

A GUIDE TO MUSLIM WOMEN

*What You Always
Wanted to Know*

Farhana Qazi

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Acknowledgements

I want to thank my students. Without them, this ebook would not have been possible. In the classroom, they listen to what I have to say. They come with open minds. They show a willingness to learn about an unfamiliar faith. My students are defense analysts, military men and women in uniform, policymakers, and civilians. They are also foreign liaison officers. In the classroom, I am both an instructor and a student. I learn as much from my students as they may have learned from me. Our sharing of knowledge is mutual.

I wish to acknowledge the guidance of my Christian and Jewish professors who have taught me more about Islam than I could have ever imagined. They have encouraged me to embrace my faith. They are professors Eric Selbin, Jerold Post, Sherra Babcock, and Suzanne Chamier. And of course, my two children, Khalid and Maryam, who always ask me about religion. From them, I have learned that faith is a deeply personal and an ongoing journey.

“Excellent. Understanding Islam helped me more than any other block of information I have received in my five and a half years of military experience. This is in my opinion the result of the experience of the instructor.”

“Understanding Islam was most valuable. I think it's nice to bring people back to reality that we aren't fighting Islam and Muslims. We are fighting terrorism and the media has distorted the views.”

“Farhana had a passion for what she was speaking about and it made me more interested. I'm so glad to learn about true Islam.”

Contents

Introduction.....	7
1. Who is a Muslim woman?.....	12
2. What does she wear?	14
3. Can she speak to men?	19
4. Can she date and fall in love?	22
5. Can a woman divorce?	24
6. Can she work?	26
7. Can she fight?	28
Bonus: Five More Cultural Cues.....	31
About the Author	33

Introduction

Islam is flexible. Islam is dynamic. With over a billion Muslims in the world, Islam is practiced differently in different communities and countries. It is a religion in which are multiple movements, groups and sects.

Just take a look at Muslim women in America. Some wear the *hijab* or headscarf. Some pray. Some drink. Some hang out at hookah bars. Some regularly attend prayer service on Friday afternoons. Some dance, in private or in public. Some are single, married, or divorced. Some have children. Some work because they want to have a career. Others work because they have to. And some are proud to be Muslim.

American Muslim women include converts and Muslim immigrant families whose birthplace is somewhere else. I came from an immigrant family. I was born in Pakistan and raised in the American southwest. In my home, I've seen my parents practice Islam according to their own traditions and beliefs. Even though they could not agree on what was right or wrong in Islam, they always sided with each other on culture.

“ *Culture trumps religion.* ”

Culture helps explain why Muslims vary. Like men, women are influenced by their upbringing and environment. They are affected by family traditions, ancient customs, and values rooted in a specific culture and/or country. Women are swayed by *other* women. In my case, most women in my family do not wear the *hijab*. It was not a part of their tradition. Neither was learning Arabic, the language of Islam, though women did

read the Quran, the holy book in its original tongue. Only in later years did I grow to appreciate the headscarf and admire women who choose it; and I began to understand the importance of understanding Arabic, rather than just memorizing sacred verses.

In my current position, I teach Islam. For my students, who are mostly American military analysts and soldiers, there is a fascination with Muslim women. I have become the go-to-Muslim-poster-child. I am asked all kinds of questions, from why I don't cover to dating a non-Muslim. These are all valid questions, which is why I created this ebook.

This short guide to understanding women in Islam is written in a question-and-answer format. This cultural guide is not the final word but one voice within the Muslim world—it is *my* humble voice, based on years of research, travel, and study of Islam and Muslims. Please share it with anyone and everyone.

Who am I?

I am an American-Muslim woman. I answer questions about Islam and Muslim women in conflict. Who are they? *Who am I?* What do Muslim women wear or *not* wear? Do they date? Is divorce allowed? What are Muslim women fighting for? And what is Islam, anyway? All these questions are relevant. They make me painfully aware of how important it is to take a 'deep dive' approach to learning. They also speak to a larger personal issue that has formed my identity as an American citizen, a spiritual woman, and a committed writer and speaker.

Years ago, I began to ask myself the same questions when I was a young intelligence officer. At the age of 25, I lived Islam

when I joined the Central Intelligence Agency. I helped answer basic questions about the differences between a Sunni and a Shia Muslim. I tried to debunk the myth that Islam is violent or Muslim women are weak and wounded (read victims of traditions and tyrants). In five years, I worked tirelessly to convey the message that Islam is a faith of mercy, despite being beaten and bruised by radicals and the religious right. And then I left.

So many people ask me why I resigned. I have no one answer. I have many answers. First, I served my country with honor and humility. I am proud of the people I worked with—people who believe in a mission that protects all Americans at home and abroad. Secondly, I believed I needed to be in the Counter-Terrorism Center to diffuse anti-Muslim bigotry and biases that was a constant challenge. The day I resigned, a senior manager said to me, “I am an atheist. But I see slander against Islam every day in my email inbox. How did you deal with it?” I smiled. I had to think and respond carefully. “You have to pick your battles,” I said.

Third, I was a highly respected and revered team player—the Center gave me several awards for outstanding performance, including a golden plaque presented to me at a farewell party. That brought me to tears. At the event, I remember telling the packed room of case officers and analysts, “Within the first three months, a senior analyst asked me, ‘How did they let *you* in here?’ I had no response. I was too stunned to reply. But I knew then that I had to prove to you and to myself that I am a Muslim. I am an American. And it is possible to be both.”

For me, a key question has always been this: What is it like to be a Muslim woman in America? Over the years, so many people have asked about my career choices as a U.S. government intelligence officer, an international policy analyst and

now, an instructor for the United States military. You can call me a storyteller and a die-hard researcher. I am one woman searching for the truth about *other* Muslim women in conflict with themselves or women who live with the wounds of war. I aim to tell their stories. I admire their struggles and sacrifices these women have made to protect their children, community and country.

Each time someone presents me with a question on Islam and Muslim women, I stop. I think about the role of religion. How important is Islam? How influential is culture? In the classroom, I say out loud *culture counts*.

Ten years of research—talking to Muslim women and their men—has made me accept that traditions and tales of the past (i.e., this is what we might call mythologies) are important to people deeply rooted in a religion like Islam. For many in the West, storytelling may be a lost art, but in many cultures, stories are passed onto families to carry the legacy of local customs and cultural norms. [I believe in this:]

“*Telling tales is an important part of oral culture. Stories are passed from one generation to another. It keeps families alive.*”

One of the core classes I teach is on Islam and the women of the faith. It's a hot-button issue. I have found that male students are intrigued by Muslim women. They question her role in society. What does she *really* want? Is a Muslim woman approachable? Why does she look invisible? (I suppose I can understand why this question is repeated, as I can imagine how women draped in long, black veils could be viewed as unsociable, unapproachable and maybe unfriendly.)

The discussion on gender may be oversimplified and overhyped, but it matters to most Americans I meet. Whether it is the veil controversy (is it a symbol of resistance and reform?) or women in power (how do women rise to the top?), my classes have taught me an important message about Islam and women—there is a genuine and growing interest to understand Islam. What it stands for. What it means for American converts and what it represents to me—an American Muslim woman who has chosen to teach a religion riddled with myths and misconceptions. And there is no better time than the present to talk about “taboo” topics, such as dating and divorce.

The core message of this ebook is to demonstrate diversity in Islam. [We’re all alike. And we’re all different too.] Certain principles are universal; others are not. Certain values are taught. Others are learned. In my own small way, I offer some answers to the most common questions about Islam in America and Muslims living abroad.

1.

Who is a Muslim woman?

A Muslim woman submits to the will of God. She follows Islam and its holy book, Quran. She believes in Prophet Muhammad and his family, including Khadija, his first wife (who was in her 40s when she proposed to a twenty-something Muhammad) and a successful businesswoman. While Muslim women share common beliefs, they are a diverse group. Remember,

“*No two Muslim women are alike.*”

A Muslim woman can be found almost anywhere, and she can look like anyone. She is African, Arab, Asian, and Caucasian. I have met Muslim women all around the world, even in countries I'd least suspect to find a Muslim woman, such as Italy. As my friend Janet tells me, I am a Punjabi-Pakistani American Muslim woman. (That's a lot to live up to.)

Contrary to popular myth, though, most Muslim women are *not* Arabs. They are Asians. Today, the top five most populated Muslim countries are Indonesia, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nigeria, Egypt, Turkey and the list goes on. Not a single Arab country is mentioned, unless you count Egypt, which also falls in the North Africa region.

In their book, *Who Speaks for Islam?: What A Billion Muslims Really Think*, John Esposito and Dalia Mogahed write:

“*Muslims come from diverse nationalities, ethnic and tribal groups, and cultures; speak many languages; and practice distinct customs. The majority of Muslims live in Asia and Africa, not the Arab world.*”

In the United States, there are an estimated three million American Muslims. That number could double to 6.2 million in 2030, according to a survey by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life. The numbers are a small indication of how diverse Muslims really are. “Religiously, culturally, economically and politically, there are multiple images and realities of Islam and Muslims.” (Esposito & Mogahed)

Therefore, it is fair to say that there is no “one” Muslim voice. Instead, there is a symphony of opinions, judgments, norms, and practices. To say the Muslim world is different and diverse is a cliché, even though it’s true. Each person’s faith is influenced by culture, tradition, family, friends, and so much more.

It’s the same for any person of any faith. A Muslim who attends Friday prayer and other services is no different than my Catholic girlfriend who chooses to go to church on Sundays because she’s been doing that as a child—it’s what she believes in. A Muslim without the headscarf who says she is a spiritual woman is no different than my Jewish professor who does not attend Sabbath but believes in Jewish principles. No doubt, faith is *very* personal.

2.

What does she wear?

Anything. Everything. Or as an American female scholar said to me jokingly, “Nothing at all!”

For most Americans, the image of a Muslim woman is one who is disempowered. She is subservient to the men in her family. She dresses modestly, which means she likely wears the *hijab* (she covers everything except her hands and her face. But the opposite can also be true. Some Muslim women are independent. They are proud to assert themselves. Some women cover. Some don’t.

The veil controversy can be caustic and choking. For Sunita Mehta, the co-founder of the Women for Afghan Women (WAW) group in New York, a *burqa* or a full-length dress is belittling. “We just don’t want to talk about the burqa,” she said, “But when it is brought up—usually by American women—we explain that it is not an issue for Afghan women. The issue is war, disease, hunger, famine, and the Afghan women in our group do not want to make it the focus of our group or our work.” But whether Mehta likes it or not, the veil is a sexy subject (no pun intended). It arouses suspicion and creates curiosity, at least from men. *Who is hiding beneath the cloth? What does she look like? Is she beautiful? And, why does she look invisible?*

In the classroom, I put on the veil. I bring different kinds of scarves and shawls to show students that the garment can

be non-threatening. It is not meant to terrorize or terrify. It is an accessory for some Muslim women, like a ring on her finger. Female students try on the scarves and I show them how it can be used to cover their hair. Some pull out their iPhones to take pictures with me. It's a fun exercise. As their instructor, it is refreshing and riveting to see American women accept a piece of garment that may have been unfamiliar and uncomfortable.

For some girls and women worldwide, the veil is liberating. It allows women to work in countries that believe in the separation of the sexes. And a woman wearing the veil in some countries is seen as honorable, respectable, and chaste. Just a single cloth over a woman's head (and her breast) changes the way that Muslim men view her. It may sound unfair and unjust, but I have accepted the perceptions attached to the veil.

These varied views reflect the intense struggle among Muslim women about honor, modesty, and shame. A British Muslim convert and former Catholic, Sarah Joseph, dons the veil for religious reasons. On a television interview, Joseph says, "the hijab is an outward sign of inward grace to achieve modesty." Egyptian-born New York feminist, Mona el-Tahawy, counters her. "I oppose the veil everywhere. It dangerously equates piety with women's disappearance."

Not all American Muslim women agree with El-Tahawy. American-born Heba Ahmed wears the niqab, showing only her small, brown eyes. She is a blogger for MuslimMatters.org from (Arizona) and makes regular media appearances. On CNN, she said, "The first Amendment gives me the right to practice my religion. The niqab is not against the Constitution of the United States." She argues for a different kind of empowerment.

Perhaps the larger question at the heart of the veil is the good versus the bad Muslim woman. And who has the right to make that judgment? Anyone and everyone has an opinion. Some Islamic (male) scholars use the Quran and oral traditions to argue that the face-veil is mandatory while others claim a woman is required to shield the head and body, but not her face. And then there are countless women (and nameless men) who have another opinion—no veil is necessary.

The diversity of opinions means there is no agreement on the issue, which leaves the veil to be a complex and controversial subject for decades to come.

A Glossary of Islamic Dress

Commonly used terms that describe the different kinds of Islamic dress for women are described below. All these terms are used synonymously for the veil. Some are fashionable and sexy, according to *Single in the City* columnist, Rym Tina Ghazal, who writes from The United Arab Emirates. Others are not so chic and can be uncomfortable or undesirable.

The following descriptions have been taken from the BBC, http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/islam/beliefs/niqab_1.shtml

Abaya – common in Arab Gulf countries. Typically black and a full-length cover once worn by the rich and noble in the eighth century Abbasid Islamic Empire. It can be made to fit and comes in all styles and for all occasions—the athletic abaya versus the dinner party abaya with gold lining.

Al-Amira – a two-piece veil. A fitting cap is worn under a longer scarf.

Burqa – a South Asian term used in Afghanistan and Pakistan; it has been called ‘tent-like’ which means the garment is loose-fitting and covers the entire body, even the face. Viewed as the most concealing of all Islamic veils. Often comes in black, white and blue.

Chador – a Parsi term used by women in Iran; a full-length loose-fitting cloth that conceals the entire body, with a smaller scarf underneath to cover the hair.

Hijab – the classical Arabic term is generally accepted by most Muslim women in the West and worldwide; it is typically a small cloth that covers the hair and neck and comes in a kaleidoscope of styles and shapes. An Arab girlfriend from Kuwait always wore her Hermes scarf and tied it in a way to display the trendy label.

Jilbab – Arabic for any long, loose-fitting garment worn by Muslim women. Also called a galebeya and caftan; comes in an array of colors and captivating designs, which you can find at <http://www.aljilbab.com/>

Khimar – covers the hair, neck and shoulders, leaving the face to be seen. The cloak stops short of a woman’s waist.

Niqab – an Arabic word used to describe a cloth that covers the face, sometimes accompanied with a separate eye-veil that is worn by many conservative and convert women.

Pardah – also spelled *purdah*, a word in the Persian language that literally means “curtain,” although in Hindi, *parda* is veil and was used as a decorative screen to separate women from men not in her family circle. Today, the word describes women in South Asia who do not enter the public space, and also refers to a cape-like garment that covers the body except the face.

Shayla – popular in the Arabian Gulf; a long shawl wrapped around the head and neck and pinned at the shoulder.

With all these terms, it's no wonder my American students and other Muslims are confused. All you have to remember is that for every Muslim woman, to wear or not to wear the veil is a personal decision.

3.

Can she speak to men?

Yes.

When I was traveling inside Pakistan, I stopped in the tribal city of Quetta, which we identify as the hideout of Mullah Omar, the leader of the Taliban. I went to Quetta to meet the girls of the largest religious school or *madrasa*. In one meeting with seventeen-year-old teachers, I was asked why I speak to American men. I didn't understand the question.

"How can you speak to foreign men? They are non-Muslim. Don't you believe in *hijab* over the voice?" A teenage teacher asked me, pointedly.

I was stunned. I looked around the room as dark eyes fixated on my every word. I smiled at the young group of women.

"Yes I believe in modesty," I responded. "And I know that Muslim women have the right to speak to other men. Look at Khadija!"

The women did not understand. They look puzzled. I want to think I hit a nerve. That was the moment when I realized that these women memorized a script taught to them by the men of the mosque and the school. They did not know Islamic history. They did not know the stories of powerful Muslim women. *How is that possible? How can a religious schoolteacher not know her own faith?*

“Remember, the Prophet’s first wife was an entrepreneur. She ran the caravan trade and Muhammad worked for her. She had to use her voice with other men in Arabia to run her business,” I said.

There was a silence in the room. Some of the girls nodded. No one said a word.

There is no rulebook titled *How To Talk to Muslim Women*. A quick search online led me to several websites with a “code of ethics” for Muslim men. According to one Islamic site, “a Muslim man can speak to a Muslim woman outside his family if he has no intention for lust and the speaking does not lead them to commit a sin.” In that case, a man should avoid women of all faiths.

Another site listed five things a Muslim man can say to a Muslim woman: he can ask about her health, her family, her finances, and her personality (to judge whether she will make a good wife, whatever that means), and to teach her about Islam. All of this sounds patriarchal and condescending to women.

Though I did find a semi-thoughtful guide entitled “How to Chat with Muslim Women” by an American woman in Colorado. She writes: Don’t stare. Don’t touch. Treat her with respect. Avoid inappropriate topics and subjects. And disregard stereotypes.

My American colleagues who served in the U.S. military remind me that rules for engagement apply to all women, anywhere. According to former Army officer Mike,

“*There’s no general rule in the U.S. military that we can’t look at Muslim women. Staring at a woman in any country is impolite. We are taught to be culturally sensitive.*”

Other American officers serving abroad have interacted with Muslim women, when necessary. A reserve officer in the U.S. Navy said, “I worked with Afghan women. One was the Deputy Minister. I waited for her to initiate contact. When she reached out her hand, I shook it.”

In other countries, talking or looking at a Muslim woman can create conflict. A former U.S. Marine officer stationed in Falluja, Iraq told me, “We were told not to look at them [the women].” Another said, “In my two tours to [villages in] Afghanistan, I never even saw a woman.”

All you have to remember is that a Muslim woman is not forbidden in Islam to speak to a man. Though often the men in a woman’s family and cultural norms will determine whether she is free to speak to a man, or not.

Can she date and fall in love?

Yes and she should, in my opinion.

I was not allowed to date. And I didn't know how. My Pakistani parents were too strict and scared to allow my sister and I to experiment with love. We had too many rules.

If you're lucky, you'll fall in love, at least once (if not twice) in your life. In college in Texas, I fell madly for a guy from Pakistan who came to America to study. It didn't work out and I didn't marry him. We discovered that we had too many differences. (We were both Muslims.)

Then I had an arranged marriage. It was my choice. Looking back now, I know I was too young to make that kind of decision. (I was 24 years old.) Perhaps it was not the best decision I made. After ten years, I had a divorce and two lovely children.

“Islam allows a woman to choose her lover and life partner. She has a right to fall in love.”

Like the veil debate, I've learned that there are far too many opinions on dating, love and marriage. To my American girlfriends, the idea of marrying a man you don't know (i.e., you have not slept with) is unconventional and uncommon. To my surprise, there are *fatwas* (legal edicts) on this subject. Sheikh Ahmad Tutty at the Islamic Institute in Toronto,

Canada issued a ruling: “In Islam, it is not a sin if you feel a special affinity or inclination towards a certain individual since human beings have no control on such natural inclinations.” However, he warned against sex *before* marriage. And yet, it’s so hard to be a virgin in America if you’re reading an article on “hot sex positions” in *Cosmopolitan* magazine and taught about the birds-and-the-bees in the fifth grade.

Today, women in many Muslim countries do not choose her future husband. In classes I teach on Pakistan, not all women have a choice. Western-educated Pakistani women from progressive families often select their spouse. Though it’s not always the case. Remember, the late democratic diva and leader of Pakistan, the Persian-eyed Benazir Bhutto, had an arranged marriage to the financial —, Asif Ali Zardari; he was voted President and ruled for five years after his wife was murdered on the streets of Rawalpindi in December 2007.

“*Marriage in most Muslim countries is a family affair.*”

Other elite women I know, from fashion designers to lawyers, also chose an arranged marriage. In countries like Afghanistan and Pakistan, women side with their family’s decision—even when a girl falls in love, she needs the blessing of her parents to move forward with her relationship.

5.

Can a woman divorce?

I call this the dirty “d” word. Why? For three reasons: divorce is believed to be displeasing to God; divorce can stigmatize a Muslim woman; and divorce often shames the entire family. In countries that value honor and the right of the family over the individual, divorce is despicable. I know from personal experience.

For years, I had to keep my separation and divorce a secret. It was too “shameful” to speak of it aloud. Keeping that kind of secret never worked for me. I had to be honest about my marital status. A woman like me could not hide from the world. Being a public speaker will do that to you.

What does Islam say about divorce? Well, it is permissible. It is not advisable, but it is allowed. A woman does not need to be abused or tortured to ask for a divorce. She can be in a ‘loveless’ marriage. That’s it. Two people can be incompatible. But saying we-just-don’t-click is often not considered a good enough reason to part ways. Of course, it all depends on the family.

The truth is that Muslims *do* divorce. While there are no accurate statistics, one study by Dr. Ilyas Ba-Yunus, a sociology professor at New York’s state university, found the overall divorce rate in the U.S. to be nearly fifty percent, and Canada is not far behind at forty-five percent. The highest divorce rate for Muslims is in the state of California (37%), with New York and Texas trailing behind at thirty percent.

In recent years, more Muslims are parting ways in America and other Western countries, including Australia, Canada, and the United Kingdom. Why? In Western countries, Muslim women have choices and opportunities that may not exist elsewhere. In other countries, women may be subject to cultural, familial, legal, patriarchal, and/or tribal pressure. Divorce is seldom an option for these women.

“*As an American woman, I have rights to the pursuit of liberty, life and happiness.*”

The key word is happiness. Muslim women, like women anywhere, have the right to be happy. If she is divorced, she has the right to remarry. To another Muslim. That's the rule.

6.

Can she work?

Yes. With or without the hijab, many Muslim women are professionals. They are artists, authors, doctors, educators, engineers, lawyers, musicians, mathematicians, scientists, and zoologists.

In some Islamic countries, Muslim women have scored political victories. In Pakistan, Benazir Bhutto was elected twice as the head of the state. Before Bhutto, Fatimah Jinnah—the sister of the founder of Pakistan—left her dental practice to be politically active. In Indonesia, the most populous Muslim country, Megawati Sukarnoputri was elected President, and Bangladesh elected Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina as Prime Ministers. Even across the Arab world, Muslim women have been key to their husband's prestige and power. Queen Noor of the late King Abdullah in Jordan is a prime example.

On the other hand, there are women who prefer not to work. For example, my sister is a mother of three children under the age of ten. She has told me that raising children is a full-time job. In her spare time, she substitutes at a local school. When we were both young, we watched my mother get ready for work. "Women who work have two jobs. One job is at home taking care of the family and the other job is outside the home," Mama said.

“ *Some women work because they have to.
Others work because they want to.*

Finally, it should be noted that in some conservative Muslim families, work is discouraged. Women remain housewives while men are the breadwinners. But I believe as more girls demand an education, they will likely want to be employed.

Can she fight?

Yes. A woman has the right to defend herself, her home, and honor. This is one form of jihad, or defensive warfare. When teaching Islam, I tell my students that jihad is not holy war. Instead, jihad is a living, breathing concept that stems from the Arabic verb jahada, which means to strive. Thus, Muslims struggle in their daily lives to embrace what is good and reject evil.

“Jihad is a word that reflects a personal inner struggle.”

In seventh-century A.D., some Muslim women participated in the early battles of Islam to protect their messenger, Prophet Muhammad. The tales of these heroic women are recorded in Islamic literature and passed onto generations through storytelling.

One of the most glorified female fighters is Nusayba bint Ka'ab, also known as Umm Umarah (or mother of Umarah, her eldest son). She fought during the Battle of Uhud (625 C.E.), lost one arm and suffered eleven wounds while defending Prophet Muhammad. Other notable women included members of the Prophet's family. His wife, Ayesha, led the Battle of the Camel; his granddaughter, Zaynab bint Ali, fought in the Battle of Karbala, a city in modern-day Iraq; and

the Prophet's aunt Safiya killed a warrior and threw away his severed head into the enemy camp in the Battle of the Trench, the second major battle that took place between Muslims and the pagan tribes of Arabia.

After the Prophet's death, Muslim women continued to fight. For example, a Bedouin woman named Khawalah bint al-Azwar al-Kindiyyah dressed like a knight when she fought against the Byzantines. Those who chose not to fight provided essential logistics and moral support to their men—they encouraged their sons to pursue warfare to protect their families, faith, and country.

In contemporary conflicts, the wives of male suicide operatives motivate their men. For example, Defne Bayrak, the wife of the Jordanian suicide bomber who killed U.S. government officers in Afghanistan in December 2009, said in an interview, "I'm very proud of my husband. He has made a great operation in this war." And Malika al-Aroud, the Belgian widow of another suicide bomber in Afghanistan publicly stated, "I have a weapon. It's to write. It's to speak out...You can do many things with words. Writing is also a bomb."

Other women choose to strap on the bomb—a trend that first emerged in Iraq, where male insurgents recruited Muslim women to support suicide attacks to achieve their strategic goal. In earlier papers and lectures, I've argued that attacks by Muslim women in Iraq reflect al-Qaeda's motivation. Even after the death of Iraq's Sunni insurgent leader, Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi, terrorists continue to seek support from women to keep the insurgency alive.

Years ago, when I was looking at Iraq's female bombers, I developed a framework that became widely used by academics and terrorist experts. I called it the "4 Rs" or "Four Reasons

Why Muslim Women Kill.” They are:

- **Reform** – ease the way for future generations
- **Revenge** – end the suffering
- **Recruit** – entree for other women join the group
- **Respect** – elevate the status of women in the community

However, not all women kill. The majority of Muslim women choose non-violence as a way to fight for a cause they believe in.

“ *Most Muslim women choose street protests to raise awareness to their cause, country, or creed.*

During the Arab Spring, thousands of women across the Middle East joined their men on the streets to call for change. In my travels to Kashmir, a disputed valley that lies between India and Pakistan, I’ve watched women march. They chanted slogans of freedom. Others carried banners and signs with political messages. These women are as powerful as their men, and they fight with words, not weapons.

Bonus: **Five More Cultural Cues**

1. **Don't ask a Muslim woman why she wears the veil.** It's a personal question and many women I've met in the hijab don't even think about it. Try to think about the veil as another piece of jewelry.
2. **Don't get too personal.** She may not want to talk about her marital status, especially if she's divorced or separated. That's a sensitive subject. However, you can ask about her children, if she has any. She will be proud to talk her babies and may even show you pictures. This can be traced to Prophet Muhammad, who said, "Paradise lies at the feet of mothers."
3. **Don't ask why she chooses one sect or practice over another.** While most Muslims today are Sunnis, there is a sizeable Shia community. (Sunnis and Shias are the two main sects.) And then there are Sufis, akin to Muslim mystics, which you will find common among South Asian Muslims. If you want to know more about Islam, ask more general questions. Leave sect aside.
4. **Don't talk about terrorism.** At least not right away. After the horrific 9/11 attacks, Muslim women are sensitive about their faith. Women are tired of being apologetic and don't want to defend their faith anymore. Muslims believe Islam is a religion of peace and the Quran is a book of mercy. They just don't want to talk about the crazies.
5. **Don't ask a woman about her diet and cuisine choices.** While I know a few Muslim women who love

whiskey and pepperoni, it is not the norm. I choose not to drink and I don't eat pork because that is my religious belief. According to Islamic law, kosher meat is mandatory and alcohol is forbidden. Just remember every Muslim woman makes different choices. (You might find a few vegetarians.)

About the Author



Ms. Farhana Qazi is a global scholar on conflicts in the Islamic world. Her travels to South Asia—which includes Pakistan and the disputed region of Kashmir—as well as to other Islamic countries in the Arab world, to assess patterns of conflict, have made her an internationally-recognized expert. Based on her knowledge of events in the Islamic world, Ms. Qazi advises U.S. policymakers, appears regularly in the media, and is a frequent speaker at U.S. government events and international conferences. Her work and opinions have been featured in *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, CNN, BBC, Al-Jazeera, FOX News, NPR, and *Newsweek*. She is the recipient of the 21st Century Leader Award, presented to her by The National Committee on American Foreign Policy. Currently, she is a Senior Lecturer for the U.S. military.

