

MUSLIM WOMEN'S AUTHORITY IN SACRED SPACES

by

Naila Althagafi

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Faculty of Purdue University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy



Brian Lamb School of Communication

West Lafayette, Indiana

December 2019

THE PURDUE UNIVERSITY GRADUATE SCHOOL
STATEMENT OF COMMITTEE APPROVAL

Dr. Patrice M. Buzzanell, Chair

Brian Lamb School of Communication

Dr. Howard E Sypher

Brian Lamb School of Communication

Dr. Ralph Webb

Brian Lamb School of Communication

Dr. Mona Hassan

Departments of History and Religious Studies and the program of International
Comparative Studies, Duke University

Approved by:

Dr. W. Bart Collins

*but over all endued with knowledge is one,
the All-Knowing
(Qur'ān 12:76)*

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

BismiAllah Alrahman Alraheem

I would like to thank my parents, Sonia and Faisal, who supported me throughout my graduate process and pushed me to complete my degree in the United States while being away from family. I would like to thank my brothers Abdulrahman and Abdulraheem for inspiring me to give graciously to those around me and to be a productive member of the community. I would like to extend my gratitude to King Abdullah Scholarship Program for funding my graduate education. I would like to thank my professors, Brian, Howard, Mona, Ralph, and Patrice for contributions to my project, support of my scholarly interests, and help in shaping this dissertation.

I would like to note with gratitude that Dr. Brian Smith served on my committee as co-chair with IRB responsibility and with input during my doctoral work and especially during my dissertation prospectus prior to his move to another institution.

I also would like to note that Dr. Howard Sypher graciously agreed to enter our discussions at the time of my dissertation defense. I appreciate his comments, recommendations, and great questions. I value Dr. Ralph Webb's comments and feedback on enhancing the outcome of this dissertation. Dr. Ralph Webb not only asked the most challenging questions that helped me produce a better dissertation, but he offered edits and stylistic contributions.

I would like to thank Dr. Mona Hassan for her willingness to serve on my preliminary exam and prospectus defense committees. Her input was very valuable at these stages. To honor her work prior to the dissertation-writing phase and to acknowledge that she did not have input into the final draft, we note here that she "abstained" from the final decisions for this dissertation.

Finally, to my doctoral chair, Dr. Patrice M Buzzanell, I would like to express my deepest appreciation for her role, her great support, her spirit, and her continuous guidance on the dissertation. Without her direction and persistence, this dissertation wouldn't be possible.

I am very grateful to my committee members as they were instrumental on getting this dissertation to completion and enabling me to share this knowledge with vast audiences.

I would like to thank The Women's Mosque of America (WMOA) for allowing me to use their site as the center of my research. At the beginning of my research, I saw their approach to empowerment as problematic and theologically debatable when it came to Islamic practice of leading Friday prayers. However, the more I spent time on this project and listened to the stories and struggles of women who come to The WMOA, the more I realized that there is a need to include marginalized voices that are not necessarily heard in religious spaces dominated by men and/or by more traditional Islamic discourse. I needed to enable these voices to be heard by the American Muslim community so that there can be grounds for better communication and a process to contribute to the *Ummah*. I came with good intentions to highlight the growing phenomenon of women empowering spaces and shedding light on this movement that is growing worldwide. This project was not created to enter theological debates, but rather to look at empowerment, agency, and authority and the ways that Muslim women in the United States constitute these processes around women-led Friday prayers.

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ABSTRACT

Muslim women's efforts to attain religious leadership roles have been central, critical, and controversial topics discussed in American mosques and in academia. Women's lack of access and leadership in religious institutions is due to the patriarchal interpretations of *Qur'ānic* scripture, the *Hadīth*, and Islamic laws leading women to engage in collective action to attain their rights while still affirming their religion (Barlas, 2002). When controversial topics challenge religious traditions and norms, such as women's roles as *khateebahs* and Friday prayer *imāms* (women sermon givers and leading Friday prayers), the discussions often are theological and political, but rarely from a communicative perspective in which the trajectory of change and co-oriented action is authored by participants through considerations of text and interaction. Muslim women in America are opening spaces for dialogue and initiating organizations that empower their Muslim sisters to take on religious roles and other positions that adhere to and broaden understandings of what it means to be Muslim.

The communicative constitution of organizations (CCO) (Belliger & Krieger, 2016; Brummans, Cooren, Robichaud, & Taylor, 2014; Bruscella & Bisel, 2018) has not yet delved into organizing within Muslim institutions. This study contributes to both CCO and to Muslim women's organizing by showing how the CCO framework is applicable to a unique context that has not previously been investigated. Specifically, this dissertation explains how women's authoring of process and structure through communication operates as a productive force constituted through linguistic choices, discursive formations, and materialities, as well as how Muslim women constitute agency within a traditional religious space situated in the United States. Consistent with CCO perspectives and especially the Four Flows model (McPhee, 2015; MCPhee & Zaug, 2000, 2008), agency is conceptualized as action through or enactment of rules,

resources, and routines in the duality of structure, based on Giddens (1984) structuration theory. In examining The Women's Mosque of America (WMOA), an in-depth case study approach helped to illuminate how women's empowerment is constructed and legitimized through women's interactions, engagement, and advocacy. Studying women's agency and structuring of empowerment through the constitutive approach of communication in organization (CCO) using McPhee's four flows (McPhee, 2015; McPhee & Zaug, 2000, 2008) links communication, feminist studies, and Muslim religious organizations.

Data for this case study were gathered through site observations and interviews; analyses were conducted through constructivist grounded theory that incorporates personal knowledge about Muslim women to assist interpretation grounded in data (Charmaz, 2000, 2004, 2008, 2017). Throughout the study, attention was paid not only to what the women said but also to their reported and observed social and ritual interactions.

In conclusion, this project not only sheds light on a segment of the Muslim American community that is marginalized but shows that McPhee's four flows can be used to study how organizations are structured along particular Islamic values and interpretations of text, while also affording agency to individuals as actors within each and across all four flows. In the case of The WMOA, the four flows communicative processes help identify relationships between Islam and organizational members, staff, and other institutional stakeholders within the material conditions of religious observances. Studies such as this project provide insight into how diverse members organize paradoxically for both social change and continuation of sacred traditions.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Feminist notions of attaining power and seeking gender¹ equality are not new concepts to many people around the globe. Laws, policies, and practices have been designed to promote women's public participation in diverse organizational spaces with more or less success depending on the time period, political-economic context, and national discussions (Örtenblad et al., 2017). In these contexts, power² has been associated with voice³ (Buzzanell, 2017), discourse and resistance (Zoller, 2014), and access and productive capacities to make change that can benefit women and other members of society (Mumby, 2000). Feminists theorize and engage in praxis to change traditional power imbalances among genders that are unequally distributed. Their pursuit is to challenge dominant voices that are constructed by men (Myers, 2014). Hence, they seek to redistribute that power in various ways to achieve gender equality (Allen, 2006) and to reconsider how there can be alternatives to traditional themes that disenfranchise women, such as competitive individualism, linear thinking, and rationalities that do not consider emotion and community (Buzzanell, 1994).

Although scholars know what power and voice aligned with gender equality means theoretically and how it is manifested materially in different contexts, these issues remain points of contention in worldwide discussions because of the different shapes and forms that voice and power take in online, local grassroots, and more formal organizing and political processes (e.g., Vachhani & Pullen, 2019; Zoller, 2014). Even so, the discussions and the controversial

¹ There is a difference between sex and gender, however, for the purpose of simplicity I use the word "gender" (psychological, social, and cultural identities) and not "sex" (biological differences) throughout this dissertation (for an overview, see Buzzanell, 2020).

² In Allen (2006), Max Weber defines power as the actor's capability to continue driving his/her willpower in spite of resistance within social relations.

³ Voice is the capability of articulating emotions and opinions of an individual or group/s of people in mediated and non-mediated spaces (Buzzanell, 2017).

relationships are most noticeable between religious traditions and secular thought (Jackson, 2017), between gendered organizing and normalization of women's exclusion (Ashcraft & Mumby, 2004; Buzzanell, 1994, 2020), such as is the case between feminism and Islam (Mahmood, 2011). In Muslim societies, two forms of feminism can be found: Islamic feminism and secular feminism. Both have different approaches to gender equality in public and private spheres that offer opportunities for diverse approaches to equality and change (Badran, 2008).

Many Muslim scholars and activists are calling for reforming religious institutions and religious ideologies to fit modernity. With the diversity of spaces that range from physical spaces such as mosques to virtual spaces such as social media platforms, individuals and collectivities use varied types of spaces to provide accessibility and voice for Muslim women's empowerment and to challenge the current status of women in cultural Islam. I intentionally used the word "cultural Islam"⁴ because of the intersection of race, ethnicity, and culture that impacts and is impacted by the way people practice Islam, especially in the West. In the American context, for instance, African American Muslims often subscribe to the black nationalism alongside their Islamic faith and other ideologies adapted to this primary identity. They want to be part of the international Muslim community as practitioners of Islam but they also do not want their particular type of Islam to be influenced primarily or overshadowed by other cultures and situated practices of Islam (see Rouse, 2004)

When looking into the interpretation and the application of *Sharī'ah*⁵—a legal framework that is derived from the *Qur'ān* (also spelled as *Quraan*, *Quran*, *Koran*) and the *Ḥadīth*⁶—that is

⁴ See Abd-Allah (2006).

⁵ *Sharī'ah* refers to Islamic law. For further explanation refer to ("Shariah", n.d).

⁶ *Ḥadīth* is a collection of reports that was documented by the companions of prophet Mohamed of his actions and sayings to preserve his traditions for Muslims to follow. *Ḥadīths* serve as the second authoritative source after the *Qur'ān* (Speight, n.d).

applied in countries that are primarily Muslim or among Muslim communities within different countries, some of the laws of *Sharī'ah* (also spelled as *Shari'a*, *Sharia*, *Shariah*) are modified and developed by the consensus of the *Ulama*, or religious scholars. These scholars used their own judgment and their societal customs for adapting *Qur'ānic* and prophetic teachings in challenging and changing situations so that people can practice religion. This type of religious authority gives the platform for scholars worldwide to reinterpret text and apply *Sharī'ah* to the best fit for contemporary cultures.

Furthermore, some argue that there is historical precedent for bypassing clear *Qur'ānic* statements, albeit in specific situations and through the application of existing legal devices. In the case of the famous *hadīth* about *Umm Waraqa* (further discussed in later section), it is argued that Islamic doctrinal understandings are now taken for granted by scholars, while the *hadīth* was initially interpreted and contested through the lens of jurists in a particular time and context (Hammer, 2012). Until this day, interpreting and re-interpreting verses of the *Qur'ān* is practiced in ways to accommodate humankind with its various diversities and cultures. However, the universal reality and the core of Islam remains the same regardless of the different cultures and localities. This core is a monotheist Abrahamic religion that believes in one God who sent messengers with sacred text to guide the world. Mohammad is believed to be the last messenger with the *Qur'ān* revealed to him as a word of God prescribed in a sacred text that has not been altered by humans since the revelation.

Although there is a difference between Islam as a religion and cultural Islam, namely between the dogma and the practice, what has been popularized about Islam in Western Judeo-Christian societies has been a strictly fundamentalist version advocated by only certain Muslim groups. For instance, these fundamentalist Muslim leaders are known to many Americans and

Muslims alike as leaders who “universalize and absolutize a single approach or practice” (Jackson, 2015, para. 10). For Muslims who are affected by autonomous and Western liberal ideas, finding religious spaces that advocate that kind of approach is problematic, especially in managing the negative reactions that might result when dealing with more conservative mindsets and practices that exist in certain mosques (Jackson, 2015). In these ways, this popularized version has “tainted” or stigmatized Islamic religion as a patriarchal, misogynist, terrorist, and unjust religion due to the cultural practices and actions of collective groups that call themselves Muslims.

Further, with the increase of Islamophobic rhetoric⁷, there is a need for Muslims to speak out and take action to combat the stereotypical and extremist images of Islam and the resulting damage that the media has fueled. As a result, Muslims worldwide and in America are leading movements targeting different issues and engaging with the general public. One of these movements and set of issues operates as the scope of this research project, namely, empowering women in religious spaces through offering the sites, resources, and leadership that can help facilitate these goals of voice and action to counteract negative portrayals. These Muslims use physical and virtual spaces to lead their movements and to challenge the norm in America.

My research focuses on organizational and identity construction in addition to voice of American Muslims—women who adhere to Islam and reside within the United States—for four reasons. First, collectives of American Muslims increasingly engage in advocacy for American Muslim issues. This advocacy causes controversies with conservative factions in America and worldwide. The advocacy centers around voice, safety, participation, freedom to practice

⁷ FOR FURTHER READING SEE *PEW RELIGION AND PUBLIC LIFE* (2017).

religion, and reinterpret the text. For instance, it is important to study these collectives so that scholars and non-academics can better understand who these Muslims are and how they constitute their identities and advocacy in ways that are controlled by and resist others' control. Second, the accessibility to Muslim individuals and Muslim communities in America is easier than in conservative countries where censorship is high and the ability to gather confidential information is low for safety and other reasons. Third, because the Muslims who are living in America are trying to manage or balance the tensions between their identities as Muslims and as Americans, they have needed to integrate Western thought and lifestyles to some extent yet also find links to American Islam.⁸ Such tensions expose contradictions in their understanding and embodiment of their different identities. Finally, it is my sincere hope that such scholarly discussion can help open more doors for dialogue between the secular West and Western Islam in addition to finding mutual ground with Eastern Islam over controversial issues. In this sense, this dissertation project hopes to encourage dialogue and deliberation through which diverse parties take risks to voice their concerns and engage with each other to derive mutually beneficial insights and solutions (Gastil, 2006). The need to engage in dialogue and find mutuality that takes the viewpoints of all perspectives into consideration is acute for Muslim women living in the United States.

For American Muslim women, it has been a constant struggle to attain their situated, political, social and religious power, let alone practice their agency to achieve change and gain more religious rights for their Muslim peers. This research focuses on American Muslim

⁸ I use the word American Islam to distinguish it from other types of cultural influenced Islam. Precisely, the influence on and intersections of American culture, politics, and identities (see Abd-Allah, 2006).

women's empowerment and agency as well as the agentic structures and processes constituted through communication within an Islamic organization. Specifically, this project studies Muslim women at The Women's Mosque of America (WMOA) who seek change and reform through utilizing different spaces and alternative approaches to Islamic practices that are claimed to be from the *Qur'ān* and *Sunnah*. In addition, this project challenges the American cultural norms of understanding women's roles that have been prescribed by Muslim male scholars. Starting from within the mosque where women are leading Friday congregational prayers. The women at The WMOA offer their space as complementary to traditional mosques and offer alternative explanations to their practices contesting the common understanding of women's roles and authority in Islam and in secular society. This study conceptualizes authority as structural and operational legitimizing aspects of organizing as well as the means by which individuals and collectivities utilize text, doctrine, and space or place⁹ to argue for and support their interpretations and associated implications for the weekly practice of Friday prayers (for an example of these conceptualizations and analyses in Christian religions, see Pauly, 2018). These Friday prayers are conducted only once a month in this organization.

Additionally, authoring and empowerment are linked in a reciprocal fashion. Women empower themselves and others to author content, forms or structures, and roles, such as prayer within rituals and sermons as leadership. Women's empowerment to do so involves claiming rights through agency and control. However, women's empowerment is more complicated and comprehensive. Women's empowerment often is discussed by reference to five characteristics. These include: women's sense of self-worth; their right to have and determine choices; their right

⁹ According to Wilhoit (2018), "space refers to coordinates or distances that can be measured, while place is lived space" (p. 314).

to have access to opportunities and resources; their right to have the power to control their own lives, both within and outside the home; and their ability to influence the direction of social change to create a more just social and economic order, nationally and internationally (United Nations, 2001, as cited in Kabeer, 2012, p. 7). These conceptualizations enable scholars and activists to engage in more complicated and nuanced discussion about authority and empowerment as expressed in Muslim women's discourses and the materialities of their everyday lives. This project looks into American Islamic practices as a result of the interpretations rather than Islamic dogma, a monolithic universal faith, to investigate the controversies around women's leadership, power, and voice, and to find the mutual grounds upon which both liberals and conservatives might agree.

This research is especially timely at this point in American politics and global political-economic-cultural uncertainties. With the Islamophobic rhetoric that has increased after the Trump administration—such as the increase in hate crimes and assaults against Muslims (Kishi, 2017)—active Muslim women are working harder to reshape their images and have their voices heard in public and private venues starting with issues that related to their Muslim identity and participation in their community.

1.1 Summary of Chapters

To summarize, this first chapter identifies the focus of my dissertation project as a study of Muslim women's communicative constitution of authority and organization in sacred spaces. My rationale for, and potential contributions of this study are presented. The end of this first chapter briefly provides an overview of my positionality, particularly my loyalties, my confusion about and hopes concerning the space in which this project is embedded, and my background as a college-educated Saudi Muslim woman who was educated in the United States.

The second chapter presents overviews and more complex conceptualizations as well as contemporary understandings in Islam and modernity of key terms and processes. These terms and processes include: authority, power, and feminism. Consistent with an organizing approach that focuses on process, this project looks at mosques as organizations constituted by communication. I also revisit literature on women's movements from other countries and compare the outcomes. I also look into arguments of feminist Muslims who extract verses and *aḥādīth* (singular form is *ḥadīth*) to support their advocacy for women leading the Friday prayer.

Finally, this second chapter concludes with the research questions that delve into how American Muslim women engage in organize, in empowering themselves and others, and act to reform their religion in general and in a particular space and place. Specifically, my first research question (RQ1) asks, How are American Muslim women organizing to author religious reform? I further examine the constitutive perspective to authority, power, and mosque that are instantiated and institutionalized through answering the second research question (RQ2): How are American Muslim women empowering themselves and others through authority inside religious organizations such as The Women's Mosque of America?

To display and analyze contemporary instances of voice, the third chapter of this dissertation project explains how the research questions led to analyses via the case study method within which constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2000, 2004, 2008, 2017), more specifically constructivist constant comparison technique, provides insight into organizing, empowerment, and gender in sacred spaces. A case study is a method for capturing complexity, detail, and context by focusing on in depth on locale-specific rationales for action and the structures that enable and constrain such organizing (see Yin, 2014). Case studies enable in-depth understanding of phenomena. Specifically, the case study I develop is centered on The

Women's Mosque of America, which explores the notion of authority for women in their sacred spaces and the constitution of organizations through the use of communication (CCO) (text, space, materialities, and interactions). The Women's Mosque of America was founded by a local Muslim woman and is located in Los Angeles, California. This organization complements existing mosques and provides a safe space¹⁰ to empower Muslim women through offering Islamic knowledge and leadership opportunities. Furthermore, one of the organization's key aims is that the community—men and women alike—have access to women's scholarship through events, classes, and their monthly women-led Friday prayer.

Chapter four focuses on the results of this case study. The overarching framework for this study and for the findings are McPhee's four flows of organizing (Belliger & Krieger, 2016; Bruscella & Bisel, 2018; McPhee, 1985, 2015; McPhee & Zaug, 2000, 2008); namely, *membership negotiation, organizational self structuring, activity coordination, and institutional positioning* in and through which authoring and authority occur (Brummans et al., 2014, Weber, 1947 cited in Turner, 1974; Adair-Toteff, 2016) To provide depth and nuance in the analysis of this case, I incorporate interview quotes, observations, and interpretations of bodies, artifacts, and space/place through which Muslim women enact authority. I delve into women's membership to the mosque through these women's own words and understandings of their actions. Through these flows and authoring processes, I show how the mosques as organization by means of communication.

Finally, Chapter five discusses the implications of, and conclude, this project. This research extends McPhee's CCO model to a unique setting and adds to previous research on

¹⁰ Safe spaces are seen as “emotional or psychological refuge from external threats without surveillance by the dominant groups... breathing space to reflect, meditate, gain strength and recover a sense of identity... provides an opportunity for self-reflection and potential empowerment” (Linabary, 2017, p. 76).

understanding the feminist ideas and challenges that American Muslim women face while asserting their religious and national memberships. In addition, this project contributes to research on women's leadership in religious organizations through constituting their positionality and establishing organizations from communicative ways (text, space, materialities, and interactions), and the use of their voice within religious institutions, specifically in mosques. It also sheds light on the grassroots organization, The Women's Mosque of America, which is part of a bigger grassroots movement calling for women's inclusion and empowerment in sacred spaces that is growing in the United States and worldwide (e.g., "First women-only mosque," 2005; Pauly, 2018; Siegel, 2010). Lastly, this research highlights the controversial aspects of Islamic feminism and examines how diverse the Muslim population is in their opinions and their practices. The relationship between feminism and both traditional¹¹ and modern Islamic movements is always contested, from which emerges more questions to be investigated.

In closing, this study about Muslim women is not simply a scholarly project but also is a project in which I am personally invested. As a Muslim woman who was born and raised in the Hijaz area (Western Province) of Saudi Arabia, my exposure to Islam was from my family and school curriculum, that are heavily influenced by Islamic values and the current practiced *Sharī'ah* laws. This system is described by scholars in the West as *Wahabbi* influenced--that is, based on Mohammad bin Abdulwahhab's teachings.¹² Much of this religious schooling looked strictly into the interpretation of the text and the practices to avoid any deviation from the prophetic tradition. Furthermore, with my close proximity to Makkah (also spelled as Mecca)

¹¹ Throughout the research, I use traditional Islam as the understanding of certain aspects in Islam from The *Qur'ān*, the *Sunnah* and based on the unanimous agreement of religious scholars on specific matters, such as women leading the prayer.

¹² For further readings see Al-Rasheed (2013).

and with my Western education, I was exposed to different types of Islam that led me to understand the differences of opinion and cultures behind diverse practices and beliefs. For instance, when first looking at this movement, my instantaneous response was that it was bizarre and not part of the Islamic tradition. It is due to the fact that women in Saudi have their own spaces dedicated for them to learn and practice Islam. Providing women's only spaces was not problematic at all, as the gender dynamics and roles in Saudi were already shaped by the current Islamic understandings. The majority of women preferred to have privacy in both public spaces (e.g., mosques, companies, governmental institutions) or private spaces (e.g., educational institutions, gyms).

However, I became accustomed to and appreciative of women's advocacy and efforts in the United States to provide spaces for Muslim women to learn, practice, and attain leadership positions. Although I am still unsure of the progressive Muslim/feminist approach to practicing Islam and specifically the case of women leading Friday prayers, I feel that this type of cultural Islam and Muslim women's authority should be documented and approached communicatively to understand how and why the different interpretations of Islam in the United States are constituted and to focus on the similarities rather than differences with other Muslims who do not share the same point of view.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Living amidst a charged political and religious climate, Muslim women in Western societies are questioned with respect to their religious identity on a daily basis. For Muslim feminist leaders living in the West, they are simultaneously challenged by their Muslim fellows around the world on their reinterpretation of religious text and religious practices that are claimed to fit modernity. This ongoing process of reinterpretation of sacred text to face the challenges of modernity means that Muslim feminists are impacted by multiple ideologies that seek to solve different issues existing in the Western world: secularism, liberalism, and feminism. As a communications scholar, it is necessary to parse out how the three dimensions of Islam, feminism, and communication intersect and are constituted for Muslim feminist leaders within U.S. Muslim spaces.

Before understanding Islamic feminism in the Western context, I first discuss *Shari'ah* and *imams*: the structure of authority in Islam. In this section, there is an overview of the constitutive authority in Islamic institutions, particularly in mosque spaces, and a discussion on the constitutive authority when interpreting sacred text. Second, I discuss authority and power at the intersection of religion and modernity. This section revisits literature on the notion of authority from sociological and political points of view. Third, a brief historical background for Muslim women's authority in Islam gives a contextual progression and regression of Muslim women's religious leadership positions in the religious public sphere. The literature mainly focuses on the Arab world as Islam and the majority of Muslim communities started from within this world region. Fourth, in discussing feminism and Islam with regard to opportunities and limitations, I examine how feminism and Islam are used to push women's agendas yet, at the same time, these women face resistance from orthodox Muslims. In this section, the literature

review focuses on the birth of Islamic and secular feminism in the Arab world, which is juxtaposed with the birth and practice of feminism in the West. In addition, I look at the practice of Muslim feminists in the West and how they view their identity, gender, membership, and religious spaces. Finally, I describe women's movement to occupy mosques, particularly communicative practices, and discuss the women's movement to occupy mosques as delineated through a structuralist and an organizational communication approach. I revisit the previous example of women's mosque movement in Cairo as it relates to the specific U.S.-based organization, The Women's Mosque of America, which is the core of this research. Communicative constitution of mosques as organizations is the first subsection that revisits literature on constitutive communication in organizations (CCO) and links it to notions of agency and authority, in addition to looking at mosques as religious organizations. In the second subsection, *hadīth of Umm Waraqa* or the feminist discourse argument, I discuss the controversial understandings of orthodox and American Islamic jurists on the concept of women being *imāms* at Friday prayer. I highlight the textual and historical debate around the *hadīth* of Umm Waraqa's incident in leading prayer.

2.1 Shari'ah and Imāms: The Structure of Authority in Islam

The structure of authority in Islam is a multifaceted concept but, for the sake of this research, the focus is on the structure of authority in the interpretation of the sacred text and leading prayers in mosques. Muslims derive their Islamic understanding, rulings, laws, and practices from three resources; the *Qur'ān*, *Sunnah*, and *ijmā'*¹³. Unanimous consensus is based on *qiyas* and *ijtihad*. The former refers to the legal analogy while the latter is an interpretive tool

¹³ *Ijmā'* refers to the unanimous consensus of religious scholars on religious matters (Ijmā', n.d).

to articulate legal responses, *fatwa*, and determining the positionality of *Shari'ah*¹⁴ in matters that the *Qur'an* and the *Sunnah* did not cover or was vague about (Albarghouthi, 2011). Further, *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence), *tafsir* (*Qur'anic* exegesis), and *hadith* sciences are linked to each other and are tools used by jurist to determine *fatwas* (Hammer, 2012).

Pious trained Muslim jurists and scholars are key interpreters of divine law. Many of the *fiqh*¹⁵ applied in Muslim countries such as Saudi Arabia derive their laws from previous documentations and opinions written by medieval scholars referred to as the *ulama*. The work of these scholars has resulted in a multifaceted and diverse body of law. Their collective opinions and interpretations of various matters that relates to Muslims have been gathered over fourteen centuries and are used even today. Supposedly, there were hundreds of school of thoughts, but after the 7th to the 13th century (Vogel, 2000) or 8th to the 10th century (Hammer, 2012), Sunni Islam settled on four main legal school of thoughts: *Hanafi*, *Maliki*, *Shafi'i*, and *Hanbali*. Many scholars today follow these bodies of laws to understand complex situations or dilemmas that happen in Muslims' daily lives (Vogel, 2000).

When laypersons experienced a dilemma about how to live their lives in accordance with God's laws, they would approach a respected *mufti* or a *faqih*¹⁶ (also spelled as *faqeeh*) to answer their questions. A *mufti* or a *faqih* could help them frame their views in ways that follow the *Shari'ah* and could address why and how these situations would be confusing in ways that other laypersons did not understand. Such a legal ruling issued by the *mufti* is referred to as a *fatwa* and is primarily derived from the four schools of thought which are based on specific

¹⁴ *shari'ah* has two main subcategories: 1) "*ibadat*, that involves religious observances", such as fasting, pilgrimage, prayer; and 2) "*mu'amalat*, that is, civil transactions, criminal sanctions" (Jackson, 2003, p. 90). The focus here is on the religious observations.

¹⁵ *Fiqh* refers to the legal ruling and regulations and is translated as Jurisprudence.

¹⁶ *Faqih* is an Islamic jurist.

interpretations of the *Qur'ān* and *Sunnah* (Vogel, 2000). The qualifications of a person who does *ijtihad* were clearly delineated as early as 820 CE. A *mufti* needs to have thorough knowledge of the *Qur'ān* and *hadīth*, a grasp of the Arabic language, and a deep understanding of culture in order to assist themselves and others with religious daily matters and dilemmas.

Shari'ah has been perceived as incompatible with modernity and modern governments because of the notion that it is rooted in principles specific to medieval Muslim values and societies (Jackson, 2003). Coupled with the idea that Islam is rigid due to the limitations of *ijtihād*¹⁷ which occurred in previous centuries and to the “concomitant institutionalization of *taqlid*, or blind following,” modern practicing Muslims and others have concluded that Islamic law is resistant to change. As a result, there has been a global call to open the door for *ijtihad* to overcome the differences and form a bridge between modernity and Islamic law. This idea of reform “would be most effectively realized through a democratization of the enterprise of legal interpretation itself, according to which the classically trained jurists would relinquish their monopoly over the authority to interpret Islamic law” (Jackson, 2003, p. 90). Legal traditions prefer “provenance over content” and have the tendency to look backward (Jackson, 2003, p. 91). This tendency does not hinder change and growth but rather preserves the “immutability of the founding documents,” gives extended correct interpretations, and is seen as a source of authority whose principles can end disputes (Jackson, 2003, p. 92).

Leading a prayer as an *imām* (also spelled as *imam*) is another type of authority that has specific qualifications attached to it. The knowledge of the *Qur'ān* (in terms of legal ruling- *fiqh*)

¹⁷ *Ijtihād* is defined as:

The exercising of discretionary judgment (traditionally by a mujtahid) in order to deduce a law or rule of conduct which is not self-evident in the scriptural sources; the right to exercise this judgement (sometimes figuratively described as a gate, either closed or open depending on whether such a right is thought to exist). (*ijtihād*, n.d)

is an important criterion for either men or women to lead the prayer (Azam, 2014). There also is a ritual requirement to perform the prayer. This ritual requirement has been described by Prophet Mohammad in narrated form as well as through his actions so that Muslims can follow his footsteps until the present day. For Muslims, prayer is sacred and a core element of the Islamic faith where Muslims face the direction of Mecca, pray five times a day, and perform prayer in the way Prophet Mohammad prescribed. These prayers can be done individually or in a congregation. Men are obligated to go to the mosque to perform their daily prayers in congregation while, according to one school of legal thought, it is preferred for women to pray in their home. Despite preference, no one would deny women the opportunity of going to worship in the mosque if the women wanted to do so. In the presence of both sexes, one man leads the prayer (*imām*) and is followed behind him by lines of men and then, after them, lines of women. If only women are present at the prayer space, one woman would lead and stand in the middle within the same front row (Al-Qaradawi, n.d).

Friday Prayer is different because it has a sermon and the prayer is shortened to two units instead of a noon prayer that is of four units. In addition, the *imām* becomes also a *khatīb* (the one who gives the speech sermon before the prayer is performed). In the *Hanfi and Shafi' madhab* (Islamic school of legal thought), the least number for Friday prayer to be held is 3 men who are present in one place. If fewer than 3 men are present (not including women and children), the Friday prayer would be substituted with the regular noon prayer. The most important aspect of the *khatīb* or the *imām* is the knowledge of the *Qur'ān* (Azam, 2014). Friday prayer in the historical experience is exclusively led by men (Keller, 2009; Sharify-Funk & Haddad, 2012).

2.2 Authority and Power: Intersection of Religion and Modernity

Authority has been a point of interest to many scholars in addition to power. It is well documented and there have been many approaches to understand authority as inherent and granted (Arendt, 1954, 1956; Adair-Toteff, 2016; Turner, 1974) and/or as continuously constituted through authoring (Brummans et al., 2014; Brummans, Hwang & Cheong, 2013). These positions are not dualistic but inform each other. However, I discuss them as distinct approaches to highlight their differences and how they contribute uniquely to work on authority and authoring.

Authority is an integral part of political theory (Arendt, 1956). Authority is known historically and is seen in its basic form established in everyday life. Such authority is of a parent to a child, a teacher to a student, or an elder to a younger person. However, the role of authority is a constant question at the intersection of religion and modernity (Arendt, 1954). In two of Arendt's (1954,1956) works, she explains that authority is an ancient model and the true meaning and concept of authority existed all the way back to the Roman Republic. Plato's concepts inspired the way the Romans approached political power, but unlike the Greeks, the Romans understood that preserving the founding city of Rome was their way to engage in politics. This understanding meant that the city of Rome was the center of political life and that to be bonded to the locality of that city was important to preserve power. Therefore, through adding settlements to the original foundation, they were able to control the whole of Italy and to unite and administer the whole of the Western world known at that time. Furthermore, Rome was the home of the Roman Gods. Thus, the government was bound to religion as the political activity of expanding their settlement power (Arendt, 1954).

The Roman ancestors, who had laid down the Roman foundation, gave authority to the elders and the Senate "by descent and by transmission (tradition)" (Arendt, 1954, p. 18). The

Senate authority was created through augmenting political decisions by the authority of the living and the support of the Gods. Yet this authority was not seen as power. This authority of augmentation that is made by man's decision was merely advice given without the use of violence or coercion. It was also approved or disapproved by the divine force (religion). Hence, all the authorities were bound and tied back to the past, tied to "the sacred beginning of the Roman history" which kept stability, ensured growth, and preserved the tradition (p. 19).

For the Romans, when the tradition (namely, the creation of their foundation then its augmentation throughout centuries through the authority of transmission) is unbroken, then authority was intact or perpetuated. Acting without authority was inconceivable to the Romans. Therefore, the Roman political framework—"the Roman trinity" that combines religion, authority, and tradition—was taken in the Christian age and replicated by the Catholic Church mimicking the authority of the Senate and leaving the power to the royals. In Arendt's (1954) opinion, if one aspect or member of the Roman trinity was eliminated, the rest would no longer survive.

Although Arendt's (1954, 1956) work provided the foundation for much of contemporary sources of institutional and everyday power, other theorists focused on the organizational processes and structures of authority. In Turner's (1974) commentary about Max Weber's work, authority was identified as "legitimately exercised power" (p. 23). People obey a power when they find "legitimate reasons for their obedience", meaning that authority is not stable (p. 23). Authority's instability arises when it is based on compulsion rather than legitimacy. Compulsion can be driven by many sources and rationalities but it also can be promoted by individuals' meanings of or purpose in life. There is a need for humans to attribute purpose to their daily

activities and this purpose gives meanings to their lives. These three reasons or “belief system[s], which legitimate relations of domination” (p. 23) are traditional, legal, and charismatic beliefs.

Adair-Totef (2016) explains Weber’s choice of words alongside the forms of authority described below: *Herrschaft* or *Autorität*. The word *Autorität* is a translation for authority, while *Herrschaft* can be interpreted as: “rule,” “domination,” “control,” “power,” or “sway” (p. 31). *Herrschaft* is defined as: “the probability that a specific group of people would obey an order with a specific content” (p. 31). Whether they are “a nation, class or a person,” people with authority have the capability to compel people toward obedience (p. 31). Compulsion is a characteristic that law and tradition have in common, hence, Weber’s word choice for *Herrschaft* when it comes to these two types of legitimacy.

Traditional authority “rest[s] on habitual attitudes and beliefs in the legitimacy of standardized and sanctified practices” (Turner, 1974, p. 23). It is grounded in strong traditional guidelines in which the person who holds such authority serves the community and mainly is interested in power and money. It is based upon a “holy custom” and holiness founded in “any old traditional customs (from standing orders) and dominating powers” (Adair-Totef, 2016, p. 33). Traditional authority has “traditional laws” that are “permanent” insofar as they have exceeded time. Those who hold traditional authority are capable of disseminating new laws if they are compatible with the old laws. Thus, “traditional authority has no regard to persons” (p. 34).

Legal authority, also known as bureaucratic authority, “is based on a belief in the legality of impersonal rules and in the procedures for making and applying rules (Turner, 1974, p. 23). This type of authority “is based on reason, it is impartially implemented by paid trained officials, and its future is stable” (Adair-Totef, 2016, p. 29). The person who holds such authority serves

to interpret rules and his/her main interest is law and power. The holder of bureaucratic or legal authority is trained to act objectively in accordance to governing rules of his/her office. He/she must be neutral in making decisions and nothing affects this neutrality. Such authority helps replace tradition with rules (Adair-Totef, 2016). Therefore, there are three characteristics that describe bureaucratic and traditional authority: “permanence, rules, impartiality” (p. 34). Both traditional or bureaucratic *Herrschaft* are “permanent structures” and those who live under such authority live under routine systems to maintain a functional structure under “rule and order” (p. 35). Domination is also a characteristic used to describe legal and traditional authority (Adair-Totef, 2016).

Charismatic authority is the multifaceted concept and contradictory process on which Weber (cited in Turner, 1974) focused. It is based on the “charismatic personal qualities” and an obedience to someone of “imputed holiness, heroism or some extraordinary quality” (p. 23; see also Adair-Totef, 2016, p. 31). Charismatic leaders appear in “chaotic times” and possess “demonic power” and have charismatic qualities (Adair-Totef, 2016, p. 31). Leaders of this sort of personal, irrational, and temporary authority are chosen by God, derive power through their personal gifts, and can perform miracles.¹⁸ One example is Jesus as explained in the Old Testament or Prophet Mohammad (Adair-Totef, 2016). Further, charismatic enterprise replaces existing authority with new ideas and relationships changing the “extraordinary into mundane” (Turner, 1974, p. 24). The pure type of charismatic authority occurs in the “process of originating” where it becomes traditionalized or rationalized or both by the social groups or followers of this new type of authority. To stabilize the disciple’s status in that movement, they

¹⁸ I would like to thank my committee member, Dr. Ralph Webb, for pointing out that both have authority from God and both are based on the belief that there is a God (namely, the authority is God as revealed through these different approaches and particularly the bases of charismatic authority). I note that, in Islam, jurists traditionally have authority to interpret holy text.

make “demands of adherence” which are compatible to everyday life and, specifically, ones related to familial and economic necessities, making the charismatic ideas “dependent on the socioeconomic factors” (p. 24).

2.3 A Brief Historical Background for Muslim Women’s Authority in Islam

Islamic laws (*sharī‘ah*¹⁹) are derived from the *Qur’ān* as well as the *Sunnah* (Mohammad’s prophetic tradition and teachings), which forms a legal framework to regulate the public and private lives of Muslims. Once women in the Arabian community during Prophet Mohammad’s time learned their Islamic laws and values, they were able to disseminate their knowledge through positions of leadership in their community. For example, two of Prophet Mohammad’s wives advocated for Islamic laws and served as judicial advisors in the Muslim community, which was inspirational to Muslim women at this time. From its early days, Islam established the position and status of women as leaders in Islam while simultaneously defying the misogynistic assumptions of pre-Islamic practices that were perceived as normative at the time (Lovat, 2012).

Yet, after the period of Mohammad (570–632 A.D.), Islamic societies developed in different contexts and time periods, leading to varying interpretations of Islamic laws and texts. These interpretations have resulted in differential treatment and expectations regarding the place of women within particular Islamic societies and within the religion of Islam itself. In some contexts, women have been treated more fairly than others. However, in other cases, misogyny, inequality, and the gender oppression of women have been justified by clerics under the name of

¹⁹ *Sharī‘ah* is “translated as Islamic law, the term *Sharī‘ah* describes both Muslim practices that relate to law in Western understanding” (Vikør, 2014).

Islam. Such patriarchal interpretations of *Qur'ānic* scripture, the *Hadīth*, and Islamic laws have led Muslim women in a variety of contexts to engage in collective action to attain their rights while still affirming their religion (Barlas, 2002).

While many religions give religious authority to individuals to interpret texts and influence their followers, Islamic laws were developed by knowledgeable individuals so that it can help lead people in various aspects of life such as regulating aspects of societal, political, and economic activities. Following the death of the Prophet Mohammad, the religious authority took many shapes that “included the caliph, the *‘ālim* (scholar), the *muftī* (legal scholar who issues opinions in the form of *fatwās*²⁰), the *qādī* (judge who issues binding rulings), the Sufi *shaykh* (mystical leader), and *khatīb* or *imām* (mosque preacher)” (Bano & Kalmbach, 2011, p. 4). These positions were not solely for men, but women were able to gain Islamic authority in the early centuries of Islam. For instance, Aisha, the wife of the prophet, narrated *hadīths*²¹ and taught Islamic jurisprudence for both men and women (Ahmad, 1992). In the following centuries after the prophet’s death and, especially in the Middle East, women were educated and held religious positions that gave them authority such as religious scholars and leaders of *Sufi* orders (Bano & Kalmbach, 2011).

It was not until later centuries that Islamic authority began to favor men as ideas that women were inferior to men were popularized. In the sixteenth century, the interpretations of sacred books limited women’s rights and the interpretations were oriented more towards men. During the Ottoman Empire the segregation of sexes was enforced. Women’s movements around the city were restricted as well as their participation in the public sector. Amidst all the

²⁰ *Fatwās* is the plural *fatwā*, which means a ruling on a point of Islamic law given by a recognized authority.

²¹ Plural of *hadīth*.

restrictions for women, education was treated differently in Islamic cultures. Turkish women were able to learn multiple languages and the memorization of the *Qur'ān* was encouraged. However, there were no careers for women pursuing sacred knowledge. The positions of *ulama* was limited to men as they had to go through religious training to be able to become a *'ālim*.²² As the patriarchal values started to take over, Turkish women slowly accepted their roles inside their homes (Dengler, 1978).

Contrary to Turkish women, the progression and resistance to patriarchal values can be traced in other societies. For instance, in China, during the seventeenth century, women had an important role in resisting the dominance of men when it came to Islamic knowledge. They claimed their own spaces in which to perform their religious duties and demanded to study under female religious scholars. Chinese Muslims were not ruled under an Islamic dynasty and they were isolated from other Muslim nations. Hence, there was a demand to have women who had Islamic education to continue on with their Islamic tradition and allow Islamic authority for women. In addition, Chinese Muslims wanted to maintain their Islamic religion and to be able to bring up generations that practice Islam. As a result, a women's mosque was established specifically to serve Chinese Muslim women. In addition, *Qur'ānic* and Islamic scriptures were translated to Chinese to maintain the knowledge and to continue raising their offspring as Muslims. These Chinese Muslim children spread the Islamic knowledge during the times when Muslims were persecuted for their religion in China (Armijo, 2009). Later on in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, there was a transformation in women's Islamic education. Chinese women gained a higher degree of authority and power that was almost equal to men. They were

²² *Alim* is a singular verb of *Ulama* which means religious scholars.

able to manage the mosque's affairs and oversee the educational and training programs for women so that they could become scholars (Jacschok, 2011).

Just as women's roles shifted according to factors related to culture, geographical location, and interpretation of sacred text, colonization in the Middle East in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century contributed to the rise of feminist, modernist discourse. During *Shaykh* Muhammad Abduh's²³ time in Egypt, feminist discourse sought to have women engage in the reinterpretation of sacred text (Badran, 2008; Bano & Kalmbach, 2011). With the colonization of Western countries in the Arab world, there was a necessity to preserve the Islamic tradition. Hence, mass education and literacy among many Arab countries changed the social structure. As a result, institutions and programs were built to educate women. Women were able to become "*ālīma, mujtahidah, and imām*" (p. 17). Further, men who had religious authority supported educating women and training them to become religious scholars (Bano & Kalmbach, 2011). In recent times, this support has continued. In 2008, in Syria, the Grand Mufti, *Shaykh* Hassoun, initiated a project to train women in Islamic law and jurisprudence so they can serve as *muftis* and issue *fatwas* in legal Islamic matters (Armijo, 2009).

The rise of Islamic revival movements that aim to preserve the religion have occurred at the same time as the rise of waves of Islamic and liberal feminism to practice religion amidst modernity. There is a similarity of the Islamic and liberal feminism in the Arab world compared to the Muslim feminist movement among American Muslims because both seek modernity under the banner of Islam and aim to empower and educate women. Through the works of Badran (2008) and other scholars, the similarities and differences as to the practice of Islam and feminism in the United States have been well documented.

²³ *Shaykh* Muhammad Abduh is known for Islamic modernism in Egypt and who held many positions such as Islamic jurist, theologian, religious scholar and liberal reformer (Abduh, n.d.).

2.4 Feminism and Islam: Opportunities and Limitations

Many lay people in the West assume that Islamic feminism does not exist, as the perception of Islam in the West does not allow room for feminist thought. For example, Orientalists have used the rationale of “oppressed Muslim women” to justify colonialism and neocolonial invasions to Muslim societies. Yet, Islam itself does not dictate specific practices of female oppression so much as the local interpretations of Islam, which are dependent on the religious authority and the context. When Islam is being practiced to favor patriarchal power, to create patriarchal hierarchy, and to privilege men over women, it solidifies the Western stereotypical notions of unjust gender treatments in Islam (Badran, 2008, p.8). However, this is not always how Islam is practiced nor is it a sign of the fundamental aspects of the religion.

The topic of Muslim feminism sparks confusion and debates when discussed. According to Badran (2008), the feminism that is constructed by Muslim women (including both secular feminism and Islamic feminism) has Islam as an integral part of it. Muslim feminism runs contrary to Western feminism which does not use a particular religion to support its claims and instead operates in a secular non-religious framework. Badran (2008) looks into feminist movements in Egypt in order to understand the types of feminisms at play and their different approaches and implementations. In her opinion, the secular feminism that emerged in Egypt was the intersection of “secular nationalist, Islamic modernist, and humanitarian (later human rights) discourse” (p. 8) and was exercised as a movement in multiple Middle Eastern countries. Even though the word secular is being used, it was structured within a national framework but instilled religious ideologies. Secular feminism used Islamic modernist arguments to seek gender equality in the public sphere. This included “secular education and work, and political rights” and worshipping congregationally at the mosque” (p. 10). However, their approach to the private

sphere, which referred to family laws, was a gender complementary framework where men should honor their responsibilities as prescribed in the *Qur'ān* --such as financial responsibility.

Islamic feminism on the other hand, focused on “gender liberation,” “social change,” and practicing a model of “holistic egalitarian Islam.” The goal of Islamic feminism was to use *Ijtihad*²⁴ to understand Islam and gender and to provide a guide for “religious and sociocultural transformation” (p. 10). Their understanding of the public/private sphere is different than secular feminism, as they have a more “fluid public/private continuum” (p. 10). Islamic feminism sought gender equality in religious professions, in rituals in the mosque, and argued that the practiced “patriarchal family model” does not follow the *Qur'ān*. Thus, Islamic feminism called for reinterpretation of the *Qur'ānic* verses (Badran, 2008, p10).

Similar to the case in Egypt, Muslims in the United States had struggled to fight misogyny and patriarchy and they sought gender equality within religious spaces and practices. However, Muslims in the United States are diverse in race and culture, ranging from immigrants, U.S. born Muslims, and converts to Islam. Muslims constitute 1.1% (3.45 Million) of the American population as a whole (Mohamed, 2018). Some affiliate themselves with orthodox Islamic opinions while others have adapted Western ideologies such as Western feminism.

Western feminism, as described by Mahmood (2011), aims to establish conditions for gender equality that enable them to create and enact self-determined goals and interests. Further, Western feminism is also used as an analytical and political tool to eradicate discrimination and suppression of women to empower them meaning that feminist movements have a legal agenda (Örtenblad et al., 2017; Mahmood, 2011; Pauly, 2018). Feminism at large is shaped by Christian capitalist gender relations, culture, and various Western social thought paradigms (Majid, 1998).

²⁴ *Ijtihad* refers to “Independent intellectual investigation of *Qur'ān* and religious text” (Badran, 2008, p.10).

Further, feminism came in phases where the first and second waves (1800s-1890s) focused on discussing the variances between men and women and specifically focusing on white women's experiences in Western countries (Örtenblad et al., 2017; Pauly, 2018). The third phase (1980s-2000s) focused on "differences between women, multiple identities, and multiple oppression" (Örtenblad et al., 2017, p. 4). The fourth wave is "thinking about goals, subjects, and feminist strategies" (p.4). Although there are different approaches to feminism such as liberal feminism, cultural feminism, modernist feminist, and postmodernist feminist (Buzzanell, 1994, 2020; Örtenblad et al., 2017; Putnam & Ashcraft, 2017), these different types of feminisms are defined as "bodies of knowledge about gender and difference that share a perspective for understanding and potentially redressing inequality" (Putnam & Ashcraft, 2017, p. 333). In general, feminist theory came to eliminate male domination on various levels and restructure American society to prioritize self development over "imperialism, economic expansion, and material desires" (Lam, 1994, p. 879)

As waves of feminism sought to promote change for women, the third wave of feminism (1980s-2000s) sought to include diverse demographics, identities, and the inclusion of intersectional categories of society such as women of color and class. Nonetheless, Western feminist ideals wanted to have a universal application yet still faced criticism. Such criticisms included the misrepresentation of female minority groups, marginalization of their experiences, and the "binary understanding of gender identities" (Örtenblad et al., 2017, p. 5). Further, some Muslim scholars such as Jackson (2015) note that the universal concepts of feminism may have served humanity in this modern world but it has disadvantages when it comes to the Muslim

community. The West²⁵ developed ideals and constructs that best fit the sociopolitical agenda that evolves according to the need of the diverse general public. Feminism, liberalism, and secularism are all Western constructs with underlying ideals which Muslims are using to call for individual's rights and institutional changes. In Jackson's (2015) opinion, Muslims do not identify with the history and legacy of Western ideals but rather adapt it to fight the injustice of the "European past, the decadent, authoritarian Muslim present and the specter of the American Christian Right" (Jackson, 2015)

For instance, there are Muslims who call themselves Muslim liberalists or use the construct of liberalism without verbal affiliation. According to Jackson (2015), liberalism came about when religion was seen as a threat to freedom, equality, tolerance, and rationality. Liberalist ideals are "white, Western, secular (or post-Christian) and, as many feminists would note, male." Jackson sees liberalism as false universals because when people of races other than white use liberalist ideals, they are looked upon as only talking about their race and culture and not about humanity in general.

Feminists use liberalism as a way to refuse hierarchy and advocate for freedom and equality (Higgins, 2004). Liberal feminism aims to eliminate discrimination against anyone and provide gender equality in social and political spheres and everyday life practices. It focuses on personal autonomy and political autonomy in addition to the belief that both genders are equal and deserve equal treatment (Baehr, 2018; Örténblad et al., 2017). Liberal feminists want to open opportunities for women in the social structure rather than challenging it. They want to "fit

²⁵ I am using "the West" to categorize a particular position that is more individualistic oriented but I acknowledge that there is much diversity within Western ideologies and concepts of feminisms and Christianity such that the "West" is not monolithic.

women into a masculine pattern of life and masculine model of humanity and culture which is presented as gender neutral” (Örtenblad et al., 2017, p. 5).

Although there is no fixed point for implementing and adapting feminist policy measures on an international level, feminism “offers both a *diagnosis* of women’s status across cultures and a *prescription* for changing the situation of women who are understood to be marginalized, subordinated, or oppressed” (Mahmood, 2011, p. 10, emphasis in original). In many American mosques, a single approach of understanding Islam and practicing it in a certain way is “universalize and absolutize” (Jackson, 2015, para. 10). Coupled with women’s treatment in American mosques, such as segregation in the prayer space, not allowing women to hold leadership positions within mosques, and side entrances for women to perform their prayers (Block & Cornish, 2014; Makki, 2012), such spaces becomes problematic for Muslims who are affected by the autonomous Western liberal ideas in addition to the negative reactions and experiences of women who are dealing with more conservative mindsets (Jackson, 2015). In such cases, Muslim women are constantly challenged to prove themselves to be equal to men, especially when it comes to sacred spaces like mosques. In this case, the discourse of gender equality (is one form of feminism’s goal) arguably go in hand with Islamic principles to create coalition and offer a space for women to serve their spiritual, social, and educational purposes (Martin, 2010). It also helps redirect the Islamic feminism that is being practiced in the Middle East (Canon, 2003).

This ongoing struggle for women in American mosques evokes similar strategies to movements in the Middle East, to call for women’s participation and leadership in religious spaces. Many of the women engaged in these movements call themselves Muslim feminists or progressive Muslims who are seeking to occupy mosque and gain leadership in sacred spaces.

The perceived limitations of feminism aligned with the Middle East is communicated and materialized in the forms of tensions with and within religion as well as attachments to ideologies of progressive Muslims in the United States that might not go hand in hand with Islamic orthodoxy (Canon, 2003).

2.5 Women's Movement to Occupy Mosques: Communicative Practices

The movement for women to be part of mosques is not a new phenomenon. Scholars have written about similar movements in the Middle East and highlighted the controversy about such movements in the West (Badran, 2008; Bano & Kalmbach, 2011, 2012; Hammer, 2012; Mahmood, 2011; Sharify-Funk & Haddad, 2012). In *Politics of Piety*, Mahmood (2011) takes an anthropological approach to examine the women's mosque movement in Cairo during Islamic revivalism in Egypt. She shows how the movement emerged because there was a need to bring back Islamic knowledge in a time when secularism and westernization was affecting Egypt, hence, opening up routes of Islamic authority for women. The goal of that movement was to "educate lay Muslims in those virtues, ethical capacities, and forms of reasoning that the participants perceive to have become either unavailable or irrelevant to the lives of ordinary Muslims" (Mahmood, 2011, p. 204).

In her book, Mahmood (2011) articulates that there are limitations to understanding women's experiences when looking at them from the feminist liberal notions of agency, resistance, and freedom. These women are brought up in a non-liberal and patriarchal tradition. Yet through the mosque movement, they are resisting the social and cultural norms that are also characterized by domination—that is, because their context looks different so does their agency. According to Mahmood, when analyzing Egyptian women's experiences, Butler's articulation of agency is used as a synonym for women's resistance, to domination, and to the power structure,

and is also used as a tool of action and recognition of the autonomous self. Further, when using the poststructuralist understanding of power, in this case, power forms itself and “dominates the subject” and gives women the status of subordinate. This subordinated subject status is a way for the realization of “self consciousness identity” and women’s agency (Mahmood, 2011, p. 210). Thus, women’s agency may look very different in the women’s mosque movement of Cairo than it in a western, liberal context

Movements similar to the women’s mosque movement in Cairo are present in the United States. The aim of such movements is to occupy mosques and create spaces for women to facilitate scholarship and leadership. With Islam spreading in the United States and worldwide, the number of religious institutions (including mosques) is increasing to accommodate different cultural and intellectual Islamic backgrounds (interpretations). According to a Pew research study, 65% of Muslims in the United States say that religion is an important part of their lives, with 43% go to the mosque weekly and 52% say that traditional Islam needs to be reinterpreted (Sciupac, 2017).

Given the different backgrounds of Muslims in the West--namely Muslim immigrants or converts to Islam in addition to the diversity of the Western cultural contexts in which they live—Muslims in Western countries have led similar movements toward empowering Muslim women but with slightly different agendas and approaches. In the twentieth century there have been progressive Muslim movements that are calling for equality in sacred spaces, specifically in the United States. In 2005, Dr. Amina Wadud, an Islamic studies professor, led a public mixed-gender Friday prayer service in New York—and previously, in 1994, had done so in South Africa—with almost one hundred people attending the service. She had women calling the *adhan* (call to prayer) and men and women stood together in one line to perform the prayer (Hammer,

2012; Sharify-Funk & Haddad, 2012). This event (2005) was controversial and was also reported repeatedly in the media to be the first of its kind. Prior to Wadud's event in 2005, there were already some articles published discussing the role of women as prayer leaders and the significance of the event since women's leadership in conducting Friday prayers has always been a controversial topic. According to Sharify-Funk and Haddad (2012), Friday prayer in the historical experience is "an exclusively male position and responsibility" (p. 42). Although women-led prayer in Islam is traced back in the Islamic history since Prophet Mohammad's time, critical discourse was sparked after the event about old and new issues that pertain to women leading Friday prayer (McCloud, 2013). Women led Friday prayer was met with a lot of criticism, especially within Muslim communities, and faced rejection from Muslim scholars of the Arab world (Sharify-Funk & Haddad, 2012).

A similar event occurred in Los Angeles in 2015. According to the *LA Times* (Parvini, 2015), The Women's Mosque of America performed their first *jumu'ah* service (Friday congregational prayer) led by a female *khateebah* (female speaker) who is not a *shaykhah*²⁶ (also spelled as *shykhah*, *shaykha*, *shiekha*), nor a person who obtained religious knowledge. Almost a hundred Muslim women gathered in Southern California to be part of that event. Because of different timing, however, the Los Angeles (LA) event garnered a bigger response in the media by virtue of the fact that it was the second event.

2.5.1 Communicative Constitution of Mosques as Organizations

Communicative processes are keys to constructing organizations. Organizations are created, sustained, amended, and deconstructed through modes of communication (Belliger &

²⁶ *Shaykhah* is a title that has a wide range of applications, but in this context the title refers to a female religious scholar with Islamic knowledge.

Krieger, 2016; Bruscella & Bisel, 2018; Brummans et al., 2014; May, 2014). In this case, the role of mosques to serve as religious spaces and institutions are as important as synagogues and churches in American context (Dana et al., 2011). Mosques are “performative spaces” for women to actively participate in worship and to negotiate their identities (Prickett, 2015, p. 63). Many scholars have studied constitutive communication in organizations (CCO) that is grounded in Giddens’ structuration theory and specifically in human agency (Belliger & Krieger, 2016; Brummans et al., 2014; Bruscella & Bisel, 2018; McPhee & Zaug, 2000, 2008).²⁷ In Giddens’ theory, humans are social agents who interact with one another and in relation to ecological societal structures; they are situated in, produce, and reproduce knowledge and resourceful materials (McPhee, 2015). Human agents are capable of making sense, making decisions and consciously having an agency that is manifested through their activities (Belliger & Krieger, 2016; Bruscella & Bisel, 2018; McPhee & Zaug, 2008). Giddens’ structuration theory provides an understanding of macro-level issues and processes in organizations and workplace relationships among actors. It explains the development of structures that are systematically established through human interactions and through knowledge of permitted and controlled behaviors in any situation, that also appear among actors throughout time (Sias, 2014).

Religious organizations, including The Women’s Mosque of America (WMA), can constitute themselves or fail to do so communicatively. Constitutive communication in organizations (CCO) is an area of inquiry that has novel methods of theorizing and analyzing “organizations as discursive material configurations [that] are produced and coproduced through ongoing interactions” (Brummans et al., 2014, p. 173). CCO focuses on the micro level-

²⁷ The many different ways in which agency is conceptualized in different constitutive approaches are presented concisely in a special forum or invited section of *Management Communication Quarterly* entitled “Organizational Communication and the Question of Agency” edited by Brummans (2015).

interpersonal and intraorganizational organizing processes (May, 2014). By defining the terms-- constitution, organization, and communicative--one can elaborate and understand McPhee and Zaug's Four Flow model (see Figure 1) more fully. This model is one of the three CCO schools of thought that have different approaches to examining organizational communication in process (organizing) and in state (organization) through the constitutive power of communication (Brummans et al., 2014).

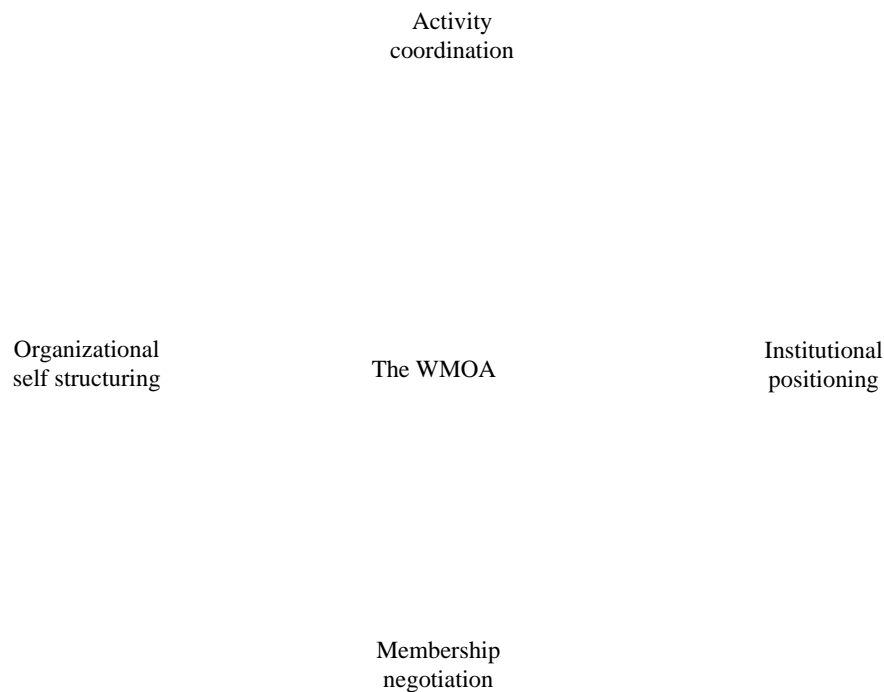


Figure 1: Adapted from McPhee Four Flow Model.

In CCO, constitution's etymological meaning encourages scholars to seek answers to ontological questions related to the functioning of communication in constructing and reconstructing organizations (Brummans et al., 2014). The term "constitution" has a multitude of meanings based on member's understandings of their organizational involvement. Meanings are based on the ontological and epistemological differences. The former refers to the community

members who constitute meanings of their social reality while the latter refers to individuals' realities that constitute and shape meanings (McPhee & Zaug, 2008). However, Giddens' explanation of constitution--"a pattern or array of types of interaction constitute organizations insofar as they make organizations what they are, and insofar as basic features of the organization are implicated in the system of interaction" (in Belliger & Krieger, 2016, p. 61; see also McPhee & Zaug, 2008) serves as the basis for McPhee's four flow approach to constitutive communication in organizations.

According to Belliger and Krieger (2016) basic features of organizations are "boundaries, processes, internal connections, and external relations" (p. 62). An organization is a "collective actor" (p. 63), hence, it can be defined as "a social interaction system, influenced by prevailing economic and legal institutional practices, and including coordinated action and interaction within and across a socially constructed system boundary, manifestly directed toward a privileged set of outcomes" (McPhee & Zaug, 2009, p. 28). Communication has a "constitutive force" that constructs agency between individuals and links them together through conversations. In bigger scale organizations, more complex communication processes occur. This constitutive force may include "single messages and interactive episodes...circulating systems or fields of messages" among "conscious, capable agents." These communicative processes are required for organizations to exist (McPhee & Zaug, 2008, pp. 28-29; see also Belliger & Krieger, 2016).

Organizations build their relations to four "audiences" — to their members, to themselves, to their internal groups or subgroups, and to their society or environment (McPhee & Zaug, 2008, p. 21). This four-flow model provides a framework to understand the production of organizations through the four communication processes of "message flow or interaction

process” (McPhee & Zaug, 2008, p. 21; see also McPhee & Zaug, 2000; Belliger & Krieger, 2016), that are also applicable to textual and dialogical forms (Bruscella & Bisel, 2018).

Through McPhee’s four flow approach, a framework is provided to apply and understand organizations, collective approaches to organizing, and “markets, networks, communities or social movements” (Brummans et al., 2014, p. 176). This framework’s flows—that may intersect or overlap with each other—highlight the “deductively derived types of communicative processes” (Brummans et al., 2014, p. 177; see also McPhee & Zaug, 2008) that construct and necessitate organizations’ existence.

In McPhee’s approach, organizations first need to maintain relationships with their members through communication processes called *membership negotiation* (McPhee & Zaug, 2000, 2008; Belliger & Krieger, 2016). These types of communication encompass indirect referencing and meanings of inclusion and exclusion in individual’s alignment or attachment to and socialization within an organization (Brummans et al., 2014; Bruscella & Bisel, 2018; McPhee & Zaug, 2000). Membership negotiation can be in forms of

hiring and firing, recruitment, human resources management, socialization in an organization such as learning the corporate culture, ways of speaking and acting that are typical, compatible, and expected by the organization, authorization and access to resources, power relations and hierarchical positions, and any kind of communication that binds members of an organization together. (Belliger & Krieger, 2016, p. 62)

Boundaries appear during socializations of members and newcomers and are exchanged though “instruction, storytelling, and dismissive reactions, as well as introduction and initiation” (Brummans et al., 2014, p.174). This flow is necessary for organizations to exist, in sense that without the information flow--that include dialectical and interaction processes, between members and organization that are identifiable, the organization does not have a distinctive identity (Belliger & Krieger, 2016). However, people do not always feel as though they are

members in organizations from the start of their connections to particular organizations. Instead, through recruiting and socializing, membership is constituted and negotiated among new and continuing members in a fluid and tensional “individual-organization relationship” (McPhee & Zaug, 2008, p. 34). Hence, agency in membership negotiation becomes apparent or visible when organizations draw in members and when members act and communicate in ways that are consistent with or advance organization’s purposes (Belliger & Krieger, 2016).

In the second flow, organizations need to maintain relationships as “formally controlled entities” (McPhee & Zaug, 2000) through *organizational self structuring* communicative flow. The “design” and “control” within an organization is a “reflexive activity” that is communicated among “role holders and groups” to “steer the organization or part of it” (Belliger & Krieger, 2016, p. 64). It occurs through articulated acts that give meaning and power to a group, to break out responsibilities and rights of individuals, and to represent people as part of an organization (Brummans et al., 2014; Bruscella & Bisel, 2018; MCPhee & Zaug, 2000). This flow “involves processes that design the organization, the setting up of subsystems, hierarchical relationships, and structural information processing arrangements” (McPhee & Zaug, 2008, p. 36). It also looks into the “internal relations, norms, and social entities that are the skeleton for connection, flexing, and shaping of work processes” (p. 36), “not the work processes themselves” (Belliger & Krieger, 2016, p. 64).

The organizational self structuring communicative flow is the process whereby organizations set “a persistent routine procedure for response” (p. 37) to handle problems that occur and avoid confusion. This procedural flow can be accomplished through

official documents such as charters, organization charts, policy and procedure manuals; decision-making and planning forums; orders, directives, and the more casual announcements that often substitute for them; processes of employee evaluation and feedback; budgeting, accounting, and other formalized control processes. (McPhee & Zaug, 2008, pp. 36-37)

Self structuring flows give the organization a “sense of self” that is purposeful and differentiated from other organizations.

In the third flow, organizations need to maintain relationships with their subgroups (McPhee and Zaug, 2000) through *activity coordination* communication; that is, self-structured interactions among members of an organization on task roles to understand members’ activities that fit with one another and accomplish obligations or responsibilities (Brummans et al., 2014; Bruscella & Bisel, 2018; MCPhee & Zaug, 2000). Further, this communication occurs when solving “immediate practical problems” that arise in uncertain circumstances and may require an adjustment in the work process. Members must actively communicate and coordinate “to settle differences of opinion, collaborate on projects, and coordinate their different but related jobs” (Belliger & Krieger, 2016, p. 65). In any structured (formalized and regulated) or unstructured (informally connected and/or emerging) organizations if members do not enact this flow, they could not transcend prescribed roles and duties (in online and other manual forms), thus hindering the resolution of problems and perceived difficulties in organizing (Belliger & Krieger, 2016).

The fourth flow connects the organization at a macro level with other organizations through all sorts of communication (Belliger & Krieger, 2016). Organizations need to maintain relationship with their collaborators and/or stakeholders in groups or clusters of establishments (McPhee & Zaug, 2000) through the *institutional positioning* flow. This communicative flow “requires a collective actor” to co-exist with other organizations. In the sense, the institution has

a distinctive identity that enables it to position or orient itself vis-à-vis other relevant stakeholders (Belliger & Krieger, 2016).

Institutional positioning may involve a range of organizational positions –“individuals, stakeholders, and competitors” (Bruscella & Bisel, 2018, p. 332) or “suppliers, customers, and competitors and collaborators, including merger or acquisition candidates” (McPhee & Zaugg, 2008, p. 39) that are managed to constitute organizations “as a sign with recognizable and significant place in the local ecology of organizations” (Brummans et al., 2014, p.174).

In McPhee’s four flow approach, text is a fundamental requirement for the development and survival of organizations. McPhee argues for the importance of studying human agents’ reflexivity on creating and using text. Texts previously were limited to human agents but the contribution to the conceptualize human’s agency through understanding the power to work with and interpret text, to act and react in evocative ways, are the biggest changes in organizational life and essential in the CCO framework (Brummans et al., 2014).

From the point of view of an organization, the four flows provide an account of organizational processes. The first verifies members’ struggles or mastery of their “roles, statuses, and relations to the organization.” The second enunciates role holders to design control and apply their decisions in a reflexive manner. The third shifts members’ independent work and engagement to collaborative engagement. The fourth describes the organization’s relationship “often anthropomorphized” with other organizations. In their point of view, these four flows do not automatically create an organization but rather they need to be more interrelated, more mutually influential for organizations to be constituted (McPhee & Zaugg, 2008, p. 42). This detailed account of the four flows provides the theoretical framework that guides this project in understanding The WMOA’s organizational processes and practices.

2.5.2 *Hadīth of Umm Waraqa: Feminist Discourse Argument*

There are two key texts used to narrate the Prophet Mohammad's position on the acceptability of female companions to lead prayer as *imāms*—both referring to *Umm Waraqa*. From a narrative reported in the *Musnad* of *Imām* Ahmad Ibn Hanbal about Umm Waraqa, the text reads:

“The prophet ordered²⁸ her to be the *imām* for the people of her house [or household, Arabic *dar*²⁹] and she has a *mu'adhdhin* [caller to prayer] and she used to be the *imām* for the people of her household.”

In another narrative by Sunan Abu Da'ud, the text reads:

“The Prophet used to visit her in her house and he appointed someone as a *mu'adhdhin* for her and he sounded the call to prayer for her, and he [the Prophet] ordered her to be an *imām* for the people of her household” and [says the narrator], ‘I saw her *mu'adhdhin* and he was an old man.’ (Hammer, 2012)

Those *hadīths* are the most commonly quoted and used as the basis for advocating for women's religious leadership in Friday prayer. However, there is historical and contextual debate about using them as a reference for the permissibility for women to be *imāms*. Dialectical arguments come from legal and other scholars who interpret *hadīth* and influence the discourse by restricting the permissibility of women's leadership in prayer. The changes in wording and in meaning, in addition to the different *hadīth* transmitters, are equally important to read the text in several ways (Hammer, 2012) and understand human agency in interpreting text (Brummans et al., 2014) and seeking the permissibility from that *hadīth* for women's leadership in prayer.

In later contemporary debates exploring this *hadīth*, scholars were “invested in the legal dimension of the prayer ritual” (p. 79) and argued that the meaning of the word *dar* encompasses “house, household, to neighborhood” (p. 79). Further, debates argue that the circumstances when

²⁸ In some versions of the *hadīth* it is reported that the words *adhana* (allowed) is used rather than *amara* (ordered) (Hammer, 2012).

²⁹ In later versions of the *hadīth*, this word is replaced by *nisa'aha* (meaning her women) (Hammer, 2012).

the Prophet ordered or allowed Umm Waraqa was applied to her in order to be an example for the women she led. She already has the knowledge of the *Qur'ān* by heart. In addition, the authority in the chain of *hadīth* transmission is found to be weak and this perceived weakness is used to dismiss its support for women's *imām*.

This debate of women-led prayer in Islam was continued around Dr. Wadud's event (2005). While scholars criticized Dr. Wadud's event, Western Muslim scholars argued differently. *Shaykh* Hamzah Yusuf, a notable American scholar, was featured on a YouTube video (Ramadan, 2010) speaking during the "Rethinking Islamic Reform Conference" in the UK in 2010. In his talk, he said that Muslim women leading men in prayer had been a debated issue early on in Islam with multiple opinions of prominent Muslim scholars in Islamic jurisprudence. Ibn Ayman, *Imām* Tabari, and Ibn Taymiah are prominent scholars in Islam who found it permissible for women to lead men in prayer if men were illiterate and women were more qualified. Ibn Taymiah said that women would lead from the back row to avoid distractions instead of having women lead upfront (Ramadan, 2010). According to Ahmad (1992), Umm Waraqa, a female companion during the prophet's time, led her household in prayer in response to the prophet's request. The household was not solely women but included men in the congregational prayer led by Umm Waraqa. Further, Yusuf Al-Qaradawi, who is an Egyptian scholar, draws from the *hadīth* that women with similar circumstances who have the knowledge of the *Qur'an* can lead prayer. The classical legal tradition (*Fiqh*) in this case is important to note and to reconsider in discourses, as it has been a result of historical circumstances. Leila Ahmed, who wrote about issues related to Muslim women, "argues that discursive and legal texts can be read as reflections of differing social realities" (Hammer, 2012, p. 81). However, it is important to note that feminist Muslim women who consider themselves as theologians base their opinions

and understanding on the *Qur'ān* rather than *Sharī'ah* and undermining the authenticity of *hadīths* (Ahmed-Ghosh, 2015).

Muslim women face challenges in Islamic worship spaces in America on a daily basis and that has spurred initiatives to empower women. In fact, according to the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA), only 14% of American mosques are female friendly, 18% of attendees at *juma'ah* prayers are women, 17% of mosques do not allow women to be or serve on the board of the mosque, and 66% use curtains as separation between men and women in daily prayers (Bagby, 2013).

When the media covered the LA incident, there were patterns of repetitive words such as “women's participation,” “female authority,” “feel empowered,” and “complementary place” (Simon, 2015). These words stem from a feminist approach of gender power relations that aims to emancipate women and give leadership positions to female Muslims. Feminist ideologies and strategies should be framed to accommodate different contexts that include; social, culture and politics. The language and context to which media were constructing discourse might have been or were different from the women's own understandings. According to Moghissi (1999), seeking sameness in gender is not the only ground base to claim equal rights for both genders in spaces.

2.6 Research Questions

Women's leadership movements which had established organizations and voices of individuals are calling to reform women's treatment in mosques. Seeking legitimacy and validation of these organization as part of the Muslim community through providing leadership program and spaces for women to exercise their authority: “Four Flows theory argues that organizations rely on institutional positioning communication to compete for resources, customers, and new members to generate social, economic, and political power with individuals

and other organizations” (Bruscella & Bisel, 2018, p. 336). Since mosques are religious spaces that are also organizations constituted through communications among actors, I propose to look into this issue further and understand women’s authority from a communicative point of view, while using CCO (and references to Weber’s classic understanding of authority); through investigating and answer the questions:

RQ1: How are American Muslim women organizing to author religious reform?

RQ2: How are American Muslim women empowering themselves and others through authority inside religious organizations such as The Women’s Mosque of America?

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I first discuss participants and context before providing details about my procedures. Because my data analytic method is the constant comparison technique aligned with constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2000, 2004, 2008, 2017), it is important to note how this analytic framing of my project influences this chapter as a whole, including my comments about participants and context, and also my concluding commentary that discusses my positionality.

As Charmaz (2017) differentiates between forms of grounded theory, particularly the original versions that followed traditional social scientific criteria for reliability and validity by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and Strauss and Corbin (1997) but that opened the doors to data-driven inquiry and development of midrange theory from the ground up. Charmaz contrasts these approaches with the constructivist approach that admits, even encourages, insights known to the researcher that are helpful in analyzing data and deriving interpretations from interpretive and critical stances. Charmaz (2017) writes,

The constructivist version [of grounded theory] fosters asking probing questions about the data and scrutinizing the researcher and the research process. Unlike other versions of grounded theory, the constructivist version also locates the research process and product in historical, social, and situational conditions. (p. 34)

She continues by saying that constructivist grounded theory offers ways of thinking about critical qualitative inquiry that involves “scrutinizing our positions, privileges, and priorities and assessing how they affect our steps during the research process and our relationships with research participants” (p. 35). These qualities of constructivist grounded theory encourage researchers, such as myself, to delve into how and where we/I made connections with research participants and our underlying motivations for doing our scholarship. These research

requirements differ from more traditional grounded theory approaches that aim for more objectivity and distance between researcher and researched (“focused on ‘what is happening’”, p. 39), by requiring self-consciousness defined as “intersecting relationships with power, identity, subjectivity—and marginality—for both the researcher and research participants (p. 36). In doing so, I weave in my own “research standpoints and staring points...tacit epistemology and preconceptions”(p. 39). With these points in mind, I now turn to the Participants and Context, then three phases of Procedures, and finally my positionality that addresses who I am as a researcher and Muslim woman living in the United States and how I approach my topic. I adhere to the guideline that my “way of knowing is always interpretive of a reality not a reproduction of it” (p. 41).

3.1 Participants and Context

Participants in this study are divided into two categories. The first category consists of women who were invited by The Women’s Mosque of America to serve as *Khutbah* or *Bayan* givers for Friday prayers. I labeled these women as leaders who either had contacted the organization to participate as a *khateebah* or prominent Muslim women—who are providing services to empower Muslims and may also work with non-Muslims, who had received an invite from the organization. The second category consists of attendees of services provided by the organizations, specifically the Friday prayer that is held once a month.

Both of these categories include Muslim women between the ages of 18-70 years who are English speakers. All of these women are active users of religious spaces in addition to The Women’s Mosque of America. Most participants are middle-aged women who were either born Muslim or who had converted to Islam. Most of the women reside in the Greater Los Angeles area, but some are speakers who fly into Los Angeles for particular occasions. The women are

named through pseudonyms. Two women are called Participant 1 and Participant 2 because both requested not to use their original names nor pseudonyms.

Twenty women participated in this research project. Women who do not affiliate with the Islamic religion were excluded.

Table 1: Participants Demographics *

Name	Age	Education	Marital status	Ethnicity	Converts/ Born Muslim	Mosque Affiliation	Current city
Cynthia	30+	PhD student	Single	Mexican	Convert Sunni	Mexico	Los Angeles, USA
Eiman	30+	MA	Divorced	Egyptian American	Born Sunni	Chicago, USA	Chicago
Participant 1	20+	BA	Single	South Asian American	Born Shia	Los Angeles, USA	Los Angeles, USA
Sarah	60+	BA	-----	African American	Convert	Los Angeles, USA	Los Angeles, USA
Amena	----	BA	-----	----	Born	-----	----
Um Yasin	40+	BA	Married	Afghan American	Born	San Francisco, USA	San Francisco, USA
Noor	40+	PhD	Married	Afghan American	Born	Orange County, USA	Orange County, USA
Nusaiba	20+	BA	Married	Syrian American	Born	Florida, USA	Los Angeles, USA
Participant 2	20+	BA	Single	Palestinian American	Born	Orange County, USA	Orange County, USA
Rahma	20+	BA	-----	African American	Convert	Atlanta	Los Angeles, USA
Rio	----	BA	-----	-----/-----	Convert	-----	----
Sabina	30+	BA	Married	Afghan American	Born	San Francisco, USA	San Francisco, USA
Samia	30+	BA	Single	-----/-----	Born Sunni	-----	Los Angeles, USA
Alia	----	BA	Single	-----/-----	Convert	-----	----
Tamara	----	BA	Single	Palestinian American	Born	-----	Los Angeles, USA
Sylvia	40+	PhD	Married	Chinese American	Convert	New Jersey	New Jersey

Table 1 continued

Zan	30+	M.S.	Married	American	Convert	New Hampshire, USA	New Hampshire, USA
Nicole	40+	----	Married	American	Convert	Los Angeles, USA	Los Angeles, USA
Hasna	30+	BA	Single	Bengali American	Born	Los Angeles, USA	Los Angeles, USA
Priscilla	50+	----	-----	African American	Convert	Los Angeles, USA	Los Angeles, USA

*Note: Demographics were ascertained from the interview rather than a background survey because of these women's prominence in their communities and because IRB requested that demographics not be collected. Therefore, if women did not provide the information or the details would indicate the women's identity, then the category is marked as ----. Only demographic information useful for interpreting interview discourse are included in Table 1. Keeping confidentiality in mind, these data are supplemented by details from observations, interactions, and my own knowledge of the setting and context that provide insights into codes that I employ to derive findings.

With regard to the context of this study, I chose to focus on The Women's Mosque of America as it already had media coverage and its members already were actively offering women-led Friday prayers every month with different speakers from the American Muslim community. Since this dissertation is a CCO-inspired project, participants are situated in the context, meaning that they interactively construct their context full of meanings, rituals, materialities, and language (Sillence, 2007) rather than the site being simply a backdrop for study or a place in which people interact. This difference in the meaning of context as communicatively constituted in contrast to context as the organization in which people interact is fundamental to the findings and their presentation.

3.2 Procedures

There were three phases to this project. The first two of these phases are listed in Table 2, Project Timetable. Subsequent tables address the third phase, data analysis, so that this phase--which was ongoing--was not listed in Table 2.

Overall, the three phases are: (a) Phase 1: Initiating contacts and obtaining institutional approval, (b) Phase 2: Data collection, and (c) Phase 3: Overview of data analytic procedures. Although data are analyzed, and later presented, through the iterative procedures of Charmaz's (2000, 2004, 20008, 2017) constructivist grounded theory, the project comes together as a case study. As a result, the fourth section of Procedures is the (d) case study framework which is followed by the final section of this chapter, (e) my positionality.

Table 2: Project Timeline

Phase	Date	Activity
Phase 1	July 2017	Initiated contact with Edina Leković at the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA) conference.
	December 2017	Attended The Women's Mosque Friday prayer without participation in the prayer. Meeting and initiating contact with Hasna Masnavi – the founder.
	February 2019	IRB approval received.
Phase 2	February 2019	Interviews and observations at The Women's mosque of America began.

3.2.1 Phase 1: Initiating Contacts and Obtaining Institutional Approval

The first phase began with a coincidental contact with Edina Leković at the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA) conference in July 2017 and concluded with institutional approval of my project. Edina took part in the first attempt to conduct an all women-led Friday

prayer at The Women's Mosque of America. Upon expressing my interest in her work and in conducting research in this area, she encouraged me to pursue sacred spaces and women's empowerment, noting the need for such research and providing me with her email for further contact.

Later that year I visited Los Angeles and emailed Edina to inform her about my visit. She replied with an invitation to The Women's Mosque Friday prayer that occurred during the time of my visit in December 2017. Since their prayers were held only once a month, I took the initiative to visit the space and witness the Friday prayer in person. This step helped me to understand more about my research context and also helped confirm my own and others' interest in the topic.

Upon my arrival in Los Angeles, Edina introduced me to Hasna Masnavi, the founder of the organization, and to other women from the congregation. After speaking with me about my research, Hasna provided me with her contact information and kept in touch during the course of my research investigation. At this time, I developed my interview protocol (see Appendix A) based on the constitutive approach to communication, specifically McPhee's Four Flows CCO approach, and on authoring and authority from CCO scholars' perspectives as well as from more classic sources on authority, such as Weber's writings (for details, see my Literature Review). I organized my interview protocol to capture the women's background, reasons for advocacy on behalf of Muslim women's empowerment, and how they constituted authority interactively and through use of texts. Questions were divided to suit the categories of women; leaders and attendees of The Women's Mosque of America. Consistent with CCO's focus on interaction, I also developed focus group and observational protocols.

Through my communication with Hasna and my readings and discussions to formulate my data gathering procedures, I developed a research plan and timetable. I submitted my request to focus on The Women's Mosque of America as a case study to the Purdue University Institutional Review Board (IRB). After multiple emails and filing the required IRB paperwork, the approval for the research came about in February 2019. The process with the IRB took longer than anticipated because of rigorous IRB scrutiny and changes in the IRB system for conducting research with human subjects.

The initial plan for this research was to conduct focus groups, interviews, and observations. However, with the extended time that the IRB took to approve my project and the imminent closure of my Saudi governmental scholarship to complete my Ph.D., the research project was modified to include only individual interviews and public observations of The Women's Mosque of America. There were no observations recorded of interactions that could identify individual women or groups of women.

3.2.2 Phase 2: Data Collection

There were two main forms of data collection. These data gathering techniques included interviews and observations in the settings most appropriate for understanding Muslim women's constitution of authority, particularly during Friday prayers. The primary source of data was the interviews. However, observations provided greater depth and understanding of women's actions within the building and during particular times and spaces.

Further, phase 2 included multiple processes to recruit participants for this research. After IRB approval, the first method began by visiting the site in Los Angeles, speaking to individuals about the research and recruiting Muslim women who participated at the Friday prayer with the organization. The second method was a snowball or networking procedure to include more

women than my own limited acquaintances would entail. With the help of The Women's Mosque of America's only current fulltime staff member, I was provided with contacts for individuals who served the community by having given sermons in the past years. In addition, reaching out to my personal network as a Muslim woman in America, I was given names and contacts of leaders in the community who took part of The Women's Mosque services. Leaders who have previously participated at The Women's Mosque of America have their contact information on their social media and in other forms on the internet. This contact information is readily accessible to the public. After obtaining contact information, I approached these leaders via email and invited them to participate in the research. Many welcomed the idea and sent in their availability for scheduled phone interviews.

Over the course of a year 5 months, women who participated in the monthly Friday prayer were recruited for this study. Almost every month I would show up and recruit women after the Friday prayer and ask them to sign up as participants for the research. Many had expressed their interest and more than 25 women, including speakers, put down their contact information to be interviewed. However, when the data reached saturation, specifically from the attendees, only twenty women interviews were used for this research.

I contacted participants via text messages and emails. I asked them about their preference to be interviewed either by phone, Skype, or in person. Many preferred over the phone as they came from different parts of Los Angeles and some were from out of town. Only one person met in person to be interviewed at a café. These interviews were audio recorded and designed to be in depth interviews ranging from 60-90 minutes. They were designed to approximate informal and situational conversations.

Before the beginning of the interview, I started by explaining the consent form (see Appendix B³⁰). The consent form outlined: the purpose of the study; the voluntary nature of their participation; the use of audio recording for the interviews; participants' rights, risks, and benefits of the study; their right to opt out of any part of the interview; and their right to decline being recorded. None of the participants had any questions. Participants indicated that they were willing to take part in the interview either through verbal or written consent. Participants had options of sending written consent prior to the interview, but most opted to give verbal consent. After consent was obtained, I began the interview. All participants were assured that the data would be kept confidential and safe.

During interviews, I asked the primary questions noted in the semi-structured protocols (see Appendix A). Some questions were refined during the interview based on the women's feedback. For instance, the question on authority caused many women to pause since they did not think that the word "authority" was most appropriate to describe women's leadership in mosques. As a result, some of the questions were modified throughout the interview to dovetail with participants' understanding of women's leadership within religious organizations. With a total of 20 interviews, ranging from 20-90 minutes (average=60 minutes), the total length of recorded interview time was 800 minutes. Some interviews were shorter than others because the participants indicated that they had no further information to provide for their responses.

After all the interviews were audio recorded, they then were transcribed verbatim, de-identified, and coded according to the main ideas and incidents repeated by participants in specific questions and throughout the transcripts (Suter, 2012). When words were in Arabic I

³⁰ When IRB forms were submitted for approval, Brian Smith was a Co-Chair on the committee and was listed as a principal investigator on IRB forms. However, by the time of completing this dissertation he was no longer serving as part of the committee because he changed institutions.

kept them in the transcript because these words had particular meanings to the participants and for the subject matter. For instance, many women used the word *Sunna*, which translates to “prophetic tradition” but has a connotation of following traditional Islam. The total amount of transcripts were about 200 pages that were transcribed in Word and transferred to Nvivo for coding and analysis.

For observational settings, the IRB did not consider the women’s mosque as a public setting and therefore required each person’s consent for any direct observations of interactions in this setting. Given that sometimes the organization has big groups of visitors, for example college students, it would have been difficult to obtain every person’s consent as the IRB had required. Instead, I noted down the context or general pattern of interactions among women as they would provide detail to supplement interviews and give insight into what the setting looked like and how people in general interacted in the setting. These observations included routine parts of prayer and services that did not enable identification of individuals or groups. These notes provided context and the setting of the services. Notes included repeated staff and attendees’ social and religious interactions, the general setup, décor, and other environmental aspects. Notes also included the social scenes and sensory experiences such as practices, sounds, and artifacts.

Prior to every organization-held Friday prayer service that I attended, an announcement of my presence as a researcher was made and any information, consent forms, and recruitment forms were at the registration table for women to come sign up and ask questions. Observations were mainly focused on Friday prayers. Each prayer took about 45 minutes to an hour starting with the call for the prayer, giving the sermon, and praying in and with the congregation. In short, my observational goal was to be able to observe women as they gathered, sat, attended a

Friday woman-led sermon, and/or prayed as a member of the congregation. Prayer was followed by the Q&A session. In this session, the women sat in a circle moderated by Hasna and the *khateebah* where women were able to ask and answer questions, exchange knowledge, and demonstrate support for each other's learning. These circles usually last about 15- 20 minutes after the prayer was over and during that time I would write notes of my observations to Q&A sessions.

3.2.3 Phase 3: Overview of Data Analytic Procedures

Lived experiences and contextualizing interactions with others adds to the body of theories in communication by exploring new insights through alternative ways of knowing and being in the world (May, 2014). Even so, these personal experiences and context are insufficient for theoretical contributions and practical implications. Instead, a focused research objective and an appropriate theoretical framework are requirements for analyses (George & Bennett, 2004). In this section, I discuss why and how I used the constant comparison technique of constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2000, 2004, 2008, 2017).

In the constant comparison technique, data gathering and analysis merge through researchers' systematic iterative and inductive procedures in efforts to develop mid-range theory that is neither apriori nor descriptive and embedded in discourse and context (Charmaz, 2000). This middle level theory provides new insights into phenomena by relying on what the data themselves provide through multiple layers of coding and, as constructivist grounded theory requires, through researchers' own insights and background into the phenomenon.

Like constant comparison technique procedures in other forms of grounded theory, researchers take notes in margins or in separate documents, compare and interrogate emerging categories by using generative questions (e.g., What is similar and different about interviewees'

responses? What linguistic choices and phrasing is similar within and across interviews?), and construct “memos” about additional questions and context. Preliminary findings occur while gathering and transcribing data or checking transcriptions against audio files for accuracy (Charmaz, 2000; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Glaser and Strauss (1967) call the systematic analysis of data—iterative layers of coding, re-categorizations, theoretical connections, returns to data for support of emerging findings and for any possible negative or disconfirming cases--the constant comparative method, whereas the broader label of grounded theory also indicates that new theory is being constructed.

During the constant comparison process, researchers look for instances where there are similarities and differences from existing theories and empirical research. As such, constant comparison approaches rely upon the researcher’s knowledge about the phenomenon and sometimes result in the use of other theorists’ frameworks for organizing data and findings. In my case and as I reviewed and coded data, I found that the constitutive approach to organizing and its theorizing on authority/authoring provided a productive lens through which to generate categories and organize data. As Locke (2001) points out, the commitment to discovery through data analysis does *not* mean that “researchers should embark on their studies without the general guidance provided by some sort of orienting theoretical perspective” (p. 34). Instead, theory should be aligned with data as codes and categories move from greater specificity to abstraction and as preliminary codes become integrated to derive findings (pp. 35-36).

Through using CCO (McPhee & Zaug, 2000, 2008, MCPhee, 2015), authority as theoretical framework (Brummans et al., 2014), and Charmaz’s (2000, 2004, 2008, 2017) constructivist grounded theory to analyze the data, a better understanding of women’s authority in American Islamic contexts can be articulated in multiple ways.

Following Charmaz's (2000, 2004, 2008, 2017) grounded theory as basis for this research enquiry, a constant comparison analysis focused on themes of authority and of McPhee's four flows was developed to help answer the research questions. I approached the data analysis manually and chronologically. For the first cycle of coding I read all the transcripts closely and coded line-by-line on Microsoft word documents. I came up with many key words that fit within the main theoretical frameworks. These codes were collective or broad codes and labels that were broken down to subcategories so they could encompass more ideas that were stated in the interviews (see examples of codes from my coding booklet provided in Tables 3 and 4, with the note that additional codes and their levels are available from the author).

Table 3: CCO Coding Booklet

CCO				
Themes defined	Codes	Sub-code 1	Sub-code 2	Sub-code 3
Membership negotiation Inclusion: sense of belonging (motivation)	1-Welcoming: ambiance/ environment/ gesture	-Verbal -Non verbal		
	2-Similar experiences			
	3-Accessible knowledge	-Religious guidance -Helpful resources/services		
	4- Safe spaces (inclusion and exclusion)	Acceptance	4- Accepting different sects	
			5- Accepting different identities	
			6- Gender	Female sisterhood All community
			7-Ethnicities- diversity	race
		Unity		
	5-Emotional fulfillment	9-Self validation		
		10- Religious		
	6- Freedom	Faith		
		Practices		
		Participation		
		Speech- relevant topic		

Table 3 continued

Reflexive self structuring And Activity coordination		Allocating effective resources		
		Acquisition of leadership qualities	-Religious knowledge - Non judgmental.	
		Nature of communication		
	Mal practices	Communication		
	Best practices	level of authority	Role distribution	
			Decision making	
			Problem solving	
			Role responsibility	
		Type of communication		
	Work process			
Mal practices	Communication			
Institutional positioning at the macro level	Types of communication			
	Institution image/ advocacy / presence			
	Recognition			
	Responses			
	Potential partners or interests			
	Positioning	Identity establishment		
		Development		
		Maintenance		

Table 4: Authority Booklet Coding

AUTHORITY			
Themes defined	Codes	Sub-code 1	Sub-code 2
Authority	Type	Charismatic Legal Traditional	
	Understanding	Traditional Progressive Modern	
	Application	Space	
		Roles/ voice	Speech
			<i>Imam</i>
			<i>Moazena</i>
		Gender	
		Effort	
		Outreach	Online
			Physical spaces

With the second coding cycle, I grouped these key words to create a digital code book (see Tables 3 and 4) Some examples of the codebook entries are: welcoming: ambiance/ environment/ gesture, similar experiences, accessible knowledge. Lastly I transferred the word document to NVivo to speed up the process of analysis and highlighted the paragraphs that best fit the categories that coincided with the research questions. The research questions were being accessed constantly to help focus the coding.

After seeing that the two theoretical frameworks of CCO four flows and authority/authoring would work with my data and for my research questions (see coding booklet Tables 3 and 4), I then engaged in more specific coding, as noted earlier. I went through the data using Nvivo and engaged in open, axial, and selective coding (see Appendix C).

I started first with open coding to understand the data from the actor's point of view and constantly compare codes to ensure development of new meanings (Porter et al., 2018). Then I performed axial coding by converting transcripts into concepts that can be categorized to provide a frame to work with. As mentioned in Charmaz (2006), Strauss looks at axial coding as “a dense texture of relationships around the ‘axis’ of a category” (p. 60). Hence, this process establishes coherent relationships between categories and subcategories.

Strauss and Corbin (as mentioned in Charmaz 2006) use an organizing schema to participant's interviews to answer questions of “when, where, why, who, how, and what” in relation to the phenomenon. These schemas include the “conditions” that shape the structure of the phenomenon, “actions and interactions” of participants to organizational issues, and the “consequences” and outcomes that are a result of these actions (Charmaz, 2006, p. 61). In the final stage, I engaged in selective coding to construct “a conceptual model”, in which a single category is selected to represent a group of axial coding (Suter, 2012).

3.3 Case Study Framework

I decided to take a qualitative case study approach to frame the analysis and findings of my dissertation project. In this way, I could incorporate my observations, my interpretations, my interview data, and content from the online sermons that are provided by the organization for the public domain. I note that I am using constructivist grounded theory as the data analytic technique and the exploratory case study approach as a means of explicitly framing my findings within context. This framing through a case study is slightly different from other functions of the case study approach. To note these differences, I first discuss the (a) case study in general and then describe (b) my use of the case study in this dissertation project.

First, a case study in general is considered to be an approach, method, or type of qualitative research used in social sciences to study individuals and groups and/or to explore a phenomenon (Yin 2003). Qualitative research is characterized by the emphasis on individual experiences, and the subjective interpretive approach of the researcher, which is an important aspect of a case study. Therefore, a case study is a comprehensive account and an analysis that can have many different theoretical layers and levels; such as an in-depth exploration of perspectives, events, and processes; a descriptive level; a causal/experimental level; or a developmental level in which a series of events is examined during various time frames. For the purposes of this project, I framed my findings through an exploratory case study that describes and explains how American Muslim women constitute their sacred spaces and authority through women-led Friday prayer at a particular women's mosque, The Women's Mosque of America.

With regard to my own use of the case study approach as a framing mechanism for my findings, I noted how the case study and the constructivist grounded theory, especially the constant comparison technique, come together in my dissertation project. As Giddens stated, individual case studies are not basis for generalization when done in a small community

(Starman, 2013). According to Yin (2003), case study design is used when the purpose of the research questions is to answer “how”. For this reason, the both research questions were stated as an inquiry of “how” and the response come from interviews and participant observations analyzed through the constant comparison technique in constructivist grounded theory as organized through attention to McPhee’s four flows and authoring literature, as described in earlier sections of this dissertation.

Specifically in this research, the case study approach enables in-depth exploration of a group of women and their understandings and motivations of authoring and authority. It examines these women in the current time period through observations of Friday prayers and interviews. Using the case study method enables me to contextualize and add field notes and personal observations to the data in addition to bringing in different theories and cultural influences that would enable me to interpret and report findings.

These different challenges from finding initial contacts to reconciling different cultural and gendered expectations for theory and practice helped shape my research questions from generalized questions about women as *imāms* and leadership in the mosque to focus more on women’s authority, how they reinterpret the text through their practice, and how they gain authority by using public space to mimic, expand, and enrich the purpose of a mosque. As noted earlier when discussing the cultural and national variations of Islam, the context or case of Muslim women in the United States is important as a setting or backdrop but also as a site in which space and place are constituted for religious and women’s empowerment purposes. I discuss my own challenges in conducting this research in the next section, my positionality.

3.4 My Positionality

As noted at the conclusion of Chapter 1, my positionality is grounded in my lived experience as a Saudi-born Muslim woman and as a communication researcher studying in the West. My identities--as a Saudi woman who has studied in the United States and who is Muslim—affect and are affected by the ways in which I view my project and myself.

To begin, I have background in this faith, in one major country where religion is the main rule of the state. Through my upbringing, the *Qur'ān* and *Sunnah* were the point of reference to any individual, communal, or governmental issues that would arise. Contrary to the United States where there is a separation of State and Church (religion), my religion and my national origins are intertwined. Western feminisms and organizational communication--or any human-developed ideology--has an influence over understanding and, in my case, to understanding and practicing Islam among a particular group of people. Although the connection of religion, culture, and organizing are explicit here, the ideological basis of organizing and, for example, work ethics as informed by religion is not always stated (e.g., Protestant and Roman Catholic work ethics and references to calling and career, e.g., Berkelaar & Buzzanell, 2015). Many ideologies and movements are utilized within influential theories utilized heavily in academic disciplines. In my many conversations with American Muslims, who were born and raised in the United States and others who were immigrants, many Western ideologies subconsciously arise or influence the paradigms of which these individuals view the world and religious matters.

At the beginning of my research, I was under the impression that The WMOA's approach was a reinterpretation of *hadīth* that is not founded in the Islamic scripture and that their claim of having women's only mosque in America sounded to me as a Western feminist approach. I was

under the impression that the *Qur'ān* and *hadīth* were not the concrete standards³¹ for which this organization or other religious organizations stand. In fact, in many of the arguments and debates I had read on women's Friday prayer, I constantly come across arguments from the traditional point of view—which is also valid based on the strong oral tradition and transmission of *hadīth* and the grounding of it in Islam. However, in this case of my dissertation it was a project of learning and understanding as a researcher but also a space where I experienced challenges to my upbringing.

The first challenge was situating myself as a researcher, as someone who could express the women's views as they understood their religious endeavors and identities as Muslim women in America. I did not participate as a congregant in the Friday prayer, partially because I am a researcher onsite trying to observe, but also because deep inside I was not convinced that this women-led prayer and authoring was the “right” way of understanding and implementing Muslim women's leadership. These tensions between my religious upbringing and my desires to give these women voice have pervaded my project and probably will continue for some time to come.

However, the more I observed and spoke with women, the more I was able to relate needs that they seek to fulfill when coming to such space. The Women's Mosque of America (WOMA) is one of few spaces designed to empower women and provide a place for praying, learning, and connecting on spiritual and human levels. In their view, The Women's Mosque of America is not

³¹ There is difference between the authenticities of scriptures when it comes to different religions. With Islam it is believed that *Qur'ān* is God's word that is not altered since its revelation. Hence it is used as a guideline and a point of reference for issues that evolve over time with practicing Muslims in religious or non-religious communities in all contexts. However, the *Qur'ān*'s “application and interpretation of its dictates in daily life are contingent and internally contested” (Munnik, 2017, p. 276).

designed solely to honor what the *Qur'ān* has given in terms of rights for women but also is a complementary space to mosques, dedicated to fulfill the needs of women who might have had traumatizing spiritual experiences, or simply could not find *khutbahs* that speak to their womanhood. In Saudi where I grew up, finding a spiritual and Islamic learning place and spaces for such experiences were not a problem at all. Because of the segregated culture and the social and religious structure in Saudi, opportunities for women's only spaces were not only allowed but encouraged as means to fulfill their needs. As a result, the consideration of other organizing forms, particularly in leading a Friday prayer, did not seem necessary and was perplexing to me at first.

My second challenge was understanding and representing the Western paradigms and notions that I detected in my conversations with leaders and attendees of The WMOA. Throughout my interviews I noticed many meanings that women used to explain the space and authority—which will be discussed further in the results section of my dissertation. In my opinion, many words are inspired by Western feminist notions such as freedom, empowerment, and equal access. Many of these feminist notions use men and their rights as a point of reference and a point of comparison rather than going back to the scripture to reinterpret or understand women's rights. For me, this difference in feminisms and societal discourses was not the typical way of understanding gender roles. Throughout this project, I found myself re-identifying with the values that we as Muslims stand for (from my upbringing and religious convictions) and juxtaposing these perspectives with the situated ideological adaptations that have been socially constructed because of culture, history and different upbringings.

Because this is a study that used constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2017), I incorporate my feelings, note my biases, and recognize my own confusion about women leading

Friday prayer. This authoring process—of gaining, legitimizing, and building authority in sacred spaces—is filled with contradiction and ambiguity for me. However, I have incorporated the experiences of women attendees of The Women’s Mosque of America in ways that enable them to tell their side of the story, their challenges and opportunities, and their understandings of influences to challenge patriarchal practices as Muslims living in the West. In telling their stories, I also tell mine.

The third challenge for me was looking at and analyzing my research through Western secular lenses and using these Western theories as a basis for my theoretical framework. I found it difficult at first and inadequate to take on a purely Western theoretical framework—mainly Western feminist frameworks, as points of reference to study issues because many of my women participants were oriented toward and embodied such feminisms. Not only was understanding these feminisms challenging in general and in the women participants’ talk and interactions, but the processes of authority, power, and empowerment as found in The Women’s Mosque of America were (and are) heavily influenced by Islamic tradition which views women’s empowerment differently, as noted in the previous challenge. As I was taught, the Islamic tradition, based on the *Qur’ān* and *Sunnah*, offer a comprehensive, divinely inspired, and prophetic framework brought to humans so that humans could interpret, adapt, and apply in ways that complement their own cultures. In other words, there is one Islam but many variations on how Islam is constituted in different regions and cultures.

According to my religious belief, this framework does not need a human Western lens to understand it. However, in studying issues of women-led Friday prayer and sacred spaces for and by women, I had to take into consideration Western influences, culture, and concepts, such as the American ethical and ideological influences on the understanding of Islam. These concepts were

developed because the United States is a combination of many ethnicities. According to Abd-Allah (2006), Islamic civilizations did not contradict cultures but rather complemented them with universal rules of Islamic laws. As a result, many take Islamic faith as a guideline for living while preserving their own cultures as long as cultural norms do not contradict Islamic rules (such as drinking alcohol, eating pork, and engaging in premarital sex).

I was sensitive to the fact that my background as a Saudi Muslim woman with an Islamic identity and upbringing had already set preconceived ideas about how this project would be explained. Starting from the basic understanding of a divinely explained ritual, the prayer, I endeavored to make sense of and convey to readers particular understandings of cultural and ideological influences that are used in the practice of rituals as well as how Muslim women constitute authority to call for women's empowerment in an American context. Because of these differences and my need to make sense of and challenge that which seemed strange to me, my analysis of The Women's Mosque of America has been both an intellectual journey and a personal one.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

In this chapter, I provide an overview of my findings and present them in the order of my research questions. My research questions guiding this study are:

RQ1: How are American Muslim women organizing to author religious reform?

RQ2: How are American Muslim women empowering themselves and others through authority inside religious organizations such as The Women's Mosque of America?

As noted in earlier sections, I used the CCO approach, particularly the Four Flows model theorized by McPhee and colleagues (Belliger & Krieger, 2016; Brummans et al., 2014; Bruscella & Bisel, 2018; Endacott & Myers, 2019; McPhee, 1985, 2015; McPhee & Zaug, 2000, 2008) and both classic and contemporary scholarship on authority (e.g., Brummans et al., 2014; Brummans et al., 2013).

Organizing and, by extension, authority, are constituted by four flows or ongoing processes that actually interact although they are reported separately in the following section. The Four Flows are: (a) membership negotiation, (b) self structuring or, in this case, reflexive self structuring, (c) activity coordination, and (d) institutional positioning. In answering the RQs, organizing involves all four of these processes. However, because the organization is small and relatively new, the two flows together--activity coordination and reflexive self structuring, overlap in content, character, and organizing structure.

4.1 Constructing Bodies, Materialities, & Membership

To examine RQ1, I look into women's experiences in traditional mosques and compare them with their experiences at The Women's Mosque of America. In doing so, their constitution

of authority can be understood through membership negotiation allowing the transformation of empowerment for Muslim women within spaces.

RQ1: How are American Muslim women organizing to author religious reform?

To respond to this question, I return to authoring insofar as this process brings authority and legitimization into being through materialities and discourses. For The Women's Mosque of America such authoring is situated—meaning that it is interactively constituted (Sillince, 2007)—in space/place and objects as well as through bodies that negotiate membership. Thus, the overall framing of a response is McPhee's membership negotiation flow. To author requires membership. Membership practices and processes enact a vision that is strategically welcoming to engage in reform. There are contradictions in these efforts. The site is currently a Christian church, the bodies do not subscribe to singular notions of what it means to be Muslim and Muslim women, and the member negotiation is not simply identification with The Women's Mosque of America as a religious gathering but also with the mosque as a community intent on complementing existing mosques, empowering women, and fulfilling their needs that are not found in co-ed mosques of the United States. The women create a space in which all are welcome while (most are) engaging in collective dissent about traditional practices, membership, and meaning (similar to collective voice found in secular organizations, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and the Roman Catholic Church, see Garner, 2013; Hinderaker, 2017; Pauly, 2018).

In this section, I first must describe the space and place in which my participants meet and engage in religious organizing. Thus, the first three sections of the findings are: (a)

space/place as a constitutive force in authoring; (b) bodies enacting authority in The Women's Mosque of America; and (c) membership negotiation and contestation.

This move to describe space is consistent with CCO approaches in which materialities—sites, objects, and bodies—are integral to understanding organizing as a whole as well as specific phenomena like authority and/or leadership in particular (Ashcraft, Kuhn, & Cooren, 2009).

Space and place address aspects of questions about how organizing comes into being and where and/or how such organizing takes place (Wilhoit, 2018). As Ashcraft et al. (2009) note about power relations and, by extension, authority,

A constitutive model...observes, for example, how available vocabulary (like “manager”, “performance review”) defines key realities of the situation (like power relationships, or the capacity to speak and be heard) before the interaction even begins. It considers how the exchange itself activates hierarchy, breathing life into organizational charts and policy manuals. And by putting abstract structures into live motion, communication subjects them to real-time improvisation and negotiation. As this suggests, the realities of the performance review are not fully formed outside of communication. (p. 4, emphasis in original)

In understanding how organizing and authoring relations of power occur, I note that objects like artifacts and documents, place, and bodies are simultaneously material and ideational and can participate in organizing with and through interaction (Ashcraft et al., 2009, p. 29). As such, “organizational place is never predetermined or finished” but also supplies “as meaningful infrastructure to interaction” and means of constituting organizational boundaries (p. 31).

As such, materialities intersect with discourses or symbolic parts of organizing to provide insights independently and in combination (Wilhoit, 2018). For the purposes of authority, especially in religious space, the site of worship and community gathering legitimizes those present and in the religion itself. The Women's Mosque of America (WMOA) is a space (designated design elements), but it also is a place or physical site in which organizing occurs, in which there are different rooms or architectural features for particular purposes, and in which

people live and interact (Wilhoit, 2018). The interactions between lived space/place and designed space have a constitutive relationship through organizing to produce organization.

4.1.1 Space/Place as a Constitutive Force in Authoring

Mosques, *masjid* in Arabic, exhibit regional differences in architectural design; shape, colors, décor, sizes, and positioning in cities. Since 1950s Muslim immigrants have influenced mosques' structures in the United States. Further, architectural expression of Mosques—such as domes and minarets “reflects possible background conditions including, diaspora, culture, ethnicity, nostalgia, and above all are ways of interpretation” (p. 239). Mosques in America serve the Muslim community on many levels: worship spaces, places for hosting educational and charitable activities, and safe spaces for the community (Kahera, 2013).

The *Qur'ān* emphasized on the “value of the edifice as a place for the remembrance of God” and has not specified the aesthetic and architectural construction of a mosque (Kahera, 2013, p. 232). In fact Prophet Mohammad said: “The earth has been made for me a place of prostration and a means of purification, so wherever a man³² of my *Ummah* is when the time for prayer comes, let him pray.” Therefore, praying in a church or any other place other than mosques is permissible unless there is an impediment such as statues (Islam Q&A, 2011).

The Women's Mosque of America is not a typical mosque in form or structure and organization. It does not have an actual building made with common modern structural mosque elements (e.g., round dome, niche, courtyards). The Women's Mosque of America rents a space at a religious institution—at first the site was a synagogue (Sharone, 2015), and currently the

³² A man in the Arabic language encompasses both sexes.

organization is renting as space at the Unitarian Church in Los Angeles, California, to conduct their monthly Friday prayer.

The Church's Renaissance Revival style has a completely different structure from that of modern mosques (for example: low flat roofs, round arched entrances and round or square windows are not typical of modern mosques). It is located on a two-way street, which makes street parking a bit challenging for visitors. Visitors may or may not spot the hand-written sign by The WMOA that points to a parking lot beneath the adjacent building. At the entrance of the church, there are many signs, events posters related to the church, but also an A4 laminated paper with writing that says "Oh *Allah*, open the gates of your mercy for me." Once guests enter the church's gates, there is a small open courtyard that allows sunlight into an area with a small fountain and some green bushes. This courtyard is an inviting open space in which women linger before or during the prayer when congregants are listening to the sermon.

Next to the courtyard is a shaded walkway that takes visitors to the prayer hall, bathrooms, and other areas of the church. When walking through to the main prayer hall where Friday prayer is held, one passes many halls that can be seen through the square wood-framed glass windows. Shortly at the end of the walkway, there are the dark wooden doors that take visitors into the prayer hall. Usually these doors are open before the beginning of the event but then are kept slightly open during the prayer to avoid any outside noise.

Inside the church, there is a dark wooden stage with a wooden podium, a grand old wooden piano that is covered most of the time, some chairs and tables that are scattered in the space, and some paintings related to biblical stories that are hung on the walls. Women either linger before the prayer in the courtyard, inside the hall, or head to the bathroom located outside of the hall to do their ablution before the prayer starts. Once the prayer starts, everyone becomes

silent inside the hall. When prayer begins and all become silent, the women constitute the church's space into a place or purposeful site for prayer (for means by which space and place intertwine and define each other, see Wilhoit, 2018).

What make the space different during Friday prayers is that the podium is centered between two big green drapes at the rear of the stage, are partially covered with two huge banners. One banner has Mohammad written in Arabic and below his name is one of his sayings that reads as "I have only been sent to perfect your good manners." The other banner has the word *Allah* written in Arabic followed by a verse from the *Qur'ān* "and when my servants asks you about Me then truly I Am near (2.186)." These two banners that are instantly noticeable are decorative pieces hung before the Friday prayer to give an Islamic ambiance and place.

On the light brown parquet flooring there are long beige rectangular sheets that are placed horizontally facing the podium (which happens to be the direction of the *qibla*, that is, facing Mecca). Black chairs are on the end of the last row of sheets for women who cannot prostrate or kneel during prayer. On top of these sheets, are colorful individual prayer rugs that are stacked horizontally next to each other to form the lines where women will sit during the sermon, then stand to pray in congregation. At the very front, is a single prayer rug placed vertically alongside with a microphone on a stand to indicate that this is the spot where the female *imām* will lead after she is done with her sermon. This rug is the same as all the other prayer rugs, however, its placement and use by the woman *imām* makes it different. It symbolizes authority to speak and lead the prayer. Similar to men's placement of a rug in traditional mosques, however, sometimes the male *imām* leads from a niche carved in the wall of a mosque facing the *qibla* followed by lines of men and behind or adjacent to men are the lines of women.

Usually there is a laptop placed on a chair to livestream the *khutbah* on Facebook™ that is managed by Hasna. Another person who manages the audio recording of the sermon who sits on one side of the stage and a third person records the video on a DSLR camera sitting on the opposite side of the stage.

The significance of this place for women and this space of prayer is authoring women's legitimacy to have their own women *imāms* leading them in prayer. This set up is similar to that of men being led in prayer by men, making the space and place with objects and bodies acting out traditional or normative prayer routines and spatial arrangements essential to authority. It also would mean that women mimic and enlarge men's ways of conducting prayer rather than following the traditional prophetic way that is taught by Ai'sha, the wife of the prophet. Most of what women are following today is from Ai'sha's narration of *hadīth*. Thus they are using adaptive strategies to situate a very non-traditional activity (Friday women-led prayer) to create new possibilities for women. The sameness of the materialities involved in constituting organizing of women-led prayer is essential to authoring processes and the authority that then becomes manifest.

4.1.2 Bodies Enacting Authority in The Women's Mosque of America

Besides space and place, CCO approaches delve into the ways in which bodies function as agents in organizing (Ashcraft et al., 2009). Many women consider the space as sacred mosque hence, when they step into the hall, they take their shoes off and place them on the sides of the entrance door or under the sign that says, "place the shoes here."

The WMOA creates an inclusive space for their diverse audience. They place a table next to the entrance that has: scarves, clay stones for Shiite sisters (exclusively used during Shiite prayer), *Qur'ān* English translation, an English guide to prayer, list of mental health service

Muslim providers, and a laptop for women to enter their names and contact information if they want to be on the organization's newsletter, or to sign up to as a *muezzinah*, to give a *khutbah*, or to volunteer. If they are professionals who can provide services of mental health, they would put down their names (this may or may not be a normative practice in traditional mosques). Samia, the only hired staff at The WMOA, says:

we leave it up to them if they choose to use them or not, we're not policing or regurgitating how women choose to pray, or when they're coming to the mosque. We just don't, it's like we made that option available... we provide an English translation and a guide to prayer, because our *jumu'ah* serves women and our events are meant to also be interfaith friendly, and are meant to be friendly for new Muslims regardless of their level.

Further, there is a basket of chocolate and candy bars that the organization brings and a black laminated box that says donation to whomever wishes to donate from the congregants to the organization even if it is only one dollar. It is not like mandatory tithing in other religions, but is following the recommended practice to give to charity anywhere and, in this case, to The WMOA. Sometimes representatives of other institutions come during The WMOA Friday prayer to provide services if the sermon's topic addresses issues like mental health, violence, and abuse. If these experts come to address topics considered important by the women, then these experts could place their pamphlets on the information table as well.

Most of the time there is a WMOA staff member--usually Samia, the only hired staff although other volunteer staff can fulfill this function--who welcomes people and greets them smilingly saying *AlSalamu Alykum*—peace be upon you. She encourages people to check the table or to find a place to sit. Women are encouraged to sit and fill the first rows--following the prophetic tradition of filling first rows of prayer. But often women choose to scatter around. Some mingle until the call for the prayer is heard while others go directly to find a spot and sit quietly.

Traditionally at any mosque, the Friday prayer starts with the 1st *adhan*, then the person who gives the sermon would stand on a pulpit (called *minbar* but pronounced as *mimbar*)—if available--greet the congregants by saying “*Assalaamu ‘Alaikum*”—peace be upon you, then sit while a second *adhan* is made. Then the sermon would begin. The end of the sermon is followed by the Friday congregational prayer. The call for the prayer marks the start of the prayer ritual and it is expected that congregants respect the call by stopping conversation and listening to the call for prayer. The call for prayer and the person who issues the call is an agent in constituting a configuration of authority.

4.1.3 Membership Negotiation and Contestation

The four flows are discussed in response to both research questions. In this section, I discuss membership negotiation noting that Table 5 provides a definition and examples of this flow that supplement what is in the text.

Table 5 Four Flows: Definitions and Examples

Flow	Definition of Flow	Examples from interviews
Membership negotiation	These types of communication encompass indirect referencing and meanings of inclusion and exclusion in individual's alignment or attachment to and socialization within an organization (Brummans et al., 2014; Bruscella & Bisel, 2018; McPhee & Zaug, 2000). This flow includes dialectical and interaction processes that occur in forms of "instruction, storytelling, and dismissive reactions, as well as introduction and initiation" (Brummans et al., 2014, p.174).	<p>1)Zan: "women are actually respected here, all women can come... we accept you as you are, you can just come, you don't have to wear a Hijab if you don't want to, I mean I personally do but like Hasna says if you don't like to wear hijab, we're not going to judge you, if you are <i>Sunni</i> that's great, if you're <i>Shiite</i> that's great, if you're <i>Sufi</i> that's great, if you're non Muslim that's great."</p> <p>2)Ameena: "there as women you're safe that you have a voice, that you don't have to set in the back."</p> <p>3) Tamara: "my first couple times I didn't feel very welcomed, some of the people were welcoming and some of the attendees were welcoming but the staff at that time, they changed now, they were very closed off, you know I was offering a lot of help, things like, I have a sound system, so I told them if I come I can do it for you for free instead of having you guys paid this person every time and they said no and then I offered to do fund raiser for free to do everything by myself, and give it to them, give the money to them, and all what they have to do is come and they said no, so at first I felt definitely closed off and I tried to talk to them about different things to do to work together, And they were very closed off to any of my ideas, so first I was like ok, this is not what I expected, but now the staff has changed and they're much more open and they talked to me about doing those things and we can try to do that."</p>

Table 5 continued

		Tamara continues: “it’s empowering to say, ask some questions and I mean to open it up at the ends, it’s giving them this opportunity to have some sort of voice, instead of the mosques they don’t have this opportunity, unless in a separate class.”
Organizational self structuring	<p>This communicative process is a reflexive activity among role holders to steer and shape the organization’s internal design and control. This is manifested in “design the organization, the setting up of subsystems, hierarchical relationships, and structural information processing arrangements” (McPhee & Zaug, 2008, p. 36).</p> <p>It occurs through articulated acts that give meaning and power to a group, to break out responsibilities and rights of individuals, and to represent people as part of an organization (Brummans et al., 2014; Bruscella & Bisel, 2018; McPhee & Zaug, 2000). It also looks into the “internal relations, norms, and social entities that are the skeleton for connection,</p>	<p>1) Sabina: “Once you come up and do a <i>bayan</i> or <i>khutbah</i>, they have this E-mail list that you're part of so you are consistently aware of things that goes on, who is going to give the next <i>khutbah</i>, what the topic will be. So there's like a running blood that is going between that, also when I was preparing for my <i>bayan</i>, I had a lot of input from the board...I was approached by Hasna because I had written the <i>khutbah</i> and she said, I want you to speak on grief at that day, and she said to write something and I sent it to her then she shared it with the board and I got feedback ... things like; can you talk a little bit more about this grief that you felt? or can you translate these words from Arabic to English? those type of things.”</p> <p>2) Nicole: “the board was structural, organizational and religious <i>fiqhi</i> issues. There is an advisory board to be consulted as needed. <i>Fiqhi</i> issues don’t come as often.”</p> <p>3) Hasna: “In the beginning, one of our advisors <i>Shaykhah</i> Rima Yousuf-- who was scheduled to give the very first <i>khutbah</i>, but she was sick and was not able to make it out. She told us if people want to pray <i>dhuhr</i> let them pray it. We were not going to officially offer it as a service, we were just going to say that ‘if you wanted to pray <i>dhuhr</i> you are welcome to do so on your own’.”</p>

Table 5 continued

	<p>flexing, and shaping of work processes” (p. 36), “not the work processes themselves” (Belliger & Krieger, 2016, p. 64).</p> <p>The organization also sets “a persistent routine procedure for response” (McPhee & Zaug, 2008, p. 37) to handle problems that occur and avoid confusion.</p>	<p>Hasna continues: “However, once we saw that there was an article by another <i>shaykhah</i> and people after reading that article started to ask questions about if this right and are we doing the right thing. Then we said we did not want anyone to feel that their religious views are not respected so we will offer this service for anyone who have a difference of belief or who want to do it as a safety measure. It is more of a gesture because technically if someone believes that they must pray <i>dhuhr</i> after the <i>khutbah</i> what they would actually do is to pray the two <i>rak’as</i> in congregation and continue the other two <i>rak’as</i> on their own. In the beginning we had 10 people on our board. So it was split (4 people for adding <i>dhuhr</i> prayer, 4 people against, and 1 in the middle). Over the course of a couple months I brought in experts to talk to us. We heard different people speak, listened to each other, discussed it and when we took a final vote it was unanimously passed to add the optional <i>dhuhr</i> prayer. That is something that I am proud of because what I always wanted to do, is that all point views are considered and as much as possible we don’t have to vote because we come to conclusion through this consensus building.”</p> <p>4) Hasna: “I wrote a 15 pages guidebook and I would send that to the <i>khateebah</i> before the call ask them to read it then on the call we will go through the document together. Just because we have so many types of <i>khateebahs</i> that speak in our mosque. This is us doing our due diligence to make sure we have clearly communicated all the policies and ground rules. E.g. No policing of women’s bodies or clothing, be respectful or differences of opinions, translate all Arabic to English.”</p>
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Table 5 continued

		Hasna continues: “All these different things we go through with each one of them. Then we go over the logistics... it usually takes 45- 1 hour. Then we ask for their <i>khutbah</i> to be written out in full, the first draft is due two weeks before. Then we do a full board review to make sure all the guidelines are followed and everything they want to communicate is coming across in a way that people will be able to listen and to understand it, then we send out our notes, then get the final draft from them. Then we have the <i>jumu'ah</i> two weeks later.”
Activity coordination	This flow appears when members of an organization negotiate work patterns on tasks and roles to understand members' activities that fit with one another, to accomplish obligations and responsibilities (Brummans et al., 2014; Bruscella & Bisel, 2018; McPhee & Zaug, 2000) or to get the work done in the absence of the “pre-established cooperation structures” (McPhee, 2015, p.490). This communication occurs when solving “immediate practical problems” that arise in uncertain circumstances and may require an adjustment in the work process.	1) Hasna: “we had a <i>khateebah</i> ask ‘do I need to wear a headscarf while giving a <i>khutbah</i> ’, that is something I purposely left vague by laws in our <i>khateebah</i> guidebook because if you think about it, the <i>khutbah</i> takes up half of the <i>dhuhr</i> prayer however the <i>khutbah</i> is different than a prayer because you can drink water while you are giving a <i>khutbah</i> but you can not drink water while you are praying. So are the rules exactly the same? obviously because there is no really any jurisprudence or anything on this issue that is why I purposely left it vague. So what we did right before she went on stage, I went up and I explained the situation to everyone and said ‘the way we will handle it is that we will ask you guys if there is anyone here who would feel that their prayer will not count if she is not wearing a headscarf. If even one person says yes we will ask her to wear it’. Two people raised their hands, and the <i>khateebah</i> had already agreed on that, she wore it and she gave her <i>khutbah</i> . This is our solution now deal with it on an individual case basis.”

Table 5 continued

	<p>Members must actively communicate and coordinate “to settle differences of opinion, collaborate on projects, and coordinate their different but related jobs” (Belliger & Krieger, 2016, p. 65).</p>	<p>2) Samia: “if the issue comes up again in terms of hijab or no hijab during the <i>khutbah</i>, we will bring it up to the congregation again and if 100% of the congregation says "we don't mind" then it is ok that the <i>khateebah</i> does not wear the Hijab during the sermon.”</p> <p>3) Hasna: “I will literally tell them, there are a difference of opinion of where women would lead the prayer, some prefer to lead in front and some would prefer within the first line. So you don’t have to make up your mind now but on the day of, let us know and we will accommodate which everyone is you preference. We just leave it up to them to do their own research. A lot of times people don’t really think about these things but sometimes people do have a strong opinion and say ‘no I want to lead within the line’. Sometimes people say ‘I do not have an opinion so we say ‘Our default is to have it from in front of the first line’.”</p>
Institutional positioning	<p>Organizations maintain relationship with their collaborators and/or stakeholders in groups or clusters of establishments (McPhee & Zaug, 2000). This communicative flow “requires a collective actor”, to co-exist with other organizations. In the sense, the institution has a distinctive identity that enables it to position or orient itself vis-à-vis</p>	<p>1) Sabina: “considering there isn't a lot of support they do have, as far as I know they do have support within certain organization or certain groups of people but I know that they have a lot of push back, and I know that they're always struggling for funds and they contently doing fund raising, so I feel like what they have the organization is doing very well, I mean it's running successfully, I know that they don't have a stream of funds coming and I know that a lot of people in the sorry was running the organization have full time jobs outside of this, so considering all these things, they are doing very well, beyond my expectation actually.”</p>

Table 5 continued

	<p>other relevant stakeholders (Belliger & Krieger, 2016).</p>	<p>2) Tamara: “I feel like so far they are trying to do everything by themselves, and I think they would be surprised how much people who would help them and they do not have to do everything by themselves... they can reach out more to the community, to do more, like marketing for example is so huge.”</p> <p>3) Um Yasin: “the spirit of what they are doing is beautiful. I do think they need guidance as far as defaulting to leaders and they have to be male leaders if that's their issue. Fine, there is, like I said, many many qualified very established very successful female leaders and teachers who I think could benefit them and maybe offer them some more guidance on how to go about doing things that would basically enhance their mission and put forth their cause, you know... they appeal obviously to a certain demographic, but every successful organization has to expand their outreach, that is the point of it. So, if they want to expand their reach, I think they need to do more bridge-building within the Muslim community and really try to look toward, like I said, other female scholars for guidance.”</p>
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In McPhee's Four Flows model of organizing, this particular flow, namely member negotiation, links the organization to its members (Putnam, Nicotera, & McPhee, 2008). Newcomers become members of an organization just as returning or core members renegotiate their membership through ongoing informational and directional communicative process from individuals who have authority in the organization (Endacott & Myers, 2019; McPhee, 2015). Member negotiation builds relationships and constructs membership of human agents with the organization through many forms; among them is inclusion (Putnam et al., 2008). Inclusion refers to the individual's or the group's sense of belongingness and participation for and in the collective and shared values (Buzzanell, 2017).

In this flow, authority is constituted and sustained for members of The Women's Mosque of America by ongoing interactions, invitation for women to participate and be part of the space. Members interact with newcomers and each other to reinforce shared values, phrases, and words aligned with their purposes, organizational culture, and normative behaviors. Over time, individuals shape their participation with the organization.

On The Women's Mosque of America's website there are many values for which the organization stands (see <https://womensmosque.com/>). But Samia—the only paid staff member, as mentioned earlier, but also the Director of Operations at the organization—focused on two values when discussing membership: (a) to empower the community and (b) to be the middle ground space that brings everyone together.

In the first value, empowerment for the community starts by empowering women and girls. Through enhancing Islamic literacy, especially *Qur'ānic* literacy, The Women's Mosque of America gives more direct access to women-generated and women-centered Islamic scholarship

with the aim of creating better skills to be able to take on leadership within religious capacities.

The second value, Samia describes as their middle ground space. Samia contends:

We're not traditional, we're not progressive, we're not liberal, we're consciously working on a middle ground space that is open and welcoming as possible to all Muslims in the community regardless of their religious practices, regardless of their ethnical background or what they will identify with.

Nicole, an attendee and a *khateebah*, described The WMOA as a space that is meant to be “complementary and not competitive to mosques...inclusionary and not exclusionary. It is not meant to critique or to present an alternative to mosques, it is meant to be complementary... and a space that is empowering to reclaim Muslim’s history.”

Nicole did not expect that she needed a space like this because of her good experience at her home mosque--which she described as friendly, co-ed, and having women in roles as board members for 50 years. Until she came to The WMOA, she did not feel the need for women-led prayer and space. As she said when she gave a *khutbah*: “when I stood before people, I felt the power of the moment, the state and the significance... it was emotionally overwhelming.”

Like everyday invitational leadership, Samia negotiates and encourages membership through a welcoming style, mutual understanding, participation, and power with each other (Buzzanell et al., 1997). According to Samia, The Women’s Mosque of America’s goal is to bring the whole community together by creating policies that do so, to make newcomers and more long-term members feel safe, and to enact spaces where religious beliefs and values are respected. When taken together, constitution of these values in organizing means that The Women’s Mosque of America tries to serve as a model and as a social experiment. Members aim to attract, build, and retain membership by integrating newcomers and returning members and by encouraging women to retain their membership as Muslim and part of the bigger Muslim *Ummah* community. To Samia, organizing to maintain these values takes considerable effort:

If we had a mixed gender *jumu'ah* (Friday prayer) there will be a lot fewer women who would feel comfortable stepping up to lead prayer or to deliver the *khutbah* (sermon), because there's a lot more disagreement within the community. First of all the controversy about women leading *jumu'ah* at all, then even there's more controversy if a woman can lead any kind of prayer in the mixed gender setting, and, as far as I know, there's very small minority of Muslims who accept that women can lead prayer in the mixed gender setting, so if we were to have our prayer service to be mixed gender, that would exclude the last majority of the community in terms of who feels comfortable and who feels like they're doing something that's acceptable from a religious perspective, and coming to participate in the women's mosque *jumu'ah* at all³³

In this context, what makes Samia and other women comfortable during their monthly Friday prayer is that it is a women-only event and Friday women-led event—even though some of their other programming outside the mosque is mixed gender (for example, communal breaking fast in Ramadan event). The fashion that women pray and lead the Friday prayer is mimicking how men are leading their Friday prayer—which is contrary to the traditional³⁴ way of women leading women in regular prayer.³⁵

At The Women's Mosque of America the Friday prayer starts with the 1st *adhan* that is called by a woman, followed by announcements and an introduction of the *khateebah* that is done by a staff member.³⁶ The *khateebah* would step up on the stage, greet the people by saying “*Assalaamu 'Alaikum*—peace be upon you” to the congregation, then sits in a chair on the stage while the second *adhan* is called by the same person who gave the first *adhan*. The *khateebah* stands, starts with a prayer that is driven from prophet Mohammad's teaching, delivers her first

³³ The controversy of women leading the Friday prayer is discussed in the literature review.

³⁴ Based on the description of how Ai'asha led prayers, the three (out of four) *Sunni* school of thought specifies that women lead other women in the middle of the front row (Shakir, 2008).

³⁵ This point about traditional, culture-specific adaptations, and ongoing changes emerging in Muslim practices is discussed in the literature review. The point being made here is designed to contrast what is traditionally experienced (and is part of my upbringing as a Saudi Muslim woman), and what is portrayed in The WMOA.

³⁶ An introduction of the person who leads the prayer is not part of the prayer. It is developed in some American mosques, as there are many people who are not consistent and come to give the sermon and lead the congregants in Friday prayers. However, introducing the *khatib* in traditional mosques comes before the *adhan*. In other countries, a mosque would have one person who had memorized the *Qur'an* and has some foundational knowledge in Islam, to be designated to lead and give Friday sermons along with the five daily prayers.

half of *khutbah*, and ends with a *du‘ā*. She then sits momentarily to make a *du‘ā* for forgiveness silently, then stands again to deliver the second half of the *khutbah*, and ends with a *du‘ā*. She says a final phrase before leaving the stage: “*Wa aqimna as-salah*--let’s perform the prayer.”

The first *iqamah* is called (this is the call for the prayer that is given immediately before the prayer to alert people to stand together, thus preparing for the congregational prayer). After the call for the *iqamah* finishes, the *imām* advises congregants by saying: “Straighten the lines, fill in the gaps, stand shoulder-to-shoulder.” The *imām* may add further direction of the prayer if the *imām* is Shiite—because there are minor differences in prayer. Then the *khateebah* leads the congregation in a two-*rakat jumu‘ah* prayer (The Women’s Mosque *khateebah* booklet, 2019). These sequencing of prayer actions, bodies, and calls for prayer are similar to what would happen in the men’s Friday prayer. However, they are providing a different template for authoring women’s religious authority or legitimacy through the normative material-symbolic constitution of prayer sessions, such as the female *imām* leading Friday prayer from front vs. leading from the middle of the row with women’s congregation.

Nicole described reasons for women attending such a space: it is fulfilling women’s needs for a sisterhood community building that transcends the place of mosques and for hearing from and learning with other women. Nicole’s experience as an attendee is different from that of a sermon giver. She reflects on her experience as a part of the congregation and describes what stands out to her in the sequences of Friday prayer:

What stood out to me was the *khutbahs* that are a combination of *Qur’ān* and *hadīth*--the same way the wisdom we share in a regular *khutbah* at a mosque, each woman included her own piece of story in her *khutbah*...that is so rare. I noticed it when I go to co-ed mosques, I pay attention if there is an I statement or if there is a personal story and it is very rare. I think in that woman’s space, the power of connection and vulnerability are what so many women are looking for.

In efforts of The WMOA to be inclusionary and not exclusionary, as per to Nicole, they found an alternative and offered the optional four-*rakat dhuh*r (noon) prayer. Women are invited to pray the noon prayer, if they choose. Some women would stand and perform the noon prayer led by another female *imām*. Nicole appreciates The WMOA efforts saying “they didn’t just say that’s a *fatwa* (legal ruling)—referring to the Friday prayer—the point is that you come and do what works with your relationship with *Allah*.” This second prayer and call to prayer--which is obligatory among the five daily prayers--is conducted to accommodate those who do not participate in the Friday prayer or those who feel that they might be missing the obligatory prayer by participating in a women-led Friday prayer. Thus, women-led prayer remains contested even as women enter the religious space of The Women’s Mosque with its constitution and contestation of women’s authority.

One of the signatures of The WMOA is the *khateebah* reflection circle where the *khateebah* sits in a circle with congregants to answer any questions or reflections about her *khutbah*. These actions invite discussion, signal participation, and serve to educate and provide a space for women to learn more about each other and their many concerns and backgrounds. This interaction in a circle with congregants runs about 25-30 minutes. According to The Women’s Mosque of America “the point of this is to foster a greater sense of egalitarianism in our *Ummah* by increasing women’s direct access to Islamic leadership” (The Women’s Mosque *khateebah* booklet, 2019).

While The Women’s Mosque wants to counter unwelcomed treatment that women experience in mainstream mosque culture, members of the mosque also want to provide a space with a set of rules and structures that allows women to feel included within structured space. Membership negotiation is based in Giddens’ (1984) structuration theory that explains the

agency of humans and their ongoing establishment of structure (and vice versa). This duality of agency-structure enables and constrains human activity in ways that are foundational to civilized society. Organizational structures are a result of interactions composed of rules and resources that guide or constrain behaviors and facilitate individuals' activities (Endacott & Myers, 2019). Rules (ranging from tacit to formalized procedures) and resources (allocative resources or capabilities, and authoritative resources transformative capacities constructing command over other (Giddens, 1984, p. 33) on which social actors draw, enable participants to produce and reproduce different levels of social systems or, in this case, The Women's Mosque of America. For instance, their policy to dress however one wants, their policy of a space that makes everyone feels welcomed, and their policy that there should be no exclusion, operate as structures that give as much freedom as possible to the *khateebahs* when they are selecting topics regardless of their liberal, progressive, or traditional views. Thus, structure through policies generates and reinforces micro-level interactions that also are welcoming and inviting for women (and these interactions support meso-level or mosque-level and macro-level or Islam-level processes). These policies are explained in greater depth later on in this chapter.

Many women (attendees and leaders) of The Women's Mosque of America mostly feel that membership negotiation is manifested in the sense of inclusion which is empowering to women in the organization. Rahma describes inclusion as "when you don't feel you don't belong or not being judged in a space." For her it is not just going there to pray but it is a safe haven for women who do not usually speak up. Women talk about issues in Islam, and issues outside of Islam and women's experiences. Nicole describes The WMOA as "it reflects our needs as American Muslim women 'by us for us.'"

I broke down the types of inclusion further into different communicative practices (verbal and non-verbal) that functioned as cues or codes, then I subcategorized inclusion further to include: (a) a welcoming space/speech, (b) accessibility to knowledge and services, and (c) shared experiences, safe space, fulfillment, sense of sisterhood and community.

Welcoming space and speech

In membership negotiation, communicative practices often are designed to determine who is or could become a member of the organization and who is not (Bruscella & Bisel, 2018). However, in The Women's Mosque of America, the aims are to develop a community by welcoming women, encouraging them to recognize that they have choices, and inviting them to participate in the construction of a community geared toward their empowerment and prayer. These actions disrupt the taken-for-granted that women do not lead Friday prayer and aim to establish a different norm that women have agency and legitimate rights to lead Friday prayer. The welcoming space and speech subtheme sets the tone and establishes the decision premises, or underlying argument structures or rules, whereby women can engage in these seemingly subversive (from traditional religious orientation) actions.

Many of the women who attended The Women's Mosque of America's Friday prayers agreed that the idea of having women's spaces is needed. Nicole says, "It is filling a need that they aren't getting somewhere else. Most women who attended The WMOA haven't stopped going co-ed mosques, it's an extracurricular...it is creating a space to women who don't have one, who are struggling spiritually and who are famished...who are disenfranchised...When people get caught in the *fiqh*--legal rulings, they miss the point."

Many of the American mosques that these women had been attending did not have equivalent access and opportunities for leadership, spiritual fulfillment, or the kinds of spaces that men had, and many times women were policed for the way they dressed by other women to make them feel that they did not belong. Rahma experienced being judged in her hometown mosque where she felt at some point that she did not belong: “compared to the other mosques where you wear jeans and when you are walking in, you literally feel like you're naked, because everybody is looking at you as different.” Nicole affirms that many women who come to The WMOA had previous negative experiences where they were shamed for not dressing the right way or putting on the headscarf from other Muslim women.

For Priscilla, she had not had negative experiences but rather she expressed her discomfort in having barriers between genders in the mosque space. She said, “When I go to a mosque that has barriers, I don’t go back again...having barriers is not cool.”

Even when women are accompanied by a male relative, they are still being pushed away from occupying main hall prayers. Nusaiba had multiple traumatizing experiences in mosques in America and in mosques in other countries:

In my previous marriage one time I was in the mosque, and we were about to pray because we were leaving town. So I said, ‘let's pray together in congregation, I don't want to go pray separately.’ So we went into the main hall in mosque and it was Ramadan. As soon as we were about to pray there was a random Muslim who ran up to me saying, ‘you need to leave!! you need to leaaaaave’ and kept telling me ‘Sister. go upstairs’ and replied: ‘I’m here to pray with my husband ...we just want to pray and go on our way... leave me alone’. I tried to be as peaceful and respectful as possible and when I did to avert that situation I just told my Ex and he said let's just start praying... so we started praying so the man could not speak to us and then afterwards I immediately just left the mosque and went to the car. But for about 20 minutes, he held on to my ex husband for 20 minutes and told my Ex how he needs to control his wife, so that was one really negative experience...this was in Atlanta in one of the largest mosques in America. It’s really expensive and beautiful from the outside but it had such toxicity from the inside.

Noor was accompanied by her husband while traveling and was asked to pray in a room that was like “a hole in the ground”:

We found a mosque nearby, I went into the main hall and nobody was there. My husband was going to lead the prayer and I was going to stand behind him and start praying, a male attendant came and said she can't pray in this room. I was looking at him like there was nobody there, the entire hall was empty... he said, 'no sisters, the women's room are over there.' It was very late at night and I had to physically to get out of that room and my husband went with me, deep down I regretted going there... it is like a hole in the ground and we went back upstairs and I looked at him and said 'we are praying here and not down there... that's ridiculous.'

These are just few negative experiences that women had spoken about but in reality there are many more in my women participants' interviews. When Nicole interacted with attendees of The WMOA she mentioned that “even [among] mosque goers, they are seen and presented here in a different way. They aren't expected to be quiet and invisible like in their other mosques, here they are truly centered and that made a difference.” As a result, many had applauded the efforts of having a women's space dedicated to fulfill various women's needs even when some had mentioned that it needed to be rooted in the Islamic foundation rather than being perceived as reforming. Even with differences of opinion about women-led Friday prayer and its authoring in Islam, Cynthia, a participant of the congregation, still believed that the most important quality of The Women's Mosque of America was the sense of inclusion. When women start coming through the door, the verbal greeting of Islam (Peace be upon you) sets the welcoming tone and ambiance along with a smile or gesture from the staff or volunteers.

The sense of inclusion was not only for women who identified themselves as Muslims. Farah, a participant of the congregation, mentioned that the organization does make an effort to have everyone feel heard and seen. In doing so, they include a variety of speakers who come from different ethnic and religious groups. Um Yasin, a *bayan* giver, noticed that among the attendees are people who were there just to support the cause, to benefit from it, and to learn

about Islam but not necessarily with the intention of becoming Muslim. This inclusion of difference created an interfaith dialogue but also brought Muslims who practice differently together in one space. To some, women referred to this space as “cool” because it not only included people from diverse sects but also different sexes like transgender as well who might have felt marginalized in traditional mosques. Farah mentioned that once an individual who was transgender came wearing a *niqab* (face cover) and no one treated that person differently from anyone else.

This space was perceived and labeled as “safe” for many women as they came from different backgrounds, Islamic sects, and choices in attire meaning that those who did not wear the headscarf were present in the same space as leaders, prayer participants, and/or listeners. Rahma described the feeling she gets in this space as “ease”, “comfort”, “safe heaven”, “no judge” space, and “inclusive.” In addition to the comfort that congregants feel, the inclusion of sects other than the dominant Sunni Islam makes others want to come to the space. Participant 1, a congregant who did not know ahead of time that the sermon giver was from a Shiite sect, an Islamic sect similar to that with which she grew up. She never affiliated herself with one sect³⁷ publicly due to the awkwardness that she felt whenever she was in either sect mosque. The fact that there was a Shiite sermon giver made her feel included and offered knowledge from the Shiite sect to other attendees as well.

Accessibility to knowledge and services

The Friday prayer is conducted once a month and followed by Q&A that is led by the sermon giver and the founder of the women’s mosque. It is described by one of the attendees as

³⁷ *Sunni* is the dominant and *Shiite* is the minority worldwide.

the signature practice of The WMOA. According to a woman attendee, the sermon that is given is an expression of women's voice but also a lesson on the topics that are discussed. The speeches that are given are related to women's spirituality and daily experiences. The sermon helps enhance women's Islamic knowledge and fulfill their emotional and intellectual needs. Participant 1 had not been to a mosque for 5 years because of her negative experiences in male-dominated mosques. On a Friday, she had her antidepressant pill and felt that she wanted to go to a mosque full of sisters and to get connected spiritually. She drove to LA and attended the women's mosque *khutbah* that was about gratitude and the Q&A session. She said:

It felt like a safe space, and it felt like there's a sense of sisterhood and community, and...I showed a sign of vulnerability and the way it was received made me want to come again and that's something that felt emotionally special to me. Usually I don't share myself in other's prayer spaces and over there the way it was responded, it made me comfortable.

These circles gave women a way to connect with one another emotionally and intellectually especially for women who had felt marginalized in their home mosques that are predominantly navigated by men. Eiman, who is a social worker and had given a *bayan* with The WMOA, described that for some women these spaces are "the only space they have for spirituality, it's the only place that feels safe." The sermons that are given not only speak about spirituality but also connect womanhood to religion. Furthermore, the Q&A sessions are an extension of the sermon, a way to inspire and educate women about their religion, and to provide a comfort and safe zone of expression. Samia says that these sessions are means for women to engage with the *imām*. Further, in male-dominated mosques, women are cut off from being able to go up to the *imām* after the *khutbah* because men are surrounding the *imām* and blockading women from approaching and being able to ask questions. Cynthia described her experience as fulfilling intellectually and spiritually:

Samia Banno who is, I guess, the only worker or the full time there in the women's mosque has taught us to read--*surat khahf* (the cave chapter)--so, we were sitting around in circle and then she was passing her cellphone with this *Qur'ānic* app so each person attending there was able to read one *ayat* (verses) of *surat alkahf* so when we finished it, she asked us to say our ideas regarding what is this subject, or what this *surah* talked about, that is related to our daily life, so it was good for me to see that our voices are recognized and our ideas about what we had read in that *surah* are important.

In addition, the organization provides services and resources from which women could benefit. During some days when the sermons focus on topics such as domestic violence, sexual abuse, and victims, The WMOA collaborates with organizations and Muslim professionals in the LA area who can provide mental health or services related to the topics chosen. These individuals or organizations have representatives who can set their pamphlets on the table and provide help, resources and advice on services related to the topic of the speech.

Shared experiences and fulfillment

This section is a discussion of how the women engage in preserving the space by and for women, noting and legitimizing the point that it does not have to be about men to matter. The topic of each sermon offers a multifaceted means of connection among women. Nicole reflected on her experience when she heard a *khutbah* speaking about the twelve wives of the prophet, peace be upon him, and comparing them to the twelve disciples:

Fundamentally the religion is being reflected, we are not throwing out the *Qur'ān* or the *hadīth* we are instead finding uplifting and centering the pieces that speak to women and The WMOA tries to offer something that they won't necessarily get in co-ed mosques. Because of that, it is above and beyond kind of thing and they have to do something special... they talk about so many things; they talked about domestic violence, divorce, motherhood, miscarriages etc.

Cynthia attended a sermon that talked about women and servitude. This sermon was led by Dr. Nawawiyah Mohammad who is African American. Cynthia reflects on her experience during the sermon:

She talked about empowerment, and about how women are believed to be servants of their family, their husbands and everything, and she said that our ignorance maybe and about what means to servitude not really good practices regarding women's quality and all that, so seeing her as a woman leading the prayer and knowing that she is the mum of six kids ,and that she is studying for her Ph.D., and working in an organization and leader of movements in the 60s, 70s was an experience.

For Cynthia, the presence and sermon of Dr. Nawawiyah Mohammad remains empowering as she reflects upon the content and a role model who offers new ways of being and doing: "I don't know that's something that I've ever seen or heard in my life."

Eiman, on the other hand, gave a speech about motherhood using herself and her relationship with her mom as an example in the sermon because Eiman does not have children. Congregants approached Eiman after her sermon saying that they were emotionally moved. They complemented her speech, and reported that they, too, had similar experiences. Many of these women expressed their sense of a void in their lives that they want to fill; they said that listening to the uplifting speeches helps them get closer to God. They often would become vulnerable and cry because, as Cynthia says, "we all face the same difficulties as women." The monthly gathering gave women the ability to build the sense of community and sense of sisterhood especially for those who are looking to connect with other women and maybe for those coming from other states. Nicole said: "women come from across LA, Orange Country even the Inland Empire to come to the *jumu'ah* every month. It is filling a need that they aren't getting somewhere else. Most women who attended The WMOA have not stopped going to co-ed mosques. For them it's an extracurricular.

These sermons drew in new members and sustained returning members, as women negotiated who they were and how they identified with The Women's Mosque of America. These sermons, connections among women attendees, discussions or instructions afterwards also

helped to build leadership abilities and knowledge about Islam through the calling for the prayer and/or speaking in the Q&A. Such development of leadership as an integral part of member negotiation and sets the stage for authoring women's legitimate place in prayer. These spaces of praying, connecting, learning, and leading are welcoming, inviting in their presentation of choices, and strategic in their ways of encouraging women to negotiate how they are members of The Women's Mosque of America.

4.2 Constructing The Three Flows of Authoring

RQ2: How are American Muslim women empowering themselves and others through authority inside religious organizations such as The Women's Mosque of America?

For RQ2, the focus of the question is about women's expression to gain legitimacy for their work (i.e., "justify" authority) and their ways to empower other Muslim women. Further, this question examines organizing processes and how organizing is accomplished through routine and innovative or disruptive processes. According to McPhee's four flows, organizing is constituted via communication interactions, embodiment, space, artifacts, linguistic choices, and other human and non-human actants who act as agents in constructing organizations. Specifically using the two flows that overlap --activity coordination and reflexive self structuring, along with the understanding of authority (both classic authority such as that theorized by Weber, and the CCO approach) and the power of voice. The three flows that constitute organizing in this section are noted in Table 5. This table provides definitions as well as excerpts from participants' interviews that supplement what is included in the following text.

4.2.1. Reflexive Self Structuring and Authoring

The organizational self structuring process is communicative in its nature as role holders have authority to communicate with other groups about decisions, policies, materials (charts, documents), dividing labor and ensuring workflow, that directs the organization. The process of communicating organizational structures sets work routines rather than having issues emerge that can control other aspects of the four flows such as membership negotiation. When problems arise during the reflexive self structuring process, it may require immediate attention and problem solving, in this case another communicative process arises that is called “activity coordination” (McPhee, 1985, 2015; MCPhee & Zaug, 2000)

To understand The WMOA’s reflexive self structuring process, I first looked into the recruiting process of role holders and sermon givers. Second, I looked into policies and problem solving of issues that occur on an organizational level. Third, I looked into the internal professional resources that the organization provided for their *khateebahs*.

The main role holder is Hasna who is the founder of the organization. Policies, and recruiting processes have run through her since the early stages of establishing the organization:

The way I run it is as an artistic project and as a startup. In the state of California to run a nonprofit you have to have at least 3 members; a president, a secretary and a treasurer. At the beginning we had more board members but with time, a smaller board became easier to manage...things run more efficiently... I also try to make it as lean as possible so we have our board meetings online rather than in person.

The process of board formation and recruiting in of itself is a reflexive self structuring process that empowers women inside the organization. According to Hasna, “the board members has to be %50 women at all times... The president’s position has to be held by a woman so the focus is on women.” Even though at the early stages of the organization’s establishment, there

were two men on the board committee and the rest were women, according to the founder, men's support and perspective is important as the organization is about uplifting the *ummah*.

To have a healthy *ummah*, we have to heal a lot of the *fitnah* and division, whether it was along the lines of racial or gender division. The focus is having a better *ummah* and the means by which we produce that better *ummah* is to uplift women in this *ummah*.

Recruiting members to be part of the organizational process of The WMOA starts through observing members who are committed volunteers, consistent in attending their events, who demonstrate a sense of responsibility and who have good character throughout their participation during Friday prayers. According to Hasna, this process of selection and commitment takes a long time where she is the one who would observe, select, then discuss if a person would be interested in joining the organization as a role holder. Role holders would go through probation contract period (3-6-9-12 months) with multiple revision processes about their contribution to the organization. Finally, they are given a contract to be part of the organization such as in the case of Samia who started as a regular volunteer then became an official volunteer then became the director of operation position at the organization.

The second way to understand The WMOA reflexive self structuring is through recruiting sermon givers and training them until the day of *khutbah* delivery. The organization communicates with the sermon givers in advance (3-6 months) to schedule their sermons. Samia says that during the communication process, the organization looks back onto their previous year and creates a list of *khateebahs* they had. Then they would put down what type of *khateebahs* they want to invite. For instance; they had more *Sunni* than *Shiite* sisters, or less traditionalists. They also look for women who are willing to come and honor the organization's policies. Then they would reach out to women they already know in the community, women who are referred to them or women who are already known and established in the American Muslim community and

invite them to participate as sermon givers (*bayan* or *khutbah*). They would approach by mentioning them in tweets or through their public email info. They have a screening process where they look for women who are willing to participate and respect the organization's values. Nicole describes Hasna's process when recruiting sermon givers: "she looks for *khateebahs* that they have a topic to talk about, personally connected to it, have the willingness to do the research to turn into a *khutbah* and work with her to finalize it...And the willingness to be vulnerable."

Hasna takes about an hour to meet with *khateebahs* and tells them:

Be vulnerable in your *khutbah* as it is the best way to connect with your audience. If they can see themselves in your shoes and it inspires them it takes the leader off the pedestal rather than making them think 'the leader is perfect and I am not, I can never be a leader.' When they see people in positions of power have more struggles, then it makes leadership more attainable. That is the hallmark of our *khutbah* in our mosque is the vulnerability element that what makes them so easy to connect to on an emotional level and inspiring to make leadership more attainable.

There are some who resist because the idea is not common in the traditional way of practicing *Sunni* Islam or, as Samia describes them, as women who are waiting for traditional authoritative opinions to recognize that type of authority for women to lead Friday prayer. However, with women who agree to participate, the organization provides them with a manual prior to their scheduled sermon or, as Samia calls it, "the training light box." She says it gives the most important information, such as basic *khateebah* requirements, day-of schedule, *khutbah* policies, *khutbah* & prayer best practices, differences of opinion, how to deliver a *khutbah* – basics, past *khutbah* topics, and how to plan your *khutbah* topic. These policies, values, guidelines, roles and responsibilities were set by the initial board members (about 8 or 9) at the birth of the organization (now this number has decreased to about 3-4 people), these policies are followed until today while some adjustments are made when needed. These values, policies, and

guidelines are explained further in the manual and sent to the *khateebahs* prior to the sermon date.

As part of The Women's Mosque of America value to empower women and increase Islamic literacy, they provide training for women who want to participate as *Muezzinah* (one who calls for prayer) or provide feedback and help in the process of preparing the *khutbah*. The *muezzinah* is an important function of The women's mosque of American as Samia indicated. Women who expressed interest are trained prior to the monthly Friday prayer. Further, the process of preparing and guiding the speech is also part of the organization's reflexive self structuring. Sarah, who gave a sermon, said:

Hasna does a very wonderful job of ushering through the process of presenting the *khutbah*. Certain words are said at the beginning of the *khutbah* so it is clear and there is continuity within the overall framework. But when the *khateebah* delivers, she asks us to tell things that are not necessarily super private but in ways that we all struggle to try to practice Islam and she also asked us to please make sure that we do include *ayat* (verses) of *Qur'ān* within the *khutbah*. It's not just to stand there and tell your opinion about something, it needs to be rooted in the *Qur'ān*. She also asks us to remember to say "we" to be inclusive, rather than saying "I" and "me." It is something that I really appreciated about her mind set.

There are acts that are articulated to give meanings of power or rather authority to individuals that is expressed by the organization. Such acts are the choice of topic, the choice of person giving the sermon, the input on the delivery of speech, and the platform that is provided by the organization to keep everyone connected. Samia described this form of authority as freedom to the *khateebahs* to choose the topic they want, the type of sermon (*bayan*, *khutbah*), the way they want to lead³⁸ the congregation while expressing that to the general public³⁹ and the

38 Women wanting to lead from the middle of the front row vs. women who want to lead upfront in the *mihrah*.

39 There are elements that are added in the *Shiite* way of prayer that are not as dominant like the *Sunni* way.

additional choice of praying noon prayer in case those who believe that the Friday prayer wouldn't count as a substitute for noon prayer.

During the scheduling process if a woman that does not believe that the Friday prayer is a possibility for women to lead, she is asked to give a *bayan*. In that case, two women are scheduled on the same day, one to give a *bayan* and another to give a *khutbah*. Bayan givers are told in the manual and expected to respect women's choice who are leading Friday prayer. Both *khateebah* and *bayan* giver are asked not to enforce their opinions between their sermons nor enforce them to the public. Given that they have the authority to choose what type of speech they will give, some still face some limitation in this type of authority. For instance with Eiman, a *bayan* giver, she wanted to talk about "the power of speech" because the word *bayan* referred to a speech. She had it all planned; however, because Hasna had the final decision and it was the month of May, she asked her to speak about motherhood instead, even though Eiman was not a mother. This sort of power that is dominated by the head of the organization dictates who will give the speech, which role is being given (*bayan* giver or *khateebah*) and what kind of speech is presented to the public.

The other aspect of reflexive self structuring is the "design" and "control" within an organization that is communicated among "role holders and groups" to "steer the organization" (Belliger & Krieger, 2016, p. 64). It occurs through articulated acts that give meaning and power to a group, to break out responsibilities and rights of individuals, and to represent people as part of an organization (Brummans et al., 2014; Bruscella & Bisel, 2018; McPhee & Zaug, 2000). This can be seen at the early stages of the organization when board members had to make a decision whether to offer noon prayer officially or have individuals do it on their own. Among

the board duties is the obligation to serve as a religious reference, thus giving agency to female religious leaders (*shaykhahs*) and women who were board members to author this process:

In the beginning, one of our advisors *Shaykhah* Rima Yousuf--who was scheduled to give the very first *khutbah* but she was sick and wasn't able to make it out-- told us if people want to pray *dhuhr* let them pray it. We were not going to officially offer it as service we were just going to say that "if you wanted to pray *dhuhr* you are welcome to do so on your own." However, once we saw that there was an article by another *shaykhah* and people started asking questions about if this right and are we doing the right thing. Then we said we didn't want anyone to feel that their religious views are not respected so we will offer this service for those who have a difference of belief or who wants to do it as safety measure but it is more of a gesture.

Hasna described offering the *dhuhr* obligatory prayer as a gesture in this organization as in her understanding that "if someone really believes that they have to pray *dhuhr* after a women led *khutbah*, what they would actually do is that they would pray two *rakah* congregation then continue on with the two other *rakahs* on their own." Further, Hasna described the process of self structuring at an organizational level when discussing individuals--who are men and women board members but not necessarily religious scholars:

In the beginning we had 10 people on our board so it was split (4 people for adding *dhuhr* prayer, 4 people against, and 1 in the middle), over the course of a couple months I brought in experts to talk to us. We heard different people speak, listened to each other, discussed it and when we took a final vote we had unanimously passed to add the optional *dhuhr* prayer...What I always wanted to do, is that all points of views are considered and as much as possible we don't have to vote because we come to conclusion through this consensus building.

For her, the process of voting was not an avenue of growth for the organization: "people are not challenged in their beliefs and really forced to consider other objectives." Instead, in this process of considering each member's voice and perspectives, individuals enacted agency by actively hearing and listening to one another while working toward the mosque's mission. As Hasna put

it, “this process is great. It is emblematic of what we are trying to do which is unify and heal divides.”

The third reflexive self structuring process can be seen among the *khateebahs* as a network and resource for one another. Just as there are networks of Muslim professionals whom the organization provides as resources for the Mosque attendees--such as the mental health professionals--many of the *bayan* and *khutbah* givers mentioned that they are part of an email list that provides services for them. This list provides support through feedback from other members, through information on *khutbah* topics and upcoming services, and through helpful resources and a platform to ask questions and guidance. These are only accessible by the speakers who were part of the women’s mosque sermons. Eiman says that the organizations provided through these self structuring activities are no longer small as the number of *khateebhs* has grown and so have the resources that they have provided. These women are also considered to be resources in their own fields in their communities.

4.2.2 Activity Coordination and Authoring

The activity coordination communicative process occurs when solving “immediate practical problems” that arise in uncertain circumstances and may require adjustments in the work processes. Members must actively communicate and coordinate “to settle differences of opinion, collaborate on projects, and coordinate their different but related jobs” (Belliger & Krieger, 2016, p. 65).

The women’s mosque has a process for resolving problems that occur on site. The organization has twelve values to which they refer when holding their events. These values also are explained in the manual and on their website. If any issue comes up, the solution of which is not guided by these values, according to Samia, they would look up Islamic scholar’s opinions

and if they could not find an answer, they would put in the effort to find the answer on their own. One of these values is the policy of hijab while praying and attending to the mosque. This value is articulated in the “come as you are dressed code policy.” This policy applies for attendees and for the sermon giver. For instance, in one incident that The WMOA faced, a *khateebah* named Mariem--who does not wear the headscarf on daily basis nor while praying--asked if she could lead the prayer without a headscarf and give the sermon without a headscarf. Since their value is to have a space that is an inclusive middle ground, Samia said that Mariem was asked to wear the headscarf during prayer because they did not want anyone from the congregants to feel that their prayer was invalidated or to feel excluded because the *imām* was praying without a head scarf⁴⁰ while the congregants were. When the question arose about whether Mariem could give the sermon without a headscarf, at first Samia’s response was “we were like hmm we're not sure, we don't know if there's any official scholar who comments on that issue and so we went to our congregation.” Hasna went up the stage, explained Mariem’s situation, and said that if one person in the congregation disagreed with Mariem, then that person’s choice would be honored so that she, the congregant, would not feel excluded when not following behind the *imām* and thinking that the prayer was not valid. As a result, the headscarf was worn during the sermon. As per to Samia, it is very important the *imām* does things in whatever is considered the proper way. In this way the women were authoring legitimacy, promoting inclusion, and honoring tradition with regard to the correct ways to do prayer in Islamic traditions.

One of the congregants expressed her concern that the prayer might also be invalidated since the sermon is an extension of the prayer. As a result Mariem wore the headscarf during the *khutbah* and the prayer. After that incident, Samia said that

⁴⁰ When praying in congregation, in the Islamic tradition, congregants follow what the *imām* does because s/he is leading the prayer in congregation.

if the issue comes up again in terms of hijab or no hijab during the *khutbah*, we will bring it up to the congregation again and if 100% of the congregation says "we don't mind", then it's ok that the *khateebah* does not wear the Hijab during the sermon.

Hasna purposely made that aspect about the hijab in the *khateebah* booklet vague. In her opinion, during the sermon you can do acts outside of the prayer (such as drinking water) that would not invalidate the prayer. Thus, leaving this option vague was so that the women could allow more inclusivity and engagement.

Activity coordination can be also seen in the internal organization and in giving *khateebahs* a network and resources. As noted at the end of the last section, the network of Muslim professionals that the organization provides as resources for the attendees is self structuring but it is also activity coordination.

4.2.3 Authoring through Institutional Positioning

This communicative process links the organization “at a macro level” with the environment or entities outside the organization. These entities can be competitors, providers, clients, and collaborators. The communicators of the organization are individuals who take on multiple communicative roles to negotiate the identity of the organization, seek recognition for the organization’s existence, develop and keep the maintenance of the organization within the larger scale of other systems, and ensure its positioning among other organizations. The inter-organizational relations allow institutions to draw on other organizations’ resources to exist, maintain itself, and accomplish objectives (McPhee & Zaug, 2000).

The WMOA aims to serve the Muslim community by offering onsite monthly Friday prayers. However, the number of attendees is much less when compared to established mosques. Many of the participants and leaders have confirmed that it is a small organization that it is still

growing. Nicole describes the organization as “a start up” that has struggles for funding and keeping the organization going:

I go back to the start up culture. There is a lot of heart and good Islamic intention, they did everything by the book to set up the institution but they didn't execute a community engagement strategy. I think it would have been valuable to have one-on-one with community leaders beforehand not to get their approval but to have informational meetings, to hear from them directly rather than indirectly. Instead, these meetings happened after the organization was launched and after the community leaders were approached by media to voice their opinions about The WMOA. In my perspective, it is better late than never. This is how we see ourselves as an institution. We did a handful of meetings with the community to naturalize [our practices]... and gain supporters.

The focus on Friday prayer resulted from a capacity issue insofar as the Women's Mosque was, at the very start, a volunteer-run organization. Since then, the work of the organization has expanded and the focus has moved from prayer to other services that members need and want. The WMOA hosts monthly co-ed *iftars* during Ramadan, and the founder participates and collaborates with other institutions to speak about the organization in these other venues. Hasna mentions that there is not enough of an outreach program, whereas Nicole says that although the institution is growing bigger, it still is considerably smaller in comparison to other institutions and it lacks the connection with other Muslim organizations.

When looking back at the establishment of the institution, there were more attendees and more attention given to the organization because of the news and Hasna's social network:

A lot of people found about us through the news. In the beginning we were doing a lot of interviews and a lot of media and that's how it came out. My very first outreach I had was [through] my family's social network [and] that [network] had already been big. I also had been very active on social media and Facebook...I used this opportunity and reached out to my networks saying “I'm starting this organization and holding a public town hall meeting. Come out if you are interested and let me know.” I started collecting emails and, by the time we had our first public hall meeting, we had about 100 emails from my own network. About 30 people showed up, half I already knew and the other half are new people whom I never knew before. From that group I asked people to join us as board members.

From these small but enthusiastic beginnings, the numbers of people have been fluctuating. These fluctuations in membership and newcomers who just attend to see what is happening occur even though the organization builds networks of resources based on their *khateebahs* and their expertise that can help Muslim women. As previously mentioned in the literature review, there were controversies around the topic of women leading Friday prayer. However, media articles and coverage about The WMOA have affected the Muslim community positively and negatively, thus, affecting the institutional positioning of the organization. Hasna said:

There were misunderstandings, I wouldn't call it a controversy. There were news reports who got our story wrong, and people reacted to the news. So it was almost like a fake controversy that was created by the journalists who were misquoting us. When we actually spoke to the people and explained that we are not exclusively for women, we have co-ed events, and we are not anti-men, then anyone who had an objection and misunderstandings because of the news reports, would be like "oh, I didn't know that" or "thank you for telling us."

Hasna's aim is to make the values, practices, and authoring of women's empowerment through The Women's Mosque of America mainstream. Her project is to eventually come to the point where the media, attendees, and others would say something like "that is not radical." Even though The WMOA leadership fights against because of false media reports. Subsequently, this wave of fake news had a positive effect where men who are role holders in mosques came out and asked how could they make mosque spaces better for women.

4.3 Agency, Authority, or Empowerment

In chapter two, an overview of Muslim women's various religious roles that were held throughout the Islamic world was discussed briefly. However, this section is dedicated to women's descriptions, understandings, and definitions of various forms of authority that many of

the interviewees had expressed. In addition to the qualities that these women saw as necessary for a sermon giver, I also discussed how women made decisions about policy implementation and other practices. The WMOA empowers women through giving them positions such as *khateebha*, *bayan* giver, *moazena*, or being part of the organizational body of the mosque.

Authority can be articulated as qualifications of sermon givers at The WMOA, invoking a traditional definition of authoring and authority such as that developed by Weber and others. Yet, this dissertation focuses on the authoring process as constitutive, as ongoing, and as interactionally and textually constructed and structured (recalling the four flows and its basis in Giddens' [1984] duality of structure). It is important to note that women's responses to the concept of authority varied based on their educational level. Nicole said:

Hasna's point is to empower women, and give them a space and uplift their voices, not just by bringing *shaykhas* to them but showing them that they can do it, showing them their own power, and their own ownership of Islam. It is more about empowerment than about authority. And the empowerment of empowering every day regular women to give *khutbahs* who you wouldn't see giving *khutbahs* in other places it is pretty extraordinary.

For Hasna, women's field of expertise was their authoritative tool upon which basis they could stand and give a sermon to the public. On one hand, Sylvia, a university professor, was hesitant at first when Hasna approached her: "I remember saying 'No, I do not want, I don't feel comfortable doing that. It is not something that I feel like I have the expertise.'" Even though she holds a Ph.D., studied and trained as an academic in the United States, and has knowledge in various areas including history of Islam in America, Islamic thought and Muslim women, Islam in gender in the United States and more, including her speaking engagements and her book on Muslim women in the United States, she acknowledged she did not feel as though she has the authority to speak at a Friday sermon. She remarked:

I am not a religion-trained scholar who had studied *ijaza* nor any classical Islamic training...I am not well versed in Arabic by any stretch. [I learned] my views in faith, as a convert to Islam who converted 15 years ago [and] who had studied and learned in terms of Islamic interpretation, and reading on my own and in the community right along with other Muslims.

For her, authority is what is given to women who are marginalized and women of color.

“Freedom” was the word that Sylvia chose to describe authority. Freedom of choice for those who were marginalized. Freedom to have the authority to have their voice heard. On the other hand, Priscilla who had been attending for four years did not use the word “authority” when she was asked about her experience. Instead she said:

I would never use the word “authority” in the same breath as giving a *khutbah* for the first time. It is like a journey that you and your audience go together because you have never done this, you sit through many but not necessarily [with] a women giving it to you. That’s a whole another dynamic that you don’t appreciate until you get up there yourself because you are absolutely petrified.

One can attain religious authority (e.g., *Alim*, *faqih*, *hafiz*) in selected or all Islamic sciences through Islamic training with scholars that is called *Ijaza*. Religious authority and Islamic training are believed to function as a chain of knowledge that goes back to prophet Mohammad, peace be upon him. In America, scholars either have traveled overseas to attain their religious authority and have trained under traditional scholars before their return, or they would have attained religious knowledge that would be refined while they are in this country. What is credible and what is not is open for debate. In the Islamic tradition, there are qualifications for an *imām* or a *khateeb* to be selected and be able to lead people in prayer. Among these qualifications is the memorization of the *Qur’ān*. When speaking with women who went on the podium to deliver a *khutbah* or *bayan* at The Women’s Mosque of America, it seemed as though many were hesitant to deliver the *khutbah* at first. One of the reasons they

expressed was that they were not qualified. However, Nicole described the eligibility for women to participate in *khutbah* or *bayan*:

To give the *khutbah*, you need to know the formula of the *khutbah*, know how to pronounce the Arabic *tajweed* correctly, cite your sources correctly, say the *du‘ā’* at the end... There isn’t much technically speaking that is required in a *khutbah*... In a co-ed mosque it is not the *shoyokh* who are giving the *khutbah*, it is your everyday brother who has learned everything I described. It is the same reason that the woman who was supposed to be a *shaykhah* to give a *khutbah* [the first sermon at The WMOA] they asked another person who is a community leader who might not be qualified to give the *khutbah*... Watching Hasna lead the organization and put herself in the background is fascinating, I rarely have seen men do that.

Hasna on the other hand expressed her understanding for her project as not giving anything but only “restoring what God has already given.” While shedding all stereotypes and going back to the resource, *Quran*, as God-*Allah* is telling humans that they are custodians on this earth. Hasna takes her custodianship to mean that she should enable women to author their legitimacy in prayer and empower women to feel as qualified as the brother who does so.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

My aim in this dissertation was to examine how Muslim women in the United States organized and constructed their identities to be true to their religion, their beliefs about women's rights, and their own voices and agency. To do so, I conducted a case study of The Women's Mosque of America (WMOA), a previously unstudied site where American Muslim women engage in women-led Friday prayers.⁴¹

This case study explored the constitutive force of communication for organizing and authoring women's legitimacy to lead a Muslim mosque by using McPhee's four flows (Belliger & Krieger, 2016; Brummans et al., 2014; Bruscella & Bisel, 2018; McPhee & Zaug, 2000, 2008) as a framework. Because the four flows model describes how organizing is accomplished through discourse and materialities, findings centered around space, place, embodiment, and artifacts to depict the context, interactions, and rituals to which women adhere in their social change efforts. Additionally, the means by which women gained authority through religious texts and their interpretation as well as through their own actions of legitimizing women-led prayer, presented a contested site in which to delve into the paradoxes of gender, organizing, authoring, and agency that formed the fundamental tensions in The WMOA and in my positionality about my subject matter and faith.

⁴¹ There have been accounts of Muslim women's leadership and change efforts across the globe in popular media and in scholarly work (e.g., Bano & Kalmbach, 2011). However, at the time that this dissertation began and throughout the data collection and analyses, there had been no studies of The Women's Mosque of America. Presently, there is one dissertation, *Rethinking interpretative authority: Gender, race, and scripture at the Women's Mosque of America*, also completed in 2019. Written by Tazeen Ali (2019), this dissertation is embargoed until July 5, 2021. Its publically available abstract concludes that The WMOA "represents an American branding of Islam that privileges individuality, civic engagement, and social and gender justice."

Over the span of almost a year, I analyzed the authoring of legitimacy by Muslim women who led Friday prayers at The Women's Mosque of America. I used the systematic methodology of constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2000, 2004, 2008, 2017) to analyze interviews and observations of twenty women who were leaders and participants in The WMOA space. Many of these women are converts to Islam, born Muslim, and/or came from diasporic and immigrant backgrounds. Their backgrounds influenced their membership, identities, understandings, and practices of Islam in America. For them, The WMOA was a sacred, inclusive, and emancipatory space for Muslim women that also provided resources, a sense of community, and religious leadership opportunities that Muslim women struggle to obtain and/or create elsewhere.

I drew on my training in Communication Studies and Women, Gender and Sexuality Studies and utilized a communicative theoretical framework to situate these women's membership and practices as sites of critical knowledge production. The two research questions were theoretically driven from understandings of the communicative constitution of organizations (CCO), particularly McPhee's four flows (McPhee, 2015; McPhee & Zaug, 2000, 2008) that is rooted in Giddens' (1984) theorizing of agency and structure. This constitutive approach to organizing, agency, structure, and authoring had formed the foundation for understanding that women in this sacred space engaged in the four flows such that they constituted their agency: (a) through their membership to the organization, (b) with each other and to the mosque on an organizational level through reflexive self-structuring and activity coordination, (c) and individually and/or collectively with other institutions.

First, I studied how American Muslim women organized to author religious reform. I looked for membership negotiation flows through an analysis of interviews and observations.

This process allowed me to examine the sense of inclusion that The WMOA offered to welcome returning and new members so that they felt as though they were part of the organization. In addition, members constituted their membership through their relationship with each other and materialities of place, bodies, and artifacts.

Findings suggested that membership negotiation not only drew women to The WMOA but also fostered identification with the organization as a whole, solidified their membership to their faith and Islamic practices, and created collectivities of women who lacked certain experiences in traditional mosques. These experiences related to their social, spiritual, and community needs. Finding explained that many of The WMOA attendees had experienced traumatizing events in their home mosques from both men and women, making The WMOA a safe space regardless of differences among the women.

Furthermore, membership was manifested through The WMOA's inclusive middle ground vision and practices. This vision and accompanying practices allowed diverse members who came from different Islamic sects (*Sunnis* and *Shiites*) to attend, lead, and participate in Friday prayers. This ritual act of a *Shiite* leading Friday prayer and followed by *Sunni* congregants (or vice versa) might not be common, or even an acceptable act in some of these women's home mosques. Further, these women practice their agency through shared opinions and narratives with little to no politicization regardless of their differences. This inclusivity gave women the sense of belonging, the sense of sisterhood, and the spiritual connection not only in ritual performances but also through hearing personal struggles and narratives. These women were able to relate the *khutbah* topics on womanhood and experiences of other women. Furthermore, they perceived that such topics and their involvement in mosque activities, especially Friday sermons, increased their spiritual connections.

In addition, membership was negotiated when women's (mostly attendees') voices were embraced and their opinions and stories were encouraged during the Q&A sister's circle sessions. This engagement fulfilled Muslim women's emotional, spiritual, and intellectual needs. Moreover, while The WMOA provided accessibility to knowledge, through their training tools for women to become a *khateebah* or a *muezzinah*, these women leaders also were the connection to resources that served other women who needed help (e.g., in cases of mental health, domestic violence). These offerings solidified women's membership in and identification with the organization and created a supportive circle and environment to which women could return.

Findings suggested that the organization was working toward reform through women leading Friday prayer, through the materials and guidelines provided for the execution of women's authority in sacred spaces, and through advocacy among participants to be part of that reform. The reform was framed as consistent with and expansive within Islamic teaching and is advertised as a way to regain what God has given women in Islamic scriptures. Regardless, the aim was to empower women spiritually and provide them with tools to lead and inspire other Muslim women.

Second, in examining the three other communicative processes, namely, reflexive self structuring, activity coordination, and institutional positioning, I studied how American Muslim women empowered themselves within religious organizing and specifically within The WMOA. I looked into the opportunities and restrictions whereby women were able to exercise their agency in relation to the organizational structure as stipulated by male religious leaders and as authored by the women themselves.

For the reflexive self-structuring flow, I looked into women's roles and engagements (as board members, as staff, as sermon givers, and/or as attendees). Findings suggested that the organization acted as a small startup with a limited number of staff members who engaged in recruitment (of sermon givers or organizational participants). Further, decision-making roles were broader in the past but have now become concentrated in the founder's position as leader. For instance, women's abilities to join the organization was dependent on the founder's observations and evaluations of women who were newcomers. However, during the early stages of the organization and when there was a larger number of board members, decisions were made through a group of men and women who were board members at that time. Decisions were based on consensus among board members over issues that were controversial or confusing to the public—such as the *dhuhr* prayer. Amendments to policies were made when board members saw the need to make adjustments to be more inclusive for women and in line with the organization's vision. Findings suggested that as the years passed by and structures were established, the smaller number of staff members could handle organizational concerns that arose.

Additionally, the organizational processes, guidelines, and tools that the organization used followed a hierarchy. Findings suggested that *khateebahs* (who already were established professionals or leaders) were recruited directly through invitations to The WMOA. Decisions on topics, *khateebah* selection, scheduling, and so on had the founder's final approval. Some *khateebahs* were redirected to choose topics other than their first choice even when the topic did not relate to their own personal experience. At these times, women's limited agency was “conditioned by lack of power, insight, decision access” (McPhee, 2015, p. 491).

Through The WMOA's empowering tools, *khateebahs* were provided with a booklet and guided on the *khutbah* selection, preparation, and delivery. Thus, allowing them to construct

their agency through their presence, voice, and space brought discourses and materialities together seamlessly such that the place and artifacts--podium, stage, microphones, and prayer rugs—served to further empower them and legitimize their authority. For instance, the booklet written by the founder as a result of her experience in traditional mosque, provided a means of countering misunderstandings and mistreatments of women in traditional mosques and of voicing inclusiveness in The WMOA space. Thus, the booklet served as a material instantiation of institutional guidelines and as a training tool that was used to explain the organization's policies and procedures for preparing women to give sermons.

Women were empowered by direct training given by the founder herself before the monthly Friday prayer. Amendments were made to the booklet or when new issues arose during meetings of the congregation, or when other occurrences needed immediate problem solving—such as wearing the hijab or not while giving a sermon. Additionally, reflexive self structuring was seen when women enacted and encouraged others' agency and voice--either as an attendee or a leader, on the podium or inside the women's circle.

Reflexive self structuring also looked at the resources that were allocated to serve sermon givers and attendees. The organization offered additional resources to retain expertise shared among *khateebahs* who had participated in The WMOA. These processes of resource allocation and expertise retention built a network of professionals who were able to provide advice on sermon scripts or answer questions on matters that related to women's issues. These processes helped women to engage online and also provided access to resources for sermon givers of The WMOA.

While reflexive self structuring may have overlapped with the activity coordination flow because of the small size of the organization, the later flow engaged both staff and attendees to

come up with solutions and redirect the work process in ways that included leaders and staff members' and attendees' voices to make adjustments. Findings suggested that the organization exercised agentic problem-solving through engaging the congregation to solve problems and through structuring the organization by means of distributed roles and responsibilities among attendees during the women's circle and to *khateebahs*.

The fourth flow, institutional positioning, was mostly expressed by the attendees' experience with other institutions and The WMOA. The organization lacked a voice within the Muslim community due to little outreach and continuous false propagation that the media portrayed about The WMOA. Findings suggested that The WMOA needed to coordinate with female Muslim scholars to gain legitimacy about their positionality, to increase engagement (through a planned outreach program), to be able to reflect The WMOA's true mission to the public, and to increase their programming to fulfill their mission of educating Muslim women about their religion.

While these flows expressed women's agentic voice and practice in an organizational level, one critical aspect of understanding and communicating authority was seen missing in the overall execution of empowerment in this space. Based on my data, the expression of authority was understood in many different ways: as freedom, as authoritative voice founded in women's field of expertise, and as the ability to speak in safe circles led by women. However, findings revealed a fundamental tension between more traditional interpretations and reform of Islamic practices, one that I myself felt throughout this research project. Specifically, some findings suggested that among the qualities that sermon givers should possess was the grounding in the Islamic tradition and/or sciences. This finding was not meant to devalue the voices of women who had participated as sermon givers in the past years, but rather to suggest that The WMOA

might consider recruiting women who trained in Islamic sciences. This recruitment would lend greater support for women-led prayer because such training would emulate that found in traditional Islamic contexts. Yet, it is important to note that The WMOA had tried to reach out to many women including those trained in Islamic sciences and/or traditions. There was resistance from women who do not want to participate or associate themselves with The WMOA because of the controversy about women-led Friday prayer.

Additionally, driven from the data and tools or resources that were provided to the women in this space, in my opinion the founder of the organization is helping build charismatic authority of the attendees and sermon givers. Women are building up charismatic qualities that occurs in the “process of organizing” (Weber, 1947 cited in Turner, 1974 p. 31) through the training tools that allow women to have a voice on the stage and an influence in the women’s circle—as an attendee or as a *khateebah*. The founder constantly encourages women to join the circle and reflect on the *khutbah*. Further, encourage them to sign up to be a *khateebah* or a *muezzina* so they can regain what God has given them from rights and inspire other women understand their own power in their voice and presence while asserting their membership as Muslims.

In the rest of this discussion chapter, I speculate further about why and how the findings of this dissertation are important. In addition to the contributions, I also note the limitations and implications of my study before concluding.

5.1 Contributions

First, this dissertation used McPhee’s model of constituting organizations through communication as a framework for understanding The WMOA organizing and authoring processes. In doing so, this study brought together two areas that had not been linked previously:

McPhee's four flows communicative processes and the processes of authoring women's agency within religious organizations, specifically Islamic mosques. Most of the four flows research has explored communication within businesses and not-for-profit organizations, although there are exceptions such as Bruscella and Bisel's (2018) work on ISIL and Bean and Buikema's (2015) work on al-Qaida. These studies that deconstructed newspapers and documents and other studies on businesses and not-for-profits used the four flows to show how organizing is conducted in non-religious and non-women-only spaces toward instrumental, not sacred, aims. However, my study focused on a context where women were not perceived by traditional Islamic leaders as having authority and, as a result, they faced structural obstacles to their authoring. I viewed these constraints as opportunities and displayed how women utilized resources at hand or created by them to constitute authority and to negotiate their membership (as new members, as members negotiating their place in the religion) through communication (as a productive force constituted through linguistic choices, discursive formations, and materialities). Specifically, the member negotiation flow showed how authoring and membership were ontologically (spatially, objects, bodies interacting) and epistemologically (knowing) constructed. In addition, constructing The WMOA organization was accomplished through routine and disruptive processes through using reflexive self-structuring and activity coordination, by which the understanding of authority and agency was constituted (as action through or enactment of rules, resources, and routines in the duality of structure, based on Giddens [1984] structuration theory). Hence, this project replicated McPhee's four flow model including the theory's assumptions about agency and laid the groundwork for future contributions in which the four flows can provide novel explanations of organizing processes in sacred and other spaces.

Second, Weber's (1947, cited in Turner, 1974) concept of authority is usually used to

understand leadership at bigger scale institutions and governments. However, my study described how women learned to empower themselves and others, and how they exercised their agency and authority to learn and author “untraditional or reformist” opportunities that are offered at The WMOA. Participants in The WMOA space were empowered and trained to hold leadership positions (*khateebah* or *muezzinah*), to use voice as a tool of empowerment, to be able to stand and give the sermon, to lead other women in Friday prayer, and to lead women’s circles. These communicative practices encourage others to take part in religious leadership roles.

5.2 Limitations

This dissertation project has limitations that affect the transferability of findings to other organizations. First, the number of interviews I conducted was 20. These interviews were with Muslim women who are leaders and attendees of The Women’s Mosque of America. Initially, there were 25 women who had expressed interest in being part of my project yet only 20 women committed to the phone interviews. This qualitative approach with a small sample size does not reflect the entire organization nor the Muslim community as a whole. In addition, at the time of this research the organization itself had only 3 active staff members (one of which was full-time). These staff members were women and, based on their tenure in The WMOA, could not always provide enough information about organizational changes since the beginning of The WMOA.

A second limitation would be the need to expand the types of participants, including other gender/s who were or are still part of the organization, and the means of accessing data. The IRB initial paperwork was limited to interviews with only Muslim women who are part of the organization. Due to the extensive time period for Purdue University IRB paperwork processing and revisions, the human subjects pool was not expanded through amendments to interview men, particularly men who previously were board members of the organization. A

larger sample size that included both men and women would have provided more varied and nuanced findings.

Third, during the interview process with mosque attendees the data reached saturation quickly. Specifically, there were no new themes and insights into organizing through the four flows or into authoring and authority. This lack of variation in interview content may have been due to the small number of women who were constantly attending The WMOA Friday prayer sessions and the timing of these prayers insofar as they were offered only once a month. Moreover, very few numbers of new members were attending over the short timeline of this research. A longer timeline could have contributed with a thick description of participants and observations that could reinforce the credibility of my findings.

5.3 Implications for Future Research and Practice

In this section, I discuss implications for future research and practice derived from my findings.

First and with regard to future research, scholars should explore the communicative construction of third spaces— as religious and social institution (Herwees, 2015; Oldenburg, 1999), at The Women’s Mosque of America. Third spaces⁴² are one of the growing phenomena in American Muslim communities (Mahmood, 2016) as well as a growing area of research in academia (Jeffres et al., 2009; Oldenburg & Brissett, 1982). Specifically, it would be useful to develop an understanding of comprehensive inclusive practices for marginalized groups in third spaces that are different and that can improve American mosques.

⁴² Third places are places outside work and home that promote community and communication (Jeffres et al., 2009; Oldenburg, 1999).

Second, the notions of “safe” space were constantly coming up in the interviews. Further research should examine religious safe spaces that mobilize change—online and physical spaces—from an organizational communication perspective. I especially encourage paying attention to the strategies of constitution and to ways in which women navigating these spaces that function as a refuge and as a means of bringing about solidarity with other Muslim women.

Finally, this growing phenomenon of women-only mosques is worldwide and is creating a social movement (“First women-only mosque,” 2005; Siegel, 2010). Future research should examine this movement’s broader social impact by assessing empowerment through both the lens of activism and of resistance (Mumby, 2005, 2017). Studies should further consider the typologies of resistance and activism in an individual or collective capacity and as not inherently intentional or overt (Wilhoit & Kisselburgh, 2017). In fact, resistance that has not been named explicitly or “externally defined” (Wilhoit & Kisselburgh, 2017, p. 877) is a concept that is rarely investigated (Hollander & Einwohner, 2004). Additionally, it would be useful to consider resistance as a relational product of how and why these women proactively resist traditional norms that are seen in American mosques. These women’s practices are agentic and meaningfully “contribute to discourses or activities that emerge” (Wilhoit & Kisselburgh, 2017, p. 876) offering an alternative that is in and of itself, resistance. By utilizing an intersectional feminist approach (race, gender, identity, and attachment to this movement) and using ethnographical methods (digital ethnographic and autoethnographic methods) to study resistance and activism ontologically, greater contributions to understanding the complexity of and contestations within The WMOA as well as the tensions experienced by some members (and my own tensions/positionality as a Saudi Muslim woman and communication scholar trained in the West) can be explored.

Second and with regard to pragmatic implications, I first discuss those applications resulting from my personal memos and observations and then those derived from my research participants' experiences.

Currently, the organization is considered to be very small, located at a church, and operating with a limited budget and small staff. Although it has been running for a couple of years, the number of women who show up to attend Friday prayers is still small and inconsistent. For the organization to operate more effectively, there should be alliances or cooperation with the majority of Muslim organizations in the area. The WMOA should engage in outreach planning and collaborate to provide events that work with their budget and their mission. One example for collaborations can be through renting a space from a Muslim organization to conduct their Friday prayer.

In addition to my own observations about practical applications, participants in this study provided insights on how the organization can enhance its performance and acceptance among the majority of American Muslims who are not in line with the organization's expression of empowering Muslim women. One strategy is to offer more programming that focuses on teaching women their religion to achieve The WMOA's values of enhancing Muslim women's *Qur'anic* literacy. Another means of expanding Islamic literacy among these women is to bring in *khateebahs* who are trained in the Islamic tradition to be part of that programming. Second, participants expressed their interests in having women's only social outings so that women can see each other more often, build bonds with one another, and connect with the *khateebah* on a personal level. Third, to enhance their online presence and engagement outreach, the organization needs to add content more than just their recorded Friday sermons. For example, sending periodic emails that discuss issues relating to The WMOA's empowerment processes

can increase understandings. Further, participants shared their desire to have The WMOA reach out to the Muslim community as a whole to clarify any misunderstandings that were caused by fake news, and to build bridges through collaborations with male and female scholars.

The Women's Mosque of America's relationship with the Muslim community is limited due to controversies in the past and due to propagation around the organization and women's roles as *khateebahs*. Some of the suggestions from the interviews included the following: to communicate with Muslim *shykhahs*--who are educated women and already have established Islamic traditional scholarship backgrounds. The idea here is to seek legitimacy and support from them. As The WMOA engages with the Muslim community in general through structured outreach programs dedicated to spreading the word about the organization's mission and values. The WMOA can also counter fake news.

5.4 Conclusion

To conclude, this dissertation project was a consideration of the contested leadership position of Muslim women leading Friday prayers through the in-depth examination of The Women's Mosque of America (WMOA) as a case study. It described women's authoring of process and structure to reform practices that may be revolutionary to traditionalist members and interpretations, through the constitutive approach of communication in organization (CCO) using McPhee's four flows model (McPhee & Zaug, 2000, 2008, McPhee, 2015). It also provides insight into gendered social change in ways different from Western approaches that dominate much of the feminist scholarship (see Buzzanell, 2020; Örtengren et al., 2017). These ways are further illuminated to describe how women's agency and empowerment are constructed, structured, and legitimized through women's interactions, engagements, and advocacy in a particular space and place. Studying women's agency and structuring of empowerment was

enabled through CCO's assumptions of agency (based on Giddens [1984] structuration theory, but see also Brummans, 2017) and Weber's notion of authority.

This dissertation proposes that McPhee's four flow model constitutes an organizing model for Muslim organizations that are structured along Islamic values, interpretations, and practices. This study and its findings provided insight on diverse members of an organization who are marginalized yet contribute to social change. This study links communication, feminist studies, and Muslim religious organizing. Future research should explore these interconnections in relation to resistance, activism, and third space.

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW GUIDE (STAFF/LEADERS AND ATTENDEES)

These questions will be asked according to the type of membership of individuals in the organization; i.e. founder/ leader/ members/ attendees. These questions are about:

1- About the organization

- How do you affiliate with The Women's Mosque of America?
 - Follow up: What does your role entail?
 - Follow up: How long have you worked with/affiliated with the organization?
- Tell me about The Women's Mosque of America (purpose, goals and values)?
- When did you feel the need to start offering such a space for Muslim women?
- Are there significant moments in the history of establishing the organization?
- How has The Women's Mosque of America changed since the day it started?
- Were you a member/ contributor / founder/ other during these changes?
 - Follow up: If other, how did you learn about organization? And how did you become part of it today?
- What were the reactions from Muslims and non-Muslims about the establishment of the organization?
 - Follow up: what were some positive responses?
 - Follow up: what were some negative responses?
 - Follow up: how did you deal with negative reactions?
 - Follow up: which segments of the community supported/challenged the organization and its goals?
- What kinds of challenges has the organization encountered within itself, in the course of its existence and how did you overcome these challenges? Or how do you plan to overcome it?
- What kinds of instrumental support does The Women's Mosque of America receive?
 - Follow up: From whom does it receive this support? (e.g., individuals, companies, institutions, etc.)
 - Follow up: what kind of support (money, labor, media etc)?

2- Experiences

- Are there any similar organizations that do the same work? If so what similarities do you see?
- What are the experiences of women when they visit religious spaces and mosques?
 - Follow up (if negative): Could you describe the incidences where you yourself had negative experiences when entering mosques or using facilities in religious spaces?
 - Follow up (if negative experience): How did you and your community tackle these issues? And did you receive any criticisms?
- When entering a religious space, what are/were you looking for?

3- Identity

- How do you identify yourself within the Muslim community and why do you describe your Muslim identity? I.e progressive/ conservative/ liberal/ modern Muslim/ other
- What are the controversies surrounding women's leadership in mosques?
 - Follow-up: What is your personal opinion on women's leadership in mosques?
- Why/how do you consider yourself an advocate for Muslim women's empowerment?
- How did you become a leader to this initiative and your community?
 - Follow-up: what makes that people view you as a leader?
- What do you hope to accomplish with this leadership/position?

4- Contribution and outreach

- What are the key programs at this organization?
 - Follow-up: Did it change or evolved over time? And if so, how?
- How does the organization determine what is included in its programming?
- During its existence, what are some of the outcomes of the organization's efforts?
- Where these outcomes broadcasted and shared with a wider audience to gained publics or media attention? How?
- What kind of outreach goals do you have for your social media? And who are your target audiences on social media?
- In general, how do you see the media coverage/social media about Muslim women?
- What kind of influences does the organization have on the general public (Muslims and non-Muslims)
 - What do you hope this will bring your community?
- What kind of influence did you have, if any, on other religious spaces, their leaders and their communities?
 - Follow up: how do you communicate with them?
 - Follow up: If the response is "n/a": Why isn't there any communication?
- How do you generate your influence on others?
 - Follow-up: How do you identify your audience and keep them engaged?
- How is your contribution different from others who are aiming to advance the rights of Muslim women?
- What do you hope to achieve by growing your audience?
- What are valuable mediums you (should) use to have your voice heard?
- What roles of leadership you envision Muslim women should have? And why?

5- Religious authority

- How does your organization operate outside of, or perhaps resist, contemporary interpretations of Islamic teaching to advocate for your work?
 - Follow up: What might be an example?
- What kind of authority and criteria do Muslim women have when interpreting text? To what extend can their interpretation fit community needs at this time and age?
 - Follow-up: are their limits to the religious authority of women?
- How would you define "leaders" in the Islamic tradition?
 - Follow up: can you provide an example of a leader in Islam?

- We have discussed a number of points, are there anything we didn't cover or discuss that you would like to add that might help me with interpreting this data?

6- Other (this includes attendees of the space):

- How did you find the space?
- What encourages you to attend religious spaces?
- Describe how the space made you feel during and after the (service/ event/ sermon) was conducted? (prompt: describe needs, emotions/ sense of belonging/ space to practice)
- What are the challenges that you faced from the community/your family/your peers when you decided that this space made you feel XYZ (e.g. comfortable, gave you a sense of belonging – depending on earlier answers)
 - Follow up: If this space didn't make you comfortable, why did it made you feel that way? And was it due to belief, society, or lack resources to provide comfort.
- What is the reason for your engagement with other Muslim women to attend prayers/ events/ talks etc.?
- What do you hope to gain from your participation?
- What do you hope your community or leaders would know or do to empower Muslim women, like yourself?

APPENDIX B: IRB FORMS

RESEARCH PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Muslim women's authority in sacred spaces

Brian G. Smith, Assistant Professor, BLSC, smit1856@purdue.edu

Brian Lamb School of Communication

Purdue University

Purpose of this study: The current study is designed to gather information about Muslim women's participation, leadership, struggles and empowerment in religious spaces. You will be one of approximately 50 people to be interviewed/ observed/ or asked to take surveys for this research.

You are part of this research because you may meet one or all of the criteria below:

- Participants in this research are Muslim women (age 20-70)
- Participants in this research are female and speak English.
- Participants in this research are head of Muslim organizations that provide safe spaces to empower Muslim women, and those who are actively associated with similar organizations.
- Participants in this research are members associated with the above-mentioned criteria of a Muslim organization or in similar organizations.
- Participants in this research are attendees of events hosted or associated with the above-mentioned criteria of a Muslim organization or in similar organizations

You are not eligible to participate in this research if you:

- Are under the age of 18.
- Do not affiliate yourself with the Islamic religion.

What will I do if I choose to be in this study? How long will I be in the study?

Your participation in this project is voluntary. You may withdraw and discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. There are several ways to be part of this study, you may be asked to be:

Interviewed: the interview location can be at the organization's site, an office, a public space, online, or via phone or Skype. Most of the interviewees in this research will find the discussion interesting and thought-provoking. If, however, you feel uncomfortable in any way during the interview session, you have the right to decline to answer any question or to end the interview.

Participation involves being interviewed by the researcher (Naila Althagafi). The interview will last approximately 60-90 minutes. The interviews can be done multiple times if all questions were not covered in one session. Notes will be written during the interview. This interview will be audio-recorded so that the study team may later transcribe the interview. Audio-recording is

mandatory to participation. If you do not agree to be audio-recorded, then you cannot participate in this research study.

Focus groups: the focus group location can be at the organization's site, an office, a public space, online, or via phone or Skype. Most of the time in the focus group in this research will find the discussion interesting and thought-provoking. If, however, you feel uncomfortable in any way during the interview session, you have the right to decline to answer any question or exit the group. Participation involves being interviewed by the researcher (Naila Althagafi). The focus group will last approximately 90 minutes. Notes will be written during the interview. This interview will be audio-recorded so that the study team may later transcribe the interview. Audio-recording is mandatory to participation. If you do not agree to be audio-recorded, then you cannot participate in this research study.

Observed in public settings: You agree to be observed in a public setting during the events that are held by the organizations. Notes will be written and audio recording of the event and subsequent dialogue will be made. If you don't want to be recorded, you will not be able to participate in the study.

Possible risks or discomforts: Breach of confidentiality is a risk and the safeguards used to minimize this risk can be found in the confidentiality section.

Benefits: Benefits cannot be guaranteed, there are no direct benefits to you for participating in our study, but your participation will allow us to expand our knowledge about Muslim women's participation, empowerment and leadership in American mosques. The study may also be used to better understand recent controversies and how they relate to Muslim beliefs and their identity in this country.

Cost and compensation: Your participation in this study is strictly voluntary. There is no cost or compensation associated with your participation in study.

What happens if I become injured or ill because I took part in this study?

If you feel you have been injured due to participation in this study, please contact Brain Smith (smit1856@purdue.edu). Purdue University will not provide medical treatment or financial compensation if you are injured or become ill as a result of participating in this research project. This does not waive any of your legal rights nor release any claim you might have based on negligence.

Statement of confidentiality: your participation in this study will be kept completely confidential we will not be collecting your name or any other identifying information in the study. Your responses will be anonymous and there will be no way for anyone to identify your responses. If any excerpts from the interviews are included, the participant's name and other identifying information will be replaced by using a pseudo name in order to maintain confidentiality. The data collection sheets, notes and electronic files will be stored in a locked office and only individuals who are directly involved in the study will have access to the information. The finding from this study will be presented in accumulated form with no identifying information to ensure confidentiality. The project's research records may be reviewed by departments at Purdue

University and those who are responsible for regulatory and research oversight. Records will be kept for 3 years after the study is over then it will be destroyed.

Voluntary participation and rights to withdraw: you must be at least 18 years old to participate in the study. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to participate or, if you agree to participate, you can withdraw your participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. The decision to participate or not in the research will have no effect on the participant's relationship with any specific entity. The researcher or the principle investigator has the right to end your participation in this study if it would be dangerous for you to continue, or if you do not follow study procedures as directed by the researcher or PI.

Right to ask questions: If you have questions, comments or concerns about this research project, you can talk to one of the researcher. Please contact Naila Althagafi (nalthaga@purdue.edu), or Brain Smith (smit1856@purdue.edu)

If you have questions about your rights while taking part in the study or have concerns about the treatment of research participants, please call the Human Research Protection Program at (765) 494-5942, email (irb@purdue.edu) or write to:

Human Research Protection Program - Purdue University
Ernest C. Young Hall, Room 1032
155 S. Grant St.,
West Lafayette, IN 47907-2114

Documentation of Informed Consent

I have had the opportunity to read this consent form and have the research study explained. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the research study, and my questions have been answered. I am prepared to participate in the research study described above. I will be offered a copy of this consent form after I sign it.

Consent:

Do you wish to participate? Record participant's response: Yes No

____ I agree to have my name disclosed in publishing.

____ I do not want my have name disclosed and would want pseudo names to be used instead.

Participant's Signature

Date

Participant's Name

RECRUITMENT LETTER

Project Title: Muslim women's authority in sacred spaces.

Principal Investigator's Name: Brian G. Smith, Assistant Professor, BLSC,
smit1856@purdue.edu.

Academic Department: Brian Lamb School of Communication, Purdue University.

Dear *[insert name]*,

My name is Naila Althagafi and I am a doctoral student in the Brian Lamb School of communication at Purdue University. I am currently working toward my dissertation under the supervision of professor Brian Smith to fulfill my degree requirement.

I am writing to invite you to participate in my research study. This research examines Muslim women's participation and empowerment in religious spaces. The current title for this research is "Women's authority in sacred spaces". Your organization offers a space that welcome Muslim women and empower them through various offerings.

For participants to be considered to be part of this research the below criteria must be met:

- Participants in this research are Muslim women (age 20-70)
- Participants in this research are female and speak English.
- Participants can be the head of Muslim organizations that provide safe spaces to empower Muslim women, and those who are actively associated with similar organizations.
- Participants can be members associated with the above-mentioned criteria of an organization or in similar organizations.
- Participants can be attendees of events hosted or associated with the above-mentioned criteria of an organization or in similar organizations

Participants who are not eligible to participate in this research are under the age of 18 or those who do not affiliate themselves with the Islamic faith.

If you decide to participate in this study, I would be conducting interviews with members and leaders of the organizations, I will send you links for surveys to you to send it to your subscribers. In addition, I will observe public events that are held by your organization and that are within the scope of the research. I would also be audio recording the interviews and observational public settings to collect data and information for the purpose of this study and its accuracy. Participant's information are kept confidential. Breach of confidentiality is a risk and the safeguards used to minimize this risk can be found in the confidentiality section in the consent forms. The data collection will be used in presentations and publications. Participants have the right to decline

being recorded, however this may affect the data collection and its accuracy. The collected data will be destroyed after 3 years of the research completion.

Your participation is of a great help to my study specifically and to the Muslim community in general, to raise awareness and to contribute to the academic field.

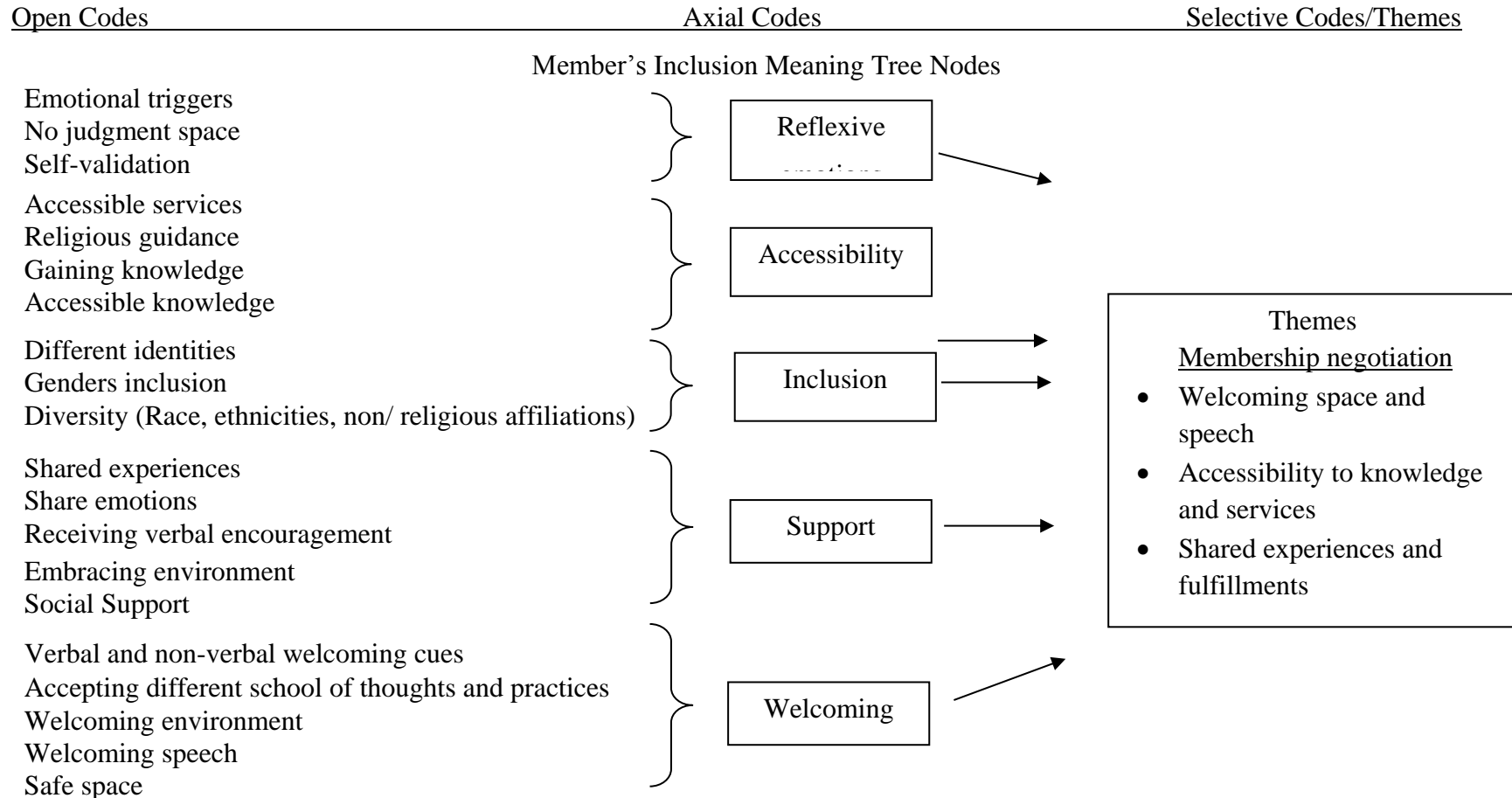
Please remember, this is completely voluntary. You can choose to be in the study or not. If you'd like to participate or have any questions about the study, please email or contact the principle investigator or myself at nalthaga@purdue.edu.

Thank you again for considering this research opportunity.

Sincerely,
Naila Althagafi
Ph.D. Candidate, Brian Lamb School of Communication
Purdue University

APPENDIX C: LIST OF OPEN, AXIAL & SELETIVE CODING

Open, Axial, and Selective Codes for CCO Flows and Authority Using Constant Comparison Technique in Constructivist Grounded Theory



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Open, Axial, and Selective Codes for CCO Flows and Authority Using Constant Comparison Technique in Constructivist Grounded Theory Continued

Open Codes

Axial Codes

Selective Codes/Themes

Reflexive Self Structuring Meaning Tree Nodes

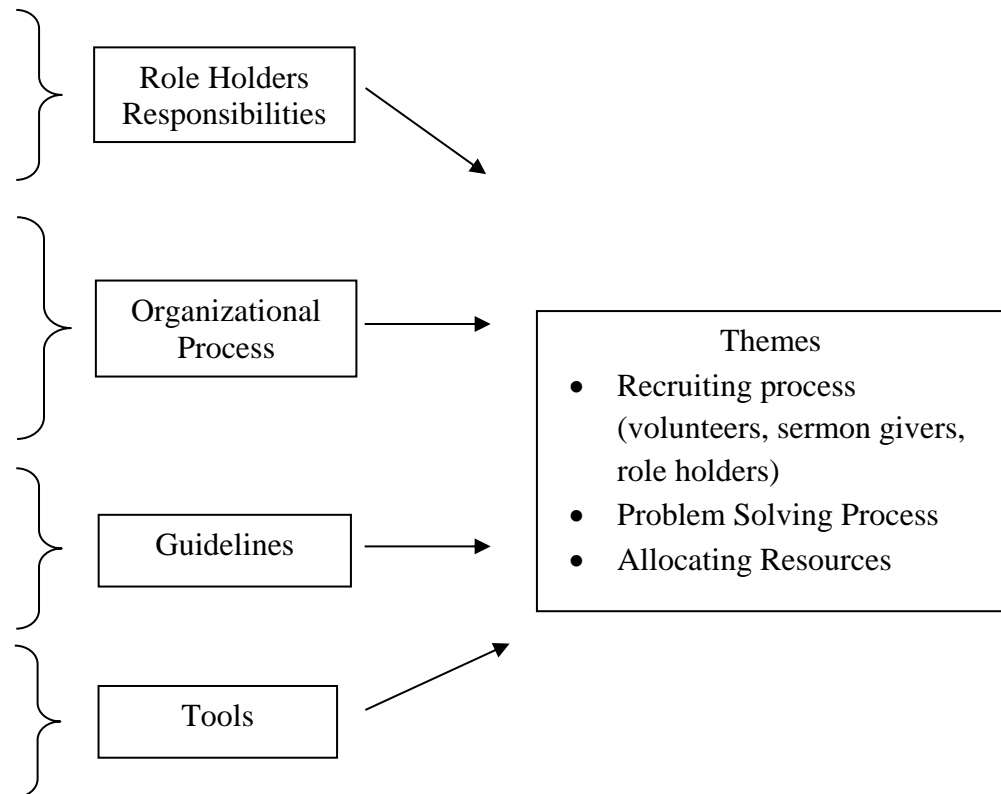
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Muezzinah roles
Khateebah roles
Bayan Giver roles
 Volunteers roles
 Board members, paid and non-paid staff roles

Choice of sermon givers
 Scheduling
 Communicating with sermon givers
 Deciding on topic
 Training
 Decision making process

Policies
 Prestablished problem solving issues
Khateebah booklet
 Vision and Mission of the org

Khateebah Booklet
 Internal *Khateebah* resources
 Members resources and access



Open, Axial, and Selective Codes for CCO Flows and Authority Using Constant Comparison Technique in Constructivist Grounded Theory Continued

Open Codes	Axial Codes	Selective Codes/Themes
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Activity Coordination Meaning Tree Nodes

Immediate problem solving
 Communication and coordination
 Staff decision vs. attendee's decision
Khateebahs, attendees, and staff roles



Themes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Arising problems Work process adjustments

Institutional Positioning Meaning Tree Nodes

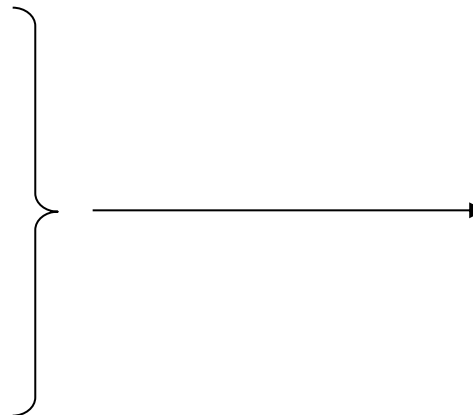
Institution's recommended activities for outreach
 Institutional outreach to the public
 Online opinion about the institution
 Attendees' opinion about the institution
 Leaders' opinion about the institution



Themes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recommended activities Institutions' ecological positioning

Meanings of authority

Freedom (speech, act, leadership)
 Empowerment
 Religious training
 Western academic vs. Islamic traditional training
 Religious Knowledge
 Expertise in their own fields
 Petrifying journey
 Qualifications
 Authority to speak, to interpret, to lead
 To give voice to the voiceless
 Restoring God's stewardship on earth



Themes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Feminist notions Reclaiming Women's status in Islam

VITA

NAILA ALTHAGAFI

December 2019

EDUCATION

Purdue University

Brian Lamb School of Communication. W, Lafayette, IN, USA | Anticipated Graduation: December 2019

Ph.D. | Communication Studies | GPA: 3.56/4.

Major Concentrations: Organizational Communication Gender, and Religion.

Graduate Concentration and Certification: Women, Sexuality & Gender Studies (2017).

Dissertation: *Muslim Women's Authority in Sacred Spaces*.

Dissertation Committee: Patrice M. Buzzanell (Chair), Howard Sypher, Ralph Webb, Mona Hassan (assistant professor of Islamic studies & history and international comparative studies at Duke University).

The American University

School of Communication. Washington, DC, USA | December 2012

MFA | Film & Electronic Media | GPA 3.6 /4.

Thesis Documentary: *Saudi Women on the Steps of Change* | <https://vimeo.com/86550677>

Faculty Advisor: Maggie Stogner.

Dar Al Hekma University

Jeddah, Saudi Arabia | December 2008

B.A. | Interior Design | GPA 4.16 /5.

Graduation Project: Designed dorms for women at Dar Al Hekma University.

Related Educational Experiences

Langue Onze Toulouse, International French School

France, Toulouse | Summer 2018

Course: Intensive French.

Lanzhou University

Gansu Province, China | Summer 2016

Course: Religion in Social Context: Religion in China.

Supervisor: Jonathan Pettit.

The George Washington University

Department of Theater and Dance. Washington, DC, USA | Spring 2009

Three Graduate Courses in Production Design.

Lighting Design Assistant - "Little Shop of Horrors", Bets Theater.

Fusion VFX Academy | Cairo Egypt | 2008

Took courses in 3D animation and design, filmmaking, and digital photography.

RESEARCH PUBLICATIONS & CREATIVES

PUBLICATIONS

In progress

Althagafi, N. (2019). Muslim women's authority in sacred spaces. Manuscripts in preparation.

Researcher and writer assistant for a book chapter "The red market: Legal religions: Islam" in Yang, F., & Pettit, J. E. (2018). *Atlas of religion in China*. Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill. DOI 10.1163/9789004369900

CONFERENCE PAPERS, INVITED PRESENTATIONS, & FILM SCREENINGS

Althagafi, N. (2017, April). *The Women's Mosque of America*. Panel entitled "Freedom from Prejudice and Discrimination: Muslims in America", presented in the 108th Annual Eastern Communication Association Convention (ECA), Boston, MA.

Althagafi, N. (2016, February). *Saudi women on the steps of change*. Invited speaker and screening of a documentary about Saudi women's contribution to the Saudi society, in the 12th Annual Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI) Cultural Film Festival, held in Indianapolis, IN.

Althagafi, N. (2016, October). Study of religion in China. Invited presentation to The Center on Religion and Chinese Society, held at Purdue University, West Lafayette, IN.

Althagafi, N. (2015, February). *Women's authority in religious spaces*. [**Competitively selected paper**] for the 8th Annual Communication Graduate Student Association Conference (CGSA), Purdue University, West Lafayette, IN.

Althagafi, N. (2014, February). *Saudi women on the steps of change*. Officially selected by the Chicago International Social Change Film Festival, held in Chicago, IL.

Althagafi, N. (2013, February). *Saudi women on the steps of change*. Officially selection by the Annual Islamic Society of North America (ISNA) Convention Film Festival, held in Washington, D.C.

Althagafi, N. (2012, December). *Saudi women on the steps of change* documentary. Public defense presentation and screening of the documentary at the American University, Washington D.C.

CREATIVE ENDEAVOURS

Film and TV

Producer:

- Althagafi, N. (Producer), Althagafi, N. (Director). (2012, December 15) *Saudi women on the steps of change* [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://vimeo.com/86550677>
- Althagafi, N. (Producer), Bryant, A. (Director) (2012). Dupont De Paul. [Motion Picture]. USA
- Althagafi, N. (Producer), Bryant, A. (Director) (2012). YouNews. [Motion Picture]. USA

Director:

- Althagafi, N. (Producer), Althagafi, N. (Director). (2012, December 15) *Saudi women on the steps of change* [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://vimeo.com/86550677>
- Alfaqeeh, H. (Producer), Althagafi, N. (Director). (2012) Quloobna Ma'ak [Motion Picture]. Saudi Arabia.
- Althagafi, N. (Director). (2011). Muslimah [Motion Picture]. USA.
- Bucannan, K. (Producer), Althagafi, N. (Director). (2011). *Homeless POV* [Motion Picture]. USA.

Production assistant:

- Dixon, A., Gray, S., Webb, M. (Producers) Dixon, A. (Director). (2011). *7:33 am The Movie*. [Motion Picture]. USA: Studio.
- Reyes, L. (Director), Reyes, L. (Producer). (2010). *Fuku*. [Motion Picture]. USA: Studio.

Production assistant, assistant editor, English /Arabic script translator, script editor & script reviewer:

- Fitaihi, W. (Writer), & Jamjoom, H. (Director). (2017). Wamahyaya 4: Wellness management [Television series]. In Jamjoom, H., Jamjoom, J., Wimp, P. (Producers). Jeddah, Saudi Arabia: Digital Hydra.

English /Arabic script translator, script editor:

- Fitaihi, W. (Writer), & Jamjoom, H. (Director). (2017). Wamahyaya 4: Wellness management [Television series]. In Jamjoom, H., Jamjoom, J., Wimp, P. (Producers). Jeddah, Saudi Arabia: Digital Hydra.

Photography

Selected photos published

- Photo 12. Althagafi, Naila. (Photographer). (2018). *A statue of Mao Zedong at Taiqing Temple (Lanzhou, Gensu)*, [photograph]. From *Atlas of Religion in China*, (pp. 58), by Yang, F., & Pettit, J. E. (2018). Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill. DOI 10.1163/9789004369900
- Razik, R. (2010). *Photography through the eyes of Saudi Arabian women*. Jeddah, Saudi Arabia: Razik Studios.
- In the eyes of Saudi women*. (2010, August 10). Retrieved from <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-10921963>

PHOTOGRAPHY EXHIBITIONS

- Awarded third prize (\$200) in The Religious Life of 21st Century China photo competition for a photo titled “Mao influence” at Purdue University, West Lafayette, IN (March, 2017).
- China art exhibition selected 3 photos to be exhibited at Wild Grass and Peonies: 中国万象：草根社会摄影展. A Photo Exhibit hosted by The Center on Religion and Chinese Society and sponsored by the Confucius Institute at Purdue University, West Lafayette, IN (October 17, 2016).
- Selected photos exhibited at “*The Royal Art Exhibition*” at the Saudi Embassy, Washington DC (July 27, 2008).
- Photography exhibition in: Dubai, UAE; Washington, DC; Jeddah, KSA; Nantes, France; West Lafayette, IN (2006-2016).

TEACHING*

*Note: because of Full governmental scholarships prohibit acceptance of teaching assistantships and adjunct positions during degree completion, my limited teaching experience didn't deny me from pursuing avenues to increase my skills

- 2016 WOST (695): Women & Islam: Struggles & Challenges.
- Teaching and responding to student's Q&A in a 3 hr class about feminism and Islam at Indiana University-Purdue University (IUPUI) (March, 2016).
 - Survey data discussion and analyses lead presentation about Muslim women's experiences before, during, and after becoming Muslim (April, 2016).
- 2016 WGSS 68000: Feminist Theories and Methods
- Presentation on feminist theory titled “Female Imams” (December, 2016).

AWARDS AND HONORS

- King Abdullah Governmental (Full) Scholarship for Ph.D. Degree. Ministry of Higher Education, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia (2014-2019).
This is a Saudi Arabian governmental scholarship--highly competitive selection--for Saudi citizens who wish to continue their higher education internationally. This scholarship funded doctoral work at Purdue University (i.e., full financial coverage of tuition, lodging, fees, course materials, research expenditures, international travel, conferences, and other equipment and experiences needed to successfully complete the doctorate degree).
- King Abdullah Governmental (Full) Scholarship for Masters Degree. Ministry of Higher Education, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia (2009-2012).
This is a Saudi Arabian governmental scholarship--highly competitive selection--for Saudi citizens who wish to continue their higher education internationally. This scholarship was awarded for MFA degree completion at American University in

Washington, D.C., but also covered other educational experiences associated with learning. The scholarship provided funding for tuition, lodging, fees, course materials, research expenditures, international travel, conferences, and other equipment and experiences needed to successfully complete the Masters degree.

- Travel award, Purdue University, West Lafayette, IN (2017, 2018).
Awarded (\$2000) to attend Harvard Arab Weekend Conference, Boston, MA. The largest pan-Arab conference in the United States that brings politicians, business and civil society leaders to discuss key issues in the Middle East.
- The Center on Religion and Chinese Society Award. Purdue University, West Lafayette, IN (March, 2017).
Third prize (\$200) was awarded for the photo selection titled “Mao influence” in The Religious Life of 21st Century China photo competition.
- Purdue Muslim Student Association (MSA) Scholarship. Purdue University, West Lafayette, IN (2015).
This competitively selective scholarship was awarded to cover (\$500) partial fees toward the summer course in China to study Religions in China.
- Excellence in Community Service Award. Dar Al Hekma University. Jeddah, Saudi Arabia (2008)

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Digital Hydra LLC. | Chicago, IL | September 2016 – December 2016

Position: Media Editor Intern.

- Production assistant & video editor for Council on American Islamic Relations (CAIR) Anti terrorism PSA.
- Wamahyaya 3 TV show English /Arabic script translator, editor & reviewer.
- Wamahyaya 4 TV show production assistant, assistant editor, English /Arabic script translator, script editor & script reviewer. These shows were broadcasted on Middle East Broadcasting Center (MBC) and Saudi Airlines.

Susan Bulkeley Butler Center | West Lafayette, IN | August 2015-May 2016

Position: Media Coordinator & Graduate Assistant Program Coordinator.

- Active member of SBBC strategic planning team for conferences and events planned for the academic year.
- Designed promotional materials for SBBC events and conference.
- Supervised the video team volunteers at the Conference for Pre-tenure Women.
- Filmed, edited and produced videos for marketing the center.
- Served as videographer for the center’s events and archived the videos for the duration of the job.

- Participated in marketing strategic implementation by creating and managing a SBBC YouTube Channel, and planning avenues to promote the Center and program development for the Center.

Deen Intensive Foundation | Istanbul, Turkey | Summer 2015

Position: Student Liaison.

- Worked as a student liaison at *Rihla* summer program that focused on teaching sacred sciences of Islamic scholarship, spiritual guidance, and inner transformation through classes and comprehensive material.
- Enabled interaction and communicated students' concerns to the supervisors of the program.
- Led student groups in Turkish touristic areas.
- Participated in brainstorming sessions to facilitate logistics for *Rihla* student trips.
- Provided feedback for improving the program's output and enhanced students' experiences.

Zaytuna College | Berkley CA | 2015 - 2016

Position: Volunteer.

- Photographed at Zaytuna College events at ISNA conference 2015 & 2016 for social media use.
- Ushered guests at 2015 graduation ceremony.
- Promoted the collage and its services at events in Chicago, Toronto and Berkley.

NailaProduction | Fairfax, VA | 2011-2015

Position: Freelancer Video Editor, videographer & VFX.

- Produced promotional videos for OneBlue Inc.
- Filmed and edited interviews, seminars and events for Fawakih Institute, Seekers Guidance, Mutajawaz Conference, Algerian women for Algerian TV.

OneBlue Inc. | Washington DC | May 2012- January 2013

Position: Video & Media Coordinator.

- Designed marketing elements such as workshop flyers and promo videos.
- Edited footage from shoots and provided short trailers for each episodes and workshops.
- Participated in strategic planning and brainstorming sessions for each project and developed solutions to speed up the project execution process.

Islamic Broadcasting Network | Sterling, VA / May 2010- June 2010

Position: Intern, Assistant Editor.

- Wrote, filmed, edited and used visual effects on Public Service Announcements, IBN Promo, You Tube shows "*Nadoona A Dawn to a Healthy Life*", "*Sisters PSA*" and "*Gotcha Covered*".

SaudiUSA.com | Fairfax, VA | September 2009-April 2010

Position: Communication Admin.

- This small self initiated Saudi student group helped guide Saudi students living in America. I participated in gathering information about universities, academic majors, US cities and compiled them in a downloadable pdf format to guide new and old Saudi students coming to the US. These guides included: “US University Directory”, “Academic Majors Directory” and “Student Guide to USA Booklet”.
- Responded to Saudi Students inquiries about universities, academic majors and disciplines in the DC/VA and Maryland areas that fall under communication, arts and film.
- Attended Saudi students organized conferences and reported back with photos and journals for publishing.
- Communicated with Saudi Students Associations at universities in the US to discuss and encourage intercultural and cross cultural dialogue through activities about Saudi Arabia.
- Acted as a liaison and a voice that represented Saudi student’s need in USA and discussed it with the Saudi Cultural Mission to provide solutions and facilitate their journey as students in the US.

The Saudi Cultural Mission | Washington D.C | January 2009- April 2010

Position: Volunteer.

- Facilitated cross-cultural, social and educational understanding between Saudi Arabian delegates, American representatives and visitors to the Saudi Cultural Mission and the Saudi Embassy’s events that are also hosted under the Ministry of Higher Education.
- Helped set up exhibitions and presented information about Saudi Arabian Students in America to visitors in the following events: Saudi National Day at the Saudi Embassy, Passport DC annual event at the Saudi Embassy, Saudi Cultural Exhibitions, SACM Graduation Ceremony.
- Volunteered to help in the annual career fair that is supervised by the Ministry of Higher Education. This fair links and offers employment to Saudi graduates in public and private sector organizations in Saudi Arabia.
- Took positions at the annual Saudi Arabian graduation ceremony in DC/VA area to lead group at the marching ceremony, to register and check in graduates and their families, to prepare and help graduates with their hoods and graduation gowns, and acted as a liaison between graduates and SACM staff.
- Designed brochures and marketing materials for graduation and cultural festivals using Photoshop and Illustrator.

PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS

- National Communication Association.
- Communication Graduate Student Association (CGSA). Purdue University.

SERVICE

- Volunteer. 6th Annual Modest Fashion Convention. Irvine, CA (2019).
Handled registration, worked with VIPs, provided information to attendees.

- Volunteer facilitator. Perfect For Her (PFH) Networking Event. Irvine CA (2019).
Facilitated interactions and ice bakers to a group of men and women (20-25), Oversaw equipment and refreshment need for the participants.
- Volunteer. The Oasis Initiative. Chicago, IL (2016-2017).
Prepared meals for homeless as part of Breaking Bread and Barriers project.
- Volunteer. Mecca Center. Chicago, IL (2015).
Renovated an Elementary school with a team of men and women in DeKalb County, IL.
- Accompanied Nimah Nawwab in Washington DC on her best selling poetry book tour as a Saudi Poetess from Mecca (2011).
- Vice President. Saudi Student Association. The George Washington University. Washington, DC. (2010).
Founder of Saudi Student Association, drafted policies for Saudi student participation, and sought recognition from the Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission.
- Volunteer. Saudi Student Association. George Mason University. Fairfax, VA (2009).
Set up photo booth and provided information about Saudi Arabia on Saudi National Day.
Represented Saudi Arabia as a country at GMU International week.

TECHNICAL AND LANGUAGE SKILLS

- Computer Software: Mac OS, Final Cut Pro, Adobe After Effect- Photoshop-Illustrator, Premier, Soundtrack Pro, Motion, Color, 3Dmax Studio, Revit, Auto CAD, Microsoft office (Word, PowerPoint).
- Equipment: Experience in lighting, video, HD & DSLR cameras.
- Languages: Fluent in Arabic and English. Intermediate French skills.

MEDIA ENGAGEMENT

- | | |
|------|---|
| 2013 | Interviews on multiple episodes of “Ya Hala America” TV show with host Ali Al Alyan. This show broadcasted on Middle East Broadcasting Center (MBC) about Saudi Student’s experience in America.
https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLp8t9oGfE4VAV0ArSUCwRgm3z2d1OsVEJ |
| 2012 | Interview conducted with Dr. Mody AlKhalaf about Saudi Student in America featured at AlArabiya TV Channel. |

GRADUATE COURSEWORK

Area/Course Title	Instructor/University	Year
Ph.D. Coursework		
Communication Studies		
COM 590: Cross Cultural Communication	Webb R. /Purdue	2016
COMM 590: Social Media Engagement	Smith B. /Purdue	2015
Women Gender and Sexuality Studies (WGSS) Certificate & Methodology		
COM 590: Feminism and Islam	Buzzanell P. /Purdue	2015
WGSS 682: ISS Feminist Research Methodology	-----/ Purdue	
WGSS 680: Feminist Theories and Methods	-----/ Purdue	
WOST 695: Graduate Reading/Research in WGSS	Mashhour A. /IUPUI	2016
EDCI 615: Qualitative Research Methods	-----/ Purdue	2016
Cultural and Religious Studies		
SOC 368: Religion in China	Pettit J. /Purdue	2016
ANTH 373: Anthro of Religion	Gruenbaum E./Purdue	2015
MFA Coursework		
New Media & Production		
COMM 513: Producing Film & Video	----/ American	2011
COMM 512: Social Documentary	Stogner M./American	2011
COMM 631: Film and Video Production I	Stogner M. / American	2010
COMM 634: Film and Video Production II	Stogner M./ American	2010
COMM 654: Motion graphics and effects I	Maher B./ American	2010
COMM 516: Producing environment & wildlife films	Palmer C./American	2010