

Dress and Diversity in Contemporary Ireland: The hijab in a minority context

Sharon Keogh

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the Bachelor of Arts degree (Social Science Specialisation) at DBS School of Arts, Dublin.

Supervisor: Ms. Vanessa Long

Head of Department: Dr. Bernadette Quinn

April 2014

Department of Social Science

DBS School of Arts

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Acknowledgements

I would like to take this opportunity to thank my thesis supervisor Ms. Vanessa Long for her guidance and advice throughout this research project. I also want to thank all the participants who took part in my research, I am very grateful to them for taking part and for their honesty and openness.

Abstract

In light of the banning of the hijab in France and the debates surrounding the hijab across Western Europe, this study sets out to investigate the importance of wearing the hijab for Muslim women in particular towards their identity construction in contemporary Ireland. The study was carried out using qualitative analysis, which involved nine semi-structured interviews with Muslim women living in Ireland. The findings show that the hijab is very important for these women, in particular towards their identity as they are proud to be Muslim. It is a deeply personal choice for them to wear it and as the findings show a complex one. The research found that they face pressures from within their own community and not just from the wider Irish society. The hijab is not a one fits all; culture, one's own interpretation and style are all factors that contribute to wearing it. In general, the women interviewed spoke very positively about being Muslim and living in Ireland. However, if Ireland were to ban the hijab this could dramatically change their experience living here. It can be concluded that the hijab symbolises much more than just a headscarf and is an important identity marker for these women.

1. Literature Review

1.1 Introduction

The aim of this research dissertation is to explore the importance of wearing the hijab for Muslim women, in particular towards their identity construction in contemporary Ireland. In the last decade a large amount of literature has been written about the Muslim community. This research has most notably taken place in America with studies focusing on Muslim women and the hijab (Williams & Vashi, 2007; Furseth, 2011; Abdurraqib, 2006). In this last decade, Muslim women wearing the hijab is becoming more visible in western Europe (Hussain Solihu, 2009). There is very little research done on this area in Ireland especially in relation to the wearing of the hijab (Scharbrodt & Sakaranaho, 2011; Honohan & Rougier, 2011).

Islam has become one of the fastest growing religions in Europe with immigration and above average birth rates leading to a rapid increase in the Muslim population (Al Azmeh & Fokas, 2007). It is recognised in literature that there are tensions surrounding Islam in Europe (Murshed & Pavan, 2011; Carr, 2011; Winter, 2006). The debates surrounding the issues of wearing the hijab have added to these tensions (Cumper & Lewis, 2009; Tissot, 2011; Hussain Solihu, 2009; Winter, 2006). According to Afshar (2008) Muslim women have received the backlash of Islamophobia post September 2011 in relation to their dress and in particular the hijab. According to the Runnymede Trust (1997) the term Islamophobia was first acknowledged in the late 1980s and was first used in reports in 1991. It has been defined as a form of hatred, dislike, dread and fear towards Muslims (Runnymede Trust, 1997, p. 1). These tensions are also apparent in Ireland where a recent hate mail campaign was targeted at the Muslim community in the form of anonymous letters to mosques and schools. The

campaign became even more targeted with some female Muslims receiving hate mail directly to their home because they wore the hijab (Immigrant Council of Ireland, 2013).

The Islamic Council of Ireland acknowledges that there are misconceptions in Ireland by quoting the following aim on its website: “Bridging conceptual gaps with the Irish society to promote real understandings of Islam and its exceptional human virtues. Enhancing the stability and firm establishment of the Islamic existence in Ireland, thus enabling it to be effective and positively accepted by the Irish society. Tackling misconception or misrepresentation of Islam in the media or in the political arena” (Islamic Cultural Centre of Ireland, 2013). The number of Muslim people in Ireland has changed significantly in recent years. The 2011 Census results showed there were at least 45,223 Muslims living in Ireland compared to 33,000 recorded in the 2006 census results, 143% increase with Islam now the third largest religious group in the state (Central Statistics Office, 2011).

There are many non Muslim people who perceive the hijab to be oppressive to women (Furseth, 2011; O’Brien, 2009). For them it symbolises inequality and subordination (Furseth, 2011; Cumper & Lewis, 2009; Galadari, 2012; Hussain Solihu, 2009). On the other hand, there are those who see women in the west wearing the hijab as a form of feminism, they see it as more complex matter related to identity (Cumper & Lewis, 2009; Frank, 2005; Furseth, 2011). According to Galadari (2012) there are many different meanings of what the hijab symbolises but it is agreed that it is a symbol of some form of expression in society. Along with the rise in Islamophobia this symbol of Islamic culture has given rise to much debate in western countries and its compatibility with western culture and values (Galadari, 2012; Hussai Solihu, 2009). According to Ho and Dreher (2009) Muslim women are being targeted in particular as they are viewed by some as being out of sync with the west. The events of September 2011 and the growing intolerance displayed in the media, governmental institutions, and society at large toward Muslims, both individually and collectively has left

Muslim communities more vulnerable to discrimination than ever before (European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia, 2006).

1.2 The Hijab

The head dress is not just a symbol for Islam, it is also a symbol in Jewish and Christian religions and many Muslim men wear a head dress also, however, it is the female Islamic head dress that has caused the most controversy (Furseth, 2011; Cumper & Lewis, 2009; Ho & Dreher, 2009). The female Islamic head dress is more commonly referred to as a headscarf which in Arabic is known as the hijab (Galadari, 2012). “The hijab refers to a thing that veils, conceals, covers, protects or denies penetration between two things” (Hussain Solihu, 2009, p. 26). According to Williams & Vashi (2007, p. 269) “the hijab is a religious and social symbol that has multiple meanings”. In literature it has been agreed that the hijab is a headscarf that covers the hair, neck and ears but leaves the face open (Furseth, 2011, p. 368; Winter, 2006; Galadari, 2012).

There are different forms of Islamic dress that females wear depending on their culture and religion and differences in terminology used to describe the different forms of Islamic dress (Galadari, 2012; Furseth, 2011; Shadid & Van Koningsveld, 2005). The burqa takes the form of a complete head to toe covering and the niqab is the veil that covers the face except the eyes (Furseth, 2010; Galadari, 2012; Shadid & Van Koningsveld, 2005). According to Shadid and Van Koningsveld (2005) Muslim women wear the headscarf because it is a requirement for modesty for both men and women.

1.3 The Hijab and Identity

Psychologists generally agree that humans have a basic need to create a positive social identity for themselves in which dress plays an important role (Cumper & Lewis,

2009). According to Frank (2005) “women who wear the hijab through choice, sometimes a courageous one, are making an assertive act by giving themselves and their Islamic identity high visibility” (p. 199).

According to research carried out in America, for many western born Muslim women, wearing the hijab is about their identity (Furseth, 2011; Bullock & Jafri, 2000; Williams & Vashi, 2007). Religious reasons are only a fraction of their reasons for wearing it, many are interpersonal reasons based on their American citizenship which promotes freedom of choice and their Muslim background (Furseth, 2011). A theme coming out across American literature when it comes to second and third generation Muslim women is a move away from parental control. It becomes their choice, and with heightened peer pressure around wearing the hijab many young Muslim women are choosing to wear it against their parents’ wishes (Hussain Solihu, 2009; Furseth, 2011; Williams & Vashi, 2007; Dakkak & Mikula, 2012). Williams and Vashi (2007) argue that young Muslim women in the United States have started to wear the hijab based on their own decision to be able to carve out their own identity and distinguish themselves from their assimilating parents. They are creating their own cultural space of what it means to be Muslim in western culture. Another theme arising from research is that the hijab has become a fashion trend crossing all cultures, borders and classes (Furseth 2011; Vojdik, 2010; Dakkak & Mikula, 2012; Dreher & Ho, 2009).

Along with a sense of identity, some Muslim women find wearing the hijab desexualises them. They mention the advertisement industry and how it objectifies women as sexual objects. They felt that their religion places importance on modesty, hence they use the argument that it is against the objectification of women. It frees them from a sexist society and unwanted male attention where they can be recognised for their brain as opposed to their sexuality (Shadid and Van Koningsveld, 2005; Dreher & Ho, 2009; Tolyamat & Maradi, 2011; Frank, 2005).

1.4 Islamic Feminism

According to Hussain Solihu (2009) western women from a young age have been made aware from society that they are judged on their physical attractiveness to the male gaze and have internalised this so they also judge themselves and their counterparts in this way. The majority of western perceptions of Muslim women view them as stuck in patriarchal traditions being obedient, meek and submissive (Siraj, 2012). Afshar (2008) argues that Muslim women and non Muslim women are caught up in the hijab debate and instead should be supporting each other across cultural differences and beliefs respecting these and showing solidarity for a woman's right to choose.

From research carried out in western countries it is clear that Muslim citizens of these countries who are educated and articulate women choose to wear the hijab of their own accord (Afshar, 2008; Frurseth, 2011; Vojdik, 2010; Hussain Solihu, 2009). For some Muslim women it is about countering the negativity towards Islam and stereotypes of wearing the hijab and showing people that you can be educated, active and professional and wear the hijab (Afshar, 2008). For many it represents freedom of choice and the right to choose to veil or not to veil based on their own interpretation of the Koran (Afshar, 2008; Furseth, 2011; Vojdik, 2010).

The secularist and western view that the headscarf is linked to a form of radical Islam assumes that these women are part of a patriarchal structure rather than women who want to cover as self-governing individuals (Vojdik, 2010; Shadid & Van Koningveld, 2005). Vojdik (2010) also looks at the banning of the headscarf from a masculinity theory viewpoint, highlighting the politics of banning the wearing of the headscarf as a nations control over a woman's body. Through the ban the state is controlling the presence of women in public who

choose to wear the hijab by prohibiting a woman who wears the headscarf from public spaces (Vojdik, 2010).

Feminism in the west has been largely based on secularism and some feminists in the west find it difficult to identify with Islamic feminism. Different ideologies of feminism can result from different understandings of what it means to be a woman. Frank (2005) compares women working within patriarchal structures in the west such as male dominated occupations to Islamic feminists working within a patriarchal structure also.

1.5 The Hijab Debate

The hijab has caused much discussion among politicians and academics which has generated much media coverage (Shadid & Van Koningveld, 2005). Hussein (2007) adds another viewpoint and advocates for a new direction in the hijab debate. Hussein (2007) feels the current debate around the hijab being a choice or something someone is forced to wear is too simplistic and takes away from the other complex issues Muslim women may face. For example, women in Afghanistan deal with poverty and war on a daily basis and feminist campaigns trying to liberate them on wearing the burqa takes away from the other complex issues these women face. It also symbolises the hijab as an expression for women of being Muslim and thus diminishing the role of the Muslim woman who chooses not to wear it (Hussein, 2007).

Cumper and Lewis (2009) make the case that in Europe one of the reasons the hijab has become so controversial is that it clashes with the notion of a liberal secular society which many European countries see themselves as. Devleena Ghosh (as cited in Dreher & Ho, 2009) compares the secularism in India to that of the west by making the case that in India secularism manages to create a strategy to accept its diverse religious setup, unlike Europe. Dreher & Ho (2009) also found that these issues and others such as the hijab being a

fashion statement are not acknowledged in mainstream debate or that Muslim women themselves have their own debates around it (Ho & Dreher, 2009).

1.6 Western Europe and the Hijab

According to Winter (2006) Muslim women who wear the headscarf have become the symbol of fundamentalist Islamic controversies in the west. The French ban of religious symbols in schools has acquired much international attention and criticism (Cumper & Lewis, 2009; Winter, 2006). International human rights organisations see it as violating religious freedom, children's rights and women's rights. On the other hand many feminists and the left in France support the ban (Winter, 2006). France has the highest Muslim community in Europe with an approximate population of 6 million (Mansoob Murshed & Pavan, 2011; Vaisse, 2008). According to Winter (2006) although the law bans all religious symbols it is recognised that it is more so about the hijab in particular. Cumper and Lewis (2009) argue that the French ban targets young girls in particular.

Shadid & Van Koningsveld (2005) acknowledge the diversity in Islamic dress and also acknowledge that a very large amount of Muslim women do not cover at all. They make the argument that a large amount of the discussion on the hijab is centred around an ignorance to the variations in Islamic dress and understanding as a whole and instead people tend to view Islamic dress as a representation of Islam in a negative way. This negative discourse in the west tends to forget to ask how Muslims feel about the headscarf which Shadid & Von Koningsveld (2005) believe to be more complex than people think, and found from research that there are diverse opinions about wearing the hijab among the Muslim population itself. In France, before the ban, opinion polls revealed while in general the French public were opposed to it there was also a divide amongst the Muslim community with nearly half in favour and half opposed.

In the United Kingdom students are allowed wear the headscarf. In Sweden it has not garnered the same debate as other countries. In Belgium and the Netherlands it has been quite a controversial issue and the niqab has been banned in the Netherlands since 2002 (O'Brien, 2009). The European Council acknowledges that member states have a right to do this as there is no policy that covers religion across all member states, however, they do emphasise that no government should implement a policy that violates Human rights and the Charter of the United Nations (Shadid & Van Koningsveld, 2005).

According to Cumper and Lewis (2009) limitations on religious freedom are subject to what a particular nation state are trying to achieve thus states have a very wide scope. Private thoughts on religion and ones beliefs are allowed and valued as religious freedom but once they come into the public societal sphere the state, by law, can impose restrictions which thus has created barriers for people who wish to wear a particular form of dress such as Islamic dress. Shadid & Von Koningsveld (2005) make the case that the European Court of Human Rights, by ruling in favour of incidents of the headscarf prohibition in Switzerland and Turkey, could be viewed as a validation for France's decision to ban the headscarf.

1.7 Misrepresentation of Islam in the West

Islam is widely misunderstood in western countries due to negative media misrepresentations (Mostafa, 2007; Carr, 2011). According to Carr (2011) Islamophobia is a manifestation of cultural racism. In western societies this is evidenced when Muslims are classified as other and viewed with suspicion. According to Carr (2011) Muslims have been branded as a homogenous group and labelled with derogatory terms such as fundamentalism and terrorism.

Ramadan (2005) recognises what he calls a "silent revolution" running through the Muslim community in the west where more and more Muslims, most notably the younger

Muslim community and intellectuals, are renegotiating what it means to be Muslim in western Europe. They are seeking ways to live in balance with the western societies which they are living in as well as holding onto their faith. Ramadan (2005) makes the case that Muslim men and women are constructing a new Muslim identity. O'Brien (2009) also discusses this, what he phrases as Euro Islam and how intellectuals are calling for Muslims across Europe to look at reinventing their understanding of Islam in line with the values of the countries they are living in. Both Ramadan (2005) and O'Brien (2009) agree that this would entail acknowledging a pluralist society both culturally and religiously without one religion being the dominant one and it would also be compatible with "liberal democratic values, individual human rights and the requirement of a civic society" (O'Brien, 2009, p. 56).

1.8 Islam in Ireland

Muslim leaders have historically had a positive relationship with the Irish government. It is said that this can be attributed to the respect Ireland as a nation has for religion and its own history of Catholicism. Ireland does not yet have the secular mindset of other European countries (Cicora, 2010; Scharbrodt & Sakaranaho, 2011).

The Muslim community began to arrive in Ireland in the late 1940s after World War Two. Due to restrictions on higher education for the non-white population in South Africa many Muslims travelled abroad to receive education (Scharbrodt & Sakaranaho, 2011). The Dublin Islamic Society was set up in 1959 as a result of the South African students. From the 1960s onwards there was an increase from other Muslim countries, most notably the Arab nations (Scharbrodt & Sakaranaho, 2011). In 1969 The Irish Arab Society was founded to promote cultural, economic, educational and political integration in Ireland. The Irish Arab Society also enabled interaction with Ireland and the Arab world. Visits by Irish government

officials to Arab countries in the 1970s and 1980s cultivated this relationship which led to an increasing number of students from the 1980s onwards from Arab nations.

Compared to other countries in western Europe, Muslims in Ireland have a diverse background with no one particular ethnicity, country or culture dominating (Carr, 2011; Scharbrodt & Sakaranaho, 2011; Honohan & Rougier, 2011). More than half of Muslims in Ireland live in Dublin and this is reflected in the visual Muslim representation in the form of mosques. The Islamic Foundation of Ireland has its mosque on the South Circular Road and the Islamic Cultural Centre of Ireland is based in Clonskeagh. Both play a major role in representing and organising Islam in Ireland. In 2006, both organisations established an umbrella for all Muslims in Ireland called the Irish Council of Imams. Because Islam is a diverse religion there are approximately 15 different mosques in Dublin that represent the different ethnic groups (Scharbrodt & Sakaranaho, 2011). It is estimated in Ireland that one third of the Muslim population are Irish citizens (Honohan & Rougier, 2011).

1.9 Conclusion

Similar to other European countries Ireland is committed to religious freedom as outlined in the 1937 Constitution. Two Muslim national schools have been set up in Dublin. The uniforms are the same as other schools except the girls in senior classes are obliged to wear the hijab which can be of any colour or texture. Although not as intensified and controversial as other western European countries Ireland has not escaped a debate on the hijab (Hogan, 2011; Scharbrodt & Sakaranaho, 2011). Most schools in Ireland permit the wearing of the hijab as long as it is in line with the colour of the uniform. However, there are incidents to show that Ireland is not immune to the fear of the hijab.

The Sunday Business Post in 2004 had reported that a school in Dublin had banned the wearing of the hijab and used the argument of the school's Catholic ethos to back up their

decision (Honohan & Rougier, 2011). In May 2008, a principal of a secondary school in Gorey approached the Department of Education and Skills for advice on wearing the hijab in school. Although the girl was permitted to wear the hijab it sparked a debate on the issue. The ensuing debate caused the now defunct National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism (NCCRI) to issue a discussion paper warning that banning of such religious symbols could result in creating tensions that did not exist before (Hogan, 2011; Honohan & Rougier, 2011). Female columnists in the national papers took the side of the hijab being oppressive and that allowing women to wear them is promoting inequality (Honohan & Rougier, 2011). These arguments all promoted negative representations of the Muslim community and one female writer for the Irish Times went as far to say that allowing young girls to wear the hijab is a form of child abuse as it exercises a type of parental control that the child can't deny (Honohan & Rougier, 2011).

This Irish discourse sees the Muslim woman as oppressed and fails to look at the hijab as a form of empowerment where the woman chooses to wear it and uses it as a “marker of identity, taking control of their bodies and giving them a sense of belonging” (Honohan & Rougier, 2011, p. 33). Amongst this debate it was only a minority who supported the wearing of the hijab and was based around their right to religious freedom, freedom of choice and their basic rights as an individual. The majority failed to recognise the autonomy of the individual to choose to wear the hijab (Honohan & Rougier, 2011).

The government recommendations on uniform policy left it up to the school to decide however, they did recommend that no clothing should obscure the face as it renders poor communication between the teacher and pupil. However, it also recommended that no uniform policy should be instilled that excludes student of certain religious backgrounds. Schools were also reminded of the Education Act 1998 that promotes equality and diversity

based on democratic values. Both the Minister for Education Ruairí Quinn and Fine Gael's Brian Hayes support the banning of the hijab in schools.

There is no research in Ireland as yet, exploring how Muslim women feel about the hijab and its importance to them in terms of their identity and sense of belonging. This research aims to explore the importance of wearing the hijab for Muslim women in particular towards their identity construction in contemporary Ireland.

2. Method

The qualitative research used was in-depth semi structured interviews. Because the researcher is looking to explore the experience of Muslim women in Ireland and their views and opinions a qualitative approach has been chosen. Data led semi structured interviews will be the data collection method. The research question to be addressed requires exploration and understanding of a social issue and its context. According to Malinowski (as cited in Ritchie & Lewis, 2003) qualitative interviews provide the ability to achieve such depth.

2.1 Apparatus

An Olympus Digital Voice Recorder VN-750 was used to record the participants. This was then transcribed to Microsoft word and saved on a password protected USB key. From word it was copied over to NVivo 10 for thematic analysis.

2.2 Participants

The research was based on informed consent from nine participants who were women from the Muslim community in Ireland. An email was sent to five Muslim organisations and associations in Ireland in which a response was received from two with an invitation to meet with some of the women. From these two sources the researcher generated enough participants to partake in the research.

Qualitative research uses non probability sampling (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). The sample was purposively selected to reflect particular features of the group within the sampled population. The participants are Muslim women who live in Ireland aged between 18 and 40 and wear the hijab. From responding to the invites the researcher was introduced to a couple of women and snowball sampling was used to interview other women. The sample was stratified purposive sampling, although it was fairly homogeneous there were differences in

nationality amongst the women and also in age. There were three younger participants who differed in some aspects from the other participants in that they were younger, 18 and 19, are students and have grown up in Ireland from a very young age, hence they would consider themselves Irish. The other six women interviewed were older ranging in ages from 25 to 40. One of them was Irish from Dublin and the other five were from Iraq, Scotland, Sudan, Morocco and Somalia. Although from different countries, most of them have been living in Ireland for over 10 years and feel very much an Irish citizen. The female participant from Iraq had been living here for 3 years but has no plans to leave.

2.3 Design

The research approach was qualitative research based on semi structured in-depth interviews. Although qualitative interviews are flexible in nature they still require a considerable amount of planning (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). An interview schedule (Appendix 1) was drawn up with major themes identified as important and questions formed under each theme. The interviews took place from the end of January 2014 through to the month of March 2014. The interviews were designed to explore the importance of wearing the hijab for Muslim women living in Ireland but also to get a greater understanding of how they felt about other issues such as banning the hijab, Islam in Ireland and misrepresentation of the Islam. The questions asked were open ended in nature with follow up probes.

2.4 Procedure

Nine participants were interviewed individually. For six of the interviews the researcher travelled on two occasions. On the first visit the researcher interviewed two participants both interviews were held in a private room with no interruptions. On the next visit the researcher interviewed four participants. The interviews were between 40 to 60 minutes in duration. Again they were all conducted in a private room. There were some

interruptions as it was much busier on the second visit. There was a call to prayer through the speaker in the room during one of the interviews but the researcher continued with the interview as neither the participant nor the researcher knew how long it would go on for. The remaining three participants were students who are members of a student's Muslim association. The interviews were carried out at the students university in which they booked the rooms.

Each participant was given a consent form to sign and inform them of the research purpose (Appendix 2). The interviews were semi structured and flexible in nature to allow for topics to be covered that suited the interviewee and so as to fully explore and probe certain areas and to "allow the researcher to respond to relevant issues raised spontaneously by the interviewee" (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003, p. 141). The interview schedule allowed some structure but due to the flexible nature of the in depth interview it also allowed flexibility. The researcher used a range of probes throughout the interview to dig deep and gain more insight into what the participant was saying. The researcher asked questions in relation to the key themes but also those that emerged from the participant. The interviews were transcribed verbatim onto Microsoft Word and from there exported onto NVivo 10.

2.5 Ethical Considerations

Before the research was conducted the research proposal was passed by Dublin Business School ethics committee. Due to the unstructured nature of in depth interviews ethical considerations are particularly important for qualitative research (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). Before the interview started the researcher received informed consent from all participants. Due to the personal nature of some of the interview questions the researcher was aware that some question may be of a sensitive nature. The researcher was careful not to use terms such as Islamophobia which may cause undue stress for the participant. Because the

research made contact with a third party initially and snowball sampling was used complete anonymity could not be guaranteed. The researcher explained to participants that all data will be confidential and their names will not be included in the data only pseudonyms will be used. The researcher also explained that all data will be saved on a password protected USB key and that due to university guidelines the data will need to be stored until November 2014 but after that it will be deleted. The researcher also explained that the signed consent forms and recorded data will be stored separately. According to Ritchie and Lewis (2003) “any study topic can raise sensitive issues for people” (p. 68). It is an obligation of the researcher to protect participants from harm and participants may be effected by questions and thoughts stirred after the researcher has gone. To combat this, the researcher was very clear in communicating to participants what the research was about and getting their informed consent.

2.6 Data Analysis

The method of analysis is data led thematic Analysis using assisted qualitative data analysis software such as NVivo 10. The interviews were first transcribed on to Microsoft Word and then on to NVivo 10 for coding. From the coding a series of themes emerged from which the analysis was carried out. According to Braun and Clarke (2006) a key benefit of thematic analysis is that it is flexible which is exactly what is needed with semi structured interviews. Due to the interactive nature of qualitative interviewing the researcher comes to the analysis stage with some knowledge of the data (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003; Braun & Clarke, 2006). However, an immersive approach is still necessary and the researcher needs to be deeply familiar with the data reading and re-reading. From the themes sub themes emerged. The researcher charted these themes which highlighted emerging themes and gave the researcher an overall view of major themes emerging from the data.

3. Findings

The aim of this research is to explore the importance of wearing the hijab for Muslim women in particular towards their identity construction in contemporary Ireland. Following completion of the interviews thematic analysis was used to analyse the data and the following is a look at the themes emerging from this data.

3.1 The Hijab – It makes me happy

The overall research is focused on Muslim women who wear the hijab. The researcher asked the participants to explain the term and what it means to them. Across all the interviews the word modesty came up when describing the hijab.

“It’s just dress modestly. Everybody has their version of modesty so in the Koran something that will cover you and not show the shapes of your body.” (Melanie)

It was clear from the interviews that each participant had their own way of wearing the hijab. The three youngest participants who were 18 and 19 years of age wore the headscarf along with regular western clothing. The six other participants all wore the headscarf but five of them also wore other elements of dress associated with Islam such as the khimer, chador and abaya. It was apparent that the wearing of the hijab is not a one way fits all and comes down to the individual, their interpretation of the Koran and how comfortable they are in what they wear.

“A lot of it today is based on how people interpret it, like you go to scholars and stuff and even they say its not that you can or can’t wear something as long as it’s loose and its covering you up. You interpret it the way you want to interpret it.” (Julie)

When asked why they wear the hijab it emerged quite strongly from the research that it is for very personal reasons. The participants felt happy wearing the hijab.

“For me when I wear it I feel proud and very happy and confident.”
(Sandra)

All the participants are very religious and very sure of their faith and beliefs. It is also about their relationship with God and their obligation to him.

“I believe very strongly in my religion and I believe it is for my own benefit and because we do believe the Koran is the word of God...” (Susan)

Rachel who grew up in Iraq never used to wear it neither did her mother or her sisters, although her mother did start wearing it in her forties. Rachel began to wear it after the equivalent of the Iraqi junior cert, and also because a friend of hers wore it and she really looked up to her friend. It became a lot more personal to her though as she became older.

“I only started reading the Koran at 18 when my dad died and I read it for him and my family.” (Rachel)

All the participants said that it is expected that you should start wearing the hijab from puberty although none of them did start wearing it this young except for Julie who is 19 and Sandra who grew up in Sudan. Julie began wearing it in first year in secondary school because she had Arabic friends and they wore it, and it was more out of curiosity. Julie was born in Pakistan but grew up in Ireland and went to an Irish primary and secondary school.

“I thought it was interesting. It just intrigued me and afterwards I was like I actually like it, I think I am going to keep wearing it.” (Julie)

Some of the other participants struggled with wearing it through their teens. Isa is an Irish born Muslim whose mother is from Carlow and converted to Islam and married her Algerian born father. She talks about growing up as a Muslim teenager on the north side of Dublin. She didn't wear the hijab as a teenager but started wearing it when she was 18. Now Isa dresses a lot more conservatively. Along with the hijab she also wears the chador, again this is her interpretation of dressing modestly and what she feels comfortable with. Isa started dressing like this when she felt ready.

“We knew the rules, we went to Arabic school but we were living a normal life. I grew up on the northside I didn’t wear a head scarf over there when I was growing up.” (Isa)

Melanie and Susan started wearing the hijab in 5th year of secondary school. Melanie had begun to read the Koran at this time and was also inspired by her mother and cousins who wore it. Susan had changed from an all girls school to a mixed school and felt it was the right time. She tried to wear it when she started puberty but found she wasn’t ready and said she never really wore it properly as she would be showing her fringe.

“I didn’t understand the concept of hijab you know...I took it off and that could have happened for a few years in a row. I put it on sometimes and I took it off.” (Susan)

3.2 Hijabis

For all participants identity around being Muslim is extremely important for them.

They are Muslim and proud and the hijab is communicating this.

“When I go outside the door people know I am Muslim and that is my identity...and that is what I am proud of ...so this is my identity and people know.” (Jane)

For the participants the hijab is more than a piece of cloth that protects and is used for modesty. It is also how you portray yourself your manners, respecting people and being a good person.

“I think the hijab helps make me focus more on what I am doing and why I am doing it...so when I wear the hijab I am sending out a message...I don’t want to be a hypocrite so it reminds me of who I am...I am representing my religion.” (Julie)

Marie one of the older participants spoke of a friend who is Muslim but is not ready to wear the hijab and does not feel comfortable with it on. Susan discusses how some of her friends who are also practicing Muslims don’t wear the hijab as they are struggling with practicing

what it means to be a good Muslim such as being honest, kind, helpful, truthful and so they feel hypocritical wearing it when they don't feel they are embodying this yet.

“I have a friend who wants to wear it but she feels there are other things she has to fix in herself before she can wear it. She doesn't want to be a hypocrite because when you wear the headscarf you are making a statement that you are Muslim.” (Susan)

With the younger participants it was evident that they were on the beginning of their spiritual journey. They made reference to themselves as “hijabis” a couple of times which is a term they use for young Muslim women and girls who wear the hijab. Although the younger participants were very sure about wearing the hijab and what it means to them there is also a sense of struggle. Some of this was due to growing up in a western society where wearing the hijab is not common practice.

“I'll be honest I don't fulfil everything of those conditions of the hijab. I want to fulfil them but it is something I am struggling with so for example even something like skinny jeans...I went to H&M with my friend at lunch time and I was trying on skinny jeans and they were fine from my knee downwards but very tight on my thighs and also my back...I didn't get them...something I am struggling with I want to be able to wear clothes that don't show my body shape.” (Susan)

3.3 I'm educated, I know what the hijab is, and I know I want to wear it...

From the interviews it was very evident that it is an extremely personal choice to wear the hijab. Any pressure the participants may have had growing up about wearing it was what they called “gentle”. They all started wearing it when they were ready. Sandra who grew up in Sudan started wearing it when she reached puberty as this was the norm for females there. She was happy to wear it as her mother, sisters and cousins all wore it too. One of the participants spoke about her 15 year old daughter who doesn't wear it. She expressed that she would like her to wear it but she said it was her daughter's choice to make and not hers. Not one of the participants expressed being forced to wear the hijab.

“My mother was supportive of it she was not like you should or shouldn’t because I was like there has to be logic to why I am wearing it if I don’t believe it, what’s the point in telling me to wear it, it doesn’t do me any benefit.” (Melanie)

In fact most of the women take quite a feminist stance on wearing the hijab. When asked about what they thought when people said they see Muslim women as being oppressed there were very passionate responses about this.

“I am educated, I know what the hijab is, I know I want to wear it, I don’t think my dad or my husband or my brother could force me to wear itI do sports, I do college, I do everything anybody else would do and If I am wearing it and not showing my hair how is that oppressive in anyway.” (Melanie)

Some of the participants felt this perception of oppression was due to the media. The participants feel people should talk about it and ask questions and get the other perspective. The women find it upsetting and frustrating that some people see it as oppressive and again their answers around this enforce the very personal nature why a woman chooses to wear the hijab.

“It is upsetting ...and that they can’t see the beauty in it...it’s something you can explain but a person won’t understand until they go through it.” (Susan)

3.4 If it was banned I would be sad...

With France having recently banned all religious paraphernalia in schools which include the hijab and other countries having major debates about banning the hijab including Ireland when asked how they felt about this the participants were not happy and they felt it is down to a fear of Islam.

“It’s an excuse France has a problem with the immigration system there, they don’t like immigrants.” (Jane)

“I think it is wrong. Everyone has the right to their own religion and that is their identity.” (Isa)

However, not all the participants felt the same about this. Rachel felt that you have to follow the rules of the country you live in and she felt that if Muslim women wear veils, gloves and are completely covered up that that makes them different. She feels Muslim women should dress more appropriately to the country and culture they are living in.

“I think that is the reason it is banned...wearing long things, gloves, veil...too much in people faces...you have to follow our religion as well to smile, speak to your friend nicely...” (Rachel)

In general the participants are not happy with how Islam is portrayed in the media and see a lot of it as propaganda. If the hijab was banned in Ireland the participants said they would feel angry and sad. They felt like their freedom to choose would be taken from them and someone else’s opinion of what they think is right forced on them, oppressing them.

3.5 It’s up to us aswell to breakdown the stereotypes...

In general the participants had a very positive experience about being Muslim in Ireland. When Marie first came to Ireland she lived in Carlow and found it hard, people would stare and were rude, but it got easier when more Muslims arrived. Jane, who covers most of her body and face is very aware that people are curious and notices people staring at her but has a very positive attitude around this.

“You expect people to stare, if you are wearing it they will stare but in this country no one was rude...you have to go along with it as it’s my choice to wear it. You can’t generalise anyway...it’s up to us aswell to breakdown the stereotypes...” (Jane)

Isa who wears the chador, a loose robe that covers from head to toe but not her face or hands, has noticed a difference in the past year in how people react.

“This year I notice people stare more or say something to me ...it wasn’t like that last year or a few years ago...I think maybe the media got people thinking more...I have teenagers coming over to me asking me ‘why do you wear that?’ and I explain to them.” (Isa)

The three younger participants talk about Islam and Ireland in a very positive light. They

have all had positive experiences in school in Ireland. People have been curious but they say in a good way it was always open dialogue about it and they spoke about the support they got from teachers and the principal and from nuns as one of them went to a catholic school that had nuns teaching there. But they have heard of people who have had a negative experience in recent years, when people who wear the hijab have been told to go back to their own country.

3.6 Culture, Fashion & Complexity

Throughout the interviews it became evident that culture has a big role to play in how the hijab is worn as all participants interviewed spoke about how wearing the hijab and other forms of Islamic dress can be based on culture and it can depend on what country you are living in. Rachel who grew up in Iraq says different cultures and different environments means people dress differently.

“In my country we don’t wear the long hijab we wear trousers, skirts some people would say I don’t wear the hijab but I think that is between me and God.”(Rachel)

Sandra from Sudan sees Islam as one religion but when it comes to dress it is different from country to country. Here in Ireland, where she has been living for over 15 years, she wears just the headscarf. She is into the style and texture of the hijab she wears and during this interview she is wearing a silver, glittering headscarf. In Sudan, where she is originally from she expresses that she would not wear it in this fashion.

“Hijab differs from place to place ...like in Sudan there is a dress that I have to wear that covers all your body so when I go back home I have to wear that.” (Sandra)

Sandra is the only participant out of the older participants who connected the hijab to fashion.

“Yeah I like the style...I like colourful ones and different colours...it’s important to me the style.” (Sandra)

An interesting theme the researcher did not expect emerged from the three younger participants. During their interviews they all spoke of the cultural aspect and that some people don't wear the hijab the way they felt it deserves. They talk about culture and religion being blurred and that some women and girls are wearing it more for cultural reasons than spiritual. One participant spoke about a family wedding she is going to in which she has been asked to not wear the hijab. For her this is a major dilemma as wearing the hijab is something she takes very seriously and means a lot to her. Members of her extended family also wear the hijab but they are taking it off for the wedding. She feels the hijab has lost its spirituality and for some it is just something you do for the sake of it. The spiritual importance of the hijab was a very important point for these participants as their reasons for wearing the hijab are very personal and religious and for them it is frustrating to know people are wearing it without showing it the appropriate respect it deserves.

“I feel like the hijab has lost its meaning from a cultural perspective...for example in Saudi Arabia you are expected to wear one it's not that you wear it for your religion you're told to wear it, it is purely cultural...it's enforced. It's supposed to be a spiritual thing, it's supposed to be something you decide to do when you reach a certain level of spirituality. It's a choice you are supposed to make yourself.” (Susan)

This shows that within the Muslim community itself, the women face pressure from their own community. One of the older participants feels that the hijab and skinny jeans is not hijab, whereas the three younger participants who wear the head scarf and skinny jeans are very much devout Muslims and understand what it means to wear the hijab and that it is more than just a cloth.

“Some women tend to wear a lot of makeup and skinny jeans. That is not hijab...they find it is just a head scarf...its nothing to do with it...” (Jane)

The older participants did not particularly see it as a fashion statement but acknowledged it does happen. Isa spoke about when she was teenager it was more about fashion but not anymore. Again the three younger participants struggle with this a bit more.

“There are some crazy ones where there is a huge bump at the back and they would have mounds of makeup on their face... Don’t get me wrong I wear makeup myself ...I just feel you are contradicting yourself and again wearing it with very tight clothing I think it’s contradicting...again the hijab isn’t your headscarf it is everything...and I know that everyone is at different levels which is perfectly fine we are all trying to find our way...so it takes people time it really does.” (Susan)

The participants are very accepting of Muslim women who don’t wear the hijab. As it is not a decision to be taken lightly and a deeply personal one the participants are very aware that some people may not be ready to wear it. They appreciated the complexity and personal nature of the reasons that women wear it.

“I don’t care if women don’t wear it. I used to never wear it. I only started wearing it when I got married...it depends on what situation you are in not necessarily because you get older.” (Marie)

The three younger participants faced a different challenge and a bigger issue for them in wearing the hijab was their extended family telling them that they shouldn’t be wearing the hijab.

“For me oppression never came into it, it was being told by other Muslims oh why are you wearing it ...granny’s and stuff like that. They are like ‘oh you’re too young, wait till later in your life when you are closer to God’that is a bigger problem!” (Julie)

Susan faces constant pressure from her aunt who doesn’t wear the hijab. At family gatherings which are quite frequent in Susan’s family, she would experience the following:

“Why are you wearing it?...you are young enjoy your youth, you have your entire life ahead of you to wear it. This is your age to look nice and get dressed up. You have such nice hair you are in college take it off...and that is what surprised me most that I was getting this from my family...that was quite difficult...it happens quite a lot.”(Susan)

4. Discussion

This chapter will interpret and discuss the results presented in chapter 3 with particular emphasis on the research question and existing literature. The aim of this research is to investigate the importance of wearing the hijab for Muslim women in particular towards their identity construction in contemporary Ireland. This data led qualitative study took nine female participants from the Muslim community in Ireland ranging in different ages and ethnic backgrounds. The main themes from the literature review were based on what the hijab means, the hijab and identity, Islamic feminism, the hijab debate, the hijab in western Europe, misrepresentation of Islam in the west and Islam in Ireland. The themes that emerged from the results differ somewhat and new themes have emerged most notable around reasons for wearing hijab, what it symbolises, the influence of culture and fashion on the hijab and also other pressures that Muslim women face within their own community.

4.1 The Hijab – It makes me happy

Across all nine participants, wearing the hijab is a deeply personal decision and based on their religious values and beliefs. According to Furseth (2011) Muslim women in America cite religious reasons as only a fraction of their reasons for wearing the hijab and cited many interpersonal reasons such as social and cultural. In this study their main reason for wearing the hijab was to be close to God. It is an obligation and a requirement of Islam, it is what they believe in and it is about being a good Muslim and was based on their belief in their religion and their own interpretation of the Koran. Although you are required to wear the hijab from puberty only two of the participants did, one because of the country and culture she grew up in where it was the norm and the other out of curiosity and because her friends were wearing it. Modesty frequently came up when the participants were explaining the purpose of the hijab. This concurs with current literature available that the hijab is a requirement for

modesty. From these findings the researcher found that overall the women are making a very confident and deeply personal choice to wear the hijab. They are choosing to wear it in a country where it is not the norm and they are the minority. Another finding that emerged from the data which was not found in previous literature is that the hijab is not just about modesty it is about manners, how you present yourself, it is about being a good person, this will be discussed more in the next section as it relates to the theme around identity.

4.2 Hijabis

The findings corroborate with existing literature that the hijab is an important marker of identity (Furseth, 2011; Bullock & Jafri, 2000; Williams & Vashi, 2007). When the participants wear the hijab they are making a statement that they are proud to be Muslim and the hijab symbolises this. Something that was not evident in the literature was what the hijab actually symbolises and something the participants talked about a lot was that the hijab is so much more than a headscarf. It is to do with manners, respect and to be of good character. When you wear the hijab you must be ready to act accordingly and strive to be a person of good character.

A similar finding to what is already in existing literature is in relation to younger Muslim women who have grown up in western culture. American literature in this area found that some young Muslim women are wearing the hijab against their parents' wishes as they have assimilated into western culture and don't want their children to be seen as different (Hussain Solihu, 2009; Furseth, 2011; Williams & Vashi, 2007; Dakkak & Mikula, 2012). In relation to this study this finding was of particular importance to the three younger participants who went as far to say that the biggest pressure they face is from their extended families pressuring them not to wear the hijab. For the younger participants wearing the hijab is important for their identity. They still wear western clothing such as skinny jeans but the

hijab is an identity marker for them. They are proud to wear it. They do struggle with their dress as they want to wear baggier clothes that hide their body shape but yet they also don't want to look too conservative that they become unapproachable. One participant in particular has noticed this happening with college classmates who follow all the conditions of dressing modestly.

The existing literature found that Muslim women living in the west wear the hijab to desexualise themselves freeing them from a sexist society where they are seen for their brain as opposed to their sexuality (Shadid and Van Koningsveld, 2005; Dreher & Ho, 2009; Tolyamat & Maradi, 2011; Frank, 2005). These findings resonated with one participant in particular, she feels by wearing the hijab people see her as a person and not an object, and they see her personality.

4.3 I'm educated, I know what the hijab is, I know I want to wear it...

Existing literature has found that Muslim women in the west who choose to wear the hijab are commonly educated and articulate women (Afshar, 2008; Furseth, 2011; Vojdik, 2010; Hussain Solihu, 2009). The findings of this study concur with this. Across all interviews it was unanimous that all of the women have made an educated and informed personal decision to wear the hijab. Most of them spoke about a time when they just weren't ready to wear it and it wasn't until they were ready personally that they choose to wear it. They all spoke about having studied the Koran and about their own interpretations. They were all articulate women and very sure and confident in their reasons for wearing the hijab. The three younger participants were all currently in university with one of them in particular putting emphasis on the fact that she does sports, is educated and goes to college like others.

In Ireland, when the hijab debate was sparked some female journalists wrote about the hijab being oppressive to women which is discussed in the literature review. From the findings this

could not be further from the truth for these women. They are very self-assured in their decision to wear it. In a society where one is not expected to wear it they have made a decision based on very personal beliefs that they want to wear it. And if anything, one participant mentioned, oppression has never come into it; the bigger problem for them is the pressure they get within their extended family to not wear it.

4.4 “If it was banned I would be sad...”

There is a lot of existing literature that discusses the banning of the hijab in France and the debates surrounding it in Europe. According to the literature women who wear the hijab have become symbols of fundamentalist Islamic controversies in the west (Winter, 2006). This research study has shown that wearing the hijab has nothing to do with Islamic fundamentalism and if anything it is the complete opposite. These women are representing peace, their spirituality and respect for them and others. For the participants it is upsetting and frustrating that the media has created a misrepresentation of Islam. They don't understand why it is banned as they believe it should be a freedom of choice, however, one participant expressed the fact that some Muslim women are covered up too much and can understand why western countries may find it intimidating. The women felt that by banning them wearing the hijab that that is a form of oppression in itself and not the actual act of wearing the hijab in the first place which for them is by choice.

As in accordance with the literature wearing the hijab is a lot more complex than people think and there are many practicing Muslims who choose not to wear it and there is a diverse opinion about it amongst the Muslim population itself (Shadid & Von Koningsveld, 2005). Ramadan (2005) and O'Brien (2009) discuss how Muslims in Europe, particularly the young and intellectuals, are renegotiating what it means to be Muslim in western Europe, this is what O'Brien (2009) refers to as Euro Islam to reinvent what it means to be Muslim in line

with the democratic values of the country they are living in. From the findings this can be seen with the younger participants as they balance growing up Muslim in a western society. As one participant revealed that she doesn't want to cut herself off from society as a whole for dressing too conservatively.

4.5 “It’s up to us aswell to breakdown the stereotypes...”

According to the literature review Ireland’s Muslim community has a history of being a positive one and unlike other countries in western Europe Muslims in Ireland have a diverse background with not one ethnicity dominating (Carr, 2011; Scharbrodt & Sakaranaho, 2011; Honohan & Rougier, 2011). This is also echoed in the findings that in general the participants have a positive experience in Ireland and also the participants are from different ethnic backgrounds. However, according to the literature review, in recent times Ireland has seen a rise in what has been termed Islamophobia (Immigrant Council of Ireland, 2013). The findings of this study concur with this in that a couple of participants have noticed that in the past few years there has been a change in peoples attitude and they feel this is down to the media. Ireland has not escaped the debate on the hijab and the banning of it in schools with female journalist calling the hijab oppressive and the minister for education Ruairí Quinn recommending it should be banned from schools (Honohan & Rougier, 2011). The younger participants in the study all had a positive experience of wearing the hijab in secondary school with support from their principal, teachers and fellow students. If it was to be banned these young women would not have had that same experience and would not be able to express their identity.

4.6 Culture, Fashion and Complexity

It is acknowledged in the literature that there are different forms of Islamic dress depending on culture (Galadari, 2012). The results of this study revealed that the hijab is

worn differently by Muslim women with many variations. This is due to their own interpretation of the Koran, cultural reasons and what feels right for them.

With the younger participants being Muslim and growing up in a western country brought challenges when it came to how they dressed and they would be more influenced by western culture and their peers but yet they are very sure of why they were wearing the hijab. This concurs with the literature that a lot of young Muslim women are carving out their own cultural space of what it means to be Muslim in western culture (Williams & Vashi, 2007). The younger participants in this research referred to themselves as hijabis, this is not something that was in the literature but it can be linked to William and Vashi's (2007) point of young Muslim women carving out their own cultural space in which it could be said they are creating their own subculture identity.

The generational gap in age had an impact on the differences in opinion in relation to the hijab being associated with fashion. With the younger participants in this study fashion does influence to some extent. They all expressed that the hijab is becoming more stylish and they talked about adapting the hijab and the style of how you wear it to what suits you. It is something that they discuss with their friends and share different styles of how to tie it up. The hijab as a fashion trend was not something the older participants related to except for one who likes to wear different styles and textures and expressed that this was important to her. This corroborates with the literature that the hijab is becoming fashionable (Furseth 2011; Vojdik, 2010; Dakkak & Mikula, 2012; Dreher & Ho, 2009).

Dreher and Ho (2009) make the point that in general the debate around the hijab in the media and about banning it or not banning it does not take into consideration that Muslim women have their own debates around it or that for some it is about style and fashion this corroborates with the findings of this study as the participants particularly the younger

participants discuss the hijab with their friends and are interested in the style.

Cultural reasons came through as a strong theme, something that was not as evident from the existing literature. Different countries have different ways of wearing the hijab and different expectations on wearing it. For example one of the participants from Sudan only wears the headscarf here in Ireland but in Sudan she would be expected to be covered up more. A participant from Morocco wore her hijab similar to the way it is worn in Morocco. The three younger participant's all wore regular western clothes and the headscarf. Their parents and extended family are from Pakistan and they spoke about the dress there that is more so a shawl that loosely covers the head. One of the younger participants spoke about Saudi Arabia as she has extended family there and that there the wearing of the hijab is enforced. She felt this was wrong as it takes away the spirituality and true essence of wearing the hijab which is only something you should wear if you are ready. The three younger participants all spoke about this element of culture where there is a blurred line between culture and religion and some people wear the hijab for cultural reasons as opposed to religious reasons and to them that takes away the real meaning behind wearing the hijab.

The three younger participants spoke about wearing the hijab in the west as being a more informed and personal choice and that women wearing it in western countries are doing it more so for spiritual and religious reasons as it is not expected of them for cultural reasons. This is also found in some literature that Muslim women living in the west know the democratic liberal values are bound by freedom of choice. They know they are living in a country where they don't have to wear it but they choose to and can symbolise that they are confident in what they are doing (Afshar, 2008; Furseth, 2011; Vojdik, 2010).

5. Limitations of the Study & Implications for Future Research

This was a small scale study with time constraints, hence if it was a larger study more data could have been gathered leading to a greater insight. Due to a language barrier with one participant it was difficult for the researcher to gather significant data. It may have been good to have all the participants having grown up Ireland to get more of an insight to what it means to be Irish and Muslim and the challenges they face from both their community and Irish society.

Due to the ethical consideration of this study the researcher could not interview participants under the age of 18. During the research one Muslim woman mentioned her 16 year old daughter who wore the hijab and was very opinionated on her reasons for wearing it and asked if the researcher would like to interview her, but as outlined, for ethical reasons the researcher had to decline. The researcher would recommend for a future study to research young Muslim women and teenagers who have grown up in Ireland and the challenges they face within Irish society and within their own Muslim community. Another area of future research recommended would be a more in-depth analysis around the pressures the young Muslim women face within their own extended family in relation to not wearing the hijab and also a more indepth exploration around the term hijabis. A further research topic could be a comparison study with Muslim women who wear the hijab and those that choose not to.

6. Conclusion

This research study set out to explore the importance of wearing the hijab for Muslim women in particular towards their identity construction in contemporary Ireland. The research found that wearing the hijab is extremely important for these women and is very much linked to their identity. They wear the hijab for deeply personal reasons, in particular due to their relationship with God and their beliefs. The hijab is important to them for their identity as it symbolises to society that they are Muslim and they are proud to be Muslim. To them wearing the hijab is not just about a piece of cloth for them but it symbolises that you are a practicing Muslim and to these women that means you are respectful, have good manners and are a person of good character.

This research has also told us that young Muslim women struggle with dressing modestly and dressing like other non-Muslim women their age. They are also up against other pressures from extended family to not wear the hijab. These young women recognise a shift in the wearing of the hijab becoming what they call more cultural reasons to wear it rather than spiritual reasons and that some women wear it without truly respecting it and take it on and off as suits. But they also are very aware of it being a personal journey and that everyone is at different levels when it comes to wearing it.

The women are aware and frustrated by the negative media misrepresentation of Islam and the banning of the hijab in certain countries angers them. In general, the participants have had a very positive experience of being Muslim and living in Ireland but some of them have noticed a change in people's reactions and put this down to the media. They also recognise that it is a two way process and that they also need to work at breaking down stereotypes. Ultimately the research question has been answered that yes the hijab is extremely important for a Muslim woman's identity while living in Ireland and even amongst all the negative

media misrepresentation these women, by choice, feel confident and proud to wear it.

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Appendix 1

Interview Schedule

Introductions and warm up chat

Themes

Islamic Dress

Can you tell me about Islamic dress?

Can you tell me about the different cultural meanings?

How important is Islamic dress to Muslim women?

Hijab

Can you tell me about the hijab?

Why do you wear it?

Why is it important to you?

How do you feel about Muslim women who don't wear it?

How would you feel if you were told you were not allowed to wear it?

How do you feel about the debate on banning the hijab?

How do you feel about the hijab as a fashion trend?

Do you discuss the hijab with friends? What would you discuss?

Identity

How do you feel about being a Muslim woman living in Ireland?

How do you identify as a Muslim woman?

Can you tell me about the importance of the hijab to your identity?

Islam & Ireland

How do you feel about the western media coverage of Islam?

How do you feel Islam is perceived in Ireland?

How do people react to you wearing the hijab?

How do you feel when people say it is oppressive to women and that women are forced to wear it?
(will talk about some examples first of where in the media this has been mentioned).

Appendix 2



Dress and Diversity in Contemporary Ireland: The Hijab in a Minority Context

My name is Sharon Keogh and I am conducting research that explores the importance of wearing the hijab for Muslim women in particular towards their identity construction in contemporary Ireland.

You are invited to take part in this study and participation involves an interview that will take roughly 40 minutes.

Participation is completely voluntary and so you are not obliged to take part. If you do take part and any of the questions do raise difficult feelings, you do not have to answer that question, and/or continue with the interview.

Participation is confidential. If, after the interview has been completed, you wish to have your interview removed from the study this can be accommodated up until the research study is published.

The interview, and all associated documentation, will be securely stored and stored on a password protected computer.

It is important that you understand that by completing and submitting the interview that you are consenting to participate in the study.

Should you require any further information about the research, please contact

Sharon Keogh (Sharon.keogh@gmail.com) or Vanessa Long (vanessa.long@dbs.ie)

Thank you for participating in this study.

Participant Signature: _____ Date: _____