beasley (1999) believes that there are flaws in the content of traditional thought. According to Bernadette Mosala, a South African feminist, 'When men are oppressed, it's tragedy. When women are oppressed, it's tradition' (Beasley, 1999, p.6).

This speaks to the patriarchal society that we live in, but also to the notion that if patriarchy is disguised under the banner of religion, then this somehow makes it acceptable. The question then is, does Islam promote inequality in the roles, duties and rights assigned to Muslim women? Considering the *hadith*, 'When the news reached the Prophet Muhammad that the people of Persia had put the daughter of Kisra to reign over them, he said: "No people will ever be successful if they have entrusted the governing of their affairs to a woman!" (5/508) (Awde, 2004, p.91). This *hadith* implies that women were not considered worthy or capable of making important decisions or governing people. This role then was ascribed to men only. This highlights the patriarchal aspect of Islam, which was evident from the time of Prophet Muhammad.

However, if one had to look at the lives of his wives and daughters there is evidence that they were independent, successful women, who were sought after for advice, by both men and women. Khadija Bint Khuwaylid was known in the community of Mecca as At-Tahira, 'the pure one' and she was considered to be a woman of great integrity, intelligence and spiritual depth (Helminski, 2003). Khadija was a widow and a very independent woman at the time of meeting the Prophet, as she had developed and was running her own business in caravan trade (Helminski, 2003). She had hired the Prophet, because of his trustworthiness to oversee one of her caravans (Helminski, 2003). At the successful completion of his task it was Khadija who through her cousin proposed marriage to Prophet Muhammad, even though he was fifteen years her junior and had no money of his own (Helminski, 2003).

This highlights the rights as well as the roles of women, as not just home makers, but independent, successful business women. Also the fact that Khadija proposed marriage to Muhammad is something that is unusual even in this day and age, but shows that women were allowed to make decisions, and not simply wait on a man to make decisions for them. Another prominent female figure in Islam is that of Fatima, the beloved daughter of Prophet Muhammad and Khadija. She is another example of an opinionated, strong Muslim woman. It is said that Fatima inherited Prophet Muhammad's 'persuasive eloquence that was rooted in wisdom', and it was she who proudly stood before men and women, to deliver her father's eulogy (Helminski, 2003).

The story of Fatima highlights an important part of Islam that has become quite controversial regarding women's rights in Islam. That is women today in Muslim communities are not given the opportunity to speak in a public forum. Women are told that their voice is part of their beauty and could therefore be used to seduce men (Mumisa, 2000). This is the reason women are given to discourage them from having a voice. However, Fatima in the time of the Prophet Muhammad would accompany him around Medina, spreading the word of Islam and at his burial delivered her father's eulogy. She was allowed to speak in front of all, men and women, with confidence (Helminski, 2003). This then raises a degree of confusion as to why now Muslim women are discouraged from public speaking.

A possible explanation would be to subdue women, to ensure that men maintain their power in society. Another example of this would be the roles assigned to the genders in Islam. Muslim men are given the task of working and supporting their family, while Muslim women are told to take care of the home and family. Dahl (1997), explains that a Muslim woman is considered successful if she is married, has a good husband and has children. This raises the concern that a woman's success is reduced to her family life and not to her personal achievements. A woman's role then centers on domestic duties, raising and educating her children and serving her husband.

However, if one looks at the life of Prophet Muhammad one would find that he did not assume his wife would be responsible for domestic duties. Aisha, the youngest wife of the Prophet reported that "the prophet in his own home repaired his sandals, sewed by himself, gave fodder to his camel used for carrying water, swept the house, ate with the servant and kneaded dough with him, and carried his (own) goods from the market, a job which he allowed nobody else to do for him'" (Helminski, 2003, p.15-16). Once again there is a contrast between how Islam was preached and practiced by the Prophet Muhammad and how it is practiced now. It does seem that as time progressed society has re-interpreted Islamic law based on the Qur'an and *hadith*, which governs the freedom and movement of women.

2.6 Women's Rights

Amnesty International, an international human rights organization made a huge effort in advancing women's rights as human rights (Gallagher, 2005). Even though the United Nations human rights laws applied to women, they did not do much to address risks women faced because they were women (Abudu, Ajemian, Albrecht & Farrell, et al, 2008). These conventions, such as the Convention on the Nationality of Married Women (1957) and the Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages (1962), mostly addressed the public sphere, because the international consensus agreed that the family is private and should remain out of government business (Gallagher, 2005). This disadvantaged women because more often violence against women takes place in the home (Bahar, 1996). Political leaders at the time insisted that the status of women emerging from cultural and social traditions remained outside of the governments responsibility (Gallagher, 2005).

This resulted in women demanding the expansion of human rights to include the rights that women feel are important because they are women (Bahar, 1996). They argued that these rights included "freedom from domestic violence, female genital mutilation, forced

marriage and pregnancy, sexual slavery, and rape, and pointed out that women were far more likely than men to suffer from abuses that afflict both. Women were raped in war or in prison more often than men, eighty percent of refugees were women and children, and women faced discrimination in their own societies because they were women. Because much of the abuse occurred in the family or workplace and was perpetrated by non-state actors, the definition of human rights was broadened" (Gallagher, 2005, p.1-2). Advocates for women's human rights, insisted that it is the states responsibility to protect its citizens, male and female, from torture of any kind. Even if that torture is carried out by one of the victims family members, resulting in domestic violence (Bahar, 1996).

With the increasing pressure from the advocates of women's human rights movement as well as its own quickly increasing women membership, Amnesty International made the decision to pass a resolution calling for greater emphasis to be placed on human rights violations against women (Gallagher, 2005). Women's human rights activists brought forward the issue of cultural relativism and argued that cultural/religious customs that are harmful to women are in opposition to international human rights standards and should be changed (Gallagher, 2005). They insisted that culture and religion should not be used against them, especially when it is used as an excuse to justify the oppression of women (Bahar, 1996). It was with this understanding that all women living under strict versions of *Sharia* law, in which the law disrespected the international human rights standards, would be considered prisoners of conscience (Gallagher, 2005). The South African term 'Apartheid' was also extended to women living in segregated societies such as Afghanistan (Gallagher, 2005).

Human Rights Violations: In 1999, Amnesty International published their report, "Pakistan: Honor Killings of Girls and Women", that marked a turning point in women's rights history. This report did a lot to highlight the Pakistani government's lack of protection of women. It spoke of government officials resistance to investigate and prosecute the crimes against and murders of women (Gallagher, 2005). "In April 1999, while the report was being prepared, Samia Sarwar, a married mother of two who was

seeking a divorce against her prominent family's wishes, was shot dead in the office of Hina Jilani, a noted women's human rights lawyer and activist. Sarwar's mother had accompanied the murderer, who had been hired by the family.

The case became an international cause célèbre and drew global attention to the international campaign against honour killings in Pakistan in which Pakistani women and other women's human rights groups participated. Amnesty International now stated unequivocally that if a government is negligent in prosecuting private individuals who abuse women or in protecting women from such abuse, it is complicit in those abuses. This concept could be applied to any vulnerable sectors of society, including ethnic or religious minorities and those persecuted for sexual orientation. This was the key development in Amnesty International's transformation" (Gallagher, 2005, p.4).

2.7 Hijab

> '*Umar ibn al Khattab* said*: God and I were in agreement over the Verse of the Veil – I said to the Prophet: "If only you would order your wives to veil themselves, for they are spoken to by wicked men as well as those with honorable intentions!"*
> And so the verse of the veil was revealed' (1/240, 242) (Awde, 2004, p.50).

The term *hijab* means 'a barrier' and is used to refer to the clothing worn by Muslim women. According to Dahl (1997), the *hijab* is a three dimensional concept and these three dimensions are often intertwined when relating to social control. The first dimension is visual, therefore meaning to hide something from view; the second dimension refers to space, therefore implying the creation of a boundary; and the third dimension is ethical, therefore referring to a prohibited area (Dahl, 1997). *Hijab* refers to the scarf (material covering the hair), the cloak (long, loose fitting dress) or the *pardah* (veil).

The *hijab* is of great importance in Islam and came about as a means to prevent sexual temptation (Bowker, 1995). According to the Qur'an, verse 59 of Surah Al-Ahzaab reads:

> "*O Prophet! Tell thy wives and daughters and the believing woman, that they should cast their outer garments over their persons (when outside): so that they should be known (as such) and not molested".*

The Qur'an clearly outlines the important issue about Muslim women having to be protected, by telling women to be covered and not expose any part of their bodies when in public or in the company of an unrelated male (Rahman, 2007). There appears to be an underlying implication that women cannot be trusted. Syed (2001) argues that the reason Muslim women are asked to wear *hijab* when leaving their homes is to ensure that they are recognized as believing women and differentiated from prostitutes who attract sexual harassment. Syed (2001) and Bowker (1995), agree that this verse was revealed to allow a woman to continue with her daily business without attracting unsavory attention and not as an attempt to confine women to their homes.

The obvious feminist response would be why then are men not required to wear a *hijab*? The response according to Bowker (1995) is that men too have rules of decency in dress. *Shariah* (Islamic law) dictates that both men and women should dress modestly and not provocatively (Syed, 2001). Bowker (1995) argues that men have the power and therefore interpret the law to their requirements. He further says that *hijab* has become an opportunity for men to oppress women and allow themselves freedom.

In doing so, men then exempt themselves from the arduous task of having to cloak themselves every time they leave the home; while at the same time ensuring no other man will take interest in his woman. Marcus (1992), agrees and affirms that when women's beliefs differ from those of men, their beliefs are considered to be un-Islamic and declared as superstition. Providing us with an example of how women's voices, when

they raise concerns over proper Islamic practice, are merely drowned out and pushed aside as nothing more than 'old wives tales'.

Moghadam, (1994) argues that Islam views the 'naked women' as a moral crisis and to solve the problem women are ordered to be covered and domesticated. Jameelah, (1976) however, tries to explain that the restrictions that Islam places on the movement and dress of Muslim women are solely intended to restrain men from taking unfair advantage of women and therefore to benefit women. Islam is not unique among the religions of the world in its condemnation of many western practices such as pre-marital sex. The Amish for example also forbid their believers in engaging in any social practices leading to it (Jameelah, 1976). However in a country like Afghanistan, the secluded, illiterate, veiled women was viewed by revolutionaries as representing the country's backwardness and therefore had to be educated and unveiled (Moghadam, 1994). Either way it seemed like revolutionizing society and transforming women could be seen as two sides of the same coin (Moghadam, 1994).

In a country like Iran any non traditional, un-veiled woman was perceived as vulnerable to western influence (Moghadam, 1994). In Africa, women were not as secluded or covered as the Muslim women in Saudi Arabia or Pakistan were (Haddad & Esposito, 1998). Moghadam, (1994) argues that the veil has signified the Muslim's perception of women's sexuality as potentially subversive and it has reduced a woman's role to her sexual and reproductive aspects. He also talks about the Muslim's perception of the authentic woman is one who practices selflessness, is devoted to her family, possesses chastity, modesty, humility, simplicity, does an excellent job at housekeeping and is loyal to cultural values (Moghadam, 1994). This idealized image of the eastern women was portrayed in contrast to the western woman who was viewed as selfish and individualistic (Moghadam, 1994).

Many Muslim women pride themselves on being knowledgeable about religious teachings and prefer to live life according to the *Shariah*, which is the Islamic law

(Moghadam, 1994). A possible reason for this is that Islam places on the Muslim mother the important duty of being educated and knowledgeable in the teachings of the Qur'an and word of the Prophet Muhammad so that she is able to educate her children on religious practices and be a good role model to them. In earlier times the traditional Muslim women was considered to be old fashioned and the more modern Muslim women was said to be under the influence of western culture (Moghadam, 1994).

Islamic countries like Iran viewed these modern Muslim women as contributing to the moral and cultural degeneration of Islamic society (Moghadam, 1994). Moghadam, (1994) feels this is when religious leaders started to use women and sexual imagery to discuss the dangers of westernization and these women were constructed as a negative image of the modern women, hence the importance of the veil in Muslim societies.

Rafia, (2006) compares the normative rules of Islamic practice against the actual practice in Islamic cultures today and claims it to be highly debatable and that it represents a direction that if followed could help to change the lives of women in Islamic culture (Rafia, 2006). Azza Karam's essay on feminist social movements in Arab states identifies three contentious perspectives each of which prescribes starkly different routes toward gender-centered reform: "Islamists" who seek to absolve religion and point accusingly to the deficient practice of Islam as the root of gender inequality in the Muslim world-if only true Islam were practiced, such inequality would not exist; secular feminists who are suspicious of all political rhetoric tinged with religious discourse and advocate an extra-religious path toward reform avoiding all religious frameworks; and religious feminists, who can be situated somewhere between the other two, wish to acknowledge the role of Islam in the lives of Muslim women and mediate the tension between secularists and Islamists by finding routes for reform within the Islamic paradigm (Rafia, 2006).

According to Landorf and Pagan (2005), the *hijab* represents religious freedom, culture, and tradition for the women who want to wear it and in certain Islamic countries like

Iran, it becomes a symbol of sexism for the women who refuse to wear it. The veil in itself "has no meaning. It's the women who wear it, whether they are in Iran, or France, or the United States for that matter, who give it meaning" (Landorf & Pagan, 2005, p.4). Therefore the meaning of the *hijab* depends on location and culture, as it cannot have one meaning throughout the world because different people in different places give different meanings to the same symbols (Landorf & Pagan, 2005). Therefore wearing the *hijab* or not wearing it seems to be a choice that women make. It becomes their expression of freedom and allows women to feel empowered in their faith (Sollie & Leslie, 1994).

2.8 Islam versus Culture

In many societies there is a general belief that women have suffered a certain degree of exploitation and oppression at the hands of men (Hussain, 2006). In Muslim societies, practices that degrade and exploit women are blamed on the Islamic religion (Hussain, 2006). What is alarming about the oppression of women's rights in Muslim societies is that it is largely done in the name of Islam (Mashhour, 2005). These Muslim communities assert that certain unfavourable practices coincide with *Sharia* law and that their personal status laws are based on *Sharia* (Mashhour, 2005).

By reviewing women's status in Muslim societies, it becomes apparent that women are treated as inferior to men (Mashhour, 2005). When we see images of women being mistreated in Islamic countries like Afghanistan, these images only help to reinforce the perception that the Islamic faith encourages such discrimination (Hussain, 2006). Faith undoubtedly influences the practices and traditions of Muslims (Hussain, 2006). However, many Muslim scholars believe that such perceptions within the socio-cultural and human relationships are not a true depiction of the tenets of Islam (Hussain, 2006). Muslim societies therefore misuse *Shariah* to provide a sacred justification for any discrimination or inequality (Mashhour, 2005).

Mashhour (2005) argues that muslims around the world share some common values, beliefs, and codes of ethics, however their socioeconomic, political, and cultural realities vary considerably. These variations appear to have given rise to different "lslams," and a diversification in interpretation and practise (Mashhour, 2005). "Religion provides societies with ethical and moral guidelines, but it is up to the society to interpret and to apply them according to its political and socioeconomic conditions, culture, and historical consciousness" (Mashhour, 2005, p.1).

Saudi Arabian men seem to have a culture that does not fit well with all women. Below a woman argues that there is a difference between what 'Arab' men preach and Islamic values. :

> "[*Arab men] are against women, and that is why we (women) are much against them. We know our rights, we have learned the Shari'a…We are working in the NIF to praise women and to make women have a better status, and to tell the world that we are as equal as men and are as efficient as men and we are as educated as men and we are as good as men and as great as men*" (Hale 1997, p.216 as cited in Willemse, 2007).

Islamic law must be taken into account with regard to women in Muslim societies, to clearly acknowldege that either Islam does or does not give women certain rights (Silvers, 2008). Mashhour (2005), makes it clear that the Qur'an highlights that men and women have equal religious duties, rewards, and punishments before God. Even with this reassurance there have been many instances of discrimination against women in current Muslim legislation, such as the penal codes regarding "Honor Crimes" (Mashhour, 2005). Mashhour (2005), believes that the Qur'an does not mention such crimes, and further argues that these penal codes actually run against the spirit of Islam and justice.

It does appear that cultural norms have become so popular that they are misconstrued as religious law. For instance the simple concept of a working women is not so simple when you consider a religion like Islam. Islamically there appears to be no

discrimination toward women working. After all Khatija, the wife of Prophet Muhammad was a working woman. In fact she was his boss, and on their marriage he benefited from her wealth, as he had none of his own (Helminski, 2003). However, in contemporary Muslim societies women are discouraged from working as their place is at home.

'…The cultural matrix through which gender identity has become intelligible requires that certain kinds of 'identities' cannot 'exist'… Indeed, precisely because certain kinds of 'gender identities' fail to conform to those norms of cultural intelligibility, they appear only as developmental failures or logical impossibilities from within that domain' (Butler 1990, p.17 as cited in Willemse, 2007). In other words, the Islamist government defines the positions available for 'a good Muslim woman' (Willemse, 2007). For instance the working woman as an identity cannot exist, as this is not viewed as a permanent phase in a woman's life (Willemse, 2007). The working woman is therefore the polar opposite to what constitutes a virtuous Muslim woman (Willemse, 2007). The position of mother and wife, is viewed as a legitimate and permanent identity according to Islamic law, an identity that the Muslim woman must assume (Willemse, 2007).

The *hadith* 'a woman's place is in her father's house, in her husband's house or in her grave' makes one question the innocence of Islam in its restrictions on women (Willemse, 2007). Islam appears to be fraught with contradiction. On the one hand Islamic literature depicts a prominent and respected Muslim woman, the Prophets wife as a working woman. Yet on the other hand *hadith* are found which places women in a role of subservience, where it is a father's decision to marry his daughter to a man of his choice. Once she is married she becomes her husband's property, and many women accept this as the norm and live in subservient bliss believing they are being good daughters and wives.

These contradictions make it challenging for the reader to understand Islam in its truest form. Yet Bazarangi (2006) firmly believes that the problem arises in the interpretation of Qur'an and *hadith*, and more precisely who is doing the interpreting. Male supremacy has existed since the beginning of time, so it is only natural that men assume the right to interpret one of the holiest books revealed to mankind, the Qur'an. Beasley (1999) argues that this is the cause for misinterpretation, because men will surely interpret the Qur'an and *hadith* to suit their needs and to ensure that they still occupy the power seat. Bazarangi (2006) agrees with Beasley and insists that it is women's lack of participation in interpreting the text of the Qur'an that has resulted in misinterpretation. However it remains difficult to believe that women would have been welcomed into participating in this process.

In this context then, the deterioration of women's rights, not just in Islamic countries, but in Muslim communities in a country like South Africa as well, has nothing to do with their Islamic nature (Mashhour, 2005). The gender inequalities don't appear to be based on Islam but are largely the result of traditional, patriarchal, male-dominated societies' practices that aim to dominate women and to suppress them (Mashhour, 2005). These societies and communities seek to demonstrate the appropriateness of their claims by applying conservative and literal interpretations of different Quranic verses or by moving certain passages out of their contexts (Mashhour, 2005).

2.9 The Mosque: A contested space

It has been argued by many Muslim scholars that Muslim men should not be viewed as those responsible for encouraging discrimination amongst the sexes (Hussain, 2006). For instance the Islamic practice in which Muslim women are not seen in the mosque is questionable, as such a practice did not originate in the times of Prophet Mohammad and was not ordered by him (Hussain, 2006). The women of his time attended services at his

mosque and the Prophet said that women should be allowed there. Muslim scholars agree to the truth of this statement, yet it is interesting to understand where such a practice originated. (Hussain, 2006). Therefore it is important to focus on Muslim women and the way that they understand and perceive their religion. Some Muslims believe that Islam promotes equal rights for men and women, but it is important to understand the views and perceptions of the Muslim women themselves (Hussain, 2006).

According to Awde (2004, p.91), The Prophet said: "Allow the women to go at night to the mosques." According to *Shariah* both men and women are allowed to pray in the mosque in the same congregation (Siddiqi, 1993). Siddiqi (1993), reports that in the time of the Prophet women and children would line up behind the men, he further highlights that there were no partitions separating or blocking the men from the women. Today however, if women are allowed into the mosque by men, then sections are constructed to keep the sexes apart (Khan, 2001). Yet at *Hajj* (pilgrimage) men and women walk and pray together, side by side. Riz Khan, a CNN anchor, reflected on his experience of *Hajj* (pilgrimage) saying "the atmosphere is relaxed. No one is tense that the segregation rules they follow at home are put aside in Islam's holy mosque" (Khan, 2001, p.1).

One wonders where these segregation rules arise, if *Shariah* itself allows for both men and women to pray together. According to Awde (2004, p.92), 'one of the wives of Umar (a friend of Prophet Muhammad) used to do the dawn prayer and the evening prayer amongst the congregation in the mosque. She was asked by a man: "Why do you women come out when you know that Umar does not like you doing this, for he is a jealous and possessive husband?"
She replied: "What is preventing him from stopping me?"
The man said: "The words of the messenger of God prevents him: 'Do not prevent the female servants of God from the mosques of God!'"'

From this *hadith*, it appears that already in the time of the Prophet men did not appreciate the idea of women being around other men. If Umar had his way, he would have forbid

his wife from praying at the mosque because of his jealousy. However Umar knew the Prophets ruling regarding the situation and refrained from stopping his wife. Now however, in today's modern age, where the Prophet is no longer around to preach the word of God, are men able to control their needs and follow *Shariah*, or do they succumb and change the rules to suit them? It appears that question speaks for itself when you consider the mosque, which has become a contested space. It represents the gender dynamics in the sharing of space, which exists in Islam.

Are women not wanted in the mosque, a holy space, a space of prayer and spiritual connection with *Allah*, because men fear their wives will attract the attention of other men? Or is it simply because men doubt their ability to remain faithful, where women are allowed freely? It now becomes clear as to why women are given a low status in society, and why women are discouraged from public speaking. Yahya (2008) believes that by allowing only men to make the decisions regarding the sharing of space between the genders, will only result in sexual apartheid and the danger of that is the marginalization of women, whereby men protect their privilege of power. It is important to make the distinction here between *Shariah* and current Islamic practice. Islam according to the Qur'an and word of the Prophet allows women into gatherings of mixed genders. The mosque should be open and accessible to all women. However it is society that has placed restrictions on women, very possibly due to the patriarchal society.

2.10 The Patriarchal Society

Barlas (2004, p.1) defines Islamic feminism as "a discourse of gender equality and social justice that derives its understanding and mandate from the Qur'an and seeks the practice rights and justice for all human beings in the totality of their existence across the public-private continuum". If this is what Islamic feminism means then surely all practicing Muslims are feminists considering they all read the same Qur'an (Barlas, 2004). However, Barlas (2004) argues that not all Muslims read the Qur'an in the same way.

There appears to be a belief among Muslim feminists that Islam is a patriarchal and misogynist religion that according to Moroccan feminist Fatima Mernissi (1996, p.13-14) "professes models of hierarchical relationships and sexual inequality and puts a sacred stamp (onto) female subservience".

Haddad and Esposito (1998), claim that the Qur'an is not considered to be a book of law, but rather it provides guidelines for people and these guidelines were incorporated into Islamic law through selection. In pre-Islamic Arabia women were often degraded and given no rights in a male dominated society, therefore it is felt that the Qur'an reformed such practices and enhanced the status of women (Haddad & Esposito, 1998). For example the Qur'an emphasized a woman's right into contract marriage, gave her control over her inheritance and property and even protected the rights of widows and orphans (Haddad & Esposito, 1998). Even though the Qur'an emphasizes women's religious and moral equality with men, the reality and values of the patriarchal society that we live in kept women in a subordinate position to men (Haddad & Esposito, 1998).

Dahl (1997), however believes that an ambivalence toward women prevailed in Prophet Muhammad's life. According to Dahl (1997, p.57), the Prophet said: "I took a look at paradise, and I noted that the majority of the people there were poor people. I took a look at hell, and I noted that there, women were the majority". There appears to be other *hadith* that depict this disparaging view of women. Implying women are the morally weak and less worthy gender (Dahl, 1997). Dahl (1997, p.54), reports the Prophet as saying: "A straw mat in the corner of a house is preferable to a barren woman" and "A black woman who can bear a child is better than a beauty who cannot give life". These *hadith* imply that the Prophet Muhammad had no respect for women who were sterile or who may have simply chosen to not have children.

This could be interpreted in many ways, on the one hand it may be assumed that Muslim women are told by men, and more particularly the most important man in Islamic history, the Prophet Muhammad, as how to exist. Meaning that women need to have children,

that is their purpose on this earth. The effect of which has led to the creation of the patriarchal society that we now exist in. On the other hand one could view this as the importance women are given in the religion, in that only they can produce offspring and obviously this is considered of high regard in the Islamic faith. There certainly are *hadith* that emphasize the equality between the genders and talk of the importance of women. Badawi (2008, p.5), reports the Prophet's famous saying: "Paradise is at the feet of the mother" and "It is the generous (in character) who is good to women, and it is the wicked who insults them".

These *hadith* emphasize the high status that women are given in Islam, according to the Prophet. It is certainly confusing to be exposed to the different *hadith* that imply different meanings as to the status of women. What then is the true message of Islam? Barlas (2004) argues that the Qur'an does not support patriarchy. She explains that the Qur'an does not represent Allah as Father or male, but rather it forbids any association with God. It promotes only monotheism, treating Allah as the only sovereign, by preaching God is one (Barlas, 2004). According to Barlas (2004), the Qur'an speaks to the notion that Allah is beyond gender and un-representable. Therefore the masculinity references to Allah as 'He' should be viewed as inaccurate (Barlas, 2004). As feminists highlight "men legitimize their power by representing God as a male" (Barlas, 2004, p.6).

Pilcher and Whelehan (2007), explain that patriarchy is a system of social structures and practices, and it is in this system that men tend to dominate, oppress and exploit women. The six structures of patriarchy, namely household production, paid work, the state, male violence, sexuality and culture, are argued to together capture the depth and interconnectedness of women's subordination (Pilcher & Whelehan, 2007). There is also a differentiation between 'private' and 'public' patriarchy, where private patriarchy is defined as centering around the family and household, and concerns men exploiting the labor of women (Pilcher & Whelehan, 2007). Whereas public patriarchy refers to the notion that women may not be excluded from public life, but rather face discrimination and inequality within it (Pilcher & Whelehan, 2007).

Historically, a women's role in society was determined just as much by socio-economic factors as it was by religious principles (Haddad & Esposito, 1998). Islamic law did provide the guidelines for practices such as marriage and divorce, etc, the actual practices in society was dependant upon social class and this varied from one region or country to another (Haddad & Esposito, 1998). Scholars such as Badawi (2008) and Barlas (2004) may argue that Islam is not a patriarchal religion, but is rather based on equality between men and women. When one looks deeper into the practices of the religion it certainly seems as though women are left with the short end of the stick. For example if one considers the law around inheritance in Islam, men receive twice as much as women.

According to the Qur'an:

> "*As for the inheritance of your children, God directs you to do the following: The male shall have a portion equal to that of what two females receive. If there are two or more females and no sons, they shall have two thirds of the inheritance; and if there is one daughter, then her share shall be one half. Thus God commands, for God is all-knowing and forbearing" (Q4:11-2).*

On first reading this verse, it may seem insensitive for Islam to discriminate among men and women so drastically. However, there are various interpretations of the verses of the Qur'an, but the most prominent interpretation of this verse explains that men are considered the head of their families and are therefore charged with the duty of taking care of his wife and children (Bowker, 1995). Therefore men must inherit more as his inheritance is used to maintain his home. Whereas a woman's inheritance is less because she does not have the responsibility of looking after others, basically her money belongs to her and she may do with it as she pleases.

2.11 The Debate around Polygamy

Badawi (1998) explains that like Judaism, Islam also permits the act of polygamy; however he further explains that unlike Judaism, Islam provides legal requirements and restraints that tend to discourage the practice. The Qur'an says:

> *"But if ye fear that ye cannot do justice between orphans, then marry what seems good to you of women, by two, threes, or fours; and if ye fear that ye cannot be equitable, then only one, or what your right hands possess. That keeps you nearer to not being partial!"* (4:3).

The Qur'an clearly indicates that men are allowed to marry up to four women, however what is important to note is that if a man decides to take on more than one wife, he must be able to treat them all equally. The verse goes on to explain that if a man fears he will not be able to treat them equally, he should refrain from the act of polygamy.

Islamic scholars agree that the reason polygamy was not completely prohibited is due to the notion that there may be certain circumstances which individuals and societies face at different times, which makes the practice of polygamy a better solution than either divorce or succumbing to immorality (Badawi, 1998). For example "when a 42 year old, Indonesian psychologist Yayah Khisbiyah agreed to marry the love of her life she was ridiculed by even her friends, because her fiancé was already married. Yayah and her fiancé Abbas had been college sweethearts 23 years earlier, but separated. She married another man, and then later divorced. Abbas was persuaded to marry another woman. When they met again, they realized they still felt strongly about each other. But Abbas's wife did not want a divorce, so they agreed a polygamous marriage would be the best alternative, and the first wife gave permission" (Kwok, 2007, p.29).

Indonesia, a country that has the world's largest Muslim community, considers polygamy a contentious issue (Kwok, 2007). Why is polygamy allowed and polyandry not? Badawi (1998) explains that for centuries the head of the home has always been a man,

so the problem then arises when there are two husbands is, who assumes the role of head? This explanation is not necessarily an Islamic viewpoint but relates very much to the patriarchal society that we live in. Yayah, who is considered to be an educated, financially independent Muslim feminist agreed to enter into a polygamous marriage, claiming that her decision was "in the spirit of feminist solidarity" (Kwok, 2007, p.29). A possible explanation for why an educated Muslim woman enters into such a marital arrangement is that a second wife, who is legally (according to *Shariah*) married, is better off than a mistress without any legal rights or security.

In Pre-Islamic Arabia, and in the time of previous Prophets such as Abraham and Solomon, women were considered on the same level as slaves, and both had no legal standing (Badawi, 1998). In the marriage process women were sold and then became the property of her husband, who if he tired of her would give her an instant *talak* (divorce), or engage in unlimited polygamy (Rehman, 2007). It was in the time of the Prophet Muhammad that the Qu'ran was revealed and it was through *Shariah* (Islamic law) that many changes were made (Alexandre, 2007). Women were awarded legal rights and were allowed to independently enter into marriage; also the restrictions around polygamy were revealed (Mashhour, 2005).

An important question arises here, and that is regarding the rationality for legitimizing polygamous marriages within the *Shariah*. Feminists critique the justification for polygamy in Islam and argue that it is prejudicial and biased against women (Ali, 2006). Women rights activists view polygamy as an attempt at marginalizing women (Kwok, 2007). However, Mashhour (2005) highlights that the verse allowing polygamy was revealed to Prophet Muhammad after the murderous Battle of Uhud, which resulted in the death of many Muslim men, leaving behind widows and orphans who needed care. Therefore polygamy was neither compulsory nor encouraged, but merely permitted as an attempt to show compassion to widows and orphans.

As Kwok (2007), highlights, the Prophet Muhammad was an advocate for monogamy, explaining that he stayed married to one woman, his first wife Khatija, for 28 years of his life. It was only three years after her death that he took other wives and only to gain political alliances in his battles (Kwok, 2007). He married his youngest wife Aisha because he saw her vision in a dream, where she was wrapped in the red bridal garment (Helminski, 2003). He believed this to be a command from *Allah* and therefore never hesitated to take her as his wife (Helminski, 2003). Helminski (2003), affirms that Prophet Muhammad went so far as to discourage his son-in law from taking a second wife, implying that it would be upsetting for Fatima (his daughter) and he should therefore refrain or divorce her.

It is fair to say that polygamy may be harmful to many marriages as well as to many women. It does seem though that Islam permitted polygamy at a time when it was greatly needed. Realizing the disadvantages of polygamy, Islam still allows it, but under strict conditions and in a situation where no better alternative is available (Badawi, 1998). Mashhour (2005) believes that polygamy is misused by men and is not understood and treated as conditional and exceptional, but rather as an absolute right and a privilege. Polygamy may be viewed as oppressive to Muslim women; however it is important to consider that the act of polygamy is forbidden if the first wife disagrees (Rehman, 2007). Islam does appear then to place women in a position of power.

2.12 Islam and the Media

If Islam awards women such power and rights why then do the media often portray Muslim women as oppressed, using the *hijab* to illustrate their point? Adam (2006) believes that the media has an important role in bringing about peace, as the media is viewed as either an instrument of war or of peace. The media has the power to shape opinions and these opinions shape behaviors and attitudes (Adam, 2006). It does appear that the media is in a powerful position to alter individual's perceptions of Islam and

more particularly of Muslim women. If Muslim women are continuously portrayed in a negative, oppressed light, then surely this is how the world views them.

However it is important to consider that the media has at times brought to the world's attention the issues of women. For example the Amina Lawal story in Nigeria, in which Amina Lawal, a 31 year old Nigerian woman was sentenced under *Sharia* law to be stoned to death for adultery in 2002 (Elaigwu & Galadima, 2003). In this instance if it were not for the media, this story would remain unknown, and the plight of Muslim women who live in oppressive regimes would go unnoticed. Therefore at times the media does play a positive role.

Maqsood (2008) argues that in order to understand Islam, the religion must be separated from the cultural norms of a society. For instance female genital mutilation is practiced in certain areas of Africa and Egypt, but is perceived with much disgust by the majority of Muslims throughout the world (Maqsood, 2008). Forced marriages may still take place in countries like India and Pakistan, but is detested by Muslim women from other countries (Maqsood, 2008). This is because Islamic law allows women the freedom to accept or deny a marriage proposal (Awde, 2004).

The negative aspect of Islam that is often portrayed in the media is actually not a true depiction of Islam but rather depicts certain cultural practices. These cultural practices performed by certain Muslims, are certainly not an example of the entire Muslim population. It is rather an illustration of how certain cultures interpret the Qur'an and *hadith*. The media then has the power to join nations and bring about peace by reporting the truth. By portraying Islam as a religion that suppresses women, without clearly distinguishing religious from cultural values, the media only succeeds in separating nations (Adam, 2006).

Tajbakhsh (2003), argues the same point and his article explores the media's role in shaping the public and private spheres in Islamic countries. He explains that there is a

need to tackle the differences relating to Islamic cultural patterns. Tajbakhsh (2003), explains that to understand the public and private spheres in Islamic countries, focusing on Islamic societies should not result in overlooking the differences between or within countries labeled as Islamic. Differences may exist that may have nothing to do with Islam as such. Therefore care should be taken to ascertain the extent to which the social phenomena under discussion are related to Islamic cultural patterns or to other national or regional characteristics (Tajbakhsh, 2003).

Hanley (2002) speaks of the 39th annual conference of the Islamic Society of North America, in which one panel discussed the portrayal of Muslims in the American media. The panel went on to discuss the fact that some Muslim Americans believe that the media intentionally construe negative stereotypes of Muslims and of Islam (Hanley, 2002). According to Hanley (2002), the conference revealed that there is a popular belief that Islam promotes the persecution of women. The result of the conference had members of the panel and audience agreeing that a possible solution to the negative stereotyping of Islam in the media is to increase the number of Muslim journalists so that Muslims have a voice (Hanley, 2002).

2.13 The South African Context

The creation of a Muslim voice in South Africa, could be a difficult task as Muslims constitute a small minority of 2% in a population of 42 million (Jhazbhay, 2000). However, Jhazbhay (2000) argues that South African Muslims today, live in a secular democracy, and that they have successfully survived slavery, colonialism and apartheid. After the apartheid era and the historical process of liberation in South Africa, which sought to establish a truly egalitarian society, the previously suppressed and marginalized individual's, including the youth; women, blacks and the poor now find themselves in a position to speak out directly and freely (Mumisa, 2000). Even the 'previously veiled

voice of the Muslim women' has been awarded a platform by the South African media (Mumisa, 2000).

"The 1998 court battles between Muslim youth and the conservative Radio Islam regarding the radio's decision to refuse Muslim women permission to participate as presenters in the programmes, are an example of the present state of Islam in South Africa. The radio station claimed that Islam considered listening to a female voice sinful, and in line with the freedom of religion granted in the new constitution, they had the right to bar women from the radio station. On the other hand the youth maintained that the decision to bar women from the radio station on the basis of their gender was a direct violation of gender equality under the new constitution. The youth received wide media support and coverage which led to the defeat of the traditional position" (Mumisa, 2000, p.1-2). Due to the efforts of human rights activists as well as the Muslim youths struggle, Muslim women in South Africa now have the right to practise their faith freely.

However to reach this point, where Muslim women are now allowed to have a voice on national radio took some time. The Islamic movement in Africa focused less on a radical approach but rather sought to purify the practise of Islam (Kane, 2007). In doing so focus was placed on Muslim communities and an attempt was made to impact society through education (Kane, 2007). Islamic schools and radio stations surfaced, also a large amount of Islamic literature was published, all preaching the values and teachings of Islam. The Islamic movement in Africa became an advocate for egaltarianism in society, between gender, race and religion (Kane, 2007). This approach held great appeal for the previously opressed populations such as women, and thereafter the presence of Muslim women was felt in Africa through the donning of *hijab* (Kane, 2007).

However, a single Muslim identity is not easily attainable in a country like South Africa due to the diversity of ethnic, linguistic, and cultural origins of Muslims (Jhazbhzy, 2000). "Muslims came to South Africa 300 years ago as political exiles from the Far East (Indonesia), as slaves from East Africa (Zanzibar), and as indentured labourers from the Indo-Pak subcontinent" (Jhazbhay, 2000, p.371). Through the hostile periods of

colonialism and apartheid, Islam remained intact and was passed down to succeeding generations, resulting in a Muslim identity that remains steadfast. (Jhazbhay, 2000).

A true breakthrough in the rights of Muslim women in South Africa came when the Constitutional Court recently ruled in favor of allowing "widows of polygamous marriages to inherit a share of their deceased husband's estates" (Naidoo, 2009, p3). The ruling came as a result of the efforts of Gabie Hassam, a 62 year old widow, who took her plea of being recognised as an heir to her husband's estate, to the Weatern Cape High Court (Naidoo, 2009). In reaction to the ruling, the Muslim Judicial Council (MJC) of South Africa claimed that the rights of Muslim women is certainly looked after by the constitution (Naidoo, 2009). This can definitely be viewed as not just a victory for Muslim women, but for women's rights in general.

CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction (Design)

The research is qualitative, interpretive and exploratory in nature (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2002). The aim of qualitative research is to create a better understanding of the social aspects of this world by focusing on opinions, experiences, and feelings of individuals (Hancock, 2002). It is believed therefore, that a qualitative design is best suited for this research because it allows for an in-depth study, openness and detail in the understanding of the different themes of information that emerge from the data (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2002). In doing so, concepts and theories are developed to understand the social world (Hancock, 2002).

In conducting qualitative research it is essential to develop a relationship with the participants, by gaining entry, building rapport, providing empathy and reciprocity (Chatman, 1984). In doing so the researcher develops a level of trust with the participants, who in turn will speak freely to the researcher. Qualitative research aims to uncover the 'why' rather than the 'how' of the research topic, through the analysis of unstructured information (Olson, 1995). Qualitative research focuses on the written or spoken word, or even observations, which are recorded in language (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2002).

The analysis of the data takes the form of identifying and categorizing themes (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2002). Due to the nature of the research topic it is difficult to rely on statistics and numbers as is used in a quantitative design to find answers. Therefore the analysis of the interview transcripts in this research will assist the researcher in answering the research question. Olson (1995) suggests that a qualitative research design is best used when the aim is to determine people's attitudes, behaviors, values, perceptions, cultures or lifestyles. With this understanding it becomes clear then as to

why a qualitative research design was chosen for this research, where the aim is to uncover the perceptions of Muslim women toward the gender dynamics in Islam.

3.2 Participants

The research focuses on the perceptions of Muslim women; therefore the participants were Muslim women of various ages to generate a comparison of feelings and insights between young adults and older women. The participants were recruited from the area of Mayfair, which is a Muslim community in Johannesburg and was easily accessible to the researcher. Eight Muslim women were interviewed in total. The criteria to participate in the study were that the participant had to be a Muslim female between the ages of 21 to 50. Out of the eight participants that were chosen three were married, another three were divorced and the remaining two participants' had never been married and were not in a relationship at the time of the interviews. Two of the participants' were between the ages of 21 and 30 years, a further four participants' fell between the 31 to 40 years category and the remaining two were between 41 and 50 years old.

All participants' have attained a tertiary education. One of the participants was still at University at the time of the interviews, while the other seven were working. The only challenge experienced in the recruitment of participants was setting a time for the interviews. All participants were busy with either work or studies and therefore many delays were experienced in settling on a convenient time for the interviews.

3.3 Procedure

The sampling took the form of convenience sampling, which is when the researcher approaches individuals who fulfil all the criteria for the research and asks them if they would like to participate in the research (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2002). Thereafter

the researcher used snowball sampling, which is when the participants suggested other people who fit the criteria to participate in the study (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2002). Snowball sampling is an approach that is used for locating information-rich key participants (Paton, 1990). Therefore this approach was viewed as most suitable for the research. This approach is implemented by contacting a few potential respondents to enquire about others who meet the characteristics of participants for the research (Paton, 1990).

Heckathorn (2002) however, argues that snowball sampling allows for bias, specifically in the way the sample is chosen. This critique of snowball sampling suggests that people tend to associate with people with the same characteristics therefore suggesting friends or acquaintances to the researcher (Heckathorn, 2002). However the researcher found that people tended to be doubtful when approached directly. They were more open and accepting of the research process when told a friend had recommended them. This was one of the main reasons that the snowball sampling technique was used.

The researcher approached each participant individually and explained what the research was about. She telephoned and then with permission visited them in their homes. The women who agreed to participate were given a subject information sheet and consent form to sign. These forms, informed participants of the purposes of the research and explained the extent to which anonymity and confidentiality are maintained, (see appendix A & B). The consent form also explained to the participants that they were free to withdraw from the research process at any time with no negative consequences.

The researcher also received consent from the participants to have the interviews audio-taped (see appendix C). The researcher met each participant at a secure location, where there were no disturbances. Four of the interviews were conducted at the participants' homes, and the other four were at their places of work, for the participants' convenience. There were no challenges experienced in finding interview venues. In this regard focus was placed on the convenience and comfort of the participant.

3.4 Data Collection

The research was done qualitatively; therefore data collection took the form of one on one, semi-structured interviews. Berg (1995, p.29), defines an interview as a "conversation with a purpose". The purpose then for the conversations with the participants' would be to gather information. The interview consisted of semi-structured questions, which were open ended and allowed the opportunity to get an in-depth analysis of the participants' perceptions.

The interview schedule is attached (see appendix D). The general theme of the questions focused on the participants' experiences as Muslim women. Therefore the questions addressed the participants' experiences of gender inequality within their religion, looking also at participants' perceptions of Islam in comparison to those of their parents or grand-parents as well as perceptions of inequality between males and females within their homes. The interviews took from 35 to 60 minutes, depending on the amount of information each participant was willing to provide. All interviews were audio-taped. Once the information was gathered, it was transcribed verbatim by the researcher, and the data was analyzed thereafter. Transcriptions were limited as far as possible to the verbatim report of verbal dialogue and both the interviewer's and interviewee's speech were recorded in written text.

3.5 Researcher Reflexivity

All the participants' were perceived as very excited to participate in the interviews. Many of them considered the research to be interesting and commented on the thought provoking nature of the questions. Despite the sensitive and serious nature of the topic, participants were able to engage with the topic in a humorous and fun way, often laughing at their own comments. The researcher opted for one on one interviews due to the sensitive nature of the topic. Conducting focus groups would not have been

appropriate as participants may not have wanted to share personal opinions in the presence of other people. They seemed to enjoy interacting with the researcher as they were able to discuss the topic freely and they often made use of personal examples to illustrate their point.

Due to the interpretive and exploratory nature of qualitative research the interpersonal interaction between researcher and participants must always be taken into account. Considering the researcher was an Indian female with an Arabic name, participants may have assumed that the researcher was Muslim and therefore responded to questions in a way they perceived as appropriate to decrease negative judgment from the researcher. It is interesting to consider the possibility of the participants knowing that the researcher was not Muslim. Would they have then been more protective of their religion irrespective of the difficulties they face as women in Islam?

What would have been the outcome if the researcher was male? Here it seems quite likely that issues around patriarchy would not have been so openly argued for fear of offending their male interviewer. How would the participants have responded to the questions of a more personal nature? Their discussions around their sexuality as Muslim women may have been hindered due to their discomfort in speaking to a male. Some of the participants seemed uncomfortable addressing such issues with the female researcher, while others were construed as very open and discussed the issues surrounding sexuality with ease.

It is also worth noting that most of the participants dressed in modern attire. One participant dressed in *hijab*. It is worth considering the participants perceptions being interviewed by a female who dressed fashionably rather than Islamically. Did participants feel more empowered to discuss the negative aspects of *hijab* because of the researcher? And if the researcher was dressed in *hijab* would participants have felt ashamed to discuss their views openly? It is impossible to answer all these questions;

however, due to the qualitative nature of the research, all these factors should be taken into account as potentially influencing the findings in some way.

One of the limitations of the use of a qualitative methodology is the subjectivity of the researcher. In this instance the researcher comes from an Islamic background and already had pre-conceived notions around the status of Muslim women. Even though the researcher consciously tried to remain neutral throughout the research process, it was impossible to ignore personal feelings about the topic, as it was of a personal nature to the researcher. Therefore a degree of bias on the researcher's side must be taken into consideration when reading the research. Due to the sensitive nature of the topic and also because the material has personal meaning for the researcher, the researcher did not want her personal issues to interfere with the research and therefore kept a diary to record and track these feelings.

However, it is still possible that the researcher may have influenced the discussion and the views suggested by participants through both direct and indirect means. Firstly, the researcher could have directly influenced participants' responses in the interview process by unintentionally posing leading questions or statements to the participants'. This could be due to the fact that the researcher has personal experience as a Muslim woman in Islam. The researcher could have indirectly influenced participants' responses via the subject information sheet, which introduces the researcher as training to become a psychologist and who has an interest in gender dynamics in Islam. Consequently the views expressed by the participants' may have been influenced by their assumption that the researcher is expecting them to maintain that Muslim women are oppressed. However the participants were experienced as open in the interviews, and felt able to share a range of views, including personal stories with the interviewer.

3.6 Data Analysis

The researcher used thematic content analysis to analyze data. Thematic content analysis is a method for analyzing and identifying patterns or themes within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic content analysis was viewed as most appropriate for this research above other methods of analysis due to its ability to produce comparable and evaluative information (Wilbraham, 1995). It is a flexible and useful research tool that provides a detailed description of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic content analysis provides a simple method to follow which allows for its limitless application to any form of written or spoken discourse (Wilbraham, 1995).

Considering the aim of the research is to uncover Muslim women's perceptions toward gender dynamics in Islam, the researcher specifically chose this type of analysis in an effort to link participants' views and perceptions by using themes. Wilbraham (1995, p.5) argues that thematic content analysis "combines well with participatory / feminist research approaches where the participants are allowed to "speak", giving voice to particular issues". Therefore it is evident that thematic content analysis fits well with this research which has become a platform for Muslim women to give voice to their concerns within their religion.

Throughout the analysis, themes and sub-themes were identified from the data. Other emanating themes included the patriarchal society, culture vs. religion, faith and polygamy. The steps included in thematic analysis are:

1. Familiarizing ones self with the data – involves transcribing and reading.
2. Generating initial codes – coding important characteristics of the data systematically.
3. Searching for themes – placing codes into possible themes and gathering relevant data.
4. Reviewing themes – check the relevance of themes against the different codes as well as against the data as a whole.

5. Defining and naming themes – create appropriate definitions and names for each theme.
6. Producing the report – produce an academic report of the analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.77 - 101).

The researcher followed both Braun and Clarke (2006) as well as Terre Blanche and Durrheim (2002) steps in analyzing the data. Both use similar steps in thematic content analysis.

Once interviews were conducted they were transcribed word for word in an attempt to maintain the meaning of participants' responses. While transcribing notes were made of significant aspects to be included in the interpretation of the data. According to Terre Blanche and Durrheim (2002, p.133), 'there are a number of conventions for indicating interruptions, speakers talking at the same time, pauses, raised voices, and so on.' However these specific conventions are used mostly when a close conversational analysis is done (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2002). Considering that this was not the case in this research, bracketed notes were used to identify interruptions, pauses, etc.

Once transcribing was completed, each interview was read a minimum of three times to familiarize the researcher with the data as well as to generate codes. In coding, the researcher broke up the data by marking different sections using different colored highlighters, according to what was considered similar views, opposing views, quotes, etc. From these codes relevant themes were identified. Terre Blanche and Durrheim (2002, p.143), suggest that "thematising and coding blend into each other, because the themes which we are using tend to change in the process of coding as we develop a better understanding of them and how they relate to other themes." Therefore themes were then reviewed and the relevance of each theme was checked against the codes as well as the interviews as a whole. Thereafter appropriate names were given to each theme which was then discussed in chapter four.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

All ethical considerations were taken into account as stipulated by the University of Witwatersrand research committee. This research project has been approved by the University of the Witwatersrand research committee.

The research on religion is often a sensitive topic; therefore it was important that participants provide full consent to participate in this study. Participants were given subject information sheets, on which participants were informed about the nature of the research and were given two separate consent forms to sign, one for the interview and one for audio-taping the interview. Participants were therefore informed from the beginning about the nature of the research and the topic to be discussed.

All participants participated in the research project on a voluntary basis and no participant was offered compensation for their participation. Participants were informed that anonymity could not be guaranteed, due to the type of data collection technique that was used. This technique is referred to as snow ball sampling, where participants' are asked to suggest names of people they feel may be interested in participating in the research, thus compromising the participants' identity.

Participants were also informed that confidentiality could not be guaranteed by the researcher as even though participants' identities were kept confidential and were not included in the research report, the research findings however is based on the information that participants provide, and direct quotes were used. Permission was gained from all participants to quote them within the research findings. Different pseudonyms were given to each participant in the discussion section in an effort to protect participants' confidentiality and maintain anonymity. Also participants were informed that they may refuse to answer any question at any time and that they may decide to withdraw from the study at any time, with no negative consequences to them. Only the researcher and the researcher's supervisor have had access to the transcribed material.

CHAPTER 4
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

Unfortunately there is a gap in research focusing on Muslim women; therefore making a comparison with other research is limited. Wyche (2004, p.319) agrees, arguing that "most of the literature is on the historical and political development of the nation of Islam and the differences among the male leaders." The religion of Islam, however, has been viewed with much contention by the rest of the world for its supposed ill-treatment of women. This study aims to achieve a more thorough understanding about how Muslim women view their position in Islam. Laying to rest misconceptions of Islam and bringing to light the truth as told by these Muslim women. In this chapter, the findings of the study will be discussed. The transcribed interviews were categorized into central themes.

Several central themes were evident in the study. They arose repeatedly during the interviews. In this chapter the main themes will be identified and discussed by analyzing excerpts from the interviews. These themes are *culture verse religion, having faith, the patriarchal society, polygamy is not allowed, dress in Islam, the mosque: a contested space in Islam* and *Muslim women are more than just homemakers*. Under each theme material supporting women's perceptions as well as the Islamic practice is provided.

To ensure anonymity, pseudonyms will be assigned to each participant. The researcher felt that it was best to use different female, Muslim names to refer to each participant, considering the topic of the research. These names are entirely different and in no way compromise anonymity.

4.2 Culture vs. Religion

Individuals' personalities and outlooks are strongly influenced by the culture and society in which each individual exists (Giddens, 1989). Culture is basically made up of the values the members of a given group hold, the norms they follow and the material goods that they create (Giddens, 1989). When broken down further one could view culture as the way of life of members of a society, including how individuals in this society dress, their marriage and religious customs, their family life as well as patterns of work (Giddens, 1989).

Religion on the other hand is belief in a supreme being, whom many call God (Ahmad & Azzam, 1976). Religion provides people with a way of life, through the practice of rituals and prayer people find themselves attaining a spiritual closeness to their creator (Dasa, 2004). It is the practical aspect of religions that get confused with cultural rituals. During the interviews some of the participants found difficulty in differentiating between cultural norms and religious practices. This could be because culture and religion are so often intertwined that it becomes difficult to tell them apart.

Hajra brings the element of patriarchy to her comment on the blurring between culture and religion:

> *"Like I said there are issues around the cultural thing but that's cultural. Like when I used to tell my ex-husband, 'you know what my friends husbands help in the house, they help with the washing like the wife will do the washing and the husband will go hang it up'. He would say they weren't taught right. But its not religion, definitely not religion."*

The above participant is Cape Malay and she reflects on her marriage to an Indian Muslim man with much frustration. Hajra was one of the participants who was divorced, and she is no longer married to the man she speaks of in the quote. While Hajra's quote also speaks to the theme of patriarchy, a theme which is discussed in greater detail later

on, it is important to look beyond this and take from her explanation her complete frustration in the blurring between culture and religion.

Hajra compares her marital life with that of her friends and the result leaves her feeling angry toward her ex-husband. The point she seems to make is that Islamically men are not exempt from assisting their wives with household duties, as she describes her friends' husbands. However, it appears that because Hajra, a Cape Malay woman, married a man out of her culture she now feels that she is suffering the consequences. Hajra seems to lay blame on cultural influences, and clearly notes a difference between the Cape Malay culture and the Indian culture, by implying that in the Indian culture men are treated as superior, whereas in Cape Malay culture men and women are treated as equals.

This raises a point concerning the differences between Muslims, based on their cultures due to the misinterpretation of the Qur'an. A possible explanation for why culture is misinterpreted as religion is provided by Bazarangi (2006), who firmly believes that the problem arises in the interpretation of the Qur'an and *hadith*, and more precisely who is doing the interpreting. If men are doing the interpreting then surely they would not want to concern themselves with arduous household chores. Bazarangi's statement is clearly defined by Hajra when she claims her husband as responding.

> '*they weren't taught right.'*

It is implied here that a Muslim man must be taught that his place is not in the kitchen, but that he has a superior role as man of the house. According to Islam, however, as laid down by the Qur'an and *hadith* men and women are equal, then one wonders where this ideology comes from (Bowker, 1995). Hajra's husband's response speaks very clearly of the process of socialization, whereby girls are taught to be caring and nurturing and boys are taught to be goal oriented and strong. Hajra is quite firm in her belief that Muslim men from different cultures behave differently, possibly exposing her distrust in the Indian culture.

Rabia, another participant agrees with Hajra and says:

> *"It's (referring to living with your in-laws) not a religious thing I do believe it's a cultural thing. It's like how Indians have a certain way of doing things and it's not a religious thing, but it's an Indian thing. And I believe that all of that stems from India. I think Hindu's and Muslims all have that same kind of thing you know."*

In the above quote Rabia singles out Indian culture as going against Islamic law. She uses the example of Hinduism as being very similar to Islam in that women from both religions display a degree of subservience in their role as women. The example she provides here is when a couple gets married, it is assumed that the wife will live in her husbands home with his parents. Rabia's response suggests that this practice cannot be solely attributed to Islam, but is rather common in Indian culture. She raises the point that Indian culture is the same irrespective of religion. Surely Rabia's assumption is a generalization. Are there no other cultures that ascribe to such practices?

Monk (2003) answers this question, by disagreeing with Rabia's assumption that such a practice is purely Indian and he argues that this practice is common in the Jewish culture as well. He explains that the ritual around Jewish marriage views the groom as being responsible for preparing living accommodations for him and his new bride, which often consisted of building an addition to his father's house (Monk, 2003). Such a custom is due to the strong family ties inherent in the Jewish culture and therefore living away from the family would be frowned upon (Monk, 2003). So it appears then that such practices stem from religious values and teachings that aim to create strong family bonds, by keeping the family unit together, rather than being viewed as acts of suppressing women.

In the extract below, Sabera's comment highlights her belief that culture rather than Islam is more oppressive to women:

> *"I mean I grew up in a family where you shouldn't be held back because you are a woman, you should pursue an education and not necessarily be kept away. So sometimes I do think it's a cultural thing as opposed to a religious thing. Sometimes the lines get blurred and it does become confusing."*

Sabera is a young, single working woman, who portrayed the image of an educated, independent woman, a woman who does not depend on a man for financial support. In her comment, she addresses the issue of Muslim girls being held back from obtaining an education simply because they are female. Sabera was fortunate to grow up in a Muslim family that awarded equal rights to men and women; she now appears to contemplate the cause of such behaviors, laying the blame on culture rather than Islamic law. Is Sabera's outlook of such practices based on her unique background which was rooted in equality, or rather is it due to the fact that Islam truly is an egalitarian religion, awarding equal rights to both men and women? Jouili and Moazami (2006) attempt to answer this question by asserting that Muslim women are in fact encouraged to acquire knowledge in Islam. The acquisition of knowledge for both men and women is considered with utmost importance in Islam as the Qur'an says "*seek knowldege from the cradle to the grave",* implying that all effort should be made to continuosly educate oneself.

Considering Islam's positive standing on the education of women, one can't help but look toward cultural practices as the cause of many Muslim girls being denied an education. Chaudhary (2004, p.50) asserts that 'while people are potentially equal, cultures definitely are not'. Chaudhary (2004) brings to the fore fundamental questions in the culture debate. She questions the endless variation in cultural practices and more specifically how these variations are justified if they cause the oppression of children. Of course these questions are not easily answered, but are certainly thought provoking. Chaudhary certainly taps on our moral and ethical values.

Leila's comment indicates the difficulty in differentiating between cultural norms and religious practice:

> *"Maybe it (women's role) could also be more of a cultural thing, because sometimes I feel that the lines get crossed between culture and between religions. I think so. And sometimes I sit and wonder like is this really what the Qur'an is about, or is it what the people tell us we should do."*

This participant appears to be pondering where the role assigned to Muslim women emerged from. Considering that this was the youngest participant, she is still unsure as to her questioning of her religion. She came across as very careful not be perceived as blasphemous. With some uncertainty she tried to distinguish between cultural and religious norms, but stated quite appropriately that the lines between the two get blurred. Implying then that if we cannot distinguish between what is religious and what is cultural, then there can be no uniformity in religion. These variations appear to have given rise to different "lslams," and a diversification in interpretation and practise (Mashhour, 2005).

The end of Leila's comment sees her questioning the validity of the Qur'an. An act that is considered taboo in the Islamic faith. Could the Qur'an be responsible for supressing women? It appears that Leila feels uneasy about considering the Qur'an as being responsible for the opression of women. She therefore suggests the possibility that man is making the rules and once again misinterpreting the Qur'an. However Leila does not come to a conclusion and remains unsure and notably uncomfortable with her questioning. As she perceives this to be questioning her religion, and questioning her religion would imply her faith is not steadfast, which would be unnacceptable for a Muslim woman. As Jouili and Moazami (2006) assert that Muslim women attain a sense of empowerment in their faith, which requires an effort to acquire and circulate knowledge.

Haseena raises an important point in the culture verse religion debate. She has this to say:

> *"Theres that disjuncture where I find that we are first told what to do in terms of religion and then we find out (the Islamic way), and by then it's too late you can't reverse, you really can't, that perception, you know all those inculcations of the values".*

In her argument, Haseena comes across as frustrated that cultural practices has become such an important part of our lives, to the point that it overshadows religious rules and beliefs. She very clearly implies that society imparts cultural knowledge before religious knowledge to children, who then grow up with miconceptions about their religion. For example the Islamic rule around the wearing of hijab is highly debateable. Many Muslim scholars argue that *hijab* is compulsory for Muslim women. However, in this study most of the participants fervently believed that hijab is merely an option that Islam provides to women, as a source of protection. Implying that the wearingof *hijab* is a choice that Muslim women are entitled to make. Are we then suggesting that society forms acceptable cultural norms that are forced upon individuals as compulsory and in this case as *Shariah* (Islamic law)?

Chaudhary (2004), agrees with this assumption and argues that children become an integral part in the reconstruction of culture. What she means is that the family plays the important role of providing cultural information to every new child and in doing so stregnthens cultural beliefs and practices. The cycle then continues and parents continually pass on to their children their cultural values and beliefs. Haseena aptly points out, in the latter part of her comment, that as adults it becomes too late to reverse this cultural learning and replace it with religious knowledge. It is certainly challenging to question and change values and beliefs that have become a major part of your being. However, the difficulty in making a change may also stem from the fear of retribution in going against what is socially accepted as the norm.

Maqsood (2008) argues that in order to understand Islam, the religion must be separated from the cultural norms of a society. For instance the belief in female genital mutilation, which is practiced in certain Muslim communities in Africa, is heavily frowned upon by Muslims throughout the world (Maqsood, 2008). The important message that scholars like Maqsood and Chaudhary, as well as woman like Haseena seem to be conveying is that different cultural practices performed by different Muslims should not be considered as an example of Islamic beliefs and practice. It is rather an illustration of how certain cultures interpret the Qur'an and *hadith*.

From these findings, it appears that there is some evidence that some women feel that there is a difference between culture and religion, and that sometimes the two get confused. These women made reference particularly to the Indian culture as being very set in its ways and therefore intertwined with religions such as Islam and Hinduism. These cultural beliefs and practices flow through generations and become so entrenched in ones way of life that it becomes difficult to differentiate between culture and religion. It is also indicated that some of the participants believe that Islam as a religion does not view women in a mediocre light, but rather allows Muslim women power and choice, and it is rather the cultural way of thinking that is mistakenly construed as Islamic values.

4.3 Having Faith

How can we live in a world without believing in God? This question and questions similar to this has echoed throughout the western world since the eighteenth century. The diversity of religious beliefs on offer is so immense that a generally accepted definition of religion is difficult to achieve. Islam, being one of the larger religions propagates a belief in a supreme being, who commands man to behave morally on this earth and who promises of an after-life to come (Giddens, 1989). Islam invokes feelings of reverence and awe among its believers, many of whom follow piously with complete trust and confidence, implying an unwavering faith.

An example of this belief is provided in the following extract from the interview with Leila:

> *Leila: "I feel that you shouldn't question it (religion), and sometimes I think it's only natural that we do question, or thoughts might come into our head, like you know, why this or why that? But I think it all boils down to having faith; you just have to have faith.*
> *Researcher: What do you think would happen if more people started questioning their religion?*
> *Leila: I think people would just go astray. I think people would start losing their faith. The thing is if you question too deep or you question too much I think your mind just starts wondering. I think it will get you to a point where you will start questioning is there a God. I think it can come down to that, so I think people would just really lose their faith."*

In the above excerpt, Leila displays her fear in questioning her religion too deeply. Her faith and belief in Islam appears to be unwavering, and she displays a concern that if she questions too much she will lose her belief all together. The participant appears to distrust not just others but herself as well in holding on to her faith. In the first part of the quote, Leila talks about being a contradicted subject, she reveals that it is not easy to have faith because she has questions lingering on her mind, but at the same time she constantly feels pressurized to accept what she has been told. What causes this pressure to accept and not question? According to Palmer (1998, p.402), Michel Foucault has stated that "maybe the target nowadays is not to discover what we are, but to refuse what we are." Such a daring suggestion certainly opposes the assumptions that are central to many cultures and religions (Palmer, 1998).

In the suggestion, Foucault seems to imply that people have not considered the quest for knowledge of ones selves with high regard (Palmer, 1998). Possibly suggesting that it is sometimes easier to be controlled by outside forces such as religion, than to differ from the norm. There appears to be an intense fear emanating from Leila to question the teachings of Islam. When looking at the second half of the quote, there is a hint toward the notion that religion has become a tool to control people. Leila's comments suggest

that people have been socialized in such a way that their fear of the unknown is so intense that they would follow religious teachings blindly, even if certain aspects do not sit well with them. This fear is so gripping that Leila, like other women; doubt their ability to hold on to their faith. The notion of heaven and hell is used blatantly in many religions, not just in Islam, as a tool to regulate people's behaviors. By instilling the fear of God into people, the quest for conformity becomes so much easier.

Like Leila, Rabia is another woman who prefers not to question her religion out of fear of retribution. Rabia had this to say:

> *"And sometimes you believe in something but there's no proof to it, you know. Its belief on faith, that's what God, asked you to do, and if you continue questioning every single thing, right till the nitty gritty, you'll end up being an atheist. So there's just something's that I just don't question. I read it and I feel okay you know what this is what is laid down and this is what I have to follow."*

Once again the notion of belief in the unknown is so great that Rabia would sacrifice her personal development just to conform. What emerges as significant in her statement is her belief that *Allah* has asked all Muslims to follow a certain path and behave in certain ways, and that if one questions his wishes, *Allah* has the power to take your faith away. This understanding provokes intense fear in individuals like Rabia. But one wonders if this fear is as a result of the lack of power that women hold. If Rabia was a woman who felt empowered and confident in whom she was, then would it be easier for her to question without the fear, knowing that her questioning would not result in the loss of faith.

Saffiya on the other hand is a woman who also chooses to conform but for more spiritual reasons:

> *"I do think there are many things that will always be beyond our understanding and I think yah, and coming from that point of view I think*

> *there are a lot of things that I might subjectively experience as unfair and wrong and you know just intuitively doesn't sit right with you, but I think that's where you give that side of you over and I think that is what faith is all about, is to give that over."*

While this participant agrees that one should not question their religion too much, she does not seem to hold this belief out of fear. She rather chooses to acknowledge that there is a higher power, and that as human beings we don't always know everything. Freud believed religion to be an unhealthy illusion; he is noted by Miller (2008, p.680) as saying, "We are like children, said Freud, who long for a strong father to protect them, and this wish can be gratified by believing in a powerful God. ... we have to make vital decisions, yet never have any certainty about our rightness in doing so - a set of divine commandments allay our anxiety about right and wrong. We suffer grief and terror in the face of death and transience - religion allows us to believe in an afterlife where we will re-meet those we have lost. We feel bitter resentment that our enemies flourish and go unpunished - religion consoles us by assuring us that their afterlife will be one of horrible suffering."

Freud makes a significant point in highlighling the use of religion to control and regulate people's thoughts and behaviours. People console themselves with the understanding that if they believe completely then God will always protect them and ensure a pleasurable outcome. Irrespective of their immediate sufferrings, the belief is that they will one day reap the rewards. With this understanding then it does appear that some individuals, like Saffiya, will choose to ignore certain discrepancies in their lives with the belief that 'it was meant to be'. But Freud was a sceptic of religion, by accepting his views are we then invalidating Saffiya's beliefs? Freud certainly provides his audience with a greater understanding as to the extent that religion can influence people's lives, but surely it is then up to each individual to empower themselves with enough knowledge to not succumb out of fear but out of a greater understanding.

An interesting theme that emerged from the interviews described breaking down Islam into two components, the practical and the spiritual. Some of the participants felt that

Islam was made up of the rituals and acts that you as a Muslim had to fulfill, for example the way you dress or only eating *halaal* foods, etc. The other aspect consisted of one's connection with *Allah*, a more spiritual level of Islam. It does appear that many of the women feel that it is their connection with *Allah* that is the most rewarding part of being a Muslim woman. If their connection is strong, the full engagement into the practical aspect becomes less significant and almost trivial in nature.

Shirin was one of the participants who fully appreciated the spiritual aspect of Islam:

> *"For me being a Muslim woman is that connection with Allah as being one and being totally trusting (of) him in every essence, every word, every breath. That's the belief and that's what people are brought up to believe in as a Muslim."*

This participant feels very strongly about developing a spiritual connection with her creator. Shirin talks about this with a sense of amazement in that Islam provides for her a space in which she is totally free and powerful. Powerful in the sense that she is able to connect with her higher power or God through her mind, and not simply through actions.

In addition, Sabera comments on how she conceptualizes her faith:

> *"I think also not to feel like you have to do this, you have to do that. It's about also developing a love for your religion and not kind of doing stuff because 'oh my God I'm going to burn in hell because I didn't do that'. And I think that really helped me conceptualize my own faith."*

Once again another participant shares the understanding that there is more to Islam than the practical aspect. Here Sabera explains that there should not be any guilt attached to not performing a certain ritual, because Islam is about finding strength and love in your religion. Sabera seems to be talking about spirituality and Galanter (2009), highlights that spirituality is inherent to man's nature, suggesting that it emerges through both biological and cultural evolution. This would be hard to attain if one constantly had to be

performing specific rituals, for example performing ones *namaaz* (prayer) five times a day. Often in religion there is fear attached to the practical aspects.

Most of these women acknowledge that Islam is not about satisfying the needs of God, but rather about satisfying one's inner need for peace and contentment. This they believe is done by conversing with *Allah* and placing their trust in Him, therefore attaining inner peace. In doing so Sabera experiences her faith as liberating and empowering. Is there then the implication that those women who enjoy partaking in the practical aspect of any religion for that matter are not benefiting from the spiritual aspect? Surely there must be a balance of both, where one could benefit from performing rituals and in that sense feel a closer connection to his/her creator.

In the quotes below, Haseena provides a contrast between Islam as challenging and Islam as liberating:

> *"I mean if you work an 8 to 5 job, practicing and trying to perform your 5 times namaaz is difficult because you are expected to be in interviews you are expected to dress in a certain way. So I would say practically yes it is very challenging."*

She goes on to say:

> *"I think Islam is one of the most progressive religions. I mean if you just think about it, everywhere else women are meant to take their husbands surname. Islam is the only religion where you don't have to take, where you actually keep your own surname. I mean if you think of all Benazir Butto, Nawal al Sadawi, those are all strong women and I mean you don't know them because of their husbands, you know them for them."*

Haseena shares the same beliefs as Sabera and Shirin, and in the quotes above discusses the challenges of the practical aspect of Islam in her daily life, but also talks about the beauty of the spiritual aspect and how liberating it is for her. For these women Islam appears to be one of the most liberating religions in a mind sense, but in a practical sense it appears to be the most restrictive. These are two dynamics in the religion which don't

seem to reconcile. Galanter (2009, p.240) tries to explain these two dynamics and points out a distinction between religion and spirituality, saying that "religion embodies formal doctrines and behavioral requirements that may be characterized by authoritarianism and intolerance, which is in contrast to spirituality, which is more likely to be democratic and tolerant."

From the responses it does appear that women find their faith liberating and empowering, but yet they are not happy when they are faced with the many restrictions that come with being Muslim, for example only eating *halaal* foods. Could it be that this is part of human nature, where people want the best of both worlds, the benefit of their faith as empowering, with out the challenges? Considering Galanters explanation though, these contradictory feelings that the participants experience are easier to understand. Irrespective of the answer, Haseena like other participants acknowledges that practicing Islam may not always be easy, but it certainly is rewarding in other ways.

From the findings, it appears that the participants who believed that having faith in their religion was extremely important were in the minority. These women indicated that they would rather have an unrelenting faith in their creator than question his intentions or the religion itself. This may imply that there is certainly a percentage of Muslim women in South Africa itself that prefer to follow Islam, with it's rules and practicalities, without stopping to ask why. It could therefore be deduced from these findings that there are more Muslim women in South Africa that question their position as women in their religion. These women choose to understand and know their rights instead of following with an unwavering faith.

The findings also indicated that at least 50% of the participants believe that following through with the practical aspect of Islam can at times be challenging. Whereas the spiritual or 'mind' part of the religion, which meant connecting to *Allah* in their minds and in their hearts is more rewarding. The fact that only half the sample of participants felt this way may indicate that a large portion of Muslim women are still finding it

difficult to think independently. They may be too immersed in the cultural rules and obligations laid down by society that they cannot truly connect with their creator on a spiritual level, which appears to allow true peace of mind.

4.4 The Patriarchal Society

Although there may be notable variations in the respective roles of women and men in different cultures, there is no known instance of a society in which females are considered more powerful than men (Giddens, 1989). Throughout the world, women are primarily considered in the category of child-rearing and maintenance of the home, while political and military activities tend to be unmistakably male (Giddens, 1989). The division of labor between the sexes in many societies is indicative of how men outnumber women in all arenas of power and influence (Giddens, 1989). This male dominance is usually referred to as patriarchy.

Shirin highlights the effects of patriarchy in Islam below:

> *"You see why it's easier to say Allah has commanded you to live that way, so they won't question it and that's where the man comes in. Once you put Allah in nobody questions anything. I mean for me to just say anything like this I promise you my brothers will die. They say I must go and read kalima's (a prayer making you a Muslim) again, because I'm not a Muslim anymore."*

In the above quote, the participant highlighted a significant point in that, men tend to make and break rules freely, because they attribute it to *Shariah* (Islamic law). And once something is considered to be the word of *Allah*, people tend to shy away from questioning it. People may dislike something, but they certainly will not question it openly out of fear of retribution. Shirin is blatantly accusing men of misusing the teachings of Islam to subdue women. Pilcher and Whelehan (2007), explain that

patriarchy is a system of social structures and practices, and it is in this system that men tend to dominate, oppress and exploit women.

What is interesting is that this participant talks about her brothers reprimanding her. The reprimand comes from men, her brothers and not a woman. This perpetuates the notion that men are in the controlling seat and appear to have the power to tell a woman that she is no longer a Muslim because she is asking too many questions. This participant however came across as very authoritative in her own space. She appeared confident in her point of view and even though she highlighted her brother's reaction, she portrayed a woman who could tell the difference between Islam and patriarchal rules. Shirin went on to declare:

"I am a Muslim woman that definitely will break every man made rule!"

Shirin makes a powerful statement claiming her right as a Muslim woman, implying that she is aware of the rules men make under the guise of *Shariah* (Islamic law), and she certainly will not stand for it. She certainly comes across as a powerful and educated woman who understands her religion well. This quote demonstrates that not all Muslim women are helpless victims. There are certainly many Muslim women who do not shy away out of fear, but rather stand their ground and arm themselves with Islamic knowledge and not teachings that have been misinterpreted by men. Such an action by a woman implies empowerment and belief beyond what is the norm. Shirin portrays a woman who is stepping out of the mould and not conforming. Rather she is making her own rules, and to refer back to Foucalt, she is placing her 'quest for knowledge' at the top of her list of priorities (Palmer, 1998).

Hajra agrees that patriarchy certainly influences religion and makes her point in discussing the *hijab*:

> *"God has asked us to be modest, but you know the hijab where they totally cover the face that was what men have interpreted, I think that's a personal opinion. But I'm just saying there has been add on's."*

While this participant acknowledges that Islam asks women to cover themselves in modesty for their own protection, she understands that men too have that responsibility. *Shariah* (Islamic law) dictates that both men and women should dress modestly and not provocatively (Syed, 2001). Bowker (1995) argues that men have the power and therefore interpret the law to their requirements. He further says that *hijab* has become an opportunity for men to oppress women and allow themselves freedom.

Islam certainly encourages modesty in dress; however Hajra accuses men of forcing the use of the veil onto women. The question that arises then is what motivation would men have to enforce the use of the veil? Is it simply that men want their woman covered to avoid the unwanted attention from other men? While this may seem as a protective act, it also reeks of disempowerment. Disempowering a woman means that there is more power for men. By placing a woman under a veil, implies masking her and therefore not allowing her a face in society. Hajra's comment therefore raises the assumption that men are using religion to eradicate the social presence of women, thereby not placing their position of power in jeopardy.

The latter part of Hajra's comment implies that Muslim women know that men are misusing Islamic teachings, and that she understands she has a choice. Where men assert that it is Islamic law to be veiled and women must conform, Hajra asserts that this is not Islamic and according to *Shariah* all women are given the right to choose what is best for them. This suggests a level of non-conformity that is rarely seen among Muslim women. Covington (2002) terms non-conformity in religion as 'religious radicalism', which she explains, emphasizes an individual conscience and argues for voluntary religion. This explanation assists one in understanding why non-conformity in religions is so scarce, because it implies going against the popular belief. Hajra in her bold statement is

choosing an individual conscience separate from what is considered the norm as is preached by religious figures.

Another participant acknowledges the oppression men create and insists that it is not Islamic. Haseena comments on the oppression of women on a global scale:

> *"I don't think it's in anybody's interest to want to see women having that higher status, because imagine what would that mean for men. All the men in the boardrooms and in the political arena or what ever, it's not in their interest…. I mean the world is not ready for strong women and I think not very many people can deal with strong women, it's a very selected few. So whether it's a Muslim woman or an ordinary women, you know a woman of another culture, it's something that doesn't really go down well with most people".*

In the above quote, a participant indicates that oppressing women is not only an Islamic phenomenon, but a global one. She very strongly asserts her opinion that women are very powerful, intelligent beings and therefore men fear giving women control. We can once again refer to socialization as part of the cause. Pilcher and Whelehan (2004, p.61) claim that "it is through the gender order of a society that forms or codes of masculinities and femininities are created and recreated, and relations between them are organized." Men and women are socialized very differently and when women start developing characteristics that are considered 'male only', for example strong minded and outspoken, this creates uproar from those men who feel threatened in their positions.

Haseena comes across as a woman that feels very empowered in her own space. She identifies herself as a strong woman, and it appears that she speaks from personal experience when she says that 'not very many people can deal with strong women'. For her the idea of breaking into a man's domain is quite exhilarating, because it means breaking the mould and not conforming to what socialization has taught us. Wright (1999) views the religious choice between conformity and non-conformity as a case of conscience. Is he implying then that to not conform suggests a lack of conscience?

Haseena does prove to have a conscience, one that refuses to view women as second class citizens. Her view certainly exposes the assumption that men feel threatened by powerful women, because this implies that their control and power will be taken away. In order to maintain their power, Haseena implies that men use culture and religion to oppress women and place them in a role of subservience. An under handed tactic on the side of men, but one that has been in existence for many years. Resulting in women like Haseena, now fighting for their power in this male dominated arena.

Rabia highlights an important aspect in Islamic history that talks to the effects of a patriarchal society. She had this to say:

> *"Yet the Taliban, when they took over Afghanistan they prevented women from studying, they (women) were stopped from going to school at standard 4."*

In the above quote, the participant refers to the Taliban, which emerged as a major political and military force in Afghanistan in the 1900's (Akhtar, 2008). Rabia talked about the Taliban with much anger and frustration, viewing them as a group of men who blatantly abused their power to oppress women. She particularly makes reference here to the restrictions placed on Muslim girls and women from seeking an education. Jouili and Moazami (2006) argue against the Taliban's actions, insisting that Islam infact encourages women to educate themselves, explaining that women play a vital role in the ubpringing of their children. If Islam encourages the pursuit of knowledge then what was the Taliban's reasoning behind restricting women?

If we consider the notion that with knowledge comes power, then it could possibly have been the fear of placing power in the hands of women that led to such extreme action. Jouili and Moazami (2006, p.617) agree, stating that with more Muslim women becoming educated and finding their voice, sooner or later this would contribute to the shifts in the structures of authority, placing women in positions of power, and creating an

opportunity 'for women to become authorized interpreters of religious sources'. If this is the case and more women become involved in the interpretation of the Qur'an and *hadith* then surely men will not be allowed to get away with their patriarchal abuse of power and subsequent supression of women. Bazarangi (2006, p.132) is a firm believer in women's involvement, arguing that the 'Qur'an itself encourages all humans to participate actively in interpretation'.

The research indicated that the majority of the participants felt that Islam as a religion is founded and based very much on a patriarchal society. These women had strong views about the teachings of Islam being distorted by men. In a way that is advantageous to them, by furthering their life achievements and enhancing their comforts in life. There was only one woman in the group of participants that sat on the fence so to speak regarding her opinion of the patriarchal nature of Islam. This surely indicates that there are many women out there who feel in a similar vein. These women may be too afraid to voice their opinions, fearing the consequences of their actions.

4.5 Polygamy is Not Allowed

Polygamy which is the act of having more than one wife at a time has been a part of Islamic law and practice from the time of the Prophet Muhammad. It has remained the same in its basic principles, based on the grounds that it originated from divine law and therefore cannot be changed (Walford, 1997). According to Bowker (1995) Islam places great emphasis on paternity and lineage as a means of building the structure of society. This he believes is what underlies the permission for men to have more than one wife.

The following excerpts all highlight how strongly opinionated women are about polygamy. These Muslim women seem to clearly understand the laws governing the act of polygamy in Islam. According to them Polygamy is not actually allowed, but rather discouraged in Islam. It is important to acknowledge that none of the participants were in

polygamous marriages, as this would definitely have an impact on their views towards polygamy. Islam is very clear on the importance of providing equally for each wife, and it is because of this rule, these women insist that polygamy is therefore forbidden because it is impossible to love two women at the same time. Feminists argue that polygamy in Islam is prejudicial and biased against women (Ali, 2006). However Badawi (1998) argues that Islam permits Polygamy as a better solution to divorce, or having an affair. Most of the participants had firm views against the act of polygamy. Below are some quotes from the interviews articulating this clear thinking.

In her comments against polygamy, Shirin refers to patriarchal rule and its roots in polygamy:

> *"That is also now justifying a man made rule, because it really doesn't matter whether you marry for lust or whether she was dying in the street. I mean it makes no difference; the point is he goes and he marries another woman. He married 20 women, 30 women it doesn't matter. The bottom line is again going right back to he marries all these women and then what happens to the women? Isn't that unfair?"*

In the interview Shirin appeared frustrated at the thought that polygamous marriages were okay. When making her comment above she had sat upright in her chair and raised her voice as if to make sure the researcher understood her point. Her frustration around this topic appears to centre on the fact that polygamy is unfair to women, regardless of the reasoning behind it. She goes so far as to imply that the reasoning behind the Prophet Muhammad marrying more than one wife is also unacceptable. Her argument looks at what the act of polygamy does to the women involved, whether she's the first or the fourth wife. Her comment makes one think that women are considered as mere objects that can be collected, and when the fascination with the current object dissolves the man can simply get another object, which in this case is another wife.

Shirin is obviously quite biased and somewhat critical in her analysis of polygamy. Are we then to assume that polygamy is completely bad and disrespectful of women? In

understanding the roots of polygamy, which is discussed in chapter 2, it's easy to view polygamy as man made, and not a creation of Islam. On the contrary, Islam ordained strict rules surrounding polygamy, making it very clear that polygamy is not an act that should be entered into lightly, but should only be considered in the case of divorce (Alexandre, 2007).

In an extract from her interview, Hajra continues her argument as to why polygamy is not allowed.

> *"Because you not allowed to love one woman more than the other. Which man is going to be able to love two women the same. Today it's because of lust."*

Hajra raises an important point concerning polygamy according to Islamic law. The Qur'an clearly states that if a man is unable to provide equally for his wives then he should refrain from marrying more than one wife. In this regard, Hajra quite forcefully asserts that no man is capable of loving two women at the same time, therefore making the act of polygamy very difficulty or simply impossible. So with this understanding of when polygamy is allowed it does appear that Islam puts women's rights first. Alexandre (2007) debates the act of polygamy, while discussing the Islamic rationale behind it; he also acknowledges the misuse of it, equating polygamy with abject immorality. Hajra affirms this point and believes that nowadays men commit to polygamy because they are not sexually satisfied with their current wives and therefore seek this satisfaction elsewhere. She terms this as 'lust', and contemplates that sexual desire can be so powerful that already married men will justify taking on another wife to meet their sexual needs.

Sabera was another participant who considered polygamy an immoral act, she commented that,

> *"For me the question would be is it out of sexual desire to have another woman to go to, its almost like sanctifying having an affair."*

Sabera's thoughts about polygamy mirror Hajra's with regard to the reasoning behind it. Sabera reiterates the notion of sexual desire being the cause of men marrying again. She focuses on the immoral aspect of polygamy, referring to it as 'sanctifying having an affair'. This is a bold accusation, but it certainly makes one ponder the reality of polygamy in today's times. To assume that most men are as humble and moral as the Prophet Muhammad, who only married because many women were left widowed and desolate after the Battle of Uhud, would be hard to believe (Mashhour, 2005).

One must remember that the Prophet did not engage in polygamy when he was married to his first wife Khadija (Helminski, 2003). It was only after she passed on and after the battle that there was a need to care for so many women, that he had to be an example to his followers. Today however we live in a world where sex and sexual innuendos are used blatantly. Sexual satisfaction has become an important factor for living a healthy life. Considering this, are Muslim men then taking the easy and so called moral way out to justify being with another woman? Sabera certainly believes so and according to her and other participants' when the prospect of polygamy emerges, the reasoning behind it must be seriously looked at.

Zainab was one of the participants who did not like the idea of polygamy, but understood that it was part of Islam. She had this to say:

> *"I feel that's (polygamy) not a right thing. If they (men) do decide to bring (marry) another woman, then they must treat them equally."*

Zainab, like Hajra, talks about an important aspect of polygamy, which is to provide equally for all wives. It appears however, that the concept of polygamy does not sit well with Zainab; as she asserts that should polygamous marriages occur, men need to follow Islamic law in supporting and providing for all wives the same. In Zainab's comment she refers to men deciding to marry again, sounding very much like it is solely a man's

decision to marry another woman. In a way this almost sounds disrespectful to women; because Zainab implies that the woman in the situation has no choice or say in her husband's decisions.

Walford (1997) reiterates Zainab's assumption by claiming that men are entitled to marry another woman without the consent of his first wife. Bowker (1995) however challenges this claim by asserting that this is not true in all circumstances. He argues that in countries like Pakistan a man may not marry another woman without the permission of his first wife. In Britain women are allowed to stipulate in a marital contract whether she will allow polygamy or not (Bowker, 1995). These laws provide women with dignity and respect, and most importantly they allow women the freedom of choice.

Bowker (1995) goes so far as to imply that the Prophet Muhammad publicly forbade his son-in-law from marrying another woman, as he did not appreciate the prospect of having his daughter share her husband with another woman. Many women however are faced with this challenge, the challenge of sharing their husbands with other women. When viewed through a woman's eyes the harsh reality of the effects of polygamy becomes clear. It then seems that the Islamic rule around treating all wives equally becomes a slap in the face to women rather than an advantage.

Rabia on the other hand respects the Islamic law surrounding polygamy, but feels that she would not be able to live in a polygamous marriage:

> *"And till today I can't imagine sharing my partner with someone else, but it's just something I respect. I respect the law and like I've told my own partner before, I said that he's welcome to take another wife if that's what he wants in his life, but then I would have to leave him. It's not that I don't respect the law, I respect it and I respect his right to have another wife, but I just feel that I won't be able to live in that situation."*

Rabia, who is a modern and successful business woman, reacted to the issue of polygamy with great confidence in her decision. From her comment it appears that Rabia has

thought about the prospect of polygamy and even discussed it with her husband. Rabia was one of the younger participants and had only been married for three years at the time of the interview, which could very possibly have affected her views around polygamy. She came across as almost being afraid to go against *Shariah* (Islamic law), as she mentions a few times that she respects the law. Being a young Muslim woman, who attended a Muslim school, it is easier to understand Rabia's fear around questioning Islam. It almost appears that Rabia fears admitting that she disagrees with the *Shariah*. An act, that would be considered blasphemous and seen as going against the Qur'an, and certainly a fear that is instilled in every Muslim attending an Islamic school. However, what does stand out from Rabia's comment is her desire to respect her freedom of choice.

As a business woman she constantly has to make important decisions in her life and has grown accustomed to being able to make choices for herself. If Islam does not award her the right to be a part of the decision as to whether her husband takes on another wife, she will then make her opinion known even before the prospect of polygamy emerges. Is this an act of manipulation on her part, where she admits that she respects her husband's right to marry other women, yet at the same time she threatens divorce should he contemplate it? Afkhami (1998) however, argues for the empowerment of women, which entails the freedom of choice. Such freedom is surely a basic human right. Afkhami certainly believes this and would view Rabia's decision as her right to take control of her own life. Afkhami (1998), fights for women's rights to education, voting as well as health care, implying that women's rights should not be viewed in a lesser vein to human rights.

The findings indicate that most of the women interviewed were against the act of polygamy in Islam. The remaining one woman felt that the Qur'an was clear on the issue of polygamy and that she would rather fight to understand it and not fight to change it. Two of the participants in particular were very clear in their explanation of the prohibition of polygamy in Islam. They believe that it is in fact not allowed as the Qur'an is very clear that if a man is unable to provide his time, love and money equally among his wives then he should refrain from marrying again. These women therefore

implied that it is impossible to love two women the same and therefore holding firm to their belief that polygamy is not allowed.

4.6 Dress

The term *hijab* is used to describe the various forms of Islamic dress, including the veil, which partly conceals the woman wearing the garment (Dahl, 1997). *Hijab* has assumed various forms throughout the ages as well as in different countries (Dahl, 1997). The reasoning behind the *hijab* is to provide the user with privacy and protection (Bowker, 1995). The Islamic *hijab* has been the cause for much speculation throughout the media and the western world as to the possible oppression of Muslim women. Many believe that the religion forces women to don the garment, resulting in their subsequent invisibility and therefore suppressing their rights. Some of the participants in the sample had strong opinions about the *hijab*.

Sabera was one of the participants' who believed that women have a choice:

> *"I think it's a choice for me I don't wear that and yah. And that's why I say it's a choice and also for people who do wear the hijab (it's a choice)."*

Support for the notion that women have choices in Islam was strongly expressed. Even though the *hijab* is the suggested Islamic dress, it is not compulsory, as it is meant to appear. Sabera clearly declares that for her not wearing the *hijab* is a choice, just as for those women who choose to wear it. In this statement Sabera is implying that she does not need to wear *hijab* to identify herself as a Muslim woman. For her the ability to choose is of extreme importance. According to Ahmed and Azzam (1976), Muslim women are given many rights and choices in Islam; it is only because men were given the role of leadership in the family that it is assumed men could make all the decisions. It is

not surprising then that Muslim women such as Sabera cannot help but stress the fact that she as all other Muslim women has the ability to choose.

This right is not just a religious one but a moral right as well. However, is the exercising of one's right to choice easier said than done? If Sabera, a Muslim woman chooses not to wear the *hijab*, how is she viewed by the rest of her community? Is she seen as not a 'real' Muslim woman because of her choice? Sabera came across as very comfortable and confident with her decision to not wear *hijab*. She at no time indicated any ostracizing from her community or family because of her choice. A possible response to these questions could be that times have changed considerably and so have people. Regardless of religion, more people are embracing the modern ways of western culture. Therefore it becomes easier to make such choices and not be considered an outcast. However, if Sabera lived in a very traditional, orthodox Muslim community, untouched by the west, then she would definitely be considered as going against Islamic culture by choosing to not wear *hijab*. It could be assumed that in such communities, women's rights are not given much consideration, due to the strong existence of patriarchy.

Rabia brings the element of oppression into the wearing of *hijab*:

> *"I do believe that there are lots of people out there who go into hijab out of choice, and obviously there are others who are forced by their husbands to. But lots of people go into it and they are very happy wearing it, you know they want to wear it, out of happiness and out of the love for wearing it."*

So clearly a portion of Muslim women feel that they are in the position to decide for themselves if they want to adopt the *hijab* or not. It is interesting to note that the participants who felt this way were not married and were independent working women. They do however acknowledge that the *hijab* is a part of Islamic culture but that wearing the *hijab* must emerge out of a desire to do so. However, Rabia highlights the contradiction between choice and oppression. She makes an important point suggesting that not all women are allowed free will, and some Muslim women live under oppression,

be it from their husbands or the state. For instance women who live in countries where *Shariah* (Islamic law) is practiced, like Saudi Arabia or Iran, have no choice and simply have to wear *hijab* (Landorf & Pagan, 2005). There are women however that come from progressive countries like South Africa, but live in oppressive homes. Some men use Islamic teachings to subdue women. Forcing a woman to wear *hijab* would be an act of oppression.

However, Rabia stresses that there are many Muslim women who wear the *hijab* because they want to and most importantly they are proud to do so. For these women the *hijab* provides them with an identity as a Muslim woman, a status that they are not ashamed of, and certainly do not want to hide. Is this therefore an implication that Muslim women who do not wear *hijab* are ashamed to be identified as Muslim? According to Rabia, who was not dressed in *hijab* at the time of the interview, this is not the case. She goes on to stress that:

> *"So for me it's not about dressing with a scarf or whatever and that makes you Muslim."*

Rabia suggests that her identity as a Muslim woman is not defined by her appearance, but rather there is much more that makes one Muslim. She certainly is implying that she is proud to be a Muslim woman irrespective of what she wears. Rabia highlights a point that was made earlier around Muslim women being given a choice. Therefore if women like Rabia exercise the right to choose to not wear the *hijab*, they certainly cannot be looked down upon or judged as being unfaithful to their religion. A closer look at Rabia's comment suggests that she has an identity outside of being a Muslim woman. Rabia is a successful business woman, a wife and mother. She may believe that being successful in these aspects of her life also contributes to being a Muslim woman.

Saffiya had the following view around the *hijab* being perceived as oppressive:

> *"I think negatives (of the religion) are basically coming from outside the community, the way that Muslim women are perceived to be oppressed I think it's something incredibly frustrating and being patronized and you know the way people treat you just because they see you in a hijab."*

Saffiya shared her frustration at being undermined because she wears *hijab*. She provides a different aspect to the *hijab* debate, in that she was the only participant who wears *hijab* full time, and she feels that people can be very judgmental towards women in *hijab*. Her thoughts were that Muslim women in *hijab* are viewed as oppressed and uneducated, and people assume that these women have no voice of their own, highlighting the outsider versus insider perspective. This implies that people outside of Islam perceive Islam to be oppressive towards women and assume that women have no rights. According to Saffiya this is not the case, in her discussion she made it very clear that wearing *hijab* is her choice; she is also an educated career woman who makes it her priority to educate herself on Islam as well.

These stereotypes created about Muslim women appeared to be extremely frustrating for Saffiya. One wonders then who is creating these stereotypes and how did they come about? Adam (2006) argues that the media have the power to shape people's thoughts and attitudes and they are simply abusing this power, by using the *hijab* to portray Muslim women as oppressed. Especially in the 21st century when women are reclaiming their power, a Muslim woman covered head to toe would not be viewed as progressive. The modern society may not understand why a woman would choose to dress this way. It appears this is where the problem arises, that Muslim women who choose to wear the *hijab*, find it liberating because to them it represents religious freedom, culture and tradition (Landorf & Pagan, 2005). Therefore it is important to acknowledge the distinction between the two perspectives. For some women the *hijab* is a symbol of oppression and gender inequality, but for others the *hijab* symbolizes freedom of expression and empowerment.

Leila on the other hand, seemed more conflicted in her view on *hijab*. She had this to say:

> *"It (hijab) might seem a bit unfair, but it goes back to preserving yourself, you know women should preserve themselves. And I guess for men……. It is a bit unfair though, I don't dress like that. But I don't know, even though it's something you should do in terms of religion it's also a choice that you make for yourself as well."*

In her comment above, the participant came across as very careful in her response, trying hard not to speak against her religion, but at the same time unable to hide her feelings on the matter. Leila was the youngest participant, who was at the time studying and still living at home. Her age may very well be the reason for her cautious response, suggesting that she is not yet comfortable in forming her own opinions about Islam, possibly out of fear of the consequences attached to questioning one's faith. She initially attempted to defend Islam's creation of the *hijab* by explaining the motivation being to preserve a woman's modesty and virtue. However, when she considers the lack of restrictions placed on men, she realizes the inequality between the sexes in Islam. However, Syed (2001) argues that men too have rules of decency in dress, explaining that according to *Shariah* (Islamic law), both men and women should dress modestly and not provocatively.

Why then is the women's version of *hijab* far more restricting than that of men? Bowker (1995) seems to believe that this is simply due to the fact that it is men who are interpreting the Qur'an, and it is therefore men who interpret the law to their requirements. Leila does clearly admit though that she does not dress in *hijab*, which was evident in the interview; as she was dressed in modern attire that in no way hinted to her religious affiliation. It appears as though Leila's fear of coming across as blasphemous leads her to a more neutral conclusion to the *hijab* debate. A view that has been shared by most of the participants', that being that the wearing of *hijab* is not compulsory in Islam but more of a choice given to women for their own protection.

From the findings it appears that most of the women who participated feel that the *hijab* is not necessarily oppressive as women have a choice of whether they wear a scarf (material covering ones hair), a cloak (loose fitting dress) or a veil. Out of the eight women that were interviewed only one wore *hijab*. She firmly believed that while the wearing of *hijab* is not a choice, but rather a compulsory part of the religion. It is not oppressive. Another participant stood out alone in her opinion, as she felt that wearing *hijab* was oppressive to Muslim women. The other seven participants all felt that the media's portrayal of Muslim women as oppressed was out of line, acknowledging that in certain circumstances this is true, but in the majority of cases, women make their own choices.

4.7 The Mosque: A Contested Space in Islam

The mosque, or otherwise known as *masjid*, in Arabic, is referred to as the house of prayer in Islam, and is therefore considered a holy space by Muslims (Kjeilen, 1996). It is common practice for men to congregate five times a day at the mosque for prayer, which is led by the *Imam* (Muslim priest who leads the congregation in prayer). However, it is not common practice for women to congregate for prayer in a mosque. In fact most women never get to see the inside of a mosque. The exclusion of women from this holy space has proven to be a controversial topic, with current day practice going against the Prophet Muhammad's teachings. The opinions of the women in the sample indicate that the mosque truly is a contested space.

Shirin is one of the participants' who chooses not to conform, she frankly declared:

> *"If I'm not allowed in that mosque I'll choose a mosque I can go to."*

Shirin comes across as a very powerful and confident woman. She is one of the older participants' who is divorced and who makes a considerable effort to know her religion.

Shirin indicates that she is the type of woman who does not merely settle with society's interpretation of Islam; rather she questions these rules and regulations, and bases her life on the Prophet Muhammad's teachings. This is clearly viewed in the above quote, where she implies that no man is going to keep her out of a mosque. This statement reeks of empowerment and highlights that there certainly are Muslim women who choose not to conform.

Yahya (2008) believes that it is those men in power, such as *moulanas* (priests) that use their authority to dis-empower and marginalize women. In Shirin's case, would conforming mean giving in to the demands of men and going against Islamic teachings? If Shirin, like so many other women, chose to follow society's rules and not fight for her space in the mosque, would she be going against the Prophet Muhammad's teachings, which openly allow women the right to pray in the mosque? This is what she believes and according to Shirin, it is her right as a Muslim woman to pray in a mosque. So who then gives men the power to take this right away from her?

Sabera shared her view on women being allowed in mosques:

> *"I've been (to mosque), since from I've been a child, I don't know maybe it's my upbringing or whatever, but we went to mosque. It's just that men and women were separated, but I was able to go to mosque."*

In her quote Sabera provides a different angle to the mosque debate, implying that she comes from a background where women were allowed in the mosque. As a child she prayed in the mosque with other women, but just in a separate section, away from the men. This in itself highlights the controversy surrounding a woman's presence in the mosque, whereby some mosques allow the presence of women, while others forbid it. From Sabera's comment it is obvious that even those mosques that accept women do so on condition that the women are not seen or heard by the men. One could argue that men

are covering up their hidden agenda of keeping women suppressed by their so-called good deed of allowing women in to the mosque in the first place.

However, this separation of genders within the mosque is in itself going against the Prophet Muhammad's teachings. Shaikh (1995) argues that the Prophet himself allowed women to pray in the same space as men, so that the women too had visual and verbal contact with him as the *Imam*. Khan (2001) argues that this segregation that exists within mosques around the world is not the case at the *Hajj* (pilgrimage), where thousands of men and women walk and pray side by side. What then makes the *Hajj* different? Surely if men and women are allowed to pray side by side in Islam's greatest mosque, praying in any other mosque should be no different.

Leila was another participant who believed that the mosque was not just a man's domain:

> *"You know I think every mosque every where should have a place for women, because I know I would love to, I mean I've never seen a mosque before and I know me, my mother and my sister, we would make the effort to go definitely, if there was a place for us."*

In her quote above, Leila epitomizes the need that so many Muslim women share. The need of acceptance within the mosque, a holy space, a space that many feel unites people in a spiritual way and brings one that much closer to their creator. Listening to Leila evokes feelings of sadness for those Muslim women who are still fighting for their rights in Islam. Leila's comment however, also evokes feelings of disappointment in society's patriarchal rules that continuously shun women. How else do we answer the previous question about what makes the *Hajj* different, if not to look at society's rules and regulations?

According to Siddiqi (2008), partitions separating men and women in the mosque were only introduced later in Islamic history. The reasons for which are purely based on

speculation, yet whatever the reason, the fact remains that women were slowly being eradicated from mosques. The *Hajj* pilgrimage takes place in Islam's holiest city, the home of the Prophet Muhammad. There is no doubt that society would never dare to go against the Prophet's teachings in his own home, in the place that Islam was revealed to mankind. Then do women like Leila, and her mum and sister have to go on the *Hajj* pilgrimage to see a mosque and to get the opportunity to pray in one? That seems quite unfair, especially when one takes into account that according to the Prophet Muhammad, women have the right to pray within the mosque, with or without the permission of men.

Saffiya highlighted Prophet Muhammad's teachings in the mosque debate:

> *"There are disputes amongst scholars whether women should be allowed in the mosque or not, but I think yah, hadith are clear that there were women in the mosque (in the time of the Prophet), but I think in general, I mean the general notion of Islam is that women should rather be at home, and I think there are various justifications or rationalizations for that."*

According to Saffiya, Islamic scholars are debating on whether to allow women into the mosque or not. One would assume the answer to such a debate would be easy considering the clarity of *hadith* on the topic, however, the fact that the mosque is a highly contested space proves otherwise. It is baffling though as to the reasons for the debate in the first place. If women were allowed into the mosque in the time of the Prophet Muhammad, why is it now a problem? Shaikh (1995) explains that many scholars believe that the prayers of a man seated behind a woman are worthless. Could this be why the Prophet himself allowed the women to occupy the back rows of the mosque, where they could still be "seen and heard by the rest of the congregation" (Shaikh, 1995, p.1).

According to these scholars then, if a man arrives late to mosque he would then be blocked by the rows of women, which seems to be highly unacceptable (Shaikh, 1995). When the presence of women creates such an inconvenience for men, it is easy to

understand what the next step would be, that is to remove women from the mosque. From this view it is easy to assume how the mosque has become a men's only domain. What is surprising though is that many women have adopted this type of thinking.

The latter part of Saffiya's comment highlights that there are women who agree with this notion that women should not be allowed in the mosque out of fear of the sexual tension that could be created by their presence. Is it because women have been socialized into accepting the inferior position that being female awards? Whatever the answer, it appears that we have come a long way from the Prophet's mosque, which welcomed all human beings interested in Islam (Shaikh, 1995). Women have now become strangers to the place of worship because they are being viewed as sexual beings who pose a threat, rather than spiritual beings and sisters in faith.

The findings indicate that most of the participants' were in favor of women being allowed in mosques. However, two out of the eight participants felt that it was best that women were not allowed to pray in mosques, but rather in their homes. Their reason for this hinted at the potential for sexual distractions that could exist between the genders, and therefore felt it would be best to avoid temptation completely. It appears that historically women were allowed in mosques, since the time of the Prophet Muhammad, however, with the changing of times the mosque has become a 'men's only' club, eradicating the presence of women. This study shows that Muslim women know that Islamically, they have a rightful place in the mosque. While some of them allow men to restrict their presence, others continue to fight for their rights and their place as Muslim women.

4.8 Muslim Women are more than just Homemakers

Walford (1997) suggests that a Muslim woman's world primarily centers on her family, which appears to be more important for her than for a man. This implies then that a Muslim woman's role focuses on being a wife, a mother and a home maker. However in

today's age more and more Muslim women are seen in high profile careers. Are they going against the commandments of Islam or does Islam truly allow women to be more than just home makers? This is what some of the women felt.

Hajra tries to explain why men and women are assigned different roles in Islam:

> *"I think, I mean we were all created by God, so he knows our strengths and our weaknesses and because he knows what we are capable of that's why men is more defined in the role of the physical activity. It doesn't mean women can't work in Islam, that's a misconception. Women are allowed to work and they allowed to be the breadwinners in the household as well. It just means that God knows that women are more caring, more nurturing."*

Hajra agrees with the notion that women are meant to fulfill the role of caretaker in the home, due to their nurturing characteristics, however she also highlights that this does not mean women can't work. The participant who is a working woman and prides herself in continuously learning about her religion makes it very clear that the Muslim women's role is not in the home, as she has every right to hire a helper in her home. Muslim women are allowed to work if they wish and the money they earn is entirely for their use, as the role of breadwinner is the man's. This definitely provides Muslim women with a sense of power in that they are allowed many choices and freedoms with in the religion.

Sabera was another participant who shared these views, she had this to say:

> *"I don't think house work was supposed to be a women's work. ...Because I mean I've been exposed to you know the Moulana (Muslim Priest) at madressa (Islamic school). I mean he was a husband, he had a wife who also taught in the madressa and she worked and he used to do the cooking at home, and he assisted with the house work or chores so it wasn't specifically a woman's duty."*

This clearly highlights the need to move away from the patriarchal mind set and develop a more egalitarian way of thinking. Muslim women are becoming more and more

knowledgeable about their religion and are therefore able to distinguish between what is Islamic and what is 'man-made'. This illustrates that individually women are speaking out in their homes. What is significant in Sabera's comment is that she was exposed to the gender dynamics in the home of her *Moulana*, a man that is respected as being well versed in Islamic law. If there was no gender differentiation in his home with regard to the assigning of roles then why is it in other homes this problem exists? Could it be because this *Moulana* interprets Islamic teachings appropriately, and in other circumstances the Qur'an has been misinterpreted to cater for patriarchal needs?

Zainab on the other hand reflected on the more traditional roles ascribed to men and women in Islam:

> *"The women's role in the past has always been that she used to look after and raise the kids and see to the daily house needs. Whereas the man is supposed to be the breadwinner. But with times of today there has to be a balance, where the men and women work hand in hand to assist each other."*

Zainab seems to reflect on gender roles in the past, the more traditional roles ascribed to men and women. It is important to note here that Zainab was the oldest participant; therefore her comment appears to reflect on the gender roles when she was young and married. Zainab is now divorced and lives with her children. Seeing her adult children live their lives inspires her comment on how gender roles need to change from the traditional roles to more of a balance, where both men and women work equally to support each other. Bowker (1995, p.121) argues in support of Zainab's claim, saying that the role of a Muslim woman is not to be confined to just a wife and mother, but also of 'women acting independently, in the public sphere, with authority and dignity'. Helminski (2003) makes reference to the wives of the Prophet as strong independent women, who were public figures and prominent business women.

It is implied then that Islam does not prescribe set roles for women to follow, rather society does. This then makes it challenging for women to break out of the mould that

society has created. Saffiya was one of the participants who faced such challenges. She talks about the difficulty in maintaining certain roles in her life:

> *"I've really tried to let go of certain roles and just so you know maybe I'm still a good wife even if I don't clean or cook myself."*

Saffiya's comment talks of the guilt many women feel when they believe that they are not fulfilling all their roles or duties sufficiently. Saffiya, who is a married woman with children and has a career, speaks of her difficulty in juggling all these responsibilities placed on her as a woman. Saffiya was also the only participant who wears *hijab* full time, which could imply a more orthodox and traditional way of life. This implication would therefore suggest that according to Saffiya more traditional roles would apply in her home and she would assume that it is her duty to see to the domestic chores. Her comment however suggests that her decision to be a working woman has left her with much guilt, because she now has no time to fulfill her domestic role.

Studies conducted by Afshar (1993) indicate that in a Muslim country like Iran, Muslim women are looked upon as inferior to men, and should a woman be seen working publicly, her husband is ridiculed and his honor questioned. These findings indicate then that a Muslim woman's freedom to decide if she would like to work or be a house wife is limited. Saffiya like other participants are trying to fight for an identity that is more than just a wife and a mother. While these roles are important in Islam they certainly are not the only identities that Muslim women are confined to. Braidotti (1997, p.31) explains that "identity is not understood as a foundational issue, based on fixed, God-given essences – of the biological, psychic or historic kind. On the contrary, identity is taken as being constructed in the very gesture that posits it as the anchoring point for certain social and discursive practices." What Braidotti is trying to say is that identity is not a simple concept that is easily defined. Rather the concept of identity is better understood in questioning how it is constructed.

In the case of the Muslim woman's identity, it does seem as though Saffiya, like many other women have been subject to indirect socialization that teaches women that in order to be a 'good' woman, one has to be a good wife and home maker. Afshar (1993) believes that this type of socialization is rooted in cultural ideologies, which result in the subordination of women. Implying then that this restriction placed on women's identities; is not limited to Muslim women.

Haseena appears to be disappointed in Islam's limited view of a woman's role.

> *"I think Islam has by and large stayed very strict in terms of the role of women, rather than making it more easier for women to practice their religion".*

Haseena is a young educated woman; she is also a wife and mother. She seems to find it challenging to fulfill her Islamic duties at home as she is a very successful working woman. Haseena's lifestyle does not depict a traditional Islamic home as she is married to a man of another religion. In the above comment, the participant refers to the difficulty in following through with the practical side of Islam. For Haseena, the essential aspects of Islam, such as the five times prayer, the wearing of *hijab* as well as the more private and humble role of maintenance of ones family, does not sit well with her. She appears to find these roles constricting and argues that Islam should make it easier for a woman to practice her faith. Implying then that women like Haseena, wish to live free lives, rather than be held down by restrictions. It could be assumed that Haseena does not feel the need to fulfill these duties and roles to be viewed as a Muslim woman. She chooses to be a breadwinner rather than a homemaker, and the question that arises then is, is that okay in Islam?

According to Jameelah (1976), this is not okay, as the Islamic role of a Muslim woman centers on the maintenance of her home and family. Helminski (2003) argues against Jameelah by highlighting the life of Khatija, the wife of the Prophet Muhammad, who was a successful business woman at the time of her marriage to him. This indicates the

rights as well as the roles of women, as not just home makers, but independent, successful career women. It seems fair to acknowledge then that the limitations placed on Muslim women may not be purely Islamic, but rather a construction of the society that we live in. So it seems adequate that Haseena, as every other woman, be allowed to choose the roles they wish to fulfill, without feeling guilty that they are not living up to their religious expectations, expectations that have been created by society and not Islam.

From the findings it appears that most of the women understood the traditional roles ascribed to Muslim women; however they do not agree with them. Some of these women firmly believe that these roles are more cultural rather than Islamic and refer to the Prophet's wives as an example that there is more to Muslim women than being a wife, a mother and tending to the home. As one of the Prophet's wives, namely Khatija, was a successful business woman. These participants challenge the roles ascribed to them by society as they too have chosen to fulfill their Islamic obligation but at the same time are all career driven women and are fighting to determine their own identities.

CHAPTER 5
CONCLUSION

There is a lack of research pertaining to the perceptions and views of Muslim women concerning the gender dynamic in Islam. This research was therefore intended to fill this gap. A lot of attention has been focused on Islam as a religion due to the contrasting and contradictory positions Muslim women are placed in as well as their struggle to meet the masculine related demands of society. Islam has received a lot of negative media suggesting Muslim women are oppressed.

This study therefore, has sought to gain further understanding of the construction of gender in the religion of Islam. This study explored how Muslim women understand the gender dynamic in their religion and tries to uncover how Muslim women view their position as women in the religion.

5.1 Central Findings

Findings from this study indicate that most of the participants were women who had strong opinions, and therefore did not fit with the misconception that Muslim women were subdued and voice-less. Central themes were identified from the interviews and a discussion around each theme was provided, using participants' quotes to illustrate the point of view and add to the discussion. These themes are *culture verse religion, having faith, the patriarchal society, polygamy is not allowed, dress in Islam, the mosque: a contested space in Islam* and *Muslim women are more than just homemakers*.

In summarizing some aspects of the findings; the following points are worth noting. Muslim women acknowledge that they are given choice and freedom within their religion. They feel that Islam awards women many rights that sometimes men take away.

Many of the participants spoke of the patriarchal society and that men interpret the Qur'an and *hadith* to meet their own needs. However, the participants often referred to the life of the Prophet Muhammad as an example of how women should be treated, i.e. with respect and honor. Culture was discussed in depth by most of the participants as being enmeshed with religion, which has therefore resulted in women being seen as the weaker sex. It was stressed that this is not Islamic, as Islam awards women a high status, but rather certain cultural practices tend to oppress women. For example the practice of female genital mutilation by certain African cultures cannot be ascribed to Islam; also the Indian tradition of an arranged marriage cannot be linked to Islam. It was clear that most of the participants felt that Islamically Muslim women are not oppressed, but culturally and considering patriarchy women in general are not considered on an equal standing to men.

The findings also revealed that most of the women understood the traditional roles ascribed to Muslim women, but at the same time they do not agree with them. The participants appeared to challenge the roles ascribed to them by society. Many of the women asserted that while they have chosen to fulfill their Islamic obligations as women, they have also chosen to be career driven women, and in doing so are trying to determine their own identities. The freedom of choice is a huge factor for these women, as many of the participants feel that the *hijab* is not necessarily oppressive as women have a choice of wearing *hijab* or not.

It was evident that many of the participants' were well educated in Islamic knowledge, providing examples of the Prophet Muhammad's life to illustrate their arguments. One area in which they did so was in the discussion on polygamy. Many of the women are completely against the act of polygamy, stressing that The Prophet Muhammad only engaged in Polygamy to provide a home for many of the widows that were left homeless after war. Another area in which participants' proved their Islamic knowledge was in the Muslim woman's presence in the mosque. Most of the participants' indicated that women should be allowed to pray in the mosque as this is what the Prophet Muhammad

allowed in his time, not necessarily alongside men, which they agreed could cause some distraction, but certainly in a separate section for women.

5.2 Limitations of the Study and Directions for Future Research

The choice and size of any research sample has important implications for the contextualization of the research results in larger society. With 90% of the participants being drawn from a middle class, Indian community there is some limitation to the possibility of generalizing the findings from this research to wider Muslim female populations. It must also be taken into account that participants emerged from various backgrounds, for example 40% of the sample were married, while another 40% were divorced. The remaining 20% of participants were not married. This could have largely influenced participants' responses. There was also a significant age difference between participants, with 60% of participants between the ages of 20 and 39 and 30% of participants between the ages of 40 and 50. All these factors must be taken into account with regard to the findings. Future studies could therefore consider gathering a larger and more diverse sample.

With regard to the methodology, individual interviews were used, and although a rich diversity of opinion was elicited from the participants, the interviews could have provided more depth in responses. A possible reason for the lack of depth in responses could be due to participants resisting certain questions out of fear of being seen in a negative light by the researcher. Also the researcher may at times have been hesitant to push participants for more explanation around sensitive topics. Nevertheless it was felt that interesting data emerged from the individual interviews. Future studies should consider acquiring more depth from participants' responses.

REFERENCES

Abudu, N.G., Ajemian, A.E., Albrecht, L.G. & Farrell, K., et al. (2008). Human Rights. *The International Lawyer*, 42 (2) p 755.

Abusharaf, A. (2006). Women in Islamic Countries: The quest for gender justice research. *Human Rights Quarterly*, 28 (3), p 714.

Adam, A. (2006). *Islam in the Media.* Pietermaritzburg: Interpak Books

Afkhami, M. (1998). Panelists Disagree on Value of Development for Muslim Women. *The Washington Report on Middle East Affairs,* XVII (3), p 72.

Afshar, H. (1993). *Women in the Middle East: Perceptions, Realities and Struggle for Liberation.* Houndmills: The Macmillan Press Ltd.

Ahmad, K. & Azzam, S. (1976). *Islam: Its Meaning and Message.* London: The Islamic Council of Europe.

Akhtar, N. (2008). Pakistan, Afghanistan, and the Taliban. *International Journal on World Peace,* 25 (4), p 49 – 74.

Alexandre, M. (2007). Lessons from Islamic Polygamy: A Case for Expanding the American Concept of Surviving Spouse So as to Include De Facto Polygamous Spouses. *Washington and Lee Law Review,* 64 (4), 1461 – 1481.

Ali, L. (2006). Reform: Not Ignorant, Not Helpless; The West is focused on the extreme cases of oppression against Muslim women. But there's another world out there. *Newsweek, 146 (24), 33.*

Ashraf, S. (2008). *Shattering Illusions: Western Conceptions of Muslim Women.* www.islamfortoday.com. Accessed on the 8th December 2008.

Awde, N. (2004). *Women in Islam: An Anthology from the Qur'an and Hadiths.* London: Routledge Curzon.

Badawi, J. A. (2008). *The Status of Women in Islam.* www.islamfortoday.com. Accessed on the 8th December 2008.

Bahar, S. (1996). Human Rights are Women's Right: Amnesty International and the Family. *Hypatia,* 11(1), p 105 – 111.

Barker, R. (2003). *The social work dictionary* (5th ed.). Washington, DC: NASW Press.

Barlas, A. (2004). *The Qur'an, Sexual Equality and Feminism.* Toronto: University of Toronto.

Bazarangi, N.H. (2006). *Women's Identity and the Qur'an: A New Reading.* Gainesville: University of Florida Press.

Beasley, C. (1999). *What is Feminism: An Introduction to Feminist Theory.* London: SAGE Publications.

Berg, B.L. (1995). *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences* (2nd Ed.). Boston, USA: Allyn and Bacon.

Bowker, J. (1995). *Voices of Islam.* Oxford: Oneword.

Braun, V. & Clarke, C. (2006). Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology,* 3 (3), p 77-101.

Bui, H. (2007). The limitations of current approaches to domestic violence. In R. Muraskin (Ed.), *It's a crime: Women and justice* (4th ed., pp. 261-276). Upper SaddleRiver: Prentice Hall.

Chatman, E.A. (1984). Field research: methodological themes. *Library and Information Science Research,* 6, p 425-438.

Chaudhary, N. (2004). *Listening to Culture: Constructing Reality from Everyday Talk.* New Delhi: Sage Publications.

Chodorow, N. (1998). Feminism and Difference: Gender, Relation and Difference in Psychoanalytic Perspective. In B.M. Clinchy & J.K. Norem (Eds.), *The Gender and Psychology Reader* (pp. 383 - 395). New York: New York University Press.

Connell, R.W. (2002). *Gender: Short Introductions.* Oxford: Polity Press.

Covington, S. (2002). King James I and the Religious Culture of England. *Renaissance Quarterly,* 55 (4), p 1337.

Dahl, T.S. (1997). *The Muslim Family: A Study of Women's Rights in Islam.* Oslo: Scandinavian University Press.

Dasa, P.V. (2004). *My Hindu Friend: The Yoga of Love.* South Africa: Bhava Bhakti Publications.

Durrheim, K. & Terre Blanche, M. (1999). *Research in Practice*. Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press.

Elaigwu, J.I. & Galadima, H. (2003). The Shadow of Sharia Over Nigerian Federalism. *Publius*, 33(3) p123.

Elliot, F.R. (1996). *Gender, Family and Society*. London: Macmillan Press Ltd.

Galanter, M. (2009). Spiritual Evolution: A Scientific Defense of Faith. *The American Journal of Psychiatry,* 166 (2), p 239.

Gallagher, N. (2005). Amnesty International and the Idea of Muslim Women's Human Rights. *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies,* 1 (3), 96.

Giddens, A. (1989). *Sociology.* Cambridge: Polity Press.

Haddad, Y.Y. & Esposito, J.L. (1998). *Islam, Gender and Social Change.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hancock, B. (2002). *An Introduction to Qualitative Research.* Nottingham: Trent Focus Group.

Hanley, K. (2002). Panel examines Islam in media. *The Washington Report on Middle East Affairs,* 21 (8), p 86.

Hartsock, N. (1987). The feminist standpoint: Developing the ground for a specifically feminist historical materialism. In S. Harding (Ed.), *Feminism and methodology: Social science issues* (pp. 157-180). Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Heckathorn, D.D. (2002). Respondent-Driven Sampling II: Deriving Valid Estimates from Chain-Referral Samples of Hidden Populations. *Social Problems,* 49, p 11-34.

Helminski, C.A. (2003). *Women of Sufism: A Hidden Treasure.* Boston: Shambhala Publications.

Hussain, M. (2006). *Gender Inequality not Found in the Qu'ran*. Evansville: Evansville Courier Press.

Jameelah, M. (1976). *Islam in theory and practice.* Lahore: Allahwala Printers.

Jhazbhay, I. (2000). An emerging Muslim identity in the global village: The South African presentation at the international conference on 'Azmat Al-Hawiyya'**.** *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 20 (2), p 369.

Jouili, J.S. & Moazami, S.A. (2006). Knowledge, Empowerment and Religious Authority Among Pious Muslim Women in France and Germany. *The Muslim World*, 96 (4), p 617.

Kane, O. (2007). Moderate Revivalists. *Harvard International Review,* 29 (2), p 64 – 67.

Khan, R. (2001). *The Hajj: Islam's Journey of Faith.* www.cnn.com. Accessed on 8th December 2008.

Khoury, N.F. & Moghadam, V.M. (1995). *Gender and development in the Arab World.* London: Zed Books.

Kiguwa, P. (2004). Feminist Critical Psychology in South Africa. In D. Hook, *Critical Psychology* (pp. 278 - 315). Lansdowne: UCT Press.

Kjeilen, T. (1996). *Mosque*. www.looklex.com. Accessed on 5th August 2009.

Kwok, Y. (2007). Feminist Polygamy! *Academic Research Library,* 17 (4), 29.

Landorf, H. & Pagan, L. (2005). Unveiling the Hijab. *The Social Studies,* 96 (4), 171.

Lester, J. (2008). Performing Gender in the Workplace: Gender Socialization, Power, and Identity Among Women Faculty Members. *Community College Review,* 35 (4), p 277.

Maqsood, R.W. (2008). *Islam, Culture and Women.* www.islamfortoday.com. Accessed on the 8th December 2008.

Marcus, J. (1992). *A World of Difference: Islam and Gender Hierarchy in Turkey.* London: Zed Books Ltd.

Mashhour, A. (2005). Islamic Law and Gender Equality - Could there be a Common Ground?: A Study of Divorce and Polygamy in Sharia Law and Contemporary Legislation in Tunisia and Egypt. *Human Rights Quarterly,* 27 (2), 562

Mernissi, F. (1996). *Women's Rebellion and Islamic Memory.* London: Zed Books Ltd.

Miller, G. (2008). Faith, Theology, and Psychoanalysis: The Life and Thought of Harry S. Guntrip/Psychoanalysis and Religion in the 21st Century: Competitors or Collaborators? *International Journal of Psychoanalysis,* 89 (3) p 679 – 685.

Moghadam, V.M. (1994). *Gender and National Identity: Women and Politics in Muslim Societies*. London: Zed Books Ltd.

Monk, C.L. (2003). *Behold the Bridegroom Comes.* www.believersweb.com. Accessed on the 30th April 2009.

Mumisa, M . (2000). Islam in South Africa: Mosque, Imams and Sermons. *Islam and Christian Muslim Relations*, 11 (2), 275.

Naidoo, S. (2009, July 19). Marriage Ruling for Muslim Women Hailed. *Sunday Times Newspaper*.

Olson, H. (1995). *Quantitative "Versus" Qualitative Research: The Wrong Question.* Rutherford South: University of Alberta Press.

Palmer, D.E. (1998). On refusing who we are: Foucault's critique of the epistemic subject. *Philosophy Today,* 42 (4), p 402 – 410.

Patton, M. (1990). *Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods.* California: Sage Publications.

Pilcher, J. & Whelehan, I. (2004). *50 Key Concepts in Gender Studies.* London: Sage.

Rafia, Z. (2006). Encyclopaedia of women in Islamic cultures Vols. 1 & 2. *NWSA Journal.* February 2006, 18 (3), p 202.

Rahman, S.M.A. (2007). *Islam for Today: Seven conditions for women's dress in Islam.* www.islamfortoday.com. Accessed on the 10th June 2007.

Ramazanoglu, C. & Holland, J. (2002). *Feminist Methodology: Challenges and Choices.* Los Angeles: SAGE Publications.

Rehman, J. (2007). The Sharia, Islamic Family Laws and International Human Rights Law: Examining the Theory and Practice of Polygamy and Talaq. *International Journal of Law, Policy and the Family,* 21, 108 – 127.

Shahidian, H. (2002). *Women in Iran: Gender Politics in the Islamic Republic.* Westport: Greenwood Press.

Shaikh, S. (1995). *Denying Women Access to the Main Space: A Betrayal of the Prophet.* University of the Witwatersrand: Wits University Press.

Siddiqi, M.Z. (1993). *Hadith Literature: Its Origins, Development & Special Features.* Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society.

Silvers, L. (2008). Sexual Ethics and Islam: Feminist Reflections on Qur'an, Hadith, and Jurisprudence. *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies,* 4 (3), 134.

Sollie, D.L. & Leslie, L.A. (1994). *Gender, Families and Close Relationships: Feminist Research Journeys*. London: SAGE Publications.

Swigonski, M. (1994). The logic of feminist standpoint theory for social work research. *Sodai Work*, 39, p 387-393.

Syed, I.B. (2001). *Is Hijab Compulsory*. www.islamfortoday.com. Accessed on the 8th December 2008.

Tajbakhsh, K. (2003). Media in the Islamic world: Introduction. *Social Research*, 70 (3) p 869.

Tedrow, B. & Rhoades, R. A. (1999). A qualitative study of women's experiences in community college leadership positions. *Community College Review*, 27(3), 1-18.

Terre Blanche, M. & Durrheim, K. (2002). *Research in Practise: Applied methods for the social sciences.* Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press.

Van Wormer, K. (2009). Restorative Justice as Social Justice for Victims of Gendered Violence: A Standpoint Feminist Perspective. *Social Work,* 54 (2), p 107 – 116.

Walford, R. (1997). *The Muslim Family: A Study of Women's Rights in Islam. Scandinavia*: Scandinavian University Press.

Wilbraham, L. (1995, October). *Thematic content analysis: panacea for the ills of 'intentioned opacity' of discourse analysis?* Paper presented at the 1st Annual Qualitative Methods Conference on "A spanner in the works of the factory of truth", The University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa.

Willemse, K. (2007, April). *Discourses, Identities and Narratives.* Paper presented to the SANPAD, Durban.

Wright, J. (1999). Surviving the English reformation: Commonsense, conscience, and circumstance. *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies,* 29 (2), p 381.

Wyche, K.F. (2004). African American Muslim Women: An Invisible Group. *Sex Roles,* 51 (5-6), p 319.

Yahya, M. (2008). *Women's Rights and Equality in Islam.* www.islamfortoday.com. Accessed on the 8th December 2008.

LIST OF APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: SUBJECT INFORMATION SHEET:

Dear Participant,

My name is Sumayya Mansoor, and I am conducting research for the purposes of obtaining a psychology Masters degree in Community-Based Counselling at the University of the Witwatersrand. I am inviting you to participate in this study if you are a Muslim female, aged between 18 and 40. The research that is being conducted is solely for degree requirements. It is a study of the 'Gender dynamics in Islam, according to Muslim women'. This study aims to give women a voice and to uncover how Muslim women perceive their gender role within the Islamic faith. This research will contribute to a larger body of knowledge on people's perceptions of the gender roles within Islam.

Participation in this research will entail being interviewed by me, at a time and place that is convenient for you. The interview will last for approximately two hours long or until saturation of the topic is reached. With your permission this interview will be recorded in order to ensure accuracy as well as to quote you within the findings of the study. The tapes will be kept in a secure location at the Psychology Department at the university, with restricted access to just me and my supervisor. The tapes will be destroyed post qualification. Participation is voluntary, and no person will be advantaged or disadvantaged in any way for choosing to participate or not participate in the study. The researcher is unable to guarantee anonymity, due to the type of data collection technique that will be used. This technique is referred to as snow ball sampling, where participants are asked to suggest names of people they feel may be interested in participating in the research, thus compromising the participants' identity.

Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed by the researcher as even though your identity will be kept confidential and will not be included in the research report, the research findings

however will be based on the information that you provide, and direct quotes may be used. The interview material (tapes and transcripts) will not be seen or heard by any other person besides me and my supervisor. You may refuse to answer any questions you would prefer not to, and you may choose to withdraw from the study at any point, without any negative consequences. There will be no direct benefits or risks to the participant for participating in the research. It is not anticipated that participants will experience any distress as a result of the interview, however due to the sensitive nature of the topic participants will be debriefed at the end of the interview and referred to relevant free counselling services if necessary. If required, participants will be provided with a summarized version of the results by the researcher. However if participants wish to read the research in its entirety, it will be available at the University library.

Please answer all questions as honestly as possible, as this will ensure the validity of the results. There are no right or wrong answers as the interview questions are purely to assess your perceptions and attitude toward the research topic. Your participation in this study would be greatly appreciated.

Thank you for your cooperation!

Sumayya Mansoor (Researcher)
084 300 0078
Sumayya_m21@yahoo.com

Malose Langa (Supervisor)
(011) 717 4536
malose.langa@wits.ac.za

APPENDIX B: CONSENT FORM (INTERVIEW)

I _____ consent to being interviewed by Sumayya Mansoor for her study on 'Gender dynamics in Islam, according to the Muslim women's perceptions'. I understand that:

- Participation in this interview in voluntary.
- That I may refuse to answer any questions I would prefer not to.
- I may withdraw from the study at any time.
- No information that may identify me will be included in the research report.
- There will be no direct benefits or risks for participating in the research.

With your permission the researcher would like to use direct quotes within the research without revealing your identity.

Signed _____.

APPENDIX C: CONSENT FORM (RECORDING)

I _____ CONSENT TO MY INTERVIEW WITH Sumayya Mansoor for her study on 'Gender dynamics in Islam, according to the Muslim women's perceptions' being tape recorded. I understand that:

- The tapes and transcripts will not be seen or heard by any other person, and will only be processed by the researcher and her supervisor.
- All tapes will be stored safely in a secure location, with access restricted to just the researcher and the researcher's supervisor. All tapes will be destroyed post qualification.
- No identifying information will be used in the transcripts or the research report.

Signed _____.

APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE:

SECTION A:

1). Age?

SECTION B:

1). What does being a Muslim woman mean to you?

2). How do you interpret the different roles that men and women are given in Islam?

3). What are your thoughts on Muslim women being given a higher status as compared to women of other religions?

4). What do you think are the differences between the gender dynamics in the home and in the mosque?

5). Are your attitudes and perceptions toward religion very different from that of your parents and grandparents?

6). What are the positive aspects of being a Muslim women?

7). If any, what are the negative aspects of being a Muslim woman?

8). What do you think about some of societies perceptions of Muslim women being subdued and oppressed?