ARAB MUSLIM IDENTITY TRANSMISSION:
PARENTS AND YOUTH


by

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Abstract


    Effective Islamic identity transmission requires determination of
the nature and extensiveness of the different interpretations held by
parents and their children and the ways these interpretations are
reflected in their practice of Isl-am and association with Arabic
heritage.  Fifteen Arab Muslim families of varied nationalities were
interviewed as part of a larger study on Muslims in North  America.
The findings indicate that parents and youth have significantly
different perceptions.  Parents have higher levels of perception for
the central concept of Isl-am, i.e., Taw.h-id (Oneness of God), but only
in abstract form, whereas youth tend to emphasize some of the auxiliary
concepts of Isl-am, i.e., human-interrelation behavior, but in the
context of Western values.  This may explain (1) difficulties parents
encounter in effectively transmitting the Islamic belief system and/or
the Arabic heritage to their children,  (2) the youths' inability to
distinguish between the Islamic/Arabic and the Western systems on the
ideological level, and (3) the youths' confusion concerning their roots
and history.

# Acknowledgments

I.  INTRODUCTION
     Arab Muslims in North America are uncertain how to transmit the
Islamic ideological and/or Arab cultural heritage to their children.
Historically, and at present, North American Arab Muslims (NAAM) have
been thought of as only a part of the Arab ethnic immigrants who may
have distinctive accents, eat exotic foods, or have "uncivilized"
social manners.  This focus on their differences from the "mainstream
culture" has often caused them to be viewed – and to view themselves –
as sojourners.  It has also presented them with the alternatives of
assimilation or a continued alien identity.
     There have been three major phases of Arab Muslim immigration to
North America.  Besides their historical significance, the
characteristics of these phases have important implications for
immigrants' assimilation and accommodation process in the New World.
That NAAM have carried different identities at the time of immigration,
or at the time of their parents' and grandparents' immigration, from
their own at the present time is a complex social phenomenon that
cannot easily be understood by the existing socioanthropological
approaches to the study of immigrants.
     This study will analyze this complex social phenomenon from a
conceptual point of view, using both conceptual change theory from
science education  and cognitive dissonance theory from the behavioral
sciences.  The problem facing the North American Arab Muslim youth is
viewed here as the youth may conceive it when they attempt to determine
their identity and reduce the cognitive dissonance that this attempt
may cause.  Using this orientation, the analysis looks into the
conceptual adjustment patterns of North American Arab Muslim parents
and the reflection of these patterns on the learning/conceptualization
patterns of their children as they deal with their Arab Muslim identity
within the larger society.
     This study uses a small sample of Arab Muslim youth aged fourteen
to twenty-two and their parents as a case study.  These families
represent a subsample of a larger group of Muslims who participated in
the author's study of North American Muslim adults' transmission of the
Islamic belief system to their offspring.  These youth are first-
generation children of immigrants who came to North America during the
latest phase of immigration in the 1960s and 1970s.
     The aim of this effort is to address two questions:
     1.   How have Arab Muslims arrived at a particular view of Isl–am
that causes them to practice it in a particular way?  The underlying
assumption for this question is that, in addition to the historical
development of the Islamic conceptual ecology and its Western secular
counterpart, the Arab Muslims of North America also have a distinct
history and, presently, a living experience to be investigated.
Moreover, an understanding of the subject matter, Isl–am as a belief
system, requires an investigation of the documents pertaining to it,
namely the Qur'–an (the Holy book) and the books of .Had–ith (the reports
of the sayings and doings of Prophet Muhammad).
     A historical analysis or, as Lortie calls it, the method of
"structural chronology," was undertaken to explore the dynamics of the
development of the present ideas and the relative stability or change
in the understanding of the Islamic tenets over time, as they might
have affected the personal concept of these tenets.  The section on
issues studied, their historical development, and findings will

facilitate this analysis.

2.  How have some immigrant Arab Muslim parents and their offspring conceptualized Isl-am and its practice in the context of North American society (the host society)?  The relation of the cognitive dissonance theory to the conceptual change theory and the notion of conceptual ecology has been used to analyze the problems encountered by Arab Muslims in their attempts to integrate their conception of Isl-am and Arabic heritage with the dominant Western ideology.

First, each individual sees his or her experience in the host society in a different manner, depending on his or her existing conceptual ecology regarding Isl-am, Arabic heritage, and the host society.

Second, there is a set of objective elements that can be a descriptive, but not a definitive, explanation for the Islamic, the Arabic, and the host society's conceptual ecologies.  These elements, whether or not the individual is aware of them, form a worldview within which she or he operates.  Furthermore, whichever conceptual ecology the individual uses may be understood on any of several levels:  the central concept, where principles, and tenets lie, the auxiliary level, where the secondary and tertiary concepts lie, or the outcome levels, where the manifestations of the concepts lie.  For this study, the beliefs and concepts of Arab Muslim parents and youth about Isl-am and Taw.h-id (Oneness of God) as its central concept are considered basic determinants for the adjustment and learning processes of these Muslims.  The Islamic concepts of cIbadat (worship) are considered secondary, but  conditional to the objectification of the central concept and to Muc-amalat (human interrelation concepts) as tertiary concepts.

Third, the investigation must focus separately on the immigrant parents and the American-reared youth.  Arab Muslim parents and youth represent two different generations, and they were raised in two different environments.  The cognitive dissonance they experience, and their behavior modification as they resolve a cognitive conflict, represent related but different problems:  (1) the attempt by Arab Muslim parents to adjust an existing belief system and a particular attachment to the "Arabic" heritage to their living experience in the secular West; and (2) the attempt by Arab Muslim youth to integrate the belief system (transmitted by their parents), the Arabic sentimentality (enforced by the communities), and the secular system (enforced by society at large).

The description and interpretation of parents' and youths' responses will facilitate this point of investigation.  One should not, however, overlook the comparison between the investigated group's adjustment process and that of other Arab Muslim groups who immigrated earlier.  The brief historical account will provide examples of these other groups.

The argument of this study is that unless educators/parents of Arab Muslims identify and reconcile the ambiguities that exist in the perception and practice of Isl-am and its relation to the Arabic heritage, the transmission of Muslim Arab or Arab Muslim identity will be limited to socioreligious customs.

II.  HISTORICAL ACCOUNTS
Since there is no single source available as a reference on the

experience of Arab Muslims or Muslim Arabs in North America, a brief summary of the different sources is in order.  Most of the sources concerned with Arabs, Arab Muslims, or Muslims as a whole draw similar distinctions between three phases of immigration.

The first involved the 1870s pioneers from Syria who streamed out of the mountains and plains of Syria over the next thirty years to make their fortune by pack peddling.  These Muslims, like the rest of the immigrants from the Ottoman province of Syria, called themselves Syrian.  Baha Abu-Laban states that the earliest record of Muslim presence in Canada dates back to 1871, when the Canadian census recorded 13 Muslim residents.  He adds that by 1901, Canada had from 300 to 400 Muslim immigrants, about equally divided between Turks and Syrian Arabs.

The second phase was the post-World War II immigration from various Arab countries.  Naff uses the term Arab primarily for post-World War II Arabic-speaking immigrants because "it more closely accords with the nationalistic reality of the times."  In contrast to the earlier arrivals, the post-1948 Arab immigrants, according to Naff, have characteristically been more educated and politicized.  Moreover, most are Muslim.  But whether Muslim or Christian, Saudi Arabian or Syrian, they wish to be called Arabs." Unlike the pioneers, these more recent arrivals had a vastly different Arab identity, in its frame of reference, from that which had been passed on to the pioneer youth by their parents and grandparents.

The consequences of this development, Naff goes on to say, "have been a debate that continues to reverberate throughout the Arab-American community today.  It evokes such questions as:  What is an Arab?  Who is an Arab:  What is Arabness?  These questions, for which no common answers have been agreed on, have inhibited the development of a common Arab identity in the United States."

The single most important characteristic of postwar Muslim immigrants to Canada is diversity, according to Abu-Laban.  The postwar "Arab" Muslim immigrants, compared to the early pioneers, are more heterogenous, educationally and occupationally.

The third phase was during the 1960s and 1970s, when the "brain-drain" from the Arab world occurred.  The influx of new immigrants, according to Muhammad, has heightened the awareness of those resident in America to the political issues in the home countries and has aided cultural cohesion and the maintenance of religious practices.  With the financial support of Arab governments and international Islamic organizations, several Islamic centers and associations emerged in response to the mutual desire of Muslim states and Arab-American Muslims for political and cultural reinforcement.

Muhammad goes on to say that events in Iran, beginning in 1979, likewise have had far-reaching, but yet unstudied, effects on American Muslims.  The Iran-Iraq war, which has been shaped by the American media as a Shic-i-Sunni conflict at times and as a Persian-Arab war at others, added another unclear dimension to the experience of North American Arab Muslims.

My concern in detecting the characteristics of these three phases centers on the shifting of the immigrants' perception of their identity and its effect on their youths' identity.  The concentration of this study on the Arab Muslim youth and their parents who are among the latest wave of immigrants, therefore, is intended to get at the

complexity of this identity transmission problem at its onset and as a process that is currently taking place. The basic questions are: What makes the present Arab Muslim youth identify with two conflicting, yet integrative, groups; Muslims and Arabs? and How do these youth realize this two-group association in the reality of the Western societies of Canada and the United States?"

III. THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The questions in discussing immigrant's integration and/or assimilation are not only whether the foreigner is responsive and open-minded, and whether the North American system is virile and broad enough to adopt the foreigner into its spiritual heritage. Donning American clothes and eating American food, using the local language (English or, in Quebec, French), adopting local racial sentiments, or being loyal in war do not constitute cultural integration. They are primarily characteristics of social assimilation.

Social Assimilation and Conceptual Accommodation

Variation in the reasons for immigration, the fact that the early immigration of Arabs--and Arab Muslims in particular--was a male movement, and the pioneering attitude of these immigrants contributed to a lack of family and community life.  Realizing the widening gap between the old-fashioned Arabic-speaking parents and their American-born English-speaking children, the Syrians, as well as the other two groups of Arabic-speaking immigrants, began to make serious attempts to preserve their cultural heritage and way of life.  The establishment of social clubs and the Hafli (parties) are the landmarks of this realization among third- and fourth-generation Syrians.

This realization is based on the assumption that the group's cultural heritage can be preserved by maintaining the sociocultural customs of the old country.  Very few Arab or Muslim groups, or studies of Arabs and Muslims, realized the role of conceptual modification/change in the attitudinal and behavioral adjustment which could lead to conceptual accommodation and social assimilation.

Arab Muslims' Cognitive Dissonance

The cognitive dissonance model is useful in understanding the responses of Arab Muslims because they are very often engaged in reconciling the sometimes dissonant attitudes and behaviors demanded by the three disparate environments in which they practice them:  the home, the Muslim/Arab community, and the host society.  The dissonance produced by these inconsistent thoughts or actions can only be resolved by social assimilation or accommodation.  Assimilation, in which the person complies with the new environment, results in the greatest change in attitude.   With accommodation, the person holds to at least the core of his or her own attitude, refuting new behaviors or modifying them so as to fit with existing attitudes or private beliefs.

These social and conceptual adjustments can be combined by placing the individuals in a matrix according to the interaction between their previous views and the process of cognitive equilibriums.  The inclusion of the individual in any of the cells of the matrix depends on how much attitude will be changed.  The inclusion also depends on whether this change (and not only temporary modification) has affected the individual's central concept (i.e., worldview) or only the auxiliary concepts and the manifestations.

IV.  THE DESIGN, HYPOTHESES, AND METHOD

The study reported here looked at this complex identity crisis from the conceptual change view, namely the conceptual adjustment patterns of Arab Muslim immigrant parents and the reflection of these patterns on the learning process and identity of their first generation American children, to:

1.   Highlight the contrast between various styles of immigrants' adjustment and to show the effect of the person's pre-conception on his/her adjustment in the New World.
2.   Focus on the conceptual conflicts that Arab Muslim youth face when they, willingly or unwillingly, attempt to maintain Muslim Arab identity.

Hypotheses

Two basic hypotheses were tested in this study:

1.    Parents' perception of Isl-am is a mixture of sentimental abstractions and rituals practiced within the framework of national/ethnic customs.  Most of them may assimilate socially (complying with new behavior), and either separate or compartmentalize conceptually.  That is, despite their apparent Westernized behavior, these parents may live triple (parallel or separate) lives conceptually, maintaining Islamic religious (in the narrow sense of the word) duties inside the home, Arab national and/or socioreligious manners within the Arab/Muslim community, and Western secular life in the outside society.

2.    The youths' identification with Isl-am reflects their parents' view of what "Islamic" and "Arabic" are.  Since they are primarily American-reared, their understanding of Isl-am is influenced by the Western ontological and epistemological worldview, and they tend to practice their perception of Isl-am within the framework of the American values as manifested in general.  Their understanding of Arabic heritage is also influenced by the Western, orientalist view of Arabs. Their practice of Isl-am may thus be minimized to the level of rituals at home and/or modified to the point of distortion.  Also, their identification with Arab heritage or culture may be confined to eating certain food, learning some Arabic words and expressions, and/or political rivalry with the Zionist Jews.

The Method

A nonrandom sample of thirty-four Arab Muslim subjects from
fifteen families of varied nationalities were interviewed in five major
cities in Canada and the United States.  The criteria for selecting
families in the sample were their willingness to participate in the
study and having youth aged fourteen to twenty-two years who were
raised mainly in North America.  The criteria for including subjects in
the analysis were their completion of all parts of the test (interviews
and questionnaires) and having at least one matching parent and one
youth from the same family.  Seventeen parents (eight fathers and nine
mothers) and seventeen youth (eight males and nine females) represent
matching sets of parents and youth.

Focus-group interviews and two sets of questionnaires were used to
detect the extent to which the subjects' professed behavior accords
with their perception of their belief system (Isl-am), its relation to
Arabic, and the host society system.

V.   ISSUES STUDIED, THEIR HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT, AND FINDINGS

To give a further illustration of this study's conceptualization
of NAAM's problem, the issue of Islamic dress and the issue of
questioning Islamic teachings and values were chosen.

The Issue of Islamic Dress

This issue was chosen because it is one of the concerns that surfaced whenever practicing Isl-am was discussed, and it is the issue that receives most of the attention of both Muslims and Westerners.

1.    Qur'-anic Basis for Islamic Dress

The Qur'-an refers to human attributes regarding dress or apparel in five basic contexts: the nature of human beings, the relationship to the Hereafter, the psychological aspect, the social aspect, and the pedagogical aspect.

   a.   It is emphasized in the Qur'-an that the spiritual and material nature of human beings is different from that of angels or animals (7:20-27).  The first parents were given the faculty of choice, which raised them above angels.  They were also capable of evil acts--the concept of Saw'ah (shame, disgrace)--which can be rejected only by training their own will--the concept of Lib-as (apparel, decency).  Humans' highest capability of rejecting evil, however, is Taqwa (conscientious devoutness to the will of All-ah).

   b.   Human choice in following the principles of modesty has consequences both in this life and in the Hereafter, where a .Hij-ab (screen) will separate the believers and righteous from the nonbelievers (7:46).

   c.   Individual disposition is guided on many levels, beginning with lowering one's gaze (24:30-31), guarding one's chastity (24:30-31; 23:5), conducting one's self before the Prophet and his family (59:3), and moderation in pace and voice (31:19).

   d.   The social interaction between the two sexes is constrained particularly with respect to women's privacy, and particularly for the wives of the Prophet (33:53). Protection for the believing women is facilitated by the concepts of .Hij-ab, Jilb-ab (outer garment), and cAwra (privacy/property protection) (33:59; 33:13).

   e.   Children are educated to be modest with parents serving as models by their behavior (24:31) and by teaching children respect for others' privacy during certain times of the day and in certain places (24:58-59).

2.    Muslim Conception of Dress in the Western Context

Judging by what is projected in the contextual environment, the Western societies of North America seem, to the new immigrant, to lack any of the above five Qur'-anic attributes regarding the concept of dress.  Although most, or some, of these attributes are part of the Judeo-Christian morality that prevails among the majority of the North American population, superficial observation may lead to considering the above projection as the norm.  For the absence of a home or community model of clear guidance to the Islamic principles regarding dress, Arab Muslim youth, like any other youth, observe what the majority of their peers or role models in the media project as the accepted dress, the one that draws the attention of the opposite sex. Therefore, when Arab Muslim immigrant parents also make the same observation (coupled with their particular conception of the Islamic dress that may or may not be according to the Qur'-an), and react by preventing their children, particularly daughters, access to the

environment (for fear that they will abandon the customary dress) or by
enforcing the "old home" customs of dress, they cause confusion in the
minds of their offspring.

3.   The Concern of this Study:
     This study attempts, by analyzing issues such as Islamic
dress, to understand the following:
   a.   How Arab Muslim immigrants perceive the Qur'-anic
        principles in their day-to-day life in North America.
        With respect to the issue of dress, how, for example, is
        the concept of .Hij-ab made applicable in an environment
        in which the concept of dress is understood generally to
        mean the fulfillment of one's individual will, instead
        of training that will, as the Islamic concept of Lib-as
        intends?
   b.   How do these Muslims, as parents, educators, or adult
        role models for the younger generation, project these
        concepts and relate their meanings to the meanings given
        to them in (1) the Arab world or the respective country
        of origin, which may or may not be the same as those of
        the Qur'-an, (2) the Western context, which is, for the
        most part, alien to these adults?  For instance, how do
        these adults address the social interaction between the
        two sexes, particularly the trend toward women's active
        involvement in all avenues of life?  The idea of women's
        active involvement is not alien to Isl-am, it is a
        precondition for the female, as well as the male, to
        fulfill their role as All-ah's viceregent.
   c.   How do Arab Muslim youth perceive the Islamic or Muslim codes
        regarding dress as reflected in the behavior of parents or
        other Muslim adults?  For instance, how do these youth react
        to the concept of guarding their chastity when they see that
        experimenting with sexual relations is the "in-group"
        practice among American teenagers in general?
     Some answers to these questions can be found in the results
section.  Although these answers do not represent the subject matter of
this study, they are essential for following the argument regarding the
conceptualization and the practice of Isl-am in North America by Arab
Muslim parents and youth in general.

4.   Historical Evolution of Belief and Practice:
     Arab Muslim responses to the issue of dress show how a belief
system evolves in the practice of its adherents.  This evolution does
not necessarily result in variations in the basics of the belief
system, but in the details of implementation.
     In any belief system there is a duality of concern.  There is the
concern of the scholar or theologian who attempts to understand the
teachings, which may or may not involve concern for implementation, and
there is the concern of the polity that attempts to interpret the
demands of the system in order to implement it.  This interpretation
cannot be abstract and divorced from the realities of the context in
which the system is being applied.
     The Arab Muslim polity's conceptual ecology, and, specifically,
the differences between parents' and youths' perceptions are

differences in emphasis on the things that concern each group the most.
Parents seem to be concerned most with preserving the ideals as they
have learned them (as memorized principles or cIb-ad-at along with some
basics of morality that was divorced from the Islamic methodology of
implementation).  Parents may resort to the basic resources of the
Islamic faith--the Qur'-an and .Hadith--but they also improvise on the
responses of previous generations to deal with a new context--the host
society's conceptual ecology.  Some use the prior responses as a point
of departure for integrating with the new context, resolving conflict
by adapting past interpretations, and some use the prior decisions as
grounds for rejecting the new context altogether instead of attempting
to resolve the conflict.  Only a few reach fresh solutions in
accordance with the basic Islamic teachings and in harmony with the new
context's auxiliary concepts.  This variation exists because the North
American Arab Muslim parents are, in general, and like many Muslims,
not trained to distinguish between the essence (the concept), the form
(law), and the manifestations of Isl-am (the outcome), on the one
hand, and between Isl-am and Arabic/Arabism as one of its
manifestations, on the other.  Furthermore, although trained in aspects
of Western methodology, these Muslims' understanding of the Western
culture's central concepts is often vague.  The issue of Islamic dress,
in general, and in the Western context, in particular, proved to be one
of the most ambiguous issues and one that illustrates the point just
made.
     The Qur'-anic teachings concerning modest dress and appearance do
not give the details of implementation.  The only detailed description
is found in verse 30 of S-urah (chapter) 4, which asks believing women
to "draw their veils (Khumur) over their bosoms (Juy-ubihin) and not
display their beauty except to lawful relatives," and in verse 59 of S-
urah 33, which asks the Prophet's wives and daughters, as well as the
believing women, to "cast their outer garments (jal-ab-ib) over their
persons, that they may be known (as believing women) and not molested."
     There are specifications, with various levels of authenticity, of
material, color, and conditions of Islamic dress for both men and women
in the Prophetic Sunnah (path of Prophet M.u.hammad).  But even with
these specifications, many Muslims take the form of dress that agrees
with their geographical or ethnic origins as the "traditional dress,"
whether or not it fulfills the specific conditions or the general
teachings.  This variation in the interpretation of the teachings is
representative of the trends in assimilating new ideas into one's world
view.

     5.   Parents' Responses to the Issue of Islamic Dress
          From the interviews with parents, we find as many responses
on the issue of dress (13) as there were respondents.  Different themes
were obvious, such as "stricter codes and guidelines for girls and more
relaxed ones for boys" and "ways to instill behavior at early age."
Only two fathers and two mothers were close to the Qur'-anic context in
addressing the issue.  One father, after long, persistent probing,
mentioned the concepts of shame and decency in apparel in response to
the question "What would be your advice to children with respect to
Islamic dress and what would this Islamic dress constitute, especially
in relation to modesty?"  Yet, he used this context as evidence that
there are Qur'anic specifications for human shame (cAwra), equating

shame with parts of the body that should be covered with clothes.  The
two mothers were primarily concerned with the education of the children
in bashfulness (.Hay-a') but their views were very close to the Qur'-anic
guidelines.

The rest of the responses expressed ambiguity and confusion.  One
mother said:  This is a sticky question!  I cannot do it, I don't have
to be different from the other people.  People will pick on you.  I do
not know."  She was seconded by another mother, while a third mother in
the group said, "I feel proud because I like the way I look, the way I
look (dressing with head cover) in this society, it makes me show as
having a different identity, and I am proud of it."

Other responses expressed ambiguity and confusion as to whether
the dress codes reflect cultural customs or Qur'-anic teachings.  Only a
few of the parents were open about this confusion.  for example, three
fathers started with a definitive prescription for female dress:
"Islamic dress definitely for the girls should be a right dress.
Islamic dress is well known and it should be practiced by mother and by
the girls."  After further probing, one father confessed that he did
not know why he is more strict with girls:  I would not let her buy a
swimming suit, but (for the) boy, it is OK....  Maybe that is the way
it was back home, that's the way my parents did that, and I do the
same.  There are few things [that] we acquire from the culture and we
mix [them] with the religion, we have double standard.

The three of them ended by saying that although .Hij-ab is a must
for Muslim women, "I have my personal view.  I feel that my wife or
daughter if they go shopping with Hij-ab, they'll attract more
attention....  So I don't force them because that attracts more
attention.  But modest dress (not a mini skirt) is a must.  Maybe I am
wrong."  (Seconded by the other two.)

This group of fathers presents a good example of Muslims'
improvising on previous interpretations for verse 59 in S-urah 33.  The
phrase "So they may be known (as believing women) and not molested,"
was understood by these fathers to mean that Islamic dress is intended
to avoid attention.  Furthermore, some of them reasoned from their new
context and concluded that Islamic dress is no longer needed or even
desirable.

Another group of fathers split in their responses; one expressed
the same confusion as the previous group, the second  was clear on the
concept of decency (.Hishma), and the third talked about the first
Qur'-anic concept of shame (cAwra).

6.   Youths' Responses to the Issue of Islamic Dress
The majority of the youth interviewed reasoned in a manner
that resembles that of the third and fourth eras of Islamic thought,
when new (non-Arabic) cultures and ideas were incorporated under the
Islamic framework.  Their curiosity, inquiry, and investigation into
the principles make them closer in their reasoning to the general trend
of scientific development and interpretation of the teachings.

Among the youth who responded directly or indirectly on the issue
of Islamic dress, two major strands among the females related to the
same theme, "being different."  On one end of the continuum is the
response,  "It is very hard to dress Islamically because people will
make fun of you, and will look at you as being different."  On the
other end of the continuum, we find:  "It is hard for us girls to dress

Islamically, but "When I did that I gained more respect because people realize that you have a different personality and they will not laugh at you if you do not join in their way of doing things."

These two strands evidence the reasoning that prevailed in the fourth era in Islamic history, when the assimilation of new ideas and customs was at its peak.  They support the hypothesis that the level of reasoning among the youth is closer to the contextual outcome than to the central concept of the Islamic teachings.  Not only does the reasoning of the youth contrast with that of their parents'--which is more concerned with form--but it is more inclined toward the Western view.  The youths in the first example do not want to be known as different (they want to conform), and even when one of them stated that she believed in the Qur'-an and its teachings, she added that she practices only the teachings that can be done in private, at home, such as prayer, not drinking, not eating pork, and so on.

On the other end of the continuum, one subject stated that everything is actually a dialogue.  "It is not just [concern] about God, but it is to resolve the question and figure out [the implications]," and another added:  "Because you can't really believe in Isl-am, without its action going with it."

The males varied in their responses, but the general concern was that girls should be given alternatives to the available mixed-sex activities through designing special programs or building a separate gym for them so they can participate in the community.

7.    Interpretations

It became obvious from the reported findings that, whatever their reasoning, all respondents interpreted the question on Islamic dress as an issue that concerns only females.  Both sexes and groups (parents and youth) saw the principle of modesty--stated in the Qur'-an for both males and females--as concerning female dress only.  This observation can be interpreted in either or both of the following manners:

a.    The general appearance of Arab Muslim male attire does not differ much from that of the non-Muslim (except when Muslims, in general, and Arab Muslims, in particular, are dressed in their national/ethnic costumes).  Therefore, the issue of dress has shifted in focus to the female attire only, particularly because Muslims, in general, and Arab Muslims, in particular, have become so obsessed with it as a priority issue for practicing Isl-am.  We see here the influence of parents' conceptual ecology on their perception of the issue of dress as well as on their offspring's perception in relation to modesty.

b.    Since one cannot talk about Arab women without specifically addressing Isl-am and Muslims, the Western emphasis on the discussion of Muslim women's dress as an important issue-- Westerners, in general, view the veil (general expression that can mean any of the following:  head cover, face cover, and purdah as practiced among a certain class of Indian women in general) as an indicator of oppression, underdevelopment, or lack of education--has particularly influenced the youth and, hence, they do not want to be different, nor do they want other female Muslims (Arab or non-Arab) to appear

different.  That is, youth may have reasoned that by using the Islamic dress, Muslim females are providing evidence for the Western view that suggests the oppression or backwardness of Muslim women.

These two interpretations are supported by the lack of any indication in the responses that adherence to the Islamic dress codes might be understood as an implementation of the Islamic principle of modesty, regardless of its form, which may vary from one group of Arabs to another or from one group of Muslims to another.  If this understanding were prevalent, parents and youth could have understood the practice of Islamic dress as a signal of rejection of the Western views on modesty, of assimilating the national/ethnic dress form into the Islamic requirements of a modest attire, or of integration of the Islamic concept of modesty within the Western environment, without compromising the principles of modesty.

Questioning of Islamic Teachings and Values

This issue was chosen because it is a subtle problem in parents and youth communication.  The problem "How do you resolve the questioning of certain Islamic values or teachings" was posed for two purposes:  To learn whether Arab Muslims communicate with others, and particularly whether youth communicate with parents, about doubts concerning Islamic/Arabic values and their practice, and to understand the values or teachings that call for questioning and the nature of the communication involved.  This problem will not be analyzed in detail as was the issue of Islamic dress for reasons of space limitation.  Only parents and youth responses will be summarized and interpreted.

1.  Responses

Eighteen persons (six fathers, three mothers, and nine youth) responded to this issue.

Two themes dominated the parents' responses.  The first concerned the way they deal with their offspring's questioning of Islamic values. Four parents (two fathers and two mothers) stated that they "don't get [i.e., either children don't ask or parents reject] questioning from children" because "things are explained as being for the child's benefit" or because children "are accustomed to these things from childhood.  Each of the other five parents had a different response.

Two youths responded in the same vein, saying:  "Parents say that if you're a strong believer that's what counts, it [does not have to] satisfy you logically, you are not supposed to question Isl-am" and "[I and my brother] both have to learn early."

The second theme concerned how to respond to children's questions. There were six different responses (three fathers and three mothers), ranging from "translate the Qur'-an into action so they understand what the teachings are," to "[You] have to trust them, boys or girls, and give them chance to make their own judgment."

Two themes also dominated the youths' responses.  The first theme concerned the issues that are questioned.  There were seven responses, and they ranged from "I don't have any question.  Mom tells me what I need to know" to " I don't think I understand why we do not eat pork and things like that.  My scientific mind does not accept the idea of miracles and Hereafter.  There is no proof for them.  I need some proof in order to [believe] in them."

Two other issues were of significance: interactions with parents and the questioning by others about why Muslims cannot go out or shake hands with the opposite sex.

The second theme was present in the responses of five youths who discussed how to respond to the questions of others or how others responded: "These issues are for grownups to discuss" to "We have to explain, but first we have to be clear in our minds." Two responses by the same youth are notable: "We have to let some questioning pass for the sake of not arguing with parents," and "Parents say: what counts is that you're strong. Your explanations will not satisfy your friends anyway."

2. Interpretation

Given the historical and ideological differences between Islamic and Western conceptual ecologies, one might expect a demarcation between parents' and youths' responses to the problem of questioning. Being raised in the West and operating more within the empirical, rationalist Western framework, youth may also vary depending on where they have spent their formative years.

This expectation is supported when comparing the responses of two nineteen-year old males. The parents of both respondents have the same country of origin, but the first had part of his secondary schooling in native country public schools, while the second attended a boarding missionary school in a neighboring country and in the United States.

The first youth, who was raised in a family with strong Islamic background and who has been in North America for six years, responded: Everything is clear to me. I do not need to ask questions. It's clear and straightforward... the things I discuss with my parents the most are what you call Muc-amal-at [human interrelations] in Isl-am." This response indicates that he is attempting to reason in the manner of Muslims in the third and fourth eras of Islamic thought, when new ideas and people were incorporated into Isl-am. He is not satisfied with things merely being clear only but attempts to discuss interactions in the new context (the West).

The same can be said for the second youth, whose disbelief in miracles and the Hereafter was cited earlier. He is attempting to understand and extrapolate meanings to fit the Western context, which is not completely new to him. Raised in the Western conceptual ecology, he is not fully familiar with the Islamic context, nor does he seem to be trained in the Islamic approach to issues of belief. Therefore, though he was raised in a highly disciplined, ethical, and religious family, his response to questions about his belief in God was "I really don't know. I believe in God, I guess, because it is in my heart. It is my faith. But there are things I don't accept, like miracles [that] there is no scientific basis for."

VI. CONCLUSION

The basic contribution of this study lies in the attempt to bridge the gap between practical concern of the Arab Muslim community of North America, on the one hand, and the perception of "Islamic," "Arabic" and Western secular worldviews, on the other.

One of the propositions of the Islamic belief system is that a belief system should not remain a set of abstract assumptions, but is objectified. In this study the belief system remains, to a large

extent, a set of abstract assumptions or definitions among the parents, while among the youth it is perceived more in an action context. This does not mean that the youth have a better understanding or are more committed to Isl-am than their parents. What it means is that parents' conception of Isl-am is more concerned with the abstract principles than with their relationship to the real world context in which they are to be practiced. This suggests that parents may have difficulty in educating their offspring about Islamic principles when they live in a different environment from their elders and approach the concepts differently.

We see here the difficulty parents face in transmitting Islamic principles to their offspring. Since the parents' perception of Isl-am and Islamic principles tends to be in the form of abstract meanings or verbalized values that are mixed with the Arabic customs and ideals, they may not be applied appropriately or effectively in a new context (North America) that is more alien to the parents than to their offspring.

To the extent that parents' perception is influenced by their previous backgrounds (see father's response to the issue of dress), while the youths' perception is more influenced by the North American environment (see responses to the issue of questioning), the interfamilial communication of Islamic ideology and Arabic heritage could be affected. If parents are concerned with teaching about principles, they deal with them as abstractions or emphasize the manifestations of these principles as they were practiced in the "old country." The attempt by parents to communicate principles as pure abstractions or in the form of behavior not readily seen as relevant to daily life in the new context sends unintended signals and meanings to the youth and may lead to their (the youths') viewing the principles as irrelevant.

If youth are confused or dismayed at their parents' application of the principles of Isl-am, one of the following patterns should dominate their behavior. They will either reject the parents' beliefs about Islamic/Arabic practice and the principles that come with them, continue to have an unresolved conflict between cultures and belief systems, try to compartmentalize by having two or three sets of behavior, or reject the advocated practice and attempt to find by themselves a new means by which they can apply Islamic principles and preserve Arabic heritage.

It is affirmed, therefore, that educators and parents of Arab Muslims need to identify and reconcile the ambiguities that exist in the perception and practice of Isl-am and its relation to the Arabic heritage in order to transmit Muslim Arab identity to the next generation. Despite the success of a few families, one cannot underestimate the seriousness and urgency of this task.

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