VISUALIZING GEOGRAPHIES OF PERCEIVED SAFETY: AN EXPLORATION OF MUSLIM WOMEN’S EXPERIENCES IN PUBLIC SPACE

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ABSTRACT

Research on fear of crime and on intersectionality have both been growing within geography in recent decades. To explore the geography of fear as it pertains to the intersecting social identities of gender and religion, Muslim women in the United States are a unique group for study. Muslim women are easily identifiable as members of a minority group because their religious coverings, such as the hijab. This study uses in-depth interviews, sketch maps, and photovoice to explore women’s geographies of perceived safety in Columbia, Missouri, and the factors that affect these perceptions. It focuses on the experiences of Muslim women with and without the hijab. The findings show that women’s general perceptions of safety were highly influenced by environmental factors, social contact, and secondhand accounts. These general factors affecting perceived safety confirmed the results of previous studies on women’s fear. Geographies of perceived safety were unique for Muslim women with a hijab. Their perceptions were influenced greatly by stereotyping, discrimination, and street harassment. The experiences of women who wear a hijab were unique in that they described experiencing less sexual harassment than their peers without a hijab, but much more religiously-focused harassment, and more street harassment overall.