

## ABSTRACT

Title of Document:           EXPLORING MUSLIM WOMEN: A  
  QUALITATIVE STUDY OF THE CONSTRUCTION  
  OF GENDERED RELIGIOUS IDENTITIES  
  AMONG GRADUATES OF AN ISLAMIC SCHOOL

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This research investigates the ways in which the gendered Islamic identities of young American Muslim women are constructed in the United States. In particular, it focuses on the influence that institutions of socialization, including family, Islamic school, and mosque, have on the process of identity construction. Participants of the study included 15 Muslim graduates of an Islamic school in the mid-Atlantic region. Two phenomenological interviews were conducted with each adolescent to understand her life history and the role that institutional actors have played in shaping her gendered religious attitudes and behaviors. Data were analyzed using critical discourse and content analysis to uncover patterns of conformation and deviation in the performance of gendered religious norms.

Findings revealed a reflexivity in these Muslim women that helped them to be conscious of and deal with the challenges that came with living in a diverse context, while also staying true to their core religious values. The Islamic school, mosque, and family played

crucial roles in shaping the gendered Islamic identities of these adolescents, and provided safe spaces for this purpose. This sense of safety for some however resulted in a lack of exposure to and engagement with non-Muslims. Within the community, experiences of racial discrimination were also reported by the Black women. Moreover, patterns of differential behavior were also shared in the expectations that their families and the community had of Muslim women compared to those of Muslim men. Despite these challenges, the participants shared an interest in contributing to the Muslim community and larger society in leadership roles. Implications of these findings for theory and future research are discussed in detail.

*Keywords:* gender identities; religious identities; Islamic identities; Muslim adolescents; American Muslim women; identity development; religious socialization