



WOMEN in ISLAM
a case study

PUBLICATIONS BY
THE DANISH TURKISH ISLAMIC FOUNDATION / 3

İsmail Bařaran

published by
DANISH TURKISH ISLAMIC FOUNDATION

Kitabın adı:
Women in Islam a case study

Yazarı:
İsmail Başaran

ISBN:
?????????

Kapak Tasarım:

Ofset Hazırlık:
Ağaç Kitabevi Yayınları

Baskı Cilt:
İstanbul Matbaacılık

AĞAÇ KİTABEVİ YAYINLARI
Fevzipaşa Cad. Şehitkubilay Sk.
No: 6 (PTT Yanı) Fatih/İstanbul
Tel: 0212 621 83 31 Faks: 0212 621 84 52
Yayıncı Sertifika No: 12866

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FOREWORD

Leading a life of wisdom and faith is one of the main points of religious teachings in Muslim life. While carrying a surreal meaning, religion also displays a social aspect through important rules and principles applied to daily life.

As well as stressing a strong faith, Islam also stresses healthy social relations on every level. Islam explains how to balance and improve the nature and web of relations between humans, with examples given in the Qur'an and Hadeeth. Along with this, the responsibility of applying these principles and reaching the ideal form is left to humans and the society.

It is hard to say that Muslims apply these rules in every aspect of their social lives. Other factors shaping their lives equally as much as religious teachings are other social dynamics, interests and thoughts. Therefore, today, it is important not to generalize when analysing the social relations and social roles and the positions of the individuals.

It is possible to state the following about the content of this case study:

In the introductory part of the study, the author explains the role of women from an Islamic point of view according to the Qur'an and Sunnah. While doing so, he does not touch upon the cultural differences on Muslim societies because cultures, in terms of their roots, do not represent Islam's core and every Islamic society has its own way of interpreting the religion.

In the section, titled Current Perspectives, the author mentions the relative perspectives of western experts like John L. Esposito.

In the section titled Project Design, the author explains why he chose to conduct a survey consisting of 5 sections of 30 questions. (Appendix)

In the findings section; the results of the survey, with 100 participants, is shown with their percentages. (Appendix)

(V) In the Discussion section, the author discusses what meanings can be drawn from the findings.

(VI) In the Conclusions section, the author discusses shortly what this study implies, evaluates the results, and mentions women's role today in the Muslim world.

(VII) In the Evaluation section, the study is assessed by Prof. Saffet Kose.

(VIII) Finally, the various literature which was referred to during this study is stated in the References section.

After giving this information in this study, we can state the following;

We have to admit that when we look back upon history to study this subject, we see several dark eras in terms of the role given to women in society. Unfortunately, when the subject matter is Muslim society, the negative image of women's roles are directly assumed to be linked to Islam, regardless of culture. The differentiation of religion and culture is also blurred in Muslim societies, as some Muslims base their view of women on Islamic terminology, which creates a never-ending cycle.

Shortly, the subject of women is a touchy subject: Those who observe Muslim societies from the outside, link the negativities directly to Islam, and some Muslims promote

their cultural norms as a religious authority. In order to conduct a healthy evaluation on this subject, one needs to take many different perspectives into consideration. The increase of studies such as this will lead us to more scientific observations.

Mr. Basaran's practical study regarding the status of Muslim women, is a very successful empirical study in which both Muslim and non-Muslim perspectives are taken into consideration. Moreover, the study will also help one further understand the subjects related Muslim women.

Prof. Ali DERE
The Presidency of Religious Affairs
Head of Foreign Relations Department



PREFACE

Because I have worked in the field of religious affairs for many years on various levels, I decided to write my Master's project on a religious subject as well. I selected this subject because the image of Muslim women in the media was always portrayed as oppressed. Today, most Muslim women are not aware of the rights that were given to them by the Qur'an. I think the most important part of the subject is the fact that like many other religions, Muslims have also added many new aspects to the religion in the name of cultural adaptation. This new combination does not always represent Islam itself.

My goal in this project is to conduct a study and assess the subject of "Women in Islam" based on the official teachings of Islam, and to find out what Muslims in Rochester (New York) think about this subject. Therefore, a survey which consists of 30 questions has been conducted towards this purpose, with the participation of 50 Muslims and 50 Christians. Later on, the similarities and differences have been evaluated.

Some of the important findings of this study are:

1. The majority of Muslims believe that Islam does not oppress women, and that the seclusion of women from the society is related to cultural practices, rather than religion.
2. On the other hand, half of the non-Muslims believe that Islam oppresses women because they mainly look at cultural practices rather than religious teachings.
3. The majority of Muslims in Rochester think liberally on many subjects. For example, they believe that

monogamy is the most ideal for Muslims, and that sex education should be given at schools. However, only 18% of them accept interfaith marriage, which is restricted in Islam. Another reason why only few accept interfaith marriage is because they do not want to lose their values and culture. This means that Muslims have adapted to their environment, but have not become assimilated. It also means that they are aware of how to balance their values and norms in a foreign society.

4. Half of the non-Muslims do not see any harm in interfaith marriage because they are used to the multi-cultural structure of the U.S. Therefore, they recognize and respect other cultures.

The results that we have reached above illustrate what Muslims and non-Muslims in the U.S. think about the subject of "Muslim Women", without generalization. Our research shows that Muslims living in the west are affected by the society in which they live and thus think liberally on some subjects like westerners, while on some subjects they are conservative. We will understand this even better as we proceed with the study.

I would like to give a special thanks to: The Religious Affairs of Turkey for giving me the chance to serve 6 years (1996-2002) in the U.S. and to complete my Master's degree; Prof. Ali Dere (Head of Foreign Relations Department in The Religious Affairs) for encouraging me to publish this study, Prof. Saffet Kose (Professor in the Theology Faculty of Selcuk University) for writing an evaluation of the study as a finishing touch to my book.

İsmail BAŞARAN
Counsellor of Social and Religious Affairs
2009 Copenhagen/Denmark

Women in Islam: A Case Study

Abstract

Since my life's work concerns Theology, I'm interested in picking an Islamic subject in my Master Project. I chose "Women in Islam", because it is a very hot topic in the media that shows the images of Muslim women as repressed and oppressed. Many women today are actively affirming the rights and responsibilities that they believe the Qur'an affords to them. I think the most important part in this subject is Muslims, like other religions, added many innovations onto the religion to suit the local cultures and we get something that may or may not represent the original version.

My goal in my project is to conduct research on Women in Islam based on Islam's normative teachings; both to Qur'an and Sunnah (traditions of the Prophet Mohammad). I also want to learn what the Muslims in Rochester think about that issue and I asked them (50 people from Christians and 50 from Muslims in Rochester) 30 questions with my Survey. I then compared the differences and similarities.

Some of the key findings in the project are; the majority of Muslims believe that Islam does not oppress women and those (inappropriate) practices (seclusion etc.) are mostly cultural rather than religious. However, almost half of the non-Muslims believe that Islam oppresses women because they see the cultural practices and do not look into the Religion itself. Although Muslims in Rochester think very liberally in many aspects of life, such as the majority of them think that monogamy is the best fit to Muslims, the majority also say that sex education should be taught

in schools, but on the other hand, only 18% of them say “okay” for interfaith (since Islam puts restrictions on it) marriage because they do not want to lose their values and culture. It means that they’ve adopted the environment (American culture) but they’re not assimilated and they are cognitive of how to balance the values and norms.

Half of Non-Muslims believe that there is nothing wrong with interfaith marriage because they are familiar with diverse cultures and admire them.

I-Introduction

The purpose of my project is to study how women in Islam are treated and discussed based on the normative teachings of Islam; *Qur’an* and *Sunnah* (traditions of the Prophet). I will also try to answer these questions; how does Islam as a religion look at this issue? Are Muslim women oppressed? What are the *spiritual, social, economic, and legal/ political* positions of women in Islam?

I chose this subject because it’s a very hot topic in the media that shows the images of Muslim women as repressed or oppressed. However, I want to explain the facts according to the Qur’an. What I hope to learn from this project is the points of views of scholars and authors towards women in Islam and what the Christian and Muslim people of Rochester (50 from each groups) think of women in Islam via the Survey.

The status of women in Islam is not as problematic as is thought by those not familiar with the culture. The attitude of the Qur’an and the early Muslims bear witness to the fact that woman is, at least, as vital to life as man himself, and that she is not inferior to him nor is she one of the lower species. Had it not been for the impact of foreign cultures and alien influences, this question would have never arisen among the Muslims. The status of women was taken for granted to be equal to that of man. It was a matter of course, a matter of fact, and no one, then, considered it as a problem at all.

In order to understand what Islam has established for women, there is no need to deplore her plight in the pre-Islamic era. Islam has given women rights and privileges, which she has never enjoyed under other religious or constitutional systems. This can be understood when the matter is studied as a whole in a comparative manner, rather than partially. The rights and responsibilities of a woman are equal to those of a man but they are not necessarily identical with his. Equality and sameness are two different things. This difference is understandable because man and woman are not identical but they are created equals. With this distinction in mind, there is no problem. It is almost impossible to find even two identical men or women.

The fact that Islam gives her equal rights - but not identical - shows that it takes her into due consideration, acknowledges her, and recognizes her independent personality.

It is not the tone of Islam that brands a woman as the product of the devil or the seed of evil. Nor does the Qur'an place man as the dominant lord of woman who has no choice but to surrender to his dominance. Nor was it Islam that introduced the question of whether or not woman has any soul in her. Never in the history of Islam has any Muslim doubted the human status of a woman or her possession of soul and other fine spiritual qualities. Unlike other popular beliefs, Islam does not blame Eve alone for the *First Sin*.

Still, the *Qur'an* does not regard Eve as the seducer of Adam, as she is presented in the Old Testament but considers Satan led both them astray. The *Qur'an* makes it very clear that both Adam and Eve were tempted; that they both sinned; that God's pardon was granted to both after their repentance; and that God addressed them jointly. (*Qur'an*, 2:35-36); 7:19, 27; 20:117-123).

The status of a woman in Islam is something unique, something novel, and something that has no similarity in any other system. If we look to the democratic nations, we find that a woman is not really in a happy position. She has to work so hard to live, and sometimes she may be doing the same job that a man does but her wage is less than his. She enjoys a kind of liberty, which in some cases amounts to libertinism. To get to where she is nowadays, women have struggled hard for decades and centuries. To gain the right of learning and the freedom of work and earning, she had to offer painful sacrifices and give up many of her natural rights. Yet in spite of all these costly sacrifices and painful struggles, she has not acquired what Islam has established by a Divine decree for the Muslim woman.

The rights of a woman of modern times were not granted voluntarily or out of kindness to the female. Modern woman reached her present position by force, and not through natural processes or mutual consent. Pressure of economic needs and requirements of industrial developments forced woman to get out of her home to work, to learn, to struggle for her livelihood, to appear as an equal to man, to run her race in the course of life side by side with him. She was forced by circumstances and in turn she forced herself through and acquired her new status. Whether all women were pleased with these circumstances being on their side, and whether they are happy and satisfied with the results of this course is a different matter. But the fact remains that whatever rights modern woman enjoys fall short of those of her Muslim counterpart. What Islam has established for woman is that which suits her nature, gives her full security and protects her against disgraceful circumstances and uncertain channels of life.

By way of background, I would rather evaluate “women in Islam” by considering the position of Islamic teachings towards women in four aspects: *spiritual, social, economic, and legal/ political*.

Spiritual Aspect

Woman is recognized by Islam as a *full and equal partner of man* in the procreation of humankind. He is the father; she is the mother, and both are essential for life. Her role is no less vital than his. By this partnership she has an equal share in every aspect; she is entitled to equal rights; she undertakes equal responsibilities, and in her there are as many qualities and as much humanity as there are in her partner. To this equal partnership in the reproduction of human kind God says:

O mankind! We have created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes that you may know each other... (Qur’an, 49:13; cf. 4:1).

She is equal to man in bearing personal and common responsibilities and in receiving rewards for her deeds. She is acknowledged as an *independent personality*, in possession of human qualities and worthy of spiritual aspirations. Her human nature is neither inferior to nor deviant from that of man. Both are members (helpers and supporters) of one another. God says:

And their Lord has accepted (their prayers) and answered them (saying): ‘Never will I cause to be lost the work of any of you, be he male or female; you are members, one of another... (Qur’an, 3:195; cf. 9:71; 33:35-36; 66:19-21).

Woman enjoys *certain privileges* of which man is deprived. She is *exempt* from some religious duties, i.e., prayers and fasting, in her regular periods and at times of

confinement. She is exempt from all financial liabilities. As a mother, she enjoys more recognition and higher honor in the sight of God (Qur’an, 31:14-15; 46:15). The Prophet acknowledged this honor when he declared that Paradise is under the feet of the mothers. She is entitled to three-fourths of the son’s love and kindness with one-fourth left for their father. As a wife she is entitled to demand of her prospective husband a suitable dowry that will be her own. She is entitled to complete provision and total maintenance by the husband. She does not have to work or share with her husband the family expenses. She is free to retain, after marriage, whatever she possessed before it, and the husband has no right whatsoever to any of her belongings. As a daughter or sister she is entitled to security and provision by the father and brother respectively. That is her privilege. If she wishes to work or be self-supporting and participate in handling the family responsibilities, she is quite free to do so, provided her integrity and honor are safeguarded.

The Muslim woman is always associated with an old tradition known as the “*veil*”. It is Islamic that the woman should beautify herself with the *veil of honor, dignity, chastity, purity and integrity*. She should refrain from all deeds and gestures that might stir the passions of people other than her legitimate husband or cause evil suspicion of her morality. She is warned not to display her charms or expose her physical attractions before strangers. The veil, which she must put on, is one that can save her mind from indulgence, her eyes from lustful looks, and her personality from demoralization. Islam is most concerned with the integrity of woman, with the safeguarding of her morals and morale and with the protection of her character and personality (cf. Qur’an, 24:30-31).

To this extend, “*Sexual purity*” is highly regarded in Islam. Seyyed Hossein Nasr explains the reasons for Muslim women’s veil in his book (*Traditional Islam in the Modern World*) and says that “The tenets of Islam based upon sexual purity, separation of the sexes in many aspects of external life, the hiding of the beauty of women from strangers, the like all derive from the principles that are to protect the family structure (Nasr, 1987:53).”

Why must Muslim women wear the veil (hijab) and what are the criteria? : First of all, Allah ordered it. Muslims have two sources for guidance. The first and most important source is Qur’an, the revealed word of Allah. They may then use Hadith, which are the sayings and traditions of the Prophet Muhammad, who was chosen by Allah to be a role model for mankind.

Here are two passages from the Qur’an that order the hijab.

“*O Prophet, tell your wives and daughters and the believing women to draw their outer garments around them (when they go out or are among men). That is better in order that they may be known (to be Muslims) and not annoyed...*” (Qur’an 33:59)

“Say to the believing men that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty; that will make for greater purity for them; and Allah is well acquainted with all that they do. And say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty; and they should not display their beauty and ornaments except what must ordinarily appear thereof; that they should draw their veils over their bosoms and not display their beauty to their husbands...” (Qur’an 24:30-31)

Economic Aspect

Islam grants woman equal rights to contract, to enterprise, to *earn and possess independently*. Her life, her property, her honor are as sacred as those of man. If she commits any offense, her penalty is no less or more than of man’s in a similar case. If she is wronged or harmed, she gets due compensations equal to what a man in her position would get (Qur’an, 2:178; 4:45, 92-93).

She has *the right to own all forms of property*, to buy and sell, give gifts and charity, and all forms of expenditure (without wastefulness) so long as it is her wealth and her acquisition. However if she is incompetent, Islam does not distinguish between men and women in declaring someone legally incompetent. Islam gave women the right to own and dispose property, so that by this she could be a full legal personality possessing the full right to administer her wealth. Islam provides her with specific sources to acquire wealth, like the dower, inheritance, gifts, and all other lawful means for acquiring wealth.

Apart from recognition of woman as an independent human being acknowledged as equally essential for the survival of humanity, Islam has given her a *share of inheritance*. Before Islam, she was not only deprived of that share but she was considered as property to be inherited by man. Out of that transferable property Islam made an heir, acknowledging the inherent human qualities woman. Whether she is a wife or mother, a sister or daughter, she receives a certain share of the deceased kin’s property, a share that depends on her degree of relationship to the deceased and the number of heirs.

Dr. Hosny M. Gaber advocates the idea (*Friday Khutbas*) that woman has no financial responsibility in the family

and says: "...Even a rich wife is not legally responsible to help her poor husband, unless she willingly and freely desires (Gaber, 1982:65)."

Social Aspect

Marriage: Islam views marriage as contract. Like any other contract the marriage contract requires full and free consent of the parties concerned. The parents may give advice, or use persuasion, but the final decision to enter into a marriage must be the result of a free choice on the part of each partner.

Nature has so arranged that man and woman are attracted to each other. This natural attraction brings them together and they lead a common life and form a family. This natural tendency, the instinct of sex, should be guided to the right direction so that it may be utilized in the service of humanity. Though the common life of a husband and wife originates from the sexual instinct, it gradually develops into a deep, spiritual, sentimental, social and economic relationship. That is what Islam calls matrimony. Islam has attached great importance to the question of marriage in its social system. In the Holy Qur'an and the sayings of the Prophet we find that marriage has been greatly encouraged. Prophet Muhammad said: "No institution of Islam is liked by Allah more than that of marriage".

The basic objectives of marriage in Islam are, first, securing a comfortable atmosphere for a husband and wife and, second, producing a new generation of healthy, faithful and virtuous children. With regard to the first objective, the Holy Qur'an says: "One of His signs is that He created for you spouses of your own species, so that you might find comfort with them. And He put mutual love and affection in your hearts. Surely in this there are lessons for the thinking people" (Qur'an, 30:21)

The Holy Qur'an says: "And one of His signs is that He created mates for you from your own species that you may find comfort in them and He put between you and them love and compassion. Most surely there are signs in this for people who reflect" (Qur'an, 30:21). From this verse, it can be seen that a couple can attain inner peace and calmness through the love that Allah has put in their hearts. But this love is different from the *concept of love* in the non-Muslim world, especially in Western culture. This love between a man and a woman includes a very important factor, the love of Allah and the love to serve Him. This is the love that remains through difficult times. It gives each spouse strength and encouragement and the will to sacrifice, not only to please the spouse or children, but mainly to please Allah, who will take account of every action done in His way.

The human being is, however, weak by nature, so things may not always work out well and in favor of the well being of each member of the family. *Although divorce is very much disliked by Allah*, it is still permitted in Islam at times, when there is absolutely no other alternative or a family's productivity and participation in the Islamic community is hindered by couple's unwillingness to be together. Islam teaches the human being to be responsible in all his decisions and actions. The Holy Qur'an and the saying of Prophet Muhammad continuously remind Muslims of their duties and obligation to one another. The application of these teachings begins in the home, among members of the family. This is why the institution of marriage is so highly regarded in Islam. The Prophet said: "When a person marries, he has completed half of his religious obligations."

I also have to mention *polygamy* in Islam. The only passage in the Qur'an (4:3) that *explicitly addresses polygamy and restricts its practice*, in terms of the number of wives

permitted and the *requirement of justice between them* on the part of the husband, was revealed after the battle of Uhud, in which dozens of Muslims were martyred, leaving behind *widows and orphans*. This seems to indicate that the intent of its continued permissibility, at least in part, is to deal with individual and collective contingencies that may arise from time to time (e. g., imbalances between the number of males and females, created by war). This provides a moral, practical and humane solution to the problems of widows and orphans, who would otherwise surely be more vulnerable in the absence of a husband and father figure in terms of economics, companionship, proper child rearing and other needs.

She is equal to man in the *pursuit of education and knowledge*. When Islam enjoins the seeking of knowledge upon Muslims, it makes no distinction between man and woman. A Muslim Guest Essayist *Mary Barry* also pointed out in her article (*Democrat and Chronicle*, Jan.25/02) that education for women is vital and said, “ The wife has primary responsibility for the care of her home and welfare of her family. *This is not to say that a Muslim woman cannot attend institutions of higher learning* –the Qur’an commands us to gain knowledge- or work outside the home in professions that are vital to ensuring a healthy, wholesome environment (D.1)”.

Almost fourteen centuries ago, Muhammad declared that the pursuit of knowledge is incumbent on every Muslim male and female. This declaration was very clear and was implemented by Muslims throughout history. *Education is not only a right but also a responsibility for all males and females*. Prophet Muhammad said, “*Seeking knowledge is mandatory for every Muslim.*” The word “Muslim” here is inclusive of both males and females.

She is entitled to *freedom of expression* as much as man is. Her sound opinions are taken into consideration and cannot be disregarded just because she happens to belong to the female sex. It is reported in the Qur’an and history that woman not only expressed her opinion freely but also argued and participated in serious discussions with the Prophet himself as well as with other Muslim leaders (Qur’an, 58:1-4; 60:10-12). Besides, there were occasions when Muslim women expressed their views on legislative matters of public interest, and stood in opposition to the Caliphs (leader of Muslims after the Prophet Mohammad), who then accepted the sound arguments of these women. A specific example took place during the Caliphate of Omar Ibn al-Khattab. Omar forbade the people from paying excessive dowries and addressed them saying: “Don’t fix the dowries for women over forty ounces. If ever that is exceeded I shall deposit the excess amount in the public treasury”. As he descended from the pulpit, a lady stood up from among the women audience, and said: “It is not within your right”. Omar asked: “Why should this not be of my right?” she replied: “Because God has proclaimed: ‘even if you had given one of them (wives) a whole treasure for dowry take not the least bit back. Would you take it by false claim and a manifest sin’”. When he heard this, Omar said: “The woman is right and the man (Omar) is wrong. It seems that all people have deeper insight and wisdom than Omar”. Then he returned to the pulpit and declared: “O people, I had restricted the giving of more than four hundred dirhams in dowry. Whosoever of you wishes to give in dowry as much as he likes and finds satisfaction in so doing may do so”.

Historical records show that women *participated in public life* with the early Muslims, especially in times of

emergencies. Women used to accompany the Muslim armies engaged in battles to nurse the wounded, prepare supplies, serve the warriors, and so on. They were not shut behind iron bars or considered worthless creatures and deprived of souls.

Legal / Political Aspect

In some instances of *bearing witness* to certain civil contracts, two men are required or one man and two women. Again, this is no indication of the woman being inferior to man. It is a measure of securing the rights of the contracting parties, because woman as a rule is not so experienced in practical life as man. This lack of experience may cause a loss to any party in a given contract. So the Law requires that at least two women should bear witness with one man. If a woman of the witness forgets something, the other one would remind her. Or if she makes an error, due to lack of experience, the other would help to correct her. This is a precautionary measure to guarantee honest transactions and proper dealings between people. In fact, it gives woman a role to play in civil life and helps to establish justice. At any rate, lack of experience in civil life does not necessarily mean that woman is inferior to man in her status.

There is no text in the Qur'an or the Sunnah that prevents women from any position of *leadership* except in leading prayer due to the format of prayer. The standing of woman in prayers behind man does not indicate in any sense that she is inferior to him. Woman, as already mentioned, is exempt from attending congregational prayers that are obligatory on man. But if she does attend she stands in separate lines made up of women exclusively. This is a regulation of discipline in prayers, and not a classification

of importance. The order of lines in prayers is introduced to help every one to concentrate in his meditation. It is very important because Muslim prayers are not simply chanting or the sing-a-song type. They involve actions, motions, standing, bowing, prostration, etc. So if men mix with women in the same lines, it is possible that something disturbing or distracting may happen. The mind will become occupied by something alien to prayer and derailed from the clear path of mediation. Moreover, no Muslim man or woman is allowed during prayers to touch the body of another person of the opposite sex. If men and women stand side by side in prayer they cannot avoid touching each other.

Furthermore, when a woman is praying in front of a man or beside him, it is very likely that any part of her dressed body may become uncovered after a certain motion of bowing or prostrating. The man's eye may happen to be looking at the uncovered part, with the result that she will be embarrassed and he will be exposed to distraction or possibly evil thoughts. So, to avoid any embarrassment and distraction to help concentrate on mediation and pure thoughts, to maintain harmony and order among worshippers, to fulfill the true purposes of prayers, Islam has ordained the organization of rows, whereby men stand in front lines, and women behind the children. Anyone with some knowledge of the nature and purpose of Muslim prayer readily understand the wisdom of organizing the lines of worshippers in this manner.



II-Current Perspectives

Most of the books written by Western authors see Islam as an Arab world because of the political issues in the Middle East. So “Women in Islam” generally means to them “Women in the Arab world”. For instance, Carolyn Fluehr-Lobban (*Islamic Society in Practice*, Chapter #4, pp.59-83) explains Gender Relations in Islam and she always refers to the Arab world (mostly Egypt).

Another thing that must be explained is that when you deal with the Islamic perspective of any topic, there should be a clear distinction between the *normative teachings of Islam* (Qur’an and Sunnah [traditions of the Prophet]) and *the diverse cultural practices* among Muslims. For instance, Qur’an and Sunnah encourage Muslim men to treat their wives very well, but the practices in Islamic cultures are very different and complex. To this extent, John L. Esposito says (in the Introduction of *Islam, Gender, and Social Change*) that, “The study of women in Islam and Muslim society is complex, reflecting the diverse and varied realities of Muslim women and Muslim societies throughout the ages (Esposito, 1998: 11). “

Wiebke Walther also says (*Women in Islam*) that “the most decisive expression of Islamic thought and the essential nucleus of Islam in general (Walther, 1992:46).” Most of the authors generally focus on the cultures rather than religious aspect of the issues. They generally do not distinguish religion and cultures either. So that makes my job harder.

John L. Esposito makes a distinction between *Islam as religion* and *Islam as culture* and says (*The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World*, volume 4) that: "Islam as religion refers to regulations pertaining to piety, ethics, and belief. These spiritual aspects of Islam are considered duties of worship (*ibadat*) and hence called 'roots' or 'foundations' (*usul*) of the faith, for instance, Allah's uniqueness, the final Prophecy of Muhammad, prayer, almsgiving, fasting, and the pilgrimage to Mecca..."

Islam as culture refers to the ideas and practices of Muslims in the context of changing social, economic, and political circumstances. People not only worship God but also interact in social relationships (called *mu'amalat*, or 'transactions') (Esposito, 1995:323)."

Some authors agree that Islam has improved the social role of women if we compare to prior Arabia. For Instance, Lois Beck and Nikki Keddie (*Women in the Muslim World*) say that: "A central feature of the rules of conduct contained in the Qur'an, the primary source of Islamic religious law, is the intent to *improve the social position of women*. Under the customary tribal law existing in Arabia at the advent of Islam, women as a general rule had virtually no legal status. They were sold into marriage by their guardians for a price paid to the guardian, the husband could terminate the union at will, and women had little or no property or succession rights (Beck & Keddie, 1978:37)."

Debates

Most of the debates are focused on *seclusion* or *oppression* of Muslim women. However, Geraldine Brooks (*Nine Parts of Desire The Hidden World of Islamic women*) argues, "Islam did not have to mean oppression of women. So why were

so many Muslim women oppressed... idea of seclusion found an easy audience (Brooks, 1995:5)."

Another debate is that the non-Muslim women authors generally approach this issue from their point of view. They say that Muslim women are *inferior* in the Islamic world. But Muslim women do not agree with this argument. For instance, Shariffa Carlo argues in her article (*The Muslim Women*, www.islamzine.com) that, "During the Gulf War, a Western reporter interviewed a Saudi woman. The reporter, trying to make her inferior, asked her, "doesn't it bother you that you are not able to go and get a job as a waitress, if you wanted to? This woman answered, "Are you joking? I am a woman with maids and servants, why would I want to lower myself to such a task (p.2)."

But one thing everyone agrees is that *The Qur'an*, Islam's holy book, and the *Sunnah* (traditions of the Prophet) considerably improved women's status by comparison to the pre-Islamic period. John L. Esposito advocates that idea and says in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World*, volume 4, "Role and Status (of women) in the Qur'an and Sunnah": "Islamic holy law (*shari'ah*) addressed some of the more flagrant gender inequities of the pre-Islamic period. For instance, Islamic regulation proscribed female infanticide; abolished women's status as chattel; emphasized the contractual, rather than the proprietary, nature of marriage; mandated that the wife, not her father, directly receive the dower; enjoined that a woman retain control and use of her property and maiden name after marriage; guaranteed her financial maintenance by her husband; accorded her the right to privacy; prohibited her husband from spying on or entrapping her; and prevented a woman's eviction from the house after divorce by requiring the husband

to maintain his ex-wife for three menstrual cycles (until childbirth if she were pregnant) (Esposito, 1995:323)."

Lois Beck and Nikki Keddie argue (*Women in the Muslim World*) that Muslim women need to improve their *social* and *economic* role in the society and say: "That Muslim women lack social and economic options outside marriage (which obviously constrains their behavior within marriage), often *lack the freedom to marry the man of their choice*, and are discriminated against by family and marriage laws mean that the Muslim wife occupies a subordinate status (Beck & Keddie, 1978:85)."

III. Project Design

Data Collection Instrument

I used a survey in my Master's project as a data collection instrument because I, as an Imam (Minister) of my Society can reach parishes (from Christians and Muslims) and get their responses easily and fast. See Appendix D for memorandum of understanding.

I developed a 30-question survey to understand what Muslims and non-Muslims (mostly Christians) in Rochester think about "Women and gender relations in Islam". The 30 questions are divided into five sections. See Appendix A for copy of survey.

Section *one* deals with *Marriage* (6 questions) issues.

All these questions about marriage are very important because the marriage is highly emphasized in all societies as a starting point of making a family.

1- Marriage is:

- a) The union of the two souls,
- b) An emotional connection that could end,
- c) A civil and legal arrangement (contract),
- d) None of the above.

In this question, I asked definition of the marriage, because it is very important how you describe it.

2- Do you believe that a woman should make her own decision about the choice of her partner in marriage?

This question will help me understand how much freedom they give their children as parents, either partly

or unlimited. I also will know whether they need parents' support or not.

3- Do you think all Muslim men generally marry four wives?

This question will help me understand if either polygamy or monogamy is the norm among Muslims. I will also know what is non-Muslims' perspective on this practice.

4- What do you think about interfaith marriage?

In this question, I will find out whether Muslims and non-Muslims are optimistic. It will also help me understand if Muslims are flexible on this or not.

5- Is polygamy (the practice of having more than one wife) good for women?

This question will help me understand how they see this practice; is it exception or mandatory.

19- Do you think that triple divorce (it is a right to divorce women in Islamic Law) practice by men is misused in the Islamic World?

It is obvious that this practice is misused in the Islamic world. This question will help me understand how much they know about the Islamic world and also will help me understand whether they agree with that or not.

Section *two* deals with *Sexual relations* (5 questions).

6- What is sexual intimacy in your marriage?

Sexual relationship in the marriage is something natural and it's part of it. This question will help me understand

that how they see it, if it is spiritual togetherness or a way to have fun?

7- Do you think that sex is a wife's duty?

According to religious understandings (in Christianity and Islam), people traditionally perceived that sex is a wife's duty. This question will help me understand if they still think the same.

8- Would you marry someone if she/he had engaged in premarital sex?

This question is clarifying the borders of the marriage in Islam and evaluating how much they emphasize sexual purity. It will help me understand their perspectives on it.

9- Do you believe homosexuality leads to the destruction of the family?

As humans, God has created us as a male (Adam) and female (Eve). This is the humans' natural structure and the mostly accepted norm. So, this question will help me understand if it is against this nature or if it might be not harmful or a matter of personal freedom.

27- Do you believe the value of "Chastity" (Haya, moral and sexual purity)?

Moral and sexual purity in Islam and Islamic societies is highly emphasized to protect the family structure. So, this question will help me understand how important it is for them.

Muslim way of life excludes the boyfriend/girlfriend system, mixed parties, dancing between men and women, taking alcohol or drugs, and other facets of the Western way of life which are well known to provide the situation

from which pre-marital and extra-marital sexual relations develop. So those relationships are very important because the understanding of sexual relations will help me know the people's (Muslim and non-Muslim) approaches whether they follow these principals or not.

Section *three* deals with *Family* (6 questions) structure and issues.

10-Do you believe the family life must be based on mutual trust and confidence?

If the couples do not trust each other regarding what is going on around the family, it will not work. So, this question will help me understand how much they emphasize mutual trust and confidence in the family life.

11-Do you think that non-Muslim woman would be happy within this society in terms of family life?

This question is asking for a feedback from non-Muslims and whether they consider themselves, happy or unhappy in their families because there are many social and moral issues within American families resulting with divorce.

12-Do you believe that Muslim families are stronger than Christian and Jewish families in terms of family ties?

Since kinship in Muslim families is very important, I tried to know what each side thinks about it. This question will help me understand their perspectives on it.

13-Do you agree with *family planning* (that is a mutual decision made by spouses about how many children they want)?

Islam insists and encourages marriage because of

morality. It also wants us to have children. Although Islam does not allow abortion, it does not prohibit family planning that is decided before pregnancy.

18-Do you believe *adoption* can be an option for those who don't have children?

What Islam does in the case of adoption, as well as in other things, is to regulate the practice and put restrictions because adopter and adoptee do not have kinship at all. This question will help me understand their perspectives on this issue.

25-Do you believe that God has given man a degree of *authority over the women*?

Muslims generally believe that man should be head of the family because he has a lot of responsibilities based on the religious teachings, and women's submissive role is emphasized as well. However, this question will help me understand what they think about this role.

Eventually, family is very important because it is the nucleus of all societies. It will also help me understand what two groups think about family matters such as adoption, family planning etc.

Section *four* deals with *Women's role in society* (7 questions).

20-Do you agree that Muslim women are getting more liberated?

This question is summing up the general picture of Muslim women in the World. This question will help me understand whether they agree with the liberation of Muslim women, in general or not.

21-Do you believe in “equality of man and woman” before God?

God has created man and woman equal as human beings and gave them different roles in society. So this question will help me understand whether they believe in equality of man and woman in front of God, or not.

22-Do you believe that Islam oppresses women?

This question is reflecting the wrong images of Muslim women in the West, which is not consistent with Islamic teachings. This question will help me understand whether they distinguish Islam itself from cultural practices or not.

23-Do you think Muslim women in the Muslim world today receive the noble treatment described in the Qur’an and the Prophet’s sayings?

This question actually is an explanation of question 22, which expresses very briefly how women are treated in Islam. So, I will learn their responses on this subject whether they agree or not.

24-Do you think, “looking after children” is a duty for women?

This is a traditional understanding and belief among people that looking after children is wife’s duty. This question will help me understand how much they moved from the traditional understanding into the liberal one.

28-Do you believe in the *original sin* (the condition of sin that marks all human beings as a result of Adam and Eve’s first act of disobedience)?

The idea of original sin was used to subjugate women to the authority of the church and men. For Instance, in St.

Augustine’s view, as temptress, woman is the instrument of the devil. But, in Islam Muslims partly believe in it, in terms of their mistakes, which both Adam and Eve sinned, and after their repentance they were forgiven, we cannot blame anyone for others’ wrongdoings, either. So this question will help me understand what they think about it.

29-Do you agree with ‘hijab’ (Muslim woman’s dress code) is obligatory for her?

Since Muslim women’s veil was accepted as a sign of oppression in the West, this question will help me understand how they see that, as an obligation or sign of modesty or no longer needed.

Women’s role in Islam is very improved if we compare to prior Arabia. But today’s Islamic world ironically ignores that role. This section is very important because there are many negative images of Muslim women in the West. So it will help me understand what people think about those images such as the liberation of Muslim women or oppression of Muslim women.

Section *five* deals with *Social issues* (6 questions).

Social problems are moral problems and need to be solved because the issues of abortion, dating and domestic violence and others are mounting issues in the society. This section on social issues will help me to better understand of two groups’ thoughts on those issues for instance, abortion is a woman’s right or not and so on.

14-Do you believe *abortion* is a woman’s right?

Today’s society in the West sees that abortion is a woman’s right. So this question will help me understand how they see abortion, is it a woman’s right, or not but it is necessary in some cases.

15-Do you think the *pregnancy* can be terminated with one of these circumstances?

This question is an extension of the question 14. What I'm trying to know is which of the circumstances they agree in the case of abortion; ending pregnancies caused by rape, abortions that are needed to save the life of the woman, pregnancies in very young women, or all of the above.

16-Do you think "*domestic violence*" is a private matter?

Domestic violence is one of the matters that was used against women for years as men's authority over women because the Major religions (Islam, Christianity and Judaism) were ordering women to be submissive to their husbands. Since then, it is seen as a private matter in families. This question will help me understand what they think about it.

17-Do you believe that religious leaders and priests talk enough about domestic violence in churches, mosques, and synagogues?

This question is an extension of question 16. It will help me understand what they think about this issue, is it spoken enough in churches, mosques and synagogues by Ministers.

26-Do you think that "*dating*" is harmful to the society?

Islam lays its social structure on the basis of a permanent relationship between a man and a woman in the form of a family. Consequently, to preserve this marital relationship, it forbids all forms of temporary associations between a

man and a woman. So this question will help me understand what they think about this kind of temporary relationship.

30-Should *sex education* be taught in schools?

While cultural taboos and embarrassment may make many Muslim parents reluctant to discuss sex with their children, they should remember that the kind of sex education their children receive in public school is reinforced by the surrounding culture. This question will help me understand their point of view about this matter.

Data Collection Process

The population I worked with is: 1-Muslim congregation who live in Rochester from Islamic Center of Rochester and Turkish Society of Rochester, 2-non-Muslim (Christian) congregation who live in Rochester from two churches; Irondequoit Presbyterian Church and St. John's Lutheran Church.

Totally, 100 people (50 people from each side) have participated in my survey. I have contacted two Pastors of both churches to give them my survey copies because I know them personally and I am a member of Irondequoit Ministerial Association as well. After both church's congregation filled the copies out, the Pastors handed them in within two weeks. I also took 25 copies to the Islamic Center of Rochester and did them in my society.

At the beginning, I explained the purpose of my study and survey to the Pastors and the Imam of Islamic Center of Rochester and I got their permission and approval to conduct my survey in their places. They said that they would be happy with helping me about this project voluntarily. *Note:* The project was submitted to and approved by the IRB. See Appendix C for copy of IRB letter.



IV. Findings

In this section of the project, I will mention what I found in the surveys that I conducted. I will also give the figures that show how many people answered the questions.

Section 1 (6 questions) Marriage, Questions; 1-2-3-4-5-19

Q.1: Marriage is:

- a) The union of the two souls,
- b) An emotional connection that could end,
- c) A civil and legal arrangement (contract),
- d) None of the above.

In this question, I wanted to find out what the marriage means to them and what I found is: 46% of all Muslims and 74% of all non-Muslims believe that marriage is the union of the two souls. 34% of all Muslims and 16% of all non-Muslims believe that marriage is a civil and legal contract as well. Fifty Muslims and fifty non-Muslims answered the question. See Appendix B for raw data for all questions.

Answer	a		b		c		d	
Muslims	23	46%	2	4%	17	34%	8	16%
Non-Muslims	37	74%	2	4%	8	16%	3	6%

Q.2: Do you believe that a woman should make her own decision about the choice of her partner in marriage?

- a) Yes
- b) No

- c) Yes, and she needs to have the opinion of her parents as well.
- d) No opinion

In this question, I wanted to find out whether a woman should make her decision about her partner in marriage and what I found is: 56% of all Muslims and 98% of all non-Muslims believe that she should make her own decision about it. 44% of all Muslims and 2% of all non-Muslims also believe she needs to have the opinion of her parents as well. Fifty Muslims and Fifty non-Muslims answered the question.

Answer	a		b		c		d	
Muslims	28	56%		%	22	44%		%
Non-Muslims	49	98%		%	1	2%		%

Q.3: Do you think all Muslim men generally marry four wives?

- a) Yes
- b) No, in fact, Islam encourages marry only one wife
- c) It's a misconception against Islam
- d) No opinion

In this question, I wanted to find out what they think about Muslim men's marriage of four wives and what I found is: 76% of all Muslims and 32% of all non-Muslims think that " In fact, Islam encourages marry only one wife". 44% of non-Muslims have no opinion about it. Fifty Muslims and fifty non-Muslims answered the question.

Answer	a		b		c		d	
Muslims		%	38	76%	8	16%	4	8%
Non-Muslims		%	16	32%	12	24%	22	44%

Q.4: What do you think about interfaith marriage?

- a) It is okay
- b) Depends on which religion he/she is
- c) I'm not optimistic
- d) No opinion

In this question, I wanted to find out what they think about "interfaith marriage" and what I found is: 50% of all non-Muslims and 18% of all Muslims said, "it's okay" for interfaith marriage. 40% of all Muslims and 22% of all non-Muslims are not optimistic about it. Fifty Muslims and fifty non-Muslims answered the question.

Answer	a		b		c		d	
Muslims	9	18%	15	30%	20	40%	6	12%
Non-Muslims	25	50%	9	18%	11	22%	5	10%

Q.5: - Is polygamy (the practice of having more than one wife) good for women?

- a) No, it degrades womanhood.
- b) Yes
- c) It might be exceptional
- d) No opinion

In this question, I wanted to find out what they think about "polygamy", is it good for women or not and what I found is: 90% of all non-Muslims and 66% of all Muslims think that "polygamy" degrades womanhood. Fifty Muslims and fifty non-Muslims answered the question.

Answer	a		b		c		d	
Muslims	33	66%	3	6%	10	20%	4	8%
Non-Muslims	45	90%		%		%	5	10%

Q.19: Do you think that triple divorce (it is a right to divorce women in Islamic Law) practice by men is misused in the Islamic World?

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) Mostly
- d) No opinion

In this question, I wanted to find out what they think about misuse of triple divorce practice in Islamic world and what I found is: 42% of all Muslims and 18% of all non-Muslims believe that it's misused by men in the Islamic world. 72% of all non-Muslims and 20% of all Muslims have no opinion about it. Fifty Muslims and fifty non-Muslims answered the question.

Answer	a		b		c		d	
Muslims	21	42%	11	22%	8	16%	10	20%
Non-Muslims	9	18%	3	6%	2	4%	36	72%

Section 2 (5 questions) Sexual Relations, Questions; 6-7-8-9-27

Q.6: Is sexual intimacy in your marriage:

- a) A physical manifestation of spiritual oneness
- b) A way to have fun
- c) All of the above

In this question, I wanted to find out what they think about sexual intimacy in their marriage and what I found is: 58% of all Muslims and non-Muslims think that it is a physical manifestation of spiritual oneness and a way to

have fun. Fifty Muslims and fifty non-Muslims answered the question.

Answer	a		b		c		d	
Muslims	21	42%		%	29	58%		%
Non-Muslims	20	40%	1	2%	29	58%		%

Q.7: Do you think that sex is a wife's duty?

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) It is an old understanding of religious teachings
- d) No opinion

In this question I wanted to find out what they think about sex, whether it is a wife's duty or not and what I found is: 70% of all non-Muslims and 56% of all Muslims say it is not a wife's duty. Fifty Muslims and fifty non-Muslims answered the question.

Answer	a		b		c		d	
Muslims	7	14%	28	56%	7	14%	8	16%
Non-Muslims	8	16%	35	70%	3	6%	4	8%

Q.8: Would you marry someone if she/he had engaged in premarital sex?

- a) No, sex should only take place in marriage
- b) It depends on the circumstances of the person
- c) One should not judge a person on their past experiences. Only God (Allah) has the right to judge.
- d) Yes. It is not important if the person has had sex before marriage

In this question I wanted to find out what they think about premarital sex and what I found is: 40% of all Muslims and 4% of non-Muslims think that sex should only take place in marriage. 56% of all non-Muslims and 42% of all Muslims think that one should not judge a person on their past experiences. Only God has the right to judge. Fifty Muslims and fifty non-Muslims answered the question.

Answer	a		b		c		d	
Muslims	20	40%	4	8%	21	42%	5	10%
Non-Muslims	2	4%	12	24%	28	56%	8	16%

Q.9: Do you believe *homosexuality* leads to the destruction of the family?

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) It is a matter of personal freedom
- d) No opinion

In this question I wanted to find out what they think about homosexuality and what I found is: 76% of all Muslims and 38% of all non-Muslims believe that it leads to the destruction of the family. 30% of all non-Muslims and 6% of all Muslims believe that it does not lead to the destruction of the family. Fifty Muslims and fifty non-Muslims answered the question.

Answer	a		b		c		d	
Muslims	38	76%	3	6%	4	8%	5	10%
Non-Muslims	19	38%	15	30%	8	16%	8	16%

Q.27: Do you believe the value of “Chastity” (Haya, moral and sexual purity)?

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) Depends on what you understand of chastity
- d) No opinion

In this question, I wanted to find out what they think about chastity and what I found is: 86% of all Muslims and 50% of all non-Muslims believe in the value of chastity. Fifty Muslims and fifty non-Muslims answered the question.

Answer	a		b		c		d	
Muslims	43	86%	2	4%	4	8%	1	2%
Non-Muslims	25	50%	5	10%	13	26%	7	14%

Section 3 (6 questions) Family 10-11-12-13-18-25

Q.10: Do you believe *the family life* must be based on mutual trust and confidence?

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) This is easy to say but hard to practice
- d) No opinion

In this question, I wanted to find out what they think about family life and whether it must be based on mutual trust and confidence, or not and what I found is: 94% of all non-Muslims and 90% of all Muslims believe in the family life based on mutual trust and confidence. Fifty Muslims and fifty non-Muslims answered the question.

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Answer	a		b		c		d	
Muslims	45	90%	1	2%	4	8%		%
Non-Muslims	47	94%		%	3	6%		%

Q.11: Do you think that non-Muslim woman would be happy within this society in terms of family life?

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) Not many
- d) No opinion

In this question, I wanted to know what they think about non-Muslim women in American society and whether they are happy or not in terms of family life and what I found is: 52% of all Muslims and 30% of all non-Muslims said that “yes, they would be happy”. Fifty Muslims and fifty non-Muslims answered the question.

Answer	a		b		c		d	
Muslims	26	52%	9	18%	7	14%	8	16%
Non-Muslims	15	30%	12	24%	6	12%	17	34%

Q.12: Do you believe that Muslim families are stronger than Christian and Jewish families in terms of family ties?

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) It depends
- d) No opinion

Here, I asked a question similar to the eleventh question. I wanted to know about Muslim families and

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whether they are stronger than non-Muslim families or not and what I found is: 42% of all Muslims and only 4% of all non-Muslims believe Muslim families are stronger than non-Muslim families. 46% of all Muslims and 26% of all non-Muslims said that it depends. Fifty Muslims and fifty non-Muslims answered the question.

Answer	a		b		c		d	
Muslims	21	42%	4	8%	23	46%	2	4%
Non-Muslims	2	4%	20	40%	13	26%	15	30%

Q.13: Do you agree with family planning (that is a mutual decision made by spouses about how many children they want)?

- a) Yes, spouses should decide and plan how many children they want
- b) No
- c) A husband should decide that
- d) No opinion

In this question, I wanted to find out if they agree with family planning and what I found is: 100% of all non-Muslims and 84% of all Muslims agree with family-planning. Fifty Muslims and fifty non-Muslims answered the question.

Answer	a		b		c		d	
Muslims	42	84%	7	14%	1	2%		%
Non-Muslims	50	100%		%		%		%

Q.18: Do you believe adoption can be an option for those who don't have children?

- a) Yes
- b) No, it will never be the same
- c) The adoption industry turns children into commodities
- d) No opinion

In this question, I wanted to find out what they think about adoption and what I found is: 98% of all non-Muslims and 78% of all Muslims believe in adoption as an option for those who do not have children. Fifty Muslims and fifty non-Muslims answered the question.

Answer	a		b		c		d	
Muslims	39	78%	3	6%	6	12%	2	4%
Non-Muslims	49	98%		%		%	1	2%

Q.25: Do you believe that God has given man a degree of authority over the women?

- a) Yes
- b) No, everyone is equal
- c) Man should be head of the family in terms of his responsibilities
- d) No opinion

In this question, I wanted to find out what they think about the man's authority over the woman and what I found is: 80% of all non-Muslims and 36% of all Muslims believe that everyone is equal and men don't have authority over the women. Fifty Muslims and fifty non-Muslims answered the question.

Answer	a		b		c		d	
Muslims	7	14%	18	36%	25	50%		%
Non-Muslims	3	6%	40	80%	6	12%	1	2%

Section 4 (7 questions) Women's Role 20-21-22-23-24-28-29

Q. 20: Do you agree that " Muslim women" are getting more liberated?

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) Very slowly
- d) No opinion

In this question, I wanted to find out what they think about the liberation of Muslim women and what I found is: 66% of all Muslims and only 16% of all non-Muslims agree with liberation of Muslim women. 56% of all non-Muslims and 24% of all Muslims agree with it but very slowly. Fifty Muslims and fifty non-Muslims answered the question.

Answer	a		b		c		d	
Muslims	33	66%	5	10%	12	24%		%
Non-Muslims	8	16%	1	2%	28	56%	13	26%

Q.21: Do you believe in "equality of man and woman" before God?

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) Not exactly
- d) No opinion

In this question, I wanted to find out what they think about equality of man and woman before God and what I found is: 98% of all non-Muslims and 88% of all Muslims believe in equality of man and woman before God. Fifty Muslims and fifty non-Muslims answered the question.

Answer	a		b		c		d	
Muslims	44	88%	2	4%	1	2%	3	6%
Non-Muslims	49	98%		%		%	1	2%

Q.22: Do you believe that Islam oppresses women?

- a) Yes
- b) No, those practices are mostly cultural rather than religious
- c) Not that I know of
- d) No opinion

In this question, I wanted to find out what they think about the oppression of women and what I found is: 78% of all Muslims and 20% of all non-Muslims believe that Islam doesn't oppress women and those practices are mostly cultural rather than religious. 44% of all non-Muslims and 10% of all Muslims believe that Islam oppresses women. Fifty Muslims and fifty non-Muslims answered the question.

Answer	a		b		c		d	
Muslims	5	10%	39	78%	5	10%	1	2%
Non-Muslims	22	44%	10	20%	5	10%	13	26%

Q.23: Do you think Muslim women in the Muslim world today receive the noble treatment described in the Qur'an and the Prophet's sayings?

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) It may vary and depends on cultures
- d) No opinion

In this question, I wanted to find out what they think about Muslim women in the Muslim world today and whether they receive the treatment described in the Qur'an or not and what I found is: 48% of all non-Muslims have no opinion about it. 56% of all Muslims and 26% of all non-Muslims think that it may vary and depends on cultures. Fifty Muslims and fifty non-Muslims answered the question.

Answer	a		b		c		d	
Muslims	4	8%	18	36%	28	56%		%
Non-Muslims	1	2%	12	24%	13	26%	24	48%

Q.24: Do you think, "looking after children" is a duty for women?

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) It's not duty but they naturally have ability and tendency to do that
- d) No opinion

In this question, I wanted to find out what they think about looking after children whether it is a duty or not for women and what I found is: 64% of all Muslims and 48% of all non-Muslims think that it is not a duty for women

but they naturally have an ability and tendency to do that. Fifty Muslims and fifty non-Muslims answered the question.

Answer	a		b		c		d	
Muslims	10	20%	8	16%	32	64%		%
Non-Muslims	8	16%	16	32%	24	48%	2	4%

Q.28: Do you believe in the *original sin* (the condition of sin that marks all human beings as a result of Adam and Eve’s first act of disobedience)?

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) No opinion

In this question, I wanted to find out what they think about the original sin and what I found is: 66% of all non-Muslims and 44% of all Muslims believe in the original sin. 42% of all Muslims and 22% of all non-Muslims don’t believe in the original sin. Fifty Muslims and fifty non-Muslims answered the question.

Answer	a		b		c		d	
Muslims	22	44%	21	42%	7	14%		%
Non-Muslims	33	66%	11	22%	6	12%		%

Q.29: Do you agree with ‘*hijab*’ (Muslim woman’s dress code) is an obligatory for her?

- a) Yes, it is an obligatory based on the Qur’an
- b) Not obligatory, but a recommended sign of modesty
- c) Best left to interpretation
- d) Outdated and no longer needed

In this question, I wanted to find out what they think about Muslim women’s dress code as a religious obligation for her and what I found is: 48% of all Muslims and 10% of all non-Muslims agree with it as an obligation based on the Qur’an. 46% of all non-Muslims and 22% of all Muslims do not agree with it. Fifty Muslims and fifty non-Muslims answered the question.

Answer	a		b		c		d	
Muslims	24	48%	8	16%	7	14%	11	22%
Non-Muslims	5	10%	5	10%	17	34%	23	46%

Section 5 (6 questions) Social issues 14-15-16-17-26-30

Q.14: Do you believe *abortion* is a woman’s right?

- a) Yes
- b) No, it is not woman right but it is necessary in some cases.
- c) Neither promote nor deny
- d) No opinion

In this question, I wanted to find out what they think about abortion and what I found is: 58% of all Muslims and 26% of all non-Muslims do not believe abortion is a woman’s right but they believe it is necessary in some cases. 46% of all non-Muslims and 22% of all Muslims believe abortion is a woman’s right. Fifty Muslims and fifty non-Muslims answered the question.

Answer	a		b		c		d	
Muslims	11	22%	29	58%	6	12%	4	8%
Non-Muslims	23	46%	13	26%	10	20%	4	8%

Q.15: Do you think the pregnancy can be terminated with one of these circumstances?

- a) Ending pregnancies caused by rape
- b) Abortions that are needed to save the life of the woman
- c) Pregnancies in very young women
- d) All of the above

In this question, I wanted to know what they think about the circumstances of abortion and what I found is: 66% of all non-Muslims and 50% of all Muslims agree that the pregnancy can be terminated with a-ending pregnancies caused by rape, b-abortions that are needed to save the life of the woman, c-pregnancies in very young women. Fifty Muslims and fifty non-Muslims answered the question.

Answer	a		b		c		d	
Muslims	2	4%	22	44%	1	2%	25	50%
Non-Muslims	3	6%	14	28%		%	33	66%

Q.16: Do you think “domestic violence” is a private matter?

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) It depends on what the problem is
- d) No opinion

In this question, I wanted to find out what they think about domestic violence and whether it is a private matter or not and what I found is: 82% of all non-Muslims and 44% of all Muslims think that it is not a private matter. 42% of all Muslims and 18% of non-Muslims think that it

depends on what the problem is. Fifty Muslims and fifty non-Muslims answered the question.

Answer	a		b		c		d	
Muslims	3	6%	22	44%	21	42%	4	8%
Non-Muslims		%	41	82%	9	18%		%

Q.17: Do you believe that religious leaders and priests talk enough about domestic violence in churches, mosques, and synagogues?

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) We don’t need to talk about those things in those places
- d) No opinion

In this question, I wanted to find out if they think that religious leaders talk enough about domestic violence in their places and what I found is: 68% of all non-Muslims and 58% of all Muslims believe that they don’t talk enough about this matter in their places. Fifty Muslims and fifty non-Muslims answered the question.

Answer	a		b		c		d	
Muslims	12	24%	29	58%	5	10%	4	8%
Non-Muslims	5	10%	34	68%	2	4%	9	18%

Q.26: Do you think that “dating” is harmful to the society?

- a) Yes
- b) No

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- c) It is okay unless doing in young ages
- d) No opinion

In this question, I wanted to find out what they think about dating and what I found is: 80% of all non-Muslims and 24% of all Muslims think that dating is not harmful to the society. 58% of all Muslims and 4% of all non-Muslims think that dating is harmful to the society. Fifty Muslims and fifty non-Muslims answered the question.

Answer	a		b		c		d	
Muslims	29	58%	12	24%	6	12%	3	6%
Non-Muslims	2	4%	40	80%	6	12%	2	4%

Q.30: Should sex education be taught in schools?

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) No opinion

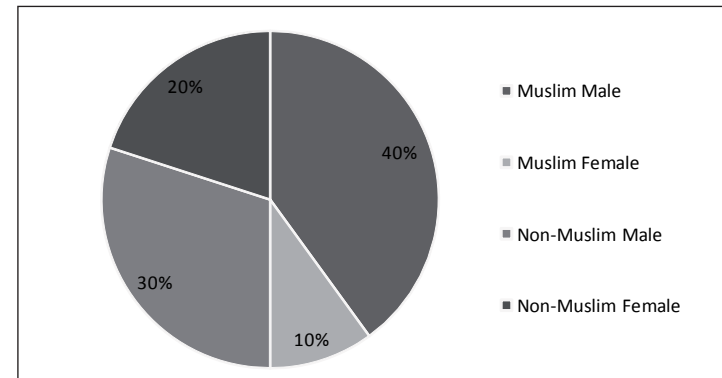
In this question, I wanted to find out what they think about sex education in the schools and what I found is: 88% of all non-Muslims and 62% of all Muslims agree that sex education should be taught in schools. 36% of all Muslims and 10% of all non-Muslims do not agree with it. Fifty Muslims and fifty non-Muslims answered the question.

Answer	a		b		c		d	
Muslims	31	62%	18	36%	1	2%		%
Non-Muslims	44	88%	5	10%	1	2%		%

Findings

Groups Participated in the Survey

Groups	Count	Percent
Muslim Male	40	40%
Muslim Female	10	10%
Non-Muslim Male	30	30%
Non-Muslim Female	20	20%
Total	100	100%



Note: Only 10% of all Muslim participants are female because the first generation of Muslims including female Muslims, do not know enough English to answer the survey questions.



V. Discussion

In this part of the project, I will discuss what Muslims and non-Muslims in Rochester think about the questions I asked them and I will figure out that they think differently or the same. I will evaluate what I found in surveys and the implications of the findings. I will also consider whether the results are consistent with the literature or not.

Section 1 Marriage:

Q.1: Marriage is:

- a) The union of the two souls,
- b) An emotional connection that could end,
- c) A civil and legal arrangement (contract),
- d) None of the above.

What I learned from this question is non-Muslims strongly believe that marriage is the union of the two souls. That implies that marriage is a unity beyond the physical. This is an emotional approach (concept of love), which is consistent with the literature. Only 34% of all Muslims believe that marriage is a civil contract (it is the very basic definition of the marriage in Islam), which wasn't what I expected. So, Muslims who live in this culture are affected by American culture in different ways. A very low percentage of non-Muslims believe that marriage is a civil contract because the marriage in western culture is not taken seriously as in eastern cultures such as Turkey, and other Middle Eastern countries.

Q.2: Do you believe that a woman should make her own decision about the choice of her partner in marriage?

Muslims and non-Muslims think the same about the choosing of her partner in marriage. 98% of all non-Muslims believe that she should make her own decision about it. It is a very liberal approach and consistent with the literature. The majority of all the Muslims agree with it as well. But, at the same time, 44% of all Muslims believe that she needs to have the opinion of her parents as well. The implication here is that Muslim families are patriarchal. They think that young couples could make mistakes about choosing their partners and they need help from their families to make the most appropriate decision, which is consistent with the literature.

Q.3: Do you think all Muslim men generally marry four wives?

The majority of all Muslims (76%) think that Islam encourages marrying only one wife, which is consistent with the literature. It means that monogamy is the norm among Muslims. 44% of all non-Muslims have no opinion about it. They probably do not know the verses that encourage marrying only one wife, or they are not comfortable with this question because they watched and saw the images of Muslim women on TV in the past 6 months.

Q.4: What do you think about *interfaith marriage*?

Half of all non-Muslims agree with interfaith marriage because they are used to seeing diverse cultures and religions that exist in America. On the other hand, Muslims do not think the same. And they (40%) are not optimistic

and they are picky (30%) because they don't want to lose their values and culture with marrying someone from outside of their own religion.

Q.5: Is *polygamy* (the practice of having more than one wife) good for women?

What I learned is that the majority of Muslims and non-Muslims do not agree with polygamy, which is a very liberal approach in terms of woman rights. I could also say it is consistent with the literature that I explained as an exception in some cases.

Q.19: Do you think that *triple divorce* (it is a right to divorce women in Islamic Law) practice by men is misused in the Islamic World?

What I learned is almost half of all Muslims (42%) agree with misuse of triple-divorce practice in Islamic world, because this (right of divorce by men in the Islamic law) is also interpreted in the favor of men. The majority of all non-Muslims said that they had no opinion about it. (I suspect they do not know what the triple divorce in Islamic law is.)

Section 2 Sexual Relations

Q.6: Is *sexual intimacy* in your marriage:

- a) A physical manifestation of spiritual oneness,
- b) A way to have fun,
- c) All of the above.

The majority of all Muslims and non-Muslims think the same about the definition of sexual intimacy. They think that it is a physical aspect of spiritual oneness and a way to have fun. There is nothing wrong with this result according to Islam.

Q.7: Do you think that *sex is a wife's duty*?

The majority of all Muslims and non-Muslims think the same in this question. They do not think that sex is a wife's duty because it is an old religious understanding in Islam and Christianity. This is also a very liberal approach in this matter.

Q.8: Would you marry someone if she/he had engaged in *premarital sex*?

In this question there is a difference in opinion between Muslims and non-Muslims. So, (40%) of all Muslims (only 4% of non-Muslims) believe that sex should only take place in marriage, which is consistent with the literature because sexual purity is highly regarded in Islam. The Majority of non-Muslims believe that you should not judge a person on his/her past experiences. Again, it is a very liberal thought and it is not consistent with the literature.

Q.9: Do you believe *homosexuality* leads to the destruction of the family?

The majority of Muslims believe that homosexuality is harmful. But, only 38% of non-Muslims believe that it is harmful, because American society accepts many concepts and practices socially, they sometimes see them as a matter of personal freedom and autonomy.

Q.27: Do you believe the value of "*Chastity*" (Haya, moral and sexual purity)?

What I learned is Muslims (86%) strongly believe in the value of chastity and that is consistent with the literature. Only half of non-Muslims believe in it. I think that non-Muslims theoretically believe in chastity as a value, but in

practice there is a conflict because only 4% of all non-Muslims said (Q.8) that sex should only take place in marriage.

Section 3 **Family**

Q.10: Do you believe *the family life* must be based on mutual trust and confidence?

Muslims and non-Muslims think the same in this question. They strongly believe that family life must be based on mutual trust and confidence and it is also consistent with the literature.

Q.11: Do you think that non-Muslim woman would be happy within this society in terms of *family life*?

The majority of Muslims vs. 30% of non-Muslims believe that non-Muslim women (it refers mainly to Christians) would be happy in American society in terms of family life. In this question, there are no dominant figures. I think this question wasn't understood well because it was very broad.

Q.12: Do you believe that *Muslim families* are stronger than Christian and Jewish families in terms of family ties?

Muslims and non-Muslims think very differently in this question. Muslims believe that they are stronger (family ties, etc.) than non-Muslim families because Islam and Eastern cultures highly emphasize kinship and family structure, which is consistent with the literature. On the other hand, non-Muslims don't think that Muslim families are stronger than non-Muslims and 26% of all non-Muslims also said that it depends. I think that neither side took this subject objectively. They wanted to honor themselves.

Q.13: Do you agree with *family planning* (that is a mutual decision made by spouses about how many children they want)?

All Muslims and non-Muslims think the same about family planning and both agree that everyone could decide how many children they want. It is also consistent with Islam.

Q.18: Do you believe *adoption* can be an option for those who don't have children?

Muslims and non-Muslims think the same about adoption and both believe in it as an option for those who do not have children.

Q.25: Do you believe that God has given man a degree of *authority over the women*?

Muslims and non-Muslims think differently about the man's authority over the woman. Non-Muslims strongly believe that God has not given men a degree of authority over the women and everyone is equal. However, half of all Muslim females don't accept authority of men (that is relatively a big percentage). Also, half of Muslim females still recognize that man should be head of the family because he has lots of responsibilities such as earning a living, etc. This idea is very consistent with the literature.

Section 4 **Women's Role**

Q.20: Do you agree that " Muslim women" are getting more liberated?

The majority of Muslims and non-Muslims think the same about the liberation of Muslim women. Both agree with it but they also agree that the process is very slow.

Q.21: Do you believe in "*equality of man and woman*" before God?

Muslims and non-Muslims think the same about equality of men and women before God, which is consistent with the literature.

Q.22: Do you believe that Islam oppresses women?

Muslims and non-Muslims think differently about the oppression of women in the Islamic world. The majority of Muslims believe that Islam doesn't oppress women. In fact, those practices are mostly cultural rather than religious. On the other hand, almost a majority of non-Muslims believe that Islam oppresses women. The implication here is that non-Muslims do not distinguish between diverse cultures and the religion itself (Islam). They are also affected a lot by the images of Muslim women in the media.

Q.23: Do you think Muslim women in the Muslim world today receive the noble treatment described in the Qur'an and the Prophet's sayings?

This question is also similar to question 22 because it requires knowledge about how Qur'an treated women. Muslims and non-Muslims think differently about it. Again, the majority of Muslims believe that it may vary and depends on cultures. It means that X-Muslim country's practices about this issue might be different than Y-Muslim country's practices because of diverse cultures.

However, almost half of non-Muslims have no opinion about it because they are not sure what the Islamic teachings say and how women are treated in Islam based on both principles. This also shows that non-Muslims don't know too much about Islam.

Q.24: Do you think, “looking after children” is a duty for women?

Muslims and non-Muslims think almost the same about looking after children. They both agree that it's not a duty for women but they naturally have an ability and tendency to do that.

Q.28: Do you believe in the *original sin* (the condition of sin that marks all human beings as a result of Adam and Eve's first act of disobedience)?

Muslims and non-Muslims think differently about the original sin. The majority of non-Muslims (66%) and almost half of the Muslims (44%) believe in it, which is consistent with the Christian teachings. On the other hand, half of the Muslims believe in the original sin, which is not consistent with the literature. I think that the Muslims believe in it partly but not exactly the same as Christianity. They probably meant that with the original sin both Adam and Eve were tempted and both sinned, but God's pardon was granted to both after their repentance. According to Qur'anic verses, it must be understood that way.

Q.29: Do you agree with 'hijab' (Muslim woman's dress code) is an obligatory for her?

Muslims and non-Muslims think differently about the hijab (veil). Half of the Muslims believe that it is an obligation based on Qur'an that is consistent with the literature. On the other hand, only 10% of all non-Muslims agree that it is an obligation. In fact, there is no choice for us if God commands us to do something because it wasn't left to our interpretation. However, half of non-Muslims believe that it is outdated and no longer needed because they consider the

Muslim women's hijab as a sign of seclusion or oppression or politics that are shown by the media.

Section 5 Social Issues

Q.14: Do you believe *abortion* is a woman's right?

Muslims and non-Muslims think differently about abortion. The majority of Muslims do not believe that abortion is a woman's right because it is a prohibition in Islam. Islam only permits abortion if the woman's life is in danger. On the other hand, almost half of the non-Muslims believe abortion is a woman's right because American culture encourages personal freedom and autonomy.

Q.15: Do you think the pregnancy can be terminated with one of these circumstances?

What I learned from this question is Muslims and non-Muslims think almost the same about the issue. They both agree that the pregnancy can be terminated with: a-caused by rape, b-to save the life of the woman, c- in very young women. Muslims think the same as the non-Muslims because they live in this culture and they are affected a lot by western norms.

Q.16: Do you think “*domestic violence*” is a private matter?

Muslims and non-Muslims think differently about domestic violence and whether it is a private matter or not. Non-Muslims strongly agree that it is not a private matter. It means that it is against the law and we need to talk about it. On the other hand, only half of the Muslims agree that it is not a private matter and almost half of the Muslims also believe that it depends on what the problem

is. They believe this because the concept of privacy is highly regarded in Islam.

Q.17: Do you believe that religious leaders and priests talk enough about *domestic violence* in churches, mosques, and synagogues?

This question is an extension of question 16. What I learned is Muslims and non-Muslims think almost the same about ministers' contribution to solving the problem of domestic violence. Both believe that ministers don't talk enough about this matter in their places; churches, mosques, and synagogues. It implies that ministers (ironically they are mostly men) perceive domestic violence as not a public issue or, they might think that this is not the place to talk about the matter.

Q.26: Do you think that "*dating*" is harmful to the society?

Muslims and non-Muslims think very differently about dating. The majority of Muslims think that dating is harmful to the society because Islam does not allow the relationships outside of marriage such as cohabitation, etc. Sexual purity is also highly regarded in Islam. At the same time, it is consistent with the literature. However, non-Muslims strongly believe that dating is not harmful to the society. They think this because it is socially acceptable and over the years, it became a norm as a contrast to Christian teachings. "Mary" is a popular name in the West because Mary represents virginity and sexual purity.

Q.30: Should *sex education* be taught in schools?

Muslims and non-Muslims think almost the same about sex education. They agree that sex education should be taught in schools. That also implies that Muslims think very liberally on this subject.

VI. Conclusions

As a matter of fact, what I found in my project is, Muslims in Rochester are getting more liberated if we compare them to the rest of the Islamic world. To this point, I do not say that the liberation is either right or wrong. It is very important that what I understand of the liberation is that rights were given to the Muslim women 1400 years ago. They already have those rights - I explained them in the introduction and literature part- even though most women do not enjoy today.

It is abundantly clear that the Muslim woman who is guided by Islam is pure, constructive, productive, alert, aware, educated and refined. She fully understands her duties towards Allah (God), towards herself, her parents, her husband and children, her relatives, her neighbors, her friends and sisters in Islam, and to her society as a whole, with all the different types of people, events and transactions it includes.

What we see today in many parts of the Muslim world is Muslim women's failure to reach that high level that Islam wants for them. This is a result of the fact the Muslims in general have wandered far away from the pure sources of Islam.

The challenge in this millennium for Muslim families is not from the external environment; it is from within. Islam has a lot to offer to the status of the family. The practical implications of the answers found in the Qur'an for those who advocate stability of the family and society are immense.

Note: The project was reviewed and checked by the Writing Center of St. John Fisher College in terms of grammar and punctuation.



VII. Evaluation

Just like throughout history, a scale that displays social and cultural life today is a society's understanding of women. In the era in which we live, women's role and place in daily life is seen as a measurement of modernization as well as the degree of civilization. This should not seem strange since women have been subject to injustice in the past.

For example, according to the Christian culture, "woman" is the creature who made Adam eat the forbidden fruit and caused them to be rejected from heaven, the human race to become sinful, seduced men, and brought sin and death to earth.

During the middle ages in the Christian world, women and marriage were degraded to such extent that from the XII. Century and onwards, many women were burned or drowned on the grounds that they were practicing witchcraft. Marriage was discouraged and being single was seen as a virtuous lifestyle.

Beliefs like these have led to today's feminism and movement of women's rights. According to this, it is possible to say that the image of the modern woman is part of a policy opposing religion. Including the subject of women, modernization in the west was born as a reaction to the authority of the church, because the guiding force behind modernization in the west is the philosophy of enlightenment (renaissance).

The theory of enlightenment basically represents an opposition to religion. One can see this as the concept of

“enlightenment”, which assumes an opposite position to the “dark ages”. As a result, when one mentions the modern western world, one can see a secular civilization in which humans have replaced God, science has replaced religion, logic has replaced revelation, and schools have replaced temples. According to this, it can be said that the modern woman, in western terms, has built her world around a thought of becoming independent from religion.

The defining factors of women’s socio-cultural standing in Muslim societies are the Qur’an, the Prophet’s practices and teachings, social surroundings, ethnic aspects and a culture which stems from times before Islam.

In the two basic sources of Islam, the Qur’an and the Prophet’s practices, the image of a woman is equal to a man in terms of rights and responsibilities. In this context, neither gender has an absolute superiority over the other. The natural differences (e.g. physical) between men and women complete each other.

Islam has given a great amount of value to women, uncomparable to any other civilization and culture. However, it is impossible to see an identical model of women in each Muslim society. The reason for this is the active cultural and environmental influence on the concept of “woman”. Moreover, it is important to stress that in Muslim societies, the concept and perception of women are one of the most resistant points.

Thus it is significant to ask this question: In which Muslim societies and to what extent have the values and teachings of the Qur’an and the Prophet, affected and shaped the concept and understanding of women? Hence, we can not define an Islamic woman identity by looking at different Muslim societies’ concept of women. When

looking from this perspective, the negative image in the west, of Muslim women stems from this paradox.

We can see this understanding in Ismail Basaran’s survey; which gave the result that half of the non-Muslims in the area think that Islam oppresses women. They reach this conclusion by looking at the image of women in Muslim countries which is based on traditional practices, and they link this directly to Islamic values. This research confirms the already existing prejudice in western societies. Muslims’ evaluations on this subject look more objective.

Although this valuable study by Ismail Basaran does not give us the right to generalize it, at least shows the understanding of “woman” by Muslims and non-Muslims in a multicultural place like Rochester. It is therefore important in the aspect that it sheds light on certain realities. I congratulate Ismail Basaran for his useful research, and wish him further success.

Prof. Saffet KÖSE
University of Selçuk
Theology Faculty



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APPENDIX:

SURVEY

The following survey is part of my graduate student master's project at St. John Fisher College. There are no negative consequences for not completing this survey. In fact, the survey does not ask for your name or any other specific information to identify respondents. In other words, it will not be possible to determine who responded and who did not. You may return your survey directly to me via postal mail at the following address. Please DO NOT use a return address.

Ismail Basaran
2409 East Ridge Rd. #167
Rochester, N.Y. 14622

Thank you for your assistance with this project. If you have any questions regarding this project you may contact me (at the above address) or you may speak with the St. John Fisher College contact person Dr. David Baronov at 385-8220.

Submitted by Ismail Basaran



WOMAN AND GENDER RELATIONS IN ISLAM

Christian Muslim Jewish Other (please circle one)

Male Female (please circle one)

Please answer the following 30 questions and *circle "Only one" choice.*

1-Marriage is:

- a) The union of the two souls
- b) An emotional connection that could end
- c) A civil and legal arrangement (contract)
- d) None of the above

2-Do you believe that a woman should make her own decision about the choice of her partner in marriage?

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) Yes, and she needs to have the opinion of her parents as well.
- d) No opinion

3-Do you think all Muslim men generally marry four wives?

- a) Yes
- b) No, in fact, Islam encourages marry only one wife
- c) It's a misconception against Islam
- d) No opinion

4-What do you think about interfaith marriage?

- a) It is okay
- b) Depends on which religion he/she is
- c) I'm not optimistic
- d) No opinion

5- *Is polygamy (the practice of having more than one wife) good for women?*

- a) No, it degrades womanhood.
- b) Yes
- c) It might be exceptional
- d) No opinion

6- *Is sexual intimacy in your marriage:*

- a) A physical manifestation of spiritual oneness
- b) A way to have fun
- c) All of the above

7- *Do you think that sex is a wife's duty?*

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) It is an old understanding of religious teachings
- d) No opinion

8- *Would you marry someone if she/he had engaged in premarital sex?*

- a) No, sex should only take place in marriage
- b) It depends on the circumstances of the person
- c) One should not judge a person on their past experiences. Only God (Allah) has the right to judge.
- d) Yes. It is not important if the person has had sex before marriage.

9- *Do you believe homosexuality leads to the destruction of the family?*

- a) Yes
- b) No

- c) It is a matter of personal freedom
- d) No opinion

10- *Do you believe the family life must be based on mutual trust and confidence?*

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) This is easy to say but hard to practice
- d) No opinion

11- *Do you think that non-Muslim woman would be happy within this society in terms of family life?*

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) Not many
- d) No opinion

12- *Do you believe that Muslim families are stronger than Christian and Jewish families in terms of family ties?*

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) It depends
- d) No opinion

13- *Do you agree with family planning (that is a mutual decision made by spouses about how many children they want)?*

- a) Yes, spouses should decide and plan how many children they want
- b) No
- c) A husband should decide that
- d) No opinion

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14-Do you believe abortion is a woman right?

- a) Yes
- b) No, it is not woman right but it is necessary in some cases.
- c) Neither promote nor deny
- d) No opinion

15-Do you think the pregnancy can be terminated with one of these circumstances?

- a) Ending pregnancies caused by rape
- b) Abortions that are needed to save the life of the woman
- c) Pregnancies in very young women
- d) All of the above

16-Do you think "domestic violence" is a private matter?

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) It depends on what the problem is
- d) No opinion

17-Do you believe that religious leaders and priests talk enough about domestic violence in churches, mosques, and synagogues?

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) We don't need to talk about those things in those places
- d) No opinion

18-Do you believe adoption can be an option for those who don't have children?

- a) Yes
- b) No, it will never be the same

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- c) The adoption industry turns children into commodities
- d) No opinion

19-Do you think that triple divorce (it is a right to divorce women in Islamic Law) practice by men is misused in the Islamic World?

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) Mostly
- d) No opinion

20-Do you agree that "Muslim women" are getting more liberated?

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) Very slowly
- d) No opinion

21-Do you believe in "equality of man and woman" before God?

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) Not exactly
- d) No opinion

22-Do you believe that Islam oppresses women?

- a) Yes
- b) No, those practices are mostly cultural rather than religious
- c) Not that I know of
- d) No opinion

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23-Do you think Muslim women in the Muslim world today receive the noble treatment described in the Qur'an and the Prophet's sayings?

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) It may vary and depends on cultures
- d) No opinion

24-Do you think, "looking after children" is a duty for women?

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) It's not duty but they naturally have ability and tendency to do that
- d) No opinion

25-Do you believe that God has given man a degree of authority over the women?

- a) Yes
- b) No, everyone is equal
- c) Man should be head of the family in terms of his responsibilities
- d) No opinion

26-Do you think that "dating" is harmful to the society?

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) It is okay unless doing in young ages
- d) No opinion

27-Do you believe the value of "Chastity" (Haya, moral and sexual purity)?

- a) Yes
- b) No

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- c) Depends on what you understand of chastity
- d) No opinion

28-Do you believe in the original sin (the condition of sin that marks all human beings as a result of Adam and Eve's first act of disobedience)?

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) No opinion

29-Do you agree with 'hijab' (Muslim woman's dress code) is an obligatory for her?

- a) Yes, it is an obligatory based on the Qur'an
- b) Not obligatory, but a recommended sign of modesty
- c) Best left to interpretation
- d) Outdated and no longer needed

30-Should sex education be taught in schools?

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) No opinion