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Love, Fear, and Loathing: A Qualitative Examination of Christian Perceptions of Muslims

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Abstract: For centuries Christians and Muslims have sometimes shown extreme thoughts and feelings about each other, often based on very little factual information. While one large and well-respected survey study (PEW RESEARCH CENTER FOR THE PEOPLE AND THE PRESS, 2002), has researched attitudes in the United States toward Muslims, including a breakdown of attitudes by religion, race, sex and other demographic characteristics, that research may be limited by its quantitative approach to a question that is best answered using qualitative methodology. This study used an innovative qualitative method inspired by market research to investigate Christian feelings about Muslims. We note the undercurrents of fear and curiosity expressed by subjects and although the respondents in this study would have received high knowledge scores in the PEW survey, we found that they actually knew very little about Islam. We give rationale and detailed examples of our method of metaphor elicitation, suggest possible uses for it elsewhere, and close with suggestions for further research.

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1. Introduction

While some have understood the treatment of Islam in the U.S. as indicative of a "clash of civilizations," ASANI (2003) argues that ignorance, especially among Americans, is the root cause of what is mistakenly characterized as this Muslim-Christian clash. It is not civilizations that are clashing, according to ASANI, but various levels of ignorance. ASANI believes that cultivating pluralism is the cure for these misunderstandings, but many Christians are not as willing as Muslims to view the other as a legitimate practitioner of a valid faith. [1]

This paper provides a synopsis of formal education in the United States about Islam and description of a study designed to investigate the feeling that Christians have toward Muslims. The findings reported here indicate that many of the Christians we interviewed had very little factual information about Islam, suggesting the need for more formal and informal education about Islam. [2]

1.1 Study of Islam in the United States

GERGES's interview of a government official in 1995 revealed that at that time, from the heights of government to the ordinary citizen, U.S. views of Islam and Muslims were "simplistic and prejudiced" (2003, p.84). Another scholar argues that recent studies of Islam in the United States tend to use the climate of fear generated by the Twin Tower attacks to further advance fear and misunderstanding of Islam (SYED, 2003). GERGES (2003) notes that Western Christian attitudes and perceptions of Islam have been guided by state policies which have sought cooperation during some eras and distancing in others. Such attitudes and perceptions are likely both cause and consequence of the lack of education on Islam in the U.S. [3]

DOUGLASS and DUNN (2003) claim that formal education about Islam had been rare to invisible in the U.S. until the sixties, but that even since that time, when Islam is now taught in public U.S. schools, it is taught through the filter of Western colonialism and Christian missionary outrage. They argue that the average American student spends only a few weeks out of the twelve years of public schooling in study of Islam (p.57). Their review of U.S. textbooks on Islam conclude that it is "generally not interpreted as its adherents understand it but as the editors believe will be acceptable to textbook adoption committees" (p.59). Rather, they claim, textbooks stress differences between the major monotheistic religions and avoid discussion of similarities and continuity of origins. In addition, these texts often characterize Muhammed's activities as clever and calculating, rather than the result of his communication with the higher power as they might do when speaking of Moses' life, for example. [4]

The study reported here was designed to investigate the feelings that Christians have toward Muslims. We were interested in learning the feelings of Christians in part because we suspect that people are more likely to take action based on feelings than on thought processes. We were also interested in the Christian

edict of loving everyone in the context of the current U.S. and global political scene. [5]

2. Research Approach

This small study reported here used a qualitative methodology to attempt to understand American Christian feelings about Muslims. BLUMER (1969) has elegantly argued the futility of using survey instruments to uncover meaning. Indeed, his first premise on the nature of symbolic interaction states that "human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them" (p.2). Hence, uncovering meaning is a worthwhile goal, and particularly when the topic is as globally important as religious diversity is at present. Metaphor elicitation seemed a compelling avenue by which to explore what may be socially unacceptable feelings. [6]

Metaphor is most easily understood in the form "A" is "B" wherein certain known aspects of "B" are used as a way to understand certain unknown aspects of "A." LAKOFF and TURNER (1989) refer to "A" as the target domain and "B" as the source domain. As such, "A" is the target of our understanding, or that which we wish to apprehend. "B" is the source of our understanding of "A." We use the attributes of "B" as a way to understand "A." As LAKOFF and TURNER (1989) explain, "[w]e use a metaphor to map certain aspects of the source domain onto the target domain, thereby producing a new understanding of that target domain" (pp.38-39). [7]

BLACK (1979) and WAY (1994) indicate that metaphors become necessary when the available resources of the language are insufficient to accurately express something. For example, when AIDS was first identified in 1981, the English language did not contain the resources to explain the syndrome. Therefore, according to HUGHEY (1989),

> "when a new disease like AIDS appears, verbal meanings must be constructed from scratch. Old labels are chosen and associated with the new phenomenon through a metaphoric process. If the old labels carry stigma, the new phenomenon will carry stigma" (p.3). [8]

Thus, the old label ("B") becomes a way to understand the new phenomenon ("A"). Similarly, it could be argued, that following the September 11, 2001 attack on the U.S.A., that has led to increased tensions between Muslims and Christians (ARMSTRONG, 2002), with relationships between the two often "characterized by dangerous stereotypes and conflict" (CENTER FOR MUSLIM-CHRISTIAN UNDERSTANDING, 2005, p.1), U.S. citizens were left with few available language resources for understanding the event or the attackers. If BLACK (1979) and WAY (1994) are correct, then in the years following the attack, new ways of conceptualizing Muslims would have developed. [9]

LAKOFF and TURNER (1989) contend that once a conceptual metaphor is learned it is used automatically and without thought. When individuals speak

about a topic, they use metaphors. This metaphor usage is largely unconscious. SCHMITT (2005), in a discussion of metaphor analysis as a therapeutic device states, "[w]e as individuals, groups, and in our culture have unconscious metaphorical thinking patterns, which are simply taken as 'givens'" (p.360). These "metaphorical thinking patterns" reflect our world view and, consequently, influence behavior. Thus, as LAKOFF and JOHNSON (1980) would argue, metaphors are much more than simple linguistic devices. Rather, they actually reflect the way individuals think and live. Therefore, a number of scholars (e.g., EL-SAWAD, 2005; LEVITT, KORMAN, & ANGUS, 2000; SCHMITT, 2005; WALLACE, 2001) have looked to this unconscious metaphor usage as a way to identify individuals' "thinking patterns" about important aspects of their lives. [10]

Through language and, consequently, metaphor, we construct reality, and how that reality is constructed has consequences for action (KOCH & DEETZ, 1981; POTTER & WETHERELL, 1987). KOCH and DEETZ (1981) argue that metaphorical expressions are "an endemic part of our language and provide a fundamental structure for experience" (p.5). Metaphoric analysis is one way to identify that structure. DEETZ (1984) and KOCH and DEETZ (1981) suggest that metaphor analysis can reveal the way members of a culture conceptualize their world. Such an analysis not only provides a description of the obvious or easily recognized reality shared by members of a society, but also has the potential for revealing alternative conceptualizations that often are "covered up by the familiarity of everyday experience" (p.13). Yet, little is actually known about how Christians in the U.S. conceptualize Muslims. [11]

2.1 Metaphor elicitation

Metaphor analysis has become a means by which we can uncover many important aspects of human nature, such as the way we think, act, and attach meaning to everyday mundane occurrences. The metaphors we use manifest the conceptual system from which we think and act (LAKOFF & JOHNSON, 1980), structure experience (MUMBY & SPITZACK, 1983), and convey attitudinal information (CLEVENGER & EDWARDS, 1990). LAKOFF and TURNER (1989) argue "metaphor allows us to understand ourselves and our world in ways that no other modes of thought can" (p.XI). The metaphors we use are accurate reflections of the way we structure our world, and they therefore "govern our everyday functioning" (LAKOFF & JOHNSON, 1980, p.3). [12]

It is the previously noted unconscious nature of metaphor usage that makes metaphor analysis beneficial in the research reported here. Interviewees who might be motivated to provide what they perceive to be a socially desirable response, (c.f. WALLACE, 2001) would still exhibit the unconscious use of metaphorical thinking patterns. Similar to nonverbal "leakage" behaviors observed in deception studies, metaphors "leak" into usage during an in-depth interview. [13]

Because people who submit to interviews based on their religious identification may have powerful reasons to give socially desirable responses, we thought that

metaphor elicitation might obviate social desirability biases. Whether people self-identified as religious would have an incentive to state their views in opposition to or in agreement with what they perceived their interviewers' beliefs to be is uncertain. They may state oppositional views in order to reinforce their feelings that they are "not of this world" or that they are "set apart." Yet they might also state agreeable opinions in order to portray themselves as basically good people. This could be the case with any religious group, but with Christians in particular, who have been inculcated with the imperative to "love," there may be a strong incentive to understand themselves as kind, loving, and tolerant of all peoples. [14]

In order to examine the feelings and perceptions of U.S. Christians toward Muslims, we used a technique inspired by our readings about the Zaltman Metaphor Elicitation Technique (ZMET) in marketing. Although some details of the ZMET are proprietary, it uses nonverbal stimuli such as pictures or music to determine what consumers think or feel about a product by encouraging the respondent to use metaphor in her or his discussion of the topic. (See COULTER & ZALTMAN, 1994, for a rather detailed description of the technique.) [15]

COULTER and ZALTMAN (1994), originators of the ZMET, distinguish between "talking about" and "thinking about" a subject. They refer to "talking about" as an expression of surface knowledge and "thinking about" as an expression of a deeper knowledge structure. This deeper knowledge structure provides a more accurate indication of what an individual actually thinks about a topic and of what the topic means to the individual. However, because people often cannot, or will not, express content from these deep structures, ZALTMAN and COULTER (1995; ZALTMAN 1997) argue that sensory stimuli is useful in helping one get closer to these deep thoughts. Thus, the use of visual (e.g., photographs) and other sensory stimuli (e.g., sounds, smell, touch, and taste) as a means of accessing individuals' deeper thoughts, became a vital part of the development of the ZMET. The objects and sensory stimuli tap into deep thought and do not constrain the interviewee by verbal cues as can occur in survey or focus group research where the interviewees' attention is on the words in a question. [16]

The ZMET uses objects and pictures to elicit a discussion of metaphor and through the interpretation of these metaphors by the subject, the researchers gain a deeper understanding of the feelings and thoughts of respondents toward the topic being studied. Because metaphor analysis may give researchers insight into the inner life of people more thoroughly than the subjects are able to consciously express, it is likely of particular salience when less than admirable feelings or thoughts are the topic. [17]

2.2 Procedures

In preparation for the interview, and in keeping with the original ZMET procedures, respondents were instructed to consider their feelings about, in this case, Muslims, and then to bring ten objects that represented those feelings to the interview. Respondents were to use their objects as an interpretive tool by

which they could express how they felt, rather than what they thought, about Muslims. [18]

Our first discovery was that it was extraordinarily difficult for our subjects to differentiate between thought and feeling. Many brought objects that represented their level of education on Arabic customs or dress, for example. Indeed, one respondent brought printouts of the PEW study itself in response to our instruction to find items that evoked his feelings toward Muslims. Feeling as though we had failed in our initial attempt to get at feeling via metaphor elicitation, we further adapted the ZMET. We then decided to give respondents examples of objects that might facilitate attempts to elicit responses in the realm of emotion, rather than knowledge. We each gathered objects from around our offices and homes, items that we knew we would not need for a few months, and put them into a white cardboard box that originally held paper (contents and photos in Appendix 1). Then, rather than having respondents bring their own objects to the interview, we gave them time alone to select ten objects from the collection in the box. We assumed that all interpretations would be psychological projections, which we would then ask them to explain, by elaborating on the meaning of each object they had chosen.[1] Psychological projection is the process by which humans imagine something from their own consciousness embodied in some other person or object. We hoped that the respondents would give just this sort of insight into their perceptions of Muslims when they discussed each of the objects. In other words, we did not expect that any object had any inherent meaning except that given to it by the respondents. After giving each respondent time alone in the room to select ten objects from the box, we returned to tape the interviews. The interviewees filled out a short questionnaire (Appendix 3) regarding demographic characteristics, and then we discussed the objects they had selected. After explaining why each object represented their feelings about Muslims, we had them arrange the objects in meaningful piles and further discussed the meaning (see Appendix 2 for more details on the questions we asked). [19]

In addition to the collection of objects in the box, we put a list of the four basic tastes on paper, asking them to use those four or any other tastes, to explain what their feelings about Muslims tasted like. We gave them a list of basic emotions and asked them to read that list, and then using one of those words or any other emotion that came to mind, to tell us how they felt about Muslims. (See Appendix 2 for details on the tastes and emotions presented.) We asked them what their feelings about Muslims smelled like, and we gave them a piece of poster board with four circles glued to it at each corner. These same sized circles contained soft brown fake fur, twigs, sandpaper, and a mirror. In the center we put a squishy yellow toy ball with several regular holes in it (see Figure 35 in

1 The complete list of objects is in Appendix 1, but we caution the reader against the assumption that any meaning inheres in any object. "Symbolic interactionism sees meanings as social products, as creations that are formed in and through the defining activities of people as they interact" (BLUMER, 1969, p.5). Indeed, that meanings are created and not inherent in any objects is clear when we see that one person chose the rock because it is ancient, and another because it brought to mind the stonings of women. One chose the crocheted placemat because its rough texture reminded her of "folk culture" and another because it evoked the veil.

Appendix 1 for photographs of objects). We asked respondents to touch each circle, and then explain, using those five or some other we had not included, what the touch of their feelings toward Muslims were. [20]

We found our adaptation of the ZMET helpful in sketching out the contours of some socially undesirable yet prominent feelings. We are relatively confident that had we relied on a survey instrument that our data would not only be one-dimensional regarding feelings, but also have produced incorrect assumptions about the relative knowledge respondents had about Islam. We say this for two reasons: 1. We noted a pattern for the respondents to say that they knew Muslims were not evil but also to associate violence with Muslims, and 2. Some who would have scored very high on the PEW Survey measuring knowledge of Islam actually knew nothing about the most basic beliefs of Islam. In other words, surface knowledge, as described by COULTER and ZALTMAN (1994) was captured by the PEW study, and by the first responses many of our respondents had when asked about their attitudes. But a research approach such as the PEW study cannot tap the deeper meanings Muslims represent for Christians, and we believe that metaphor analysis can reach this deeper meaning. [21]

We recognize that by asking for smells and tastes, etc. we were forcing the metaphor. However, we did so because our goal was to force them out of their "knowledge" talk and into "feeling" talk. [22]

2.3 Sample

The study involved a non-random sample of twenty self-identified Christians[2] aged 21 to 66 drawn from the population of a metropolitan area in the southern United States and an urban university campus within the city. The city is a state capitol with approximately 300,000 residents, roughly 50% African American and 50% white. The university has an average enrollment of 5,000, many non-traditional and working students with about 35% African American and 65% white. Among interviewees there were six males and 14 females, and there were eleven white and nine African American respondents. First, interview subjects were recruited through flyers posted around campus and in courses taught by the researchers. More participants were found using snowballing from the initial respondents. Respondents were either given extra credit for class or twenty dollar gift cards from a department store. The interviews ranged from one half hour to one and one half hours in length. Both researchers were present at all but one of the interviews. The tape-recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim. Photographs were taken of the items respondents brought to the interview. [23]

In addition to participation in the interview, subjects also completed a brief questionnaire (Appendix 3). All these Christian respondents reported feeling either somewhat or extremely close to God (a question we asked because this question and the following question are highly correlated with overall religiosity scores in survey research). Almost all prayed at least once a day, though eleven

2 In other words, if a potential respondent claimed to be a Christian, he or she was eligible to participate in the study.

reported praying several times daily. Ten reported believing that the Bible is God's word without error, and ten said that it was divinely inspired but did contain human error. Among those reporting an opinion, all reported believing that miracles still happen today. [24]

2.4 Metaphor analysis

The basic research question guiding this work was: What views do Christians from the U.S. hold about Muslims? In order to address the question, each researcher read all of the interview transcriptions a minimum of three times. First, each researcher read through all of the transcriptions at least once without marking metaphors. During the second reading, the texts were examined for metaphorical expressions and these expressions were marked within the text. The texts were read a third time, to identify additional metaphors that might have been missed during the second reading. Some of the longer interviews were read an additional time by one or both researchers. This additional reading was to address the issue of researcher fatigue. [25]

After the metaphors had been marked on the transcripts, each researcher then made a list of them, along with notes regarding surrounding context. The lists were prepared independently. Once the list of metaphorical expressions was complete, each researcher then identified categories of prevalent themes, perceptions, and feelings of Christians toward Muslims. Any category with two or more entries was included in the final analysis. This approach was based on the model of metaphor analysis provided by WALLACE (2001). [26]

After the individual researcher identification of categories was complete, the researchers compared their lists and notes in order to reach agreement on dominant categories. When disagreement occurred, the researchers went back to the original transcripts. After reading the texts again, agreement was reached. [27]

In the case of single instances of metaphorical expression, three steps were taken. First, the researchers discussed the expression and, if possible, included it in an agreed upon category. If this was not possible, the researchers took a second step of returning to the text for additional clarification. If, after this second step, agreement still could not be reached, the third step was elimination of the metaphor from further consideration or analysis. [28]

3. Findings

Although respondents frequently replied with words like "think," "believe," and "know," in response to many of our questions about feelings, even when we repeatedly noted that we were asking specifically about their feelings, we have nonetheless gained some insight into the feelings and thoughts these American Christians had toward Muslims. We present here the three most prevalent themes identified in the interviews. The first theme is the metaphor "veiling." The second major theme is "knowledge," especially as it relates to an understanding of various aspects of Islam. Thirdly, we present the emotional disjuncture (love

and fear) of our respondents toward Muslims. We then discuss these findings and their implications for an anxious Christianity in an increasingly global arena of religious expression. [29]

3.1 Metaphor/veiling

We noted that our respondents were quick to choose items that reminded them of veiling, or of things hidden.

> "The women wear cloth over their head and face and I just feel like you know they're covering up their identity of who they really are and you know the beauty, you know you really can't see it because it's covered up." (Alberta) [30]

1Interview subjects commonly noted the disparity between male and female coverings in the cultures in which the veil is worn, as illuminated here:

> "Their lifestyle, and you know to us it's not right the way women are treated, but to them, gosh I mean that's their culture, that's the way they feel, that's what they're comfortable with, having their face covered, and things expected of the them and I, you know is it up to us to push 'em to change? Why is our way right?" (Francine) [31]

But Francine and many others were discussing veils. Indeed, we found that the piece of coarse white cloth in the box was frequently chosen as an object by our respondents. Christine, on the other hand, was also concerned about the picture of a woman who was not wearing a veil.

> "She's not covered up, her eyes and her face are not covered up but her hair is and all of her skin and everything is covered up." (Christine) [32]

Although several of the interview subjects noted that women and men dressed differently in veiling cultures, we suggest that the recurring theme of veiling or covering up is relevant to the anxiety we may feel toward those we do not understand. The metaphor of the veil reveals the concern with things hidden.

> "Marlee: I think that (most people) think that Muslim people are mysterious. You know, (they've) got that dark skin and dark eyes and that. And ...
>
> Interviewer: Are you using the word mysterious as appearance?
>
> Marlee: It's the whole thing. That they wear the veils and do different things that we don't know about. Just a completely different culture that we're not. We just don't know about it all." [33]

We suggest, from the many references to veiling, and later to the respondents' self-reports of being ignorant of Islam, and the anxiety several expressed about the potential to learn more about Islam, that the veiling is a metaphor for the unknown, and this is the source of the distress associated with the choice of the coarse white fabric. [34]

3.2 Knowledge

Perhaps the most striking finding we discovered was the lack of information most of our respondents had about Islam. There were two groups of responses which indicated lack of information or ignorance about the religion of Islam. These were mistakenly blending or fusing religion with national identity, lack of information and misunderstanding of beliefs and rituals. [35]

3.2.1 Conflation with national identity

SHAHEEN has reported that Americans have habit of conflating Islam with Arabs, in spite of the fact that only about 12% of Muslims are Arabs (1997, p.5), and we found this tendency among our respondents. For example, many conflated Islam with Middle Eastern culture, and when asked to explain why they had chosen an object best expressing their feelings about Muslims, often reported that the object made them think of the desert, or of traditional Arabic style dress. For example, Reggie, a 24 year old black male fundamentalist said that the coarsely woven fabric in the box had reminded him of Muslims because of the headdresses that Saudi Arabian males wear, and also said:

> "That signifies Muslims. Also, I picked it out because you know a lot of Muslims are (into) agriculture and stuff like that, like over in the Middle East, so I picked it out so maybe they could use it to put goods in and stuff." [36]

1Although the United States has a roughly one percent Muslim population, their existence seemed invisible to many respondents. Indeed, with about one and a half billion Muslims in the world population, most of whom are not living in the Middle East, it is intriguing that the religion was often understood as a marker for place of origin, particularly among people who sometimes expressed anxiety about becoming converted to Islam if they were to study it. Respondents also often expressed ignorance of the doctrines or beliefs and rites of Muslims, as we found when they sometimes attempted to discuss these with us. [37]

3.2.2 Lack of information

Some respondents were familiar with the five pillars of Islam[3], and at least one (Murray) had even read some of the prophet Mohammed's words, however, we also found stunning misconceptions about Islamic belief and practice. Linda, for example, expressed her belief that Muslims pray to objects rather than to god when she said they pray a certain amount of times a day to different objects. Although she is correct that devout Muslims pray several times a day, the suggestion that they pray to objects is quite inaccurate. [38]

3 These five are the *shahada*, or recitation: "there is no god but god, and Muhammed is his prophet," *salat*, or five times daily prayer, *zakat*, or giving to the poor, *sawm*, fasting at Ramadan, and *hajj*, the pilgrimage to Mecca.

Lakeeta suggested that Muslims use incense in their rituals:

> "This looks a lot like a terra cotta, it reminds me of a terra cotta pot and the smell coming from it is smells like incense and that made me think of Muslims too because the views that I see on television because I see like smoke swirling or even not just Eastern Muslims but like black Muslims. Black American Muslims or whatever they're called. They use incense in a lot of their rituals." [39]

Shondra chose a candle to express her feelings about Muslims, and explained her choice this way:

> "The candle is used ... for meditation. I know some people, some Christians may use candles when they meditate ... so I chose that, thinking maybe Muslims do the same thing. I'm not sure." [40]

Shondra did not seem to realize that meditation is not a traditional form of Muslim prayer and in fact, among Muslims, prayer is often performed with the body, as in the motions on the prayer rug or the whirling of the male Sufi dervishes. [41]

Linda also thought that Muslims pray to the sun, as evidenced by her choice of a small bag that reminded her of the sun:

> "And this little bag here, I picked it. I was looking, I was looking at that as maybe being a sun. I know that they, by reading I think I can remember that they, they pray to like different things and I think the sun was one of them. And that's why I picked that." [42]

While there is no doubt that many of our respondents were unaware of important facets of Islam, it is interesting to note that the ignorance was rather mixed. Shondra, for example, understood the necessity of the pilgrimage to Mecca, but then said this when explaining why she had chosen a cup to represent her feelings about Muslims:

> "I wasn't sure if they had different ceremony drinks or something that they do when they have ceremonies, but I chose the cup because of the drinks that they may be needed and I thought 'cause like, Christians they have communion and they ... drink wine, some people drink grape juice, so ..." [43]

The researchers had rated knowledge of any of the five pillars of Islam as an above average knowledge level. Even though Shondra ranks above average in her knowledge based on those criteria, she also seems to have also used her imagination about Islam to inform her choices of items for the study. This is interesting primarily because of past attempts to quantify knowledge of Islam. [44]

In the PEW study (2002), respondents were asked to either self-report their level of knowledge of Islam, or to identify the Islamic sacred book and the Islamic name of god. We suggest that the ability to identify these two words is not necessarily associated with knowledge of Islam. [45]

In addition to the mixed levels of knowledge that Shondra expressed, another respondent, Linda, spontaneously mentioned the Koran as the Muslim holy book and Allah as the Islamic name for god. This same respondent, however, reported that Muslims pray to objects, possibly including the sun. Those familiar with Islam know that idol worship is so sharply forbidden that no representations of created beings may be depicted in mosques. A visitor there may find words or letters adorning the walls, but absolutely no images of people or things. Linda would have been ranked in the PEW study as having a rather high knowledge of Islam, but clearly has no sense of the religion's tenets. This is one argument for supplementing survey with interview research, and particularly when exploring questions of meaning. [46]

As in the PEW study (2002), few of our respondents felt that they knew a lot about the Muslim religion. It is interesting to note that the PEW survey also found that respondents who were most likely to know the names of the book and the god were also more likely to rate Muslims and Islam far more favorably than those who know little or nothing about Islam (p.19). [47]

In the PEW study, respondents gave their own opinions of their knowledge level of the Muslim religion, with approximately 34% reporting "a great deal or some knowledge" of Islam (p.18). However, it is possible that even these respondents may have thought that they knew much more than they actually did know about Islam. [48]

Although willing to make sometimes sweeping statements about Muslims, many of the respondents in this study realized that they did not know very much at all about Muslims and their religion. Here, then, is the avenue of hope for the instructor planning to bridge the gaps in knowledge of Islam among our predominantly Christian students. [49]

3.3 Emotional ambivalence (fear and love)

We found that respondents expressed some anxiety in discussing what they did and did not know about Islam. For example, it was suggested that remaining ignorant of Islam was a good and safe strategy. Welton, for example, after choosing a large black marker as one of his objects, said:

> "If a Muslim approached you in a situation it just seems like if they taught and they expressed their ideas and beliefs and things upon and they just expressed you what the Muslim religion meant and what you would get out of it, it just seems like they left a mark on me. That's what I really thought about that. I mean they put a mark, and being a black marker, they put a dark mark on you because it's like they want you to see it. You know they want you to get their point so they put a mark on you." [50]

His response suggests that simply learning about Islam could taint the listener or reader. Lakeeta, in addition, reported that she was afraid to read the Koran, because it might lead her to question her beliefs.

> "I'm not going to read it. I'm not going to read it ... I'm just not going to read it. I know it doesn't talk about the Lord Jesus Christ. And um people who are really into the Koran, they're ritually, they're ritual type people. They—it's very scary to me. I was told not—I was told that the Bible is the Bible. The Bible is what it is. The Bible is God's word and that's what you should believe. And that's how I believe. I strongly believe in the Bible. I don't see a need to read the Koran ... I'm going to say that it opens, it would open up doors that should not be opened. I'm afraid that it would—some things are better left alone. I believe that that's one of the kind of things that are better left alone." [51]

Lakeeta does not seem reluctant to read from the Koran in this exchange merely because it is not her own religion, but because she believes that it may be able to exert power over her if she were to examine it. Welton also expressed this anxiety about talking too much to Muslims.

> "If you listen to Muslims and you're drilled by a certain amount of time, sooner or later something is gonna try to sink into your mind and you're gonna hear it, you know, you're gonna try to…do something or you might even change your religion." [52]

Mabel was more direct when she said "I might stay away from them, scared that they'll bring me in." [53]

We found these sorts of answers rather startling, as they seemed to come from some of the most outspokenly religious people that we interviewed. These people have strong beliefs about the universe, god and the place of humans in the universe, and believe that these are unchanging and absolutely true. Yet at the same time, they fear that contact with Islam will change their beliefs or infect them. The existence of suicide bombers had given some of our respondents the impression that Muslims are more devout than are they. Indeed, some respondents reported that Muslims are more devoted to their faith, more certain, and more confident than they are. These comments suggest the idea that Islam is stronger than Christianity, as it is capable of overpowering ones' own faith system merely by learning about it. We suspect that these respondents believe in contagious magic, that is, that the act of touching or examining something which they believe is bad can make the examiner take on those bad traits inherent in the other. It is interesting to find magic among Christians, and particularly among evangelical born again Christians who may report a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, because magic is, by definition, an impersonal set of formulas by which humans may manipulate the supernatural (HOWELLS, 1962, p.48). Perhaps this is the sentiment underlying the fundamentalist concern with educational advancement in general, if education on a topic is capable of contaminating the learner. [54]

Unfortunately for those in academe and elsewhere who are trying to establish a more comprehensive education about other cultures in our diverse student population, some students may be afraid to learn more about others. As SPITZBERG and CUPACH (1984) contend, competent communication requires that the communicator have three areas of strength: knowledge, motivation, and

skill. In other words, many of these students lack the motivation required to enhance knowledge, much less skill. In fact, they appear to be motivated to do the opposite—to *avoid* knowledge and skill. This poses as particular challenge when addressing students who may believe that such involvement may damn them to eternal torment. Hence, we have suggested elsewhere (McKENZIE & PEVEY, 2006) that diversity educators in the U.S. use caution in making parts of the Koran required reading for their predominantly Christian student populations, as this may cause extreme distress among student. Instead, a more general discussion of form and content of a variety of religions and religious texts might be more appropriate when incorporating cultural diversity education into the classroom. [55]

Many of the interview participants also expressed a dislike or fear of Muslims. Half reported feeling afraid or cautious of Muslims, while six stated that they believe Muslims are violent. [56]

Although Reggie said that terrorists distort our views of Muslims, his associations of Muslims with terrorism and bombs were among the most pronounced of all those we interviewed. Suicide bombings were often cited as a reason to fear Muslims, and the belief that Muslims are going to hell for not believing that Jesus is the Messiah was also cited when the respondents discussed their feelings of discomfort regarding Muslims. [57]

Our respondents reported that Muslims were misguided, pitiable, and subject to the domination of those in authority. In spite of their wrong beliefs and unfathomable behaviors, the Christians we interviewed believed that it was their responsibility as Christian to love Muslims anyway. The respondents seemed to perceive themselves as tolerant and loving of Muslims, even though many feared and disliked them. [58]

One respondent in particular, Reggie, made frequent reference to violence in expressing his feelings about Muslims, and he also frequently stated that he had nothing against them. Reggie's apparent contradictions between thinking of Muslims as violent and thinking of Muslims as peaceful may reflect the disjuncture between attitudes and emotions that the ZMET was originally designed to capture. That is, when asked about his feelings, Reggie chooses items representing violence. But later in the interview, when he began discussing his own religion in depth, Reggie reports that Muslims are actually peaceful, and pretty good people in general. [59]

Alberta chose a set of headphones as one of the items expressing her feelings about Muslims, and she explained their relevance this way: "I can block what they might say to me so that way you know ... I can listen to them and not really hear them by having my, these headphones on." Yet when asked which emotion from the list she would choose to express her feelings about Muslims, she had this to say:

> "Well, you know I'm very confident in what I believe in so I think confident would be a good word ... I'm confident (in) how I feel about them and I know that they're

> confident in their religion and their beliefs, but I am overwhelmed that they don't believe in the same thing I believe in, but I'm confident ..." [60]

Mabel, who had earlier expressed fear of being brought in by association with Muslims, said that she also had hope the world in spite of the various cultures, when she said:

> "I think as Christians we're supposed to … not look at color or not look at race or culture or anything and once we do that, then, you know, these people will be recognized and they will be valued … as part of God's world." [61]

What is not clear in her answer is whether or not she believes that they can be brought in as a Muslim part of "God's world." These and other responses may provide a direction for pedagogical structure among those interested in bridging the gap between the religions everywhere. [62]

One respondent, Rhonda, stated that she believes that Muslims are more true to their faith, or more likely to practice purity than are Christians. She defined purity as:

> "following the teachings and abiding by the teaching that have been set forth by a religion. That's what it pretty much means to me ... and honoring whoever the god is ... religion is more important to Muslims than Christians ... they pretty much stick with the teachings." [63]

Even Reggie, who continually returned to the theme of violence to express his feelings about Muslims, had this to say about their goodness, "I feel sorry for them because ... a lot of them, ... are ... peaceful people ... and really pretty good people ... I think they got it kinda rough, Muslims." [64]

In spite of his report that they are good, and peaceful, Reggie also believed that they were going to hell because they were not Christian. Rhonda, however, did not believe that Muslims are going to hell, even though she reports a belief in hell. She believes that they respect the religions of others. She reported that she did not have negative feelings toward Muslims and that she might actually switch from Christianity to Islam. [65]

4. Discussion

This interview project examined the attitudes and feelings of Christians toward Muslims. Although the sample was very small and not randomly selected, the findings are an intriguing suggestion for further research. We found that most of our highly religious self-selected Christian respondents knew very little about Islam, that several of them believed that Muslims were going to go to hell, and that many of them expressed anxiety regarding learning more about Islam. [66]

DOUGLAS (1966) argues that feelings of boundary violation or threat from outsiders are behind the imposition of many regulations on society's members. Welton's comment: "it just seems like they left a mark on me" seems to speak to

this issue, and also to illuminate the confusion in the sacred spaces. DOUGLAS also suggested that when something falls into an in-between category, or is ambiguous, it is more likely to be considered dangerous by society. In other words, the less able we are to categorize something, the more likely we are to believe it is a threat to society. For Christians, who are instructed to love everyone (even turning the other cheek if stricken on the first), the job of actually having to love people who may actively hate them could be particularly marginalizing. In addition and outside of all known boundaries, Fundamentalist and Evangelical Christians in particular may need to find a way to categorize people they perceive as extraordinarily devout yet absolutely wrong. These two branches of Christianity are renowned in the U.S. for being more likely than any other Christian group to believe that the Bible must be interpreted literally. Indeed, in his discussion of fundamentalists from major religions, SWATOS (2001) notes that fundamentalism is the tendency to accept a "text without context." But fundamentalists also typically believe that women should be subordinate to their husbands, and that modernity is dangerous. Fundamentalists and Evangelical Christians have been a powerful voting block in the U.S., and the George W. Bush administration has been sharply criticized for discussing global political matters as well as election strategies with leaders in these organizations. Our sample was predominantly Fundamentalist and Evangelical, and the respondents often admired what they perceive as the devotion of Muslims, yet may be expressing anxiety or confusion at the proposition that something other than Christianity could legitimately provoke devotion. [67]

This intriguing case of cognitive dissonance may be due, in part, to the negative portrayals of Arabs and Muslims in U.S. culture. SHAHEEN (1997) has documented twenty years of negative stereotyping of Arabs and Muslims in U.S. media and suggests that because terrorists of other faiths are not identified by their faith when discussed in news reports as is the case with Muslims, that the American public has a negatively skewed impression of the Islamic religion ingrained in their consciousness. These pervasive negative stereotypes and biased reporting may have influenced the Christian subjects of this study to almost automatically report negative feelings about Muslims. [68]

Respondents were given a chance at the end of the interview to tell us what question they would have asked, had they been conducting the interview. In other words, did the respondent believe that we had omitted an important question? Four of our respondents would have checked on the sincerity of Christian belief among the interview subjects. Mindy, who had earlier been brought to tears when discussing the terrible things which happened on 9/11 as well as during the Crusades, wanted to make sure that all the interviewees were faithful Christians, and not just extrinsically religious, or culturally religious.

> "I don't think that just going to church makes you a Christian, just praying makes you a Christian. I believe that it's personal daily sacrifice, walk with Jesus. And so that's what, you know, like when I read the flyer I was like how do you know? I just would just ask them (potential respondents) what it means to you to be a Christian because I think that that's places you in a different, a different category." (Mindy) [69]

This is illustrative of the idea of anxiety we believe that many of our respondents felt when discussing Muslims and Islam. The anxiety seemed rooted in the desire that Christians in our interviews make a good showing for themselves, in order for us to understand the true nature of Christianity. Yet, as earlier comments illustrate, comparative study is unlikely to be considered a valid means to a deeper understanding of the meaning of Christianity. As with those making policy in Oceania's government in ORWELL's (1949) *1984*, ignorance is, for several of these respondents, strength. It provides safety from questions which have unsatisfactory or ambiguous answers. Faith is not an answer to doubt, but rather, *not* doubting is the answer to doubt. We found this particularly frustrating and suspect that other educators may also find this troubling as well. [70]

And yet, after the terrorist attack attributed to Muslims on September 11, 2001, Americans have been asking themselves why or how people of other nations could have so much hatred for the U.S. The spread of global communication networks is drawing us ever nearer people whose beliefs and/or practices may challenge the core of our sense of personal identity. The recent surge in numbers and power among U.S. Christian Evangelicals and Fundamentalists challenge educators to find new ways to motivate this important subset of the U.S. population to learn about religions other than their own. [71]

The study has several limitations. First, all respondents were self-selected, and the sample size is small. This prevents generalizability. As with most qualitative research, however, this method gives us an idea of range and the depth of the feelings of the respondents. Secondly, our choices for items for the box were not randomly chosen in the technical sense. In the future, scholars who are interested in pursuing this technique might find many more objects, draw them from a box without looking, and keep every 4th item for the respondent box. In other words, make object selection for respondent deliberation more random. [72]

In addition, it is possible that we have, as SCHMITT (2007) has cautioned against, overinterpreted the metaphors expressed by our participants. We have tried to avoid that, however, by having the respondents elaborate on their meanings when discussing their chosen metaphor. [73]

Finally, our method was admittedly unusual. We believe, however, that we are in a better position to explore attitudes or feelings which contradict socially accepted norms and values by using this method, and in so doing, gain more insight into attitudes and beliefs which the respondents themselves may not realize they carry. Respondents often gave "politically correct" answers from a Christian perspective, but when asked to use the objects and other metaphor/feeling tools, sometimes they said quite negative things about Muslims. In spite of its limitations, we encourage other researchers to try this and other inventive methods to help uncover feelings and meanings of respondents. [74]

While there may be more quantifiable methods for examinations of the disconnect between attitudes and feelings, such as the Implicit Association Test (see ROWATT, FRANKLIN, & COTTON, 2005), we believe that the ZMET offers

more in-depth insight and nuance because it encourages respondents to draw from their own psyches and projections, rather than from words and images pre-selected by researchers. [75]

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Appendix 1[4]

Box contents

(* indicates items chosen at least once):

Figure 1: Papier-mâché statue of man carrying baskets of beans and rice *

4 There is no photograph for some of the items listed in Appendix 1. We did not anticipate such interest in photos of the objects. Upon completion of the project, some of the items were simply lost or destroyed. For example, the "French for the Humanities" book went to a thrift store, the chocolate tulip was eaten, and the copy of the magazine advertisement was thrown in the garbage.

Figure 2: Cotton hat with "Costa Rica" printed on the front *

Figure 3: Empty roll for quarters *

Figure 4: Large binder clip *

Figure 5: Empty purple satin drawstring bag with small golden lettering "UP&UP NORTH: Jewellery & Accessories: ... Australia *

Figure 6: Natural colored cotton crocheted placemat *

Figure 7: Audio cassette tape *

Figure 8: Packet of Long Life Organic White Tea *

Figure 9: Empty Christmas gift bag with two bells and holly design (6 x 4.5 inches) *

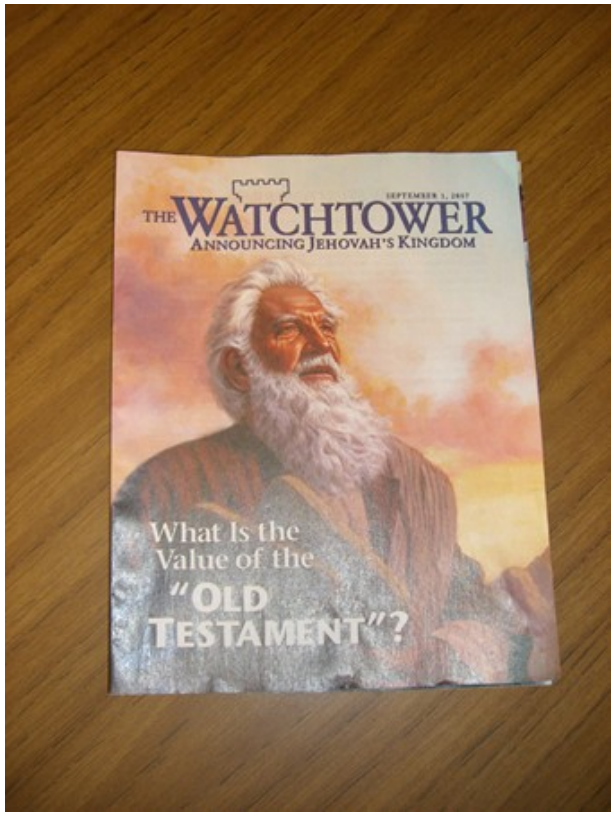

Figure 10: Watchtower magazine

Figure 11a: Boggle game that was taped shut with mailing tape and had hourglass included side view*

Figure 11b: Boggle game that was taped shut with mailing tape and had hourglass included top view

Figure 12: Smooth river rock *

Figure 13: White cotton fabric bag approximately 12 by 24 inches *

Figure 14: Blue candle in terracotta pot *

Figure 15: Bookmark "How far that little candle throws his beams! So shines a good deed in a naughty world." with cord and metallic book charm attached *

Figure 16: Book: French for the Humanities * (missing)

Figure 17: Blue SOLO cup *

Figure 18: Bottle of Tums antacids *

Figure 19: Wooden gavel *

Figure 20: Gateway mouse pad with cow design

Figure 21: Large black Magic Marker *

Figure 22: Rechargeable laptop battery *

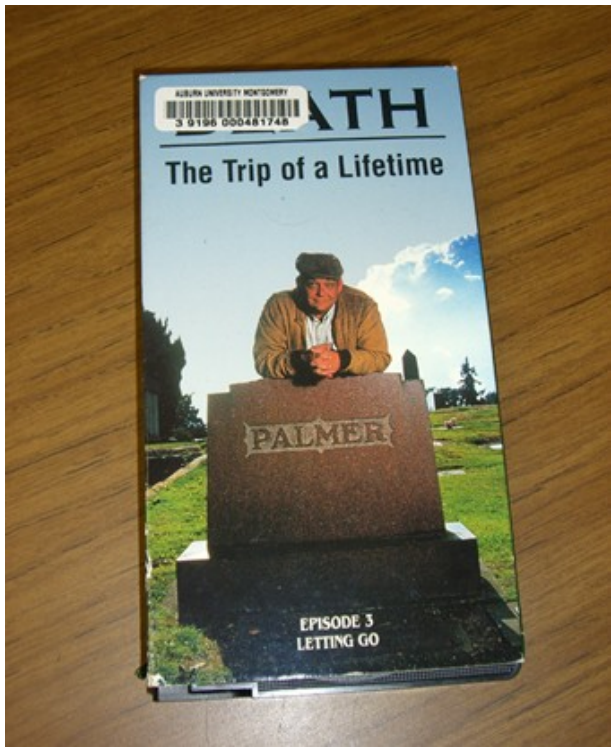

Figure 23: Video "Death, the trip of a lifetime" *

Figure 24: Crucifix (2 inches long) on multicolored crocheted lanyard *

Figure 25: Sunblock *

Figure 26: Copy of magazine ad reading "stereotyped, pigeon-holed, unrepresented and glass ceiling" "The Power of Diversity" * (missing)

Figure 27: 3 ½ inch floppy disk *

Figure 28: Travel clock *

Figure 29: Chocolate tulip wrapped in pink foil on plastic stem * (missing)

Figure 30: Stuffed cloth Dachshund with Mardi Gras jester hat *

Figure 31: Compass * (missing)

Figure 32: Clear blank name tag

Figure 33: Assorted items

Figure 34a: Full box of items, side view

Figure 34b: Full box of items, top view

Figure 35: Circle board

Appendix 2

Guiding questions

1. Describe the content of each item.
2. Describe any pictures or objects the respondent was unable to locate and explain the relevance.
3. Sort the pictures or objects into meaningful piles.
4. Explain the basic ideas and how they are related. Say that we are going to show the subject several pairs of objects and will repeat this several times. Then pick out three pictures at random and ask the respondent to tell us how two are similar to each other but different from the third. Repeat until no new constructs are elicited.
5. How would you describe the touch of your feelings about Muslims?
6. Looking at these tastes, or thinking of some other flavor or taste, what is the taste of your feelings toward Muslims? Sweet Sour Salty Bitter Spicy
7. How would you describe the smell of your feelings about Muslims?
8. How would you describe the sound of your feelings about Muslims?
9. How would you describe the color of your feelings about Muslims?
10. Please read the following words and tell us which of these words, or some other word we did not list best describes your own feeling toward Muslims. Angry Anxious Ashamed Bored Cautious Confident Depressed Disgusted Embarrassed Enraged Frightened Frustrated Guilty Happy Hopeful Hysterical Jealous Lonely Love-struck Mischievous Overwhelmed Sad Shocked Shy Smug Surprised
11. Please choose the most representative picture/object of your feelings about Muslims.
12. How is that representative of your feelings?

13. If you had to pick out one picture or object, which would you say best describes your feelings about Israel? Why? What about it?
14. If you had been involved in choosing the questions and doing these interviews, what question would you have asked that we have not asked? What is your own answer to that?

Appendix 3

Brief survey

1. The Bible is the word of God and is to be taken literally, word for word.

Agree strongly	Agree	Disagree	Disagree strongly
1	2	3	4

2. Right and wrong are not usually a simple matter of black and white; there are many shades of gray.

Agree strongly	Agree	Disagree	Disagree strongly
1	2	3	4

3. Immoral actions by one person can corrupt society in general.

Agree strongly	Agree	Disagree	Disagree strongly
1	2	3	4

4. Open discussions of other religions may lead believers to question their faith.

Agree strongly	Agree	Disagree	Disagree strongly
1	2	3	4

5. Would you best characterize yourself as fundamentalist, moderate or liberal Christian?

(Please circle the word in the above sentence that best describes your Christianity.)

6. Which of the following best describes how often you attend church?

___Never

___Once a year or less

___2-6 times a year

___7-11 times a year

___1-3 times a month

___Once a week

___2-3 times a week

___Several times a week

7. About how often do you pray?

___Several times a day

___Once a day

___Less than once a week

___Never

___Don't know

8. How close do you feel to God most of the time?

___Extremely close

___Somewhat close

___Not very close

___Not close at all

9. Which of the following best expresses your view of the Bible?

___The Bible is God's Word and all it says is true.

___The Bible was written by men inspired by God, and its basic moral and religious teachings are true, but because the writers were men, it contains some human error.

___The Bible is a valuable book because it was written by wise and good people, but God had nothing to do with it.

___The Bible was written by men who lived so long ago that it is of little value today.

___Other (please explain) _____

_____

10. Which of the following best expresses your opinion concerning miracles?

___I believe that miracles sometimes happen in our current times.

___I believe that miracles only happened in Biblical times.

___I do not believe in miracles.

___I do not have an opinion about miracles.

___Other (please explain:) _____

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