



McGill

*A Critical Exploration of Discourses around
Identity and Social Cohesion in Canadian
Muslim Diaspora*

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Study Purpose

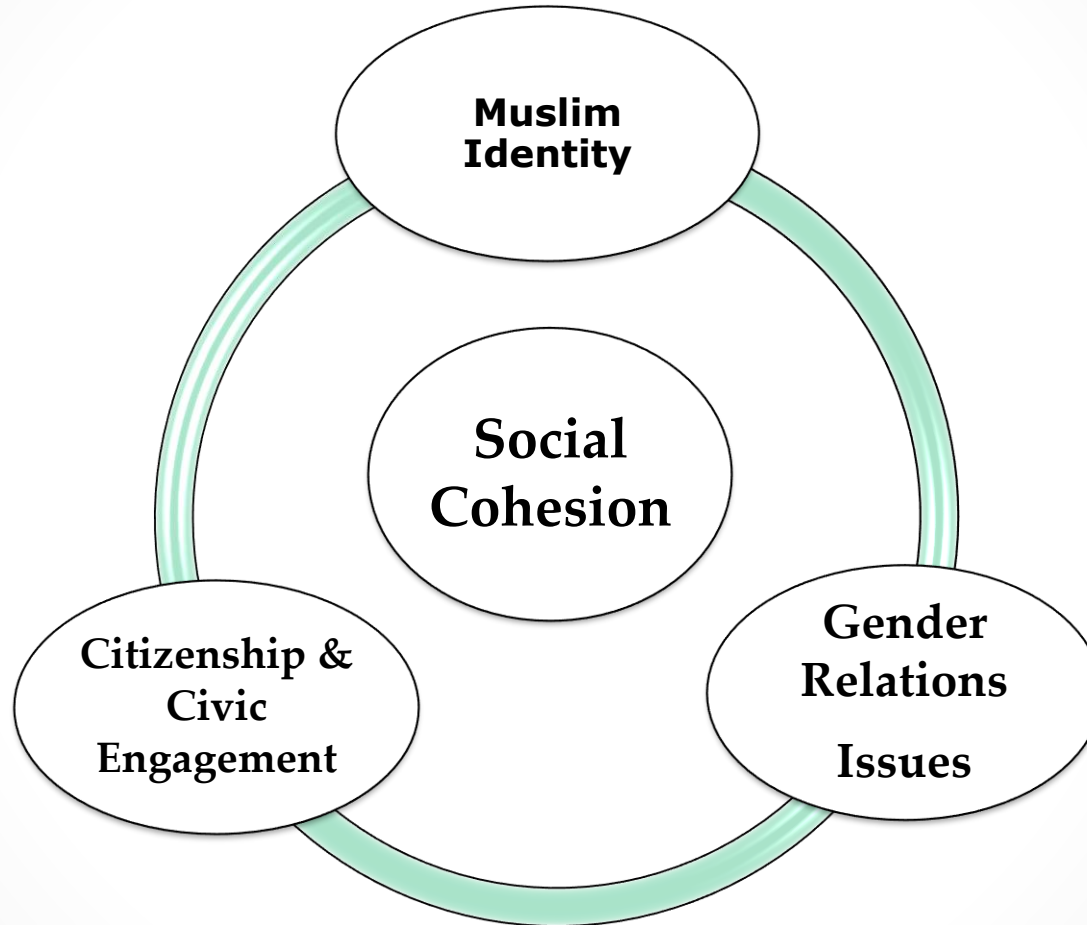
- Developing an increased awareness of the ways in which Muslim diasporas understand and respond to issues of violence, extremism, and security
- Looking at Muslims' perceptions of themselves and how they think others view their religious, racial, ethnic, and gender affiliations
- Exploring the ways in which they constantly construct, negotiate, and (re)invent their identities in response to these discourses

Collaborative Research

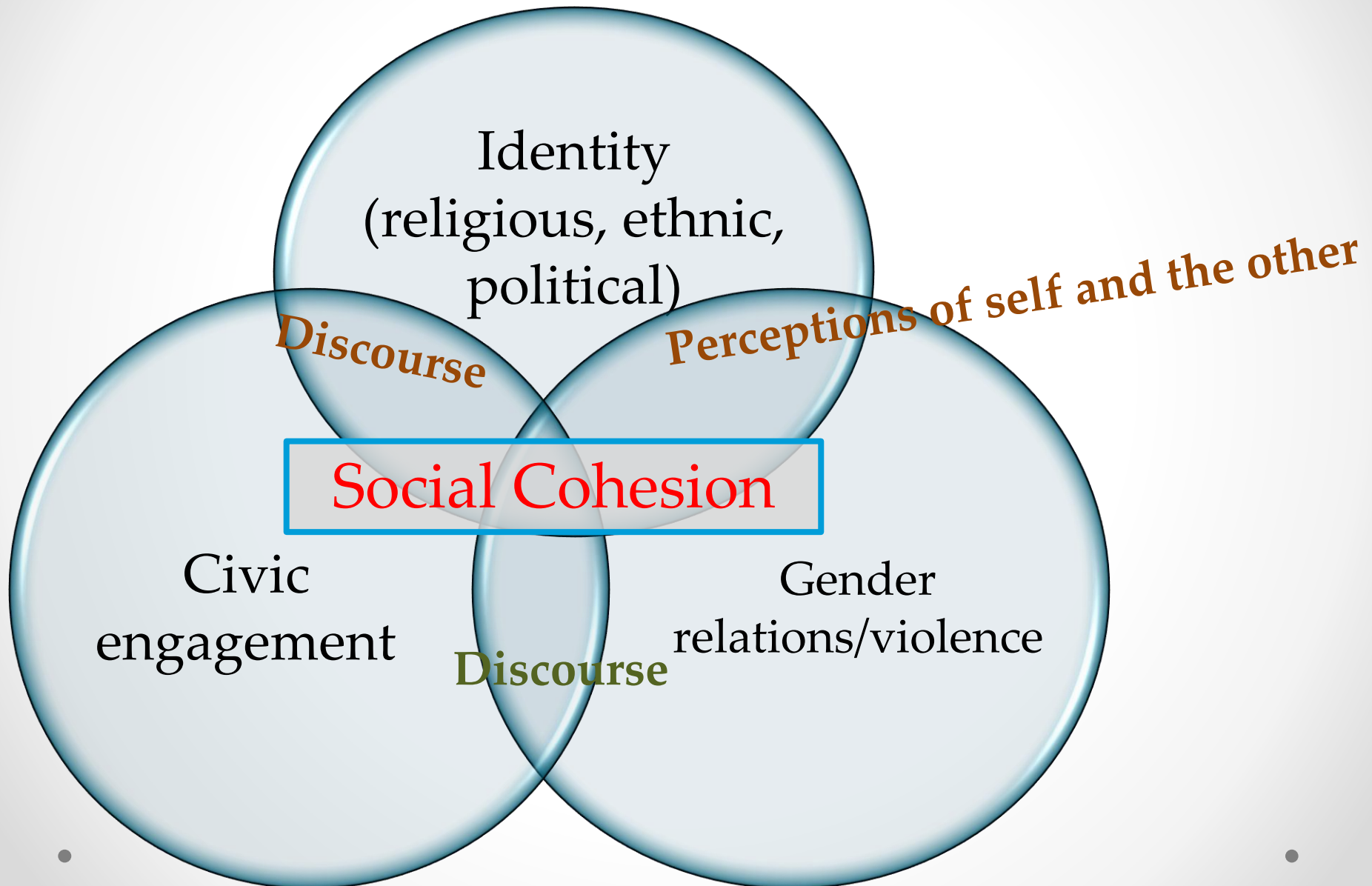
- *Community Partners: North American Spiritual Revival (NASR)*

University Partners: McGill, York

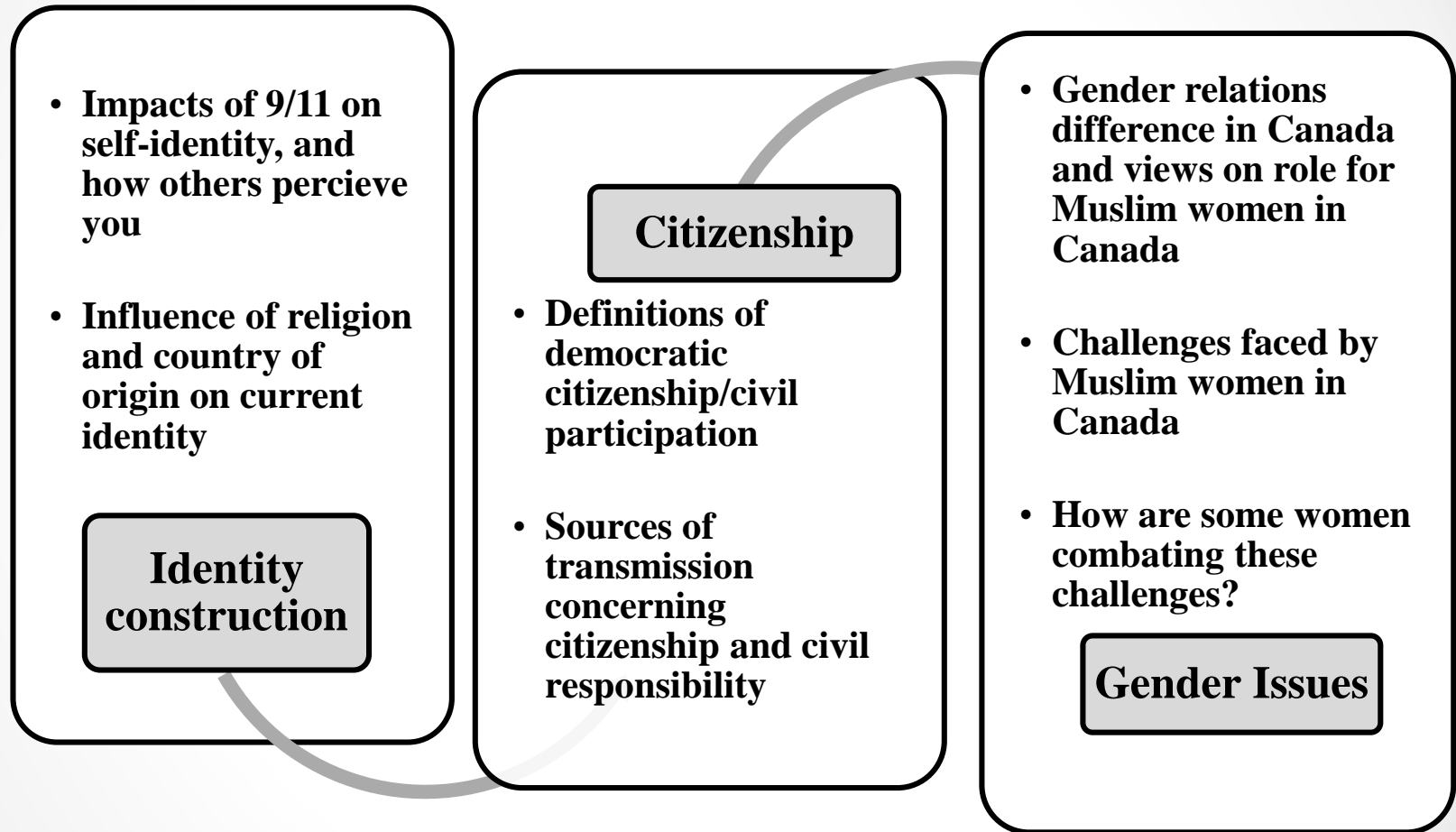
Conceptual Framework



Conceptual Framework



Conceptual Framework: Key Themes



Identity Construction: Tensions & Negotiations

The religious dimension of Muslim identity has not been fully explored on the role of social differences in identity formulation.

Race and gender have been thoroughly explored in relation to identity construction

How does religious identity intersect with these aspects of one's identity in a secular context?

(Zine, 2001; Hirji, 2006; Dizboni, 2008)



Identity Construction: Tensions & Negotiations

Focus of Inquiry: Questions

- What have been the impacts of 9/11 and the war on terrorism on their sense of identity, and how others perceive them?
- In what ways does religion shape their identity?
- In what ways do they relate to and perceive the issues and conflicts in their countries of origin?

Identity Construction & Social Cohesion: Notions of Citizenship and Civic Engagement

- Civic engagement is conditioned by how they relate to other individuals, groups, and institutions in the society
- Exploration of Muslim identity to understand how their identity constructions may shape their role as citizens

(Williams, 2003)



Identity Construction: Notions of Citizenship and Civic Engagement

- Dominant citizenship model in western societies
 - Context: nation-state and secular nationalism
 - Components: civil, political, and social
- Limitations of this model in modern secular societies
- Religion or religious nationalism (*Ummah*) is an important marker identity and the locus of individual loyalties.

(Juergensmeyer, 1994)

Identity Construction: Notions of Citizenship and Civic Engagement

- Conceptions of citizenship in educational programs in North America (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004).
- ***Personally responsible citizens***
 - obeying laws, making environmentally responsible choices, helping others)
- ***Participatory citizens***
 - participating in social organizations, community events
- ***Justice-oriented citizens***
 - critically examining societal problems and working to effect systemic change to promote social justice

Identity Construction: Notions of Citizenship and Civic Engagement

Focus of Inquiry: Questions

- How do Canadian Muslims construe and enact citizenship in this society
- In what ways do they concur with, and challenge, the dominant constructions of citizenship?
- Do they view themselves as equal citizens of the state? And if they don't, what experiences lead to a sense of marginalization in the society?
- What role does religion play in their conception of citizenship?
- How and where do they learn about civic engagement (home, school, Mosque)?
- Equally importantly, what does civic participation look like in Muslim youth communities?

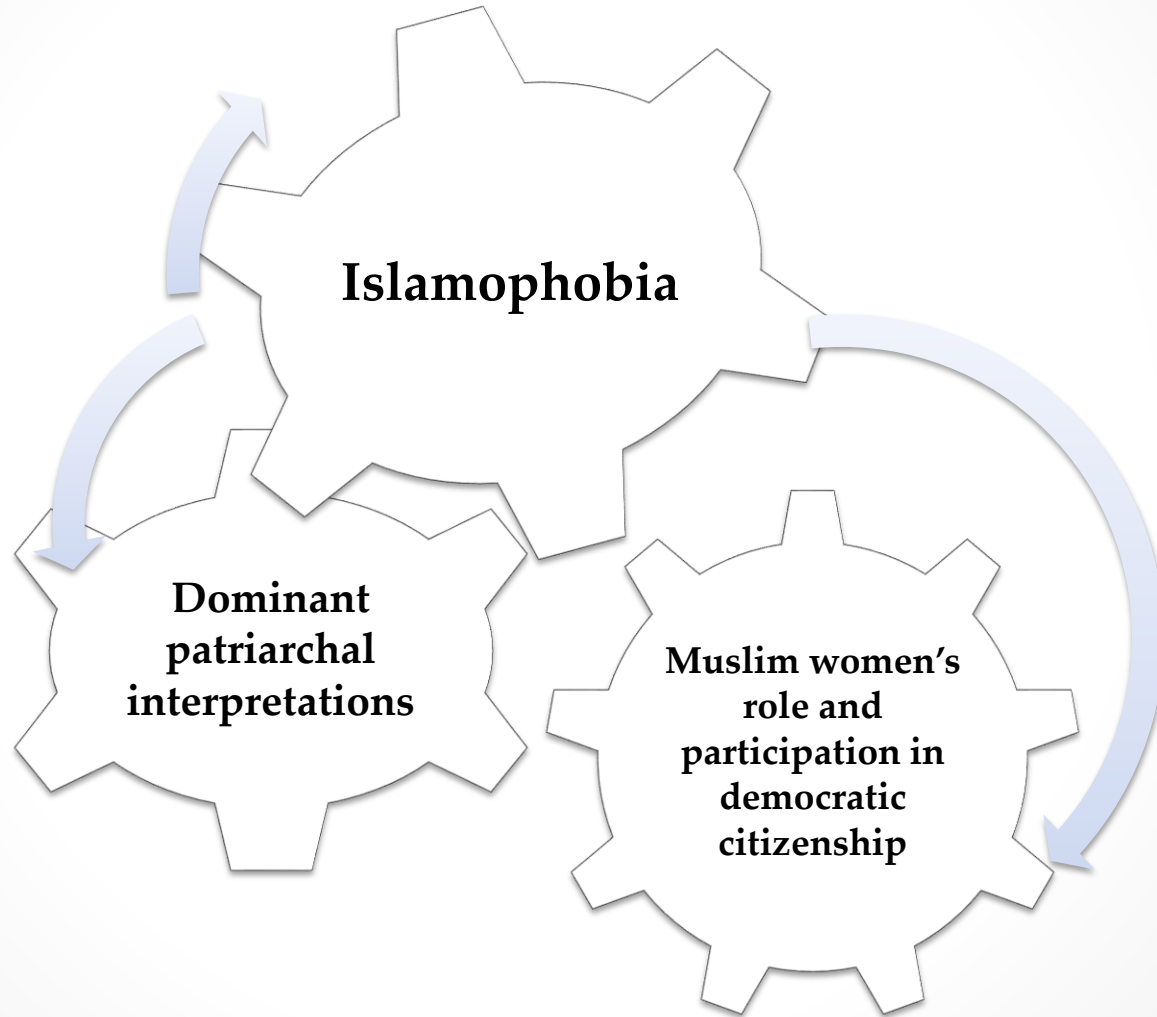
(Barber, 1998; Butts, 1988; Parker, 1996)

Identity Construction: Gender Roles, Relations, & Civic Engagement

- **Dominant traditionalist and patriarchal interpretations of Islam discriminate against women, silence their voices, and relegate them to a lower status.**
- **How the discourses around identity and citizenship are constructed, and contested, in modern Muslim societies**
- **What is the role and place of Muslim women in building a democratic society?**



Gender Relations and Issues

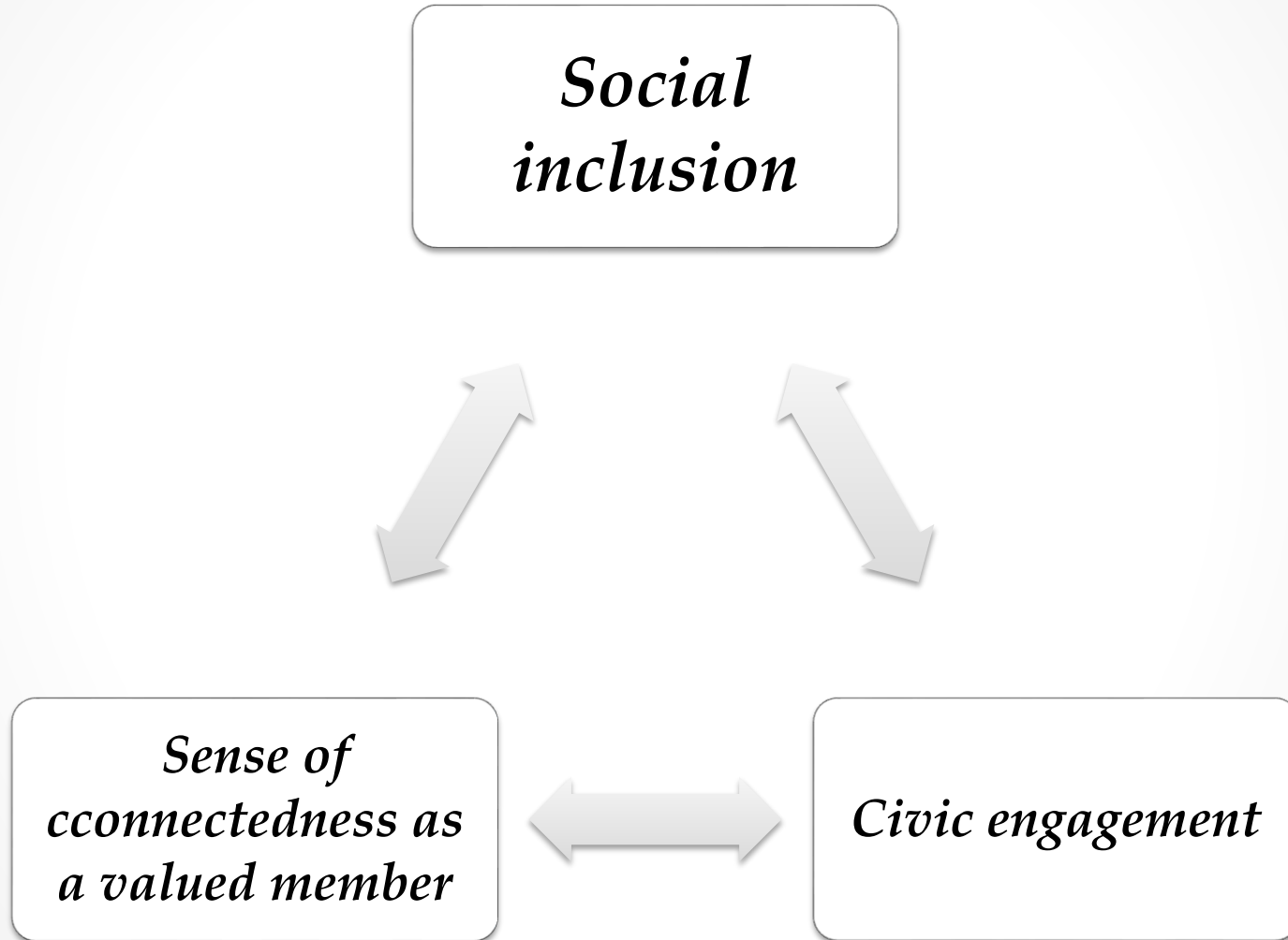


Identity Construction: Gender Roles, Relations, & Civic Engagement

- Islamophobia and its impact on women and expression of their religious identity
- Critically examining the dominant traditionalist and patriarchal interpretations of Islam and how they discriminate against women and silence their voices, and relegate them to a lower status
- The role and place of Muslim women in building a democratic society to learn how gendered discourses around identity and citizenship are constructed - and contested.



Social Cohesion: A Common Framework



(Deniz et al., 2008; Johnson & Peeples, 1987; Rutledge & Mitchell, 2002; Rutledge & Warden, 2000; Sinatra et al., 2003)

Methodology: Participants & Settings

- Muslim secondary school/CEGEP students in two provinces – Ontario and Quebec (semi-structured interviews and focus group interviews)
- Muslim college/university undergraduate and graduate students enrolled in Canadian universities in Quebec and Ontario (online survey, semi-structured interviews, and focus group conversations)
- Non-Muslim youth – semi-structured interviews
- Muslim community members, women leaders, academics in Canada (semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions)
- Online exchanges among Canadian Muslim communities

Social Cohesion: A Unifying Framework

- **Participation and Access to Opportunities:**

Widespread participation in community, social, economic, and political life is essential to social cohesion.

- “Society and its members benefit when more citizens are involved in setting and working toward collective and community projects.”

- **Bonds:** “Trust, connections, networks, and bonds with others” critical to collaborative engagement and social inclusion.

- Institutions, policies, legal frameworks, infrastructure, equitable economic distribution – “Canadian understanding of social cohesion”

(Policy Research Initiative, n.d., Stanley, 2003, p. 8.)



Methods: Data Sources & Qualitative Analysis Strategies

Social Media

- Twitter exchanges
 - Blogs
 - Websites
 - Articles posted on social media sites/news sites
- coding for salient concepts emerging from online exchanges
 - organizing codes into thematic matrices (Maxwell, 2005)
 - building profiles (Seidman, 1998)
 - writing analytic memos
 - creating matrices and displays
 - within and cross-case analyses using the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967)

Online Explorations

Dialogue/Exchanges between Muslims and non-Muslims: Shifting Identities and Alliances

Discursive Practices:

- Accusing and defending Islam
- Responding to accusations
- Clearing misconceptions about extremism
- Treatment of Muslims in non-Muslim countries
- Anti-Islamist Protests
- Sense of belonging to ***Ummah***

Online Explorations: Discursive Practices

Religious and Gender Identity - Civic Engagement

Exchanges around the Social Charter of Values

“Multiculturalism was forced on French Canadians. Quebec's not truly a part of Canada. They don't got that Canadian spirit.”

Preliminary Findings

Social Charter of Values – Quebec

“Anti-Muslim sentiment rises across Canada; Quebec's demagogic "charter of values" campaign a driving force”

Verbal and physical assaults against veiled Muslim women in Quebec since the introduction of the charter

Inflaming social tensions in work places, community settings

“So what will really change with the passage of the law?
Will the law bring social harmony as promised?”



Preliminary Findings

Social Charter of Values – Quebec

“The childish idea that taking off the veil while at work will somehow magically transform these people of faith or rather as the militants see them, women under the hard lash of their husbands, is a fantasy that only a desperate mind could envision.”

“As I write these words I am astounded at the utter ridiculousness of such dangerous fantasy, because the law will do exactly the opposite, create social conflict on a level never seen in this province.”

Preliminary Findings

Assertion of Ethnic and Cultural Identity

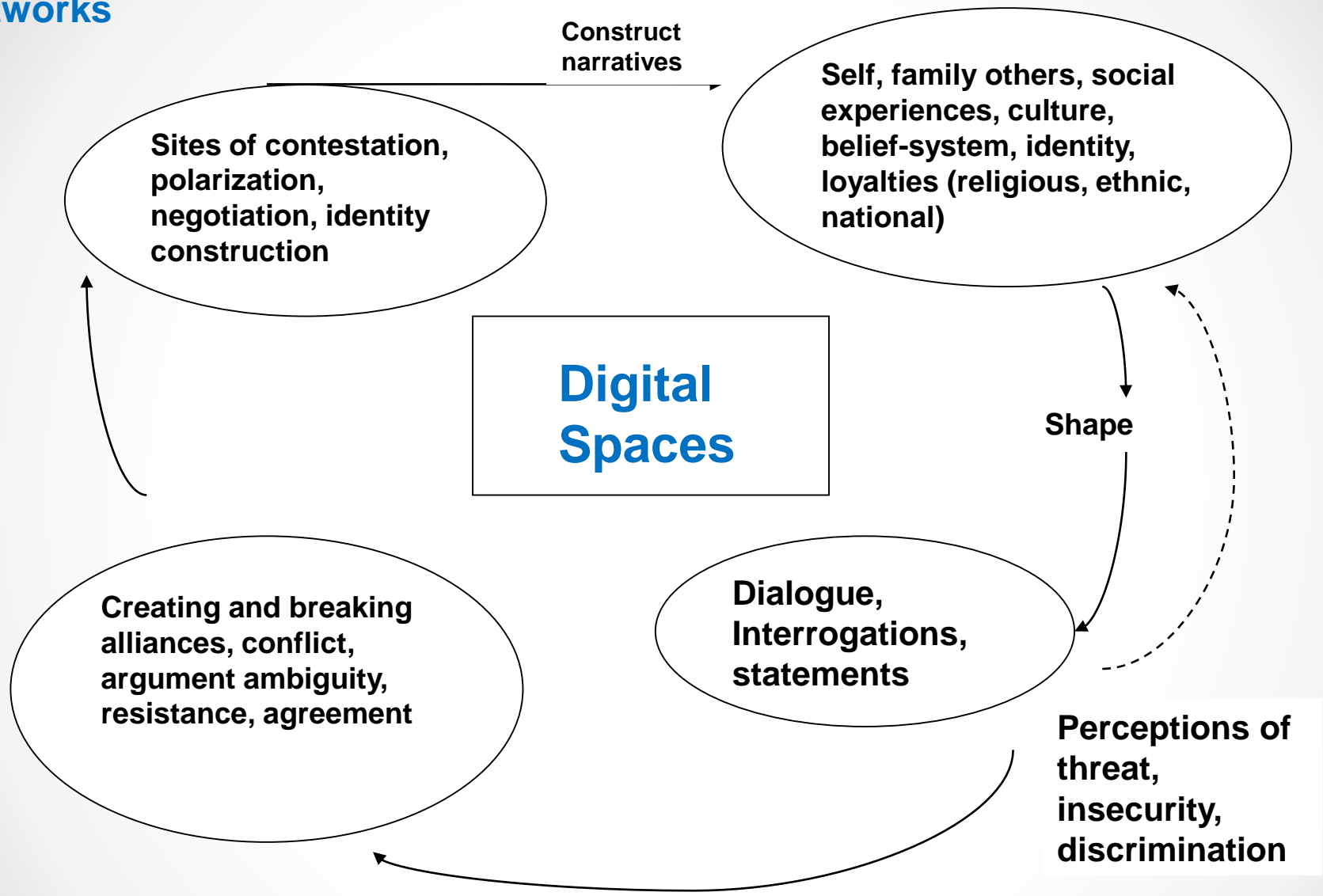
“ Proud of my heritage, henna, mehndi, desigirl”

Preliminary Findings

Identity and Multiculturalism

“Multiculturalism seduces ppl to see each other as labels with the baggage of our parents rather than as individuals with our own identities.”

Concept map of Thematic Networks



Further Exploration

Alienation

**“Self-reliance”: Proactive Civic
Engagement around Security Issues
and Concerns**