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Thursday, March 21st, 2013

*الشورى (Shura-Discussion): How The American News Media Reports on Islam and Its Impacts
on Muslim Americans in the United States*

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An abstract of
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Abstract

الشورى (Shura-Discussion): *How The American News Media Reports on Islam and Its Impacts on Muslim Americans in the United States*

By Maral Cavner

The world is becoming an increasingly globalized place, where interaction with individuals who are different from ourselves is both crucial and, frankly, unavoidable. Given the extreme influence that the media has in shaping individuals' perspectives, it is important to recognize how non-Western cultures are reported about in the American news media. Of all of the non-Western cultures portrayed in American media today, none receive more negative attention and stereotyping in reporting than the Middle Eastern culture, particularly those who identify with the Islamic faith. It is for this reason that I decided to analyze the American news media's portrayal of Islam and Muslim individuals and how Muslims feel this impacts their life experiences living in the United States. Throughout the course of my research I interviewed undergraduate Muslim students, imams at local mosques, and media informants in order to gain a human perspective on the effects of the American news media's portrayal of Islam. From my research, I concluded that Muslim-Americans believe that their lives are negatively impacted by their characterization within the American news media in terms of the ways that non-Muslim individuals regard them.

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I would like to begin by expressing my sincere gratitude to the individuals whom allowed me to interview them throughout the course of my research. It is almost a shame that they will remain anonymous, because without them this thesis would not exist. Next, I would like to thank each of my thesis advisory committee members: Dr. Sam Cherribi, Dr. Roberto Franzosi, and Dr. Gordon Newby. Their kind encouragement and thoughtful advice throughout this process has been apt and so very appreciated. Especially, to Dr. Cherribi, who allowed me to make invaluable use of his vast network connections, please know I could have not have done any of this without you. Lastly, I would like to thank my friends and family for their constant support during this process, which was so uplifting to me. Thank you all!

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Chapter 1: An Introduction

The purpose of my research and of this thesis is to give a face to the lived experiences of followers of Islam who live in the United States. My initial interest in this topic began because of my mother, who was born in Tehran, Iran. My mother is Assyrian, but because of her accent, her dark hair, and the color of her skin I noticed from a young age that people who do not know her often interact with her differently. Although my mother has been an American citizen for over a decade, she is routinely stopped for extra screenings at airports. During one of these extra airport security screenings many years ago, I noticed that other people who had similar features to my mother were stopped alongside her. It was then that it dawned on me that people were oftentimes mistaking my mother for a Muslim and that this might explain the different treatment she received. From this realization onwards, I became personally invested in both the fairness and correctness of information. In short, I became interested in the treatment of Muslims in the United States because my mother is treated like one.

A 2007 study conducted by The Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion and Public Life, concluded that,

“The biggest influence on the public's impression of Muslims, particularly among those who express an unfavorable opinion of Muslims, is what people hear and read in the media. About a third of the public (32%) – including nearly half of those who offer a negative opinion of Muslims (48%) – say what they have seen or read in the media has had the biggest influence on their views. Other factors, such as personal experience and education, are less influential, though they are cited far more often by those who have favorable impressions of Muslims than those who express negative views.”¹

¹ The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life. "Pew Forum: Public Expresses Mixed Views of Islam, Mormonism." Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life. <http://www.pewforum.org/Public-Expresses-Mixed-Views-of-Islam-Mormonism.aspx> (accessed October 2, 2012).

This study became the basis for this honors thesis. I became incredibly interested in the Americans news media in terms of how people in the United States use its information and presentation as a basis for the judgment and treatment of individuals, particularly towards those who identify with the Islamic faith. With both personal life experiences and the findings of Pew's Forum on Religion and Public Life as evidence for my thesis, I set forth to interview Muslim individuals living in the United States with this hypothesis: that Muslim-Americans' lives are negatively impacted by their characterization within the American news media in terms of the ways that non-Muslim individuals regard them. Unfortunately, my hypothesis was resoundingly confirmed by every individual I interviewed during the course of my research.

The interviewees in my research are representative characters. In the book, *Habits of the Heart* a representative character is defined as “a kind of symbol. It is a way by which we can bring together in one concentrated image the way people in a given social environment organize and give meaning and direction to their lives.”² Thus, the stories that each of my interviewees have shared with me, during the ethnographic portion of this thesis are representative of life experiences not only for them, but for countless other Muslim individuals living in the United States. Throughout this thesis, I will introduce you to eight of these representative characters. My interviewees represent a wide range of life positions, young and middle-aged, liberal and traditional interpretations of the faith, male and female, from traditional teachers of the Qur'an, Imams who lead religious services at mosques, to everyday Muslim undergraduate students at Emory University, to those within the news media in the United States who are balancing the line between a Muslim identity and working in a major American news media corporation.

² Bellah, Robert, Richard Madsen, William Sullivan, Ann Swidler, and Steven Tipton. *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985.

These “representative characters,” allowed me great latitude with my questions about their life experiences and opinions, and talked with me so openly throughout the course of my research process. These individuals made me think of things that I had never thought about before and challenged me to discover what their life as a Muslim in the United States is really like. Thus, I would like to clearly express how incredibly grateful I am to each of these brave individuals for sharing their lives with me when it would certainly have been easier and more comfortable not to do so. Throughout the research process and the writing of this honors thesis I have tried to paint a human picture concerning the injustices, misconceptions, and life trials and tribulations that my interviewees have experienced as members of American society. Through my work, it is my sincere desire to bring light to the often overlooked biases within American society that have for too long rested comfortably in the dark.

Chapter 2: Methods

Initial Research Questions of the Study:

I began my research with the following questions: (1) How do Muslim individuals living in the United States feel about their portrayal in the American news media as a whole? (2) Do Muslim individuals living in the United States feel their portrayal in the news (be it positive or negative) affects the way non-Muslim American individuals regard them? If so, how? (3) What would Muslim individuals living in the United States like their counterparts in the United States to see, read or hear about on the news in relation to Islam in order to help combat misconceptions about their religion? (4) Do Muslim individuals living in the United States feel that liberal versus conservative American news media sources portray their stories related to or about Islam differently? If so, in what ways and what do they think this reveals about these news media sources? While in this thesis I will necessarily incorporate a number of statistics and figures to help address these questions, my primary focus for each of these questions is to examine the human impact behind easily reported facts, figures, and statistics.

Study Design:

There are three samples groups contained within this research. The first is a nonprobability sampling of Emory University students who are Muslim. The students were all at least eighteen years of age with no upper age limit as long as they were currently in their final (senior) year of study at Emory University, located in Dekalb County, Georgia. The total number of undergraduate participants was two males and two females. No individuals interviewed during the course of the research process for this honors thesis were considered members of a vulnerable populations.

The second sample group of this study I have characterized as “media informants.” While I originally began with the intention of interviewing two informants, one from a liberal media source (for example, MSNBC) and one from a conservative news media source (I approached FOX News and their affiliate in Atlanta, Georgia), unfortunately no one from a conservative news media source was willing or able to be interviewed for the purposes of my research. My media informant was not a member of a vulnerable population.

The final sample group for this study consists of Imams who currently teach at mosques. Unfortunately, I encountered difficulty in finding imams in Atlanta, Georgia who were both willing and able to be interviewed. However, because I was especially interested in the differing perspective that these religious teachers might bring to my research, during a break from school spent at home in Missouri, I traveled to the nearest two mosques and interviewed two imams who reside in the state. None of the Imams interviewed were considered members of a vulnerable population. There was no other specific exclusion criterion for this study.

The setting of each of the interviews was determined on an individual basis by each of the interviewees and included places such as local coffee shops, the Emory University Woodruff Library, the Dobbs University Center at Emory University, at the various offices of the interviewees, or by phone (as was done with my media informant).

Recruitment:

When recruiting individuals to fit my sample groups to be interviewed a variety of different methods were used. When seeking out Muslim undergraduate individuals, I relied heavily on social media sources, such as Facebook, and Emory University’s LearnLink communication system to provide me with a list of Muslim students organizations at Emory University. Most

individuals who agreed to be interviewed had affiliations with the Muslim Student Association. I also attended various Muslim Student Association events on campus including a panel discussion centered on the topic of being a Muslim living in the United States on February 14th, 2013 at which I approached individuals in attendance. I then emailed a recruitment letter (see attachment #1) to these organizations.

The recruitment email explained my thesis topic, who I am, and why volunteers were needed for the research topic. The students were informed both through the recruitment email and again in person immediately before the interview began that their participation in my study was completely voluntary, would be kept completely anonymous to everyone except for myself, and would in no way be linked to their academic success or failure or standing with Emory University or its faculty members. The recruitment email also explained the criteria for participation in the study: at least eighteen years of age, a Muslim individual, and a current student at Emory University. Interested students were prompted by the recruitment email to contact me directly. I recruited individuals to fill the demographic components described in the sample description, but did not exclude any other individuals on the basis of any other demographic characteristics when seeking Emory University undergraduate students to interview.

When recruiting individuals to fit my second and third sample groups: media informants and Imams, I relied heavily on the good standing and vast network connections within the Muslim community in Atlanta, Georgia that my lead committee advisor, Dr. Sam Cherribi possesses. Thus, snowball sampling was used for these two sample groups. The media informant and Imam sample groups were provided with a slightly adjusted version of the recruitment email; for example the text explaining the autonomy of the interview in relation to

academic standing was obviously removed. Nevertheless, the anonymity and voluntary nature of their participation was emphasized both in their recruitment email and in person before the interview began.

Informed Consent:

During the recruitment stage, correspondence between potential participants and myself emphasized both the voluntary and confidential nature of participation. At the beginning of each interview, I provided a consent form to the participant and requested that the participant read the consent form to ensure that they understood its contents. After this, with the participant's permission, I obtained written consent from each interviewee. Once written consent was obtained, I proceeded with the interview. At the end of the interview I asked the participants if I could contact them in the future should I need to clarify any information collected during the interview. The participants' consent was captured orally during the audio recording of the interview.

Procedures:

Prior to the beginning of each interview the interviewees were asked if they consented to being recorded by a digital voice recorder throughout the course of the interview. All interviewees consented to having their voices recorded. Each of the interviews was recorded on a digital recorder to ensure the complete accuracy of thoughts, opinions, and stories given and then quoted within my thesis. The recording of each interview was erased after thorough transcription. Interviewees were given the opportunity to end the interview at any time, refuse to answer any particular questions, and ask me any questions at the end of the interview. I provided

each person I interviewed with both my email address and cellphone number so that if any issues or questions arose after the interview for the participant they would have a direct means of contacting me. No experimental procedures were conducted during the course of the interviews.

Risks to Participation:

There were, and remain, no foreseeable physical, psychological, legal or economic risks to participation as an interviewee for this research. This factor, or lack of, was stressed both in my recruitment email and in person before the interview began. In conjunction to this, confidentiality and complete anonymity for all individuals except between the interviewee and myself and perhaps my thesis adviser, was emphasized in the recruitment email and in person before the beginning of the interview. I provided each participant with my contact information so that, if needed for any reason, including if they felt a risk resulting from their participation had arisen, they could easily contact me. As of today, in some instances months after the interviews have taken place, I have not had a participant contact me regarding any developed risks or consequences to their participation as an interviewee in my research.

Immediate or Future Benefits to the Subject:

As I explained in the text of the recruitment email, there are no direct benefits to those individuals who allowed me to interview them with the one exception of my gratefulness for their participation.

Data Management and Monitoring / Confidentiality:

After the conclusion of each interview, the voice recordings were transcribed to my

personal computer, which is password protected. After transcription, the digital file was immediately erased from the voice recorder. The transcript of each of the interviews does not include any identifying names, characteristics, places or events. To protect my participants' confidentiality, codes and/or pseudonyms were used to identify the participants on all digital recording files and transcripts. I am the only person to have access to the code linking participant identities to research data.

Chapter 3: An Example of a Misconception - A Comparison Between Holy Books, the Qur'an and the Bible, and Their Portrayals of the Roles of Women

When those who are critical of the Islamic religion in the United States voice their opinions on Islam they often point to the sometimes violent treatment and status of women in the Muslim community as one of the principal reasons for which they feel so staunchly negative about the Muslim faith. Indicative of this, a Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life poll conducted in August of 2007 found that 45% of Americans believe that Islamic religion itself encourages violence, both within and outside of its followers.³ Further, when I asked each of my interviewees what they believed the largest misconception held by Americans about Islam or Muslim individuals, without fail, all expressed they believed that the idea that Islam promotes violence and the mistreatment of women reigned superior.

Figure 1 – Percentages of Americans Who Say Islam Encourages Violence⁴:

Image redacted due to copyright, but can easily be accessed via the link included within footnote #4.

It is not difficult to see what contributes to this Western linkage between Islam and violence. It is undeniable that the practice, commonly referred to as “honor violence” occurs in the Muslim culture and is often graphically depicted in the American news media to the shock and outrage of the public. According to a definition from the AHA Foundation, “honor violence”, which often results in body mutilation or death, “describes physical violence against a woman or girl by another family member for engaging in behavior deemed by the family to be shameful.”⁵ Instances of depictions of honor violence, particularly killings, in the Muslim culture are not difficult to find in American news media sources. In 2009, CBS News’s program *48 Hours Mystery* devoted its program to the story of Noor Almaleki. Almaleki, who was living with her

³ The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life. "Pew Forum: Public Expresses Mixed Views of Islam, Mormonism." Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life. <http://www.pewforum.org/Public-Expresses-Mixed-Views-of-Islam-Mormonism.aspx> (accessed November 2, 2012).

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ The AHA Foundation. "About the AHA Foundation." AHA Foundation. <http://theahafoundation.org/about/> (accessed March 11, 2013).

family in Arizona at the time, was purposefully run over by her father in his car at the age of twenty as a response to her becoming “too westernized” and for her protests against an arranged marriage which would require her to relocate to Iraq.⁶

A second notable example of honor violence committed against a Muslim reported on by American news media occurred in December of 2012. Twenty-two year old Nilofar Bibi was publicly beheaded in India by her brother, after she was discovered to be hiding in the home of a former boyfriend in an apparent attempt to escape the confines of an arranged marriage. While Nilofar’s story was picked up by major American news media sources and reported with strong condemnation fitting the crime, it is also worth noting and may be surprising to some critics of Muslim culture that the most famous Arabic news media source in the world, Al Jazeera, also reported on the occurrence with the severe condemnation. The headline of the report detailing Nilofar’s story began, “‘Honour killings’ bring dishonour to India.”⁷ I wish to explicitly highlight here that the three individual quotation marks at the beginning of the title of the article by Al Jazeera are not errors in my typing, but that Al Jazeera purposefully put “honour killings” in quotes in order to emphasize the falsity of such a name for such an act.

Unfortunately, acts of violence similar to those committed against Noor and Nilofar are far from being isolated incidents. In the year 2000 the United Nations estimated that the approximate number of honor killings resulted in the death of 5,000 individuals each year, although, recognizing the obviously sensitive nature associated with such tragic and controversial events, experts believe that this number is too low.⁸ Even more troubling is that the

⁶ Dahl, Julia. "Honor killing" Under Growing Scrutiny in the U.S. - Crimesider - CBS News." Breaking News Headlines: Business, Entertainment & World News - CBS News. http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-504083_162-57409395-504083/honor-killing-under-growing-scrutiny-in-the-u.s/ (accessed March 10, 2013).

⁷ Arjunpuri, Chaitra. "Honour killings' bring dishonour to India - Features - Al Jazeera English ." Al Jazeera English - Live US, Europe, Middle East, Asia, Sports, Weather & Business News. <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2012/12/2012121614107670788.html> (accessed February 2, 2013).

⁸ Chesler, Phyllis. "Worldwide Trends in Honor Killings: Middle East Quarterly." The Middle East Quarterly. <http://www.meforum.org/2646/worldwide-trends-in-honor-killings> (accessed March 2, 2013).

number of honor killings appears to be on the rise in recent years, as evidenced by their increase in frequency by twenty percent between the years of 1989 and 2009.⁹

A simple inquiry into the search engine Google will bring up hundreds upon hundreds of webpages, all with titles which correspond to similar critical opinions typical of the one found on the website “Infidels Are Cool” which originates from *The American Thinker*, a media source that has tens of thousands of followers online. *The American Thinker* proclaims at the top of its article, that, “The oppression of women that Islam advocates is not only disturbing, but is in direct contrast with everything that Western civilization stands for when it comes to the rights of women.”¹⁰ The “Infidels are Cool” website explains how the founding Western ideals of the United States do not correspond with the status and treatment of Muslim women by men in their culture as influenced by the founding teachings of the Qur’an.¹¹ Corresponding with this, the results of the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life study clearly demonstrate that a significant percentage of Americans, a plurality in this polling, link Islam with violence within and outside the religion.¹² Because the vast majority of individuals living in the United States consider themselves to be followers of the Christian religion, I chose to draw comparisons between it and Islam. Through an analysis of the holy book of Christianity, the Bible, in comparison with the Qur’an, specifically regarding both religions’ portrayals of women in the texts, it can be seen that these two holy books, which many people believe differ widely in terms of the status and treatment of women, are not as dissimilar as many critics of Islam in the American media and public depict them to be.

While in neither religion are women portrayed as the dominant, or main characters (consider

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ “Top 10 Qur’an Quotes Every Woman MUST SEE.” *Infidels Are Cool — American Politics | World News | Anti-Jihad*. 11 Jan. 2008. Web. 01 May 2011. <<http://infidelsarecool.com/2008/01/top-10-quran-quotes-every-woman-must-see/>>.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life. “Pew Forum: Public Expresses Mixed Views of Islam, Mormonism.” Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life. <http://www.pewforum.org/Public-Expresses-Mixed-Views-of-Islam-Mormonism.aspx> (accessed November 2, 2012).

Jesus and the Prophet Muhammad, both males), each holy book's overriding messages do not differ as widely as the contemporary differences in the treatment and status of women. Women are portrayed in a number of scripture passages in the Bible and Surahs in the Qur'an. To paint a picture of the characterization from each book, two selected passages from the Bible and one specific and lengthy Surah from Qur'an are included within this chapter. For the sake of accuracy, it should be recognized that there are some slight characterization differences between women's status and position in the Old Testament (Hebrew Scripture) in comparison with the New Testament and for this reason a passage from both the Old and New Testament has been chosen as representative of the text found within the rest of the holy books regarding women and analyzed.

The Bible and Women:

Nowhere is it clearer what the ideal woman is like in Christianity than in the Bible's Proverbs thirty-one, verses ten through thirty-one. The title of this passage, "The Wife of Noble Character" is a clear indication of what behaviors women should model in their own lives. In the passage it is written that a "wife of noble character,"

"Is worth far more than rubies. Her husband has full confidence in her...She brings him good, not harm, all the days of her life. She selects wool and flax and works with eager hands...She gets up while it is still night; she provides food for her family and portions for her female servants...Her husband is respected at the city gate, where he takes his seat among the elders of the land...She watches over the affairs of her household...Her children arise and call her blessed; her husband also and he praises her...Honor her for all that her hands have done, and let her works bring her praise at the city gate."¹³

¹³ Proverbs 31 - Passage Lookup - New International Version, ©2010 - BibleGateway.com." *BibleGateway.com: A Searchable Online Bible in over 100 Versions and 50 Languages.* Bible Gateway. Web. 12 Dec. 2012. <<http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Proverbs 31&version=NIV>>..

This passage says much to praise women; however limitations are subtly in place. The value of a woman is clearly stated at the beginning of the verse, claiming that a good and noble wife should be thought of as worth more than jewels, in other words, you are a richer man if you have a wife with these characteristics than a man who possesses a vault full of rubies. This places a woman's worth and status above that of physical items, but it is important to note that this fact had to be stated, where as with men, a position of great value was not stated, but assumed.

In the beginning of the Proverbs passage, it is written that the wife brings only "good" into her husband's life and nothing that could be harmful to him.¹⁴ While it seems reasonable that no one should, for example, bring harmful and poisoned food to their husband, it does seem rather peculiar that "all the days of her life" the wife should only bring her husband good.¹⁵ Consider the situation of a physically or mentally abusive husband. If a woman's husband is cruel to her should she not bring his actions to light, a course of action that could be considered "harmful" to him and his reputation?¹⁶ However, there is no 'abusive husband clause' which leads this passage to convey the message that any harmful action, be it justified or not, does not allow one to fit the qualifications of a "wife of noble character."¹⁷ Additionally, the passage states that the wife is in charge of managing the affairs of the household. While the work done at home is of incredible value and importance, women have long ago stepped out of the kitchen and into the public workforce. However, the "wife of noble character" will manage the affairs at home, and there is no other option for her provided by the passage.¹⁸

The passage goes on to explain the behaviors of this ideal wife that make her worth so much; a wife that "eagerly" rises to work at night in an effort to make sure that her family and her

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

(female) servants are provided for.¹⁹ The fact that it is specified that she cares for her “female” servants and not just ‘servants’ causes one to pause at this specification.²⁰ Could it be that the household is made up of only female servants? This is unlikely due to the hard manual labor that is often required in households who grow their own food supply. Could it be that male servants would resent having a woman provide for them? This seems more likely than the previous possible explanation. Nevertheless, the importance and value of a good woman in a household is clearly demonstrated in this passage.

Finally, it should not go unnoticed that despite the fact that a woman’s husband is allowed to go sit with the elders at the city gate, a “noble” woman’s only interaction or relationship with the city gate is to receive praise at it, despite the considerable responsibility that she bears for her household.²¹ This characterization is an example of the praise that a good woman will receive, but also of the subtle limitation and boundaries that are placed on her.

The next scripture passage to be examined comes from the Bible’s Ephesians chapter five, verses twenty-one through thirty-three.

“Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives be subject to your husband as you are to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife just as Christ is the head of the church, the body of which he is the Savior. Just as the church is subject to Christ, so also wives ought to be, in everything to their husbands. Husbands love your wives...In the same way (as Christ) husbands should love their wives as they do their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hates his own body, but he nourishes and tenderly cares for it, just as Christ does for the church, because we are members of his body...Each of you, however, should love his wife as himself, and a wife should respect her husband.”²²

This passage details the relationship, or role that women are to have in relation to their

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ephesians 5:21-33 "Be Subject to One Another out of Reverence for Christ.... NRSV - Online Bible Study." *Bible Study Tools Online, Verses, 40 Versions Commentaries, Concordances*. Web. 4 Dec. 2012.

husband. At the very beginning of the verse women are told to be subject to their husband, a clear secondary status to men. The passage does not detail that women should be “subjects,” in other words, secondary to men, in only particular occasions, be them social, or religious, but that “in everything” women are to function in this capacity.²³ Devotion to this role is paralleled to the church’s devotion to Christ, effectively emphasizing the importance to which this status must be fulfilled and lived out. Further, the scripture portrays this relationship by characterizing that men are their wife’s “head,” in an effort to explain that similar to how Christ is the head of the Church, men are the head of women, or in a position of superiority and leadership to them.²⁴

While the passage gives “instructions” to women as to how they should function in capacity to their husbands, the passage does not neglect to include “instructions” for men.²⁵ These “instructions” seem to be placed in the passage to help men understand the importance of their relationship to the women in the lives.²⁶ It is written that husbands should love their wives in the same way that they love their own physical body, providing for it with nourishment and care. The characterization of this relationship seems strange. It is not written that a husband should love his wife because of her good qualities and love for him, but because she is a part of him and “no one ever hates their own body.”²⁷ In other words the passage assumes that no one will ever hate their own body and as a result no man will ever hate his wife. This line of thinking is clearly flawed. With the extreme rise of obesity in the world today, it seems plausible that many people do not tenderly care for, nourish, or even like their own body. Most individuals, be they alive today, or alive when Ephesians was written, have some part of their body that they do not particularly care for, a fact that further damages the foundation on which this passage

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

characterizes a husband and wife's relationship.

In the final verse of the passage, a summary of the preceding verses is given: "Each of you, however, should love his wife as himself, and a wife should respect her husband."²⁸ If a man loves his wife as himself, it seems logical to conclude that his love for her is based on how he wishes to be loved, a statement which is not necessarily heartless or insensitive, but is, when this is the only reason given to love one's wife. The very first line of the passage, "Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ" seems misleading when the rest of the passage speaks solely to the idea that women should be subject to their husbands.²⁹ Nowhere in the passage is it ever suggested that this role of a subject should or even could apply to men in relationship to women. A final reminder of this occurs in the very last words of the passage that says that, "a wife should respect her husband."³⁰ These words seem to serve as an indication to women that they are the ones who should be doing the respecting, highlighting an obvious absence of any reciprocal relationship of respect.

The Qur'an and Women:

Surah number four, An-Nisa, is very similar in style and instruction to the Bible's Proverbs thirty-one, examined earlier. Surah An-Nisa, "The Women," was named such due to the fact that the passage centers on women, their obligations, rights, and status in comparison to men, particularly with regards to the institution of marriage.³¹ Please note that for the purpose of clarity and organization for the reader when reading the analysis of this Surah, topics are grouped into sections by number within the following text.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Pickthall, Mohammad M., trans. *The Meaning Of The Glorious Qur'an*. 2nd ed. Beltsville, Maryland: Amana Publications, 2006. Print.

“(1) Marry women of your choice, Two or three or four; but if ye fear that ye shall not be able to deal justly (with them), then only one... (2) Allah (thus) directs you as regards your Children's (Inheritance): to the male, a portion equal to that of two females: if only one (daughter), her share is a half...(3) If any of your women are guilty of lewdness, Take the evidence of four (Reliable) witnesses from amongst you against them; and if they testify, confine them to houses until death do claim them, or Allah ordain for them some (other) way. If two men among you are guilty of lewdness, punish them both. If they repent and amend, Leave them alone; for Allah is Oft-returning, Most Merciful...(4) Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because Allah has given the one more (strength) than the other, and because they support them from their means. Therefore the righteous women are devoutly obedient, and guard in (the husband's) absence what Allah would have them guard. (5) As to those women on whose part ye fear disloyalty and ill-conduct, admonish them (first), (Next), refuse to share their beds, (And last) beat them (lightly); but if they return to obedience, seek not against them Means (of annoyance): For Allah is Most High, great (above you all).”³²

To begin, section number one in this Surah explains to men that they are entitled to marry the woman of their choice. Be it two, three, or more, all are acceptable if the man is still able to justly provide for his wives. Here one should note the formatting of this verse. “Marry the women of your choice” is a statement made solely to the male gender.³³ The rest of this passage continues to give guidance and instruction to men, with no instruction written to be directed towards women. Any instruction in this Surah that women receive (“guidance” is a term that seems to fit more appropriately with what is written for men) is given through males. In other words, it is almost as if these words are meant to be spoken and acted upon by men who then pass along this knowledge to the women in their lives.

Section number two deals with the issue of inheritance. It is here that the reader of the passage can clearly see the position of superiority, or value that men hold over women,

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

according to this holy book. It is not written that fathers should not provide for their female offspring, but it is written that male heirs should receive a greater portion of the total inheritance than their female siblings. Or if only female heirs exist, these women are only to receive half of the total inheritance. It seems plausible that male heirs might need more money to provide for their families, but when female heirs are the only to exist, it seems strange that they would not be provided for to the full extent possible. This section of Surah number four clearly elevates the status of men over women. Women should be provided for, but nonetheless there is an obvious presence of limitations, or a “glass ceiling” on how far this kindness should go.

Section number three deals with the issue of lewd behavior. Here the consequences of such acts can be directly compared between the sexes. The punishment for a female who is thought to have engaged in such poor behavior is confinement until death, while the guidance for two men who engaged in lewd behavior is simply to be “punished.”³⁴ There is an absence of specific instruction for men that seems to be ever present for women. The passage once again speaks directly to men, as evident when it says “if any of your women,” not so subtly indicating the possession of women by men and the status women have in relation to the men in their lives, a condition that these women have little to no choice over, as indicated earlier men are told to marry whom they desire to.³⁵

The fourth section of this Surah to be examined plainly states that Allah has given more strength to the male gender and as a result men are the protectors and maintainers of women. As a result of this role that men undertake for women, women should be “devoutly obedient” to the men in their lives.³⁶ By including such strong language as to women’s relationship with men, their status is very clearly defined. People are obedient to their bosses, children to their parents,

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

students are obedient to their teachers, and women are to be obedient to men. When one is obedient to someone, it is because that person has some superiority, be it in knowledge, position or age, over him or her. In this section of Surah number four the reader can see that men are being granted a position of superiority over women.

The fifth and final section of this Surah to be examined gives specific insight as to how to deal with women who are suspected of being “disloyal” or behaving poorly.³⁷ The punishments are successively meant to increase in severity, with the final level resulting in a light beating. Coming from the viewpoint that all persons are equal in whatever higher power you believe in, it is difficult to read that men were instructed to beat the women in their lives if they engaged in behavior that they (the men alone) thought was ill-fitting. The reader can clearly see the position of elevation that men were given over women in this final example. There are however, parameters placed on this balance of power between the sexes; if women are to reform themselves, it is written that Allah will hold them accountable from then on and no longer are their husbands responsible. To disobey this instruction would be to go against Allah, who “is most great (above you all).”³⁸

Surah number four, a Medinan Surah, makes up the fourth chapter of the Qur’an. This chapter is also the third longest chapter in the Qur’an. Due to both the length of this fourth chapter and its appearance so early in the holy book, it seems reasonable to deduce that the role of women was one of the fundamental issues to resolve with the people via the Qur’an.

From the selected scripture passages from the Bible and Surah number four from the Qur’an the readers are given direct characterization and instruction concerning the role and status that women are to subscribe to within their respective religious traditions. Yes, there are some direct

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

differences in the freedoms given to men over women; for example nowhere in the Christian Bible is it expressly written that certain behavior warrants a (light) beating, as it is written in the fourth chapter of the Qur'an. Examples such as this point to undeniable differences which are present between the two holy books, but the overall message that these passages work to convey to their readers are, all in all, rather similar in principle: women are praised for the particular value they provide yet also exist in a secondary class distinction as compared to men. To illustrate this, consider Proverbs chapter thirty-one and compare the good and noble wife who "eagerly" awakes in the middle of the night to provide for her family to the good wife in Surah number four who is "devoutly obedient" to her husband.³⁹ Both women are characterized in their respective holy books as if they are solely provided for by this male and her actions of being 'eager' or being 'devoted' both seem to be ways of characterizing how a woman should 'thank' her husband for all that he is doing to provide for her. While the words describing this "thanks" are different, the overall message to which this language contributes is strikingly similar.

Or consider the importance of the ideal of respect presented in Ephesians chapter five with the instructions presented to men in Surah number four if they have wives who are engaged in disloyal or poor behavior (a synoptic sentence for disrespecting one's spouse). Each holy text explicitly details that women are to respect their husbands due to the fact that they are their "protector" and "maintainers"⁴⁰ (Surah number four) and because women are men's "subjects in everything" (Ephesians chapter five).⁴¹ Again the message of 'men have a position of elevation' in comparison to women's status or role in life seems to translate through both passages, simply

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ephesians 5:21-33 "Be Subject to One Another out of Reverence for Christ.... NRSV - Online Bible Study." *Bible Study Tools Online, Verses, 40 Versions, Commentaries, Concordances*. Web. 4 Dec. 2012.

with slightly different wording.

If the messages from the Bible and the Qur'an share a common ground when it comes to many of their central foundations regarding women, it is reasonable to conclude that these texts did not contribute one hundred percent to the advancement or stalemated status of women in the world. If the messages included in these works alone did contribute to the status of women then their results should be more similar. There have been great advancements for women in the world of Islam, but these advancements are few and far between in comparison to the advancements of their female counterparts in the Christian world. These texts did undeniably play a role in creating a sense of elevation of men over women, but they contributed to this dynamic more through the assisted creation of patriarchal cultural norms in the Islamic world than directly through the passages and their messages themselves. In other words, this "trumping" by culture in the Islamic world has further separated the original messages of the Qur'an from the practices of those who swear allegiance to it, and as a result, further expands the differences between the status and treatment of Christian women and Muslim women.

The American Thinker is but one of the many American news sources that one can access from the Internet which typify all Muslims into a singular category of violent individuals, particularly towards women. There is no mention on the website, twitter or Facebook associated with *The American Thinker* that while violence certainly does occur through the decisions of some followers of Islam, its holy text the Qur'an, and the Prophet Muhammad, that this violence is actually carried out by an incredibly small portion of the 1.6 billion member population that comprises the religion.⁴² While the Qur'an and the Bible are not that far apart in terms of values,

⁴² The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life. "The World's Muslims: Unity and Diversity - Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life." Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life. <http://www.pewforum.org/Muslim/the-worlds-muslims-unity-and-diversity-executive-summary.aspx> (accessed January 10, 2013).

philosophy or theology, that still does not prevent their misuse to facilitate personal or institutional bias. Generalizations certainly can prove dangerous, especially when made to encompass such large numbers of people, yet lack of contextualized information from which to form an opinion is an equally damaging occurrence as demonstrated through the narratives of my interviewees examined in chapter five and chapter six.

*Chapter 4: The Political Economy of the Media and Its Implications
for Professional Journalism*

“Media power is political power. The five dominant media firms, now among the largest in the world, have that power and use it to enhance the values preferred by the corporate world of which they are a part of.”⁴³ The relationship between the political economy of the media and media bias is incredibly interwoven, but begins from a fundamental fact: the media is made up of big businesses, primarily the “Big Five,” who are operating in a capitalist society whose primary motive is profit.⁴⁴ Major decisions about a company thus cannot be made without (at least some) consideration of the bottom line of the company. Those at the top of the corporate ladder in Time Warner, The Walt Disney Company, Murdoch’s News Corporation, Viacom, and Bertelsmann, nicknamed “The Big Five,” have secured incredible wealth and stability from the capitalist system in which their companies operate.⁴⁵ Thus, why would they through their airwaves or other media outlets encourage a critiquing of the system that has put them where they are, at the top of the social and economic ladder, when they operate so successfully in the capitalist society of today? History shows us that this is a legitimate concern.

⁴³ Bagdikian, Ben. *The New Media Monopoly*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2004.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

Figure #2 - Business Ownership Among the Big Five:



Media Businesses' Mechanisms of Expansion:

Considering that only five companies own the majority of the newspapers, magazines, book publishers, motion picture studios, and radio and television stations in the United States, it is evident that the presence of an extreme concentration of ownership, in other words, an

oligarchy, is a defining feature of the media system.⁴⁶ When the Big Five were examined in expansive detail by Dr. Ben Bagdikian, author of *The New Media Monopoly* and former dean of the University of California at Berkeley's Graduate School of Journalism, he concluded that their primary strategy has been to have major holdings in all the forms of media, from newspapers to movie studios, as is evident in the table above, see Figure #2, depicting company ownership within each conglomerate. According to Dr. Bagdikian, "this gives each of the five corporations and their leaders more communication power than was exercised by any despot or dictatorship in history."⁴⁷ He goes further and explains that, a result of this constricted competition is that the thousands of media outlets carry highly duplicative content. In other words, Americans have "artificially narrowed choices in their media."⁴⁸ The five media conglomerates, which operate like the businesses they are with the goal of increasing revenue firmly in mind, constantly strive to expand their empire, as evident by the business acquisitions that have resulted in their conglomerate status. This expansion is often seen through three key mechanisms: horizontal integration, vertical integration, and through the merging (integration) of companies with the aim of diversification.

Horizontal integration occurs when the same types of companies buy each other out, for example, a newspaper company buys another newspaper company. A recent example of horizontal integration occurred when the (now conglomerate) McClatchy Company purchased *The Anchorage Daily News*. The McClatchy Company, which includes prominent newspapers such as *The Miami Herald* and *The Charlotte News*, now has an average Sunday circulation of 2.8 million newspapers, making it the third largest newspaper company in the United States.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Nichols, John, and Robert McChesney. *Tragedy and Farce: How the American Media Sells Wars, Spins Elections, and Destroy Democracy and What You Can Do to Change Things*. New York: The New Press, 2005.

⁴⁷ Bagdikian, Ben. *The New Media Monopoly*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2004.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Smith, Heather. "The Charlotte Observer Library: Organizational Culture Insights." *LIS 1* (2009): 1-11. Print.

Vertical integration is the most typical type of expansion strategy undertaken by media companies, and occurs when a company buys out other companies on each side of the production process with the aim to control the entire production environment. As an example, a newspaper company buying a paper making company and a railroad company to then deliver the newspaper would be a classic example of vertical integration.

The third of the three predominantly used mechanisms, a merger, occurs through the integration of different companies with the aim of diversification. Each of these individual mechanisms result in a general increasing process of concentration or, in other words, in a large number of individual media companies' combination into a smaller number of more powerful large media conglomerates.

The Significance of Mechanisms of Expansion Regarding the Media:

Noteworthy and prominent examples of integration within media forums include the merger of America Online, more commonly referred to as AOL, and Time Warner's merger, which, to give you an indication of the massive impact such mergers can have, was valued at an incredible \$350 billion and remains the largest merger in United States business history.⁵⁰ What comprises that staggering \$350 billion sum? Among the subsidiaries of AOL Time Warner are some of the most prominent names in media today, as indicated in the table, Figure #2, above: New Line Cinema, Time Inc., Home Box Office (more commonly known as HBO), The Turner Broadcasting System, The CW Television Network, TheWB.com, Warner Brothers, Kids' Warner Brothers, Cartoon Network, Boomerang, Adult Swim, Cable News Network (more commonly known as CNN), DC Comics, Warner Brothers Animation, Cartoon Network Studios,

⁵⁰ Arango, Tim. "In Retrospect: How the AOL-Time Warner Merger Went So Wrong." *The New York Times*. The New York Times, 10 Jan. 2010. Web. 25 Jan. 2013. <www.nytimes.com/2010/01/11/business/media/11merger.html?pagewanted=all&r=0>.

Hanna-Barbera, and Castle Rock Entertainment.

When examining these mechanisms of expansion for profit on the surface level, they seem to be little more than that, expansion for profit. However, one would be naive to overlook the implications of such ownership and oligarchic type of conglomerate control. A notable instance to examine for the implications of ownership occurred in 1986 when the General Electric Company, more commonly known as GE, bought The National Broadcast Company, more commonly known as NBC. The General Electric Company, the sixth largest firm in the United States, holds government contracts for a variety of sophisticated and expensive weaponry. As an example of one of these contracts, General Electric Company Aviation, a division of General Electric Company, is the world's number one producer of large and small jet engines for commercial and military aircrafts.⁵¹ In the fiscal year of 2011, the General Electric Company Aviation branch contributed to 13% of the total revenue for the General Electric Company. In December of 2012 the General Electric Company announced that it had won an award from the United States Naval Supply Systems Command Weapons Systems Support for \$265 million.⁵² According to the press release, the new contract, "spanning three years, involves repairs, replacement, and program support for 35 F404 engine (F/A 18 A-D) aircraft components."⁵³ In 2012, it was reported by the Military Industrial Complex Group, who has been collecting government contract data for the previous six years, that the General Electric Company recorded 3,541 contracts during the year, at a value of \$346,551,440,322.⁵⁴

The National Broadcast Company (NBC) is one of the most highly watched major

⁵¹ Zacks Equity Research. "New U.S. Defense Contract for GE - Yahoo! Finance." *Yahoo! Finance - Business Finance, Stock Market, Quotes, News*. Zacks Equity Research, 7 Dec. 2012.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ Military-Industrial Complex Year End 2012 Totals." *Military Industrial Complex*. Military Industrial Complex, n.d. Web. 3 Mar. 2013. <<http://www.militaryindustrialcomplex.com/2012-totals.asp>>.

broadcast networks in the United States. Now linked so intimately and economically with the General Electric Company, is it then plausible to question whether The National Broadcast Company might be used by its partner, the General Electric Company to influence the government and the electorate towards the acceptance of entering a war, a circumstance that would then be advantageous to the General Electric Company's bottom line. There are 346,551,440, 322 reasons why we should question whether media autonomy actually exists in modern journalism at The National Broadcast Company, and other companies in similar situations, as well as who might benefit from the lack of it, such as those atop the corporate ladder on the board of directors.

Board of Directors and Interlocking Directorates:

Boards of directors determine the strategic methods for each of the Big Five companies. An economic mechanism that is beneficial for the company itself and its desire for profit is to have an interlocking directorate on the board. An interlocking directorate is an economic mechanism where one or more individuals will serve on the board of directors for more than one company and has been regarded as a "prevalent features" of capitalism across societies.⁵⁵ The Big Five not only have interlocking members on their respective boards of directors, but also have a total of 141 joint ventures that makes them business partners to each other.⁵⁶ Additionally, all five join forces in one of Washington's most powerful lobbying groups: the National Association of Broadcasters. If an executive of a major financial institution or advertising company serves on the board of any type of media company, such as a newspaper

⁵⁵ An, Soontae, and Hyun Jin. "Interlocking of Newspaper Companies with Financial Institutions and Leading Advertisers." *J and MC* 81.3 (2004): 592. Print.

⁵⁶ Bagdikian, Ben. *The New Media Monopoly*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2004.

company that it is in business with, then this board member can use their position on the board to advance their company's strategic interests.

A clear and troubling example of this can be found within a study entitled the *Interlocking of Newspaper Companies With Financial Institutions and Leading Advertisers*, which examined the affects of these corporate board interlocks in publicly traded, print media companies in a long-term study from 1988 to 2000. The companies analyzed included: A.H. Belo, Dow Jones, E.W. Scripps, Gannett, Knight-Ridder, Lee Enterprises, McClatchy News-Papers, Media General, The New York Times Company, Pulitzer Publishing, The Times Mirror Company, The Tribune Company, and The Washington Post Company. The researchers working on this study found that nearly 90% of the editors at these thirteen major daily newspapers reported that advertisers on their boards "attempted to influence the content of stories appearing in their papers."⁵⁷ As an example of the findings, the Times Mirror Company had more than two-dozen interlocks with 1,300 Fortune companies and Dow Jones showed a similar number of interlocks with the nation's largest firms.⁵⁸ Further, the study concluded on a larger scale from its data that,

"Corporate interlocks, in which a person affiliated with one firm sits on the board of directors of another company, are a prevalent feature of U.S. corporations. A study of 456 Fortune 500 manufacturing firms found that more than 70% had at least one officer who also sat on the board of a financial institution. The newspaper business is not much different. Research showed that the boards of newspaper companies consisted heavily of officers from finance and law firms. Of the 131 outside directors of seventeen companies, only 13% had any newspaper background."⁵⁹

⁵⁷ An, Soontae, and Hyun Jin. "Interlocking of Newspaper Companies with Financial Institutions and Leading Advertisers." *J and MC* 81.3 (2004): 592. Print.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

Clearly the executives of both media, financial, and advertising companies work in consort with one another to share corporate leadership, even when they lack relevant experience. The question remains, if this shared leadership is used to promote policies in the capitalist system that has been used to increase the revenue coming into their companies? The necessity of this partnership is understandable on some levels; as an example, the money paid for a newspaper or a magazine once covered its production costs, however this is not the case today. Today news media companies, be their emphasis in print, on the airwaves or both, need to have money from outside sources, such as financial institutions and advertising companies and 70-80% of the total revenue for the thirteen newspaper companies examined in this study relied on this source of funding.⁶⁰ Most large media corporations, including those comprising the Big Five, have traditionally preferred conservative policies due to dominant media owners having highly conservative politics and choose their programming accordingly in order to maintain and promote their own interests in the capitalist system.⁶¹ It then has the potential to become a self-fulfilling process: the larger the media corporation, the greater its political influence, which produces a still larger media corporation with still greater political power. However, at what cost to the American electorate?

The Government, the American News Media, and the War in Iraq:

While financial and advertising companies alike play a substantial role in affecting the news and media output, there is another institution that plays a major role in this process: the

⁶⁰ An, Soontae, and Hyun Jin. "Interlocking of Newspaper Companies with Financial Institutions and Leading Advertisers." *J and MC* 81.3 (2004): 592. Print.

⁶¹ Bagdikian, Ben. *The New Media Monopoly*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2004.

government. A central example of the power that the government can wield over the media can be seen in the circumstances surrounding the time shortly after the attacks on September 11th, 2001 and the buildup to the war in Iraq. It has become increasingly clear that President Bush's administration led the United States into a war in Iraq under false pretenses; the connections between Saddam Hussein and Al-Qaeda did not exist and weapons of mass destruction were not found. However, the United States did not have to enter a war under unsubstantiated facts or rationale. It is the role of the media, the fourth branch of the state, to investigate and bring knowledge to issues affecting our world.

The time leading up the war in Iraq is now regarded as one of the most embarrassing moments for journalism in the United States when questionable claims were left uninvestigated and unsubstantiated by anyone outside the Bush administration. In later years both *The New York Times* and the *Washington Post* have issued statements admitting that they had neglected to ask the key questions at such a crucial junction in United States history.⁶² As Representative Jim McDermott was quoted as saying when describing this period in the American news media's history, "I talked to people everywhere I went who said that if the media, especially television media, had done its job, there would not have been a war."⁶³ ABC News White House Correspondent Terry Moran described the press during the buildup to the war in Iraq with the word "zombies," and Copley News Service Washington correspondent George Condon Jr. told the *American Journalism Review* that the press corps "just abdicated all responsibility" during this time.⁶⁴

While they were not alone in their lack of investigation into the reasons for entry into a war with Iraq put forth by the Bush administration, why did the National Broadcast Company not

⁶² Nichols, John, and Robert McChesney. *Tragedy and Farce: How the American Media Sells Wars, Spins Elections, and Destroy Democracy and What You Can Do to Change Things*. New York: The New Press, 2005.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

investigate these claims? Did the media use a narrow definition of patriotism to capitalize on consumer support in a uniquely unified time period, post-September 11th 2001, to keep the executives of the media conglomerates happy through ever-increasing profit? Most media conglomerates operate as businesses with the desire of revenue or profit driving their system. Journalism then suffers and so does our country. In this example and many others, it is clear that the media is doing our society a disservice by its business, profit-centered mindset.

Professional Journalism:

What was clearly missing in American news media during the buildup to the war in Iraq and yet still remains lacking today is an element of professional journalism. Dr. Robert W. McChesney has been nationally recognized for his expertise in the field of communication through many prestigious awards, such as the Gutzwiller Endowed Professor in the Department of Communication, as one of the “Nine Pioneers of Mental Environmentalism” and as one of the “Fifty Visionaries Who Are Changing the World.” Because Dr. McChesney is among the most widely respected and honored communication scholars in the world, I rely on his definition for professional journalism: “the notion of objectivity.”⁶⁵ Dr. McChesney explains in his book written with Dr. John Nichols, *Tragedy and Farce: How the American Media Sell Wars, Spin Elections, and Destroy Democracy and What You Can Do to Change Things*, that “the strengths of professional journalism are self-evident. It gives editors and reporters a measure of independence from owners’ politics and from commercial pressures to shape the news to please advertisers and the bottom line. It places a premium on being fair and upon being accurate.”⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

Dr. McChesney and Dr. Nichols go on to detail in this book the history of professional journalism and the “commercial assault on the autonomy” of it, which they both, after much research, believes has been occurring primarily since the 1970s through two fronts: first, through a mass media consolidation and conglomeration and second, through loosened federal regulations.⁶⁷ Dr. McChesney and Dr. Nichols write that, “Increasingly, the deal between media owners and journalists—the Chinese Wall separating church and state, commercial interests from journalistic values—no longer made as much business sense to the owners.”⁶⁸ Ms. Roberta Baskin, a well-respected journalist with over seventy-five awards and two Peabody Awards with ABC and CBS, echoes what Dr. McChesney and Dr. Nichols concluded in similar sentiment. Ms. Baskin says that, “investigative journalism became the first area cut over the past two decades as corporate values conquered the newsroom. Moreover, investigative journalism went from being a protected and encouraged entity, to something viewed by corporate managers with suspicion.”⁶⁹ Ms. Baskin goes on to state even more explicitly why investigative journalism has come to be viewed with suspicion: “But whereas the lawyers were once sympathetic, playing an advocacy role to the journalists and trying to get their stories on the air, now they’re representing the perspective of the owners (who employ them), that investigative journalism is a lot of trouble and the less of it the better.”⁷⁰

International News Coverage:

Professional journalism has not been the only element in American news media to suffer a decline as international news coverage has also suffered with the rise of a new commercialized

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

environment. International news correspondents are more expensive to support in their work, which does not bode well for them when considering that there has been a decline in the overall number of journalists in recent years. CBS News correspondent Tom Fenton's book, *Bad News*, is an account of the reduction in international news media coverage by American news media sources, especially, in the television medium of news.

“Fenton notes that the amount of coverage in United States newspapers and on television news devoted to foreign affairs dropped by seventy to eighty percent in the 1980s and 1990s. Fenton outlines in depressing detail the utter lack of interest corporate media executives have in covering the world. By the time the 9/11 attacks occurred, the news media had left the American public with no grounding to evaluate what had taken place and why. An American arguably had to devote enormous attention to scouring obscure sites on the Internet or pursue advanced degrees in international politics in order to have the same sense of the world that many Europeans had from exposure to their mainstream media.”⁷¹

One can only hope that as more attention is brought to these issues that more pressure on media companies will result from media consumers and a return to a “notion of objectivity” will once again be the primary thing ruling the day in American news media. In the coming chapters, my interviewees' stories speak to the immense need for the rebirth “professional journalism” for the sake of the Muslim population's standing and treatment within the United States.

⁷¹ Ibid.

Chapter 5: A Report of the Data Gained From Interviews

Please note that all quotes are taken directly from a transcription of each interview that was produced after recording each interview on a digital recorder and then transcribing the recordings into a Microsoft Word document.

Emory Muslim Undergraduate Student #1 – Background Information:

The first undergraduate student that I interviewed during the course of this research is a female, twenty-two year old who is currently in her last year of study at Emory University. She was born in Chicago, Illinois to Muslim parents who came to the United States from India, although her ancestry goes back to Baghdad, Iraq. She considers herself to be a practicing Muslim, wears the burka, and attends services at a local mosque “every once in awhile.”

Media:

She told me that she obtained her news mostly from the Internet, with her main source being Al Jazeera. She also relies on social media and her friends and family to alert her to stories that she can research on her own. When asked what media sources she relies on the most for contextualized and unbiased news, she did not feel that she could answer the question with any news media sources in the United States and instead relies solely “on things coming from the Middle East.” She also said that she relies on YouTube, in that the site allows individuals to upload videos themselves and with account usernames which could be harder to trace. She

believes these videos provide no filters and are not dominated by molds that people are trying to fit within; instead “they are just what people think.”

When pressed on American news media, she explained that she does not watch Fox News a lot, but from what she has seen and from what she has heard from other Muslims, she believes Fox News is very biased. Further, she believes from her personal experiences with the news, and again from other Muslims, that Fox News, along with the major broadcast networks ABC, CBS, and NBC all “tend to be the same and have a pro-American stance and pro-American policy standpoint so they are catering to that (American) audience. They want to please their government so the stories are catered to a certain agenda.” Specifically, she feels that these American news agencies,

“Portray anything Islamic, Islamic voices, as very one-dimensional. Those are just terrorists and those are just radicals (or) fanatics. They just kind of dismiss the other side completely and are more quick to label Muslims with these names than other groups. They also do not contextualize. They just might show a story and there is no background to it. So there might be a bombing and they might just show that, maybe what was the situation there? For example, what were the policies of the embassy that was bombed? What was the affect of these policies on the people there? Will only show one aspect and then you lose everything. Then they can distill everything down to Muslims are extremists.”

When asked where she thought this media agenda came from, she replied that it came “From people who want to maintain their power and the way of life that they are leading here. It’s all interconnected between the government and the higher ups and the news media sources.” She said that, until recently, Muslims tended to believe that liberal media sources were speaking in ways that were slightly less charged, less religiously oriented, less with a neo-con agenda, but in the grand scheme of things she feels that both liberal and media sources are pushing the same

agenda. She did state that conservative media sources were the worst in terms of 1) passing judgment and 2) lack of contextualization. When examining the American news media as a whole, she feels that “very few, maybe 5%” of news media stories about Islam or Muslim individuals provide enough contextualization to provide the full picture necessary for a viewer, reader or listener to understand an issue. When asked if she felt there was an effort on the part of any American news media sources to balance the time spent between positive or negative stories related to Islam, she replied that she felt PBS and CNN did the best jobs out of all American media in terms of making an effort to balance, but,

“Overall, most of these media sources are not interested in balancing it because they are answering to someone, but like individuals reporters among those media sources, some might be better than others. Overall, the establishment that runs those media sources does not make an effort to balance.”

Impacts of American News Media on Muslim-Americans:

When asked how she, as a young Muslim individual living in the United States feels about her religion’s portrayal in American news media as a whole, she answered that she strongly believed that, “it is not giving a correct picture. It is not giving a holistic picture.” She has “definitely” noticed a difference in treatment based off of what media sources: liberal or conservative, people watch, listen to or read. She elaborated further saying,

“You construct your opinions and your views based off of what you are hearing and if what you are hearing is biased then you know you are going to see a Muslim, especially a Muslim does not want to conform, a Muslim who wants to retain their Islam, they will see them as what the media portrays them to be, an extremist, a fanatic. They won’t really understand the whole historical basis for why people are reacting that way. The person

who relies on conservative news media would immediately be more hostile, but the other one (the liberal) might still have wrong impressions or ideas, but would still be perhaps willing to see that Muslims are not how the media portrays them to be. Conservative, more religious and Christian people tend to be more hostile. They have certain ideas because of the ideological and religious ideas they feel more tension there. Liberals, I think they tend to be more inclusive because they don't really see religion as a barrier to communication."

When asked what she believes to be the largest misconception about Muslim individuals or Islam put forth by American news media, she said that, "There are so many misconceptions. The thing that Muslims are all very conservative and very closed off to a strict lifestyle which can be oppressive, especially towards women." Further along this topic, I asked her whether she believes that there are differences in the misconceptions held by people living in the United States as opposed to people living in other countries; she replied that,

"Yes. Americans are more isolated than the rest of the world, even though they might be intruding more in the rest of the world. They see everything from behind a glass so they do not see or understand the reality of the situation. For example, they could drop a bomb over there, but because it is over there they do not really see the realities of the affects. The Europeans are much more in contact with the Muslim world so they immediately see much more of the impacts, even though they might be doing the same things that America is doing, they feel that reaction and they know that that war is not removed. So I think that Americans are much more removed and isolated and living in a kind of alternate reality."

Given the significance that the events of September 11th, 2001 had for Muslim and American relations, and continue to have to this day, I asked if she believed any differences existed in terms of American news media content before September 11th, 2001 in comparison with afterwards.

“Before 9/11 people did not know much about Islam. I think that there might have been biases before 9/11, but they kind of just ignored it because they did not think that it was important, but after 9/11 they realized that this is a huge population of the world and Islam is really something. So I think that the animosity just came out more clearly; I do not think that 9/11 did it, I just think that it exposed it more clearly. Americans were forced to confront Islam after 9/11.”

Looking towards the future, I asked her what she would like her counterparts in the United States to see, read or listen to on American news media in relation to Islam. I posed the hypothetical question: If you could control the story content of your own television channel or newspaper, what kind of stories related to Islam would you as a producer or editor include? She answered that,

“I think that the news has to be more historically grounded, that when looking at a news stories there need to be more shown perspectives because usually when looking at a news story it takes the perspective that it wants. The perspective might be there, but it might be a small minority being inflated and the actual perspectives that is the majority is diminished. So more fairness, I think. Seeing more reactions of the Muslim people who are opposed. Both sides, not just the pro-American side.”

Being a Muslim at Emory University:

Given my relationship with Emory University for the past nearly four years, I asked each of my undergraduate interviewees how they felt their treatment at Emory University has been as a Muslim individual. She characterized her experiences at Emory University by saying,

“Among the student body people just accept you. However, even like the conversation that we are having many people would be resistant, and feel like you are going to intrude on them somehow. They are in a cocoon of sorts. They feel like their world is going to be altered and they won't be

able to understand it anymore so they want those fixed qualities and fixed beliefs. If you don't try to intrude on that then people probably just go about their life, but if you really try to reach out and say this is who I am, what I represent, and because of our involvement in other countries maybe you should try to understand the perspectives of the people in those countries. There are all kinds of reasons to not have that conversation. It is a lot of avoidance. Maybe if you do sit down to talk about it, their ideas are so entrenched that you will likely not get anywhere. There are people, like my roommate from my first year who I lived with everyday for that entire year, I wanted her to know who I am so I tried to bring up the conversation of what she believes and where we are coming from, where she is coming from in order to try to get past the superficial relationship that you can have as a roommate and she felt very violated. So we did not progress anywhere. We had a 'hi, bye' relationship. She watched the news a lot. She liked the world as constructed by the news media as opposed to seeing the individual person coming from there."

Emory Muslim Undergraduate Student #2 – Background Information:

The second undergraduate student that I interviewed is a female, twenty-two year old who is currently in her last year of study at Emory University. She was born in Chicago, Illinois to Muslim parents who came to the United States from Pakistan. She considers herself to be a practicing Muslim, does not wear the burka, and attends services at a local mosque "at least three to four times per week."

Media:

She told me that she subscribes to *The New York Times* and receives their daily updates that consist mostly of headlines. She also relies on CNN and social media, particularly

Facebook, which connects her to news stories brought to her attention by her sister in Houston, Texas and other friends and family. When asked what media sources she relies on the most for contextualized and unbiased news she explained that she thought that, “CNN is more unbiased than most.” I then asked her if she felt there were any differences between liberal and conservative American news media sources to which she replied,

“I can’t think of a specific example to characterize this on the spot, but it is kind of a joke now that Fox News is kind of like, frankly terrible. I think definitely (there are differences) because you can see the same story being reported at different times and if something comes out then one person will say this, but then there is more evidence and then some people will change it to make it more realistic and others will just leave it and make it sound crazy. The others that just leave it are the conservative ones, (they are the ones) who just leave it (the story) more shallow and not contextualized.”

I then asked her whether she has noticed the presence or not of different thematic connotations that seem to reappear in reports, more than others, in American news media when reporting stories about Islam or Muslim individuals. She answered this question by saying that,

“I think definitely violence, especially internationally there is more attention based on what is happening in different conflicts, but I also think that regionally and locally there can be a lot of positive. So in our community we have a partnership walk every year which is to raise funds and awareness to end poverty globally. And so, every year we get it posted in the local newspaper and we get positive attention, but it is not generalized to the Muslim community, whereas if there is violence it gets generalized to everyone (in the Muslim community). I think that violence kind of appears in both, but they give it more of a human face in the liberal media sources and more localized as opposed to generalizing like the conservative ones do.”

When asked why she felt that conservative American news media sources have a tendency

to overgeneralize in comparison to their more liberal counterparts she replied that,

“I think because conservative media, Fox News, thrives on the stereotypes. Because the population that they serve, the audience, kind of wants it and enjoys it so that is what they serve to the audience and that is what they know maybe.”

Impacts of the American News Media on Muslim-Americans:

When I inquired how she, as a young Muslim individual living in the United States feels about her religion’s portrayal in American news media as a whole, she answered that she strongly believed that,

“I think it is kind of sad that there are only certain sources that are able to reach the masses and that people only take what they want from it and it is not always the most honest perception and a lot of times, I feel like I have to sit down and not really explain, but tell another side of the story. Sometimes, if it is people that I do not really know then I will not take the time because I feel like it is not going to really matter, but if they are close friends and we are having a conversation, then I will explain.”

I then asked whether she had noticed a difference in treatment between people who rely on American news media, be it liberal or conservative. I was especially curious to ask her this question because she is of lighter skin color, does not wear the burka, and does not possess typically distinctive Middle Eastern physical features. She replied that,

“I do not have one necessarily from the two perspectives of the media, but in the 6th grade, I actually moved thirty minutes from one school to the other and this was right after September 11th, 2001. It was my first day, at the end of 6th grade, in March, and the first day during recess it came out that I was Muslim. All the students were like ‘What? Wait, you can’t be!’ Even my

teacher was like, ‘Really, you’re a Muslim? I’ve never seen a Muslim that does not look like the ones I have seen on television.’ Because, all they saw before were women covered from head to toe who seemed weak and it was like (I was) another face for them and I think it was challenging for them, to fit it in. I guess at that time both of the sources (liberal and conservative) were showing one side.”

Next, I asked her what she felt was the largest misconception about Islam and Muslim individuals held by the average American consumer of news. She answered by saying,

“I think that Islam promotes violence. And I think that whole idea is really propagated and upheld by the media in an ‘America is the best’ type mentality. I think there is a large misconception about Muslim women especially that they are inferior and that Islam promotes lack of equality between men and women and that they do not have the same freedoms, but I do not think that that is true or, there are going to be conservatives found within any religion that uphold certain ideals.”

I then asked her about her experiences surrounding September 11th, 2001 and whether she felt American news media content differed before and after this event.

“Yeah, so I remember that day really vividly. We were in the 5th grade and there were about twenty-five kids in my class and (only) nine left by the end of the day because parents kept calling to take their kids home. When we got home we sat around the table, but no one really had an appetite to eat. We had the television on. It was just really confusing at that time because all of the images that kept replaying were the planes flying into the buildings. I did not really understand what it meant or what it would mean for years to come in terms of the Muslim identity in America. I think that post 9/11 there was a lot of emphasis to see what was happening in the Middle Eastern world, in the Islamic world and what America was shown was women covered and without rights to speak in public and then that became the idea that everyone had in their minds.”

Looking towards the future, I asked her what she would like her counterparts in the United States to see, read or listen to on American news media in relation to Islam. I again posed the hypothetical question: If you could control the story content of your own television channel or newspaper, what kind of stories related to Islam would you as a producer or editor include? She answered that,

“I think that there are a lot of positive things happening around the world and I think if that there are good things and bad things happening and not to hide the terrible things happening, but maybe to bring attention to the positive things and how we can use that to leverage what is happening.”

Being a Muslim at Emory University:

She characterized her experiences as a Muslim at Emory University by saying,

“I do not think my treatment has been altered because I am a Muslim. Like I said I do not even think that most people know I am a Muslim because I might not look like a typical Muslim that they expect to see, but I think that at Emory there is a pretty large Muslim community at least, so it is more of a community than other Muslims at large. Outside of Emory University though? I think it has not really been an issue because I do not have a head covering so sometimes people do not even realize I am Muslim so I do not get treated differently because of that, but I’m sure once they find out they might associate what they have seen or heard with me.”

Emory Muslim Undergraduate Student #3 – Background Information:

The third individual I interviewed is a twenty-one year old male from Atlanta, Georgia who is currently in his last year of study at Emory University. Both of his parents were born in Karachi, Pakistan, but moved to the United States in 1984 when his father obtained a residency

position at Emory University. His parents are both Sunni Muslims, “but not traditionally as religious. We pray whenever my grandparents are in town.” He considers himself to be a Muslim, but does not consider himself to be a “practicing Muslim.” He is involved with Emory University’s chapter of the Muslim Student Association, as well as the Pakistani Student Association, but does not attend religious services at a mosque and instead, through these organizations, he participates in events that center “more directly on the culture that surrounds Islam.”

Media:

He is a member of the debate team for Emory University and thus stays very well informed about the news through a variety of sources, partly out of necessity for his continued success while debating. When asked how he obtains his news, he replied that,

“Definitely from online news. I try to keep up to date with Google News, *The New York Times*. I debate for Emory University so I do a lot of research independently. I try to stay away from television agency news, like CNN, Fox News, even C-SPAN because I tend to think that those are a little bit too political and less objective in my opinion. I also look at Al-Jazeera to get that perspective. Last year’s debate topic was about the Arab Spring so I did a lot of research, which was good for my own introspection about the nature of Islamic government and the culture that surrounds those places.”

Next, I asked him if he felt any American news media sources portrayed Islam or Muslim individuals in a consistently negative or stereotypical light, and if so, how do they do so? He answered by saying,

“The negative, definitely Fox News, without a question. I think that the stereotyped question is distinct, because I think that sometimes Islam can be so generically used and referenced, but I do not think that it always has a negative connotation. I think that there has been this tendency recently, in most major news agencies in the United States, to be like ‘radical Islam,’ that is what they call it. I think the word ‘Muslim’ is still very much a taboo. For example, when Barack Obama was running for president people labeled him as a Muslim. The first thing they (the campaign) did in response was say that he was not a Muslim. It was more of a rejection. There was not a response of ‘why does this necessarily matter or why is that a negative thing to conceal?’ So I think that there is a level of racist underpinnings with the way that the media, with the way that the media portrays Islam, but instead of being direct and saying ‘Islam bad’ they’ve kind of relabeled the nomenclature to call it ‘radical Islam’ but I think it has the same outcome and meaning fundamentally.”

When asked what number of American news media stories related to Islam he believed portrayed his religion in a fair and contextualized way, he responded with “2.5 out of 10.” He then elaborated on what contributed to the “2.5 out of 10” stories naming Fareed Zakaria as the main person contributing to the 2.5 number. He then mentioned that he felt international sources, such as the BBC, “are probably the most objective period.” I asked whether he believed that ideologically liberal and conservative media sources portray their stories related to or about Islam differently in the United States. He responded by saying,

“Yeah, so I think that they will describe the objective event the same (way), but the justifications as to why that event occurred are fundamentally different and that is when they introduce their own personal bias. I think that Fox News definitely appeals to a certain demographic of people where the answer or answers are much more black and white and make much more sense to them. I think that can also apply almost equally to MSNBC or CNN, but I tend to be more ok with what MSNBC and CNN say because I think that they are at least more understanding with why certain things happen as opposed to what happened.”

When asked about the reappearance or not of thematic connotations in American news media stories related to Islam he said,

“(There are) Definitely more stories related to violence. Conservative media sources are definitely more violent in terms of how they portray Muslims in America and especially, I think the type of response they induce is more violent because I think it feeds a level of xenophobia and a level of discrimination that is not justified and I think that there are some thing that it makes sense to profile from or make assumptions based on religion, but I think that they kind of over-generalize that.”

I then inquired whether he felt there was a concerted effort on the part of any American news media sources to balance the time spent between positive or negative stories related to Islam. He answered by saying,

“Well I think early on, around September 11th (2001), just generally speaking media that is negative probably gets more coverage than media that is positive. Then when Islam gets attached to it I think that negative Islam media is a lot more prevalent than positive Islam media. Although, I do not want to jump on the train that the media ‘is so negative.’ I think that there have been efforts made, like with Fareed Zakaria, he does a good job. Certain news agencies show the intersection of Muslim culture with supporting Jewish cultures supporting Jewish synagogues. They try to make them more Americanized. What news agencies do this? Oh man I think that...(long pause) CNN does that, definitely seen news reports on BBC that do that. Foreign Policy is good, but not as much domestically as much as with Arab Spring things obviously.”

Impacts of the American News Media on Muslim-Americans:

When asked how he, as a young Muslim individual living in the United States feels about his religion’s portrayal in American news media as a whole, he replied that,

“If I had a sentence and I was like ‘even if I did this, then this would happen,’ those two parts of the sentence contrast each other, but if I take only one part of the sentence, in the abstract, then it sounds crazier sounding, very bad, and the other part sounds very good, but put together they balance each other out. I just think that effort has not been made and I kind of wonder if that effort is ever feasible. But the media portrayals are more external, like jihad against others who do not want that connection with God. I think that is just so, fundamentally not true, not what the intent of it is. Because it is like with any type of text that you take, you take something in the abstract and say ‘this is what it means,’ but without the bigger context and then you won’t have any idea. I think that the media inherently cannot overcome that because it builds on these sound bites, these very short segments and so you cannot provide the overall context and if you do try to provide the overall context you are just going to default to going towards someone who provides ‘oh yeah, that is what it means.’”

After speaking about the effects of the “sound bites” which he described in his previous answer, I asked him what he believed was the largest misconception about Islam stemming from American news media sources. He answered this question with the following,

“A sense of violence. Like Islam is violent and the people that associate themselves with Islam are inherently violent. Definitely at my high school and lower middle school that was definitely very common, that was thought about Islam a lot; and actually the school did a lot to try to counteract that image, but I think that would definitely be it. That Islam slash the Qur’an oppresses women as well.”

I then asked him to tell me about his experiences before and after September 11th, 2001 and whether he thought differences in American news media content existed before in comparison with after.

“I think the main repercussions came later on in the semester when the Afghanistan and the Taliban and that linkage was made. And you know Afghanistan is kind of close to Pakistan ‘sure.’ I think once that was made,

that was when people were a little different. I think that most people in my grade already knew me, so they knew who I was and so they did not look at me as ‘them,’ but I think they viewed me as more of the exception versus the rule of what they saw in the media. Like, he is a good Muslim and the rest of them are radicals. One personal anecdote is, I remember being in chapel, a service where they would announce things and since it was a Christian school we would pray and such. One kid came up to me and said something like ‘Did your uncle hijack that plane or bomb this?’ And I just said, ‘Shut up.’ It was not a guy that I even knew. It was just kind of thrown out there, like ‘aha.’ It wasn’t funny and he was just trying to be facetious. Do you know that movie *Team America: World Police*? There is a part in that movie where they yell Arabic words over and over again, like ‘Mohammed jihad, Mohammed jihad!’ and then they just go bomb shit. It’s funny, I do not think that that movie was intended to support racism, but I think that people, like took that, for example some of my friends would say that around me, and it’s like, they know I am Muslim, but they thought it was ok because they were joking, but it still was very offensive, but I never took it personally. I never took it personally in large part to protect myself and protect my own security within myself. A lot during my adolescence I would try to distance myself from those portrayals of Islam in movies and in the news media and be like ‘oh yeah you are right, those are bad Muslims and I am a good Muslim and I do not do that, I do not pray like them.’ So I would try to separate myself as much as possible. So for a time I tried to suck it up and say ‘yeah, that is funny’ even though I was like ‘ugh.’ This went on for a while; it was something that was there until I graduated. I think those guys, who were Southern, very conservative, that said it thought that ‘oh he does not take this personally because we are friends with him,’ it was more like we were all joking around with each other. They would say, ‘Well you can call us cracker. It all balances out right?’ But it didn’t really.”

Looking towards the future, I asked him what he would like his counterparts in the United States to see, read or listen to on American news media in relation to Islam. I posed the hypothetical question once again: If you could control the story content of your own television channel or newspaper, what kind of stories related to Islam would you as a producer or editor include? He answered that,

“You can try to argue and say this is what it actually means and debate about interpretation, but I do not think that that is the way to go because people do not have enough time or energy to actually think about that. I think just simple stories about Muslim people doing normal things, like going to PTA meetings, taking their kids to soccer games, being good doctors, whatever it may be. Things that make people seem more Americanized and I think that that is what people do. I think that there is this, the radical needs to be counterbalanced to the normal and I think that the radical gets too much American news coverage and (if) people see the news stories about ‘this Muslim man who helped out at a school, he was a fireman’ (or) whatever it may be, I think that that would be the best and most productive way to counteract the images about Islam in the American news media, mostly conservative outlets, but not exclusively so.”

Being a Muslim at Emory University:

Given my relationship with Emory University for the past nearly four years, I wanted to ask each of my undergraduate interviewees how they felt their treatment at Emory University has been as a Muslim individual. He characterized his experiences at Emory University by saying,

“I think that personally when I introduce myself, it is not like I wear ‘Muslim’ on my sleeve. So there is definitely a barrier for me to say, ‘I am Muslim’ as freely, but I think that Emory has a very accepting culture, but it has kind of blinded me to the realities that are external to Emory University. In comparison, I recall when I was in high school, I went to a predominantly all white, Christian school, that I would want to get to know someone first before I even introduced that I had a Muslim background. And even then I would never say it explicitly; I would say like ‘Oh I cannot eat that ham sandwich.’ ‘Oh why can’t you eat that?’ ‘Because I am Muslim.’ So it would come out that way, that it was kind of my hope that if they got to know me as a person first I would then introduce Islam, that I am Muslim, that kind of the automatic, my guard(ed self) would be less there because then they would know me as a person versus ‘I am this Muslim guy.’ But it’s definitely something I have dealt with. Like my uncle, who lived in the United States, after 9/11 shaved off his beard

because he wanted to look more quote Indian than Pakistani because he knew that that would just cause so much trouble you know, going through the airport and such. It is the small things I have noticed. You know, my grandmother and grandfather when they come to America, my Dad definitely tells them to dress more Western-like; whereas before 9/11 they would wear their formal Islamic garbs and be able to walk out in public without feeling that same pressure. But it is in these small ways which I think if you look into it signify a lot and I think it have definitely had an impact.”

Emory Muslim Undergraduate Student #4 – Background Information:

The fourth undergraduate I interviewed is a male, twenty-two year old individual in his last year of study at Emory University. He was born in Pakistan and lived there for two years with his parents before his family moved to Atlanta, Georgia. He says that he has been back to Pakistan four or five times since moving to the United States. He considers himself to be a practicing Muslim, but makes sure to tell me that, “I mean, I do not pray five times a day, but I fast. I do not attend services that often, but I go on special days, such as Eid.”

Media:

He relies on the Internet to get his news, primarily *The New York Times*; that is his homepage. He explained that he also goes to other news sites daily and that he goes “to CNN(‘s webpage) a lot. I also go to *Dawn*, which is Pakistan’s English newspaper, various times throughout the day.” From American news media sources he relies on *The New York Times* for contextualized and unbiased news related to Islam. When asked if he believes, from his

experiences with American news media, if there are any sources which consistently portray Islam in a negative or stereotypical, he answered by saying,

“I think that predominantly in the United States, even if their portrayal is not negative they do use some stereotypes. I think, they focus a lot more on the conservative side of Islam than the average Muslim and that does not have to necessarily be a negative thing, but it does end up being a more negative thing just because of most people’s beliefs here about fundamental Islam and Muslims. Obviously I think that Fox News is the most stereotypical and the most negative towards Islam, but I feel that even things that are stereotypical, like the AJC (Atlanta Journal-Constitution) are stereotypical towards Muslims when they are talking about Islamic countries. Like, as an example, when they recently talked about processions in Islamic countries, I think it was in Saudi Arabia, instead of quoting an average person, they always quote a cleric or an Imam or something. Which might not necessarily be a bad thing, but it does result in you getting a very stereotypical view of Islam and Muslims.”

Next, I asked him what percentage of American news media stories related to Islam portray his religion in a contextualized and accurate light, he said that, “From what I have seen, maybe around 10% to 20%.” When expanding on this topic, he said that he believes that, “On CNN, at least I have seen Anderson Cooper say, ‘oh this is obviously an extremist group’ and specify, but I feel it is more important for them to actually show the context in which violence or anything else is happening.” I then asked him, since he had not mentioned any conservative leaning media sources, what he believed to be typical of their reporting in terms of context. He said that he thought that Fox News does not ever show the proper context to a story related to Islam. “I do not think that Fox News does at all.” When I inquired whether he believed that ideologically conservative in comparison with liberal American media sources differed in terms of positive or negative content when reporting about Islam, he replied saying that,

“I think they tend to (differ), but I think that both probably tend to use stereotypes, but I think that conservative media tends to use a lot more negative primes and what not to portray Muslims. I think the level of, like on Fox News when Glen Beck, and you know, I think this was actually on CNN too, when Glen Beck interviewed the first Muslim congressman. He asked him, ‘Out front I am just going to ask this: how do I know you are not working against us?’ And that is a weird question to ask someone who is a congressman. It seems like that type of stuff happens a lot. While I am pretty sure in this case this also happened on CNN, this type of stuff always seems to happen all the time on Fox News, as a way of how they portray Islam. It is always the enemy and it is always something negative. (As an example) Like how President Obama was called a Muslim, as if that was supposed to be a bad thing. Overall I think the American news media operates with a pro-American agenda.”

I then asked what he believes are the most common thematic connotations that appear in American news media reports related to Islam. He answered this question by saying,

“I think, and this just might be because of the ways of the Muslim world where there is a lot of violence, but I think that violence definitely seems to be a major part, in both liberal and conservative media in how they portray other countries. You might hear that Islam is a religion of peace, but you do not see examples of that of that in the American media at least. Any example you see is of sectarian violence, of honor killings, of wars, of terrorist groups doing something. So I think that a lot of it is violence based.”

Impacts of American News Media on Muslim-Americans:

When asked how he, as a young Muslim individual living in the United States feels about his religion’s portrayal in American news media as a whole, he answered,

“I think that what is most striking, is that I do not feel like the representation represents me at all. I feel that there is a huge disconnect between Muslims in the American news media and Muslims that I am

around on a day-to-day basis and also the person who I am. I think that anytime a Muslim is on any American news media type of outlet, it is either someone who is very, very conservative or it does not even have to be a militant, but very, very conservative in the way that they act and they are pushing an idea of Islam that is not mainstream. I think there is a link missing between people who are more, I am not saying 'assimilated' because I am not a fan of assimilation either, but more in touch with the society in which they are living, and that seems to be missing from American news media's portrayal of Islam and this creates a sort of separation between Americans and Muslims."

I then asked whether or not he believed this portrayal of Muslims in the American news media affects the way non-Muslims regard him.

"I think it changes how someone who hasn't met me regards me. I think after people meet and interact with people their perceptions are changed regardless of what they see in the media. But definitely when you first meet someone, their perception of you is based fully on what they have seen in the media. I mean there are times at a grocery store or times in a (taxi) cab where even if you smile friendly at someone there might be someone who looks at you differently or talks differently to you because they see that you look different. Being from a sub-continent, they think, 'oh you are brown' or whatever, which is fine, it is a color of skin, but then there are lots of different religions which fall under that. So we have seen Sikhs suffer for that, we have seen Hindus suffer for that, for being mistaken as Muslims and then there being attacks against them because of it. So when people see you in a store and see this brown guy they automatically think they are Muslim and so they will act and talk to them differently. I have definitely had that happen to me, where someone has talked to me in a more aggressive way or talked to me like I can't speak English or something.

It is not just at grocery stores obviously, but there was this one time while at a grocery store where me and my brother, we were going to get like gum or something and I think we just ended up getting more stuff, so we had a total of ten to twelve things in our shopping cart and we were in the express lane. The guy who was standing behind us, he took his cane, and I was bending down to pick something up, and he flicked his cane at a sign that was right by my head, it was like right above my head so he was actually really close

to hitting me, and he was like, ‘Oh, can you guys not read English? It says there is a fifteen item limit’ or something (like that). It was just like the way he was looking at us and the tone that he was using, it was not a friendly tone, it was not an understanding tone, it was, in the way that he was saying it, I think he was very clearly saying ‘you are an outsider. You are not American.’ Which, at the end of the day, does not bother me because there are going to be people who think that no matter what.”

When asked what he believes to be the largest misconception about Muslim individuals or Islam held by the average American consumer of news, he said that,

“I think that Muslims are all the same, that they are all alike, that they are all violent, particularly towards women. There are definitely shared values, but those are more cultural. The Arab Muslim does have similarities with the Pakistani Muslim, but just like in Christianity, the beliefs are very different. They can be very, very different. I think that there are now 1.6 billion Muslims in the world and there are probably 1.6 billion ways of practicing Islam.”

Expanding upon this topic further, I asked if he believed he could pinpoint how this misconception was generated. He said he believed he could answer and said,

“Media, definitely I think is a large part of it. Because when you only portray one type of Muslim, one type of thinking, one line of thinking even if you say that there are others, without giving any type of contextualization, without giving any type of visuals, then people will only believe what they see.”

Given the implications that the events of September 11th, 2001 had for Muslim and American relations, and continue to have to this day, I asked if he believed any differences existed in terms of American news media content before September 11th, 2001 in comparison with afterwards. Included within his answer, he spoke of differences between the two most

previous presidential administrations, President Bush's and President Obama's, saying,

“Yeah, I do not think there was as much interest in what Muslims were doing around the world. I mean there was violence in the Muslim world before, and I am sure it got some coverage, but not to the extent that it does now and no one knew what a terrorist was then. Like they would not equate terrorism with the word ‘Muslim’ back then, but now when you hear the word ‘terrorist’ you are going to think of Muslims no matter what. If anything, I think that things have gotten even more divisive after President Obama's election. Because I think there is a reactionary group against any, I think that maybe the current administration might be more understanding towards Muslims and might be more understanding towards Islam, and towards Islamic regimes and whatnot. I mean President Obama gave a speech in Cairo, Egypt right after he was elected, but that also creates a reactionary group which is led by people in Fox News, people in the Tea Party, people like Glen Beck or any of these people. So, I think it is actually probably worse now and louder now than it was under President George W. Bush's administration even though the administration now is probably more friendly, I would say towards the idea of Islam, I would not say towards Muslims countries; or, Muslim countries to a degree as well.”

His words about the two administrations prompted me to ask him how he felt the two presidents handled policy issues related to Islam.

“I think that President Obama is more open to dialogue, but I think that in terms of specific policies, drone attacks have increased now. There have been more drone attacks during President Obama's first two years than there were during the entire (President) Bush tenure. The same thing with the war in Iraq, there was a surge and (President) Obama, after he was elected, supported keeping troops in there until he said, ‘when the job was done.’ Guantanamo Bay was supposed to be closed, but it wasn't and it is still open. Drones are still used in Pakistan and elsewhere. So, in terms of policy I do not think there has been so much change, but in terms of diplomatic initiatives, like President Obama making a speech in Cairo, making (Secretary) Hillary Clinton more proactive in terms of talking with other diplomats, which probably (Secretary) John Kerry will continue, which I think is important, but not necessarily represent a huge policy change.”

Looking towards the future, I asked him what he would like his counterparts in the United States to see, read or listen to on American news media in relation to Islam. I again posed the hypothetical question: If you could control the story content of your own television channel or newspaper, what kind of stories related to Islam would you as a producer or editor include? He answered that,

“I would try to do it without an agenda. I would try not to put anything out there that I did not think were newsworthy. If there was a Muslim group doing volunteer work at a homeless shelter, I would not go out of my way to put that out there, but if there was a Muslim group who was doing a much more large-scale thing, I would put that out there, as I would do for others (non-Muslim groups). But if I was in charge of a news agency I would not try to do it with any agenda. For Muslims in general I think that the most important thing is personal experiences. I think that if you have the personal relationships with your friends, with your professors, with your (if you are a teacher) with your students, with your sports team, with social media, or whatever, I think it is important to have positive interactions, that you are not just representing yourself or your family, you are representing Islam as a whole and to take that responsibility seriously.”

Being a Muslim at Emory University:

In an effort to understand what being a Muslim individual is like at the educational institution both he and I attend, I asked him to tell me about his experiences as a person of the Islamic faith at Emory University.

“I think people here (at Emory University) are very open towards people of other religions and cultures and that too may be sort of a perverse, misguided interest. I would not go as far as saying there is orientalization or anything, but I think that it might not be as innocent as it seems that people are so interested in other cultures, but for the most part I think that it is a good thing.”

Interview #1 with an Imam – Background Information:

Due to the fact that no imams who live in Atlanta, Georgia that I contacted were either willing or able to be interviewed, during a break from school when I had returned to my home in Missouri, I traveled to two mosques in the state in order to obtain interviews. The first imam I interviewed was in his late forties to early fifties and identifies as a Sunni Muslim. He has been at his current mosque for over a decade although is originally from Pakistan.

Media:

He told me that he gets his news primarily from the Internet, relying on sources including CNN, *The New York Times*, and the BBC, although he does not visit any media sources frequently. When asked what media sources he relies on for contextualized and unbiased news relating to Islam, he said that he relied primarily on the BBC and sometimes on CNN. From his personal experiences with American news media, as well as from what he has heard from friends and family, he believes that “Fox News is quite stereotypical when reporting on stories related to Muslims and Islam.” He did make sure to clarify after this statement that “they (Fox News) are not the only ones who use stereotyping.” He elaborated that he thought that, “the stereotyping of Islam and Muslims is something that you see across American news media.” When asked why he believes this stereotyping is so present in American news media he said, “Muslims are still a relatively unknown minority in the United States. Given that the United States is predominantly Christian, it is easier for stereotypes to exist for minorities as opposed to the majority.”

Impacts of American News Media on Muslims Living in the United States:

When I asked him how he felt about his religion's portrayal in the American news media as a whole, he said that he "wished a better picture of Islam was given, one that represents the faith as opposed to only a few who identify with it." He explained that most people in the United States outside of his immediate Islamic community "do look at him differently" than how he believes they would look at the average white male of his age. Next, I asked him what he characterized the foundations of Islam to be and what he thought the average American consumer of news would characterize the foundations to be. He answered by saying that,

"I think that the foundations of Islam are recognizing, whether it is nature, whether it is someone or an object is a creation of God and loving and respecting that as a creation of God, so not disrespecting that in anyway. Obviously this stems from the Qur'an whose importance cannot be understated, both in my life and in the lives of other Muslims. I think the average American would probably see Islam, well, there are a lot of different opinions of Islam held in the United States, but in a general sphere, in a nicest way they would say it is a religion of peace that promotes unity and understanding and on the opposite end you would probably hear that it is a religion of war that promotes tyranny and oppression against women, and warfare and what not."

Looking towards the future, I asked him what he thought the best course of action would be to improve relations between those of the Islamic and Christian faiths in the United States. He replied that he believes,

"It has to be (through) education. Trying to improve the curriculum in schools. Even in academia, there is a Western-centric model. If you try to study like that you will not be able to get accurate information and dispel the myths/misunderstandings. The mosques need to talk more internally within the Muslim community. It becomes our job to clarify. Maybe hold workshops or do some sort of community outreach programs. You can't

just be friendly without doing that because then people will just think that you are friendly and those other people are terrorists. You have to give information (to make the connection) that you are not separate from those people.”

Interview #2 with an Imam – Background Information:

The second imam that I interviewed also teaches and leads religious services at a mosque in Missouri. His ancestry goes back to Pakistan and India, but he has been living in the United States for the past twenty years. He identifies as a Sunni Muslim and has been at his current mosque for the past seven years.

Media:

He told me that he relies on Al Jazeera and the BBC, both through their online forms. When I asked if he relied on any American news media sources for unbiased and contextualized news, he simply said, “No. I rely on international sources for that.” When I pressed him as to why this was the case, he said because of “the pro-American, pro-Christian standpoint that dominates mass media in this country. There is an undeniable bias.” Building on this, I asked him if he thought the Islamic faith or Muslim individuals were stereotyped as a result of the narrow confines of this “pro-American” bias in American news media across both liberal and conservative news sources. He replied that “yes I believe this is true. Muslims are the minority in the United States and, when you are a member of a minority, it is harder for people to know about you maybe just because they have not had the opportunity to interact with someone like

you or maybe because of what they have heard from family, friends or media which might not be true, sadly.”

Impacts of American News Media on Muslims Living in the United States:

When I asked him how he felt about his religion’s portrayal in the American news media, he said that he wished the portrayal would be “more education based, more Qur’an based, and more diverse than just showing violent Muslims. There are over a billion Muslims in the world and they should all be represented.” Because of the pro-America bias in American news media sources, he said that he has “given up watching or subscribing to American news.” He elaborated that he believes, especially in Missouri, which traditionally leans more conservatively and more Christian demographically, that “the events of September 11th, 2001 did much to harm Islam’s status because the hijackers’ actions were attributed to all Muslims. This does much to discredit our people and our faith.” I then asked him what he believed to be the foundations of Islam and what he thought the average American consumer of news would characterize the foundations to be. He replied that,

“I personally think that Islam, like the other books of Abraham religions, are very similar in terms of the values that we put forth. I think that the focus is definitely on a lot of love and respect for the people around you. Jesus’s golden rule ‘treat others as you would have done onto you’ I think also has roots in the Qur’an and is something that I think the Prophet Muhammad would definitely feel very strongly about that too. I think the difference between Islam and Christianity, I pick Christianity because I think that it is the other major religion, is that Islam is much more of a weighing scale. So there is a set amount of good and there is a set amount of bad. Does your good outweigh your bad? Whereas in Christianity there is an all or nothing take, so if you accept Christ then you are forgiven. So I think that Islam puts a lot more accountability on your actions and

ironically I think that it is weird that the word ‘jihad’ is so often used because it is such a small part of the Qur’an when it is actually examined; and jihad, as it actually means is a personal thing, like overcoming the difficulties within yourself to understand your connection with God or Allah. I think that, sadly, most Americans would think that the foundations of Islam are those that encourage violence, towards the world, towards women, and towards those of different faiths.”

Looking towards the future, I asked him what he thought the best course of action was to improve relations between those of the Islamic and Christian faiths in the United States. He replied that he believes “education and dialogue leads to understanding. So there must be much more dialogue and educations about the faiths between Muslims and Christians across the world, but especially in the United States.”

Media Informant – Background Information:

To begin my report of this interview I want to state that for the purpose of my media informant’s anonymity, I will not be disclosing in this thesis where she works. However, I do believe that it is important for you, the reader, to know that she works at a prominent news media organization that would be regarded by the vast majority of viewers and those working at the organization as a liberal leaning media source. In any place where she named the place that she works, as she often did throughout the interview, I have inserted a line. In the place of this line, please insert, for your own frame of reference, “a prominent liberal American news media network.” She is in charge of the overall interview process for all guest platforms on the network and so, she decides who comes on the airwaves to be interviewed about any given news topic. Additionally she identifies as a Shia Muslim. Her father was born and raised in Uganda

and her mother was born and raised in Kenya and both also identify as Shia Muslims. Her parents settled in Maryland where she was born and raised until the age of twelve when they moved to Georgia and she has lived in the state ever since. She considers herself to be a practicing Muslim and does not go to religious services “every week, but I try to go regularly.”

Media:

When I asked her how she gets her news, she explained that she relies on television, newspapers, radio, and the Internet. “I read up to ten to fifteen different newspapers per day. I obviously watch television working here at _____. I also get news from Twitter, Sirius-XM Satellite Radio, and Facebook. I get my news from everywhere.” From all of these sources and mediums of news, I asked her to clarify what sources she relies on the most for contextualized and unbiased news. She answered by saying that,

“I mean, I obviously rely on _____, I work here. Speaking as a citizen, I think that anyone who only relies on one particular source of information is basically discounting himself or herself. I think that every citizen has both the opportunity and the responsibility to actually be well rounded in terms of their sources of information and to really deduce and process information and make judgments for yourself and not to rely on any one medium to tell you what the news is or to tell you what the truth is. It is our responsibility as human beings, I mean; we have been given brains, to think things through ourselves and to come to conclusions on our own.”

Next, I asked her if she believed that there are any American news media sources that she believes consistently portray Islam in a negative or stereotypical light.

“I do think the media, it is not an inherent bias per say (that it has), I think that frankly, I think the reason the media’s coverage of Islam has been, you know, distorted or full of stereotypes in the past, is because of journalists’

lack of knowledge about what Islam is. I think a lot of the presentation and coverage about Islam and Muslim individuals has changed in the past 10 years, especially after 9/11. I think that now, there is not a single person that does not know what the religion of Islam is about. Really, the expectation is that journalists need to present stories about Islam with more nuances. It is not just about the five pillars or automatically reacting to a story of terrorism by going to a Muslim and getting their point of view...I think that, if there is bias or if there is an appearance of bias, it is frankly because of a lack of knowledge about what the faith is. Also, what I chose to explain it off as being a lack of diversity within our newsroom. There are not enough people in the newsroom sort of raising their hand and saying, 'you might want to take this angle' for the story or 'wait you are characterizing this in a different way.' People just do not know that they are committing a crime or saying something in the wrong way. Again, I do think the more multi-cultural our society is becoming, the more people of color and the more people of these different faith communities that are involved in journalism become a part of the profession, the easier it will be to sort of get those stereotypes out."

I then inquired as to whether she believed that ideologically liberal and conservative leaning American news media sources portray their stories about Islam differently. She answered by saying, "Right, I mean of course they do...I think that ideological media is very different from journalistic media," which she characterizes as the ideal in news media reporting.

Next, I asked her whether she believed certain thematic connotations reappeared in reports more than others. She responded by saying that,

"I do feel that, for example, something that really irks me is the visual medium of how Muslims are presented. I know from speaking to people and journalists, if there is a story about Islam, they want that perfect pictorial representation of what a Muslim is and I think that most people, no one is going to believe a person is Muslim or the character is Muslim unless they are defined as somebody who has a hijab on or as somebody who has a beard. I think to that extent there is a bit of selective inquiry happening, especially when you are visually presenting what Islam is. I think that people have yet to understand and appreciate the diversity within the faith and that not every conservative Muslim or Muslim who is practicing wears

the hijab or the burka or has a beard and wears a hat, you know?”

In an effort to expand further on specific themes present in American news media stories related to Islam, I asked her if certain themes appeared more in liberal news media sources than conservative news media sources and vice versa. She said that,

“Frankly, I think themes of violence or associating Islam with violence, especially in regards to women, are not really a liberal or conservative media thing. I think both equally representative in terms of issue or how that is depicted. In terms of the ideological conservative media, I think there is more of a depiction of Islam as a violent religion. I think that is because, from an ideological point of view that justifies their argument that Islam is bad.”

Next, I asked her whether she felt her portrayal in the American news media (be it positive or negative) impacts the way that non-Muslim individuals in the United States regard her.

“Oh yeah, absolutely. I am never going to say that the media does not have a role. It absolutely has a role in people’s perceptions of Muslims. Whether it is the portrayal of someone of Arab origin who happens to be a Muslim on a series like *Homeland* or *24*, you know people are going to create assumptions about that. I think that a lot of it is because Muslim Americans in particular are not people who are out there flaunting the faith. You know, my next-door neighbor could be Muslim and I might not even know it. Until that sort of integration of our community sort of happens and people are more open about their faith and talk about it in public setting and not feel ostracized about it for doing so, I do not think that is going to change and people will continue to get their perceptions of Islam or of Muslims from whatever media or forum in which they are participating in. You know, it is like someone who goes to church every day and hears their pastor say, ‘Islam is bad,’ and that is their only source of information about what Islam is, they are of course only going to know that. This goes back to your original comment or question about getting different sources of information.”

When asked what she believes to be the largest misconception about Muslim individuals or Islam put forth by American news media and held by the average American, she said that,

“I think the largest misconception about Muslims is that we are all the same kind of people. I think that people still do not understand that Muslims come from all varieties, all backgrounds, all ethnicities, all caste systems, class systems, and all economic backgrounds.”

How Does Your Media Network Work:

For the first question specifically related to her job as the person in charge of guest bookings, I asked her to take me through the process of how news media informants (people brought on to discuss a given news topic) are chosen and whether there is certain inclusion or exclusion criterion.

“The process through which we select people to come on our air is relatively basic. Do they have a field of expertise? Do they have something to say? Are they a newsmaker? Are they able to articulate well on television? Because obviously we are (primarily) a visual news broadcast medium. We cannot have someone go on and explain a point in twenty minutes when we only have two minutes for the segment, so we are looking for all of that.”

In an effort to be explicit, I clarified her answer by asking if this process is the same when reporting on stories related to Islam or Muslim individuals. She replied that, “yes” it is.

Next, I asked her if there are any themes that appear more so than others in stories related to Islam reported by her network.

“No. I think that we do a really good job, and I’m not just saying that because I work at ____, but I think that we do a good job about talking about the religion when it is actually part of the story, not just sort of dripping it in

because we have some sort of evil intent. If the religion is an integral part of the story, then we mention it, and we take time to create some context around that reporting, but if it doesn't matter. For example, someone's faith background is irrelevant to how they are performing at work, right; unless they themselves make it clear that the religion is informing their work. We are very careful not to create assumptions or to create connections where there are not necessarily any."

My following questions centered on how the network handles controversy surrounding people that are brought on the air to discuss a news story related to Islam or Muslim individuals and/or discuss their own opinions on the story itself. I asked her whether there had been any instances that she would feel comfortable sharing where there have been objections to someone being brought on the air and how it was handled.

"I think a good example of that would be that Florida pastor who was burning the Qur'an; I do not remember his name. The first time that he did that we covered it and it became a massive news story because everyone was like up in arms about it. We made a concerted effort to not draw more attention to him because what he was doing was clearly evil. He only was doing it to raise attention. So the next time he did it and burned the Qur'an, we made an editorial effort to not cover it, we did not draw attention to it. I think that is where we showed, what we in my industry call, 'moral courage' around issues that we know are bad. Another example of moral courage would be our coverage of sex trafficking of people. We all believe that the selling of another person is just wrong and unethical. So the lens through which we would view that reporting is obviously very clear in that we are pursuing it, knowing that it is an epidemic, knowing that it is an issue, but also by trying to get people to understand that by highlighting this issue we are also trying to champion the issues that people will do something to change. We are coming at it from this general human principle that the selling of a human being is wrong."

I concluded my interview with her by asking her the same question that I asked each individual I interviewed: looking towards the future, how would you work to dispel myths about

Islam or work to create more harmony between Muslims and Americans/Christians or Islam and the United States in general? My question was slightly adjusted for her, in that I asked her to consider the question from both a professional and personal level. She began by discussing how to do this through her profession,

“I think I have been trying to do that the past ten to fifteen years that I have been working at _____. You know, one way to do it, is to always pick voices when you are speaking about Islam, to ensure that you search out diversity within Islam’s community to speak about Islam. Not just the usual suspects, the usual organizations that are front and center. From more of a personal point of view, I would love to be able to see the news media use Muslim Americans to speak about issues and to be characters in stories that where they are not necessarily presented as Muslims, but more about who they are as professionals; for example, a doctor or an engineer. By highlighting more Muhammads and Khadijas on the air who are talking about things other than their faith, the more integrated they will become in terms of people’s mindsets in thinking that ‘these are Americans and not just those people who are Muslim.’ I think we can all sort of contribute to that. I think by doing more of that, by creating a culture within the Muslim community in America that only we are responsible for how we are perceived, that it is not the media’s fault. This is not me being defensive of my profession, it is actually me speaking from the experience of being a journalist and understanding how the media views things and how flakey, frankly we are about stories; we are not going to stay on something (a story) forever, we are not going to give something the depth and the context that a lot of people might expect from us because we have to move on and we do not have enough time or minutes in the show.”

Chapter 6: Analysis of Interview Data

Media – Through What Forums Do They Acquire News:

When explaining to me how each person received their news every interviewee referenced a primary reliance on new forms of media, particularly away from print media and towards online forums as the mechanisms through which they access their news. This correlation amongst each of the individuals I interviewed aligns itself with national statistics. According to a Pew Research Center for the People and the Press study conducted from 1991 to 2012, “traditional” news platforms, such newspapers, magazines, and other print media have “lost audience.”⁷² Currently, Pew found that 46% of Americans say that they get news online or on a mobile phone at least three days a week, with a third of the public (32%) saying they get their news online every day.⁷³

Movement towards online forums of accessing news information is significant in that it puts the person in search of the news in more control of their own news acquiring process; no more does the individual have to buy a bulky newspaper that bleeds on your fingertips and get stuck with the sections they have no interest in and would have rather not paid for, nor do they have to wait around for the 5:30 P.M. news to come on, interrupting dinnertime. Instead individuals of today can access the news whenever they desire, be that while they are walking to class or while they are sitting on the bus. More convenient and fast methods of acquiring the news have come primarily at the expense of print and radio media, Pew found. “The percentages saying they listened to radio news and read a newspaper yesterday have steadily declined over the past two decades. Currently, 33% say they listened to radio news (down from 54% of the

⁷² The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press. "About the Media Consumption Survey Data | Pew Research Center for the People and the Press." Pew Research Center for the People and the Press. <http://www.people-press.org/2012/09/27/about-the-media-consumption-survey-data/> (accessed March 4, 2013).

⁷³ Ibid.

population in 1991), while 29% say they read a newspaper yesterday (down from 56% in 1991).”⁷⁴

All of the females that I interviewed, the Emory University undergraduate students and the media informant, cited social media forums, particularly Facebook and Twitter, as providers of their news. Both of my female undergraduate students interviewees brought up social media, without my mentioning it, in as a way to keep in touch with the news that their family and friends were talking about. While it is understandable that the imams, both males, who were by no means old, but older than most people who use social media most prevalently (ages 18 to 29), might not use social media given their age, it is interesting that none of the undergraduate males I interviewed mentioned social media forums as providers of their news. This trend divided by gender lines in my sample groups also correlates with national trends. In a study conducted by the Pew Research Center’s Internet and American Life Project from 2005 to 2012 researchers concluded that, “Women have been significantly more likely to use social networking sites than men since 2009. In December 2012, 71% of women were users of social networking sites, compared with 62% of men.”⁷⁵ National trends also indicate the increasing prevalence of social media forums for accessing the news across gender lines. The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press’s study found that in the short span of time from the years 2010 to 2012 that reliance on social media for acquiring news more than doubled, up from 9% in 2010 to 19% of the population in 2012.⁷⁶

After explaining to me how they acquired their news, each interviewee then elaborated specifically what news agencies they relied on for their news. Female undergraduate #1 said that

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Brenner, Joanna. "Pew Internet: Social Networking (full detail) | Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project." Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project. <http://pewinternet.org/Commentary/2012/March/Pew-Internet-Social-Networking-full-detail.aspx> (accessed March 4, 2013).

⁷⁶ Ibid.

her main source of news from a news agency is Al Jazeera. Female undergraduate #2 relies on *The New York Times* and CNN. Male undergraduate #1 said that his main sources include *The New York Times* and Al Jazeera. Male undergraduate #2 relies on *The New York Times*, CNN, and *Dawn* (Pakistan's English newspaper). Imam #1 said that he relies on CNN, *The New York Times*, and the BBC. Imam #2 relies on Al Jazeera and the BBC. The media informant relies on a wide variety of sources, international and national, but primarily the news organization at which she works, a well-known liberal leaning organization. With the one exception of female undergraduate #2, every individual I interviewed named at least one non-American source of news as a primary supplier of their news. In a Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism study they concluded that, "The overwhelming majority of Americans (92%) use multiple platforms to get news on a typical day, including national TV, local TV, the internet, local newspapers, radio, and national newspapers."⁷⁷ The key word I wish to emphasize here is "national." When 92% of Americans rely on national sources of news and almost the same percentage of my interviewees cite international sources, the contradiction between the two is evident. Then question then becomes: why do the vast majority of Muslims feel the need to rely on at least one international news media source?

⁷⁷ The Pew Research Center. "Understanding the Participatory News Consumer | Project for Excellence in Journalism (PEJ)." Project for Excellence in Journalism (PEJ) | Understanding News in the Information Age http://www.journalism.org/analysis_report/understanding_participatory_news_consumer accessed March 4, 2013).

Islam in the American News Media:

“I think that what is most striking, is that I do not feel like the representation represents me at all. I feel that there is a huge disconnect between Muslims in the American news media and Muslims that I am around on a day-to-day basis and also the person who I am.”⁷⁸

Every single individual I interviewed reflected similar sentiment to male undergraduate #2 when speaking of Islam or Muslim individuals’ characterization in the American news media. While their words were slightly different, the message was resoundingly the same: they value, want, and need a more holistic presentation of news to help citizens of the world, much less citizens in their own country, understand that their Islamic faith is not totally comprised of “terrorists, radicals, extremists” or “fanatics.”

This prevailing belief on the part of all of the Muslim individuals interviewed illustrates the importance of contextualization in understanding culture surrounding the Islamic faith, as well as the faith itself. Each interviewee spoke of both a desire and a necessity for contextualization to accompany stories related to Islam. Female undergraduate #1 spoke of the dangers of this lack of contextualization in American news media in terms of how easy it then becomes to put all Muslims into a singular type category of “extremists.”

“(American news media sources) Portray anything Islamic, Islamic voices, as very one-dimensional. Those are just terrorists and those are just radicals (or) fanatics...They also do not contextualize. They just might show a story and there is no background to it. (For example) So there might be a bombing and they might just show that, maybe what was the situation there? For example, what were the policies of the embassy that was bombed? What was the affect of these policies on the people there? Will only show one aspect and then you lose everything. Then they can distill everything down to Muslims are extremists.”⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Interviewee, Anonymous. Interviews by author. Personal interviews. Emory University, February-March, 2013.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

When considering the differences in contextualization given or not given between American and international news media sources, one of my interviewees suggested that I investigate the story of Ms. Sila Sahin. Fox News's online forum reported on Sahin's story. Sahin was described as "a Muslim actress" who posed for the German edition of *Playboy* magazine.⁸⁰ Fox News wrote that Sahin "has been branded a whore and a Western slut," but fails to mention who or what organization of the Muslim faith characterized her in these terms. Further, the news report details that postings to the original article found in *The Sun* mention things such as "she needs to be very careful" and that "she must pay."⁸¹

These strong phrases chosen by Fox News serve the purpose of indicating the supposed amount of radical fury that Sahin has invoked in the Muslim community, fury that may result in physical punishment for her, in other words a "payment." The headline of the article on Fox News is, "Muslim Actress Reportedly Receives Threats for Playboy Pictorial"⁸² yet when referencing the original headline from *The Sun*, which, it should be noted, is based out of the United Kingdom, it reads "Fanatics' Fury at Muslim Playgirl"; Fox News uses vague or no wording in the place of where *The Sun* rightfully states "fanatic."⁸³ As a specific example found within the text of the article by Fox News, consider the following language included and not included: "Sahin's photographs, according to posts on Islamic websites, have shamed 'Muslim womanhood' and depict her 'prostituting herself for money,' the newspaper reports."⁸⁴ The specific language of "Islamic websites" is incredibly vague. What kind of websites? Websites

⁸⁰ Fox News. Muslim Actress Reportedly Receives Threats for Playboy Pictorial FoxNews.com." *FoxNews.com - Breaking News | Latest News | Current News*. Fox News, 27 Apr. 2011. Web. 27 March, 2013.

<<http://www.foxnews.com/world/2011/04/27/muslim-actress-reportedly-receives-threats-playboy-pictorial/>>.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Hall, Allan. "Muslim Actress Causes Storm After Posing Naked for Playboy Mag: Fanatics' Fury at Muslim Playgirl." *The Sun | The Best for News, Sport, Showbiz, Celebrities | The Sun*. The Sun Online, 27 Apr. 2011. Web. 01 May 2011.

<<http://www.thesun.co.uk/sol/homepage/news/3548816/Muslim-actress-causes-storm-after-posing-naked-for-Playboy-mag.html?OTC-RSS>>.

⁸⁴ Fox News. Muslim Actress Reportedly Receives Threats for Playboy Pictorial FoxNews.com." *FoxNews.com - Breaking News | Latest News | Current News*. Fox News, 27 Apr. 2011. Web. 27 March, 2013.

<<http://www.foxnews.com/world/2011/04/27/muslim-actress-reportedly-receives-threats-playboy-pictorial/>>.

that are created and controlled by what kind of Muslims or Muslims who believe what? Where is the context to distinguish Muslim extremists from the vast majority of their 1.6 billion-member population? It simply is not there.

Understandably, it is incredibly concerning to anyone who believes in basic human rights to read that a physical punishment might result from such an action. However, Fox News generalizes to the 1.6 billion-member population of Muslims implying that all of them would support such a course of action against Sahin. The article on Fox News's website includes phrases like "The Islamic Community of Germany has called for a boycott of Sihan, the star of the German soap (opera) 'Good Times, Bad Times,'" and could easily lead a person to believe that the entire Muslim community of Germany has decided to boycott her and her professional endeavors.⁸⁵ The only link that Fox News includes in this article with regards to the boycott from the "community," in case anyone wanted to specify who makes up this "community" is a hyperlink within the word "Germany" which takes you to a database of every article Fox News has ever written with the word "Germany" in it. This could hardly be called thorough or "fair and balanced" unbiased and contextualization based professional journalism.

This example is but one of many of the extremely selective verbiage and generalizations constructed by the media, in this case Fox News, to construct a single characterization of all Muslims in its viewers' minds; which depicts all Muslims as easily angered and Muslim men as abusers of women. Further, this lack of contextualization too often gives the news media the ability to present the part(s) of the story that support their personal, business or cultural biases.

Being pointed in the direction by an interviewee concerning a story that Fox News reported related to Islam was not an accidental or even a one-time event. Not a single individual I interviewed said that they watched or read any news that Fox News produces when they search

⁸⁵ Ibid.

for contextualized and unbiased news. In fact, the sentiment among all of my interviewees, with the slight exception of my media informant who did not take Fox News to task in such strong language, was that conservative news media in the United States, characterized primarily by Fox News, is “frankly terrible.” When I asked if my interviewees felt that any particular American news media sources portrayed Islam in a consistently negative and/or stereotypical light, “without a question” Fox News was named more times than any other news media organization. While the majority of my interviewees had difficulty naming sources that they felt employed the characteristics that make up professional journalism in their reporting, the almost automatic answer which seemed to require very little thought at all and the tone in which it was given was striking.

I found it incredibly interesting that my interviewees were so calm and somewhat nonchalant and dismissive about interactions and events in their lives that could easily fit a definition of “discrimination,” yet when speaking about conservative news media, again characterized by Fox News, it brought out a passion, frustration, and anger in their tone. Why such a reaction? Female undergraduate #1 said that she felt so strongly about conservative news media sources because they are the worst in terms of passing judgment in their reporting related to Islam and because they fail to provide enough (or any) contextualization for the viewer, reader or listener to be able to put together a full picture. Female undergraduate #2 echoed similar sentiment when she said that conservative news media sources “just leave it (the story) more shallow.” Male undergraduate #3 offered an opinion as to why the reporting on Fox News is left “more shallow.” He explained that, “I think that Fox News definitely appeals to a certain demographic of people where the answer or answers are much more black and white.”

Conservative news media portrayals of Islam and Muslim individuals, like the ones on Fox

News, undeniably have a substantial impact. In a Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion and Public Life study conducted in 2007, researchers found that only 26% of conservative republicans expressed positive impressions of Muslims, compared with 66% of liberal democrats, which was the highest proportion of all examined demographics and political groups.⁸⁶ Consider that it was also concluded by researchers at Pew that the biggest influence on Americans' perceptions of Muslims was what they hear and read in the news media. Certainly the vast disparity in percentages of Americans who hold positive impressions of Islam between liberal and conservative individuals echoes the critique of Fox News expressed by my interviewees.

While conservative news media like Fox News was believed to be the worst in providing little contextualization, passing judgment, and making generalizations related to Islam, all American news media was looked at as being somewhat naïve in their reporting about Islam and/or Muslim individuals. This sentiment can be clearly seen through the answers to my questions inquiring as to their beliefs about widespread misconceptions about the faith and its followers.

Impacts of American News Media on Muslim-Americans:

All individuals I interviewed responded to this question sharing two key misconceptions: the first, is that they feel Muslims are represented in a singular category. My media informant characterized this belief with the following: "I think the largest misconception about Muslims is that we are all the same kind of people. I still think that people do not understand that Muslims

⁸⁶ The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life. "Pew Forum: Public Expresses Mixed Views of Islam, Mormonism." Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life. <http://www.pewforum.org/Public-Expresses-Mixed-Views-of-Islam-Mormonism.aspx> (accessed October 2, 2012).

come from all varieties, all backgrounds, all ethnicities, all caste systems, all class systems, and all economic backgrounds.” The second misconception brought up by all of my interviewees is the widespread association of Islam and violence, especially against women. My media informant offered insight related to the problems of combating these misconceptions in American news media when she said,

“...Me speaking from the experience of being a journalist and understanding how the media views things and how flakey, frankly we are about stories; we are not going to stay on something (a story) forever, we are not going to give something the depth and the context that a lot of people might expect from us because we have to move on and we do not have enough time or minutes in the show.”

In other words, my media informant explained that reporting in American news media might be “shallow” in its reporting due in part to time constraints. When explaining to me how she decides what individuals will go on the air at her news network to talk about a news story, she spoke of the time constraint factor once again; one of her qualifications for the person to go on the air is that the person be able to articulate “well on television... We obviously cannot have someone go on and explain a point in twenty minutes when we only have two minutes for the segment.” In this sound bite culture, how can time constraints reconcile themselves with contextualization? We have seen the advent of news programs that go for an hour reporting a story in almost a soap opera/entertainment fashion and also some news programs, like Fareed Zakaria’s that go much deeper, but as the world becomes increasingly reliant on quick and mobile news, who will be left to listen to Zakaria’s program and others like it?

When looking towards the future, I asked each of my interviewees what they would like their counterparts in the United States to see, read or listen to through American news media related to

Islam.

“I think that the news has to be more historically grounded, that when looking at a news stories there need to be more shown perspectives because usually when looking at a news story it takes the perspective that it wants. The perspective might be there, but it might be a small minority being inflated and the actual perspectives that is the majority is diminished. So more fairness, I think. Seeing more reactions of the Muslim people who are opposed. Both sides, not just the pro-American side.”

The themes of the answers to this question, exemplified in female undergraduate #1’s answer above, were relatively basic and straightforward: to show average Muslims doing normal and positive things and to bring a more educational aspect to reporting, one that would emphasize dialogue and contextualization.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

I end my analysis where I began, in the library at Emory University. The Woodruff Library and I have seen quite a bit of each other lately and, in turn, I have seen a large sampling of fellow Emory University students during these long hours at the library. While walking around the library with my thesis topic on the brain, I could not help but notice how very much Emory University is representative of a microcosm of the world when it comes to a widely diverse and inclusive student body and university community; even looking at the names of my thesis advisory committee demonstrates this microcosm that is Emory. This coupled with the critical thinking that comes with a dynamic higher education environment represents what is possible in our world when it comes to bringing contextualization to the center of news reporting and awareness as citizens of the world. These wonderful characteristics contribute to the general sentiment which my interviewees expressed when I asked them how they felt their treatment at Emory University has been as a Muslim individual: “Among the student body, people just accept you,” “I think people here are very open towards people of other religions and cultures,” and “I do not think my treatment has been altered because I am Muslim.”

Male undergraduate #3 spoke of a key distinction, “...I think that Emory has a very accepting culture, but it has kind of blinded me to the realities that are external to Emory University.” When demonstrations were occurring in response to plans for an Islamic cultural center and mosque to be built in New York, New York some angry demonstrators held up the signs, “All I ever need to know about Islam, I learned on 9/11.”⁸⁷ The message on these signs soon after found its way onto t-shirts, bumper stickers, and proliferated itself through the online media forums in the United States. Twelve words were used sum up 20 to 25% of the world’s

⁸⁷ Debusmann, Bernd. "America's Trouble with Islam | The Great Debate." Analysis & Opinion | Reuters. <http://blogs.reuters.com/great-debate/2010/08/27/americas-trouble-with-islam/> (accessed March 10, 2013).

population dispersed through at least fifty-seven countries, who speak a wide variety of languages, follow different customs, and most importantly, believe in different interpretations of their faith, just as any other world religion, including Christianity and Judaism. In addition to the tragic loss of life on September 11th, 2001, clearly another tragedy resulting from the events on that day is that the actions of suicidal murders became representative were generalization to entire religion and its people.

My research clearly demonstrated that, “The biggest influence on the public’s impression of Muslims, particularly among those who express an unfavorable opinion of Muslims, is what people hear and read in the media.”⁸⁸ Those in the news media have a responsibility to present stories in context as professional journalists and likewise, those who receive the information have the responsibility to understand that contextualization is central to understanding any story, whether it be about Islam or not.

⁸⁸ The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life. "Pew Forum: Public Expresses Mixed Views of Islam, Mormonism." Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life. <http://www.pewforum.org/Public-Expresses-Mixed-Views-of-Islam-Mormonism.aspx> (accessed October 2, 2012).

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Attachment #1:

Dear [ENTER NAME],

My name is Maral Cavner, and I am an undergraduate student in the Department of Sociology at Emory University conducting a senior honors thesis. I am conducting research into the ways in which the American news media reports on stories related to Islam and how this affects Muslims living in the United States. I am looking for participants for this study who are willing to be interviewed for approximately one hour. All information collected would be kept confidential and reported without names attached.

The interview will be conducted at a mutually agreed upon location at a time and date that is convenient for you. I am unable to provide compensation for your time, but your participation is essential for my study and will be greatly appreciated.

Your participation will be completely voluntary, and you may choose to end your participation at any time.

If you are interested in being interviewed, please contact me by replying to this email. You may also contact me at 417-827-7828. If you are unsure of whether you wish to participate and would like to ask me any questions before deciding, please contact me and I will be happy to answer any questions or address any concerns.

Thank you for your consideration.

Kind regards,

Maral Cavner

Co-Investigator and Senior Honors Student, Department of Sociology
Emory University

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