

The Portrayal Of Muslim Women In Canadian Mainstream Media:

A Community Based Analysis

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**REPORT:
PORTRAYAL OF MUSLIM WOMEN IN CANADIAN MAINSTREAM MEDIA**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report, produced by the Afghan Women's Organization, reviews research, local activism and community perspectives on the portrayal of Muslim women in Canadian mainstream media, as well as providing Muslim women's views in the form of focus group discussions.

The growing Muslim Canadian population combined with the largely negative coverage of the Muslim community in the mainstream Canadian media render it necessary to raise community awareness of the media as well as to determine the most appropriate strategies for changing current stereotypes.

The literature reviewed here points to the prevalence of Orientalist images of Islam in shaping current media portrayals. One aspect of this kind of Orientalism are media portrayals of Muslim women that tend to promote an image of 'the' Muslim woman that has little to do with real Muslim women's lives. Muslim women are frequently portrayed as the Alien Other, as veiled, passive victims of patriarchy. More recent political circumstances that have seen a number of radical fringe groups perpetuating violence in the name of 'Islam,' have led (not surprisingly) to media portrayal of Islam as violent. Increased communication and interaction between media personnel and the Muslim community are necessary to assist the media in understanding how to report on the actions of some Muslims without tarnishing the entire religion of Islam and the peaceable majority of its adherents. Careless media portrayal of 'Muslim' terrorists, or 'the oppressed Muslim woman' lead to discrimination and sometimes violence against Muslims living in Canada.

The focus group discussions revealed that participants were conscious of the terminology used in coverage, of the subjectivity of journalists, and of the limited knowledge of Islam in leading to what most discussants felt was negative coverage. However, there was a minority who felt that there was sufficient positive coverage and that the coverage had improved significantly in recent decades. Discussants' comments revealed that the negative coverage often results in feelings of insecurity and a loss of confidence in their identity - as Muslims, and as Canadians.

This report suggests that further media literacy and the encouragement of journalism as a profession for Muslims and especially Muslim women, are important factors for change in media institutions. In terms of media relations, the production of informative material on Islam by Muslims, and the promotion of positive media relations in collaboration with other organizations (both in the Muslim and mainstream communities) are necessary as a means of improving media portrayal.

Referring to the discourse, as discussed by Edward Said in his book *Orientalism*, whereby the "Orient" is constructed as an exotic Other in European scholarship and popular culture.

INTRODUCTION

This report is a review and analysis of both academic and non-academic literature, as well as a review of community activism in Toronto, in regards to the portrayal of Muslim women in Canadian mainstream media.

The first objective of this report is to review any available literature pertaining or relevant to the portrayal of Muslim women in mainstream media in Canada. This means any research that can provide us with an analytical framework and understanding as well as shed light on appropriate strategies for change. These materials are MA and PhD theses, books and articles, as well as internet sources. The latter serve as indicators of popular thinking on the topic in the Muslim community.

The second objective is to include an analysis of community perspectives, which have been gathered from focus group discussions held in February and March 1998 in Toronto. A selection of the comments is included in Appendix A.

The overall purpose of this report is to assist the Muslim community in assessing the work which has already been done and moving forward from that point towards a more accurate portrayal Muslim women in the media. Hence, there is a list of suggested readings, documentation of community work/research that has already been done (Appendix B) and a listing of articles on Muslim women (Appendix C) that provides not only a reference but a source of further analysis of media coverage.

“Media” in this project refers specifically to both print and broadcast information programming.

BACKGROUND

The portrayal of Muslims in mainstream media is a topic frequently discussed in the community; there is a nearly unanimous feeling that current coverage is inaccurate and unfair.

The portrayal of Muslim women in particular is a concern, not only because of the stereotyping all women continue to face in the media, but also due to the tension and negative responses to the head covering, or hijab, in Western culture.

Furthermore, due to the Iranian revolution and the Taleban's policies on women in Afghanistan the already negative representation of Muslim women that is embedded in Western popular culture is further entrenched by extra media attention given to these political regimes.

Numerous incidents of negative coverage over the past few years have evoked distress among Muslims, who are understandably upset by what they consider to be the misrepresentation of their faith. They have now begun to seek ways to translate that distress into productive and effective ways of improving and correcting these misrepresentations. Organizations such as the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), in the U.S., began letter writing campaigns, and provided assistance in how to respond to media coverage most effectively. Since then, CAIR offices have been established in Canada while other Muslim organizations, such as the Canadian Islamic Congress, have also become active in media relations. Public relations efforts and dialogue with the media are beginning to occur more frequently.

This report is the product of a larger project, sponsored by the Afghan Women's Organization and funded by Status of Women Canada and the Multiculturalism Program, Canadian Heritage, as a response to the equally pressing needs of greater community participation, and change within the media itself, in regards to the portrayal of Muslim women specifically.

In addition to the information gathered in this report, the project encompassed media literacy workshops for Muslim women, the formation of a Muslim women's media advocacy group, and the distribution of information and a contact list of Muslim women to mainstream media. The time frame of the project was from October 1997 to September 1998.

By investing additional time and resources into expanding Muslim women's knowledge of and involvement in media and media relations, and increasing dialogue with and availability of information to those working in media, it is hoped that we can see significant improvements in the coverage of Muslim women.

The stereotyping of women more generally, particularly in the Canadian context, has been documented at length by MediaWatch, a national women's media advocacy group.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Material analyzing the portrayal of Muslim women in the media was limited, and was found mainly in MA and PhD theses and some articles, mostly on the Internet. Edward Said's Covering Islam is the notable exception. Other books that examine the media portrayal of Arabs or the

Middle East have been included - 'Arab' and 'Middle East' have often served as shorthand for 'Muslim' in mainstream Western culture.

Two theses that have focused on Muslim women examine the portrayal of Saudi women specifically, in documentaries and in popular culture respectively. In "A Rhetorical Analysis of the Image of Saudi Women in Two Specific Cross-Cultural Media Messages" Soraya Hassan Mashat argues that the cultural orientation of the producer is what ultimately impacts the way the material is presented to the viewer, and that in cross-cultural documentaries, producers must be careful not to superimpose their own value-system on the material they are presenting.

She notes the importance of various factors in TV images: the use of narrative, techniques to focus or divert attention, the centrality of the reporter, the introduction and conclusion and the use of symbolic images. She contrasts a PBS docu-drama, "Death of a Princess" with an ABC documentary, "Saudi Women Behind the Veil". The docu-drama was presented through the producer's eyes; the visual representation was from the point of Westerners; and, an unrepresentative topic served as a reflection of the Saudi culture, ignoring the average Saudi woman. In contrast, "Saudi Women Behind the Veil" sought to overturn stereotypes. It looked at Saudi women's views, roles and rights and consciously stated the contrast between Western and Saudi values. Mashat found the ABC documentary to be a much more effective and accurate portrayal of Muslim women.

The second thesis, "Unveiling Portrayals of Muslim Women: Examining Western Texts on Saudi Women", looks at both popular and academic literature for the portrayal of Saudi women. Zurbrigg finds that Saudi women are portrayed as exotic, erotic and oppressed "others". The author takes a feminist perspective to show that the portrayals are constructed by the authors through writing techniques, and are placed in the context of the background of the author. As did Mashat, Zurbrigg concludes that Saudi women are viewed through the cultural lens of the western observer. Zurbrigg argues that Western notions of sexuality shape the view of Muslim women as oppressed, while evoking stereotypical images of the veil, marriage and polygamy.

Sajidah Kutty's paper titled "Speaking for Her: The Representation of the Muslim Woman in Popular Culture" analyses the construct of the Muslim woman in Western popular culture within a historical context of cultural and political interactions between Muslims and the "West". According to Kutty, it is the denial of women's rights in Muslim countries which has led to the association of Islam with backwardness.

The author also notes that three personas tend to be attributed to the Muslim woman. The first is the "sexual mystique", of which the harem is best known; the second is "the oppressed Muslim woman", often represented as the hijab wearer or the woman who is unable to drive; and, finally, there is the "militant Muslim woman", often shown in hijab with a gun and military clothes.

Kutty holds that there is a direct link between media portrayal of Muslim women and social policy. For instance, the expulsion of a Quebec student from school for wearing hijab (because it is "undemocratic") can be linked to the portrayal of Muslims as villains/terrorists (24). Conversely, countries which deny women's rights to wear hijab (such as Turkey and Tunisia) are not portrayed in the media.

Another article, titled "Middle Eastern Women in Western Eyes: A Study of U.S. Press Photographs of Middle Eastern Women", in an analysis of 230 photos, finds that the most common stereotypes are of women as: victims; passive; veiled; and, as impersonal, in accordance with the framework of Orientalism. The exception is the mention of only one female politician. Wilkins argues that this is a reflection of both the operational practices of editors, who assign a "news value" to items, and of a moral and political discourse that assigns an ideological value to these photos.

In Chapter 3 of her PhD thesis, "The Politics of the Veil", Katherine Bullock argues that the monolithic image of the hijab in Western culture as a symbol of oppression must be challenged. She shows that both the media and popular culture reproduce Orientalist images, ignoring the diversity of reasons for which women cover – whether social, spiritual, economic, political, or personal. She suggests that the majority of women cover by choice, in contrast to what the media would have us believe. She also notes that such negative stereotypes create an image of Muslim women as being ignorant, and as not belonging to Canadian society.

In relation to Muslims more generally, both qualitative and quantitative studies of U.S. media have been conducted. An example of the latter is "US Television and Press Coverage of Islam and Muslims 1979-87", a PhD thesis by Abdulaziz Atiyah Al-Zahrani. This is a comparative quantitative content analysis of the New York Times and ABC. Coverage of Islam and Muslims was found to be connected with violence more than non violence, and was more negative than positive - mostly crisis events.

The author found this was due to factors such as cultural bias; lack of information; the power of the pro-Israel lobby; reporters' attitudes; as well as reliance on "ignorant sources". It also resulted from difficulty in gaining access to Muslim countries. Business and economics news was ignored and there was nothing on disasters or accidents which the "Islamic world" experienced in that time period. Finally, it was found that documents of Islam and Muslims were ignored as sources of information.

Strategies for change which Al-Zahrani noted included training programs for journalists about Islam and its cultures; the need for more reliable sources of information; examination of the reasons of violence; greater access to Islamic countries; and to encourage Muslims to "reflect their behaviour according to Islamic teaching".

Dima Dabbous, in "The Western Construction of Islam, Terrorism and Counter-Terrorism and the Hegemonic Role of the Media" compares international news reports of a specific incident, in 1993, which involved conflict between Israel and Lebanon. Through an analysis of headlines, the use of sources and "actors", implied meanings and the strategic use of information, Dabbous

reveals in detail the subtle ways in which media bias occurs. Hence we are shown how the number of Lebanese (civilian) victims is downplayed; how the press construct Hezbollah as “terrorists” rather than as a “resistance”; and how it is not only the frequency, but the size of quotes from each side (Lebanese and Israeli) which reflect a biased position.

Only one thesis has specifically focused on the Canadian media - Darren Gowlett's “Perceptions of Islam in Canadian English Print Media, 1983-85, with Reference to Islamic Resurgence”. This thesis is an analysis of the perceptions of Islam in four Canadian dailies, and takes into account the context of the history of perceptions of Islam (the Crusades, Orientalism, imperialism and secularism).

Most coverage is found in the foreign affairs section. The author notes that the media ignores its own hegemonic positioning and favours certain views -for instance, Islam's adherence to religion is seen as backwards but Israel's is not. He also notes that there is reliance on sources such as government, military and corporations for information, thus limiting the sources and nature of the news.

Gowlett's research shows that in 1985, 86% of Canadian press coverage of the Middle East was from foreign sources; 17% (including letters to the editor and editorials) was from Canadian sources (23). Canadian Press for instance is dependent on U.S. sources and is credited with only 20% of foreign news items in Canadian papers (27).

Gowlett has also found that in the Canadian News Index many articles on Islam are not indexed (78). Of those which are indexed, the following results were found based on a six month study in 1985:

- The *Globe and Mail* had an average of 2 stories per day on Islam; 46/53 dealt with violent subject matter and the remainder with tourism, restriction of freedom and the military (81).
- The *Montreal Gazette* had just over 2 per issue; 50/54 dealt with violent themes and the main source was Associated Press. Only 3 stories had Canadian sources and most were from news agencies, meaning that they report events rather than analysis, opinion or information.
- The *Toronto Star* had between 1 to 2 stories a day with 43/48 being violent; the remainder dealt with Islamic law, tourism and Hajj. Nearly 50% were from Associated Press.

Any positive references to Islam were found in the religion page; topics covered here included the Qur'an; Islam in history; and rituals and practices (such as local coverage of Hajj (the pilgrimage to Mecca) or Ramadan (the month of fasting)).

Canadian media coverage of Muslims has recently come under further scrutiny by a community based organization. The Canadian Islamic Congress, which was formed in 1997, has been very active in media advocacy. This group released a report in September 1998 which analyzed coverage of Muslims in five Canadian papers: the Toronto Star, the Globe and Mail, the Toronto Sun, the Montreal Gazette and the Ottawa Citizen.

The report notes that anti-Islam bias instigates hate against a minority group and can thus jeopardize the well being of individuals, particularly children (2). The research and its methodology focus upon levels of association of Islam with violence. Editorials, cartoons and letters to the editor were included in the monitoring. Articles that identify Muslims by religion when involved in violent acts are considered worst, and are followed by terminology that associates Islam with violence such as “Muslim militant”. Problematic, but not as bad, are reports that are culturally insensitive or those that are selectively presented with use of popular ‘experts’ (11). Based on six months of monitoring, the Toronto Star is found to be the worst, the Toronto Sun the best of the five; also, news from Reuters and AP is identified as the worst in comparison to letters to the editor, which are found to be the best. Not surprisingly, the report found the worst reporting to be in relation to international news; but on the positive end all five papers had greater coverage of local events in 1998 compared to 1997. The report stresses the need to use qualifiers such as “*according to their interpretation of the Qur’an*”, to separate forms of practice from the religion. It also notes that there is insufficient coverage of the achievements, events, and traditions of Muslim Canadians and that the lack of education of Islam in schools and universities is a contributing factor.

In addition to the analyses discussed above, several books have been written that examine either the portrayal of Muslims or of Arabs, or of the Middle East, at a more general level in American print and broadcast media. The best known of these is Jack Shaheen's *The TV Arab*, which examines myths and stereotypes of Arabs in U.S. broadcast media – who are stereotyped as wealthy, as barbaric, as sex maniacs and as terrorists - in various entertainment programs. His interviews with TV producers and directors reveals this to be the result of ignorance and limited contact with Arabs. He finds documentaries to be much more balanced. He also finds Arab women to be portrayed as restricted to the veil, under conditions of seclusion and as being in polygamous marriages.

Another important book is Edward Said's *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World*, in which he notes that it is poor scholarship and poor journalism to define the actions of the world's Muslims under the gross generalization of "Islam", whether as culture or as religion (xvi). He notes that there is an urgent need for more dialogue and less sensationalism in the coverage of Muslims, and demonstrates this by discussing specific programs and their use of "experts" and questioning techniques. It is worth noting here that Said's insights were made eighteen years ago, yet the issues and problems described by him remain pressing even today.

Similarly, *Split Vision: The Portrayal of Arabs in the American Media* discusses the portrayal of Arabs and the Middle East, in U.S. and Canadian mass media. The first portion of the book includes interviews with several journalists that provide information as to whether they perceive biases and if so, why they exist. Quite often the responses imply that Arabs are either not visible enough nor organized effectively enough to lobby media. The second portion of the book includes a paper titled "Canadian Mass Media and the Middle East" by Thomas Naylor, which examines the historical background for North American attitudes towards this region. Examples of the association of Islam with fanaticism and violence in both print and broadcast media are pointed out.

COMMUNITY RESPONSES: THE INTERNET

Various Internet sites address the issue of the portrayal of Muslims in the media, though none look at Muslim women specifically. The information is found primarily in the form of opinion pieces in alternative media or through the documentation of events that feature speakers knowledgeable about media.

Several authors suggest that the misrepresentation of Muslims in the media exists due to limited interaction with Muslims in society; for instance, John Wing writes that the public is largely apathetic and ignorant in learning about Islam, and encourages Muslims to "come out into the community". A group called Arabview, in producing a feature designed to promote more sympathy and understanding of Muslims in Western society, avoided Muslim scholars and focused on well known, "normal" Muslims to show that like the majority of Westerners, they pursue life peacefully and have the same desires and fears as do non-Muslims. The group emphasized interfaith dialogue, education, community information, and presentations to the public.

Others note that negative coverage is a result of a larger "campaign" - Richard Curtiss blames media conglomerates and pro-Israel tendencies and concludes that Muslims should support their own paper, this being the only means of achieving objective coverage. Similarly, in his article, Ashraf Luqman sees the stereotyping as a "campaign" to destroy Islam's reputation.

According to Nohad Toulan there are "insufficient academic studies on Islam". While many would disagree with the latter statement, according to Toulan this, as well as the historic rift between Islam and Christianity (and hence a fear of Islam), provide a partial explanation for media stereotypes.

In terms of the nature of the coverage of Islam, the terminology used and the focus on violence are recurring observations amongst critics of media coverage. The Muslim News notes that the words used to describe Muslims (such as terrorist/fundamentalist) are problematic and serve to divide the community. Hussein also notes that the 5 million Muslims in the U.S. are absent from daily coverage, and most often are reported as terrorists or in relation to violence. Media coverage makes assumptions about violence existing in the religion itself, an idea that has been given legitimacy by prominent academician Samuel P. Huntington in his book *The Clash of Civilisations and the Remaking of World Order*, who believes that Islam will be the source of the next clash of civilizations with the "West". Toulan also observes the frequent association of Islam with violence. For solutions, Toulan stresses our own responsibility as Muslims to contribute to positive images, the negative portrayal quite often being due to ignorance on the part of mainstream society. Ted Koppel, of ABC's Nightline, also places a measure of responsibility on the Muslim community. While he acknowledges that US media are deficient and biased on many points, he comments that "[Muslims] need spokespeople who are succinct, and know *colloquial English*, to make articulate and intelligent statements" [italics added].

Anser Hassan makes several useful observations in his discussion of Islamic stereotypes in Western mass media. For instance, he comments that the image of Muslims in the media is limited to stereotypes such as fundamentalism, jihad, women's rights, and terrorism, as well as

selective use of words, such as "fundamentalist" rather than revivalist - and only in the case of Muslims. Other groups are not identified in such terms. Like history professor Karim Khan's speech, which Pierre Harper reports on in the on-line college newspaper *Kapio*, Hassan notes that media are "failing to separate the dominance of culture over actual religious text". He comments that "some responsibility does lie within the Muslim world", but they are in a minority as the Islamic revival is primarily peaceful. At the other end, he notes that there are often inexperienced reporters who don't understand local cultures or speak the language.

In the case of women, Hassan notes that Islam is presented as male dominated and male oriented, when in fact Hassan, like many other Muslims, believes Islam sought to protect women's rights; the current status of women, he believes, should not be blamed on Islam. According to Hassan, the media judges the position of Muslim women by extreme cases, based on culturally specific traditions such as complete veiling. He notes that many Muslim women are unable to challenge male authority, and they may not be aware of the differences between law and custom. Islamic countries would be better represented if the media identified how and why Muslim governments have limited the rights guaranteed women in the Qur'an rather than portraying them as victims of a harsh religion.

ANALYSIS

The research documents reviewed show that the portrayal of Muslim women is embedded in the cultural and historical context of relations between Islam and the "West". It is difficult to separate media from this context, particularly when it is understood as a discourse that is always reproducing itself. Focus on the media also provides an opportunity to see more clearly the ways in which Islam is portrayed in mainstream society.

While quantitative analysis is only useful to a certain extent, to discuss the problems of negative representation of Muslim women without some form of systematic analysis is not as effective and persuasive in dealing with the media. Gowlett's examination of Canadian newspapers is very helpful, and the work of media analyst Teun van Dijk (whose research methodology was applied by Dima Dabbous, reviewed above) are very important as they show that media portrayal has more to do with racist discourse - or, cultural biases - reproducing itself in a text, than with what is going on in the "Islamic world" or with cultural practices as such. Thus, due to lack of interaction with Muslims, many media personnel unknowingly reproduce oriental and colonial images of Islam, even while they believe they are faithfully reporting the 'facts' objectively. Part of our task, then, is to illuminate these kinds of colonial and orientalist heritages of western commonplace notions of Muslim women as backward, oppressed, or terrorist.

Surprisingly however – or, perhaps not so surprisingly – many of the authors, in both the academic literature and the community based literature on the Internet, do blame Muslims (at least partially) for the negative stereotype, in that some of the world's Muslims commit violent and oppressive acts. Al-Zahrani actually recommends that Muslims "reflect Islamic behaviour" while Kutty comments that the denial of Muslim women's rights in Muslim countries is the cause of Islam's image as backward. While it is true that there are many conflicts and crises in the "Muslim" world, and that women's rights are violated in many countries, these are not sufficient cause for the pervasive image of Islam as the cause of every such crisis. It ignores a multitude of Muslim countries where this has not been a central issue – such as Indonesia, which has the largest Muslim population in the world.

The context of this literature should also be taken into account. Shaheen's book, for instance, documents a period of stereotyping when the oil crisis was an issue in the "West". Many of his observations remain relevant, of course, but there has also been a shift in the imaging since that time. As Kutty notes, one of the more recent stereotypes is of the militant Muslim woman. This should be taken into account along with the frequent comments of all these authors that Islam is overwhelmingly associated with violence. The US State Department's Report *Patterns of Global Terrorism* (1997) demonstrates that the number of terrorist activities in the Middle East is not greater than those in Latin America, but in the mass media and popular imagery the term "terrorist" remains linked to Muslims. Finally, it is notable that much of the academic literature has had a geographic or ethnic focus (primarily Arab) and has only begun to look more generally at the portrayal of Muslims as a group. In this context, Muslim women are either invisible behind the images of a violent Islam, are present as both veiled and violent themselves.

CONSULTATIONS: FOCUS GROUP RESULTS

INTRODUCTION:

A necessary aspect of a project that seeks to speak for a community is to obtain the direct input of members of that group. The purpose of these focus groups was two-fold: to hear from a diverse group of Muslim women their own views about their portrayal in the media and its impact on their lives; and, to learn of their analysis of the media and the strategies, or solutions, they feel are required. The questions and a selection of responses are included in Appendix A.

MEDIA USED

The survey of media accessed by Muslim women shows the predominance of television, as well as the fact that mainstream Canadian stations were found inadequate in their international coverage, which was of importance to many of the participants.

COVERAGE

Participants' analysis of media coverage encompassed many levels. They identified and were aware of:

- § The specific content of news reports: the adjectives used and topics selected; the choice of interviewees
- § Subjectivity: the role of the journalist and editors in shaping reporting
- § Journalist's knowledge of Islam: participants felt there was limited knowledge of the religion as well as confusion of religious elements with cultural practices
- § Stereotyping: the association of Muslim women as having certain characteristics, such as passivity

It was clear that participants felt that the diversity of their lives and activities was not represented adequately. However the complexity of the issue of "culture" was also revealed - while some felt that cultural aspects of their lives were represented (in contrast to religious aspects), there was a simultaneous feeling that the diversity of Muslims was not reflected. There was also discussion over the idea that it was cultural practices that led to the misrepresentation of Islam, as some of the documents discussed above have commented.

IMPACT OF COVERAGE

Participants discussed how the coverage affected their actions but did not explicitly address or analyze its impact on their self image. However, some of the comments reveal that there has indeed been an impact on the self-image of some women. One woman commented, "I'm unusual..." and another noted that "you start to question your own people".

The incidents and experiences which women related of the attitudes and experiences of others were in themselves not as surprising as the calm acceptance with which women spoke. They acknowledged that it did hurt them but they had almost come to expect the discrimination,

rudeness and intolerance they described.

CAN COVERAGE BE IMPROVED?

It is interesting to note that although the comments regarding the nature of media coverage pointed to inaccuracies on the part of media, the participants felt that the primary means for any improvement to occur is through community strategies and change, rather than expecting the media to change itself. This was reflected in the suggestions that we must improve our religious knowledge - to defend ourselves – that we develop media relations, and increase our involvement in community development and in building relations with other communities as a means of building a better image of Muslims more generally. However, the list of suggestions that have resulted from the focus groups provide many useful ideas for sensitizing the media.

The need to build trust was reflected in the apprehension of many towards contacting media, and in the comments about being "on guard", a "token" or a "representative". These comments also reflected the extent of the impact of the negative coverage on these women.

CONSULTATIONS: COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

Muslim organizations in Canada are developing media relations by encouraging the community to participate in more active monitoring and to respond more effectively to the media. They are also promoting more positive coverage and beginning to build relations with journalists. Meetings with editorial boards have also begun.

Other advocacy organizations in minority communities have had much more experience and resources available, and have thus been able to develop media relations, provide training to diverse groups in the community, and have conducted research both in regards to the portrayal of coverage and its impact on society.

It is difficult to say how effective a research project may be, considering the time and resources available in the Muslim community. However, further media literacy and analysis of the portrayal would be more helpful for women in the community, and to communicate with the media.

Please refer to Appendix B for a listing of organizations contacted and the information and activities they have available.

COLLECTION OF PRINT AND BROADCAST MATERIALS

In addition to the resources discussed above, this project included a component for the collection of "raw data". Appendix C lists Canadian newspaper articles that contained the words "Islam" and "woman", from 1993 to 1997. While the funding allocation did not allow for the analysis of this material, it is hoped that this can be the basis of further research on Muslim women in Canadian print media. Photocopies of these articles can be requested through the Afghan Women's Organization.

It would have been of equal interest to collect and analyze broadcast material; however, it is much more difficult and time consuming. This does not mean it should be dismissed, but merits further attention in the work to be done by the Muslim women's media relations committee formed through this project.

Materials which were collected include recent programs from CBC radio: "Young Muslim Marriages" (This Morning) and "Islam and Youth" (Morningside, 1993) .

From Global TV, transcripts available on Muslim women were: "Bosnian Lovers" (1993); "Sarajevo Harmony" (1994); "Egypt 1" (1995: Rise of Islam in Egypt); "Egypt 2" (1995: "Overpopulation" and Islam); "Nasreen's visit" (1995: Taslima Nasreen); "Mid East women" (1995); "Beijing" (1995). Because these were only available in transcript form, however, any analysis can only be incomplete when visuals - which define television - are excluded .

CBC television broadcasts which have been documented (but not collected) included a story in February 1996 on Ramadan, an April feature on Hajj, aired on Newswatch, and 1995 Prime Time News coverage called "Behind the Veil" about the expulsions of Muslim girls from school for wearing hijab .

Provided courtesy of Catherine Piggott and Sue Gardner, CBC Radio
Provided courtesy of Fady Tabbara, Global TV
Information courtesy of CBC Resource Library

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based upon the above observations, it appears that stereotyping has been so pervasive – whether in society generally or media more specifically – that many people (including North American Muslims) believe that a large extent of the problem lies with the people “over there” – that is, in “Muslim countries” – rather than with the cycle of stereotypical imagery. This is not to say that problems do not exist in other parts of the world, just as they do here. Violations of human rights can be perpetrated by persons having a Muslim identity as much as by those having another religious identity – whether Jewish, Hindu, or Christian. However, the vilification of Muslims exceeds any other form of representation, just as the religious identity itself often supersedes any other aspects of the identity of a person who happens to be Muslim.

As noted by Darren Gowlett, the bulk of coverage of Muslims is foreign, and from sources which are not Canadian, hence making it much more difficult to implement changes. Simultaneously, there is minimal coverage of Muslim Canadians, hence emphasizing the “Otherness” of Muslims for other Canadians. For this reason, it is crucial to raise the profile of Muslim Canadians, particularly women, in Canadian mainstream media. This includes coverage specifically about Muslims as well as other news coverage. Fostering media relations in this manner also means building media skills in the community, particularly building more trust between mainstream media and Muslim women. As the focus group discussions indicated, at the moment this relationship is quite fragile.

Some tentative suggestions can be made for future action for Muslim women to take:

- . Media literacy, analysis and media relations skills for Muslim Canadian women, particularly young women, to allow for a more in-depth and critical look at how the media portrays Muslim women
- . Greater exposure to media of activities, events and individual accomplishments of Muslim women
- . Production of informative material on Islam/Muslim women for the media
- . Encouragement of journalism as a profession for Muslim women
- . Dialogue with journalism schools in regards to course content (sensitivity to the portrayal) and journalistic practices
6. Working with other organizations to promote positive relations with media
7. Educating and mobilizing the community at large in responding to media messages

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These journalists call for a more open, critical and responsible practice of journalism - to examine one's motives and techniques; as well as recognition of subjectivity, which can increase access and understanding of the story. It is also noted that minorities have less than 11% of newsroom jobs; in journalism schools, 2% of faculty members are people of colour.

Grange, Hamlin. "Here's the News", Currents, Summer 1984, p10

Grange advises that the media should be approached during "good" times to establish meetings with editorial boards or to form advisory groups, rather than when we need to deal with a crisis; also, rather than depending on friends in media we should engage in dialogue with those we see as opposed to our views, before a "crisis".

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Henry, Frances "Racist Discourse and the Media", Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants (OCASI) newsletter, Spring 1997, p4

Henry argues that though the media is supposed to be neutral and "democratic" it instead reproduces racist discourse through its employees, the social construction of groups, negative stereotypes, the racialization of issues in editorials and features, and linguistic and semantic styles and conventions. While racism itself is not caused by the media it does reinforce it and legitimizes forces of power.

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This is an easy to follow book that critically analyses the media by examining its structure (ownership, advertising) as well as giving listings, examples and descriptions of "media buzzwords", and analyses the use of headlines and language. A postscript includes helpful suggestions on activism and how to overcome specific challenges.

Rees, Phil. Worlds Apart New Statesman, Aug. 1/97 (32-34)

This article notes that there is anger, hostility and distrust between many Muslims and the media due to several incidents that demonize Islam. Recent events in the Muslim world, but also the fall of Communism and the desire to find a new threat to capitalism are possible factors. Thus there are reports of "Muslim extremists" in Algeria, yet the media doesn't acknowledge that the military overthrew a democratically elected party (33). Rees makes the little noted observation that even the left seems unwilling to address the roots of militant Islam, and focuses on issues "where Islam appears oppressive, such as women's rights and literary freedoms". It ignores that "Islam" has grown as a reaction to imperialism, with social justice as its concern - a protest movement replacing socialism as the voice of the poor (33).

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Van Dijk, Teun A. Racism and the Press: Critical Studies in Racism and Migration, London: Routledge, 1991

Van Dijk stresses that we must ask some critical questions about the press coverage of minorities- why is the topic newsworthy? Why is so much or so little attention given to it? Does it challenge or maintain stereotypes? Who is able to speak? Whose interests and perspective are defended? Structures of news are such that elite groups have access through press releases, strategic leaks, personal contacts, and financial incentives. Elements to examine are headlines, topics, structure (who is the first to speak), quotations (who are the major and minor actors? How often are they quoted? What are the topics they are quoted on?), underlying meanings (presuppositions, vagueness and semantic strategies) and rhetoric.

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APPENDIX A: FOCUS GROUP RESULTS

INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY:

The results that follow are based on three different focus group sessions held in February and March of 1998. Participants were recruited through contact persons in the Muslim community in Toronto. Every effort was made to include diversity in age, sect, and cultural background. The sample was limited to the Greater Toronto Area .

There were 25 participants in total: ten in the first session, and six each in the remaining two. There was a fourth session, but because only three women attended the results from that session were only used as a supplement to the other three. There were also two facilitators, each of whom led two sessions. The sessions were tape recorded with the consent of participants

The majority of participants were in the 25-44 age category, with the remainder split between 16-24 and 45-64. None were 65 or over. Nearly all are Canadian citizens, but the majority was not born in Canada. In terms of education, half were at or had completed the post secondary level, and nearly half were at the post graduate level. One third were of South Asian origin, while the remainder were of various backgrounds including West Indian and East African. Three quarters were Sunni Muslims, the others Shi'a Muslim. Most participants were either employed full time or students, but represented a wide range of income levels from under \$ 20 000 to over \$100 000

The questions used were formed in consultation with Dr. Fred Fletcher, from the Departments of Political Science and Communications at York University and Yasmin Zine, a Ph.D candidate in the Sociology of Education at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto. The questions were then finalized by the advisory committee for this project. Since the full transcripts from the sessions would be too lengthy to include, what is presented here is a selection of comments that reflect the range in viewpoints. Each paragraph represents a new person or new comment. Finally, as evident below, the discussion focuses on news and information programming in both print and broadcast media.

QUESTIONS

1. We are interested in knowing about your use of the media. How many of you read a newspaper regularly? [show of hands] Which ones? Why? How many watch a TV (news or information) program or listen to radio (news or information shows) regularly? Which ones? Why? Which source do you like the best? Why?

Summary of responses:

- About half the participants read a newspaper regularly.
- The breadth of coverage - that it be both local and global - was important, as well as the depth in the participants' selection of media sources.
- Participants based their choice of media source partly on the sources' inclusion of ethnic communities, and on the sources' political standpoints
- A significant majority (about 80%) watched TV regularly.
- Radio was mentioned less frequently.

- Some participants mentioned that at times they would watch news with the intent of seeing how Muslims are covered, for themselves and also for their children, to try and assess how the report might impact the broader community's image of Islam/Muslims, and so to be able to use their insights as a "critical tool" in opposing negative stereotyping
- Some participants felt that the internet should have been included in the discussion.

Sample comments:

I'm a history student, and for the daily news coverage, the *Globe & Mail* is what's recommended.

Probably the 24 hour news channels, *CNN*, *CBC* [*Canadian Broadcasting Corporation*], because there are so many of them now. I like to watch them to get their perspective to see what they say about an issue, though I may not agree with it, it's kind of good to know.

For regular news, 6 o'clock news I prefer to watch *City T.V.* because I feel that they address the cultural issues. Other than that, it is generally *CBC*.

I read the local newspaper, and if I want to find out what is going on, I look at the news to find the global issues, but in terms of reading the newspaper, I just read the community newspapers.

I will buy a paper, if I find, hear something interesting, but I don't read it every day, and I also get *Time Magazine* and read publications in the Muslim community

The *Toronto Star* for me provides enough local coverage, but it also provides enough international coverage. The *Globe* [and *Mail*] is good, but I would access the *Toronto Star* before that, simply because of its local nature. The same thing for television. It is simply the quality of television, and what you are looking at. If I were watching the *CBC* for news, it would probably be because I was getting the national and local news coverage, and a somewhat in-depth coverage of the issues. Whereas with *City [TV]*, if I wanted to quickly know what was happening, I would flip to it for two minutes, type of thing. So I would say that I am looking at reporting that is, more or less, left of the centre is probably the best way I would describe it. I don't know if I would define *CBC* that way...but, I am sorry, I wouldn't listen to *CFRB*, because every time I would turn that on, I would, 'Aw, I'm listening to some right-wing, you know racist, sexist individual mouthing off, and that would turn me off. The same thing with the [*Toronto*] *Sun*. I would not pick it up - even when Christie Blatchford was writing good articles in the *Sun* about teachers, someone would have to put it in front of my face for me to read it

I think that it is important to read [*the Sun*], from time to time, so that you know what is happening. I think that is my major reason for reading the papers, I think that those are the two things that most people read, within the Toronto area, so I'm reading what other people are reading, and if it is negative, or positive, or whatever, you can also say something about it. I watch probably they same TV stations that you do, because it is local and national, but I also like to watch *City*, because I find that it covers more of the ethnic...

The one thing about *City*, is that it's always been on the cutting edge, they have always been one of the leaders in hiring minorities

I don't think that I myself watch a lot of *CFMT*, but sometimes when I am flipping through, there is something interesting that might catch my interest. I find that I watch a lot of *CNN* and *CTV* as well as the *BBC*, just because I feel that I get a lot more of an international perspective, in general

When we read newspapers or watch TV it obviously depends on what we are looking for. I do read, I think to everyone's surprise, sometimes, the *Sun*, because I do think the editorials, especially by Eric Margolis are extremely well presented. Certainly our point of view, because we are minorities, don't get discussed in a balanced way, and that's why I think that we can't write off the *Sun* completely, because it is part of my reading.... and *CNN*, that is one. Again because of international news. As far as the *Star* goes and the *Globe & Mail*. I think [the] *Star* has basically gone through certain changes. I find that it was very informative, once-upon-a-time, but I think that the focus has shifted... I think the *Globe & Mail* now is basically coming from my perspective, providing a more comprehensive news, not only about the world, but the local also, you know both.

2. In general, how do you feel about the coverage of Muslim women in newspapers? On TV? Radio? Let's identify some of the good and bad points of the coverage. In what ways is it/ is it not accurate?

Summary of responses:

- It was felt that the coverage is largely negative and inaccurate, even when based on the best of intentions. Evidence for this conclusion included:
 1. The adjectives used, which tend to define Muslim women as submissive, victims, etc.
 2. The confusion of cultural elements with religious elements
 3. A narrow focus upon particular issues, events or more sensational elements
 4. Generalization of the religion based on specific cases that usually cast a negative image of the religion
 5. A limited understanding of the religion
 6. Selection of certain viewpoints: e.g. anti-hijab; others were often edited out if they diverged from a certain viewpoint, or were asked closed questions or given shorter segments
 7. The association of Islam with violence

- Several pointed out that there was positive coverage occasionally and that the coverage had improved. For example:
 1. Feature articles which focused on Muslims in the community - lifestyle, community work
 2. Acknowledgement and/or coverage of Muslim events and holidays

Sample comments:

If you look at the coverage of the Taliban, you see that ‘Women are suppressed to the point that they have to cover! Let’s get NGOs in there, lets fix up the situation’. But in Turkey, ‘Oh women are not allowed to cover their heads.’ - That’s all that they report. It’s not, ‘Oh this is an affront to human dignity, this is something that we should have NGOs to go in...’

Raheel Raza did a couple of articles on Ramadan, and then did another one on, in *Condo Living*, about a woman from Pakistan...she tells me that the more people call in and say ‘I really like this article’ the more chances of her being able to get more articles in. Her thrust is to show the diversity within Islam, and also how peace-loving a religion it really is.

I think what it comes down to... is that we are living in a country that is not Islamic, and the fact that we are getting this much recognition now is good. Because if you look 15 or 20 years back, people did not know what Muslims were. You could not go out dressed in a hijab, or everyone would stare at you. ...So slowly, because more Muslims have come to this country, and they have come from all over, there is more recognition towards Islam, maybe in another five or ten years, you would get even more coverage.

The adjectives used to describe Muslim women are strictly our external garb, it is the most annoying thing that I have ever come across. We don’t describe our women here, what they are wearing, they could even take their bra off, and that’s fine, this is our culture... Then why do you then define [by clothing] any other woman who happens to be wearing a longer dress, or covering the outside of her head!

The forms that [media] use to objectify woman, like using metaphors, like the veil, becomes a metaphor that is used to stand in for the women’s identity, because that embodies all sorts of negative meanings, that they are oppressed, backward, living in a misogynist society. So you, therefore, erase the reality of these women, and replace it with this metaphor that is embodied in the veil, for example. So there is a lot of what of what I call ‘literary violence’, in the way that we are portrayed...And we really need to start to attend to just even the style - how you talk about travel, for example, you see these wonderful exotic things, you are framed in this exotic context, you are not seen as agents existing in modern society, and working and having a life. You are seen as this very exotic component of something foreign.

I think that [what] is particular about the media, is that they separate out the ‘Muslim woman’, you never hear about the ‘Christian woman’ or the ‘Jewish woman’.

I think the reason why we have a lot of views stating, that ‘we are sort of feeling sympathetic to Muslim women, because they are oppressed, they don’t have a say in their daily lives, I think that this is due to the fact that a large [amount] of the media’s perspective comes from Saudi Arabia, as one of the hugest population of Islam and the power structure of it, and the huge investment of the US in Saudi Arabia. So the biggest perception of American society, is that they have rules that condemn them to do with anything to do with their lives, you know, driving, etc.

[Media] tends to sensationalize. They go to Saudi Arabia, or did anyone see Diane Sawyer go to Afghanistan... they tend to find the dissidents always, the women who are unhappy... there is this search for what is disreputable in these societies.

A couple of things, I think one thing is, the media will take whatever they want from what people say, generally. The second one is, the large reason we are portrayed, partly has to do with the way that we work within our own communities,... here we tend to perpetuate in many ways, the images that the media get. I think that it is still very much a gender issue, yes, there are some women in the media, but the percentage of power is still very male... so I think that a lot of time what we are seeing is male power.

The diversity is here, whether we like it or we don't, among ourselves and among everybody else. Media has to look at it objectively, and give us news that is relevant to another person reading it. And it is not relevant to them whether I...am wearing my hijab or not, or do I have nothing on... - so if they are doing news about me, they should say, 'she is doing this', or 'she is saying that' ... - I think that is what the crux of the issue in my mind. Now they do not do long intensive articles on Islam and say, these are the principles of Islam, and this is how it is from the Qur'an. Nobody knows that... if they say, well this is what is happening to the women, then you have a context, from which you can then look at it.

Yeah, and the way they sometimes talk about Muslim women in those countries, as something very exotic, mysterious, something that you would dream about in *Arabian Nights*, or whatever, 'dark-eyed women peering behind gauzy veils' or whatever, you know and 'the gloomy winding streets' or whatever. I suppose that is just an effort to try to sell the tourism aspect of the country, but I've noticed that on occasion.

There are many times that the coverage by the media is stereotypical, and that unnecessarily at times, it identifies someone as a Muslim.

I was just going to say, that I saw a positive article written about Muslims, I mean I read it that way. It was about the Taliban, written in *Homemakers*[Magazine], last spring, and I remember them saying, this is not based on religion, but it was based on this Taliban interpretation of Islam, and because of that article they got a lot of momentum going to do something for the woman there. I think that a lot of times, we complain about the media, and I am not saying that they are right, ... but sometimes they bring to the attention, that we as Muslims, don't do anything about [it] either.

I did write to Sally Armstrong [editor of *Homemakers*] she went to Afghanistan and wrote this marvelous article. There were a lot of issues, I had a lot of issues with her. Every letter, which came in, they didn't say, that 'It was the Taliban who didn't believe in Islam,' every letter said, 'It happened because they were Muslim what is happening to the women... and do you know how many letters they have accumulated?!

What we need to look at is, is how we are being portrayed... And I do happen to possess a faith that they need to either clarify, like our friend [Sally] Armstrong here, or come to me. They say

'Look the Talibans are doing these awful things, and this is your Islam?' - What the Talibans are doing is, we don't know what they are doing. All we know is that the media tells us that the women are being oppressed. Homemaker [magazine] tells us! If I haven't been there, or been doing investigative journalism, and I haven't got a clue about what they are doing. I cannot at this point tell you what kind of Islam they are practicing, as a Canadian I am very ignorant about that.

I don't think that the various media they really have a clear understanding of the religion... I think it was *Eye*, and it had a horrible article on Muslim woman. What they were talking about was on women's rights all over the world... and this was from a quote 'progressive magazine' and I wasn't surprised, I am just saying, that ... they had a Muslim woman actually writing one of the articles, and of course it was this Western woman who was anti-hijab, and so if they do have Muslims that they put out there who tend to be progressive, they don't really understand the issues, and they tend to support the stereotypes.

When it comes to Muslim women I still feel marginalized, even if factually they are telling the truth...the ignorance of the reporter or broadcaster... sort of shows through. Sometimes even they way the pronounce the word Muslim, they say 'MOSE-lem', just little things like that make me feel marginalized, as if this person doesn't have a real understanding - Islam is not just one thing, you can't take the situation of women living in one country, where they might be living under an oppressive government and generalize it for all Muslim women in the entire world, but yes they do generalize, and because they don't have a deep understanding of the whole issue... And when it is over you say well 'at least they didn't say anything too terrible

There are always articles on women, basically, girls, in Middle-Eastern countries, that are in hijab, against their will, forced to do, what not. they are always portrayed as a form of oppression, which is totally wrong, because you don't have to show your body in order to get recognition....

There's sort of a paradoxical image of Muslim women, those Muslim women that they are showing, there are usually covered in from head-to-toe in black, but they are yelling protests, 'kill Clinton' or 'death to America' or whatever, so there is this image that they have of Muslim women of being so oppressed and beaten down and down-trodden, but here they are in the street yelling at the top of their lungs to fight, fight, fight...

3.a) When was the last time you saw someone like yourself [a Muslim woman], whom you could identify with, in a media report. Was this a Muslim Canadian, or a Muslim elsewhere?

**b) Did you think the report was:
fair/unfair;
accurate/inaccurate?
positive/negative;**

**(Each person should address each of these, and discuss reasons)
(if they thought it was negative:)**

Can you recall a positive report about Muslim women? Discuss.

(if they thought it was positive:)

Can you recall a negative report about Muslim women? Discuss.

Summary of responses:

- Most women could not identify very deeply with most coverage, either due to the issue of hijab [because the hijab is portrayed negatively whereas they feel positive about hijab, or because they don't cover and Muslim women were always presented as veiled] or to cultural differences
- Some positive reports were recalled. These were mostly in alternative media (radio and TV), in relation to community groups or events
- Most reports were seen as unfair because often important elements would be edited out.
- There was also a sense of unfairness because the most extreme cases were shown
- Working women, particularly those who wear hijab, felt that women are not shown in their roles outside the home often enough

Sample comments:

I think the portrayals are 'from beyond Canada', because I think that people haven't opened their eyes enough to see that Muslims come from all walks of life from all parts of Canada, from all countries, different backgrounds...I think that the ones that are most harshly viewed, are the ones that are going to be portrayed on TV. - that is what I was getting back to, like the Taliban, or with Saudi Arabia,...

[...] really comes to mind, she is a lawyer in Pakistan and... she feels that she is speaking for a lot of oppressed Muslim women she gives interviews on the CBC, 'As it Happens', because CBC now knows that there is a woman in Pakistan who can speak English, and can speak against any establishment, it doesn't matter if it is Islamic or secular, or whatever...So she is speaking, and I don't feel that I can identify with her, because, one she is speaking anti-Mullah, anti-establishment, and also she doesn't understand Islam, she is saying things about Islam that I don't think she knows...

I haven't really identified with anybody either, if I have it is not 100 per cent, it is maybe one aspect or one facet that touched a chord in me. Perhaps I feel the opposite of [...] because, I find that people on TV don't wear hijab, and in that sense I don't feel the identification with them. And sometimes the ones that do wear hijab, there may be differences, so that I am not on a 100 per cent wave length with that person. They may be in a different school of thought, or coming from a different angle. I think again they make it into an ethnic pigeon hole, and make it a cultural thing, and obviously I don't carry that baggage, but then again if they are presenting it as a 'Pakistani thing' or an 'Arab thing' I feel excluded from that as well. I can't go to an individual and say, 'Yes, I identify with her'... I don't think that has ever happened.

I think that the alternative radio stations, the *U of T* [University of Toronto] station, and... 88.1, which I think is a community radio station, they, they have some interesting shows which are

hosted sometimes by Muslim women. But if you don't know the radio schedule, or whatever, it is sometimes by chance that you should just happen to fall upon them, and some are okay, and some of them are the same thing where the journalists will bring in their biases. Where they will go interview a person to specifically ask them, 'so what's your trouble?' instead of 'what good things are you doing, what kind of community building are you doing?'

I know I don't remember seeing - I mean you sometimes see a Muslim's name - but I never remembered seeing a woman in hijab, on TV.

I say as a Palestinian Muslim student, or woman, I guess I haven't seen anything on T.V. that I can relate very deeply with.

4. Do you see Muslim women in your local community portrayed? How often?

Summary of responses:

- Most were able to recall local coverage in the past year - some felt it is still limited and others felt that it has improved greatly
- The majority of local coverage was in alternative or community media

Sample comments:

A couple of times I have been asked [by journalists], well I have been looking for a White convert to Islam, and I will refuse to do it. and generally there is a person who is Muslim who will ask me that. They will say that they are doing a talk show, or documentary or something...So I don't see myself portrayed very much, unless it tends to be me.

Recently there was an article published in the *Toronto Star*, by a young lady, who happens to be one of our youth, and she did a good job of explaining that hijab was a women's choice.

I was just going to say just a view weeks ago, I saw a program on Reflections of Islam, and they had a sister from Erindale College from U of T [University of Toronto], and she was on it talking about the MSA [Muslim Students' Association], and a bit of her personal life. And what I thought was interesting how, that they didn't get a brother, ...I thought that it would be good, because a lot of Muslim women are considered to be shy and quiet, and they don't speak up...I talked to her, and I go, 'Well it was good to see you on the program, because a lot of the sisters can identify with you' - because she mentioned about her studies, which is science, and right now you see more Muslim women getting into the science fields. But before that, I don't think that I would see a Muslim sister on a show like that, and even if you did, they would be talking about the MSA, they would be talking about 'women in Islam' and I think that sometimes that topic gets overplayed, you expect it to be talked about every time you turn on the T.V. And thought it was good that they deviated from it, so you could hear about a student's life, about the MSA and how sisters are involved, but not only sisters.

I guess I would agree with everyone else that the representation that we see of Muslim women locally again, is very partial, it's limited, it's very stereotyped. You do see some examples of

women coming out and representing another view of their lifestyle, and so on. I think that the foreign representation is a little more essentialized, I think that when they look at Muslim women in other countries, it tends to be in a more backwards kind of way. We don't see as much of the diversity of experience, abroad. And I think that a lot of women who are doing something, who are working or in the academic world, we do get called upon. As [...] was saying, to come and be the role models, and to come and represent Islam, and that is where I disagree with [...] at one point, when you say that you don't like to be the representative of the convert Muslim. I sometimes feel politically that we have to take up, because we do come from different locations, as you pointed out.

You asked about seeing your own culture or whatever. I don't really see that represented so much, but I do see myself, represented as a Muslim women more than I ever have before. And every time I see someone who is a woman who Muslim speaking, I say 'Great! There's a woman and she is Muslim.' And every time someone asks me if I know anybody who can speak, I will suggest a Muslim woman...I think that the voice of women need to be heard. And if someone comes to be and says... 'You are Muslim, will you sit on this or that' and I say 'Yes.'

I find that in Markham [Ontario], that most of the coverage of cultural issues, Muslim or otherwise is focused on the children. So we'll see a lot of young girls of different diverse faith backgrounds, but they will never look at adult issues.

In the *Scarborough Mirror*, a couple of times, they have covered a science fair or something, and they will maybe have a Muslim girl wearing hijab, just in one of the photographs.

5. When you think of the coverage in the media, what aspects of your own identity are represented? Which aspects are not? (culture/sect/personal situation/professional lives, extracurricular/volunteer activities)

Summary of aspects which are represented:

- These included the most frequently stereotyped aspects of Islam ie. Islam as a violent religion that oppresses women, terrorism, the veil as oppressive, Islam as medieval, backward, Muslims as poor, stupid, not democratic

Sample of comments:

The hijab...Muslim women with abusive husbands, that is always represented too.

Polygamy

I think also the impoverishment.

And on the other hand Muslims in general in the Middle-East being oil barons, and very wealthy. They don't know what they want us to look like, I think.

Summary of aspects which are not represented:

- Professional and volunteer roles
- Choice of and belief in Islam
- New Muslims (those who have converted)

Sample comments:

Muslim women in roles, like the Muslim women who are doctors, teachers, you know everything, we don't really see that, again just the stereotype of the Muslim woman in the home, which is fine but, there is - it would be good for the West, which is so about the career, to show the women in these different fields.

I really feel that there is a lack of focus on the positive work that Muslim women do. There is a community that I work in right now through school, which is out at Jane and Wilson. There is a very high Muslim population there. Because government services aren't there, the women have been taking care of themselves... it is never on the news, the great programs that they have managed to come up with in community development, and how they are pushing their community forward

Muslim women are being shown as chattels, with no mind of their own, or the intelligence of Muslim women is not being shown on T.V... Many of the Muslim women that I know are very educated, very knowledgeable, not just about Islam...and are not just following a blind faith either. It is something that they have chosen; I think too, that the sisterhood of Muslim women is not being shown, the incredibly strong support systems that we forge for ourselves, we are often shown as isolated, or also, once again there is this paradox, we are seen as part of this paradox, being part of this harem, with one man.

Why can't someone come and ask me, like 'what is the best way to compost?'. You know, why can't we know about those things? - Why can't we have an opinion about Free Trade

I don't think, I didn't really feel that that [they showed] I guess, the international diversity of Islam they focus on certain communities, like now Kashmir is really big so people know what is going on there

I've never seen it shown, the fact that someone could actually choose leave a religion like Christianity, choose to convert to Islam. So often the Muslims they show on T.V. people...assume that you have to be born into Islam, and that's it. They believe that it is an exclusionary religion, that you have from a certain country, a certain culture

I am not sure that I can separate myself, - that I am a woman, I am a professional, and I am this, - I just happen to have one simple identity, I am Muslim. So if they write about Taliban, if they write about this, they write about Saudis, it bothers me, it hurts me, because I don't go into analysis, or whether they are profoundly Islamic, or Muslims or not, or they write about Palestinians, or they write about everyone. As a Muslim, I identify myself with Islam, okay. For other people, they don't understand what Islam is, fine, we need to educate. And that is what I

would like to be seen, I being represented, as a Muslim woman...And I think by this, I would like the media to portray my religion in a positive way so that I can identify with this, because this is what my religion is.

If they are doing a report on converts, that touches on part of what I am. But then again, they may focus on converts who have gone through a different school of thought in a different sect, which doesn't reflect who I am [laughter]... for example in Britain a lot of Muslims go in for [Sufism], but I am not into that at all.

I think about personal situations, - I think that they always portray Muslim women at home having lots of children [laughter], and that's... well I'm at home with a baby, but...

Let's put a positive spin on it! Volunteer activity? - I don't think that they ever talk about the kind of stuff that I do, which is going into my kids school with the PTA and things - it's very small and individual - just what I can do in my little corner of the world. I don't think that is talked about

I have not seen educated Muslim women being represented in the media, I have not seen working Muslim women represented as much in the media. I have not seen Muslim women, who may not... - look like Muslim women, because they are not wearing that special way of dressing, but they are Muslim inside, so that is not being... So they only look for an image, and they keep to that image...

I did notice that Islam is not represented, in general, probably the way it should be. All those things go under the banner of Islam. Why is it that something like Hajj, which is the largest gathering of people anywhere, Muslim or non-Muslim, a peaceful gathering is never ever shown and is never talked about? even if you are represented, it doesn't matter if you are represented, if you are not represented properly! But it doesn't bother me that I am not personally portrayed. It bothers me that the religion itself is not portrayed properly. I don't care if no one wants to listen to a Muslim student and her life

I just wanted to say that it is the media who is what renders Muslim women invisible and voiceless. Just to go back in terms of my identity. For example, when they show Muslim women, they never ask why they would choose to do that, especially when they choose to do this. This is the sign of my liberation. This is my 'badge of honour', and it is a symbol that I am not a tool of pleasure for every Tom, Dick and Harry that I meet on the street, and that is how Muslim women should be portrayed, if at all portrayed. And it is not about Muslims, it is about Islam in general. And Islam is what makes up our identities, even if those identities are not portrayed. So that's okay even if they showed us going to university, is that more important? - or that we choose to cover and then go to university? You know, to them that's an oxymoron, so then how does it play out?

6. Does this coverage (positive or negative) affect your own self-image? Does it affect the attitudes of others? In what ways? Does it affect their behaviour? In what ways? (work; friends; school; strangers) [specifically: personal experiences- if media coverage affected them personally]

Impact on self-image:

- Nearly all saw the coverage as affecting them in a positive way, by strengthening them from within.
- Having to constantly disprove media stereotypes carried a burden of responsibility - many spoke of always having to be "on guard", or of being a representative of their faith to others
- Some women were left with doubts about hijab, and about themselves.

Attitudes of others:

- Participants felt that the media had a significant impact on the behaviour of others. Some indicated that the connection between the two was evident by the homogeneity of people's responses to them - why would people have the same ideas and images of Muslim women, unless they were socialized that way.

Behaviour of others:

This included both positive and negative responses. There were many more of the latter.

Sample comments:

I don't think that I let it affect my self image, as such. I don't think that I need the media to validate me as a Muslim woman. But having said that, it would be good to see more positive representation of Muslim women in the media, but I don't think that I need it. I'm not dependent on that.

I had a personal experience where I attended a public forum, where [Taslina Nasrin, the Bangladeshi feminist] was speaking...I was one of three women in hijab. Then that weekend Michelle Landsburg wrote an article [in the *Toronto Star*], and she labeled me a fanatic. she didn't know anything about me, but she was ready to hurt me, because of the way I dressed, and associate me with a certain group of negative people.

And then having been brought up in Canada, I can think of many experiences where people have said things to me because of hijab, or questioning or that kind of thing, and I all can I say is that I've grown, that I'm unusual and people will ask me questions and it's to how I deal with the way people ask me questions and how I present myself. That's the image that they walk away with. So I have come to own my identity, and how I look, and to take responsibility for how I then allow people to think of me personally.

I went to orientations before I started to wear hijab, and people would talk to me. Actually a week after I started to wear the hijab I went to an orientation session with 100 other Americans and no one would talk to me. Not one person would talk to me! I would go up to people and say hello, and they would walk away. They would literally walk away. I turned to someone, who was Indian, and I asked, 'What is going on here?' and she said, 'They think you are a fanatical nun!' ...I was so shocked. I had people curse at me, I had people spit at me those things I do mind... Those things that I don't mind though, are when people come up to me and ask me stupid questions, but at least they're asking, and it provides me with the opportunity to explain myself.

I think the problem is with Canadian society putting out prejudiced ideas, I'm sure for you growing up, I mean, I know so many of my friends who say that they were made fun of. I mean and where are these kids getting it from, they are getting from their parents and the media - so the media, basically, is creating these stereotypes which filter down to our children, who if they are watching TV, they believe everything so...

In the media, culture is many time mistaken for religion, it may be cultural, but they say Muslims are doing it, so it must be Islam...

If you read the *Globe & Mail* and listen to the *CBC* or whatever, there is an absence of coverage about Muslim women, and the consequence of that is that you get coverage of Muslim men who are portrayed as violent, so the conclusion of that would be that Muslim women are victims of that violence, and quiet victims that you never hear from. Our voices are not there.

As an undergrad student, I remember taking a course in anthropology, I remember raising my hand in class and saying to the professor that I disagreed with the way that he was portraying jihad, and later on he said to me, 'You know I was really surprised when you spoke up in class, because I thought that you would be shy and demure'. [laughter]. I ruptured that stereotype, permanently, I hope [laughter]... You start to realize that you are evaluated on the basis of how the media portrays Muslim women - their common portrayal of Muslim women as somehow being reticent, you know, very quiet, and not outspoken, not having agency and so on. It doesn't happen very often, but it did in that instance. I know also in doing research on Muslim students in the public schools, one of the phenomena, that happens around Muslim girls wearing hijab, they often get low expectations from teachers who, because of reports, the Taliban for example closing down schools for woman, that therefore, Islam does not value education for women. Therefore we don't need to promote these girls, let them take the General Level courses, this is a process of streaming, what they call, 'colour-coded streaming' ...One other point as people are starting to become more aware of Islam, I am dealing with people, for example men, who sometimes you are introduced to people and you don't know what to do with your hands, because you don't want to shake hands with them...it's always appreciated when someone realizes that and step back and does not extend their hand, because they are aware. I have had it happen, more often lately, and they are aware of the distance. I have even had men lower their gaze when they speak to me, when they are non-Muslim. And I don't know if that represents an innate awareness of that the hijab represents modesty [laughter], or it might be that they are culturally savvy enough to realize that they shouldn't be staring at you. So in terms of conducting yourself according to Islam in a non-Muslim society, the implications of the media are both positive, and negative in that way. And when there is more awareness, when there is

more positive media, then it makes it, that much more easier for us to negotiate our existence

I had two young girls come in, they are both sisters, ...and they were looking for employment. So one applies, and she doesn't wear the hijab, and one applied the same job, and she had a hijab...So guess who got the job? And they said to [the other sister]... 'The way you dress up, you know, the clients come here, people, and we will get, you know, they will complain.' But she is fluent [in English], she is born here!... she is traumatized, she doesn't know what to do, she has doubts about herself, she has doubts about her hijab, and now you are sitting here, and you are trying to help her out, and to work out this feeling, and to try to make her look at the job opportunity from a different point of view! The girl has no confidence! She has no self-esteem, she has no confidence anymore!

When I did work in the summer last year, there were a few people who did ask me, 'Why do you wear this?' - and what not. And there were a lot of people who thought it was a form of suppression, 'Why do women have to cover? - You know, you are in Canada, and you have equal rights'. Again they are thinking that in Islam, or back home, you don't have equal rights, and they think that - so called ignorant people wear this, that people in the villages wear this. Again it is totally misrepresented, they don't understand why women cover. I guess again, by the media it is always portrayed in a negative way. Strangers always, they always ask, but not always, I guess it depends. Sometimes if they are really, really curious then they come and ask 'Why do you wear that?' - and some people will agree, but some people are just curious. And the thing is that non-Muslims that are curious as to why a Muslim does wear this, when they get a response from a person who does wear it, they are a bit surprised.

In the beginning their behaviour is more reserved, they don't want to talk to you too much or converse, but when they get to know you, they realized that a Muslim woman can be intelligent and capable of doing many things, even though she is covered.

I am just going to talk about my experience after I started covering my face. I did through high school. Does it affect the attitude of others? - Yes. People think that I am an immigrant, or from Saudi Arabia, they can't believe that I was born in Canada, and brought up here. Their attitudes, it does affect their attitudes, people here are very rude, and didn't realize that until I started covering my face, until later on. I realized that 'Oh my God! - Canada is not as multicultural as it hopes to be'. A lot of times they will yell out comments like, 'Ninja!', 'Terrorist!' - A lot of the times, they will make the sign of the cross against you, like I'm a Satan...When you go to an office or something, they don't think that you have a brain...That's not to say that everybody is like that (alhumdulillah) [thanks be to God]. There are a ...very discernible minority...there is a difference between somebody saying, - 'Why the hell do you wear that?!' - and to somebody who is just wondering why you wear that. There are some people who ask in a very rude way, in that case, they don't deserve a polite response. And some people are nice, they ask in a polite way, 'You know, why do you wear that?' - 'Where were you born? - Where are you from?' - in those situation, yeah, I do answer nicely, it's made me to the point, that I don't expect good behaviour from people on the first shot. I expect them to react in a weird way.

I think that I am an anomaly, [...], you know this from past conversation. Because I haven't really had any bad experiences, like with anything, not hijab or like , Islam or being Muslim, I

think that I am really lucky that way...If anything, I would meet people, and afterwards they would say, 'I didn't know this about Islam,' or 'I didn't know that people wear hijab by choice,' or 'I saw this happening on T.V. and what do you think?' - But it never came down to me personally, that rude, but maybe it is just the kind of people I have met, I do meet.

The media is responsible for our socialization. And a lot of people have the same image, like you [...]said, why would they all have same images, unless they have been socialized that way - that 'ninjas cover their faces,' and 'terrorists cover their faces'.

In the Gulf War, when they were telling everybody that Iraq is bad, and people see images on TV of Iraqis, but they transfer that to all the Muslims, because they see women seeing head scarves and so on, and I was told that in Canada, I wasn't here at the time, that in high school, that some our relatives who were wearing hijab in high school had a very bad time from other kids in the school, because of the atmosphere. I was in Britain at the time, and I was scared to go out alone. In fact at the time if I wanted to go out, I went with a Christian neighbour, I didn't dare go out on my own, because there was a lot of racism in the city that I was living in,

There are people, who when they meet someone like me ask very intelligent questions. I've been fortunate to meet quite a few people like that in the last few months, because I've been involved in the PTA in my children's school. I think that someone should be there to remind them that not everyone celebrates Christmas and so on. So, for people like that it makes them ask, it makes them curious, 'What is it with this Islam? - What is it with these Muslims'. So it could affect people in positive or negative ways, it depends on the person concerned.

I think, could I just add something, because you were say that books were biased and things like that. As students you get really influenced by what you read and what your teacher says. Because I remember when the Gulf war started I was in Grade 8: . Everything I was reading was so negative, and everything the teacher was telling us about Saddam Hussein was so negative, that in a way you start to question your own people, you go, 'Oh Muslim people, are they really like that? - How can they not feel, and just kill people?' - Again there is a lot of influence by what your teacher says, and by what you read. Because everything I used to read about Saddam Hussein was so negative. And at that age you are so young, your mind is so soft, you just believe, right. You can't make up your own mind, and you can't go in depth to understand each article very clearly, so you just believe what ever you read.

And I have to say that it has made me stronger, I mean like, all the people who have made comments, or stared at me made me a stronger person. ... it forces you to question who you are all the time. What does this mean? - why am I wearing this? - because you are 'out there', 'cause you are saying that you are proud to be Muslim, to me I think it is a commandment of the law, so you are [doing] *dawah* [spreading the news of Islam] just by... like I think that in my program, I am very vocal in my class. And I think even not talking about Islam, just seeing a woman in hijab in my program doing something that's maybe not traditional...

In my family, ...none of whom are Muslim, my cousins and parents and aunts and uncles and so on - their entire idea of Islam, before I came around anyways was shaped by *Not without my Daughter*, that movie, that one movie... in their minds explained all they ever need to know

about Islam, and when I became interested in Islam and started talking about it, all of the questions that they were asking me, were coming from that movie, and I have been spending so much time explaining about all the things in that movie that were not Islamic, that were specific to her relationship with her husband, and that country, in that particular time, and contrasting that with what Islam really is.

Well you represent the whole Muslim community, so whatever is happening in Afghanistan, ... it's like, 'Oh what are your people doing? [laugh] And I think that it comes back to a problem, that they cannot distinguish culture, from Islam

7. If you could influence the coverage, how would you like to see yourself portrayed? How would you like to see the Muslim women (in the community) portrayed?

Summary of responses:

- Participants said that they would like to see themselves shown as they are, to be recognized for the positive things they are doing.
- They would like Islam to be shown in a positive way so that they can identify with it, and for culture to be separated from Islamic beliefs.
- Some also felt it was important to show debate within Islam - that not everyone is the same - others wanted to focus on unified aspects of the faith and keep differences out of the mainstream gaze.

Sample comments:

As a Muslim woman with a mind of her own.

An educated, dignified Muslim woman.

If I owned my own TV station, or something like that, I would hire Muslim women to do the financial and political analysis on the news, and cover areas, where it is seen that Muslim women do not go near, even though I know Muslim women who are experts in those areas. - To have it be normal. Not for it to be a strange, new sort of the, 'Wow!' - have it be just regular. To see a Muslim woman in hijab, reporting on the news, a big fire over here, and blah, blah, blah, and just have it be, normal.

Just the same sort of idea that we are part of the mainstream environment too, that we can talk about the water, and the environment, you know, we are not alien from this culture, we are part of it.

Separating the culture from Islam. What the Taliban, is doing is not Islam... I saw a documentary about the Taliban and it was not making those separations. It was saying, 'This is what Islam does.'

To actually show some of the debate within Islam itself. You know, this isn't a 'great big entity', that we discuss our problems, and if necessary, we change them. you know it's not just that

everybody does the same thing that the Ayatollah says that they should, or that we don't think about our religion, our own faith.

It is not just focusing on the holidays, and not try just to focus on sensational things.

I feel that the positive things that women do, because the negative things are always portrayed. You could always say, that women are as strong as men, they can fight. But the first reaction is that anybody would have when they see that is, 'Oh my God! They are killers'. That's the first reaction. So instead of focusing on the negative things, they should focus on the positive things, because there are a lot of positive things, contributions, that women make, that Muslim women make in society, that you should make to that.

If they need to be portrayed at all, and obviously they need to be portrayed, then they should be portrayed as who they are. Straight up. In terms of most of us, we are all Canadian, born here, brought up here, going to university. And you know, especially, why do we do it? - Why do we cover up ourselves? To them it is a paradox, an oxymoron. They need to be told, 'No, it's not, it goes hand-in-hand'.

Take us as we are, and accept who we see ourselves. We don't see ourselves as oppressed, we don't see ourselves as down-trodden. We see ourselves as liberated by our religion. So why can't they accept that. That is not much to ask is it?

8. Do you feel that media coverage can be improved? How could it be improved:

- a. By the media? [publishers; editors; content; hiring; advisory groups;society]**
- b. Through community strategies? [In what ways can the Muslim community address the issue of media representation - discuss any initiatives you know of, or any strategies you would like to suggest]**

Summary of responses:

Everyone felt that the current coverage can and should be improved. The majority of the strategies suggested focused upon community initiatives rather than upon the media.

Areas for improvement within the media itself included:

- To give the foundation of the religion more analysis and research
- Journalistic responsibility and accountability
- Hire more Muslim journalists and editors: both for coverage and as role models
- Form an advisory or consultative committee for the media
- Liaison of mainstream media with Muslim papers
- To broaden the coverage: not necessarily to be covered only on "Muslim" topics or events
- Education and awareness by media of their biases: to reform their thinking about Islam
- To over accentuate the positive and show the diversity of women, and in different roles

Community strategies included:

- Develop Media relations - hold discussions with media, promote positive coverage, contact Muslims already in the media
- Participation in a media monitoring - either individually or through an agency
- Community involvement - Muslim and other - to be more visible, to understand mainstream "culture" and learn from other communities
- Build our media literacy skills - how media works and how to respond
- Encourage journalism as a profession in the community

Other suggestions:

- Use legal pressure
- Advertising: Since this is the main source of income we can boycott products.
- Improve our Islamic knowledge
- Alternative media: start our own media (thought some felt this would only segregate ourselves)

A minority felt that the coverage could not be improved fundamentally. This was due to their belief that the media is controlled by certain groups who would not allow the portrayal of Muslims to be positive

Sample comments:

Maybe meeting with the community, getting feed-back...meeting with the media and saying this is a deficiency, these are the things that we would like to see covered

I guess when the editors, when they are deciding what stories to do, I guess assigning stories that are not just about violence or impoverishment, but also about people going out and making contributions to their communities, those positive images. And, and, not just as a tokenism

I think that they would have to also lay a foundation of knowledge, and say well, 'This is what Islam is all about.' - and then they could bring in stories, after people have some awareness.

Maybe they could even be liaising with Muslim newspapers, so that they could get a stand-point about international, about the culture.

I think having shows with Muslim women, interviewing other Muslim women.

Talking about issues that aren't quote-unquote 'Muslim' .

Is there anything that we could do ourselves, that doesn't depend on people, because it seems to me that the people who are in charge of the newspapers and T.V., and so on, they need to change their fundamental way of thinking, because a lot of education needs to happen, and awareness and critical analysis around an issue needs to happen... before any sort of change in the representation of Muslim women happens, and probably we would have to decide where to go -

who do we talk to, to get these things changed, we need to go straight, probably to the people who actually make the decisions, or do we go to the people who actually do the front-line work. Who do we go to, to make those things happen? - or is there a way that we can produce our news program, or our own film, or our own radio program, or our own film, or news magazine, and get them 'out there', not just keeping them circulating amongst ourselves, as... wonderful as that is...How do we go about getting our own stuff 'out there', rather than waiting for them to put our stuff on their programs.

Our own media sources, our own media people, journalists. You know, working with the youth, I see many of them going into diverse fields, but so few going into journalism. And I think that we as a community, have to make it accessible and alright to them. We keep putting these standards, 'You have to become a doctor, a lawyer, an M.B.A, engineer.' - Where is 'journalist' where is 'publisher'?

We can raise our children to be aware, raise our children to critically analyze what they see on television, what they see in the newspapers, what they hear on the...if something is wrong, that they don't have to sit there and take it

Even if it means just writing a letter, writing that letter is actually a very empowering thing to do. To actually say, that 'I did not like what you wrote in your paper, this is not true, this is the truth' signed, whatever, and actually mailing it off. That is a very empowering thing to do, because they are the ones who are coming after us, and some of the changes that we would like to see happen, aren't going to happen, like this [snap of fingers]. They are going to take awhile. So the process has to continue, whatever we do has to continue to the next generation.

I think extending what [...], was saying, I think we need our media people to talk to us as well, to say this how you could approach different segments of the community, and get your word out, get your message out. To make sure that our community is not intimidated by, or hostile to the mainstream, media - that we have to work with them as well.

I guess part of it is that they have strategies too, even when they have community liaison, to say, 'I want to have a column in your paper too, not every 6 weeks, but every week' to have something out there, positive images, because it is going to be a long time - and in the different papers, so it is not going to be some token thing not just once in the while.

I think that Muslim people should be able to represent Islam rather than non-Muslims. The articles that you read in the newspapers, they are all written by non-Muslims.

They should invite very knowledgeable scholars about Islam, because they know about politics, and the history, and have speaking sessions and videotape them. And invite media too, ask them to cover that kind of session.

I just wanted to say two things. First of all to improve the media, it can't be us versus them, in terms of what we can do to improve them. It should be that we should get involved and be proactive. Also when Muslims are writing, there should be the proper sensitivity, that yes, there are problems in the community, but when you are writing for non-Muslims, you don't want to talk about problems in the community, you want to present a good united front, and leave those

petty things behind. And you want to recognize that Muslims are already in the media. An editorial page editor in the *Toronto Star* is a Muslim. How many people know that, and how many people bother to contact him. He is invited ...to speak everywhere, and I have never seen him invited by Muslims to speak anywhere or to ask his advice. He's everywhere. There are people who work at National Geographic, there are Muslims working at the CBC, so many working at the CBC, and right now, all those people working on CNN

Call right away. If you see somebody misreporting, or making a misconception... Just speak out ... And we are not used to that, we are usually reactive, so we need to speak out more.

As I said, we have to become more active, as I said before, to be a part of the decision making people, become a board member, and donate time, it makes a difference

We should work along-side people. We should know the culture, not the culture in the sense of the real ethnic culture, but how things work in the community, and we should not just stand up and make a noise. - Why would they listen to me, being rude is really going to get us nowhere. We should also learn to get along with people. We should find ways that we can be effective.

I think that we should also work in the community. I often think of this, this time around Ramadan...There is one simple thing that we could do that would really getting a lot of coverage. If Muslims, would start donating non-perishable food to food banks in the month of Ramadan...and how much food they could donate, and think of the media, they would be banging down your doors for an interviews, because they would like to see that you are doing something worthwhile...

We have to understand what the media wants, how the media works. What they want is a 'story', and we have to be able to provide them with a story. If we mobilized a demonstration at Queen's Park, and forced a lot of women to show up, they'd have to report it... And as a consequence of that, they would see our point of view, because they would have to interview us. and however they represented us, that's up to them, but at least that's a start, and if we keep doing it they can't ignore us. And the more people find out about us, the more aware they become

I was just going to say to over-accentuate the positive. I mean that we have been so pressed down with all of the negative representation of the media, that we have to build upon the little things that we find might not stand out as much.

And I think that is where as a community we need to develop our own media literacy skills. I think that in some cases there have been workshops done in how to approach the media. How to write responses if you see something that you want to protest in the media. and I think it's important because how you approach - if you are going to come off as being hot-headed and, you are going to just reaffirm the negative stereotypes. It is very important how you go to the media with your concerns or stories or issues.

What my experience is with the media, because I am quite exposed to it is that I would suggest that women if they are called upon that they should truly understand and read the Qur'an, and be able to quote it. I have found that is the most powerful tool that I have. As far as the media goes,

the media only responds to pressure. The media will not respond if we go and say ‘We are nice people will you come and have a dialogue with us?’ You say, ‘We have Eid coming’ and they will say, ‘Okay, we will write two lines for you.’ But on the whole issue they will not listen to you, because I write a lot of letters to the *Toronto Star*, especially when I read how Jews are being re-compensated for what is happening to them, and the Palestinians don’t even have one little land that they will give to them. ... So I think that we as a community should become politicized to the point that we should be in every election arena, whatever that is. And the second piece that the media only responds to pressure, and advertising is their main source of income. So if we have an issue we should go to whoever advertises, and it could be a product on the market, and we could target it ourselves, we could mobilize and say, that we will not buy that product, and we can begin to look at where their revenue comes from, and if we really become mobilized, then that will be a good outcome of that [action].

I was thinking that that would not be a bad idea, if they had some people, some representation in the media itself, an advisory board, or maybe a consultation, in someone the media can always contact if they are going to write about this [topic], ... and they could invite the media as part of the events in the community so that we could discuss, events like Ramadan, and they would be more than happy to send someone...

9. a. Have you ever contacted any media organizations to express your views on the portrayal of Muslim women? What was the response?

b. Have you ever been contacted by the media? What was your response?

Summary of responses:

- One-third of the participants had been contacted by the media, not necessarily in regards to Islam.
- Those who had contacted the media were also in a minority. Some had written letters to the editor or called in to shows, although these were not always printed or aired. This was not always in regards to "Muslim" issues.
- Some felt that contacting the media would not make a difference in changing dominant beliefs.
- Others preferred having a central organization through which they could channel their complaints particularly in terms of the impact of an organized lobby as compared to individual efforts.
- There was also some frustration with the impact of editing and sound bites, which reduced their motivation to contact media.

Sample comments:

CIC [Canadian Islamic Congress] is about a two years old organization. One of the actions was

to write to the *Toronto Star* asking them to review how they have been writing articles about Algiers, and how Islam was portrayed. They didn't respond very encouragingly. So we hired a lawyer to say to them, these are the conditions or will go through this court case. To that they responded very positively, and they invited us to come and have a dialogue with them

There was an Eid dinner...we called the media and they came. I was on *CITY Pulse* ...and they had my name up on the screen and they had [my name] -MUSLIM' ...I don't mind being labeled a Muslim, at least people see you and they know that these events are taking place.

The people who write these articles are just regular people, with their own biases and stereotypes. I have a friend who works for the associated press in Detroit. I said, 'Hey Ramadan is coming up, why don't you write an article about Ramadan?' and she said, 'Hey that's a great idea, I never thought about it!' - ...so she wrote this huge article, and it got published in a States' paper.

I was a focus of a documentary, *CBC* a few years ago... ..and it talked about multiculturalism, it was me and about 5 other people...They practically moved into my house for 3 days...but what did they choose to talk about then the most sensational things you might choose to say. And I was actually recommended for that through a friend who works for the *CBC*. And ...I was on *CBC* on a morning show, talking about multiculturalism, and again on a panel ... that came through another friend who worked for *CBC*, who said, 'Call her, she'll be good for this'.

The *CBC* called and wanted us to be on *Tapestry* to talk about the difficulties of growing up in Canadian society, and I felt like saying 'you know what, it is not that hard...

We don't monitor, we don't write, we don't call, we don't stand up, we always become justifiable! - 'I know I am sorry, I know how Islam is being practised.' Well I don't care how Islam is being practised, I am saying, 'I am a Canadian woman, treat me as such!'... We need to go after them constantly. We need to have thousands of us writing letters, and thousands of us calling.

You know I have to admit, that I have been very complacent. I see all these things and I say well, 'Why are you doing this', but I haven't been very proactive in offering an alternative, especially when it is discussing Muslim women

Sometimes you feel that this is an issue where they are not going to listen to you.

And community support, there is sort of a fear as well, that I feel, that if I was to go out and do something, and be interviewed or whatever, do I really want someone else in the Muslim community to find out about it, and pass comment on it.

My fear is, that my one voice alone will not make much difference, so what use will it be, but then, I guess, each one could count, because it will all add up in the end.

Sometimes people won't act themselves, but will call up different people in the community and say 'Could you represent us and find out what is going on'.

I had been contacted for this *CBC* show, and they were concentrating on ‘Well, what’s like growing up Muslim in Canadian society’ and I didn’t have very much trouble with it [laugh] so, I don’t think that they really wanted to interview me [laughter], ‘You don’t have enough problems!’. ...as it happens I am supposed to be interviewed by Erica Ehm on *Real Life* but ...the journalist doesn’t know yet that I’m a woman who wears hijab.

The reason why I didn’t contact [the media], is because I know that they are in control by a certain group, that’s all, and they [that group] have control no matter what, they...

To be quite frank, you could ask me to respond, but there are watch groups that I would help by volunteering, rather than responding on my own. - Like CAIR, I would help CAIR out before writing tons and tons of letters. Because how much of my life am I going to invest in this anyway?! -

During the Gulf War I was part of a youth group, and they interviewed us on the National... I got to speak to Barbara Frum... I was really young though.

APPENDIX B: LIST OF ORGANIZATIONS INVOLVED IN MEDIA ADVOCACY IN CANADA

Canadian Arab Federation

*1057 McNicoll Ave., Scarborough ON M1W 3W6
Phone (416) 493-8635 Fax (416) 493-9239*

The activities of this organization are focused around media relations.

- ◆ Press releases and "Action Alerts" are issued regularly, in relation to various local and international events as a public expression of the Arab community's concerns
- ◆ Canadian media coverage of several of these events, as well as features on various issues relevant to the Arab community.

Canadian Association for Islamic Relations (CAIR-Canada)

*P.O. Box 649, Stn "P", Toronto, ON, M5S 2Y4
Phone (416) 977-2057 Fax (416) 971-6058*

CAIR-Canada has been active in developing media relations. This includes:

- ◆ Sending out press releases about events in the Muslim community such as Eid and Ramadan, to promote positive coverage of Muslim Canadians
- ◆ Speaking to the media on behalf of the Muslim community in relation to incidents and issues which arise (such as the hate literature which was distributed at Western Collegiate High School in 1998 by an adult resident of Toronto).
- ◆ Media workshops for its members.

Canadian Islamic Congress

*420 Erb St W #424, Waterloo, ON, N2L 6K6
Phone (519) 7461-CIC Fax (519) 746-2929
cic@cicnow.com <http://www.cicnow.com>*

This organization has been active since 1997 in all areas: dialogue with media, media relations as well as research. These include:

- ◆ A "Muslim Mediawatch": CIC monitored coverage of Islam/Muslims in six major Canadian newspapers for 6 months. The results, which rated the newspapers for accuracy and fairness in reporting, were released in September 1998. The newspapers concerned covered the report. Copies of the report are available through CIC.
- ◆ Complaints were filed against the Toronto Star (for their coverage of events in Algeria during December 1997), and the Globe and Mail, for their use of the term "Muslim terrorist". An apology as well as corrective actions were demanded. As a result, the group

met with the editorial boards of both newspapers with promises of greater dialogue and improvement from both newspapers.

- ◆ A weekly "Friday Bulletin" which is sent out over fax and email with notices concerning Muslim Canadians, including any news items in the media which require a response and community action.

Canadian-Muslim Civil Liberties Association (CMCLA)

885 Progress Ave UPH 15, Scarborough ON, M1H 3G3
Phone (416) 289-9666 Fax (416) 289-0339
CMCLA@torfree.net

This organisation is largely focused on legal advocacy, but media relations form part of its mandate: CMLCA has published several pamphlets relevant to media relations, including:

- ◆ "Newspapers: The Black and White on Getting into Print". This pamphlet offers tips for countering media coverage of Muslims: writing Op-Ed pieces and Letters to the editor, and meeting with editorial boards.
- ◆ "Speaking for Her: The Representation of the Muslim Woman in Popular Culture" by Sajidah Kutty (1997). Please see page seven of this report for a synopsis of Kutty's article.

MediaWatch

#204-517 Wellington St. W, Toronto, ON, M5V 1G1
Phone (416) 408-2065 Fax (416) 408-2069

This organization has numerous resources and research it has conducted in relation to the portrayal of women in the media. These include:

- ◆ A publication on "Gender Issues in the Media" for educating children on stereotyping in the media.
- ◆ A letter writing guide
- ◆ A Global Media Monitoring Project
- ◆ A research paper on Minority Representation in the Media
- ◆ A Media Skills Kit
- ◆ An Intervention Kit: for addressing the CRTC
- ◆ Presentations on women in the media/newspapers
- ◆ Women and the Media - resources
- ◆ A Media Directory of Women: a guide for journalists

They also lobby the CRTC, a possible source through which to register complaints.

Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants

110 Eglinton Ave W #200, Toronto, ON, M4R 1A3

Phone (416) 322-4950 Fax (416) 322-8084

The "Nation of Immigrants" project aimed to foster good media/community relations, and work towards a fair portrayal of minorities, immigrants and refugees in mainstream print media.

Results included:

- ◆ Fact sheets highlighting positive images of immigrants and refugees, which aimed to dispel myths
- ◆ A Media Resource and Reference List on issues of immigration, race and representation in the media
- ◆ Case studies on mainstream coverage of specific individuals and events: A murder in "Chinatown"; a series on immigration in the Toronto Sun and an Indo-Canadian family murder-suicide.
- ◆ Ten community agencies were given media relations training, to develop or enhance their capacity to respond to the media. This covered the role and structure of the media, identifying/responding to media bias; strategies for media coverage and techniques for giving effective interviews.
- ◆ Roundtables were held with community members and media representatives (Toronto Star and Globe and Mail)

Year Two of the project was initiated in 1999.

Urban Alliance on Race Relations:

675 King St. W #202, Toronto, ON, M5V 1M9

Phone (416)703-6607 Fax (416)703-4415

uarr@uarr.org

This organization's media relations committee has conducted various activities which include both research and education. This includes:

- ◆ A qualitative content analysis of the Toronto Sun (Power without Responsibility, Effie Ginzberg 1987). Ginzberg identified, in the Toronto Sun, negative stereotypes, defence mechanisms, racism, scapegoating and inciting of fear and hatred of minority groups, including Arabs, by examining specific articles.
- ◆ Media literacy workshops
- ◆ Letter writing activity

- ◆ An evaluation of journalism schools (Ryerson, community colleges) - this included an evaluation of the outline/course content and lobbying for increasing the composition of minorities among the teaching staff.
- ◆ Articles and research such as "The Press We Don't Deserve" on the portrayal of Asians in the media.

APPENDIX C: LISTING OF NEWSPAPER ARTICLES ON MUSLIM WOMEN

Key Words "Islam*" and "wom*n"

1993-1997

Source: Canadian Business and Current Affairs (CBCA) index

CH= Calgary Herald

GM= Globe and Mail

MG= Montreal Gazette

TS= Toronto Star

VS= Vancouver Sun

WFP=Winnipeg Free Press

Muslim veil threat to harmony in French schools, minister says/VS 09/15/94/A18
Clerics flog rape complainant/WFP 12/19/94/B4
A veil of tears in Algeria/WFP/04/06/94/A6
Western eyes see Iran in different light/TS/03/18/95/PG#
An act of faith or a veiled threat to society?/TS/05/14/95/F5
Shrouded in black, women rendered invisible, voiceless/TS/09/25/95/A19
Struggling to hold the middle ground/TS 08/13/95/F7
Egyptian feminists battle fundamentalist backlash/TS/12/18/93/J8
A peek at private lives behind the veil of Islam/TS/02/26/95/C3
Muslim scarf ban discriminatory, commission rules/TS/02/15/95/A22
When the law comes to a head/GM/03/11/95/PG#
Nasrin shakes up UN/GM/03/11/95/C3
What everyone's talking, and talking about/GM/003/03/95/PG#
Hijab in schools supported/GM/02/15/95/A4
2 unveiled women murdered, Muslim extremists suspected/VS/03/31/94/A16
Koran distorted by "terrorists", woman claims/VS/05/04/94/A7
Saudi women denied keys to the kingdom/GM/001/11/95/A11
Brooks opens gender curtain in Mideast/GM/01/28/95/PG#
Understanding does not always lead to tolerance/GM/01/31/95/PG#
My hijab is an act of worship - and none of your business/GM/02/15/95/PG#
A cry to the world from under the veil: "Algerian women are alone"/VS/04/06/94/A11
Afghans told to screen women in the home/TS/03/20/97/PG#
Protesters demand woman die/CH/08/06/94/A9
Feminists fighting for equality in Iran/CH/07/02/94/A11
Wives divorced from justice in male-dominated Iran/GM/11/18/94/A13
"Not a fashion fad but a way of life"/GM/08/27/94/D7
Their Canada includes hijab/GM/08/22/94/A1/
Being Canadian can include head scarf/GM/08/22/94/A2
Western women target of Saudi religious police/GM/05/09/94/A5
Pair's wishes ignored in divorce row/GM/11/27/93/A21
Three little words/GM/10/02/93/D2
Arabian women unveiled at Donna Karan boutique/GM/09/02/93/D2
Militants kill two women without veils in Algeria/GM/03/31/94/A15

Throwing away the circumcision knife/GM/01/15/94/D2
 Secret sanctuary/GM/02/26/94/D3
 Time to debate headgear issue, minister says/GM/10/26/94/A4
 Kashmiris protest Indian rule/TS/10/25/97 (PHOTO)
 Egyptian court overturns ban on female circumcision/GM/06/25/97/A17
 Behind the veils/12/15/96/F1/F4
 Call to prayer on Yonge St./TS/02/02/97/A16
 Solidarity for Afghanistan/TS/05/24/97/L26
 Silent pain/TS/03/08/97/L1
 Women's legacy of pain/TS/06/26/97/C5, C6
 Stoning reveals mistreatment of women in Iran/MG/03/05/94/I5
 Model contracts/MG/09/04/94/B5
 Egyptian actress drops show biz for the veil/GM/08/27/93/C10
 Keeping women in the back seat/MG/12/02/93/B3
 Muslim woman expelled by judge for wearing head scarf in court/MG/12/02/93/A1-2
 Quebec won't support hijabs in public schools, Landry says/MG/10/26/94/A6
 Forcing hijab on teachers unacceptable: Houde-Pepin/MG/10/24/94/A3
 The new law: Wear the veil and stay alive/MG/04/11/94/B3????
 Sudan's Islam under the gun/TS/04/19/97/C1,19
 Love, marriage and Islam/TS/10/30/97/E4,
 Iranians seek to ease fundamentalist grip/TS/12/29/97/A1, A4
 Traditions differ but faith remains/TS/12/29/97/E1,E2
 Bangladeshi defies Muslim edicts/GM/11/02/96/A12
 China, Islamic Conference threaten feminist UN agenda/VS/06/23/93/A12
 Student files rights complaint over school's ban on hijab/MG/12/16/94/A4
 New code constricts Kabul's girls, women/WFP/09/29/96/A3
 Men banned from viewing sports event/CH/02/16/93/A3
 Behind the veils/TS/12/15/96/F1, F4
 Bengali feminist honored/TS/10/26/96/A4
 Many Egyptian Women return to concealing body/TS/07/30/96/E3
 Canadian teenager wears veil against an immodest world/TS/07/30/96/E3
 Lifting the veil of ignorance/TS/07/30/96/E1,E3
 Undercover lessons in being 'different'/TS/07/30/96/E1
 Islam's cruel 'justice'/VS/10/14/95/B3
 Women's role in Islam shrouded in controversy/TS/04/18/93/F2
 Slowly, Islamic women trade the veil for white collars/TS/04/07/93/A15
 Islamic women creating momentum for real change/GM/05/18/96/E11
 A stoning in Iran: Refusing to let the horror die/GM/04/02/94/C17
 Bhutto feud chips away at family/GM/10/26/96/A14
 Muslim women ignored, forum told/GM/10/16/96/E11
 Malaysia seeks liberal role/GM/10/12/96/E11
 Quebec cannot copy solutions from France/CH/02/17/95/A5
 Where Islam takes a vacation/GM/08/29/95/A13
 Bhutto attacks Muslims who deny women's rights/GM/09/05/95/A1, A12
 Women pushed out of UN jobs/GM/11/09/95/E5
 A walk on the repressive side of the Islamic movement/GM/04/02/94/C17

My body is my own business/GM/06/29/93/A26
Wearing a uniform of oppression/GM/07/05/93/A12
Proud of hijab/GM/07/17/93/D7
Home life in Syria tough for women/GM/08/21/93/A7
Breaking barriers/MG/04/07/97/E3
Mon Coeur is window on world of Muslim women/MG/04/03/97/C10
Cairo under cover/MG/04/25/97/B1
I'll ignore hijab ruling:MCSC chairman/MG/02/16/95/A1,A12
Made-in-France controversy/MG/02/16/95/B3
Hijab ban wrong, study finds/02/15/95/A1,A5
Algeria's dirty war/MG/06/25/96/A1,A6
Egypt bans long veil at school/05/23/96/B1
Islam's women: what would Prophet say?/MG/03/11/95/H2
Militants attack Iranian cyclists/GM/05/03/96/A12
Veils issue pits parents against Egyptian government/MG/10/01/94/B3
Gunmen in Algeria kill two young women who were not wearing veil/MG/03/31/94/A13
Manual details women's rights/GM/12/30/96/A7