



Muslim Modesty: Cultural Reverberations of Local Predominant Conventions Towards the Meaning-Making of Modesty Among Young Adult *Muslimahs* in Marawi and Manila, Philippines

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ABSTRACT: Islam is widely recognized for its prominence on the manifestation of modesty throughout existing religious customs, primarily grounded on holy scriptures urging *Muslimahs*, especially, to maintain self-effacement in public. However, the universal benchmark for Islamic modesty has been interpreted and reshaped by Muslim women worldwide, depending on cognitive and external constituents observed and practiced across different localities, upbringings, and ethnic groups. The study utilized a qualitative approach in ascertaining these determinants and examining their comprehensive bearing toward a *Muslimah's* meaning-making of modesty. The research focused on a comparison between *Muslimahs* living in Manila and Marawi due to their contrasting lifestyles, norms, and backgrounds, specifically the internal and external factors, their lived experiences, and their influence on the meaning-making of modesty. Findings show that the meaning-making processes between Manila and Marawi respondents considerably differ. The former relies more on external considerations such as the prevailing norms (social, religious, and ethnic) of the non-Islamic city. However, it is notable that perception and practice only narrowly accord with one another among Manila respondents. Marawi respondents have a far more extensive grasp on *Hayaa*, where they primarily establish their judgment and compliance according to internal influences (personal belief and knowledge) while still acknowledging the impact of a Muslim-centered environment towards their practice.

KEYWORDS: *Hayaa*; Islam; modesty; Muslim women; predominant conventions

INTRODUCTION

The fundamental religious idea of Islam illustrates complete submission to the practices of a Muslim's faith, in which the religion's doctrinal and social views are based upon principles sourced from the scripture, the tradition, the consensus, and eventually – the concept of individuality. Modesty in Islam is treated as a sacred aspect of one's character. According to Khuri (2001), a Muslim's idea of modesty and decency, behavior, manners, and etiquette must adhere to the teachings of Islam as one's demeanor embodies his or her faith in Allah SWT.

Siraj (2011) stated that modesty in Islam by nature is posited differently in the social lives of Muslim men and women. Modesty in Muslim women, or *Muslimahs*, is strictly implemented and given more importance than modesty in Muslim men. To non-Muslim individuals, this is most evident with its physical manifestations among its followers, specifically on clothing and attire, which is closely associated as a symbol of modesty and identity for Muslim women within the traditional and orthodox perspectives. An example of such includes the wearing of the *hijab*, a head covering worn in public by *Muslimahs*. However, the dispute regarding the use of this special garment is an immobile discussion among Muslim and non-Muslim communities. Whether as a form of Islamic protectionism for women (Farole, 2010), a representation of a tradition distinguished by mediocrity and servility (Siraj, 2011), or a symbol to judge a *Muslimah's* commitment to Allah SWT, the accepted function of the *hijab* varies from scholar to scholar due to differences in terms of scriptural interpretation. Concerning the dissimilitude within religious concepts, the Republic of the Philippines does not surpass this debate in Islam. The proliferation of Islam in the Southeast Asian region introduced a system of government and culture to the Philippines and formed a single nation from the country's disintegrated constitution.

However, it is possible that consistent practice of Islamic traditions may fluctuate throughout the country's Muslim regions. From a variety of ethnolinguistic groups, over half of Muslims live in an area known as Bangsamoro or the Moro region, making itself one of the country's largest cities inhabited by Islamic Filipinos (Moro Muslims, n.d.). The people of Marawi, commonly Maranao descents, are considered the largest of the Muslim cultural-linguistic groups in the Philippines. However, it is possible that consistent practice of Islamic traditions may fluctuate throughout the country's Muslim regions.

Consequently, it is feasible for environmental factors and cognitive factors to act as founding causes (Bandura, 1989), resulting in comparing or contrasting the functioning degrees of physical modesty among female Muslim women in Marawi and Manila. This is possible as the two cities have different predominant cultures present due to the principal religions occupying the regions. Religion, culture, and perspectives mold the norms of a community (Gant, 2020; Vajpayee, 2016). An individual's cognitive process and personal opinions on how they should present themselves to society can be affected by what they

observe and how they interact with the people around them (Bandura, 1991; Green & Piel, 2009; Jhangiani et al., 2014).

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

In the context of Islam, the concept of modesty is strongly emphasized with regard to the internal and external manifestation of commitment to the laws of their faith, where female followers or *Muslimahs* are required to maintain modesty and privacy from the public (Allen, 2011; Huda, 2020; Siraj, 2011). However, this universal standard may be tested with cognitive and environmental factors in mind, claiming that individuals are inclined to act accordingly with observations brought by external influences (Cherry, 2019). Given the identification of Islam's official benchmark on *Muslimah* modesty, the levels of modesty being practiced among *Muslimahs* residing in Marawi and Manila can be compared as the two areas have central lifestyles that are in contrast with each other (Carlos & Cuadra, 2014). Factors such as predominant conventions and norms on female behavior and the appearance of two opposing cultures in the country also serve as variables. While there are a few studies touching upon the Muslim community and their concepts of modesty, there is still a great lack of research, study, and literature surrounding the topic, even more so in the Philippines. When situated in a preponderantly Catholic nation such as the Philippines, the primarily-Islamic island of Mindanao has its own overriding society of Muslim constituents (Bara, n.d.). With this said, the paper specifically focuses on comparing differences between *Muslimahs* residing in Manila and in Marawi to discern how predominant religious, social, and cultural conventions of their residential locations play a role in influencing the meaning-making processes of their faith. As such, the following are the specific aims of the paper:

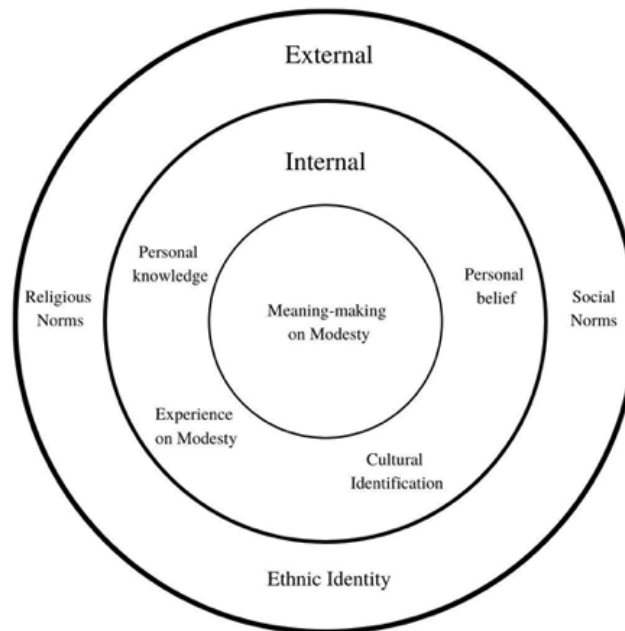
- What are the internal and external factors that shape young *Muslimahs'* understanding of modesty?
- What are the lived experiences of young *Muslimahs* in practicing modesty?
- How do the internal and external factors influence the experience of modesty among young *Muslimahs*?

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The study aims to describe how cognitive and environmental factors can create a *Muslimah's* meaning of different aspects of modesty within Islam. In turn, it can also result in how they adhere to the religion's traditions. The study utilizes an Euler's diagram to explain the relationships between each factor and how they could become subsets within one another (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework



The external factors refer to the physical and social environment that may affect young adult *Muslimahs'* behavior. External factors include religious norms, social norms, and ethnic identity. Religious norms are based on traditions that are stated by the Holy Qur'an and Hadith. Social norms pertain to the predominant conventions commonly observed and done based on the locality and its constituents. Meanwhile, internal factors refer to an individual's personal beliefs, experiences, and existing knowledge of Islamic concepts. It must be noted that "cultural identification" does not hold the exact definition of "ethnic identity," as the latter takes experiences and cognitive factors into account. At the same time, the former is based on familial descent.

The diagram implies that external factors are a much broader concept that already encompasses and affects internal factors. Bandura's social cognitive theory recognizes that cognitive, self-regulatory, and self-reflective processes play a central role in how people think and act (Bandura, 1989). In his paper, he further elaborates on the fact that ideas and behavior may be formed and learned through direct observation and interaction with their environment as cited in Cherry (2019). Within the core of these outer circles is the "meaning-making on modesty." This pertains to the result of all the factors in which a Muslimah creates her interpretation of modesty based on the aforementioned collective factors and how she adheres and commits to the religion's traditions concerning the topic.

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative methods were utilized in the study to give way to the different specific definitions and narratives people give to certain concepts and experiences (Merriam, 1998). According to Creswell (2014), there are different types of research designs in the qualitative approach. To enable the researchers to seek and establish the meaning of a phenomenon from the views of participants, the researchers employed a constructivist worldview approach and an ethnographic design in the observation of behavior. Specifically, this approach delves into identifying a culture-sharing group and studying how shared patterns of behavior are developed over time. With regard to ethnography, one of its key elements in collecting data is to observe participant behaviors and engagements during activities. However, with the ongoing pandemic, the researchers opted out of this. Instead, the research utilized the phenomenological method to understand better how participants understood and made meaning out of the studied phenomenon.

Steps in setting the stage for discussion involved in data collection included setting boundaries for the study by collecting information through semi-structured interviews (Creswell, 2014). The research then applied the thematic analysis method in identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns of meaning by categorizing them into themes within the gathered qualitative data (Clarke & Braun, 2017).

The period of adolescence is vital in determining how one will view and interact with the world as an adult. As such, 20 female, young adult *Muslimahs* between the age range of 18 to 21 were selected as participants. The research utilized purposive, and non-probability sampling methods accomplished through synchronous communication due to limitations caused by COVID-19. A pre-selection criterion was used in selecting respondents.

Google Forms were sent out to collect participants' primary contact information. It included interview guide questions, a brief description of the study, a discussion of ethical considerations, and assurance of data confidentiality following the Data Privacy Act of 2012. The semi-structured interviews conducted on Zoom and Google Meet were recorded with the participant's consent for accurate data collection. Participants were reminded of the purpose of the study, research procedures, expected risks, benefits, and their right to withdraw from the study at any time. Data analysis consisted of transcribing and checking for common themes and identifying such categories. The data analysis procedure consisted of three phases. First, the interview transcripts. After double-checking from interview recordings, they were reviewed multiple times in search of recurring themes or patterns (Merriam, 1998). The researchers then identified and labelled these categories before coding the transcripts. Lastly, the researchers compiled interview transcripts to look for relationships within and across given primary and secondary data sources.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section provides a summary of results and discussion in regard to the previous aims stated in the Statement of the Problem which includes internal and external factors that shape Muslimah's understanding of Modesty, common lived experiences from both cities, and influence of the said factors to Muslimahs' modesty. The researchers further interpreted the answers given and connected them with the related literature and conceptual framework.

Internal Factors That Shape Understanding of Modesty

All participants had a basic understanding of how Islam establishes modesty. In Islam, "*Hayaa*" refers to one of the aspects of faith a Muslim must have, and specifically, the urge to avoid anything that is deemed "indecent, shameful, or terrible." Though not everyone recognized the term "*Hayaa*," they were aware of the principle of modesty from religious knowledge and practice. Overall responses are classified within internal factors, corresponding to the conceptual framework's discussed themes, specifically their experience, personal knowledge, personal belief, and cultural identification.

As seen in the conceptual framework, the first common theme is their experience on modesty, which includes the practice of traditional rules related to the virtue and the effect of such towards their knowledge on *Hayaa*. Findings show that there are observable variations within the magnitude of these experiences' effects. Nonetheless, participants were influenced by either the environment and practice they have been exposed to for an extended period of their life or personal experiences that link to clothing and interactions. For example, seven participants from Manila, whose parents were more lenient with modesty norms or who did not grow up wearing the hijab for most occasions in their child to teenage years, continued to do so in their young adult years. Steph narrates:

"Parang kasalanan sa amin kapag nag-break ka ng rules, pero kasi, kung 'di ka naman masyadong religious or hindi ka nasanay na -- ng parents mo -- na nagsusuo ng ganon, ang hirap din talaga niyang sundin." (It's like a sin for us if you break the rules, but if you're not that religious, or if you were not taught by your parents [as a child] to wear [traditional clothing/clothes that adhere to the rules], then it's really hard to follow.

Those who live in Marawi, on the other hand, claim that they feel more comfortable in clothing that adhered to Islamic regulations because they were raised in a community that urged them to observe such and hence were surrounded by conservatively-dressed

women. Happy Mark briefly explained the reason for her sentiments which is similar to other *Muslimahs'* answers:

"Sa Marawi, most people, most Muslimahs wear long sleeves, long skirts, and pants and wear hijab din. So kung ako, I don't really feel different, or it's easy for me to fit in kasi lahat, mostly ng Muslimahs sa Marawi dress up like this." (Most people in Marawi wear long sleeves, long skirts, and pants and wear hijab also. So if it's me, I don't really feel different, or it's easy for me to fit in since most Muslimahs in Marawi dress up like this.)

Based on the study's interview data, a notable observation is that this latter group of participants had more knowledge of *Hayaa* and its rules since they were more exposed to Islamic culture and followers. Concurrently, participants who were not extensively educated on *Hayaa* did not possess a solid understanding of the establishment of Islamic rules. Although debate on functioning and religious grounds was evident from the lack of knowledge and clarification, participants were still obliged to such rules, following what others, primarily family members, ask of them.

The discrimination some participants faced for being Muslim and for wearing hijabs is one other common subtopics included in the "experience" theme. This also affected their choice of wearing one. Most participants were calm and continued to wear the hijab despite these occurrences. Phia described this prejudice as inevitable and explained her understanding on its grounds,

"Hindi maiiwasan na ma-discriminate ang mga babaeng Muslimah sa Pilipinas kasi parang 'yung iba hindi nila naiintindihan yung belief naming mga Muslim about sa pagiging modest or yung mga pananamit namin. Kaya may mga times talaga na parang hindi kami maintindihan so naju-judge kami or nadi-discriminate kami." (It is inevitable for Muslim women in the Philippines to be discriminated against because it seems that others do not understand our Muslim beliefs about modesty or our clothes. So there are times when we are not understood, so we are judged or discriminated against.)

Still, Lalab from Marawi mentions how, during the Marawi siege, she and some Muslims had to remove their *niqabs* and hijabs to be accepted in jobs or protect themselves.

"During the siege – Marawi, na-force tanggalin yun mga hijab kasi tuwing may dadaanan kami, pupuntahan kami, bibili, simpleng may bibilhin ka lang, nahihirapan ka. So for the sake na like ma-meet mo yung basic needs mo, minsan nawawala – natatanggal mo yung niqab. I even know some people na natanggal

talaga yung hijab kasi during the siege tinanggal yung hijab kasi 'di matanggap sa trabaho, or tatanggapin lang sa trabaho kung tatanggalin niya yung hijab." (During the siege – Marawi, we were forced to remove hijabs because every time we pass by, or if we just have to buy something, you will have a difficult time. So for the sake of meeting your basic needs, sometimes you lose— you remove the *niqab*. I even know some people who actually removed the hijab during the siege because they could not be hired, or they will only be hired if they remove the hijab.)

In the related literature, Droogsma (2007) and Potts (2009) elaborated on the discrimination *Muslimahs* experienced in choosing to maintain reserved outfits in more Western societies or other communities with less-modest clothing as the norm, with some also forced to remove their head coverings. This experience on Islamophobia may not have directly influenced their clothing choices but have impacted their meaning-making of modesty, particularly emphasizing the need for compliance to attire regulations for their protection despite the scrutiny they face.

Meanwhile, others also somehow disagree with having to follow them for their comfort and fit in with other Non-Muslims. Luna from Manila said that she still feels conflicted with these rules because of this,

"Pag magkakasama kami ng friends ko, ako lang nag-iiba, so 'di na ako nagkukumbong kasi minsan nahihiya din ako 'pag tinitingnan nila ako. Nagkukumbong lang nga ako with my – when I am with my cousins and family gatherings." (Sometimes, I am the only one different when I hang out with my friends, so I do not wear the kumbong because I get embarrassed whenever they would look at me. I only wear the kumbong when I am with my cousins and at family gatherings.)

Along with this comes the second and third common themes, which are personal knowledge and personal beliefs, respectively. "Personal knowledge" pertains to the information they were taught or already know about modesty. In the context of religion and this paper, "knowledge" can be information that is true based on the teachings or writings of Islam. "Beliefs" are information they deem to be true, yet have no justified basis for them; personal opinions and anecdotal evidence are examples of these. A belief "carries the connotation of disputability – the believer is aware that others may think differently" (Abelson, 1979).

When asked about their opinion about the connection between religiosity and tradition in Islamic culture, participants provided specific reasons for compliance to general Islamic traditions. Allah SWT, Prophet Muhammad SAW, and overall respect to Islamic origins and scriptures are mentioned frequently by the respondents from both

cities. Despite some admitting inadequate knowledge regarding said rules, all presented reasonings nonetheless. Luna said that following traditions are connected to religion because it can determine how much a Muslim respects Allah SWT.

“Yung sa Islam kasi, ang connection niya sa pagsusunod sa tradisyon, base sa alam ko ah, ito yung – it shows how you respect Allah or our God, and mate-test yung pagiging masunurin mo sa mga rules na binigay niya kapalit yung buhay mo, (...) yung life nga namin is parang, hiram lang siya from Allah, kaya importante siya, kasi base sa kasi yun nga, ito yung – it shows our respect sa kanya.” (In Islam, its connection with following tradition – based on what I know – it shows how you respect Allah or our god, and your faith will be tested based on how strictly you follow the rules that he gave in exchange for your life, (...)) We only borrowed our life from Him, which is why it’s important because it’s based like I said – It shows our respect to Him.)

Another participant, Lingzi, mentioned Prophet Muhammed SAW and the Qur’an in her interpretation of the importance of the following tradition. She added to this discussion on purity about these Islamic origins by describing the implications of Islam’s sacred scriptures.

“Sobrang halaga niya kasi yun yung nakasulat sa Qur’an namin, yun yung gusto mangyari sa amin ng Prophet namin, yung sa mukha ng ibang tao is malinis kami tingnan.” (It is extremely important because it is what is written in our Qur’an, this is what our Prophet wants for us, that in others’ eyes, we look clean/pure.)

However, when asked about their opinions, the results varied significantly. Twelve participants from both cities combined believed following general traditions, including those about clothing, was a sign of having strong faith. Phia of Marawi describes this connection concerning Islamic preachers.

“In order to be labeled as Muslim, you should follow the beliefs of our religion. Some people kasi label themselves as Muslim pero they don’t act as Muslims, and that’s not right kasi according to our Islamic preachers if Muslim don’t act as Muslim, then he cannot be called, or she cannot be called a Muslim but a Moro.” (In order to be labeled as Muslim, you should follow the beliefs of our religion. Some people label themselves as Muslims, but they do not act as Muslims, and that is not right because according to our Islamic preachers, if a Muslim does not act as a Muslim, then he cannot be called or she cannot be called a Muslim but a Moro.)

Hera also agreed on the concept of *Hayaa* and likened it to fire:

“It’s not because I grew up believing on that reasoning, but I think it’s just right. I think that with all the story behind it...I can’t specifically tell you the stories that the Prophet Muhammad SAW (Peace Be Upon Him) actually told or actually narrated. In my own opinion, I actually believe that if we don’t go near the fire, then you won’t be burned from the fire. So that’s why we need to at least keep away from the fire, that’s why we need to not expose ourselves, that’s why we need to be kept protected.”

The remaining informants either disagreed on the aforementioned link or believed it to be conditional to the situation. Seven had mixed opinions regarding “*Hayaa*” or Islamic modesty specifically. For Monopoly, an informant from Manila, her views on the reasonings behind following traditions for religiousness and the rules concerning *Muslimah* modesty are the same:

“Hindi ako agree kasi gusto ko ipakita yung skin kasi, as a girl, syempre gusto mo maging free. Gusto maipakita yung buhok mo, not for others, but for yourself...confidence, eh wala, dahil sa mga ganyang rules, nali-limit...hanggang bahay ka lang.” (I don’t agree with it because I want to show my skin. As a girl, of course, you would want to be free...like that. You want to show off your hair, not for others, but for yourself – for your own confidence. But because of those rules, I can not – my [actions] are limited. Your place is just inside [the house].)

Another participant, Violet, stated that some rules had to be broken in certain situations although she acknowledged its establishment for the purpose of women’s safety.

“Patas naman siya; may konek naman kasi siya sa safety naming mga Muslim na babae. Pero still, parang may rules din kami na bawal lumabas mga babae mag-isa, lalo na sa panahon ngayon, pero paano mag-tatrabaho kung hindi ka mag-isa? Kaya minsan talaga may time na hindi masunod yung rules, pero gets din naman namin kung bakit may ganoong rule.” (I think it’s justified; it’s really about our safety as Muslim women. But still, there are some rules like, women cannot go out alone, especially during these times, but how can you work if you cannot be alone? Sometimes there are just moments where you cannot follow all the rules, yet I still understand why these rules exist in the first place.)

This knowledge on general traditions, its connection to religiosity, and its corresponding importance influenced their way of clothing. Some who disagreed or answered “It depends” did not always follow modest clothing standards according to the religion, and those who mainly agreed wore more conservative attire. By giving them specific aims or rationale from religious scriptures, knowledge about the topic affects their meaning-making of modesty and their beliefs surrounding it. However, the women still choose whether to accept or refuse these grounds and apply their methods and beliefs in practicing faith.

The last theme found among the answers and in the conceptual framework is Cultural Identification. “Cultural Identification” refers to the individual’s feeling of belonging to a group that is more related to factors such as nationality, history, religion, social class, and ethnicity (Grayman-Simpson, 2017). In the context of this research, since most of the participants talked more about their ethnicity and religion, this factor will focus more on these two subtopics. According to their own observations and experiences, seven interviewees of Maranao descent would often note that the Maranao ethnic group was much stricter with Islamic rules and traditions than other Muslim ethnic groups. Suzy, who is of Maranao descent, shared her insights on the matter.

“Kasi sa Maranao, sila yung grupo na mas mahigpit talaga as a Muslim. Yung talagang mga parents nila mas gusto nila yung anak nila talagang sumusunod sa rules sa tradition ng Islam unlike sa ibang group ng Muslim.” (As Muslims, the Maranao ethnic group is the most strict. Maranao parents really want their children to follow traditional Islamic rules, unlike other Muslim groups).

The general answers of most Maranao participants, who are connected more with their culture showed that the more they followed the rules and traditions or the teachings of their parents who grew up in that community, they were more likely to be stricter with themselves in their own clothing choices and interactions with others, in terms of being modest. Despite some not agreeing to the strictness of their ethnic group, they had more knowledge on rules concerning modesty and the reasonings behind them. Some participants who were half-Maranao, half-Iranun, half-Maranao, or half-Maguindanaon, had the general observation that the latter ethnic groups were much more lenient with the rules. For example, they allow their daughters not to wear modest clothing (mostly hijabs) at some times or allow them to talk about the men whom they are interested.

Lingzi shared her own experience with her half-Maranao, half-Maguindanaon lineage, noting that her parents’ differences in practices have made her feel conflicted on which she should follow. She said:

"Ako, as a half Maranao and Maguindanao, mahirap siya kasi kailangan balanced siya eh. Kaya di mo alam kung ano susundin mo kasi sa side ng daddy ko, parang fino-force niya ako, pero yung sa mommy ko parang, 'Sige, hayaan mo na kasi bata ka pa naman; Gawin mo nalang 'pag sa lumaki ka na 'pag 20 plus [years old] ka na.' Kaya nga ganon, parang nato-torn pa rin ako kung gagawin ko ba 'yun or hindi." (In my opinion, as a half-Maranao and Maguindanao, it is hard because it needs to be balanced. So you would not really know which to follow because, on my father's side, it is like he is forcing me (to follow tradition), but my mother is like, 'Okay, just let it be because you are still young; just do it when you are 20 plus years old.' It's like I still feel torn on whether I should do it or not.)

However, Maranaos, according to the participants in the mentioned ethnic group, put more emphasis on following traditions and practices, wearing conservative clothing, and restricting interactions with non-*mahram*. The term *mahram* refers to any person the *Muslimah* is prohibited to marry, such as direct family members and others who are blood-related. On the other hand, non-*mahram* refers to any person the *Muslimah* is permitted to marry. Those participants who grew up with Maguindanao or Tausug parents that were lenient on rules and somehow preferred this kind of culture felt that they had more freedom on their choices on clothing and even interactions with non-*mahram*, and did not limit themselves to the restrictions of their religion.

External Factors That Shape Understanding of Modesty

More than half of the participants recognized that certain external factors affected their understanding of modesty. Data from the majority reveal that the several components of environmental factors discussed are present in their statements. As stated in the conceptual framework, the three external factors include religious norms, social norms, and ethnic identity.

In terms of religious norms, the concept of *mahram* and non-*mahrims* is mentioned repeatedly by informants from both Manila and Marawi City. Numerous statements delineate that *Muslimahs* are prohibited from interacting with non-*mahrims* and showing parts of their bodies to these men. *"Women should not display their beauty and ornaments to other people other than their husband, father, in-laws and other immediate family members"* (Surah An-Nur 24:31). Here are a few verbatims from the participants regarding the matter:

“Di dapat basta basta makisalamuha sa mga lalaki.” (Women cannot just interact with men anytime they want to.)

“Hindi ka magpapaganda, hindi ka magpapa-attract sa mga lalaki.” (You are not supposed to make yourself pretty and attractive to men.)

Another recurrent standard under these norms is the concealment of a *Muslimah’s awra*, referring to all of the woman’s body parts except for the hands and the face. According to “Explanation of 24:3” (2019), many agree that the meaning of “what is apparent of it” in the third verse of chapter 24 of the Holy Qur’an refers to the face and hands. This consensus has earned varied accords from informants, primarily among the majority of the Marawi informants. Conversely, Manila informants have not brought up the term and instead provided examples of other rulings on *Muslimah* attire.

Meanwhile, on the matter of social norms, participants residing in the two areas are exposed to considerable differences in clothing trends and adherence to traditional Islamic rules. According to the Philippine Statistics Authority (2017), approximately 1.20 percent of residents in Manila, the capital of the Philippines where the national economy and development are centered, are Muslims which makes them part of the minority. Additionally, it is heavily influenced by Western trends, making it a liberated society (Soltani, 2016). Based on the study’s interview data, women in Manila are more free to choose whatever they want to wear so long as it makes them comfortable. In line with this, an informant stated:

“Pag sa Manila talaga, kung ano gusto nilang suotin, susuotin nila, parang kahit sobrang ano na, kung saan sila komportable, kahit sobrang halos labas na lahat. Sobrang ang iikli, paiklian talaga, pero kung ano, ganun nila mahalina yung body nila, okay lang.” (In Manila, whatever women want to wear, they would wear it; even though it may be too revealing, they shall wear whatever is comfortable for them. The clothes are usually so short, it is almost like there is a competition for ‘shortest,’ but if that is how they love their body, it is okay.)

Subsequently, based on the observations from the participants from Manila, typical attires in the area tend to be tight-fitting or revealing. Numerous Manila informants also claimed they are not strict in following traditional Islamic rules as they might stand out from their predominantly non-Muslim community.

On the contrary, Marawi informants stated that the usual attires of women in Marawi City were obedient to traditional Islamic rules, consisting of head coverings, loose and long clothes covering the body’s shape, and unobtrusive clothing. Custodio (2019) stated that Muslims account for 99.6 percent of Marawi City’s population, making itself

one of the country's largest cities inhabited by Islamic Filipinos (Moro people). Moreover, Marawi City is the only place in the Philippines not impacted by Western trends (Bara, n.d.).

On the matter of ethnic identity, Maranaos are generally stricter on implementing traditions and customs than any other Muslim ethnic groups, regardless of the area where they live in. An informant shared the reason behind Maranaos' distinct characteristic,

"Pinakamalaking lamang ng Maranaos... yung pagiging strikto talaga eh... Sa mga Maranaos, sobra yung kailangan – yung dignity, yung reputation." (Among Maranaos, dignity and reputation are essential, thus the strict implementation.)

Several participants compared Maranaos with Maguindanaons, while a few mentioned Tausugs. They mentioned that Maguindanaons and Tausug are more lenient with prescribing clothing in Islam and are more inclined towards Western or modern customs. Three-fourths of the Maguindanaons' homeland was occupied by non-Muslims and impacted by Western culture after a long period of resistance against colonialism as recorded in history (Bara, n.d.). On the contrary, Maranaos are usually reprimanded by family members whenever their clothing does not adhere to traditional Islamic rules. Handling matters about interaction and relationships of opposite genders were also raised. It was mentioned that Maranao elders prohibited young *Muslimahs* to talk about men, unlike the elders of the Maguindanaons who tolerated such things. Furthermore, when it comes to marriage, the informants stated that checking the prospective spouse's background, including the religion they believe in, is highly important for Maranaos. For other Muslim ethnic groups, it does not matter as much.

Lived Experiences of young *Muslimahs* in practicing Modesty

Reports by Amnesty International (2015) and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (2020) have shown that Muslims are still frequent victims of prejudice. However, Muslim women are more susceptible to Islamophobia because of certain physical manifestations exclusive to female Islam followers. *Muslimahs* constantly face discrimination and violence, with conflicts often rooted in their obligation to dress as Muslim women by covering up their bodies for the sake of modesty (Soltani, 2016).

Based on the gathered data, discrimination was present regardless of whether the residential community is Muslim-centered or not. Results from the study show that approximately half of the paper's total respondents have described at least one experience where they have been discriminated against, most of the time immediately

after the sight of their hijabs. The remaining few have expressed their inexperience with Islamophobia in the Philippines due to the increasing number of non-Muslims who have become more open to Islamic followers. However, most of these women say they are described as “terrorists” by the non-Muslim people in their respective communities. According to Jojo from Manila,

“Kapag nakita nila na naka-hijab ka, sometimes ‘di ka nila paparahin (by jeepneys during commute), ‘di sila tumitigil kasi natatakot sila, o kaya discrimination as a whole in Islam na kapag Muslim ka, terrorist ka.” (When jeepney drivers would see that you’re wearing a hijab, they won’t stop for you because they’re scared. It’s discrimination that they associate us with terrorism because we’re Muslim.)

This is fundamentally influenced by the generalization and stereotyping of the West and assisted by media misrepresentation and extremist groups. Arena and Arrigo (2005) define “extremism” as composed of ideological beliefs about an obligation to bring back the political system to a form suggested by religious norms through violence. Wibisono et al. (2019), the official Government of United Kingdom website (n.d.), and the Islamic Networks Group (2016) names ISIS or the Islamic State of Iraq & Syria and Al Qa’ida as examples of these groups who base their violent actions through the Holy Qur’an, the sacred scriptures of Islam, despite the religion’s foundations revolving around peace and prosperity. The cases of Islamophobia in the country that Muslim women have encountered are continuously transpiring.

As mentioned, the said intolerance against Islamic believers has even extended towards countries where Islam is one of the predominant religions. According to Malan and Solomon (2012), rivalry among various ethnic and religious groups in the Philippines were caused by the sensitivity and hostility brought by several periods in history, when the country had been colonized. However, a notable information given by respondents that may have contributed to the amplification of Islamic Discrimination in the country is the recent incident of the Battle of Marawi or the Marawi Siege, which is presently known as the longest urban battle within the Philippines’ modern history (France-Press, 2017). The aftermath of this five-month-long event was a celebratory achievement, yet, as described by Miavaldi (2017), the Moros have been subjected to more bias since then. This event brought a significant impact on the lives of Filipino *Muslimahs* to the point where, according to the interviewed participants who experienced this themselves, it had jeopardized Islamic rulings on female clothing and attire—a traditionally essential manifestation of modesty in Islam. They mention that they and fellow *Muslimahs*, specifically those located in Marawi, were indirectly forced to remove their head veils in

order to avoid facing discrimination from fellow Marawi citizens who were nonetheless non-Muslim people. Lalab of Marawi provides an example of such:

“I even know some people *na natanggal talaga yung hijab kasi* during the siege *tinanggal yung hijab kasi ‘di matanggap sa trabaho, or tatanggapin lang sa trabaho kung tatanggalin niya yung hijab.*” (I even know some people who actually removed the hijab during the siege.” because they could not be hired, or they will only be hired if they remove the hijab.)

Furthermore, despite data from the Philippine Statistics Authority (2017) shows an expanding population of Muslim people in the country, there is the emphasis that Islamic followers are nevertheless an ethnic minority among Filipino citizens (Afable, 1960), to which one of the study’s interviewees agreed with. Hence, Muslim women feel, particularly those obliging to Islamic rules on clothing, a sense of alienation when traveling to different localities in the country that are not Muslim-centered. Both Manila and Marawi respondents express that people are unfamiliar with the Muslim community. Respondents have shared that a non-Muslim environment has definitely affected their practices on modesty, specifically on how Manila *Muslimahs* can defy specific rules on clothing.

With this, there have always been followers who do not adhere to particular rulings of the religion, including *Muslimahs* who do not wear the hijab. There has always been international and local debate on the usage and interpretation of the Islamic head veil (Ingber, 2015; Noor, 2007; Read & Bartkowski, 2000). For instance, in a study conducted by Bhuiyan in 2018, it was found that some Muslim women living in Britain disliked being seen as different and have found relief in not having to wear hijabs and other religious head coverings. He also stated that some Muslim women choose not to wear hijabs and instead choose Western alternatives that did not make them stand out as Muslims as their way of clothing was seen as an imprint of their religious identity and the common stereotypes surrounding it. Meanwhile, according to Sylaj (2019), clothing is a medium of communication to express one’s personal choices and beliefs. Through modest clothing, *Muslimahs* consider their outfits not as pieces of clothing they are obliged to wear but rather as their personal choice.

Nonetheless, despite the ongoing debate among Islamic individuals, *Muslimahs* in the Philippines are judged by non-Muslims for non-compliance, as shown from the information given by participants. However, it is notable that only the Muslim informants residing in Manila do not conform to this specific ruling on headwear, mainly on account of environmental influence and the sense of unfamiliarity with the practice from early childhood up to the present. According to Gutoc (2005), Moro women still value religion and tradition; however, they have also already started to respond to the challenges of

modernity where Muslim women are slowly moving out of the safe cocoons of their clan and community. Additionally, respondents have shared that a non-Muslim environment has affected their practices on Modesty, with Manila *Muslimahs* being able to defy certain rules on clothing, where Catholics and Christians are their companions on a day-to-day basis.

Jimin of Marawi stated,

“Mas mahirap mag-maintain ng level of expectation kaysa sa ‘pag nandun ka sa non-Muslim na community. (...) Parang kapag lumabas ka lang walang hijab, pwede kang ma-judge and then even if ayaw mong mag-care sa kanila, kailangan mo mag-care kasi nga you’re not affecting just yourself, but your family as well and people who raised you.” (It is harder to maintain the level of expectation than you are in a non-Muslim community. (...) Like if you go out without a hijab, you will be judged, and then even if you do not care about them, you still need to care because again, you are not affecting just yourself, but your family as well and people who raised you.)

Meanwhile, within a specific ethnic context of the study’s data, there is a much more profound shared experience among these *Muslimahs* who are primarily of Maranao descent regardless of residential location. Manila and Marawi informants agree on the high level of expectations they have experienced within their ethnic group. The establishment of such has its grounds on the significance of public stature among the Maranaos.

However, the fusion between culture and religion is not the only distinction of the Maranao tribe. Mik compared her tribe to others and stated that the Maranaos can preserve Islamic tradition and cultural heritage the most despite societal changes due to the level of conservativeness being practiced.

“Sa ibang tribe, parang nagkakaroon ng modifications or yung tawag nila na “modern Islam”, which is hindi dapat. So yung one example is yung engagement. Some tribes prina-practice na nila yung nagsa-stay or pwedeng magsama yung a woman and a man kasi engaged sila. Pero kami as Maranaos, since wala ‘yun sa Islam, hindi kami nag-adapt sa mga ganoong changes.” (In other tribes, there have been modifications or what they call “modern Islam,” which should not be. One example is engagement. Some tribes follow the practice of a woman and a man living together since they are engaged. But we, as Maranaos, since it is not in Islam, we did not follow those changes.)

Based on information provided by participants, the researchers have observed the following: Familial reputation is considered an important element of Maranao culture. Participants claim that there has been a growing confusion between being of Maranao descent and being an Islamic follower. Whether in Manila or Marawi City, informants describe the incorporation of ethnic culture to Islamic rulings as an adverse effect of the group's well-preserved heritage over the years because the traditions then lose their connection to the faith. Compared to the Maguindanaoans and the Tausugs, the Maranaos have branded themselves with their vital conservation and observance of traditional Islamic rulings, where although have positively led to a more manageable commitment to Islamic rulings on modesty, especially when in Marawi City themselves, have allegedly become excessive.

Influence of Internal and External Factors on the Modesty Among Young *Muslimahs*

This section illustrated the opinions of Manila and Marawi *Muslimahs* on whether the environment they live in affects their choices of clothing. Regardless of location, most participants answered that the environment they currently live in does indeed affect their clothing choices. Referring to the study's conceptual framework, the social norms of an environment, which is one of the external factors mentioned, can play a huge role in determining an individual's lifestyle choices. Only two percent of the Muslim population in the Philippines reside in Metro Manila (Bueza, 2015), whereas 93 percent reside in Mindanao (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2017).

Nevertheless, no matter where they reside, Muslim women have faced discrimination and violence both in Islamic and non-Islamic communities (Soltani, 2016). The majority of the victims of hate crimes against perceived Muslims were committed against "visible" Muslim women who wore hijabs. Although they were not that severe in the Philippines, a few participants have mentioned that they refrain from wearing a hijab to avoid discrimination. However, participants have noted bias not to be the sole factor. Just like what many of our participants from Manila have mentioned, previous studies (Bhuiyan, 2018) have also found Muslim women to avoid wearing hijabs as they disliked being seen as different or having to be associated with common Muslim stereotypes. Parallel to Manila participants, the study was also conducted on Muslim women exposed to globalization and the pressures of not wearing the hijab.

Given that Marawi is the country's largest city inhabited by Muslims (Custodio, 2019), the majority of the participants from Marawi have stated that growing up in a Muslim community prompted them to be exposed to Islamic teachings. Additionally,

seeing plenty of other *Muslimahs* strictly abiding by the rule was one of the reasons that has made them conform.

Similarly, many participants shared the same sentiment: “We are expected to be modest, shy, or reserved.” Data gathered from the study illustrates lived experiences of *Muslimahs* from Manila and Marawi City respectively showed that the majority of the Manila participants mentioned the presence or personal experience with prejudice and discrimination as Muslims because they were not understood, while the half from Marawi have cited that they have not experienced discrimination and, in contrast, were well-accepted as Muslims in their communities. In addition, one participant mentions: “Muslims and non-Muslims are actually studying together and having a harmonious relationship.”

Participants have also mentioned familial influence and maintaining a public image as indispensable factors. Marawi participants, in particular, emphasized that their every move as Muslim women was constantly under judgment from others.

Internal factors such as personal knowledge, personal belief, experience in modesty, or cultural identification also influence one’s decision-making. These factors significantly differ per city, with participants from Marawi tending to have more knowledge and better in-depth understanding and appreciation of Islam than the Manila participants with regard to following traditional Islamic rules. Participants from Manila were not only exposed to the city’s lack of Islamic presence and globalization. Still, they were also found to be less knowledgeable when it came to traditional Islamic rules than those from Marawi. Hence, most of them found Islamic rules hard to follow, with many referring to it as “super strict”, according to the participants’ direct quotes.

Concerning the general clothing conventions expected of each city, Manila participants identified casual articles of clothing usually prohibited by Islam to be the norm in Manila. In contrast, Marawi participants answered modest and covered clothing conforming to traditional Islamic rules to be the norm in their city. Informants from Manila were not that strict in abiding by traditional Islamic clothing rules as compared to those from Marawi. Thus, Manila informants described their everyday experience with clothing as normal, as they would be wearing what was considered normal in the city. In contrast, those in Marawi were more compliant, following the rules because it was what is expected in their community. Regardless of the city, the majority believe that conforming to the traditional Islamic rules is a sign of respect to their creator, their religion, and ultimately themselves.

A few of the participants from Marawi have mentioned going on *Hajj* (an Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca), which gave them new light in perceiving Islam, making them

appreciate their religion more afterward. When it came to factors surrounding ethnicities, the majority mentioned how Maranaos were stricter than other Islamic ethnic groups when it came to abiding with traditional Islamic rules. Reyes et al. in 2012 writes that Maranaos are strongly bound to traditions and culture, which are mostly rooted in patriarchal beliefs where men are given more responsibilities and power. While the women are definitely seen as important figures with their common roles as respectful and generally well-mannered mothers or daughters, Maranao women struggle to separate themselves from this identity in their own communities, as they are raised in the strictest manner under a patriarchal system with these expectations. (Plawan, 1979, as cited in Velasco, 1987).

CONCLUSION

A *Muslimah's* meaning-making process on modesty is established on the predominant conventions present within their respective localities' primary external and internal influences. Describing the local dynamics of the two subject cities proved that Manila *Muslimahs* are dissimilar compared to those of Marawi due to some contextual differences. With only limited knowledge of *Hayaa*, Manila participants adhered more to the Western or less conservative standards regarding clothing and interactions, which likewise emulated trends prominent in the non-Islamic city. Most of their knowledge of *Hayaa* and traditional rules on modesty came from their own experiences or teachings from their family and ethnic lineage. Hence, it only follows that participants from Marawi, who grew up in Muslim communities, were more familiar with the religion's rules on modesty and having observed other *Muslimahs*, follow suit.

Other notable factors include influences from family and ethnic culture, in which their upbringing and exposure to Islamic traditions or practices impart knowledge and belief in modesty. Due to limited Islamic presence in their community, *Muslimahs* from Manila mainly depended on their families for meaning-making of modesty rather than on norms they were exposed to. Participants from both cities also mentioned how certain ethnic groups were either stricter or more lenient with following traditions and how these affected their practice of religion, especially since some of the traditions and norms were exclusive only to their ethnic community.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors would like to express their utmost gratitude to the following people for their endless support in helping accomplish this paper. First, to the research respondents, for their participation, cooperation, and faith in entrusting the researchers with their information throughout the whole process. Second, to the researchers' professors, for broadening the researchers' perspectives and paving the way on how to conduct research. Third, to their class adviser, Mr. Lambert Yancy Garganta, for his utmost patience, encouragement, and understanding in guiding the researchers. Lastly, the authors would also like to extend their sincerest thanks to the De La Salle University Integrated School, for providing numerous opportunities and equipping them with the necessary resources to complete this study.

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