Identity and Self Reflection:

Six Arab Muslim Immigrant Women Tell Their Stories

by

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Dedication

To my mother, Pao Fen and my late father Chen Chuan Wang for their unconditional love and constant support.

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Abstract

This study examined the experiences of six Muslim women who emigrated from countries in the Arab League to the Detroit Metropolitan area in Michigan. A review of the literature indicated that very little research has been done on immigrant women and, in particular, Muslim immigrant women. In order to fully understand these women's experiences, a qualitative design was utilized with a phenomenological approach within the framework of critical dialogue theory. This study focused on learning Muslim immigrant women's experiences and identities as they integrated into their new societies through their individual's stories. Readers can learn the stories of six Muslim immigrant women who come from different countries and have different educational backgrounds. This study investigates how these women identify themselves, how educational attainment contributed to their integration process, and how they adapted to their lives in the United States. Women shared their stories in their own voices. The findings suggest that their experiences were influenced both by a supportive community and by their own conceptualizations about educational attainment and cultural adaptation. It is a self-reflective phenomenon based on their religious beliefs and their home traditional cultures.

Keywords: Arab Muslim immigrant women, culture, education, gender, identity, religion

Chapter 1: Introduction

This research demonstrates the importance of cross-cultural understanding in determining the experiences of Muslim women who immigrated to the Detroit Metropolitan area from countries of the Arab League, which consists of 22 different countries (Algeria, Bahrain, Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, UAE and Yemen). Arab Muslim immigrant women in this study were defined as women who immigrated to the United States, who are Muslim and who are from countries of Arab League. The Detroit Metropolitan area including the city of Dearborn has the highest concentration of Arab immigrants in the United States. Recognition and understanding of diverse people who live in a community has become important to organizations that serve the community, such as institutes of higher education.

The City of Dearborn with a population of around 98,800 has a large community of immigrants and their descendants. According to the Gartner BI Report (2016), Arab Americans comprised 51% of the city's population, and the city had the largest proportion of Arab Americans in the United States. According to the Center of Immigration Studies (CIS) (Durán & Pipes, 2002), Dearborn also is the only city in the country with a substantial concentration of Arab Muslim immigrants. Immigrants come to the United States not only for political reasons, such as religious persecution, ethnic persecution, and civil wars, but also for educational opportunities and the improvement of their socio-economic status (Durán & Pipes, 2002). Higher education provides immigrants opportunities for political freedom and economic rewards. According to the Institute of International Education's (2014) *Open Doors Report* 2014, the

number of international students from the Arab League countries has been growing every year.

The CIS report notes that female Muslim students are also inclined to stay in the U.S. (Durán &

Pipes, 2002). Durán and Pipes (2002) claim that female Muslim international students

appreciate the opportunities available in the U.S. for independence, self-sufficiency, and

assertiveness; returning home means confronting restriction and family dictates.

Through volunteer work in the Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services

(ACCESS), I met Arab Muslim immigrant women who work or study at ACCESS. I had very

little understanding of them before this research. As an "outsider," an immigrant woman from

Asia, I observed these women's lives with a fresh set of eyes. My initial contact with Arab

Muslim immigrant women as a group was my first visit to ACCESS in 2010. In the advanced

adult English as a Second Language (ESL) class, I sat quietly in the back of the classroom. The

class had eighteen students. The students were new immigrants living in Dearborn

neighborhoods. The teacher was a young lady wearing a red floral dress and a red and black

combination veil (hijab).

The class was studying several concepts: the distinction of subject and object, the difference

between "his" and "him," and words that sound similar, like "worry" and "weary," and when to

use "I" and "me." One of the students raised her hand and asked, "What is the difference

between his and him?" As I looked at each student, my memory flashed back to thirty years ago

when I sat in an ESL class. These women were in the same place as I was when I first came to

the United States from Taiwan. They came from completely different cultural and social

backgrounds than mine, yet we were all women who had moved from one society and culture to

another. From reading stories and watching films about Arabic women, I realized that there is a

pop culture stereotype about Arab Muslim women, which presents an "orientalist" image to the

public (Haddad, Moore, & Smith, 2006; Said, 1977). In reality, they were a diverse set of

women with complex backgrounds and perspectives in our community. The visit to ACCESS

inspired the study in this research.

My Story: A Self-Narrative

I would like to tell my own story in the beginning because my own immigration

experiences initiated my interest in learning about Arab Muslim immigrant women's

experiences. I came to the United States with an F-2 visa as a student's dependent in 1982 and

became a citizen in 1998. I grew up in a traditional middle class family in Taiwan. My father

was an educator. He worked two jobs at the same time as a college professor and a high school

principal. My mother has been a housewife since she married my father. She has devoted

herself to her husband and her children throughout her whole life. My brother, two sisters and I

were taught that education is the only pathway to success. I carry that tradition and culture

within me. My culture and way of thinking influence the ways I interact with people and guide

me in viewing the world and judging events.

My immigration experiences involved all kinds of mixed emotions. I came to the United

States with my ex-husband, a Ph.D. student, one month after we were married. During the first

few years, I was homesick; I was lonely; I did not know how to prepare food; and I did not

understand casual American conversation and slang. I started taking English as a second

language classes at a city community center shortly after I arrived. I took the English

proficiency test and, later, enrolled in a university. I struggled at school because I was not

familiar with the language and the classroom culture. I remember that I had to drop one class,

which made it impossible for me to pass at the end of the first semester. A professor commented

that I could not learn because he thought I was a Vietnamese refugee. I did not know that I could

speak up. I could only feel pity for myself. I was afraid to tell my parents that I was not happy.

I wrote letters and told them that I was doing well. During all these years in the United States, I

have missed the times with my family back home. I cannot make up the time that I could have

had with my family by only visiting once a year. I also am guilty that I have not been taking care

of my mother during these years, since in Chinese tradition; it is the children's responsibility to

take care of elderly parents. I was caught in between two places. But, as time went on, it

became harder to think about moving back home permanently. One home is my birth country.

The other home is my adopted country, which became a true home here. I visit my home

country once a year, but I feel a disconnection whenever I go there. I become a stranger when I

go back to what used to be a familiar environment. I do not taste my favorite foods back home

the way I used to. I do not smell the familiar smells anymore. I am losing significant

relationships with friends, relatives, co-workers, classmates, and teachers back home. I feel that

I have become a different person after years of living in the United States. When I first came to

the United States, there were differences that I managed easily, such as the weather, learning

how to drive, and learning how to cook. The differences of culture and language were harder to

overcome. I grew up in a homogeneous culture with a very close community. Everybody

follows the same traditions. There are different kinds of racial problems in Taiwan, arising from

the political conflict between Taiwan and Mainland China. However, people share the same skin

color and live similar lifestyles. Although there are different dialects, most people can

communicate with Mandarin Chinese. The traditions are not hard to translate among people

from different provinces. Family, friends, and even neighbors maintain very tight relationships.

People have very little privacy. They will visit each other without advance notice. Rules are

bendable and flexible back home. Because Mandarin Chinese is my native language, learning

English was frustrating and continues to be a deep struggle. I seek shelter and comfort among my fellow Chinese immigrant friends. I feel as if I am living in two overlapping worlds in one place.

For an immigrant woman, there are many obstacles to overcome. Although, I felt a loss of safety as a result of a divorce and no family support around me, I had found a meaningful life with people whom I met during these years in Michigan. They offered their friendship, and mentorship, trusted me and gave me the opportunities to rebuild my self-esteem. When I look back over the years since I left home, I see that I have grown personally developing a professional career, freedom of choice without gender constraints, and educational opportunities. Immigration has inevitably created a complex identity for me. My identity process is always shifting in different locations and different situations. I feel that I am an "outsider" at the same time I am accepted as an "ethnic insider" by immigrants and international students whom I interact with daily through working at a university and living in an ethnic neighborhood. I preserve my ethnic traditions and at the same time integrate into the society where I am now living. It is a complex and never-ending process. Being an immigrant woman who came from a different family and cultural background, I always feel that self-esteem has to be built upon educational attainment and advanced degrees. It was very important that I could return to school to further my education. The best thing I found out in this country is that one is never too old to go back to school. There are adult education programs everywhere. Many people are interested in learning even if it is less about credentials and more about personal enrichment. There is a word "nontraditional student" in the United States' higher education, but the word does not exist in a Chinese educational setting. This concept is different from the culture where I came from. In my home culture, elderly people are established and well respected. Traditionally, people do

not go back to school at an older age. It is rare that universities and communities offer adult

education programs. When I first came to this country, I was impressed that universities offered

classes in many disciplines in the United States and that one could change his/her discipline if

he/she chose to. The educational system back home does not allow a student to switch from one

discipline to another without a formal examination. Higher education in the United States

respects students' personal choices and interests. A student can change his/her major anytime if

he/she finds her real interest. Because of educational freedom, I was able to return to school and

switch my field of study from business management to education. It was a dream come true for

me! Most Chinese parents make decisions for their children about a field of study and future

careers. My parents made the choice for my major when I took the college entrance

examination. My future was determined by the result of one college entrance examination. I

was able to make my own choice to change a major when I returned to school. By living in the

United States, I have learned how to make decisions through different ways of thinking. I have

learned creative leadership. I have learned that people are different. I have learned to respect the

differences. I have learned to accept the differences. I have learned that I can make a difference

as a woman. I have found my freedom to seize opportunities to make the best of my life in the

United States.

My assumption is that immigrant women from different ethnic backgrounds have the

same immigration experiences. My assumption is that education will change women's identities.

My assumption is that women will develop different identities during the time they spend in a

new country. Through the contacts with Arab Muslim women, individuals can view the

conceptualization of identity, education and being independent differently. My own experiences

did not follow a linear process. My experiences have been constructed like a spider web. I have

been influenced by the environment and by people who are around me. In the meantime, I have also worked to meet the traditional expectation from home. My ethnic identity does not change but culturally I am mixed. The women I met in the Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services (ACCESS) have their own interpretations of their needs and their experiences. This study focuses on Arab Muslim immigrant women's experiences within the context of my experiences and tests my own ideology and adaptation process in the new environment.

Statement of Problem

Immigrant women's experiences in a new country are hard to express in general. One woman's experiences cannot apply to another woman's, because each individual comes from different cultural backgrounds, different religions, different countries, different educational backgrounds, and has different reasons for immigration. It is hard to understand an individual's experiences without listening to an individual's stories. It is hard to reach an understanding without hearing these women's critical voices.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to (a) analyze Arab Muslim immigrant women's identities during their integration to a new country; (b) examine the experiences of Arab Muslim immigrant women in the Detroit Metro area; and (c) learn how and what formal educational attainment might impact an Arab Muslim immigrant women's identity development and how they adapt their lives in the new country. The focus of this study will be to present personal stories of these immigrant women and to explore what these stories mean to their lives.

The perception of the public toward an ethnic group needs to be addressed by the individuals in the group. We are limited in our understanding of ordinary immigrant women and

the normative patterns of their lives in our communities. Three areas are addressed in this study:

identity, educational attainment, and cultural adaptation.

      Identity. According to Gordon (1964), an "ethnic group" (p. 27) in the United States is

established by race, religion, and country of origin. A person's identity may develop on the basis

of past and present group of population (Gordon, 1964). A person may decide to keep one's own

ancestral identity but share relationships with members of the society he/she moves into

(Gordon, 1964). Immigration is an emotional experience, which involves stages of changes

(Berger, 2004). Immigrant women are not typically studied separately as a group, although most

studies show immigrant women's experiences of loss of sense of self and a struggle as they

negotiate their identities in the new environment/host country (Berger, 2004). Muslim

immigrant women's experiences can be affected by a general conception of the host community

(Afzal-Khan, 2005). Overtime, the general public might see the population as a group

(collective identity) without looking into the individual's development and reaction to her new

environment (individual identity). Dai (2009) states that individual identity is the personal

expression of oneself with distinguished characteristics while collective identity is formed by a

group of people who share the same kind of systems, norms, and behaviors that creates a cultural

identity; both forms are self-conceptualizations and socially constructed and grounded. As Arab

Muslim immigrant women come from different educational backgrounds, different countries of

origin, and different cultural practices, an individual identity may not be represented within the

same ethnic group (Brewer & Gardner, 1996). As Arab Muslim immigrant women increasingly

become active in the community, while preserving traditions at home, there are expectations to

be part of the sphere of communities outside of their homes. Studies of Muslim communities

show that Arab Muslim immigrant women often bring their strong managerial roles to serve

mosques and the community (Abraham & Shryock, 2000; Aswad & Bilgé, 1996). These women represent themselves through the identities they see in themselves and through the transitions of the social structure in a new society.

Educational attainment. Nekby, Rödin and Özcan (2007) studied acculturation identity and educational attainment in immigrant men and women in Sweden. Their findings show that integrated immigrant men are more likely to have higher educational level than assimilated men; however, there are no differences in women's educational level between integrated and assimilated women. Furthermore, Nekby et el. (2007) show that there is a complete lack of identity in immigrants with lower levels of education. Read and Cohen's study (2007) show that Arab immigrant women's views in educational attainment and employment are different from other ethnic groups. This study presents views of educational attainment of six Arab Muslim immigrant women.

Cultural adaptation and integration. Does a woman choose assimilation or acculturation? Assimilation is defined by Gordon (1964) as an immigrant giving up his/her own culture in order to incorporate into the dominant group. Acculturation is defined by Gordon (1964) as an immigrant keeping his/her own culture at the same time he/she adapts to a new culture (1964). Gordon finds that the concepts of "assimilation," "melting pot," or "cultural pluralism" do not fully describe the complexity of social organization of ethnicity, race, and religion in the United States (1964). Decades ago the melting pot really meant Anglo conformity (Gordon, 1964). According to Gordon (1964), all immigrants attempt to establish Anglo-American hegemony over other non-Anglo-American people in the United States. The investigation of immigrant experiences is lacking in adequate views about non-European and non-Western immigrants (Gibson, 2001). Cultural adaptation is not a comparison of American

culture to another culture (Gibson, 2001). Between living in the margin and in the mainstream, the structure of adapting new cultures is formed based on ethnic background, social class, and groups' intellectual interest (Ajrouch, 2012; Bourdieu, 1986; Boyer, 2001; Cainkar, 1988; Gibson, 2001; Gordon, 1964; Ogbu, 1993). Immigration is certainly not just simply "blended in" or "blended out" (Gualtieri, 2009). Assimilation is not the only outcome of immigration (Berry, 1997 & Gordon, 1964). The question is not to make choices between whether to assimilate or not to assimilate. The question is how one person is influenced by the new culture and how the new culture becomes part of a person's characteristics to navigate in a new society (Ogbu, 1993; Kim, 2001; Kim, 2007; Kim, 2008). During the adaptation process, an immigrant's relationships with his/her surroundings (i.e. family members, coworkers, friends, a different culture, a different language, different religions, and etcetera) becomes complex after years of living in majority "white" countries such as the United States (Gordon, 1964). Regardless of accent, skin color and/or appearances, an immigrant might change overtime by living in a host country. A woman's attitude about the self might be different over time due to the influences of a new environment (Brewer & Gardner, 1996). This self-identification may influence the cultural adaptation process (Brewer & Gardner, 1996).

According to sociological research, male and female immigrants' experiences in a new society are different even within the same ethnic groups (Cainkar, 1988). Research shows that men and women have distinctive roles and rights due to the social structure and cultural tradition in the homeland; these ideas will continue to influence them after resettlement in the new society (Cainkar, 1988). Assimilation is not the only outcome that women want. It appears that there are other factors influencing women's choices of whom they want to be and how they wish to be viewed by others. Haddad et al. (2006) stated:

Definitions of women's roles are clearly subject to cultural and ethnic variations that

come into play as Muslims try to determine how closely they want to or are able to

adhere to traditional ways and what kinds of adaptations or changes are desirable or

necessary in a new context. (p. 16)

The images of Arab Muslim immigrant women are often defined by the mass media as being

seen as a collection of vague perceptions with a lack of understanding in the mainstream

community (Afzal-Khan, 2005). It is common that women feel isolated and have the sense of

"cultural homelessness" when they just moved to a new society (Bystydzienski & Resnik, 1995).

The new environment and relationships in a strange land might become obstacles to some

immigrant women. They might be interested in learning a new language, new culture and

searching for a pathway to fit into the new society (Fertig, 2009). The conflicts arise when they

struggle to maintain their values and beliefs in the new society (Bystydzienski & Resnik, 1995).

According to the *Muslim American Report* (Pew Research Center, 2011), Muslim immigrant

women experience more conflicts between being a Muslim and living in Western society. The

report stated that 71% of Muslim immigrant men say there is no conflict between Islam and

Western society, but only 54% of Muslim immigrant women agree that there is no conflict

between Islam and Western society (Pew Research Center, 2011). Haddad et al. (2006) found

that "Subject to pressure from inside and outside the Muslim community, women struggle to

determine what is possible, acceptable, and workable" (p. 14). Arab Muslim immigrant women

might face the critical questions of how to define themselves between living a tradition and a

new culture in the host country.

Integration is bringing different ethnic groups into free and equal association (*Webster's

New World Dictionary*, 1980). The existing evidence and literature reflects mixed results

regarding Muslim women's cultural integration in the United States. Immigrants' cultural

transformation experiences in a new society can be examined by looking into the integration

behavior of acculturation and assimilation. Most immigrants maintain some level of social

structural separation in the host country, particularly the structure of home culture and religion

(Cainkar, 1988; Gordon; 1964; Ogbu, 1993). Research findings suggest that immigrants'

adjustment and integration outcomes are determined within immigrants' internal influences from

their ethnic groups and external influences of relationships between ethnic groups and the

dominant group (Ogbu, 1993). Cainkar (1988) stresses the importance of the fundamental role

of social relationships and the social organization of immigrants' everyday lives in a new

community. The population's demographic background with the experiences in their homeland

and host country and, religious, linguistic, political, and socio-economic status are all intertwined

and influence integration outcomes (Ajrouch, 2012).
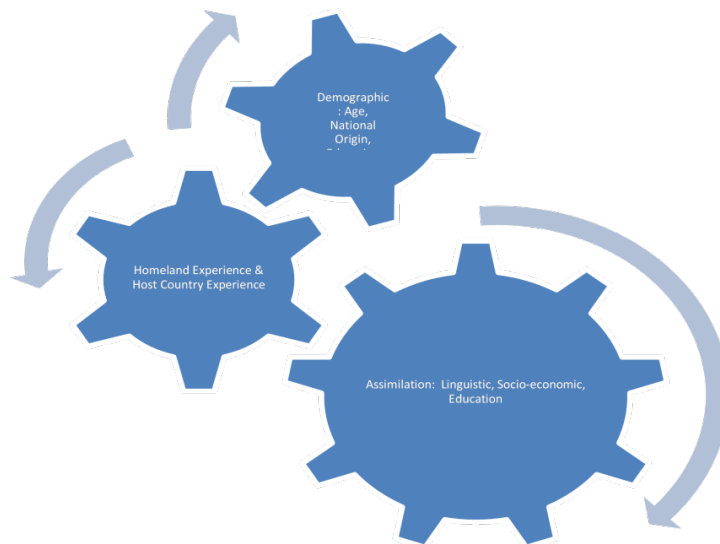
Figure 1. Integration Outcomes are Influenced by Different Factors

Immigrant women might experience some similar obstacles in the United States, such as language and culture. However, the issues arise from the bias toward and perceptions of Arab Muslim immigrant women, which might make their lives in a new country more complex (Haddad et al, 2006). The portrait of Muslim immigrants is marked by public perception (Abraham & Shryock, 2000). Men with Arab names were held as terrorists after 9/11 (Cainkar, 2009). Women who wear hijab were threatened in stores (Afzal-Khan, 2005). The mass media often mobilize society by providing pictures of popular cultural representations (Afzal-Khan, 2005). The cultural image of Arab and Islam are received in a shallow channel and not understood fully by the west (Afzal-Khan, 2005). The information the public receives from the media is often questionable. The portrait of orientalism such as women being oppressed, married to polygamists, being sexually lustful, and exotic can be seen in the media, film, and literature (Afzal-Khan, 2005). A collection of vague perceptions in the community with a lack of understanding of the life of Arab Muslim immigrant women creates a mystery to the mainstream community. Haddad et al. (2006) wrote:

> Muslim women in America may or may not choose to publicly identify themselves with Islam as a religion and a way of life. Yet all of them in one way or another are facing the compelling questions of how to understand themselves as Americans and how to define themselves so as to be understood by their fellow citizens. (p. 4)

Said (1977) raised a whole set of questions which are worthy of the discussion for the problems of human experience:

> How does one represent other cultures? What is another culture? Is the notion of a distinct culture (or race, or religion, or civilization) a useful one, or does it always get involved either in self-congratulation (when one discusses one's own) or hostility and

aggression (when one discusses the "other")? Do cultural, religious, and racial

differences matter more than socio-economic categories, or politico historical ones? How

do ideas acquire authority, "normality," and even the status of "natural" truth? What is

the role of the intellectual? Is he there to validate the culture and state of which he is a

part? What importance must he give to an independent critical consciousness, and

oppositional critical consciousness? (p. 326)

An Arab Muslim immigrant woman who carries a deep traditional culture and religious

background might feel her identity being challenged in western society. Differences are affected

by many factors according to researchers: religion, ethnicity, gender, culture, age, disability,

sexual orientation, work, education, class, income, and etcetera (Ogbu, 1993). Living in a new

society, speaking a different language, adapting to a different lifestyle, learning a different

culture, searching for different values, and experiencing different political rights are all factors

might affect Arab Muslim immigrant women's lives in the United States.

Chapter 2: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

This chapter presents brief studies about the history of immigrants who moved to the United States from countries in the Arab League, including the roles of women immigrants have played in history. Based on studies, the reasons of immigration were stated in order to understand immigrants' diverse backgrounds. The studies on the topics of identity, religion, culture, gender, family, English language proficiency, educational attainment and cultural adaptation provide insights to analyze immigrant women's experiences. This chapter provides a review of the research and a theoretical framework for this study that explores Muslim Arab immigrant women's identities through their personal stories.

Arab Immigrants

People who immigrate to a new society voluntarily are defined as immigrants (Ogbu, 1993). According to *Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language* (1980), an immigrant is a person who comes into a new country, region, or environment in order to settle there. The United States was built by immigrants (Spickard, 2007). Immigrants who move to the United States believe that they will establish better economic conditions, more opportunities for better lives, and gain political freedom (Cainkar, 1988; Ogbu, 1993). In the literature, Arab immigrants and Arab Muslim immigrants are frequently mentioned together. Arab immigrants have played unique roles in United States immigration for centuries (Abraham & Shryock, 2000; Cainkar, 1988). Like other immigrants, according to historical descriptions from the Arab American National Museum (AANM), Arab immigrants initially experienced a lack of objective structural social and political position. Arab immigrants come from rural and urban areas in

different countries. This study focuses on immigrants from the Arab League. Although these countries do not have the largest Muslim populations, they do have the highest density of Muslim population (Pew Research Center, 2007a).

According to a Pew Research Center report (2011), Muslim immigrants comprised less than one percent of the total population in the United States in 2000, but Muslim immigrants have increased to more than one percent of the total population in the United States in 2011; 63% of Muslims in the U.S. are first generation immigrants; 37% are foreign-born Muslims from the Arab regions. Of the Arab Muslim immigrants in the United States, 55% are male and 45% are female; more than half of Arab Muslim immigrants are married (Pew Research Center, 2011). In the United States, Arab immigrants represent a diverse population with different races, languages, groups, education, and cultures (Haddad et al., 2006). They practice different religions, work in a variety of fields, and have a range of educational backgrounds and political affiliations (Haddad et al., 2006).

People in the United States view these Arab countries through economic, religious, and political lenses; they play important roles in relation to the United States economically and politically (McAlister, 2001). McAlister (2001) states that "Moral geographies" (p. 5) mark connections of the United States and the world, which shapes human understandings cognitively, ethically and politically. Conflicts of race, religion, and culture have long existed and persist to this day. Humans suffer from different situations that happen in different parts of the world and in different times. Arab Muslim immigrants have experienced different circumstances, different racial questions at different times of history and these conflicts and questions have grown more urgent and visible since 9/11 (Cainkar, 2009; Haddad et al., 2006).

Research shows that Arab Muslim immigrants believe that immigration would lead to more freedom of choice, better educational opportunities, better economic well-being, and an escape from political insecurity (Cainkar, 2009). Ogbu (1993, 1981) argued that voluntary immigrants are more willing to try to overcome some obstacles and are motivated by a desire to seek better opportunities (Ogbu, 1993, 1981). Ogbu (1993) theorized that those who immigrate involuntary tend to resist assimilation into the new society and they might try to return home quickly. Immigration for women, in particular, may be either involuntary, such as new brides who find themselves in a total new environment, or voluntary, such as those who come to study for self-achievement through at higher education or to seek better economic prosperity. These immigrant women may reexamine the issues of gender, relationship, identity, education, religion and culture after they have resettled in the new country and society (Cainkar, 2009; Haddad et al., 2006; Shakir, 1997).

Late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century Arab immigrants. In the early nineteenth century, the majority of Arabs immigrated to the United States were from "Great Syria," which included the countries of Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, and Palestine/Israel, and with small numbers from Yemen, Iraq, Morocco, and Egypt (Cainkar, 2009). During the 1880s and 1920s, economy and politics were driving forces for immigration (Spickard, 2007). Because the U.S. census uses racial identity Arab immigrants, many of whom are white, they are not easily identified in the U.S. census data; however, we learn from researchers that Syrians were the first Arabic-speaking immigrant group to arrive in the United States in the 18th century and were not classified with any racial identities (Gualtieri, 2009; Naff, 1985; Spickard, 2007). At a time when immigrants of color were banned from becoming United States citizens, (Gualtieri, 2009, Spickard, 2007), Arab immigrants were able to integrate to society and benefited from political

inclusion and economic mobility (Cainkar, 2009; Gualtieri, 2009; Naff, 1985). For example, Najour in 1910 and George Dow in 1915 as Syrians were able to claim their whiteness and earned United States citizenship (Gualtieri, 2009, Spickard, 2007). By the early 20th century, Arab immigrants were able to maintain a distinctive culture while assimilating into a mainstream American society (Abraham & Shryock, 2000; Gualtieri, 2009). "Whiteness" was for people immigrating to the United States from European countries and this notion of "whiteness" and "sameness" helped Arab immigrants' rapid incorporation into the American middle class (Gordon, 1964; Gualtieri, 2009). This was not always the case for immigrant Muslim women.

The life of an immigrant woman was seen differently depending upon the factors of religion, culture, age, work, education, and class/income (Cainkar, 2009; Haddad et al., 2006; Shakir, 1997). Due to religious beliefs, a family might have made a decision that an Arab Muslim immigrant woman should not travel alone traditionally, this traditional practice continues in the present (Cainkar, 2009; Shakir, 1997). Arab women, especially unmarried women, traveled to places that were not appropriate in Arab customs and this kind of family movement imposed limitations on women's experiences in their new country according to Cainkar (2009). While the literature describes a chain migration, in which the young unmarried Arab males often arrived in the United States before their wives or fiancées' arrivals, there is also evidence of Arab women migrating to the United States as widows who operate outside the traditional chain migration paradigm (Gualtieri, 2009; Spickard, 2007).

Culturally, some Arab women were expected to keep the house in order and to care for their children while men worked outside of the home; however, research evidence shows that during the early migration era between 1880 and 1920, Arab immigrant women also played active roles as breadwinners (Shakier, 1997). Shakier (1997) mentions that some Arab

immigrant women experienced liberation in the United States, usually due to economic reasons; they might work outside of the home to support the family. Some women worked as peddlers; others worked in mills and factories. They worked to support their families in the United States and even sent money to their families back in the home countries. Shakier (1997), as similar to the stories described in the Arab American National Museum in Dearborn Michigan, describes the cases of women's migration as having occurred mostly due to economic reasons in early nineteenth century. They earned enough money to send their husbands and their children to the United States.

  Twentieth century Arab immigrants. United States immigration laws of the Emergency Quota Act of 1921 and the Immigration Act of 1924 restricted and then shut down immigrations from certain countries. Immigration policy changed and was reopened again with the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965. The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 (enacted 1968) changed how quotas were applied and ended the Nations of Origins formula. The early immigrants were from peasant origins with little formal education and were Christian (Cainkar, 2009; Naff, 1985). Although, the majority of Arab immigrants who came to the United States were Muslim and Christian with modest means and with little education (Cainkar, 2009; Naff, 1985), there was a segment of immigrants who came with privileged backgrounds as well as students and professionals who immigrated to the United States during that time (Cainkar, 2009; Naff, 1985). Arab immigrants settled in the United States for different reasons, not only for economic advancement but also because of the interest of American foreign policy in the Middle East (Cainkar, 2009). Cainkar (2009) stated that unlike immigrants from many other ethnicities, whose motivations were principally domestic interests, Arab and Muslim Americans' reasons for immigration were influenced by "the global political and economic

interests of a rising American superpower" (p. 2). Historically, Arab immigrants were associated

with American foreign policy instead of domestic economics, which was quite different from

other immigrant groups (Cainkar, 2009). According to Cainkar (2009), "Arab immigrants who

migrate seeking personal safety, political stability, better work, education opportunities, a better

life for their children, and the capacity to generate enough capital to support family left back

home" (p. 83).

The new law of 1965 marked a specific impact on immigrant women (Spickard, 2007).

Due to the open door policy, many professionals and international students came to the United

States to work or to attend universities. Because of the trend of family immigration, overall

women's immigration increased sharply (Spickard, 2007). Many Arab men and women came to

study in higher education institutions in the 1980s for the political reasons (Cainkar, 2009). The

experiences of Arab immigrants were embedded in local social relationships (Cainkar, 2009).

Immigrants brought with them their human capital and sought out relatives or friends upon their

arrival in the United States (Bourdieu, 1986; Cainkar, 2009; Ogbu, 1993; Shryock, 2000).

Although an immigrant community exists only after Arab women immigrants arrive and

formalize a family, Arab women are often neglected in the immigrant literature studies (Cainkar,

1988). They were examined only when they entered into the workforce (Cainkar, 1988). While

gender is a critical matter to examine, the immigrant experience varies depending on the person's

country of origin and religion. There is a perception that Muslim immigrant women are

oppressed (Afza-Khan, 2005). Cainkar's (1988) research shows, however, that Palestinian

immigrant women in the Chicago area expressed contentment with their roles in the context of

home and community in the United States.

Trends of immigration and its impact. Throughout the twentieth century, there have

been many cases where immigrants have arrived in the United States to seek better economic

development or educational opportunities. Economic trends show that education and technology

have brought people closer in different parts of the world. Notions of citizenship have been

defined and redefined in the global age. While people are brought together physically from

different countries, immigration has been described politically, economically, and globally. The

multicultural understandings become more important as a whole internationally. Globalization

also affects the traditional idea of immigration to Arab Muslim immigrant women. Loveland

(2016) reports that Arab Muslim immigrant women are trained to be engineers or leaders in a

business environment. In order to understand the complexities of economic trend and its impact

on immigration, McGrew's (1995) definition of globalization is adapted here to explain the

global trend of migration in the socio-economic respect:

> Globalization refers to the multiplicity of linkages and interconnections that transcend the
>
> nation-states (and by implication the societies) which make up the modern world system.
>
> It defines a process through which events, decisions, and activities in one part of the
>
> world can come to have significant consequences for individuals and communities in
>
> quite distant parts of the globe. Nowadays, goods, capital, people, knowledge, images,
>
> communications, crime, culture, pollutants, drugs, fashions, and beliefs all readily flow
>
> across territorial boundaries. Transnational networks, social movements, and
>
> relationships are extensive in virtually all areas of human activity from the academic to
>
> the sexual. Moreover, the existence of global systems of trade, finance, and production
>
> binds together in very complicated ways the prosperity and fate of households,
>
> communities, and nations across the globe. (p. 470)

The advantages and disadvantages of economic movement and its impact on immigration are based on government immigration policies (Kambutu, 2013). The role of government is to establish an institutional framework in order to provide the freedom of commodities exchange practices, educational exchange practices, and immigration (Harvey, 2005). Under the term of globalization, many government policy makers adjusted some policies to embrace this huge scale of exchanges (Harvey, 2005). The process of globalization has developed not only in the form of government's institutional frameworks to preserve the national and/or elite power but also has developed a sense of freedom in exchange of labor, social relations, and technologies (Harvey, 2005).

Immigration is one major force rapidly reshaping the world (Schiller, Basch, & Blanc, 1995). Immigration contributes to capital transmission and capital circulation which makes the United States a leading force in leading policies, education, and world economies (Spickard, 2007). Capital circulation creates a phenomenon of constantly shifting, thinking, and acting of knowledge, cultural transmission, social classification and economic empowerment in the United States and the whole world (Kambutu, 2013). Globalization has affected the educational programing practices at universities such as study abroad programs and the recruitment of international students (Harvey, 2005). The new digital era has created the world that is mutually interactive and interconnected and has crossed many boundaries (Harvey, 2005). In the past, researchers have viewed immigrants as persons who try to disconnect from their roots and to assimilate into a different society and culture (Schiller et al., 1995). In more recent years, however, researchers concluded that in many cases immigrants adopt multiple and situational identities (Schiller et al., 1995). Immigration processes are increasingly seen as linked to the restructuring of capital globally (Schiller et al., 1995). There is a need to reconceptualize

immigrants' experiences in the United States (Schiller et al., 1995). Schiller et al. (1995)

indicated that "When we study migration rather than abstract cultural flows or representations,

we see that transnational processes are located within the life experience of individuals and

families, making up the warp and woof of daily activities, concerns, fears, and achievements" (p.

50). Reasons for immigration could be for jobs, education, to escape political persecution, to

find safety, to get married, or for other reasons (Pew Research Center, 2007b). Jordanians and

Kuwaitis, for example, say that the reason to immigrate to the United States is for education;

Lebanese, for example, say that the main reason to immigrate to the United States is for safety

(Pew Research Center 2007b). Almost all people from different countries cite the prospect of

job opportunities as a reason to immigrate (Pew Research Center 2007b).

Globalization serves the opportunities of capital circulation freely (Fitchett, 2013). That

being said, immigrants consider immigration as a path based on more secure and better economic

opportunities (Fitchett, 2013). During the recent globalization, immigration to the United States

has been steadily increasing every year (Pew Research Center, 2011). Through the process of

immigration, the exchange of commodities and human resources creates international integration

(Kambutu, 2013). Global commerce and free trade have created a phenomenon of individualism

(Kambutu, 2013). Commerce and free trade exchange also create gaps between equity and

inequity (Tastsoglou & Dobrowolsky, 2006). Immigrants often have to accept minimum wage

jobs to make a living in a new country (Tastsoglou & Dobrowolsky, 2006). For nations that

accept immigrants and to serve the interests of poor nations, there is a concern of the

unawareness of emerging social injustices such as cultural domination, racism, ethnic prejudice

and religious intolerance (Kambutu, 2013). While the world is embracing the concept of

economic globalization, its challenges are to consider human migration under the domain of the

labor and market without neglecting cultural and social capital (Fitchett, 2013). Pew Research Center's Pew Global Attitudes surveys show that there is a great concern about inequality, threats to traditional culture/identity, threats to the environment and threats to immigration policies (Pew Research Center, 2007b). Fitchett (2013) describes in order to understand globalization, people need to understand "critical critique of hidden neoliberal message and appreciating the multifaceted realities of our society" (p. 34). Immigration creates a community of plurality and multiple identities by each nationality (Fitchett, 2013), and in the process people learn to embrace diversity and engage in cross-cultural exchanges (Fitchett, 2013). Such interactions raise the need for a critical consciousness concerning issues of social justice (Kambutu, 2013).

The effects of being exposed to the rapid changes are present globally for men and women; women's immigration is often also connected with the need of changing socio-economic conditions (Pew Research Center, 2007). The motivation for immigration may change immigrants' attitudes toward the traditional roles in different contexts. Immigration policies allow immigrant women to work at different levels of jobs and support the family domestically or internationally (Tastsoglou & Dobrowolsky, 2006). A woman's role in the context of global capitalism is an interesting area to investigate.

Women's immigration for economic reasons could be categorized into three different groups: the first group comprises those who immigrate to the United States as dependents, such as a wife or a daughter; the second group includes those who immigrate to the United States to work in jobs to support the family domestically (at the host country) or in the home country; the third group includes those who immigrate with skill sets to study or work as professionals in the United States (Spickard, 2007). Globalization policies also allow many women to study at

university in the United States with their home government scholarships (International Institution

of Education, 2014). Changes in today's social world have brought attention to the immigrant

female work force (Tastsoglou & Dobrowolsky, 2006). Women's economic immigration

experiences have become more complicated according to Tastsoglou and Dobrowolsky (2006),

"experiences of downward class mobility and de-skilling were common" (p. 10). Tastsoglou and

Dobrowolsky (2006) further found that when making employment decisions, immigrant women

gave first consideration to the needs and wishes of family members. Opportunities and

constraints encountered with economic movement are not consistent in all ethnic groups, which

make the understanding immigrant women's experiences in a new society more complex (Read

& Cohen, 2007; Tastsoglou & Dobrowolsky, 2006). Tastsoglou and Dobrowolsky (2006)

suggest that we need to interact with immigrant women by hearing their insights, understanding

their dialogues, and considering their perceptions, then drawing on their experiences to inform

immigration practices.

Identity

Identity refers to socially constructed unique qualities of an individual and a group (Dai,

2009). According to Dai (2009), identity can refer to individual identity or collective identity.

Individual identity refers to a self as distinct from others (Dai, 2009; Brewer & Gardner, 1996).

Collective identity refers to a group of people who form a unique collective cultural identity and

share a meaningful system (Dai, 2009). Researchers (Dai, 2009; Brewer & Gardner, 1996)

found that both individual identity and collective identity are grounded within social interactions.

Cross-cultural interaction in different societies, individual identity (self-representation) and

collective identity (group-representation) create a cultural negotiation phenomenon (Dai, 2009).

Identity is constructed and constantly recreated by an individual (Dai, 2009). Researchers (Dai,

2009; Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Kim, 2001) found that individual identity can be enriched by experiencing different societies. Influences from different societies transform a person's self-recognition, which creates a unique individual identity (Brewer & Gardner, 1996). Researchers (Dai, 2009; Kim, 2001) have utilized cultural extension to explain how one defines him/herself through his/her relationships to others and to social groups. In these extensions, fundamental cultural differences are not neglected; one's culture does not just exist to be adapted without any effort (Dai, 2009; Kim, 2001). When a person is exposed to a different culture, he/she evaluates relationships with others (Ogbu, 1993), the need to participate and to negotiate relationships form collective identities (Dai, 2009) and primary cultures within a group (Ogbu, 1993). This relationship assessment between self and others reflects one's integration outcomes (Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Ogbu, 1993). The cross cultural relationships establish when participants keep open minded attitudes and negotiate what to accept and what not to accept (Dai, 2009). Mindfulness of one's frame of reference creates venues of one's adventures to assess one's self need and motivation of accepting new cultures (Ogbu, 1993). The frame of reference includes a person's past experiences and a person's recognition of who he/she was and who he/she is now (Ross & Buehler, 2004).

Some argue that one's identity is a more important issue among the women (Haddad et al., 2006; Volpp, 2001). Volpp (2001) examines the problems of ascribing labels to immigrant women, such as victims, through a feminist or multicultural lens as they self-identity during the citizenship-making process. Public stereotypes of immigrants may preclude the sense of belonging for immigrants to the mainstream society (Volpp, 2001). Therefore, identity is posed as an important issue in the citizenship-making processes for immigrants (Ross & Buehler, 2004; Volpp, 2001). Citizenship mentioned here refers to one's collective experiences and the process

of creating an individual identity. Identity is often misrepresented between religion and culture

(Volpp, 2001). Identity could also be confused as a freedom of choice and/or a misperception of

a citizenship representation (Haddad et al., 2006). For example, some Muslim women might

choose to veil (wearing a scarf for coverage) in order to express an identity to the public (Haddad

et al., 2006). Public views of veiling differ in social and political contexts; for example, veiling

in France has been challenged as not representing the "national French character"; however, in

the United States, veiling is a personal decision of practicing freedom of choice (Read, 2007). A

Western White woman who wears a scarf as a fashion statement might be mistakenly identified

as a Muslim woman (Volpp, 2001). The practice of veiling is a complex matter for Muslim

women. The *Qur'an* does not stipulate veiling; however, it has the original intention of

protection, honor, and distinction of women (Esposito, 1988). Arab immigrant women and the

first generation of immigrants practice culture and religion to preserve traditions: however,

future generations might be confronted with different ideas between the tradition and the new

culture. Who gets to decide to veil or not to veil? These questions can only be answered by the

individual herself. By adapting knowledge situationally, an individual can utilize the frame of

cultural reference to negotiate his/her own needs and identity in order to gain/maintain her social

and cultural memberships (McLaren, 2009; Ogbu, 1993). A woman's identity could change

because of her age, class/income, status, work, education and could always contest within

oneself and the community one lives in (Volpp, 2001).

Identity is often studied in the fields of psychology and social studies for human

development in a diverse community. There is a phenomenon of identity transformation and

extension in a new environment (Berry, 2005; Boyer, 2001). The above discussion makes a case

for immigrants who establish intercultural identity throughout their time in a new country (Ross

& Buehler, 2004). However, a person's identity is influenced by religion, culture, gender, and

relationships with others (Haddad et al., 2006; Gordon, 1964; Gibson, 2001; Read & Oselin,

2008). What happens if immigrants live in a community where there are no differences between

home and the new country? What happen if immigrants bring with them a strong ethnic enclave

and home tradition culture? These questions need to be answered by studying each immigrant's

stories.

 Religion. Muslim immigrants' religious practices vary by countries of origin, by age, by

culture, and by personal beliefs. A Pew survey finds that 65% of adult Muslims who live in the

United States were foreign-born, 37% of foreign-born Muslims are from Arab regions; 55% are

male and 45% are female (Pew Research 2011). According to Pew Research (2011), about 41%

of first generation Muslim Americans come from Arabic-speaking countries in the Middle East

and North Africa, 27% Muslim immigrants are from South Asia (Pakistan, India, Bangladesh

and Afghanistan), and 33% Muslim come from other various countries. Religious practice is

often mixed with cultures (Read, 2007). There is a notion that religious practice plays an

important role in integration; however, according to Ajrouch (2012) the prime factors

contributing to integration are assimilation and education, attending religious services is not an

influential factor for the integration. Religious institutions provide support to the lower income

levels; however, they do not enhance ethnic groups economically (Ajrouch, 2012). Ethnic

communities maintain boundaries between their cultural orientations and the American

mainstream by defining their gender and family roles (Read & Oselin, 2008). While Islam

clearly establishes that men and women are equal, it does recognize that they are not identical in

terms of their roles in the context of family and community (Read & Oselin, 2008). According

to the posted information at one mosque, "God's rules apply to both genders, but in different

ways." For example, God commanded women to cover certain part of their body to preserve their modesty (Esposito, 1988). Men are also required to cover parts of their bodies out of modesty, but not in the same way as women (Esposito, 1988). Traditionally, Arab Muslim immigrant women live in a collective community in their home countries. Their roles in the family and community might change in the new society (Read & Oselin, 2008). One example of attribute is the practice of religion. Practicing religion is considered an important part of the daily life for Arab Muslim immigrant women (Haddad et al., 2006). However, women might practice religion differently from men (Haddad et al., 2006). The Pew Research Center found that females attend the mosque less frequently than males due to the reason of female's being constrained to be outside of their homes (2007). Some women might choose to express their religion in very public ways while some women might choose to not to express publicly but privately (Haddad et al, 2006). The religious practice might be reflected in their dress, their participation in the mosque, and their lifestyles. In today's western society, some women might not focus on their religious identities, their appearance, or mosque attendance; some women might choose to challenge the traditions in a different place and time according to Haddad et al. (2006).

Muslims believe in one God, Allah; Muhammad is His Prophet, and *Qur'an* is the teaching of Muhammad (Esposito, 1988). Although the beliefs and practices integrate Muslim life, the interpretation and applications of Islam are different in different cultural contexts, teaching, and in different eras (Read, 2007). According to the survey by Pew Research Center (2011), 100% of Muslim in Arab League, Middle East, and North Africa believe in one God and the Prophet Muhammad; 98% of Muslims from Southeast Asia and 97% of Muslim in South Asia and Central Asia believe in one God and the Prophet Muhammad. The subject of women

and the family remains an important and sensitive topic in Muslim societies (Esposito, 1988).

Sharia law reflects the *Qur'anic* concern for the rights of women and the family (Esposito,

1988). The traditional family structure, the roles and responsibilities of its members, and family

values may be identified in the law; the father or senior male is the leader to guide the family

(Esposito, 1988). The law has clearly identified male and female roles (Esposito, 1988). By

law, females should be protected for their civil liberties based on the guidelines set forth by God

and His Prophet (Esposito, 1988). Muslims practice Islam by following the five pillars and the

law of *Qur'an* (Esposito, 1988). The sixth pillar was added to the five pillars as the collection of

six traditions is done through consensus of the community (Esposito, 1988). The six traditions

are (a) the profession of faith (b) prayer (c) almsgiving (d) the fast of Ramadan (e) pilgrimage (f)

to strive or struggle in the way of God (Esposito, 1988). According to one teaching from a

mosque in Dearborn, Michigan, instead of restriction, the *Qur'an* tends to emphasize the

participation and religious responsibility of both men and women in society (Esposito, 1988).

 Culture and religion. Complexity of the conceptualization among the Islamic religion,

Middle Eastern culture, and Western society was seen as very common during the generations of

immigrants (Esposito, 1988; Read, 2007). The interpretation of Islam is often mixed with the

interpretation of culture (Haddad et al., 2006; Read, 2007). The interpretation of cultural

traditions is also varied depending on the area in the Arab League countries (Read, 2007).

Maintaining the traditions among generations is important and yet is a challenge to most Muslim

Arab immigrants (Read, 2007). It has been reported that Muslim immigrants "modify" their

interpretation and practices of Islam and their culture in Western society (Haddad & Smith,

1996). Mosques and Imams are the equalizers to the community (Esposito, 1988). An Imam in

Dearborn stated that mosques in the United States have multi-functions, such as celebrating

weddings, providing a social place for the community, and providing a place where the immigrants gather to celebrate their home culture. Mosques in the United States also support social relations in the community. Imams will provide marriage counseling, will visit the sick, and will serve as a mediator for family conflicts. There is a notion that religious practice plays an important role in integration; however, Ajrouch (2012) found that attending religious services is not an influential factor for integration. Ajrouch (2012) indicates that the religious institutions provide support to the lower income levels; however, they do not enhance ethnic groups economically.

Gender and relationships. Islamic values toward the practice of relationships and marriage are viewed culturally rather than religiously (Walbridge, 1996). Immigration often caused by economic and political force, also arises from a widespread of influences from social relationship in the home country and the host country (Cainkar, 2009). The social relationship in the home country refers to friends' and families' emigration to the United States influencing the new immigrants' immigration decision (Cainkar, 2009). The social relationship in the host country refers to friends and families' receiving new members into the same community (Cainkar, 2009). Family and community relationships are the main function of ethnic cultural reproduction (Aswad & Bilgé, 1996; Cainkar, 1988).

Marriage within the ethnic group is considered essential to build a strong circle to maintain traditional culture (Cainkar, 1988). A male and a female each play his/her role to determine certain patterns of social life in the family as well as in the community (Aswad & Bilgé, 1996). The concept of human rights between males and females in Islam is often debated in Western society. There are things that males are permitted to do but are not permitted to females, such as in the circumstances of dating and marriage (Aswad & Bilgé, 1996).

Professional Muslim men who are eligible for marriage will not marry an Arab girl who has

dated at all, but will marry an American girl who dated many men (Haddad & Smith, 1996).

Muslim men are easier to situate in a work environment and Muslim women face more

restrictions; for instance, it might be a concern for Muslim women to work with males in the

workplace (Haddad & Smith, 1996). Girls are concerned about how they supposed to behave,

what they can and cannot do outside of the home, what they can eat and what they cannot eat

(Shryock, 2000). Men and women's relationships are taught during the early ages (Shryock,

2000). Shryock described that it is the men who make the decisions and women are expected to

show men the appropriate respect (Shryock, 2000). Haddad & Smith (1996) cited Azizah al-

Hibri, a lawyer, a professor, and a spokesperson, which described the general perceptions of

women's role for maintaining the Islamic value:

- The woman's role is clear that whether or not she works outside of the home. Women
  have primary responsibility for the care of children and the household management.

- The American feminist movement tends to see its own individual experience. It doesn't
  apply cross-culturally to all women from different countries of origin.

- Arab Muslim women's concerns are clearly political in nature, but American feminists
  are unwilling to risk involvement in those issues.

- Western feminism focuses on freedom and opportunity for the individual rather than for
  the welfare of the larger group. Muslim immigrant women are more conscious of their
  cultural identify.

- Western feminism raises consciousness based on the desire to avoid exploitation by
  males, while, for Arab women, it is to avoid exploitation by outsiders. (p. 38)

Studies of social relations and organizations show that women play the role in maintaining ethnic home culture (Aswad & Bilgé, 1996; Haddad & Smith, 1996; Cainkar, 1998). A woman usually holds primary responsibility for housework and raising the children in a family. She controls the reproduction of ethnic culture (Aswad & Bilgé, 1996; Haddad & Smith, 1996; Cainkar, 1998).

English Language Proficiency

English language proficiency has a positive correlation to cultural assimilation and employment across ethnicity groups (Ajrouch, 2012 & Read & Cohen, 2007). The English language skills, education and length of time in the country associate with political integration, work, income, and socio-economic integration according to Ajrouch (2012). Research indicates that younger males with higher education levels, proficient English language skills, and longer time in the United States and working full time have higher household incomes (Ajrouch, 2012). Research also indicates that the Muslim immigrants from South Asia have better English language skills and have higher household incomes (Ahmed, Kaufman, & Naim, 1996). The case of South Asian Muslim immigrants shows that learning English prior to immigrating to the United States leads to professional jobs. Their experiences indicated that English proficiency was not related to the political integration but related to culture, economics, work, and income. Ajrouch (2012) found that a male immigrant who speaks English well stays a longer time in the United States with a good host country experience and has the best integration outcomes in the host country. There is no research that shows the effects of immigration integration for Muslim immigrant women specifically.

Educational Attainment and Human Capital

The motivation and consequences of female education in ethnic and religious contexts have been studied by scholars such as Cohen, Read, and Oselin. Some Arab Muslim immigrant

women, depending on their countries of origin obtain formal education while some do not have any formal education. Some women choose to stay home with formal higher education while some choose to seek employment regardless of their levels of education (Read & Oselin, 2008). Research has shown that religious conservatism weakens women's educational achievement and decreases their employment opportunities (Read & Oselin, 2008). However, Read and Oselin's (2008) evidence showed mixed results within different ethnic groups. This evidence indicated that gender inequality does not link to female education and employment. Read and Cohen's (2007) research showed that the link between education and employment is not consistent among groups of Arab, Iranian, Korean, and Asian Indian women. Education has traditionally been viewed as a pathway for females to gain skills for employment and gain income for being independent from their husbands' and family supports (Read & Oselin, 2008). According to the U.S. Census report in 2009, educational attainment among students who are foreign born or who have foreign-born parents and who are White and non-Hispanic at the graduate level is 66%. Since the designation of "Arab" is included as "White" according to Census report, it is possible that they are part of those foreign born who have obtained education. An analysis and case statement for the Dearborn report showed that in 2000, 41% of Dearborn citizens were foreign born and more than half arrived in the United States between 1990 and 2000 (Metzger, 2007). Although the report shows a low employment rate among women; 35% of women 16 years and over are in labor force, the report reveals that the city has highly educated younger immigrants and high educational attainment among second and third generation Arabs, (Metzger, 2007). The research showed that "Arab Americans support female education as a resource, not for economic mobility, but to ensure the proper socialization of children, solidarity of the family, and ultimately the maintenance of ethnic and religious identity" (Read & Oselin, 2008, p. 296).

Read and Oselin's finding recognized that religion is not the factor in relation to female

educational attainment and employment. Religion does not prevent women education and

employment. Culture influences the determination whether females utilize education for

employment purposes or as a collective family resource (Read & Cohen, 2007). Read and

Oselin's study did not explain the relationship between religion and culture and whether the

combination of both factors affects Arab Muslim women's decision about educational attainment

and employment. It would be worth studying whether they might be interrelated or separated

factors.

The correlations between ethnicity, family characteristics, degree of cultural assimilation

and employment are complex (Read & Cohen, 2007). Cultural assimilation and employment

have a positive correlation to ethnicity and duration of residence in the United States (Read &

Cohen, 2007). In studying immigrant women's employment, the research shows that it varies

among different countries of origin and ethnic groups. Formal education traditionally influences

women's employment; however, women view formal education differently among different

ethnic groups (Read & Cohen, 2007). Human capital is stated as educational attainment in this

discussion. While Bourdieu (1986) argues that education is the institutionalized state of cultural

capital, which is a form of capital to form the foundation of social life in a society, Read &

Cohen state: "The human capital argument (increase education, decrease inequality) derives

from a rich literature on White-Black-Latino/a disparities and seems to best fit the Hispanic-

origin subgroups, but is less tailored for Asian and Middle Eastern women" (2007, p. 1729).

Read and Cohen (2007) focused on human capital in four categories: (a) the characteristics of

education and English language and the relationship to factors of employment (b) the

characteristics of employment and the relationship to factors of discrimination in the industrial

restructuring; (c) the characteristics of cultural assimilation and the relationship to factors of

nativity and duration of U.S. residency; and, (d) the characteristics of family structure and the

relationship to factors of household size and income. Education and English language

proficiency have little impact on Arab immigrant women's employment, which implies other

factors are affecting their employment decisions. There is an indication to draw our attention to

how we conceptualize and measure the influence of culture on women's employment. There is a

gender role to shaping women's employment decisions outside of the home. There is a sense of

a strong intergenerational self through conveying tradition culture with women's roles in the

family (Read & Cohen, 2007).

According to the Pew Research Center (2007a), education is highly valued by immigrants

in the United States regardless of gender. Education is not part of the cultural capital without

putting in effort to develop it; as Bourdieu's (1986) explained, it refers to a part which is not

originally one's guaranteed property. Education allows an individual who can invest in oneself

to improve one's social and economic class (Bourdieu, 1986). Common arguments fail to see the

value of educational investment that takes account in human capital theories; debates of the

monetary costs of schooling and the time to study are "unable to explain the different proportions

of their resources which different agents or different social class allocate to investment [of

education]" (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 48). Bourdieu further explained: "because they [economic

arguments] fail to take systematic account of the structure of the different chances of profit

which the various markets offer these agents or class as a function of the volume and the

composition of their assets [human capital]" (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 48). The effects on "national

productivity [from education]" are unmeasurable and powerful (Bourdieu, 1986). Bourdieu

(1986) described education as a conversion of external wealth "into a habitus" (p. 48) and

becoming internal part of a person. It is a self-improvement by engaging in the work of

educational attainment (Bourdieu, 1986). Educational attainment and utilization undergird the

cultural capital. It is part of prime factors of integration in the new society which relates to the

enrichment of culture, economic and work/income (Ajrouch, 2012). A direct benefit of

education might be viewed differently by Arab immigrant women; however, a collective benefit

to the family and community is highly valued according to the research (Read & Cohen, 2007).

Cultural

Culture is defined by McLaren (2009) as "the particular ways in which a social group

lives out and makes sense of its "given" circumstances and conditions of life" (p. 65). Cainkar

(1988) defines culture as part of social structure. According to Ogbu (1993) immigrants

encounter three types of cultural differences: universal cultural differences, primary cultural

differences, and secondary cultural differences. Universal cultural differences arise when an

immigrant transits to new environment, such as new cultures, new languages, new styles of

communications, and new social relations (Ogbu, 1993). The theory of differences in a cultural

frame of reference states that universal cultural differences, primary culture differences, and

secondary differences happened with contact in a new environment (Ogbu, 1993). The universal

culture differences happen to everyone not just immigrants, such as a child going to school for

the first time, the child find differences between home and school (Ogbu, 1993). The primary

culture controls the way of behaving, thinking, feeling, and living (Ogbu, 1993). The secondary

cultural differences lie in the relationship between the dominant group culture and the culture of

the minorities (ethnics groups); therefore, conflicts arise between dominant group and minorities

(ethnic groups) when interactions occur (Ogbu, 1993). Encountering cultural differences, a

cultural frame of references takes place during the interaction process (Ogbu, 1993). Factors that

affect the cultural acculturation and integration experiences are suggested as: (a) immigrants'

different culture background (countries of origin), (b) hosting community's experience

(geographical location in the host country), (c) socio-economic status at the home country, (d)

education level at the home country, (e) immigrant's' occupation skills, (f) immigrants' previous

knowledge of urban and western culture, and (g) immigrants' gender (Gibson, 2001).

Several theories help in studying Arab Muslim immigrant women's cultural

transformation experiences in a new society such as Ogbu's (1993) cultural frame of references

and cultural-ecological theory, Bourdieu's (1986) form of capital and habitus theory; Gorden

(1964) and Boyer's (2001) cultural assimilation theory; and Kim's (2012) cross-cultural

adaptation theory.

Cultural frame of references and human competencies. Ogbu (1993) states that "the

bearers of primary cultural differences had their different cultural attributes before they came in

contact with the dominant group or entered the institutions controlled by the dominant group" (p.

490). People have a preset idea of what is acceptable and what is not acceptable within a culture

(Ogbu, 1981). Ogbu states that "the oppositional cultural frame of reference includes devices to

protect the social or collective identity of the minorities and protect and maintain their sense of

self-worth" (1993). The assessment for the integration for immigrants, especially for the group

has a sharp difference of cultural background and belief; a cultural frame of reference will take

place more profoundly (Ogbu, 1993).

Investigating immigrants' origins of human competencies could determine the integration

pattern. Depending on how Arab immigrant women see the differences in cultural frames, they

may find needs of developing human competencies to meet their subsistence demands in a new

society, since a person will need to develop different subsistence tasks to meet different society

needs (Ogbu, 1981), such as English Language training. For life in a new society, some women

may adapt skills to meet environmental demands (Ogbu, 1981), while some women may find

there are no needs to change at all in a new society.

　　　　Ogbu describes that people live in the United States as societies of "hunter gatherers" and

"subsistence farmers" (1981, p. 421). He adapted Barry, Child and Bacon's (1959) concept of a

person's attitude to have a means of making a living and meeting the demands in "low-food

accumulation" societies or "high-food accumulation" societies (Ogbu, 1981). From the cultural-

ecology framework's perspective a population was taught in a culturally organized system,

which grows through generations' collective experiential activities to meet environmental

demands (Ogbu, 1981). Daily, an Arab immigrant woman may utilize the culture differences

reference and be influenced by people and the environment around her during the transforming

process (Ogbu, 1981). It is a natural reaction of a human to react to the environmental demand

for human competencies to gain subsistence of making a living (Ogbu, 1981). Depending on the

conceptualization of the needs and the demands, an Arab Muslim immigrant woman's cultural

integration experiences may be different. Ogbu argues that the competency requirement is

different from one cultural group to another (1981). The definition of competence is different in

different populations; therefore, competencies should be viewed within the context of real life

situations (Ogbu, 1981). Connolly and Bruner (1974 as cited in Ogbu, 1981) suggest

competence could mean that an individual possesses a set of skills to perform culturally tasks

cognitively and intellectually. The competency agents are cognitive, linguistic, social-emotional,

and practical (Ogbu, 1981). These competencies help an immigrant woman to fulfill social

obligations in the society in which she lives (Ogbu, 1981). There is not enough cross-cultural

research information to explain the reasons for some immigrants to integrate/transform from a

home culture to a new society differently. However, there are research findings suggesting that human beings adapt "child-rearing" techniques such as cognitive, linguistic, social-emotional, and practical skills to meet their societal needs (Ogbu, 1981). A person will need to develop to different subsistence/cultural tasks to meet different society needs, because subsistence tasks and cultural tasks are different among all populations in different gender, age, cultures, socio-economic status and education background (Ogbu, 1981). The relationship between society and the environment determined the strategies of a person's needs to survive and influence a person's characteristic attributes (Ogbu, 1981). While immigrants move from one place to another, they face a new society like a child sees the world with a set of fresh eyes. They transform and adapt to a new set of competencies to meet the new needs to live in a new society. Like a child, an immigrant grows competencies to meet subsistence demands. Researchers (Ajrouch, 2012 & Bourdieu, 1986) explain competencies based on the forms of capital. As Arab immigrant women move from their homelands to the new society, the competencies and demands are different between the homeland the new society. Bourdieu's (1986) capital theory further discusses the cultural-ecology theory, which explains different competencies that were adapted by Arab immigrant women during the process of cultural integration and adaption transformation.

The forms of capital could gain competencies during the process of one's transformation in a social context (Bourdieu, 1986). The forms of capital namely are cultural capital and social capital (Bourdieu, 1986). McLaren (2009) and Bourdieu (1986) both claim that the world is socialized in the context of accumulated history. Capital is accumulated labor in its state of materialization, its state of objectification and institutionalization (Bourdieu, 1986). When capital is appropriate for an individual, the capitals enable the individual with social energy to situate him/herself in an environment (Bourdieu, 1986). The concept of cultural capital is in

three states: (a) the embodied state (an accumulated culture, which is linked to body and mind, such as language and tastes), (b) the objectified state (materials objects, such as clothing and belongings), and (c) the institutionalized state (qualifications) (Bourdieu, 1986). These states of cultural capital help with the study of Arab Muslim immigrant women's experiences in the United States. An immigrant woman might utilize the form of capital to establish the foundation of social life in a society (Bourdieu, 1986).

Cultural adaptation process. Researchers discussed cultural adaptation in multiple ways: such as acculturation (Berry, 1997; Boyer, 2001; & Gordon, 1964), accommodation acculturation (Berry, 1997; Boyer, 2001; Gibson, 2001; & Ogbu, 1993), selective acculturation (Gibson, 2001), additive acculturation (Gibson, 2001), cultural extension (Ogbu, 1993), cultural inversion (Ogbu, 1993), cultural diffusion (Boyer, 2001), sojourner (Sarroub, 2001), linear acculturation (Gibson, 2001), and assimilation (Gordon, 1964). Acculturation occurs when groups of people with different cultural backgrounds interact and cultural effects happen among the groups (Berry, 1997). In cross-cultural psychology, acculturation is a change of an individual (Berry, 1997). The adaptations during the changes are varied depending on the individual's development of conceptualization in the new country (Berry, 1997). Gibson (2001) mentioned three models of acculturation: linear acculturation/assimilation, accommodation and acculturation without assimilation (selective acculturation), and additive acculturation. Linear acculturation/assimilation describes immigrants economically and culturally integrates into the society throughout the duration of stay in the new society. It is a cultural and social integration from one culture to convert and accept the other culture (Gibson, 2001). A linear acculturation/assimilation model does not fully describe immigrants' experiences because we cannot neglect diverse populations and human relationships in today's society (Gibson, 2001,

Gordon, 1964). Ogbu uses (1993) "cultural inversion" to explain the phenomena of

acculturation which Gibson describes as "accommodation with assimilation" (2001). The

presumption that immigrants assimilate into a homogeneous culture has changed in the United

States these days. Immigrants from a strong ethnic enclave and home traditional culture adapt

selective acculturation (Gibson, 2001). These immigrants believe relationships maintain in the

ethnic groups keep culture tradition alive in generations (Cainkar, 1988). The assumption of a

selective acculturation can lead immigrants to rapid mobility into the middle class and a selective

acculturation can also lead immigrants who are without education, occupation skills to

downward into poverty and trapped at the bottom of economic ladder depending on the factors

such as educational attainment, living situation, environment, employment, and etcetera (Gibson,

2001). Ogbu's theories (1981 & 1993) of a frame of cultural references and a cultural-ecological

perspective and Gibson's theory (2001) of additive acculturation explain Arab Muslim

immigrant women's views of educational attainment and integration approach.

Boyer's research (2001) explains cultural assimilation as two concepts; cultural diffusion

and acculturation:

Cultural diffusion denotes the passage of ideas, norms and practices from one group to

another in general. Acculturation is the processes whereby one cultural system conquers

the minds of an individual or group. (p. 3032)

Boyer's definition (2001) of cultural assimilation is "generally to denote the situation in which a

group gradually acquires some traits of a larger society's repertoire of concepts and norms" (p.

3032). Boyer (2001) repeated Gordon's argument that "melting pot" was phrased in the 1910s.

In the nineteenth century, America accepted immigrants from European countries. The ideology

was the unification of immigrants from different origins.

It was thought to describe the essentially American and altogether laudable practice of

combining norms and practices from different groups in order to create a distinct

American political entity as well as a distinct culture. It was assumed that this cultural

alchemy would preserve the best of each culture and create and even better one, in the

same way as a free market weeds out inefficiency and fosters good practices. (Boyer,

2001, p. 3033)

Both Gorden (1964) and Boyer (2001) agree that the melting pot ideology was changed during

the time while America was becoming more diverse with immigrants from all over the world.

The patterns of integration and adaptation have been viewed differently by different society

members. While social justice is still needed, today, people celebrate multiculturalism

(Shryock, 2000). Boyer claimed that cultural diffusion occurs when minority groups attempt to

make their culture and their status visible in order to gain political power in the society (Boyer,

2001). After 9/11, Arab immigrants called for justice politically. Social justice theory argues

that people should not be treated differently because of their last name, their gender, and their

appearance (Shryock, 2000).

Examining Arab Muslim immigrant women's transformations in the new country,

cultural assimilation could take place into different ideas; some women might choose to be

sojourners (Sarroub, 2001) while some women choose to be settlers during the initial stage of

assimilation (Boyer, 2001). Integration outcomes of assimilation, and acculturation could be

complex. In some cases sojourners might not totally reflect the rejection of assimilation even

though sojourners are less willingly to adapt the new culture in a new country (Kim, 2012). As

Sarroub (2001) described, sojourners have one foot in the United States and the other in their

homeland. According to Sarroub (2001), "classic sociological theory maintains that a sojourner

is one who remains attached to his or her own ethnic group while simultaneously living in

isolation and staying apart from the host society" (p. 392). It is possible that sojourners might

take some time to become settlers or remain as sojourners forever. Kim argues that a

transformation from sojourners to settlers is not a matter of duration an individual's stay in a

country (2012). Kim's theory has some agreement with Sarroub's sojourner theory. Kim (2012)

agrees that pluralism reflects the immigrants assimilated into the mainstream culture and keep

the home traditional culture at the same time. Unlike Gibson, Kim (2001) does not suggest

acculturation is a linear process; according to Kim, the process has to go through changes over

time, which is a spiral process not a linear process (Figure 2). The individual has the choice to

seek "a dual identity" (Kim, 2012) between her home traditional culture and the new culture in a

new society.   It is common that each individual could feel more comfortable in her own ethnic

group during the intercultural transformation (Cainkar, 1988). Kim's research (2012) explained

that the phenomena during the process of integration, modifications have to take place under

different environments and different circumstances by each individual. The adaptations of

environments, the strength of dealing with stress, and the levels of support from their own ethnic

groups, play influential roles during the process (Kim, 2012)

　　　　According to Kim (2012), between being a sojourner to a settler, there are phases of

transition from enculturation, acculturation, deculturation, to assimilation. Kim (2012) asserts

that

　　　　Each individual grows up in one's given culture since childhood; the individual processes

　　　　the same kind of learning moving from one culture to a new culture, it is a repeating of

　　　　enculturation and at the same time moving to the stage of acculturation. (p. 624)

It is a process between primary culture and universal culture (Ogbu, 1993). Kim (2012) stated

that during the transition between 'enculturation' to 'acculturation', one is "challenged to

suspend, or even abandon, some of the cultural patterns that have symbolized who they are and

what they are" (p. 624). The challenges create inner conflicts which it requires time to shift to

the stage that one will start deviating from his/her own culture and start adapting the new culture.

The process of deviation is deculturation (Kim, 2012). Kim explained the phenomena of the

process of transformation from enculturation to deculturation as assimilation (Kim, 2012).

During the integration process, a person has experienced different degrees of stress and adaption

according to Kim's figure below (as cited in Kim, 2001, p. 59).
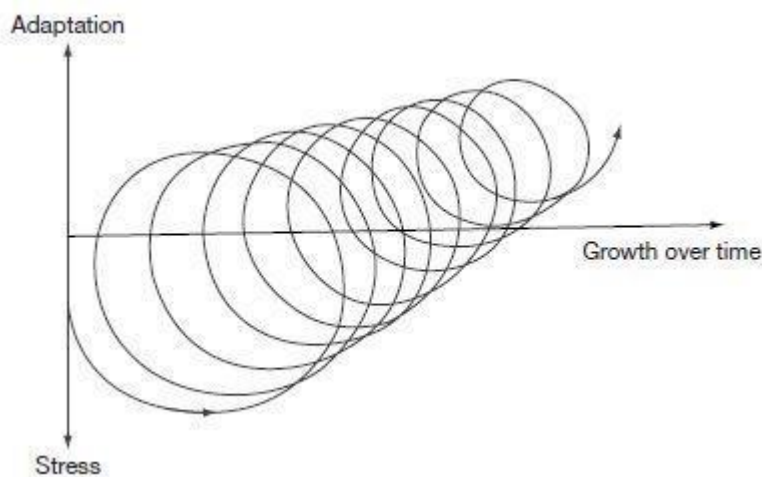
Figure 2. The Stress-Adaptation-Growth Dynamic (Kim, 2001, P. 59. Reprinted with

permission.)

Kim's (2001) theory has a similarity to Bourdieu's habitus theory, in which, "as strangers, all

newcomers embark on a cross-cultural journey as outsiders" (p. 59). Intercultural transformation

could take place from an unconscious state, to a conscious state, and to a creative stage (Dai,

2009). Kim mentioned a few factors are considered during the 'growth over time' (p. 59); three

of those factors could affect Arab Muslim immigrant women's assimilation: interpersonal

communications, pressures, and ethnic group strengths (2012). Interpersonal communications

involve those that are among people, in the environment, and the person, him/herself. Pressure

could come from the family, the community, and the person, him/herself. In the Arab immigrant

community, people preserve a tight circle of support (Shryock, 2000). Overtime, a support from

the person's ethnic group will release one's stress level and will facilitate the adaptation process

(Kim, 2012).

The cultural transformation is established on the redistribution of cultural capital in the

form of classification which Bourdieu referred it as social capital (1986). The concept of social

capital is defined by Bourdieu (1986) as resources that create the relationships to connect an

individual and the society; "the network of relationships is the product of investment strategies,

individual or collective, consciously or unconsciously aimed at establishing or reproducing social

relationships that are directly usable in the short or long term" (p. 52). The characteristics of

social capital are formed by institutionalization and representation (Bourdieu, 1986). This

classification is recognized as the power and the meaning between groups and classes (Bourdieu,

1986). Immigrants brought with them their socio-economic and unique cultural backgrounds to

seek better lives for themselves and for the next generations (Shryock, 2000). They network

with relatives or friends upon their arrival in the United States (Shryock, 2000). Immigrants with

the expenses of leaving some of their cultural capital and their social capital in the home country

seek out the connection with friends and relatives in the new country and try networking with a

group in the new community in order to rebuild their capital in the new country (Shryock, 2000).

They establish memberships and new relationships in this foreign land with the backing of the

"collectivity-owned capital" (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 51). This establishment of the membership is

an aggregation of "the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable

network or more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition-or

in other words, to membership in a group" (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 52). This connection is made by

social affiliation with a relative, uncle, aunt, brother, sister, cousin, or elders in community, or

organizations (Bourdieu, 1986). It is an action of continuous exchange during the process of

transformation (Bourdieu, 1986). This exchange of reproduction is referred to Bourdieu's theory

of social capital as "exchange transforms the things exchanged into signs of recognition and,

through the mutual recognition and the recognition of group membership which it implies,

reproduces the group" (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 52). This phenomenon of the immigrant community's

continuing introduction of new members into the group is involved with the whole, not an

individual (Shryock, 2000); as Bourdieu said: "It is what makes the games of society" (1986, p.

52).

The process of accumulation of cultural capital in its fundamental state is a process of

embodiment and cultivation (Bourdieu, 1986). The acquisition of cultural capital could be

unconscious or conscious throughout the length of time or the engagement in the environment,

which is described by Bourdieu as habitus (1986). The habitus theory (Bourdieu, 1986) and a

cultural frame of references (Ogbu, 1993) explains that process of acculturation and integration

could take a period of time by individual's examination, measurement, and mapping out of the

representation of those who live in it. Naturally human practice cannot be forced, a person's

body and mind embodiment of cultural capital to language, habit, skills, manners and

dispositions that one possess due to the life experiences can only be affected when a person

elucidates the perception and the evaluative schemata agents occur in their daily lives (Bourdieu

& Wacquant, 1992). People sometimes mistake habitus as being deeply ingrained; however, it is

a process of cultural development (Bourdieu, 1986 & Kim, 2001). Habitus is a system of

dispositions, which is process of structures and practices (Bourdieu, 1986). A person's physical

embodiment of cultural capital could change overtime and among different generations after

moving from one society to another society (Bourdieu, 1986). One could adopt new habits,

skills, and dispositions unconsciously due to one's life experiences in a different environment

(Bourdieu, 1986). A person's experiences in a new society could be like playing games and an

embodied type of feeling for games, in which we regularly find ourselves (Bourdieu, 1986). The

habitus theory explains the form of a person's navigation in the new social environment

(Bourdieu, 1986). This cultural development by a diverse community could build aesthetic

sensibilities by citizens from different cultural backgrounds (Fitchett, 2013). The social world

can be divided by different fields and each field is not mutually exclusive depending on a

person's own adaptation and transformation (Bourdieu, 1986). One might want to totally

assimilate while another might want to acculturate (Sarroub, 2001). During inter-transformation

among the fields, people often struggle to position themselves to hope, to navigate, and to adapt

(Bourdieu, 1986). Bourdieu's form of capital theory formulates an understanding of immigrants'

transformation in western society.

Kwon's (2009) research on human capital is derived from Bourdieu's cultural capital and

social capital theories, which Ajrouch considers the major factor to study immigrant's integration

experiences (2012). Human capital is fundamentally embodied in people with higher levels of

individual competence (Kwon, 2009). Ogbu (1981) also mention that human beings acquire

competencies to meet their needs. Humans become valuable assets and make contributions to

that capital on Kwon's (2009) economic perspective. Two types of capital are contributing to

society; the first one is based on humans as members of a labor force as an economic

perspective; the other one is based on the investment of physical capital as an education and

training perspective (Kwon, 2009). From the macroscopic aspects, human capital affects various

social components (Kwan, 2009; Bourdieu, 1986). Human beings frame knowledge, skills

through connecting between self and environment with constant concern for reflexivity

(Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Depending on the immigrant population's demographic

background, socio-economics, and education in their home countries, the transformation

outcomes could be assessed by their development of habitus (Bourdieu, 1986). The conceptual

foundation of human capital is based on one's accumulation of knowledge, skills through

individual's learning activities, which helps a person's transformation in a new society (Kwon,

2009).

Theoretical Framework

       The study proposed here is based on a critical theoretical frameworks and critical

discourse theory (McLaren, 2009). Critical discourse theory incorporates dialogues of

storytelling in order to illustrate lived experiences. Critical discourse theory helps to identify the

relationship between the individual and society (McLaren, 2009). Identity needs to be declared

by action, as Freire (1970) suggested, actions (interactions between the individual and society)

have to take place during changes. Kambutu (2013) suggested any objective study should

consider positionality which corresponds to the critical theory. Critical theoretical framework is

recommended to analyze the identity and the cultural adaptation experiences (Freire, 1970,

Kambutu, 2013 & McLaren, 2009). Critical dialogues serve to act as emancipation and social

agency to help the general public's understanding of individual immigrant women's view about

how they think who they are and how they identify themselves as whom they are. Arab Muslim

immigrant women might find themselves navigating to determine what is possible, acceptable,

and workable by the Muslim community and within the family circle they might receive support

and pressure at the same time (Haddad et al., 2006). The critical theory explains the

relationships of power, culture, and society (McLaren, 2009). The process of emancipation

relies on the insights of critical dialectical theory, which can serve as praxis for empowering

humanity in a globalized environment (Lee, 2012). A learner obtains knowledge through social

interaction in the world in which she lives (McLaren, 2009). Critical dialogues serve as venues

for exchanging personal cultural experiences. Problems cannot be resolved without interactively

exchanging information between individual and society (McLaren, 2009). Critical dialectical

theory claims that "knowledge is socially constructed, they mean that it is the product of

agreement or consent between individuals who live out particular social relations (e.g., of class,

race, and gender) and who live in particular junctures in time" (McLaren, 2009, p. 63). History,

language, culture, and place are interwoven in a social construction, which influence an

individual's meaning of life (McLaren, 2009). Critical dialectical theory allows one to question

how to claim an identity to share cultural experiences by recognizing the reality of some forms of

knowledge (McLaren, 2009). The strong trust among communities is based on the dialogue of

love, humility, and faith in the community (Freire, 1970). There is also a need to bring the action

by searching one's own identity and own experiences; this searching is rooted in one's

incompletion in a society which can only be carried out within the context of interaction with

others (Freire, 1970). Reflexivity and reflection help dialoguers engage in the world as a process

and as a transformation (Freire, 1970; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Surviving in a new society

is to present a continuing transformation of reality (Freire, 1970). A revolutionary movement

will allow human beings to learn the importance of equality (Freire, 1970). This revolutionary

movement has to be achieved by praxis with reflection and action (Freire, 1970). Movements

require open dialogues; it is essential that "the oppressed participate in the revolutionary process

with an increasingly critical awareness of their role as subjects of the transformation" (Freire, 1970, p. 127). One must be accountable to herself; one must to use reflexivity to speak frankly to herself of her achievements, her mistakes, and her difficulties to be able to move forward during the transformation (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Critical discourse theory incorporates dialogues of storytelling in order to illustrate lived experiences. By practicing Paulo Freire's (1970) critical pedagogy theory of emancipation and social agency, this research will extract collective reflections and a participation of freedom of expression. It is essential to create a movement of social justice to create the foundation of human equality and to empower multiracial democracy, to nurture dialogues that create an environment for crossing cultural and ethnic boundaries (Lee, 2012). To advocate for the social justice, emancipation and social agency have to be examined by addressing McLaren's (2009) statement of critical dialogue:

men and women are essentially unfree and inhabit a world rife with contradictions and asymmetries of power and privilege . . . dialectical theory attempts to tease out the histories and relations of accepted meanings and appearances, tracing interactions from the context to the part, from the system inward to the event. (p. 61)

Critical dialectical theory supports the empowerment of socially disadvantaged individual (McLaren, 2009). The empowerment is related to a relationship of a person him/herself and the society. Within dialectical perspective, all analysis starts by addressing problems within the context of individual and society, which shape the life and meaning to human experience (McLaren, 2009). By recognizing the ways and means of dialectical theory, people could utilize the social relations between oneself and the society to transform the capital sources for themselves, their families and the society they live in (McLaren, 2009).

Conclusion

The literature review shows that there is a lack of attention to women and, in particular post 9/11, when Muslim women have been stereotyped more than before (Afzal-Khan, 2005). By examining Arab Muslim immigrant women's experiences individually in the contexts of home, school, and the community, their voices will serve as a forum to create bridges of knowledge, dialogue, and greater understanding among the community. In order to study the women's experiences in the United States, this study examined their background cultures, education, family life, and communities both from their home countries and the host country. I utilized a phenomenological method by conducting individual interviews with the participants. Every lived experience is different for each individual person (van Manen, 1990). A person's story "attaches us to others and to our own histories by providing a tapestry rich with threads of time, place, character, and even advice on what we might do with our lives" (Whitherell & Noddings, 1991, p. 1).

The majority of studies about immigrants investigate them as a whole. My study focused on the Arab Muslim immigrant women in Dearborn/Detroit Michigan area. The city of Dearborn is the largest Arab communities outside the Middle East (Durán & Pipes, 2002). The "Coming to America" exhibit at the Arab American National Museum (AANM) in Dearborn tells the stories of Arab immigration over several generations from different areas in the Arab League. Learning from AANM's history research, Arabs started coming to Michigan before the auto industry's employment booming in early 20th century as peddlers and shop owners. However, the Henry Ford's five-dollar payday did bring many immigrants to work at factories in Highland Park and Dearborn including a large group of Arab immigrants. It has been rumored that Mr. Ford preferred to hire immigrants from the Arab League countries rather

than from other parts of the world and Arabs followed Mr. Ford loyally. According to AANM's

research a majority of Arab Muslims live in the city of Dearborn and Southeast of Michigan

while Christians live in cities north of the Detroit Metropolitan area. Arab Muslim immigrants

keep moving into the city of Dearborn because they seek to unite with their relatives or friends. I

encounter Arab Muslims every day at work, at restaurants, at grocery stores, at community

centers, at all kinds of businesses in the city of Dearborn. There could be a banker who is an

Arab Muslim immigrant, a police officer who is an Arab Muslim immigrant, a school teacher, or

a government official who is Arab Muslim immigrant. Many of them are highly educated and

successful professionals, while some of them have very little education and are poor. Many are

totally assimilated into mainstream society, while some are still living in the same lifestyle as at

the home country. Abraham and Shryock (2000) described the Detroit area as an emerging

community with diverse identities. Due to the complexity of the Arab Muslim immigrants in the

Southeast of Michigan, instead of studying the whole population, I decided to seek women as the

participants for my study. I chose women because I am an immigrant woman. I want to hear

other women's experiences. Furthermore, literature studies show that women play significant

roles in shaping the immigration settlement.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The intention of this research was to gain insights into the Arab Muslim immigrant

women's post-immigration experiences on how they identify after their immigration. This

research explored in the traditional culture, how immigrant women identify themselves and how

they adapt their lives in the new country. This research documented six Arab Muslim immigrant

women's voices and their experiences. It documented their self-perceptions prior to and post

immigration to the United States. It documented how they interpret their lives and themselves in

this new society. Since the study was a critical dialogic exercise about self-conscious in cultural

representation, a qualitative research design was utilized. The research questions for this study

were:

- How do Arab Muslim immigrant women identify themselves now that they permanently

  reside in the United States?

- Is this identification of themselves different from before immigration, and, if yes or no,

  how?

- Are they seeking their own identities to serve their own needs or for other reasons?

- How does education affect their identity development?

- Do these women utilize education for employment purposes outside of the home or as a

  collective family resource?

- How do they adapt to their lives in the United States?

As Creswell (2009) states qualitative research is a "means for exploring and understanding the

meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem" (p. 4). This study used

critical dialogue and culture as themes for analysis. Since the research relied on the participants'

experiences and views, the dialogue had to be meaningful with a cognitive consciousness of

finding certain patterns of understanding of these women's lives in the United States (Crotty,

1998; Giorgi, 2009). Crotty explains (1998), "meanings are constructed by human beings as

they engage with the world they are interpreting. Before there were consciousnesses on earth

capable of interpreting the world, the world held no meaning at all" (p. 43). I interviewed

women who varied by age, countries of origin, socio-economic status, education, and

professional backgrounds.

Site and Selection of Participants

In this research, I selected Muslim immigrant women who emigrated from countries in

the Arab League to live in Dearborn and Detroit Metropolitan area. The initial selection was

from personal contacts at the university where I work. I also established some personal contacts

with the director and staff at ACCESS. ACCESS has provided services to the Southeast

Dearborn community since 1971 and plays the role of advocacy for civil rights in the Arab

community as well as promotes education among the communities. I received a small grant

($5,000) from the University of Michigan - Dearborn in 2012 to work with ACCESS's Family

Literacy Program to provide Citizenship classes to low-income families and new immigrants

(Wang, 2012). My contacts with women started in year 2013. Through personal contacts, a

snowball selection method was utilized with a convenient and purposeful sampling (Creswell,

2009). Because of the focus of the study, only women who self-identified as Muslim immigrants

who came from countries in the Arab League and had citizenship or were in the process of

gaining citizenship in the United States were invited to participate in the study. I sought

diversity among the participants from different countries of origin to gain stories from women

with different backgrounds. I started with contacting 27 women by phone, email, and informal

get acquainted meetings in 2013. These women were not limited to the contacts of ACCESS and

mosques. Many of them were referred by colleagues or students at the university. Ultimately, I

identified eight women to participate in this study and six women were actually interviewed.

One woman was from ACCESS. One woman was referred by a student at the university. Two

women were referred by two colleagues. One woman was referred through another woman in

this study. The interviews were completed in May 2016. These women came from similar

socioeconomic backgrounds in their home countries. I gave each participant a pseudonym in

order to keep their anonymity as well as to keep track of each story during the study. I selected

the sites for this interviews that were convenient to the informants at the university, ACCESS,

the participant's home, and a café.

Data Collection

       Procedure. The data collection was conducted immediately after I received the

Institutional Review Board's approval to conduct the research. The duration of data collection

was three years from the initial contact with the women to the interviews with each woman. I

communicated with each woman by email, phone, and in person more than once in order to be

culturally sensitive (Leonardo, 1984). I realized that in these women's cultures, conversations

needed to be built upon mutually trustworthiness (Leonardo 1984.) The first meeting was to

introduce myself and to establish a relationship in which the women felt comfortable. After the

introduction, I obtained consent (Appendix A) from each woman by obtaining her signature.

The consent form outlined each woman's right to withdraw from the interview, if she did not feel

comfortable. It gave the right to the women to reject any questions. It explained that the study

was no risk to them. The women knew that their identities would be protected.

Interviews. An unstructured, ethnographic approach (Fontana & Frey, 1994) was utilized. These interviews were organic in nature with questions that were open-ended to avoid leading to certain presumptions. I prepared 20 interview questions (Appendix B). The interviews focused on each particular topic but they were all connected. During the interviews, there were not any objections from the women and the interviews went smoothly. All interviews started with providing each woman with an introduction to the research. I explained the purpose of my study and invited each woman to participate this study. I asked each to read the consent form and sign the form if there were no questions. I then asked each woman to tell me more about herself. After the initial topic was raised, I let the women take the lead and I went with the flow to ask more questions because some questions triggered new questions and some questions had answered my prepared questions. The interviews were audio recorded with an iPad. None of the women rejected voice recording. I took very few notes during the interviews because I wanted to focus on hearing their stories. Instead, I wrote notes immediately after I finished the interviews usually in the car before I left the interview site. There were three steps to complete the interviews.

Step one: I contacted the women by phone, text message, and/or by email. It took numerous communications to establish the initial interview appointment. The main reason for these women to accept my interview request was that I was referred by people with whom they were already acquainted.

Step two: I allowed a period of time for the women to know me and feel comfortable with me. One face-to-face personal interview was conducted with three of the women, and two interviews were conducted with the other three women. I had to conduct a second interview with three women because we could not complete the interview during the first interview. Each

interview lasted for one and a half hours. The interview was scheduled to take place at sites chosen by each woman. I anticipated some participants would not have transportation to travel; therefore, I did meet three women at their homes.

     Step three: I emailed or texted each woman to thank them for meeting with me. I let them know that I might come back with questions during transcribing the interview. I did email one woman to ask more questions while I transcribed her interview.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

     Each interview was transcribed verbatim. Once transcribed, I listened to the recording to check the accuracy of the transcription for a few times. Transcripts were analyzed to identify categories and emerging themes. All audio recordings and transcripts were saved in M+Box folders with secure login unique name and password. All hand written transcripts and notes were shredded after transferred to digital files.

     Coding. I utilized in vivo method to code the data. The transcripts were coded and were transcribed twice. I transcribed the recording by hand first, then transcribed again by typing in order to capture the meaning of each of the words and sentences. The transcripts were read and reread to capture common treads. I used three cycles to process the coding.

     First cycle: For the first cycle, I utilized two column tables. Each sentence was coded and put in the first column. I highlighted words that repeatedly showed up. I counted the frequency of the words. I then developed the categories for each individual sentence into: immigration (visa categories of these women moved to the United States), identity (the cultural identity which these women identified themselves), hijab (the views of religion and wearing hijab), marriage (the stories about their marriage), family (children, husband, and women's role), community (worshipping, ethnicities, and connections), employment (work outside of home),

educational attainment (formal education and college degrees), English language proficiency

(learning English language, accent, interaction with others), culture and religion (traditional

home culture and religious beliefs), and assimilation and adaptation (integration process,

language usage at home, and relationships with the mainstream). All sentences were broken

down to fit into each category and recorded in the second column.

Table 3.1

Cycle I Coding Example

Statement	Category
"Children do the same what they see at home."	Family
"Women carry the tradition at home."	Identity Cultural tradition Family
"I used to go to learn the language."	Educational attainment
"He went back to Africa to few months."	Immigration
"I went Africa and it's part of love."	Marriage
"They got married have children grandchildren, yeh, we are all here now."	Marriage Family
"All the way, I have to check out my kids."	Family
"All the family get together on Friday."	Family
"I start wear scarf."	Hijab
"I worked in this house, all the way."	Family
"I used to be at the store every day."	Employment
"I am more religious because of children and grandchildren."	Culture and religion
"I speak Arabic at home."	Assimilation and adaptation

Second cycle: I searched themes across all interviews from the first cycle of

categories. Five themes were identified from each category for each woman: cultural identity,

women's role in preserving the family traditional culture and religious beliefs, educational

attainment, a supportive community, and selective acculturation. I created documents for each

theme and labeled each document by the theme.

Table 3.2

Cycle II Example

Woman's name	Theme: educational attainment
Fadia	"I used to go to learn the language."
Zayn	"My father goes to hospital a lot, I want to study to be a nurse."
Amina	"Go back to college, I need to interact with others."
Zehar	"Because I am educated."
Nahid	"When I started doing my Master's degree, I felt life for the first time."

Third cycle: I triangulated the data across all interviews in order to connect categories to subcategories and I searched any missing or disconnected information. Each subcategory was color coded on each the document from second cycle. I then created a word document file for each color to check for triangulation across the data.

Creswell (2009) suggests that a researcher assure the data's consistency during the process. A member checking procedure needs to be conducted. Member checking can be carried out during the interview process through follow up questions and restatements to check for my understanding of what was said. I checked transcripts to make sure they did not contain mistakes and to make sure the codes were developed rationally (Creswell, 2009). I went back to the participants to make sure I understood what they said correctly.

Researcher bias

My experiences with immigrant women make me believe that I am included somewhat as an ethnic insider because of my immigrant status. One of my friends who is an Arab immigrant jokes that she can talk to me without concerns because I am an immigrant woman as well. One woman in ACCESS told me that she felt comfortable talking to me because we all speak with accents. One thing I had to be careful about was that being an immigrant woman myself I stayed

neutral and did not show any bias during the data collection, analysis and interpretation. I did

not allow my personal views and perceptions to affect how the data were analyzed. In order to

be sure that I was sensitive with the culture of these women, I took classes at the university to

learn about the local Muslim community, religion, and history.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Findings

The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of Muslim immigrant women who immigrated to the Detroit Metro area from six countries in the Arab League. The findings addressed the questions of how the women identify themselves in a new country, how formal educational attainment might impact an Arab Muslim immigrant women's integration process, and how they adapted to a new culture when they moved to a new country. Findings from this study are presented in two sections. The first section describes the six women with their backgrounds. The second section presents the findings with four themes: cultural identity, educational attainment, community, and cultural adaptation. Findings cannot explain in general the complexity of each woman's experiences; however, the interview data reveal factors, which influenced the women's lives in the Detroit metropolitan area are interconnected. These factors are their religious beliefs, their traditional family cultures, their families, communities, education, countries of origin, and reasons for immigration.

The women's demographic backgrounds are summarized in the Table 4.1 and each woman is introduced individually. Six women, from age 27 to 58, participated in this study. They came from Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Palestine, Syria, and Yemen, all part of Arab League. Fadia, Nahid, Zehar, and Zena immigrated to the United States to join their husbands and received citizenship as dependents of United States citizens. Fadia, Amina, and Zehar were married to second-generation immigrants. Fadia's husband was born in Lebanon of immigrant parents from Lebanon. Amina's husband was born in the United States of immigrant parents from Palestine. Amina who is originally from Palestine received her green card because of her

parents. She moved to Michigan after she married her husband. Zehra's husband was born in

the United States by immigrant parents from Yemen. Zehar came to visit the United States from

Yemen as a tourist and married her husband and first lived with her husband in Louisiana while

her husband's family lived in Dearborn Michigan. She later moved to Michigan to stay close to

her husband's family in Dearborn. Nahid's husband is originally from Egypt and Zena's

husband is originally from Iraq. Both men came to the United States as students and received

their citizenship through their employment. Zayn came to Michigan as a refugee. All six

women have a minimum of high school education obtained in their home countries. Amina and

Nahid are currently studying for their Master's degrees. These women except Zayn are all

naturalized United State citizens. Zayn is currently pursuing her citizenship as a refugee. These

women are listed alphabetically by their country of origin in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1

Women in this study

Name	Country of origin	Highest Education level	Marital status	Immigra-tion Year	Immigration Status
Nahid	Egypt	Earning Master's degree in U.S.	Married	2005	Spouse
Zena	Iraq	Attended High School in Iraq	Married	1996	Spouse
Fadia	Lebanon	Completed High School in Lebanon	Married	1991	Spouse
Amina	Palestine	Earning Master's degree in U.S.	Married	1991	Child Dependent
Zayn	Syria	Attended undergraduate degree program in Syria	Single	2016	Refugee
Zehar	Yemen	Completed Bachelor's degree in Yemen	Widow	1995	Spouse

Stories of the Women

      Nahid. Nahid is a 33 year-old Egyptian woman who came to the United States in 2005. Nahid earned her undergraduate degree in Political Science at American University in Cairo. She had worked in the career planning office at the same university for four years after she graduated before she married and came to the United States. Nahid met her husband, a Kuwaiti born Egyptian citizen, at the career planning office when he visited one of his friends in Cairo. He attended the same school in the past and continues to his friend every time he returns to Egypt. He came to the United States as a graduate student and graduated from a U.S. mid-west university. He now works as an engineer at a company in Detroit and also runs a direct sales business as a side job. Nahid and her husband had a long distance relationship for six months between Egypt and the United States before they married. They married in December 2004; then she came on a dependent visa of her husband. He had an employment-based, non-immigrant visa at that time, but both have since obtained United States citizenship.

      Transition after immigration to the United States. Nahid started her life in the United States by helping her husband's online marketing business. She soon had two boys. At first she was not interested in further education because she had earned a bachelor's degree back home already. The flexibility of arranging her own time was great in the beginning. Then she realized that children and business were not fulfilling personally. She told her husband that she needed to take a break from the business. It was not an easy decision to make for her. People in this kind of online marketing business are doing it as a family business, husband and wife attend business meetings together. Nahid did not want to leave her husband doing the business by himself. She found herself going through a severe depression and was not happy at all. She could not figure out why she was so unhappy. "It was not postpartum depression." She told her husband that she

was depressed. He told her that she would be fine, but she went to a psychologist twice. Nahid

said, "The psychologist was an American. She could not understand my background. Seeing the

psychologist did not help me." [1] It was hard for Nahid to make friends in the United States.

Nahid described, "I met people in the United States but not true friendships. I was searching for a

supportive community I could relate to." She enjoyed attending business meetings, meeting with

business partners, but at the same time she did not feel that she fit in the community. She missed

her family and her friends in Egypt. Because of her depression, she decided to go home to see

her family. After she came back to the United States from the visit in Egypt, she thought she

could try to go to school. She applied and was accepted into the social science graduate program

at a university close to where she and her family live. She explained, "I have to do something

for myself. Doing the business with my husband was fine in the beginning; however, I felt that I

was conditioned that it was a family business." She felt that she was just there to support her

husband but did not like it at all. She said, "It came to the point that I could no longer do it

anymore." She wanted to get out of her depression before it became worse. Her condition has

been improving ever since she started going to school. Her husband noticed it too and supported

her decision to separate herself from the business. She is going to receive her degree in

December 2016 and would like to study feminist studies and perhaps to go into a Doctor of

Philosophy degree program in the future.

   A supportive community. There were three turning points in her life in Michigan.

Studying for a Master's degree was the first turning point in her life in the United States. She

was "able to work with other students and faculty at the university." She likes the interactions

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[1] The quotations are direct quotes from women. The conversations were informal; therefore, the English grammar may not fit into correct English language standard.

with others. The second turning point was when she found her community in her life in the

United States. She found a group of Egyptian friends when she and her husband went to a

political demonstration at University of Michigan a few years ago. The group was formed for

Egyptian Americans to express their political views. Today, there are more people joining the

group, which meets once a month regularly. "We do not talk about politics anymore. We

celebrate both Christian and Islamic holidays. We enjoy food and music and the richness of

Egyptian culture." She found comfort from having the same Egyptian cultural background as the

group and connections with and support from the group.

>   ***Religion, culture and identity***. The third turning point was when she made the choice to

remove the hijab. She said, "I was considered a liberal person back home in Egypt." According

to Nahid, the definition of liberal is based on religion. She has a big family in Egypt and they are

very close to each other. Her mother's side of family is "very conservative religiously and

overall conservative." Her father's side of family is "conservative too but a little more liberal"

than her mother's side of family. Even though she thought that she swung between being

conservative and liberal, she was always "considered liberal" by people around her. She started

to wear the hijab when her cousin passed away and decided to take it off a few years after she

came to the United States. In Egypt, she used to have friends who dated. She said, "my friends

were liberal and I was too even thought I was not dating at that time." She used "dating" as a

sign of social liberalization. According to Nahid, not wearing hijab and not following the

traditional culture were considered "not religious and liberal behaviors." She was "socially

active" when she lived in Egypt and said, "My family prayed for me because of my behaviors."

She started reading literature about religion and women's rights after she moved to the United

States and was influenced by feminist literature and started forming her own thinking about

religion. According to Nahid, there is a difference between culture and religion. She thinks

"religion changes the culture, people make their own interpretation, culture is one thing and

religion is a different thing, and people set rules but religion does not set rules for people."

Nahid has her religious faith but does not "follow the traditional rules," she believes the reasons

women decide to wear hijab are very personal; "some people put hijab on out of love, some

people put hijab on out of fear." Her reason to put hijab on was "out of fear." Her cousin who

she was close to, died in 2003, and she wanted to be with her cousin again in heaven. Her

understanding was that if she did not follow the rules she would not go to heaven. She heard that

"women showed their hair would be thrown into fire." At the time when her cousin died, there

were scholars in Egypt asking women to put their hijab on to follow the traditions and to show

the religious faith. She read the *Qur'an* and scriptures but did not think too deeply about them.

She followed rules during the years that she wore hijab. Now, she practices religion but she has

a different interpretation about the religion. She thinks "practicing Islam nowadays should not

be the same as in the old time." Nahid started reading more literature about Islam in recent

years. She decided to interpret it in her own way. She took her hijab off a few years ago. It was

a long battle to gain her family and her husband's approval. In the end, she was able to convince

her husband to agree with her that she would remove her hijab. There were two major reasons

that she received her husband's agreement. One of the reasons was that her husband saw his

sister removed hers. He is from a very conservative family; his sister's action "changed his

thoughts a little bit." The other reason was that she told him she would leave him if he did not

agree with her choice. He finally said that she could do whatever she wanted to do. She said she

is proud of her Muslim identity; however, she did not want to show her identity publicly.

She used to be seen as "an acceptable religious woman in public" and then she would "go home and dance to loud music." She expressed that she "used to have multiple identities, but now has one identity." She is a religious woman within herself now. She is her own self after such a painful journey of finding herself in the past. Nahid expressed that "I can now teach my children to be true to themselves and to be proud of being themselves."

Zena. Zena is from Iraq, who came to the United States from Baghdad when she was 26 years old. She was 46 years old at the time of the study. Her husband is an Iraqi who came to the United States as a student. Zena said, "Even within Iraq, culture for marriage is different depending on the area of Iraqi people live." Some marriages happen when men and women meet in colleges or at work places, and they ask parents' permission to get married. Her marriage was arranged by her parents and it happened very quickly within one month. Her husband's brother was a friend of her father for many years. On one of their trips back to Iraq, they visited Zena's parents who knew he was a good man without having to "check out his background." She thought "as long as he is a good person even there will be trouble in the future, we can figure it out together later on." He returned to the United States after they were married in Iraq. She came to join him after two months.

Transition after immigration to the United States. Her husband had lots of friends in Michigan. The new couple was given a party in a restaurant when she arrived in Michigan. She slowly described how happy they were in the party. She had a big smile on her face when she talked about her experience coming to the United States as a newlywed. It was July 1, 1996, when she arrived in Michigan. She remembered seeing fireworks, which reminded her of the fireworks back home. People said to her that she must be excited to see the fireworks and they

assumed that it was her first time to watch the fireworks. She told people that "I watched

fireworks from ships when I grew up in Iraq."

She was excited to come to the United States because she heard so much about this

country. She wanted "to know how people lived and what people ate in the United States."

They lived in an apartment in a city Northwest of Detroit in the beginning for about eight years.

The apartment was one building with ten units. They had American neighbors. She learned

British English when she was in Iraq, but was very shy to speak to her neighbors because

"British English is different than American English." Her neighbors were very nice to her. They

encouraged her "to practice English with them." She said she has "tried to keep in touch with

them until today," but "one neighbor moved away, and another neighbor moved too after the

neighbor's divorce." She learned about American holidays from her neighbors. She exchanged

food with them especially during holidays. Her first Valentine's Day celebration was with them.

Zena "had never heard about Valentine's Day in Iraq." She described it was "great memories"

about her moving to the United States after she married and moved to Michigan.

A familiar community. She had "a happy life growing up in Iraq." Her father was able

to support the whole family of six children with his salary as an elementary school teacher. They

had a big house. Her father gave her a small car. She used to "go out with girlfriends to

shopping malls." She missed her family in Iraq but did not get homesick when she came here.

People in Iraq told her that she would love Michigan because she would "feel it just like home."

She said that "there were no surprises" to her after she moved to Michigan. She loves her life

here because she is able to keep her lifestyle. She feels comfortable because people are friendly

to her and her family. Zena told me a story of meeting a woman at Walmart and she showed the

lady how she put on the hijab. Zena said that even though she should not take her hijab off in a

public place, she was so happy that she did not mind to teach the lady about the hijab. She

emphasized that Baghdad is a capital city and it was the reason that she "lived in the same

lifestyle in Baghdad and Michigan." She also described that "the stores in Dearborn are very

similar in Baghdad." She purchases the same kind of groceries and prepares the same kind of

food at home here. She said "I had almost everything in Baghdad except they did not have pizza

at that time and young people could not date."

   The family. Zena and I met for the first time on the day of interview. We met at her

mother's apartment in Dearborn. When Zena opened the door she kept her hijab on, but quickly

took it off after I stepped into the apartment and she closed the door. Her mother greeted me

when I walked in the apartment. During the interview, her mother sat with us most of the time.

Both she and her mother wore long skirts and long sleeved blouses. After we sat down, her

mother turned off the small fan and brought out a bigger fan and set it on the floor making sure

that Zena and I got the breeze from the fan. The apartment's sliding doors were wide open. I

could see through the sliding door and saw part of the mosque just a block away. There were

beautiful flower pots on the balcony. There were some old family pictures on the walls. An

Arabic TV show was running with very low volume in the living room. Her mother understands

a few English words but does not speak English. Zena's mother and father have already received

green cards through Zena. Her father had been living with them in Dearborn but went home to

join his son whom he missed and was still living in Iraq.

   Zena has two daughters and two sons. Sama the oldest of her four children is 20 years

old. She studies at a community college not too far from where they live. Her son is a freshman

at the same community college. The younger daughter is in high school. The youngest son is in

elementary school. Her husband makes a living by running a commercial business for Iraqi TV

stations these days. They live in a house, which is located at north of the Detroit Metropolitan

area. She takes the girls with her to visit her mother every Saturday. Sama came out from a

bedroom and sat with us for a few minutes during the interview. Sama had her thick curly black

hair wrapped up and had facial cream on her face. Sama was proud that she taught her mother to

make American English conversation. Zena said, "I learned British English when I was in Iraq."

A traditional woman's role, home culture and education. Zena teaches her children

traditional culture. She said, "some people do not agree with me since we are living in the

United States." She insisted that keeping with traditional culture is very important. She said, "I

teach the way as I was taught when I grew up." They speak both English and Arabic at home.

Zena and her husband put their attention on their children's education. Zena drives their children

to their schools, picks them up, and takes them to all their activities. Zena did not finish high

school because of a back injury. Her goal is to complete her General Education Development

(GED) and has taken the test twice, but is still unable to pass. She said, "I am very busy with

children's schedule." She puts her children first and thinks about herself later. She would like to

go to college after she passes the GED but will wait until later after her children are grown up.

On the day of the interview, Zena's son had his graduation party at home. The girls

visited Zena's mother while her husband stayed with the boys at the party. I asked her whether it

was necessary for her and the girls to leave the party. She answered casually saying, "I wanted

to give boys freedom to celebrate the graduation." She had prepared everything that they needed

for the party.

Religion, culture, and identity. Zena follows the same tradition of worshipping in

Michigan as she did back home, although she wore jeans and t-shirts when she lived in Baghdad.

She had her hair up high and wore makeup. She said it was hot in Iraq and it was uncomfortable

to wear hijab. She described herself living in an American style when she was in Baghdad.

When she and her husband agreed to get married, she was 25 years hold. He told her that he

wanted her to wear hijab and not wear jeans and t-shirts anymore. She agreed and expressed

"feeling happy" when he asked. She felt it was inside of her that she was "already ready to

change and to wear the hijab." She could not decide whether to wear the hijab or not on her own

because once she put it on, she would not take it off until she died. She was "filled with joy" that

he asked. She felt it was "a compliment" that he asked and felt "trust in her husband." The

"trust" became to the reason that "he asked in the beginning not later." She felt that she and her

husband had "a total understanding of the commitment" about her putting on hijab and their

marriage. She once again confirmed that she considers him to be "a good man because he is

religious." In her religious belief, "a man has to take good care of his wife." In her mind, she

told herself that "he follows the rules and I will be safe with him in a strange country." She said,

"I am the same person before I was married and now." She is a mother and a wife now but

inside of her she remains as one identity of herself as a religious woman.

Fadia. Fadia, who is 58 years old, came to the United States in 1991. She identified

herself as a Muslim woman who was born in Lebanon. The first time I visited her to conduct the

interview, she greeted me wearing a colorful long dress and hijab. She looked like a movie

princess. We sat comfortably by the kitchen table in the basement. She put tea, dates, and nuts

on the table. She took her hijab off and started telling me her story. She has a very soft voice.

She paused and seemed to be in deep thought when she told the story, ending almost all

sentences with "Alhamdulillah" (thank god).

Fadia was married at the age of 18. The marriage was a traditional marriage arrangement

by their families. She met her husband during his visit to Lebanon. He returned to Senegal three

days after they met. Within one month of their initial meeting, they were married in Senegal. She lived in Africa for 15 years helping with her husband's business in Senegal before she moved to the United States.

   Transition after immigration to the United States. Fadia was born in a family with six siblings in Lebanon. She remembered the big house they lived in. She remembered that she "went to school and came home to help" her mother. She had never worked outside of the home, then she married and she worked for the family business in Senegal. Her immigration story began when she moved to Senegal. She was able to work daily in the business office in Senegal because she had maids to do her housework. She said, "now I am in Michigan, there are no maids, I have lots of housework." Fadia's husband is a Lebanese-born United States citizen. His family's immigration history went back to his mother, Fadia's mother-in-law. Fadia's mother-in-law was an American Lebanese who married a Lebanese, had children and lived in Lebanon. Later on, the family moved and built a family business in Senegal. Fadia, her husband, and the in-laws all lived together in Senegal when they married. After she had her second child, the family (her husband and her in-laws) decided that she and her children "needed to move back to the United States for the children's education." Fadia's in-laws had previously owned a house in Dearborn. They moved back to Dearborn, and she and children moved in with them. She lived with her in-laws for 15 years in Senegal and lived with them for about 17 years until the in-laws died. Fadia and her family are still living in the same house in Dearborn. The majority of residents in the neighborhood are from Middle Eastern countries. The house is decorated with traditional Middle Eastern arts and furniture. Her parents and her siblings immigrated into the United States and moved to Michigan after she obtained her citizenship.

She described how she lived with her in laws, how her in-laws treated her like their own daughter, how she and her husband taught their children, how she kept up the traditions in the family, and how she was happy with her life in Michigan. Her husband is still running the business in Senegal today where he and his brother own a dry powdered milk factory. He travels between Senegal and Michigan and Fadia travels to Senegal to visit him sometimes. During our interview, her husband called through FaceTime from Senegal. She said that she told her husband that "we had an interview." I waived to her husband and said hi to him on FaceTime. Her husband said he just wanted to say hi to us and he let us go back to the interview. She said she would not want to change anything in her life. For her, she feels that her life in Michigan is an extension of her life in Lebanon.

The family. Fadia has four children, three boys, one daughter and seven grandchildren. Her oldest boy, his wife, and their children live in Senegal. Her second son, his wife, and their children live at suburb near Dearborn. Her daughter, her husband, and their children live at suburb near Dearborn. Her youngest son was married in July 2016 and lived in the house. Fadia's second son married her cousin. Fadia's daughter married a good friend of her second son who is also a Lebanese. Fadia has been a stay-at-home mother to her children since she moved into her in-laws' house from Senegal. Together she and her mother-in-law raised her children. She explained that her daughter quit working to raise her children just like and her mother-in-law did for their children. She and her husband wanted the children of her oldest son to move to Michigan for education, which she considered as important; however, she revealed that "the most important reason to move to Michigan is that they have to grow up with their cousins." The whole family gets together every Friday. Fadia prepares food all the time. She stated that it was her "responsibility" to keep the whole family close together.

A supportive community. Fadia attends a mosque in Dearborn with her father, who she drives, to worship together. She volunteers at the mosque and cooks with other women. They do bake sales to support the mosque. She loves the community where she can use Arabic, shop at Arabic grocery stores, and eat at Arabic restaurants. She has support from her family and friends in the community in Dearborn and is happy with her life in Michigan.

Religion, culture, and identity. Fadia follows Lebanese traditions in her daily life. Fadia became very religious after she immigrated to the United States. She explained that she "did not think too much of religion" when she was in Lebanon and in Senegal. She said when she grew older and she had children and grandchildren, religion became more important to her. She did not wear hijab when she was in Senegal because it was very hot. She could not make up her mind to wear hijab or not when she was young in Lebanon, so she wore hijab sometimes but not all the time when she lived in Lebanon. She committed to wear hijab from the date her daughter decided to wear one. It was during Ramadan, her daughter was 17 years old. She described that she saw "a girl who wearing a hijab in the living room" the morning of that important day emotionally. She was moved by her daughter's act and "wanted to wear hijab" with her daughter together. She studies religion "harder and more intense" these days and teaches her children by the book of *Qur'an*. She expressed that she was "paying back the lost time" that she did not realize the importance of the religion in her life.

Amina. Amina, 45 years old, identified herself as a Muslim woman from Palestine. We met at a coffee shop near her home. She picked a table at a quiet corner. While walking toward the table, I asked her if she would like a cup of tea or coffee. She said she did not need anything. I told her neither did I; however, I felt that we needed to order something in order to sit in the coffee shop. She waved her hand and said: "Don't worry. We don't have to order anything if

we don't want anything." This was my first impression of her, confident and determined. Amina claimed her permanent residency status of the United States when she was 16 years old through her parents' status. She did not immigrate and move permanently to the United States until she married.

Amina met her husband when he visited his grandmother's house in a village outside of Ramallah, Palestine, when the grandmother was very ill. Her husband's parents emigrated from Palestine to live in Michigan, where he was born and raised. He saw Amina reading prayers for his grandmother. He told his father that he "wanted to marry her and wanted her to raise my children." In Palestinian culture, a man's father should call the woman's father and request the marriage. However, his father refused to call. As Amina described, his father-in-law said to his husband, "She is an Arab Muslim woman, you are raised and born in America, and this is not the type you can adjust to each other." Amina's father-in-law is a cousin of her father. The family knew each other but "doubted the marriage would work well," because her husband did not know how to speak Arabic. He called Amina's father directly and requested to marry his daughter. He talked to Amina's father and talked to Amina on the phone after he returned to the United States. She said: "we got engaged on the phone." She agreed to marry him because "he is a very nice guy." She said: "I think our marriage will work." She married him and came to the Michigan when she was 20 years old. She likes Michigan; "it is not like New York"; it is "very similar to home."

Transition after immigration to the United States. Life was not easy in the beginning when Amina immigrated to the United States. Her husband did not speak Arabic and he taught her to speak English. She taught him to speak Arabic. They both committed to their marriage and tried to work out the language first. Amina said that "I can speak English and he speaks

Arabic fluently now." She described her marriage as a very successful one compared to her sister's marriage. Her sister also married an American-born Palestinian man, but they divorced and he re-married another woman. Her sister's marriage could not survive because of the language and culture barriers. She was grateful for her husband's support, being able to integrate into a life in a new country. Her husband encouraged her to pursue her education and to obtain a formal higher education degree. He taught her to drive. After she received her driver's license, the first thing she did was to enroll in an English Language as a Second Language class. She expressed that she wanted "to do something" and "did not want to sit at home." She found an opportunity to teach Arabic at a mosque. She then taught Arabic at a Montessori school. She then decided to earn a Master's degree at a university. She said with a confident voice "learning is always on my agenda." Now, she is a Master's degree student studying Near Eastern Languages at a university in Detroit. She expressed the opportunity was available because she is living in Michigan and not in Palestine.

The family. Her mother is an American citizen and her father became an American citizen through marriage. Her father wanted his children to obtain American citizenship so they would be safe in the United States. Her father took her and her sister to New York to process their green cards when she was 16 years old. She was "lonely and did not like being in New York." Amina described, "There were always friends, relatives, and family around you back home." But in New York, "there were only my father and my sister." After she received her green card, she went home to Palestine.

Amina has one sister and four brothers. Her father was a lawyer and had owned a law firm, which closed because he did not have clients anymore. Amina explained that "the Israelis took two of his properties" in Palestine. He still had three pieces of land; however, he wanted

the children to be "in a safe place" in the United States. One year after Amina married and came to the United States, Amina's father decided to move the rest of the family to the United States. He moved the family to Texas and Amina and her husband came to Michigan.

While in Palestine, she worked at her father's law firm when her father still had the business. She said her father gave her confidence when she was a girl, she could do whatever she wanted to do. She spent some time talking about her father giving the impression that that she missed him very much. He died five years after he moved to Texas. He had "never liked the life in the United States." She said, however, if "he knew about Michigan, if he moved to Michigan, he might like the life here."

Amina has three children, two sons and one daughter. She stayed home with her children until the youngest child was four years old before she stared working outside of home.

Religion, culture, and identity. She practices Islam and uses it as a guide to teach her children. She expects her husband to be "a good example" to their sons. She thinks "culture is what people made to benefit for themselves." She is against putting women in inferior positions in her home traditional culture. She gave me a few examples of how her mother treated her and her brothers differently. She said that "boys do not have to do anything but girls have to help mothers to clean the house, to cook, and to stay home." Her father, however, was the one who treated the girls and boys the same.

The way she identifies herself will not change, but she thinks differently. She finds more opportunities in the United States as a woman. She said: "Here, I can do anything. Whatever I want, anything, nobody will stop me." According to Amina, her life is "easier here than back home."

Zayn. Zayn, who identified herself as a Syrian Muslim woman, is 27 years old. The first

time I met Zayn was the day of interview. Zayn and my friend Esma who is from Turkey

greeted me outside of Zayn's apartment. They waved with smiles on their faces while I walked

toward them. They gave me big hugs and kisses on the cheeks. Zayn's curly long hair was

blowing in the wind. She looked happy. They started speaking with me in English mixed with

Turkish. Esma translated the Turkish to English for me. Zayn quickly told me her name and

apologized that her English was not fluent. I said I did not mind as long as she was comfortable

talking in both languages. Esma was able to translate if she did not know any words in English.

Zayn speaks Turkish fluently. Esma and I encouraged Zayn to speak. We told her that her

English will improve quickly because she seems very talented in learning languages.

While we walked toward her apartment, Zayn started talking about how she came to the

United States through the aid of the United Nations' in January 2016. She said, "the date to

come to the United States finally arrived after four years in Turkey." Once we walked in the

apartment, she introduced me to her father and her sister. Zayn's father does not understand or

speak English. I do not know whether her sister understands or speaks English because she did

not speak a word the whole time. She smiled at me when I was introduced then she turned her

eyes to her cell phone. Zayn sat on the floor with her knees bent while she talked to us. Her

father and her sister sat on the armed chairs facing Esma and me. Esma and I sat on the couch. I

finally had a chance to formally explain the purpose of my interview, and I knew Esma had

explained everything to them earlier while she established this appointment for us two weeks

before the interview. Zayn asked if we wanted to sit by the dinner table. We moved to the

corner of the room where the dining table and four dining chairs were placed. Zayn's father and

her sister remained sitting in the living room. They could hear our conversation. The apartment

is a typical apartment setting located in northern suburb of Michigan. Zayn made Turkish coffee

and brought out cookies. While we moved from the living room to the dining room, I heard her

father talking from the living room and his voice was not pleasant. Zayn explained to us that her

father wanted me to write about the war and how the citizens were treated cruelly.

Zayn started telling me about the conditions at home, the bombing, lack of food and

water in Aleppo where they lived. Her family initially did not plan to emigrate from Syria, but

due to her father's illness and the war they made the move to Turkey first because her brother

was in Turkey. Her brother had fled to Turkey for political reasons and settled down in Istanbul

a few years ago. The family was still in Syria when her brother went to Istanbul. When the

bombing started, she traveled with her parents and her sister from a village in the south of Syria

to Aleppo then from Aleppo to join her brother in Istanbul four years ago. She told me that her

mother, her sister, and she do not typically wear hijab. Because they were scared they covered

themselves from head to toe during the escape from Aleppo to Turkey. Zayn described their

fears: "We were so afraid that we were to be killed or raped by ISIS." After they arrived in

Istanbul, there was a good neighbor who tried to help them. She worked in the neighbor's store.

It was good to live in Turkey but her father's medication became very expensive. The United

Nations recommended that the family apply through the United Nations Development Program

so her father could receive treatment in the United States. They took the advice and applied to

come to the United States. She was the first one in the family to receive the approval to travel to

the United States. The family has a distant relative who is living in California right now. They

were hoping to go to California to be close to the relative and not come to Michigan. She said

they accepted to come to Michigan because it would have taken longer if they waited to go to

California.

Transition after immigration to the United States. Zayn is single. She studied law when she was in Syria. She worked and learned Turkish during her years in Turkey. She likes Turkey and calls it home. Zayn arrived in the United States four months before her father and her sister. Her brother would be arriving soon she said during the interview. Her mother has problems walking and cannot travel; her mother is considering returning to Syria if she will be by herself in Turkey. According to Zayn, immigration is not a good thing for the family, and it caused another problem for the family because the whole family will be in the United States without her mother. Zayn's father wants to go back to Syria; he cannot leave his wife by herself in Syria. Zayn's sister has a boyfriend in Turkey; therefore, she wants to return to Turkey too. Zayn thinks it will be the best to go back to Turkey and the whole family can live in Turkey. She appreciates being in the United States because her father can get medication at much less cost.

When she arrived in Michigan, a staff member from the United Nations met her at the Detroit Metro Airport and helped her to temporarily settle in at a home of a Syrian immigrant family for two weeks. She then moved to stay with two Syrian students for three months. When she was notified the date of her father and her sister's arrivals she decided to move into an apartment to prepare for their arrivals. She received some money from the United Nations, but it was not enough for her to support her sister and her father and was provided for only six months. She has Syrian friends who help her with many needs to live in Michigan. They helped her to find a job as a maid working in a hotel. She walks to the hotel working from 8:30 in the morning to 4:30 in the afternoon where she has to clean 24 rooms every day. She meets "good people" in the hotel and practices her English at work. She wonders if she can leave early, as soon as she finishes all rooms, and plans to ask a Syrian woman who works in the kitchen. She has "not had any bad experiences during these four months living in Michigan."

Zayn hopes that she can go back to school one day. When she said this, she became very

emotional. Her tears started flowing. At this moment, I had to stop the recording. Zayn, Esma,

and I were all crying. Sunshine was pouring through the windows. We could hear other

immigrants and their children's voices in the apartment's courtyard. According to Zayn, they are

all immigrants from Middle Eastern countries. Zayn said, "I came from a good family. My

father values education very much. He was very mad when he heard that I work as a maid in a

hotel." She said that he had a very hard time to accept her reality. She wants to be a nurse even

though she was a law student before and wants to take care of the whole family especially

because of her father's illness. Zayn took the responsibilities of taking care of her father.

She is still trying to learn what she can do in Michigan and is still looking for a second

job. She does not have Internet access. She said, "the Syrian family who hosted me for two

weeks will pay for the Internet and will buy a modem for me." She has furniture in the

apartment, which her Syrian friends gave her; however, she said "I will pay them back when I

save enough money." She does not know what the future will hold but she is grateful for what

she has right now. Her goal is to be proficient in English so she can attend college to earn a

nursing degree in the United States. Zayn said she can receive a green card in a year and would

like to return to Turkey one day. It appeared that she missed her mother and she missed Turkey.

Religion and identity. She said she had been afraid of revealing her identity as a Muslim

woman and was afraid to tell people she is a Syrian. She said, "going to the Arab stores in

Dearborn reminded me of home in Syria." It was not a pleasant reminder. Her memories of war

in Syria have haunted her like a nightmare. It took her a while to feel comfortable in her new

community. She feels comfortable now to tell people her identity, because people have been

very nice to her. She goes to mosque and worship regularly, which she considers to be a safe place.

Zehar. Zehar is from Yemen. She is 48 years old and came to the United States in 1999. My first impression of her was her was as a confident woman--her fast walking and her fast paced speaking. This impression that she is truly a very strong willed woman was confirmed after I learned her remarkable story of being a single mother and working full time in ACCESS, where she is currently in charge of the parenting program in the adult education in ACCESS.

Zehar is from Aden, South Yemen, which was a British colony and the Port of Aden was an internationally recognized location. According to Zehar, Aden is a liberal city where men and women are treated equally. She is very proud that she comes from a well-educated family. She learned British English at school. After she graduated from high school, she moved to the northern part of Yemen. She hoped the move would open the door for her to travel to the United States or Britain. According to Zehar, northern Yemen is conservative and it is a male dominated society. After South Yemen and North Yemen united as one country, North Yemen also became internationally engaged in the world. She worked for an international organization in the northern part of Yemen. She had opportunities to meet with women from all over the world. That experience opened her eyes. She decided to come to the United States.

Transition after immigration to the United States. She came to United States on a visitor's visa to visit her friend in Arizona, whose husband was a doctoral student at Arizona State University at the time. Her original plan was to enroll in a school and study for a Master's degree. She said: "but, you know, you dream but the reality is different." During the same period of time, she came to visit a friend in Michigan where she met her husband. Although her husband's family is in Michigan, they moved to Louisiana after they married, only because he

wanted to move to a southern state. She later on shared with me that her husband died in a car accident on a visit to Yemen, which she did not learn about until she heard the bad news from a friend, which was confirmed by his family later. His death left her and an eight-month old baby boy alone in the United States. Her husband had a big family in Dearborn but she was not close to them at that time. She did not know what to do at first, but decided to leave Louisiana after his death and returned home to Yemen. She stayed in Yemen for four years and 18 months in a house close to her family in Yemen. She could not even bring herself to visit her husband's tomb; she said, "relatives came to visit and paid their condolences and it was too painful to face the reality of his death." She struggles between cultures and her own future. She believes that a woman should not raise a son on her own, but she decided to move back to Michigan. She said that she could not find an inner peace. Although she still struggled, she thought her son needed to learn Arabic. She moved again back home to Yemen when her son was seven years old, but moved back to Michigan again when her son was in fourth grade; she finally told herself that she needed to settle down for her son. Since then she has been living in Dearborn, so her son can be close to her husband's family. She has not remarried. She is happy with her son now in Dearborn. She cried when she talked about her husband's death and smiled when she talked about her son. Her son is going to be 14 years old and is going into high school. He is close to her husband's family. She said: "I wanted it to be this way. He has to be close to his uncles and cousins."

Religion, culture, and identity. She does not feel difficulty living in Dearborn. She lives, worships, and works here. This is her community. She regrets that she "still has not fulfilled the dream of going back to school for a Master's degree." She said, "If my husband were alive, my initial dream of coming to the United States and attending a school could have

come true." She does not know whether it is possible now. She works full time with immigrant women in ACCESS and home to fulfill all duties for her son. She believes that "God will lead" her. She maintains her traditional culture and focuses on her son's education. She hopes that "one day will be my turn to go back to school."

These women's stories reveal their experiences with their self-awareness, their self-affirmation about living in a new country. These data reveal the similarities of their experiences. The next section will discuss the findings which emerged from their stories.

Findings

The findings about these women's experiences in Detroit Metropolitan area are discussed in following four themes:

- Cultural identity: Women's identities based on their self-conceptualizations of their cultural identities, which include religion, traditional home cultures and their countries of origin, women's roles, and religious beliefs as foundation of identities.

- Educational attainment: Educational attainment does not affect identity but helps the integration process.

- Community: A supportive community in the new country contributes to a more positive experience after immigration.

- Cultural adaptation: Women utilize situational and selective acculturation during the process of adaptation.

Each theme answered the research questions of how the women see their identities, what educational attainment means to them, how a supportive community affect their lives in a new country, how they value their families, marriages, traditional home culture and religious beliefs, how gender roles continue after they moved to a new country, and how they adapted new

cultures in a new country.   These findings are interconnected and affect their lives as Muslim

immigrant women living in a new country. Each finding cannot serve as an independent factor

to affect these women's lives; they are intertwined.

   Identity. The women's identities include religion and traditional home culture. This

finding pertains to their experiences in maintaining their cultural identities even though they are

now living in a new country. Findings indicated that living in the United States affected self-

conceptualizations for all the women in the study. They modified their traditional home cultures

in the new environment but the modifications did not change their identities. They all expressed

their traditional cultural identities as their primary identities. All six women described

themselves first as Muslim women. They then identified themselves as women from their own

countries of origin. These women believe that religion and traditional culture are the two

primary factors contributing to their identities. As first generation immigrants, they do not feel

that their identities have been challenged in the communities where they now live.

   Religious identity. They all have children except Zayn. Fadia, Amina, and Zena

specifically expressed that they teach their children based on the book of *Qur'an*. Fadia said:

"even looking at her children, people may think they are American, but when they start talking,

they are Lebanese. Her children's behaviors are governed by religion mostly. She said this

proudly with an indication that the religion and traditional culture were carried on in the family.

Fadia likes being in the United States but she never considers herself an American. The other

women expressed the same feeling. It appears that religious identity has become more important

because of living in the United States. The ideology of teaching children the traditional culture

and religion was pointed out by all the women. They want their children to keep their ancestral

culture and religion. These women realized that it is important to keep their children religiously

ethical and moral. Furthermore, it is important to maintain the traditional culture through the

generations.

     Culture identity. Findings show that the traditional culture's foundation is religion but

their interpretations differ. Amina modifies her religious belief to fit her life in the United States,

while Fadia and Zena keep their cultural traditions firmly in their daily lives here. Amina,

Nahid, Zayn and Zehar believe that traditional culture limits women's behaviors, while Fadia

and Zena just accept the traditional ideas put upon them. Amina said: "I create my own culture

based on religion not the culture back home." These women's cultural identities formed

naturally; however, the conception of their identities is different in the new country. Being

recognized as a Muslim woman is important after immigrating to the United States; these women

want to keep these identities for themselves and in their families, although they may practice

religion in their own ways. It appears that culture and religion are intertwined in their lives back

home and here in Michigan. Although they may change how they practice their religion after

their immigration, all women said their identities as Muslim women do not change. Zayn said:

"I am a Muslim woman." Amina said: "I don't want to say I am American. I want to say I am

Arab Muslim woman." Amina, Nahid, and Zehar reported that they modified their traditional

culture and their religion to fit in the new country while Fadia said that she enforced the original

religious practices even firmer after she immigrated to the United States. Fadia did not wear

hijab when she was younger in Lebanon, even in Senegal. Her cultural identity as a Lebanese

Muslim woman became stronger after she had children. Other women also expressed that since

it is important to teach children about their traditional culture, their cultural identities became

stronger in the United States. According to the women, they kept their ancestral identities in

their new communities. Their cultures, their roles, and their thoughts may change but they claim

that they work to maintain their religious and ethnic identities in the new country.

     A Supportive community helps to preserve cultural identities. It is recognizable that it

was not an easy process moving to a new country that has diverse cultures and religions. The

women's feelings related to the host community appear to be an important factor to their

experiences. Findings showed that their experiences in Michigan were pleasant and nurtured by

the welcoming community. The exposure to the western style while living in this community

made them more aware of the importance of protecting their original identities. The supportive

community gives them the opportunities to keep their cultural identities without feeling

unwelcomed. This cultural identity is grounded with their basic cultures and is related to their

origins and their traditional home cultures. It reflects their self-affirmation of maintaining their

cultural identities.

     Zayn as a Muslim Syrian woman was afraid to reveal her identity because of her own

experiences of the war in Syria. She could easily blend into the community because her

appearance was not significantly different than any other American woman. She was new and

did not know about her new environment when she first arrived here. It took her some time to

feel comfortable and to feel safe to tell people she was a Syrian Muslim woman. Zayn expressed

that she grew up in a good family. Her former social status in Syria no longer exists in the

United States. She struggles to accept the fact that she is trying to survive these days. It was

stressful to live a typical daily life when she first arrived in this new country. The other five

women's immigration paths were different than Zayn. Four of these women obtained their

United States citizenship through marriage. They were much more settled than Zayn.

   The roles of home culture and religion contribute to women's identities. Zehar had

gone through her personal struggles after her husband's death. She is very proud of who she is

now. She contributes her successful life in the United States to her educational background, a

support from a well-educated family back home and her faith. She said:

   I am very independent who come from overseas and live here by herself, this is very rare.

   But I come from a well-educated family, the confidence there, wherever you want to go,

   you have a goal, you have an objective.

For Zehar, as a professional woman working in the Arab Muslim immigrant community, religion

is essential for her life both back at home and in this new country. She shows herself as an

independent woman by raising her son on her own. She said to herself being a single mother: "I

don't want people to take advantage of me." Identity for her has evolved from being a

conservative Muslim woman to an advocate for the gender equality for all Yemeni women.

Zehar has moved between Yemen and the United States three times. She said:

   Moving back and forth, it was my own transition, I thought that I kind of lost what I

   want. I feel I need to be, my sisters are my friends, they are my friends, they cannot

   come here, and it is very difficult to come to America. Maybe, they were here, I would

   not think of going overseas [going home to Yemen]. I need support, emotionally support,

   my family support. Thinking me and my husband, we were friends, I felt I lost him, I

   don't have any support. I used to live in Louisiana. I did not know his family. I was

   trying to find my way.

Zehar sat straight and held her hands, her eyes filled with tears, she paused and said: "you don't

want anyone to control you but thank God for everything, thank God for my family, they are

well educated, they trust us [meaning her family trusts her and her son can live without her

husband].” Zehar was very proud of her family in Yemen. She emphasized that her family is

well-educated, so they allow her to pursue her goals even though she is a woman. Zehar presents

herself as a self-sufficient woman living in a foreign country. Her religious beliefs support her

when going through the difficulties.

For Fadia, Zehar, Amina, and Zena, identity is who they are as women who maintain

their religious practices and traditional culture in their families. These women's religious beliefs

are the foundation of self-conceptualization. Their religious beliefs strengthen their willpower

daily. Zehar continued expressing herself expressing a strong inner strength:

> I was struggle, it was everyone thinks I am strong, but deep inside of me, I am not. And I
>
> felt faith, I believe in God. I met my husband, I married him, he took my husband, but he
>
> gave me my son. He is a beautiful son. So probably everything happened for a reason. I
>
> believe in this. God gave me a son; he knows that I am capable of taking care of him. I
>
> think of this way; we should accept our destiny. That was my destiny. For me, to come
>
> to America, to meet someone to marry him, to have a son from him, and he died, God
>
> knows I can take care of him. I think this way probably this is the way see that I am a
>
> strong woman, but wound is still there your know.

Nahid's self-reflection revealed how she had to negotiate with herself about her identity.

She identifies herself as an Egyptian. She goes home once a year with her husband and her

children to connect to her identity as an Egyptian woman. She was the only woman in the study

who did not mention her religion when she was asked about identity. She was the only one who

expressed a loss of sense of self and struggled to negotiate her identity in the United States. She

gradually expressed her perception about religion. She thinks identity is based on religion and

she feels that the religion is a very personal issue. At the same time, like the other women, she

believes that keeping the religious tradition in the family is the core foundation to preserve and

reproduce of her identity and traditional culture. The different ideologies between Nahid and

other women came from how she practiced the religion. These ideologies were affected by the

environment she lives in now. She was happy with whom she was but she struggled a lot when

she moved to the United States. Nahid said:

> I know lots of Arab woman, they can have house, they can make being a homemaker
>
> staying home with their kids, it could be a project. They give it all and happy doing that,
>
> but it was not fulfilling for me. I felt I do well I enjoy my time with kids, but there was
>
> something missing. I wanted to do something for my own, enrichment, something
>
> working toward a goal; a goal for myself. I felt Egyptian women and other women in
>
> general, they have . . . they have lots of issues, especially when they come here [to the
>
> United States]. The issues could be . . . maybe gender equality, maybe social taboo, and
>
> social and cultural norms that hinder women from reaching true potential. It doesn't have
>
> to do with religion.

Unlike other women, the sense of loss had been the main struggle until Nahid made changes in

her life. She chose to practice religion within her own philosophical views. The criticism from

her family in the United States and family in Egypt were put behind. She came to realize that

religion to her is inside of herself not what she needs to show to the public. She struggles

through the pressure from herself and from the Muslim community to determine what is

acceptable to her, her family and her community. Her identity is affected by her interaction with

the expectations from her home community, the community she lives in now, her family's

recognition, and her own expectations. She said: "I am proud of wear scarf. I am proud to

present my identity to be Muslim." However, she decided to remove hijab. She describes

herself as a religious person and is "liberal and modest"; she does not want to show her religious

identity by wearing hijab. People may not know how to react to the differences in terms of

people's different look such as clothing and appearance but it is not what concerns her. Nahid

said she never had anybody treat her differently. She further described:

> At some point, I felt the life is a little bit harder because of it [wearing hijab]. I am used
>
> to in Egypt being very sociable, have lots of friends. I felt this is causing people to take a
>
> step back a little bit here. I don't think it is intentional. People don't know me until they
>
> get to know me, and they don't. I feel we like people are similar to us.

Nahid's identify transformation went through different stages in the United States, she was able

to find her own identity by going back to school, by finding support from an Egyptian social

group, and by removing hijab.

     Critical self-reflection. These women thought of themselves with distinguished

characteristics about their self-conceptualizations during the transition from their home countries

to this new country. They bring different historical backgrounds with a common religion and

common language to their lives in a Muslim immigrant community in the United States. Each

woman's individual identity is rooted in her cultural identity of her traditional home culture and

religious belief. During their interactions with the mainstream community, they are particularly

cautious in the sense that they fear that their children would be Americanized. They expressed

an emotional self-serving driven attitude. They wanted to preserve their traditional home culture

and religion for the next generations, so they are very conservative in regards to adapting to new

cultures. The fundamental values about these immigrant women's lives in a new community in

terms of the relationships with family and community, the traditional gender roles, and the

reproduction of the traditional culture have not changed during the time they have lived here.

Preservation of traditional culture and religious beliefs in their families. When the

women talked about their lives in Michigan, it was inevitable that the conversations would

always lead to their families. The topics evolved around their husbands, their children, and

themselves. Family life is based on the foundation of their traditional culture and religion.

These women appear to have made efforts to maintain their traditional roles and traditional

family structures in the new society. A family is constructed basically on marriage, gender roles,

culture and religion which are all inter-related. It was women who maintained the family values

of traditional home culture and religious belief.

In keeping with their traditional cultures, these women do not allow their children to date.

Fadia said: "my kid, if they want a friend, know the parents, know they are good Muslim."

Amina and Zena take their children to every activity. They do not allow their children to sleep

over at their friends' houses either. Zehar and Nahid's children are still young. They have not

discussed with their children about relationships with opposite sex and dating.   They simply

said: "We don't date in our culture." Fadia said: "That's how we raise. That's how we

continue how new generation to be. My kids used to see me how I used do with my mother-in-

law. Respect, love, and how we raised." Fadia's children were grown up. Her children married

to their spouses who are Lebanese descendants.   One of Fadia's boys married Fadia's own

cousin. Fadia's daughter married to Fadia's son's friend. Again, this marriage within the family

circle is to ensure the traditional culture's reproduction in the family. Zena expressed:

> Culture you know they don't have hard rules; the rules are to protect them to live your
>
> life straight and for you and for other people. It is not like hard or impossible rules. How
>
> they understand, boys if you talk to them, my sons you have to be this you have to do

that, he will follow not to make you repeat again. Girls ask for reason why we have to do

that why other people do different.

Children have their own characteristics no matter what. As first generation immigrant women,

these women battle with their children in order to let them understand the importance of keeping

the core values in the family. As for Amina, she said:

Teaching my daughter is easy, my sons are hard, but like I told you I treat them equally.

What help me the most is I am close to them. See for my mom, she used to be close to

boys and leave the girls, me and my daughter and my sons, we are very close to each

other.

As parents, the women live in a cross culture environment; they make every effort to preserve

the traditional culture and religion in their lives in this new environment for their children.

    Reproduction of the next generation. According to these women, Islamic values toward

the practice of relationships and marriage are viewed culturally rather than religiously. The

reason for marriage is for the reproduction of generations within the same ethnic identity and

traditional culture frame. Therefore, marriage should be between the same country of origin,

same ethnicity, and same religion. According to the women, it does not matter whether Shia

marries Shia, or Sunni marries Sunni, or Shia marries Sunni. Fadia said: "We marry each other.

We don't ask. It is okay." They believe the core values are the same between Shia and Sunni.

    A marriage is not necessarily arranged by families. It could be formed by a traditional

arrangement by parents or could be formed by an occurrence of social events. These women's

marriages were within the same religious beliefs and within the same countries of origin. There

were no cross nationality marriages among them. Amina expressed that her husband is a good

person, because her family knew him. Zena mentioned the same. Zena said: "You don't have

to ask of his background. They are fine. They are good people like us. We get married." A

marriage based on the religious belief gave the women confidence that they married to a good

husband and the marriage would work out well. Amina said: "He said that is what I want

[Amina's husband saw her as a religious woman], I want to learn how to speak Arabic ands I

want to be learning about my religion. So he is a big supporter to me . . . I had to say you know

God told me he is the right guy."

For these women, except Zayn, they were married and they moved to the United States,

during the changes of their lives, they had the faith that all would work out well because their

marriage was based on the same culture and same religion. Searching for friends and family

support is a significant factor for these women's adaptation experiences in the United States. For

the women, their support initially came from their husbands during their transition into the new

community. Zehar was devastated after her husband's death. She described her feeling with

tears in her eyes: "I felt thinking me and my husband, we were friends, I felt I lost him, I don't

have any support." Zehar decided to stay with her husband's family in Dearborn, Michigan, so

her son could be "close to his father's family." It was important for her that her son grew up in

the family circle.

A marriage means reproduction of the traditional culture. All the women mentioned that

they may manipulate their own culture to meet the new environment; however, one thing will

never change which is to continue keeping the family values. Fadia said:

Every day like I told you before, have a big family [pauses and smiles] yes, even my

father-in-law, when he got sick, he stayed in the hospital for seven months [pauses] so we

stay with him for seven months of hospital. Twenty four hour, whether the boys, the

girls, every one of them, the family has to stay with him, even in the waiting room. If

somebody is with him inside, somebody is gonna stay outside, day and night, even with

my mother-in-law, we do the same when she got sick.

Fadia further said (something she mentioned many times during our interview): "They [in-laws]

used to love me a lot. It's not like daughter-in-law, mother-in-law, it's like mom and daughter."

Family values stay as a foundation in the family. Fadia and her husband told their son who lives

in Senegal to bring the grandchildren back and get an education in Michigan. She said: "It is

important to have education here, the most important to be with the family, to grow up with

cousins." Zayn hopes that her family can stay together one day. Amina and Nahid bring their

families back to their home countries regularly so their children will learn "where they come

from." These women reported that the traditional home culture and religious beliefs are

foundation of the family value, which need to be carried on in generations.

Women's roles. Although the women expressed that Islamic values are the foundation of

the family relations, they also expressed the interpretations are different culturally in terms of

women's roles. Fadia said: "You know my husband, he used to do the same like me with his

mother and father. . . the same way, but sometime you feel the lady gonna do more of course,

yeh, of course." The father or senior male remains the leader to guide the family in Fadia's

family. She said:

> My grandfather [she names her father-in-law as grandfather] he used to be the like a
>
> [paused and searched for a word] . . . he was the biggest in the family. Whatever from
>
> our family has problem. We used to come to see him.

Although most women play the role of maintaining ethnic home culture, the women reported that

it was a family effort. All the women eat their traditional foods, but they made sandwiches,

macaroni and cheese because their children like them. All the women expressed that the

oppression of women does exist in their own cultures. Fadia said when she was young and lived

with her parents, she went to school and stayed home to help her mother in the house. Fadia

described her life here as "all the way home, I do a lot for the family because I am a grandma,"

as her husband's role is to support the family financially and run the business in Senegal.

Fadia's husband called from Senegal during our interview. He was making sure that his wife

was safe when a stranger was in the house. In Fadia's family, men and women have equal

responsibilities; however, being a woman, she thinks it is natural for "a woman do more work in

the home." She is assured that her children were on the right track with school and education.

She said: "Sometimes if I need help, my husband is going to be there." Her love of the family

was overflowing. She talked, she paused, she was in her deep thoughts for a moment, and then

she continued talking. Fadia told the story of how she learned from her mother-in-law that her

son wanted to marry her cousin who was visiting in Michigan from Lebanon. Three generations

lived in the same household. Women supported each other and filled in each other's role. She

described her mother-in-law raised the children with her together. She said, "She raised my kids

with me." This kind of family structure is hard to find in the western society. It is easy to find in

this Muslim immigrant community.

As Fadia described, men were in charge of making important decisions; Nahid's decision

to take her hijab off needed her husband's consent. She said:

> As a man walking beside an Egyptian [woman] who is not covered [with hijab] is an
>
> insult of his manhood. That is how it projected in Egypt [paused] He did not like the
>
> idea. He did not think I was able to do it. I did not do it without his consent at the end.

These women said according to *Qur'an*, a man should take care of his wife. The role of a

woman and a man is clearly defined in these women's families.

Women maintain traditional family structures. The views of culture and religion are

intertwined for all the women while they were in their home countries and even here in the

United States. For these women the interpretation of culture and religion is hard to separate.

Fadia expressed that she did not have a religious conscious when she was younger living in

Lebanon. She said she did not wear hijab when she was in Lebanon. She said although: "My

father likes to see girls wear hijab." Of all the women, Fadia was the only one who lived with

her in-laws in the same house. Although her children did not live with her after they were

married, they lived close by. The family gets together every Friday. Fridays are very important

in the family for Fadia. All family members come to the house, they go to mosque, they pray,

they eat together, and they stay around until late in the evening. According to Fadia, every

Friday, they do the same routine just like back home in Lebanon. She said: "People come in and

out of this house, and they have the children here, grandchildren. We used to have a full house

every day, yes . . . thanks God!" This close relationship among the family allows the family

members to carry on the tradition for generations. Her daughter quit her job and decided to be a

stay-at-home mother to raise her children. They celebrate Ramadan in a traditional way by

fasting, praying, and going to the mosque. Tradition is rooted in Fadia's family. She plays the

role of passing on the traditions among the younger generations in her family. Fadia and Zena

said they taught their children the same way they were taught back home. Fadia said she

followed her mother-in-law's ways and her daughter followed her ways with "respect and love."

Her memories brought her back to the time when she lived with her in-laws. She said this is the

way they raise the family:

> I used to live with my mother-in-law my father-in-law and I got teach a lot from them
>
> that was for me like a school. You call it like school. Even my kids how they saw me

and my husband to treat my father-in-law and my-mother-in-law and how they are telling

their kids; if you see my mom how she did it with my grandmother my grandfather, I

want you guys to do the same, keeping doing it the generation and the generation.

All the women except Nahid said they raise their children based on the book of *Qur'an*.

They reported that their family values are based on their religion. Amina's husband is an

American born Palestinian who learned to speak Arabic and to practice Islam from her. She and

her husband raised their children based on the teaching of *Qur'an*. The women appeared to

modify the traditional culture to fit the current environment. Amina gave an example. She said:

You know we sit; we give a lecture every week, me and my children about the faith about

what we have to do. The thing I taught him to love it not to force it, because even my

children, I never taught them if you not doing you gonna go to hell and fire. I taught

them if do this we are going to heaven, I taught them the positive not negative things.

These women have no confusions about their beliefs between their own culture and the western

culture. The challenges arise when they want to keep the traditional cultural and religious beliefs

for the next generations. They modify the culture and practice of religion to allow their children

to understand better and to adapt well in all contexts in the United States. Amina said:

Like for me, I told them [children] no boyfriends no girlfriends. This is our culture. This

is our religion. Even my husband, he met some of his colleagues from work at mall, you

know how they always hug. I used to scream and yell at him because of that. Say this is

not our religion and this not our culture, should not hugging, should not even shaking

hands with her. I am trying [she paused]. I told my kids it is not you are not supposed to

talking to woman or woman is evil or something, part of respecting woman, you should

not be shaking her hand. You just put your hands like this [she crossed her hands in front

of her chest]. For my husband, I am so hard on him because of culture. Because I want

him to set an example for my children. He changed. But for my children.

Amina's method to teach her children is to interpret the traditional culture in a contemporary

way so her children can accept and practice willingly. All the women consider their children

who were born in the United Sates as their greatest challenges.

Educational attainment. This study revealed that educational attainment does not affect

the women's cultural identities although it helps their adaptation and identity development

during the transition. They utilized education as pathways for personal achievement and socio-

economic movement. Education was viewed as a function more than a need for the women.

They emphasized the importance of education, particularly for their children. Education does

not appear to be a factor in their identities. The concept of education was influenced by the idea

of traditional home culture about women and education. It is not that the traditional cultures do

not support women's education. Zehar expressed, the interpretation was that sometimes it is

inconvenient for women to get an education due to women's mobility. For example, a woman is

not permitted to travel along or travel far away from home by herself. From the cultural

backgrounds where the women came from, they stated that being a woman, education equality

was not viewed in the same manner as for a man. Boys had the privilege of going to school but

girls sometimes were left behind because of culture interpretation, which the women considered

wrong. Women were raised in cultures where gender inequality was common. According to

these women, females were oppressed because of the strict interpretation of the religion which

manipulated the culture. Living in the western society, Amina, Nahid, Zehar, and Zayn modify

their traditional cultures of women's roles; they pursue to empower their own self and for their

daughters. Amina gave an example of how people manipulated religion and oppress women in her culture.

> Like women should be staying home. She should not be seeking knowledge or having doing a job. The woman is her thing is staying at home. Where it comes into when you look into the book of *Qur'an* and prophet, if you teach a woman, God will send you to heaven. In the book of *Qur'an*, he said, woman should be working, but man has to support her, he is not supposed to take money from her. If she is willing to give it to him then it is up to her, it is her choice. So where it says that they will come and say the religion say the woman should stay at home. This is culture thing. They don't want women to be educated, or to have a job, because it is hard for men to handle after that. So they make it into a religion thing, smart!

Amina claimed that her grandmother and her mother still kept the traditional ideas that girls did not need to go to school. Amina further said:

> He [Amina's father] is the only one who pushes that women should be educated. He used to treat us the same verses my mom and my grandma, no, boys are different, girls are different. And we have to serve them, why you need education, why you to have the knowledge, you are gonna be in the kitchen cooking, you don't need all this. What a waste, they will say.

For her daughter, Amina told her to pursue her own dream. For Amina herself, she is studying in graduate school. She said she had changed some traditional thoughts after she attended the school. She would never let her daughter to go to a medical school outside of Michigan in the past. Now, she will let her go to any school and let her pursue her study and her career in the future.

Education as discussed here by the women included English language skills and a formal educational attainment. English language skills are utilized for the function of these women's daily life when needed. A formal educational attainment is viewed as a human capital, which is a pathway of integration to the mainstream and a self-achievement by these women.

English language skills. Women ensured that they had sufficient English language communication skills so they could communicate with their children's schools and teachers. English language skills create opportunities to engage in mainstream society. The other important function was to obtain citizenship in the United States. Fadia said she learned French when she lived in Senegal and she learned English when she moved to the United States. She attended English as a Second Language classes and she learned English conversation from her children. She had to stop attending English classes because her father-in-law was ill. She never returned to classes because she was always preoccupied by children and family. Zena expressed the same perspective, as she had to stop attending English classes because she was too busy with children's activities. These women speak Arabic or mix of English and Arabic at home. They required their children to learn Arabic so they could understand the book of *Qur'an*. Zayn is attending English classes so she can apply for a nursing degree program. Amina, Nahid, and Zehar knew English before they immigrated. They expressed that English language skills had helped them to engage with the mainstream community. Amina was able to utilize her English skills to teach Arabic. She and Nahid were able to be accepted to Master's programs at universities. Zehar was able to work in the community center because of her English language skills.

Formal educational attainment. Formal educational attainment is viewed as a credential that is related to social economic movement. It brings jobs and recognition from their

communities. Women valued higher education. Amina is pursuing a Master's degree because

she would like to teach. Nahid is pursuing a Master's degree because she finds that no one can

take it away from her once she receives her degree. She related the educational attainment to

economic security. She said she had seen too many women in her community who relied too

much on their husbands and lost their foundation when their husbands left or died. Formal

educational attainment helped the women see options and opportunities. Formal educational

attainment empowers them to think differently than they had been taught back home. The

women expressed that educational attainment does broaden their views, which helps the identity

development but does not affect their identity. Zehar is holding off on her plan to return to

school until her son finishes his college education. She said with regret in her voice: "I felt like

if I did not lose my husband, maybe I will be something." It appears that the "something" is

related to a formal educational attainment. Amina and Zehar expressed that reaching to their

initial goal of completing a Master's degree will make them a complete person in the United

States. Zehar said: "This society is very judgmental society." Her need for educational

attainment emerged from the expectation of herself. It shows that education could serve as a

pathway to provide a higher soci-economic status. Zena said the same that she will raise her

children first then complete her General Education Development later. Nahid's personal goal of

getting a Master's degree had helped her to find a meaningful life and go through the transition

in the United States. Nahid stated:

> Now when I looking back, when I started doing my Master's degree I felt for the first
>
> time. I am starting to own my own life. I decide for myself what I want to do. Instead
>
> for the society or my husband, family, because I wanted to live each person's
>
> expectation.

One major finding is that these women's goals to obtain education are to achieve personal goals but not solely for employment. Education helps their adaptation to mainstream culture and identity development but does not affect these women's traditional cultural identities. Their stories suggest that they are negotiating a desire to maintain a connection to their home and their family while at the same time seeing broader potential for developing other aspects of their identity. There is clearly a desire to maintain their traditional cultural identities, and they also see the potential of developing an identity as a professional, as economically independent, and as an individual. The data suggests that is not an easy clear choice that they are making. Their individual engagement with their traditional culture, questioning of cultural norms and views of educational attainment are an example of how they negotiate these different perspectives.

Community. A supportive community in the new country contributes to a positive experience. This study revealed the importance of community supports to these women. A supportive community provides these women with positive experiences in their new country. A supportive community means that the mainstream communities provided a sub section community, which is similar to these women's home communities. They feel comfortable living in it and without further thoughts of being in a foreign country. For Amina, Fadia, Zayne, Zehar, and Zena, their transitions were in their own communities immediately after their immigration. They expressed that they lived in a community just like back home. They interacted with their own people who spoke the same language when they immigrated to the United States. For Nahid, her experiences were different than the other five women because she entered into the mainstream community before she knew any Egyptian people when she immigrated to the United States. She interacted with people in business that did not come from the same backgrounds as hers. Two types of community conditions that impact these women are

discussed below; the first condition was those who identified they lived in communities which were similar to back home and one who did not have her own community in which to fit.

  Communities similar to back home. These women come from communities that have tight relationships among family and friends. Women are protected by their families; therefore, they do not travel alone or live alone. Relatives live nearby and they visit each other frequently. These women referred to their hometowns as "villages." They described their households with grandparents, parents, and children live in one house back home. These women expressed that although they left behind the community social life back home, they were embraced in a supportive community in Michigan. The social services, grocery stores, medical centers, senior living facilities, schools, and mosques provided needs to them. The community grew bigger when they found their own connections to their friends and relatives who already settled in the community.

  Fadia's daughter and her eldest son are married and live only a few miles away. Fadia has the support of the family and the community. She said she did not want to change anything about her life here. She described her life as "perfect" now. The Lebanese grocery stores and restaurants are within a few blocks in the neighborhood.   She goes to the mosque regularly where she serves with a group of women. They have bake sales on Sundays. They prepare meals for people who go there to pray. She said: "my home is here." She fits right into the community, which is built by immigrants from the Middle East. She said: "My neighbors are all immigrants. . . . We have a big family here, my husband's family, his brothers, sisters." Her parents, her sisters and brothers moved into the neighborhood later years. Fadia said: "all of my family are here [in Michigan] now."

Zena lives in a very similar setting as Fadia in the United States. Zena's parents also immigrated to the United States after Zena received her citizenship. Zena had good memories about her neighbors in the apartment where she and her husband first settled after they were married. The neighbors gave her lots of help when she first arrived in Michigan. She and her husband moved to a city north of Dearborn later. Zena said: "I never had bad experiences with people here. We are teaching them [our neighbors] also our culture. Like holiday, I will bring them sweets, their holiday, they will bring their sweets. This is kind, kind people." Zena described her life in Michigan as: "No surprises and I love to live here like because it is the same what I grow up." Zena settled her parents in Dearborn because she felt the community is more like back home. She drives from her home to Dearborn to shop and visit her mother every Saturday.

Zayn found a Syrian community and a Turkish community that she receives supports from. She said: "I am lucky!" One Syrian friend who is also an immigrant helped her to pay the bills and settle in Michigan. Zayn said with an emotional tone: "I will pay her back." Zayn was afraid to visit stores in Dearborn when she just arrived in Michigan. She related the experience to her home in Syria. She covered her eyes when she talked about her feelings. Zayn lives in a community that has a mix of different ethnicities and Americans. Syrian and Turkish friends had helped her tremendously during her transition into the new community. Zayn has become more relaxed in her new environment these days.

All the women expressed that the community support is essential for their resettlement. Amina said:

I really like it here; it felt like back home. I felt people more majorities are, we live at

Dearborn Heights then, it is Arab community. So I felt like it's like back home for me.

> Our neighbors are Arabs. I am surrounded by Arabs. When I go to the store it's Arab. I
>
> feel like home. It is not in New York.

Amina's parents moved to the United States because Palestine became too unsafe for them to continue living there. Her parents moved to Texas. Amina said: "There are not many Arab people and Muslim community there. He just sat home. I don't think he liked it and enjoyed it. It would be different if they moved to Michigan." Her father died five years after he moved to Texas.

> Zehar had to move three times between the United States and Yemen after her husband's sudden death. She mentioned it many times during the interview; "I cannot stay here [in Louisiana]. I need the support." The last move was to Michigan. She said:

> I came to Michigan, because he [her son] has a huge family here that he can relate to
>
> them. They have boys, so he can play with them. I don't want him to feel like . . . he is
>
> not alone. He has a huge family here, his dad's family, uncle, his grandma, his cousin,
>
> my husband's uncle . . . huge family here. So I want him to belong to a family.

Zehar has her best friend here in Michigan. Zehar said: "Even she is not Yemenis, she is Palestinian. We always travel together, we always have fun." Zehar provides social services to Arab Muslim immigrant women. She said she does not mind working with male clients but her female clients do not want to have the male in the program; she said:

> I remember three years ago, I started with seven women, now I have 119 in the program,
>
> and I have over 100 in the waiting list, because it is only for women. They feel that we
>
> belong to this. Men with us . . . we don't want. So we don't accommodate men, but for
>
> me, I don't care.

Zehar is one of the women who remains living in a community that maintains a sub immigrant

section within the mainstream community. They established their own activities in their own

community in their daily lives. They do not have the need to interact with the mainstream

population.   This self-sufficient community has schools, mosques, grocery stores, restaurants,

and social service organizations. Amina, Fadia, Zayne, Zehar, and Zena moved into their ethnic

communities when they immigrated into the United States. Although they came to a foreign

country, they required less adjustment for their daily lives during the transition.

     Finding a supportive community to fit in. From a different perspective, Nahid expressed

that she had experienced pressures from inside the Muslim community about people's

perceptions of practicing religion. She was looking for a community that fit into her own

ideology. Nahid made remarks about Dearborn, she said: "you live in Dearborn. You know . . .

people are very conservative." Nahid was seeking a support from the community who can

accept her and she can relate to as well; as she described: "The middle ground is to having

someone Arab also open minded was challenging." She struggled to determine what was

possible and workable to be acceptable by her families and communities. The stress was

overwhelming for Nahid during her early stage in the United States. She questioned herself

about how to understand herself and how to define herself to be understood by her family while

living in the United States. She joined her husband in a direct sales business and met people

based on the business relationship. She described the business as: "something I did not choose,

but it was something it was available." She said:

> I do it [the business] initially, because it is a good bridge. It introduces me to American
>
> culture and I meet a lot of friends through it. I am happy to do it. I am not just staying
>
> home. It was something I was doing, but it was not fulfilling.

Because of the business, Nahid interacted with people who did not speak her own language who did not understand her cultural backgrounds. She felt a disconnection with her own community, the one just like back home she said. Nahid had to return to Egypt to find emotional comfort from her family and friends in Egypt. During our interview, we analyzed her experiences as a Muslim woman lived in a western society. She described the situation as being caused by two factors:

> The first thing is not having a community, a supportive community I relate to, as much as I enjoy having friends from different background and culture but at some point I needed someone I can relate to that would understand where I come from, how things are back home, how this could affect me here. It is not happening in community. Maybe in the business, we are close, but we are not close enough, because we are always business partners and business always the main focus for our get together. So we could not get very close as there were limit on how . . . so maybe the community I could not fit in, within that community. Also, I am not doing something for myself, not doing something pursuing my own dream.

Libraries and media are convenient for Nahid to collect information where she, her husband and children live now in another city in Michigan. She also found literature about women studies after she started a Master's degree study at local university. This literature affects her thoughts about her religion and her identity. The major change came when she found a group of Egyptians when she and her husband went to a political demonstration at University of Michigan.   Before she met this group of Egyptians, she missed her active social life in Egypt and she just wanted to go back home. After she met the group, she said: "that changes everything." The members of the group are mainly students at University of Michigan. Nahid

said it has been four years since she and her husband discovered the group. They meet monthly.

Politics and religion were put aside by the group, although the group was formed for the political

reason initially. The group that Nahid described is a culturally integrated group. The members

are Egyptians. They also bring in other ethnicities that enjoy Egyptian cultures, food, music, and

socialization by intercultural marriage. The emotional comfortableness from feeling of

belonging to a community is the most essential factor affecting immigrant women's lives in the

western society.

For these women, currently, they all live in a supportive community. The community

provides spiritual and materials support, which provides a comfortable and stressless

environment for them. They teach their children and enjoy their lives in this new country.

Acculturation. The adaptation process is viewed by the women differently. The longest

length of living in the United States was Fadia, who has lived here for 25 years. She showed no

reasons for adapting to mainstream culture, because she said she had everything in her

community. Zayn was living the shortest length of time in the United States, less than a year.

She works in the mainstream community but limits her social contacts to only her Syrian

community. Amina, Zehar, and Zena had about the same length of living in the United States.

Amina expressed that education helped her integrate into the community. Amina's connection to

the mainstream community is from her teaching Arabic language to the community and her study

at a university. She described her experiences of integrating into the mainstream community as

follows:

> I started teaching Arabic at the mosque. I started interested in community more and
>
> more. For me, decided to go back to college, because I wanna know the language. I
>
> know the Arabic language but I need to interact with others (who doesn't speak Arabic).

It is not just stopping like for me is yes I want to interact with Arab, I also need to know

the language (English language), I need to be more aware of what is going on around me

(the mainstream community) . . . I teach Arabic language at Montessori school. They all

from different background not just Arabs. I communicated with them in English. I teach

Arabic but the communication is in English . . . I adapted American lifestyle more than

back home. So I feel like America is my home."

Socially, Amina appears to have more interactions with the primary American community than

the other women. Her husband's background as an American born Palestinian and her attitude of

being open minded, and her integration to the mainstream accommodated her life here. Zehar

and Zena lived in a close ethnic community. They had limited interactions with the mainstream.

Nahid's adaptation is a continuing process of introspective. Two common factors were

discussed below: (a) reasons of immigration affected adaptation experiences, (b) accommodated

acculturation but not assimilation.

     Reasons of immigration affected adaptation experiences. The women in the study

immigrated to the United States for different reasons: to seek educational opportunity, to be

united with a husband, to seek political shelter and/or a combination of one or all of the above.

These women take responsibility between two generations between their parents and their

children. They maintain lives here in Michigan and maintain their connections with their

families back home. Zena said her husband's business is in Iraqi television commercials.

Fadia's husband maintains the family business in Senegal and travels among Lebanon, Senegal,

and the United States. These exhibit a globalization phenomenon in some of these women's

immigration backgrounds. The interview data show that they follow the trends of earlier

immigrants to seek their relatives and stay with the ethnic communities. Their family structures

might change in the future based on influences of mainstream environment. There are fewer

generations who live in one household, but they still want to maintain in the same community.

Zena settled her parents in a senior apartment in Dearborn while she and her family live in

another community. Fadia's in-laws returned from Senegal and bought the house to settle down

in Dearborn. The house became the gathering place for all family members. Zehar's in-laws

have been living in Dearborn for many years. They lived in the communities, which were

established by immigrants who arrived earlier which allowed them to live similar lives as back

home. The five women had their husbands' support and they were able to adapt a new life in a

new community smoothly. As Amina described:

> I feel like it is an easier life here. It is not as hard as back home. It is easy with my
>
> education, with the help from my husband too. He helps me live and make it easy for me
>
> to stay in America

Zehar had a dream of getting her education in the United States; she has not given up yet. All

women, except Zayn, look at immigration as a good thing that happened. Zayn was still in the

initial stage of settlement, which made her experience different from other women. For Zayn,

she traveled alone to Michigan. Her reason for immigrating was to obtain medical services for

her father in the United States. She did not want to live here permanently although she was

pursuing citizenship status. Her involuntary immigration makes her plan to stay in the United

States different from other women. Her plan is to return to Turkey after she receives her green

card so the whole family can stay together.

Accommodated acculturation but not assimilation. The findings from this group of

women showed that they all have a common desire to keep their traditional culture for the next

generation; although they showed very different perspectives during their transition into a

different country. There are differences of accepting the new culture depended on their personal

situations. The majority of these women immigrated to the United States through their

marriages. According to their descriptions of coming to the United States, their immigration

could be identified as voluntary immigration. These women accepted their new environment

with a more positive attitude. They showed interest in adapting to new things in their new

environment. However, depending on individual self-conceptualization of the needs and

demands, in a real life context, each one has her own experiences of her own choice of

adaptation in a new country. These women preserve their strong primary culture on their own.

They have a strong foundation of belief and the way of living based on the needs of their

individual families and their self-conceptualizations. They utilized the frame of reference to

interact with the environment they live in. They observed the environment; they defined their

needs; and, they live their lives cognitively in the new country. At the same time, changes

happen unconsciously depending on the level of their interactions with the mainstream

community. Among these women, Fadia, Zehar, and Zena showed very similar adaptation

experiences. According to Fadia and Zena, they lived the same lifestyle as back home. Zena

described her life here as:

> No surprises and I love to live here like because it is the same what I grow up especially
>
> my neighbors. When you feel the neighbors there it is the same this make you happy,
>
> because you did not go to a strange country. You go to the same country it is a beautiful
>
> feeling.

Zehar lived and worked in the Arab community in Dearborn. She said: "I live the same lifestyle

just like home, just different location. It is comforting for me." They agreed that they enjoyed

this environment and lived the similar lifestyle as back home. Amina shared her experience:

"But I start comparing our culture and their culture and the way they taught the way they treat each other, I took the good and left the bad, but it is a great experience." These women maintain a distance to look at the western culture as "their culture." Amina also expressed:

> I feel like it is an easier life [in America]. It is not as hard as back home. So for me, because I interact with education, going to college, working, I think I find it easier for me to adapt American lifestyle.

Amina related education to her culture adaptation, which is consistent with the other women's statements of broadening their views and becoming open minded. In the past few years, Nahid has experienced the transition in her life in the United States. She said she makes western style food and traditional food at the same time. She said she could not identify between American lifestyle and the Egyptian lifestyle:

> I speak Arabic with my husband. At home, we speak Arabic. We watch a lot of Arabic movies. I am not immersing in the American culture maybe the American society as much. That is why I cannot relate very well to them [mainstream Americans].

Among these women, it is obvious that their adaptation experiences were influenced by their husbands, their families, their religion, their country of origins, their socio-economic status back home, their educational level at home and in the United States, their English language skills, and their relationships with the community. Their adaptation is a process of habitus. They were sojourners. They experienced stress, support, and selection during this process.

Summary

The findings revealed these women's experiences in the Detroit Metro area and in the city of Dearborn have been welcoming. They showed courage to share their personal stories and their lives in the United States. These individual stories tell us how these women identified

themselves in a new country; how they utilized their educational attainment; and how they

process their adaptation in a new country.

The findings indicate that all these women's identities are grounded in their religious

beliefs and their nationalities. These women practice Islam following the *Qur'an*. They maintain

their traditional cultural identities in their new country. They believe that as women they have

better lives and better educational opportunities in the United States. They value education;

therefore, it is important for them to ensure that their children received a good education in the

United States. They believe that educational attainment creates opportunities to interact with the

mainstream community, which helps with their adaptation process. They believe formal

educational attainment will provide opportunities to engage employment and help their socio-

economic condition, although it is not the only reason for them to obtain a formal education.

Families are their primary focus in their daily lives. They rely on family values that are based on

traditional cultures and religious beliefs. They serve the roles to maintain these values in their

families. Their immigration through marriage showed that there was no different from the

majority of women's immigration pattern in the history. Their experiences in the United States

have been enriched by supportive communities. It appears that the communities provide positive

social support both from the mainstream community and the ethnic communities; these women

are less likely to pursue culture change. Their adaptation process depends on their own

conceptualizations of how much they are willing to adapt and what they want to accept from the

mainstream culture. These women believe their lives here are better than back home. They feel

that they are able to modify their traditional home cultures to fit into their lives in the United

States. Their acculturation experiences are limited in the new environment; since they lived in

supportive communities, which were similar to their home communities. Chapter five concludes

the study with implications, final thoughts as well as stating the limitation, and recommendations

for further studies.

Chapter 5: Conclusions and Implications

This chapter concludes the research with implications and recommendation for the future studies. Data were collected by analyzing personal stories from six Muslim immigrant women. The findings answered questions of how they identify themselves post immigration; how educational attainment contributes to their personal lives, and how they adapt to their lives in the United States. Interpretations of the findings are presented based on the four themes from chapter four: (a) cultural identity, (b) educational attainment supports integration process, (c) a supportive community, and (d) women's choices to accommodate acculturation but not assimilation.

Cultural Identity

This study found that women's fundamental cultural identities were maintained during the integration process, which is similar to Abraham and Shryock's (2000) study about Arabs in Detroit and Aswad and Bilgé's (1996) study about family and gender among American Muslims. This study found that the women showed some level of social structural separation from the mainstream community, particularly the structure of home culture and religion, which is similar to what Cainkar (1988), Gordon (1964), and Ogbu (1993) found.

Similar to Ogbu (1993), I would argue that each woman's primary cultural identity was what was planted in her before her interaction with different cultural groups. These women carried their primary cultural identities from their home countries to the United States. These women show continuing identity development due to the influences of different environments, influences from their children, and the personal changes as others have noted (Dai, 2009;

Bourdieu 1986; Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Gordon, 1964; Volpp's, 2001). In other words, while

these women show their cultural identities, their new experiences after immigration show that

their identities develop on the basis of past and present national group also within the social

interaction in the new environment. I would like to name these factors as environmental social

governance factors. They live in an environment where they breathe and function daily. They

are concerned about their ancestral and future-oriented identities for the next generations. These

women see their cultural identities as important matters after they immigrated into the United

States similar to findings by Volpp (2001); they also reveal a combination of individual identity

development while keeping their collective religious cultural identities. These individual

identities were revealed particularly when they wanted to ensure their roles to educate their

children.

    Religious identity. Religious identity is a complex and living faith that different

communities interpret and understand in different ways. Their identities show a combination of

culture, religion and nationality, which differs from other studies (Dai, 2009; Berry, 1997; and

Kim, 2008). Instead of a systematic citizenship-making process in their new environment the

women in this study expressed their identities through practicing traditional cultural and religious

customs. Their individual identity development is based on their fundamental traditional cultural

identity. One woman experienced adaptation stress but did not appear confused about who she

was during her self-reflective period. Unlike the research, such as Brewer & Gardner (1996),

Afzal-Khan (2005), Berry (1997) and Kim (2008) that indicates that individual identity is

separated from the group identity, this study shows that each woman's individual identity is

embedded in her group religious identity. In spite of their different personal backgrounds and

being from different countries of origin, these women first identified with their traditional

cultural identities. The woman who did not identify herself as a Muslim woman when she first

introduced herself did state that as a Muslim woman, she presented herself differently before and

after her immigration. The religious identity became part of their cultural identities.

       Preserving traditional culture and religious beliefs for the next generation. This

study found that Islamic beliefs and traditional home cultures are the foundation of family values

for these women. This study found that relationships, marriage, and gender roles are viewed

culturally rather than religiously just as Walbridge's (1996) study in an American Lebanese

community. As Aswad & Bilgé (1996), Cainkar (1988), Haddad & Smith (1996), and Gordon

(1964) found, marriage within the ethnic group is considered essential to build a strong circle to

keep the traditional culture in families. The function of a family is to assure ethnic cultural

reproduction. All the women permanently settled in the United States through their marriages

except Zayn who immigrated to the United States as a refugee. They grew up within strong

family values and they want to ensure that these values continue in next generations. Each

woman in this study derived her own inner strength from within herself. Unlike Berger (2004)

and Bystydzienski and Resnik (1995) who found that women find themselves culturally

homeless in a new country, this study found that there was no identity confusion phenomenon for

any of the six women; even though one woman had gone through the adaptation stress. Their

identity negotiations arose only when they made efforts to keep their primary cultural identities

for the next generations. Although the women reported that it was a family effort to maintain

their ethnic home culture, they indicated that this was their primary role. The women work to

ensure that the reproduction of traditional home culture will remain for future generations, so the

ancestral identity will be carried on for a longer period of time.

Educational Attainment Supports Integration Process

This study found that the women see educational attainment as serving one or all of the following functions: self-enrichment, a pathway to reach the mainstream community, and upward socio-economic movement. There is no general pattern for all of these women's formal educational attainment for themselves. They put effort into assuring that their children and the next generation obtained a formal education. These women expressed that the value of educational credentials and language skills are part of their human capital. All of these women see the credential of higher education as valuable similar to Bourdieu's (1986) and Ogbu's (1981) forms of capital. During the educational attainment process, women gain cultural and social competencies. Through social interactions with mainstream culture, such as a university setting, the women's minds are stimulated and they are energized to interact with their environment. They recognize that a formal educational attainment leads to opportunities for the exchange of ideas and interactions with the mainstream community. However, depending on the woman's family situation and whether she has a supportive husband or not, not all the women expressed the need or desire to seek a formal educational attainment and/or English language skills. This finding is consistent with Read and Oselin's (2008) study of comparing the conception of education and employment among different ethnic women groups showed that Arab women value educational attainment differently. Culturally, they are protected by their families; therefore, they utilize the formal educational attainment more as self-enrichment. In other words, these women's socio-economic status is supported by their families. In different situations, such as Zayn as a refugee and Zehar as a widow, they are the breadwinners of their families. This study found that education and English language do not influence these women's cultural identities but influence their potential integration process. All these women were raised

in traditional cultural contexts back home. They expressed that they not only keep their cultural

identities but they make sure the next generation will keep the same cultural identities, which is

influenced by a mix of religious and cultural strains. Formal educational opportunities provide

the opportunities to bring interactions and idea exchanges with the mainstream community,

which does not change who they are, but encourage potential integration into different cultures.

A Supportive Community

This study found that the women's relationships with their communities are supportive of

their experiences in the new community. These women lived in a collective community in their

home countries. With the exception of Nahid, they all stayed within their own circles when they

immigrated to the United States. They brought their parents and siblings from overseas to live

permanently in the United States, which is akin the whole stakes during immigrants'

resettlements just like Shryock's (2000) study about the Arab in Detroit which is also like what

Bourdieu's description of the phenomena as "the game of society" (1986, p. 52) also similar to

Bourdieu's (1986) social capital theory. These women joined communities, which became the

foundation of social life in these ethnic communities. Their communities have mosques,

community centers, and institutions/services (doctor's offices, pharmacies, restaurants, gas

stations, grocery stores) that accommodate their religious/ethnic/linguistic/cultural practices, and

support all the basic needs for their daily lives. They are able to communicate in Arabic. This

familiarity reduces their stress levels and facilitates their adaptation process. It appears that the

ethnic communities serve them well; therefore, there is minimal desire for these women to

interact with mainstream society. They are able to maintain their home lifestyles as they did in

their home countries. This ethnic security creates a separation from the larger mainstream

community both at the group level and individual level during these women's integration

process.

Accommodated Acculturation but not Assimilation

This study found that these women do not reflect any one particular cultural adaptation

models, despite what Berry (2005), Boyer (2001), Gibson (2001), Gordon (1964), Kim (2012)

present as important theories of acculturation and assimilation. These women's acculturation

processes in their new environment have their own implications as other researchers (Brewer &

Gardner, 1996; Dai, 2009; Kim, 2001; & Read, 2007) have indicated, i.e., there are differences

among different ethnic immigrant groups. Although stress did exist in their acculturation

process, the women showed lower levels of identity crisis during the adaptation process, which is

not exactly what Berry (1997 & 2005), Kim (2001, 2007, 2008, & 2012), and Haddad et al.

(2006) described about acculturation phenomena. The strong ties to religion and family

combined with the shared experience with others in the community have slowed the assimilation

process. The findings of the six immigrant women's cultural experiences cannot fit into only one

of the following models, presented in the literature: a leaner formation model (Gibson, 2001), an

accommodation acculturation (Ogbu, 1993), a selective acculturation (Gibson, 2001), a sojourner

(Sarroub, 2001), a transformation through cross-cultural adaptation (Berry, 2005; Kim, 2001),

and a habitus (Bourdieu, 1986). The findings show that models can explain the process of

adaptation and integration. However, they cannot show human experiences. Data show that

these women's experiences are situational and dependent on their needs, the time of events, their

family structures, and the community in which they live. There is not one woman in this study

who fits into only one model and who has totally assimilated into mainstream culture. Findings

suggested that the combination of Ogbu's (1981 & 1993) theories of cultural frame of reference

from a cultural-ecological perspective and Bourdieu's (1986) theory of habitus support the

phenomena of women's adaptation development.

These women live in ethnic supportive communities. They are content with the similar

lifestyles as at their home countries. They do not have to engage with mainstream society if they

chose not to. All the women acculturated situationally (Gibson, 2001) with their self-

conceptualizations in their current society. They utilize cultural frame of references and adapt to

the new culture selectively. They decide how much they want to engage in the new country's

culture. They are also influenced by the needs from their children and their children's social

activities. There were no data showing women's reaction to tragedies such as 9/11. They did

not mention political views. They did not mention any negative experiences. Therefore, Boyer's

(2001) theory of cultural diffusion in the literature review does not apply to these women.

There are no relations found between these women's length of time living in the United

States and their integration process. Each woman depending on her own situation decided her

own cultural needs of competencies. Fadia, Zahar, and Zena reveal the sojourner characteristics.

They choose to attach to their own ethnic group while living in their own ethnic communities in

the new country. Fadia had lived in the United States longer than any of the other women in this

study. Fadia took English as a Second Language classes when she first arrived in the United

States. She anticipated that because she was moving to an English language speaking

environment she needed to learn to speak the English language. She later found out that she

could live without speaking English in her community. She learned to speak English from her

children. She did not decide to either assimilate or not assimilate to mainstream society, it turned

out that her lifestyle remained the same traditional lifestyle as back home. Findings from this

study indicated that these women did not fit into either a linear formation or assimilation model.

They adapted to the new cultures as needed (e.g., because of their children's influences or particular circumstances or needs), while at the same time living within their traditional home cultures. Amina and Nahid's integration outcomes reveal developments of habitus (Bourdieu, 1986), which are contributed to their formal educational attainment. These women took periods of time to examine, to measure, and to map out the environment in which they live. Throughout this process, there was no pressure to change, but their adaption happened through consciousness. The findings show that their cultural development of habitus is a reflective process.

Findings show that these women connect with their own ethnic communities but inevitably have to interact with the mainstream community. It is a complex situation, where it is not possible to separate themselves from the mainstream community completely in their daily lives. As Ogbu (1993) and Sarroub (2001) described, an ethnic community, no matter how much it is committed to supporting its members, cannot isolate members from the mainstream community; this study found that influences from all ethnic groups in the larger community do exist. For these women, particularly for their children's activities, they have to connect with the mainstream community. The adaptation process is a personal matter. Self-conceptualization between traditional cultures and the new culture is the way they make sense of their lives in the new country. Abraham and Shryock's (2000) described the stories about Arabs in the Detroit metropolitan area as full of mysterious from margin to mainstream. Ogbu's theory (1993), on the other hand described how these women utilize the cultural frame of reference to justify their universal cultures (traditional home cultures), primary cultures (religious beliefs), and secondary cultures (mainstream cultures) in order to decide what they need to live their lives in the new country. The justification comes from these women's motivations and willingness as to how

they want to live their lives in the new country. Findings showed that ethnic stratification does exist in ethnic communities. There are immigrants who live in the ethnic community and show very limited interaction with the mainstream community. For these women, a cultural frame of reference takes place when they negotiate with their children in order to enforce their children keeping their traditional home cultural and their religious beliefs. These women also rely on their children to interact with the mainstream community when needed.

Findings indicated that these women's life choices reveal that their adaptation to life in the United States was based on their cognition of their own lives here in the United States. Depending on their selection, it is a self-conceptualized phenomenon; an individual's cultural experiences in a new country will derive from the historical experience to a present experience. The phenomenon can be described as Bourdieu and Wacquant's (1992) reflexive theory and Ogbu's cultural frame of reference theory (1993). This kind of enactment takes place when cultures symbolize meaning for immigrants in their daily lives (Ogbu, 1993). There is not a single adaptation model which can fit all women. However, one common self-affirmation exists among them; they do not want to be disconnected from their own traditional home cultures and the communities that they emigrated from.

Significance of Study

This study took personal level factors into account in a research design. I was able to capture the voices of six women who represent a population that has often been stereotyped in the media. This study argues against the women's identity conflicts as described by researchers Haddad, Moore, and Smith (2006). This study illustrates the influences of the women's cultural identities into their cultural integration process. This study reveals that because of these women's ties with their traditional home cultures, they view functions of formal educational

attainment differently. This study shows that a supportive community influences immigrant

women's experiences in the United States. The majority of the studies about immigration and

immigrants focuses on policies but lacks human stories. These women live in our community.

Their daily lives are part of our daily lives. This study supports the findings that an immigrant's

experience is influenced by factors in her personal experiences in the moment and how their

lives take on meanings that are individual. This study identified religion as an important factor

into the acculturation process for these women. There are various personal conceptualizations

and community supports incorporated to include factors contributing their experiences in a new

country. Women serve important roles in the families and communities. Findings do not fit into

the stereotype perspective from the general public and media. From these women, I learned that

because of the protective family structure, traditionally they do not play a role as a bread winner

role. They are willing to sacrifice their personal agendas such as delaying pursuit of a formal

college degree or choosing to delay seeking employment; and focusing on their children's

wellbeing. This concept of maintaining basic family traditional culture as a foundation is

important in today's society. There are many ethnic studies focusing on men and women as

monolithic groups. Studies in the area of gender within different ethnic backgrounds are still not

prevalent enough. For centuries, immigrants have come to the United States to find better

opportunities, to establish families, or to escape political persecution. Given the scenario of the

increasing numbers of immigrants to the United States, the dynamic of population in the

community will vibrate with ethnic groups and their descendants. These are likely to be

immigrants who seek to learn new languages, new skills, and new cultures, at the same time,

wanting to preserve their own identities, cultures, their own languages, their own food, their own

music, and their own values in the new countries.   Findings showed that these women adapted

their lives in the new country with the conceptualization of an acculturation approach. This approach presented three important dimensions expressed by Berry (2005): "cultural maintenance, contact and participation, and the power to decide on how acculturation will take place" (p. 706). The theoretical framework of critical dialog in this study provided immigrant women the opportunities to reflect their own thoughts and express their own voices. They felt empowered by being able to participate in these critical dialogues. Based on these findings, the community, rather than posing policies to immigrants instead should consider trying to understand the individual's rooted preferences and cultural differences. Diversity is embraced by communities and also is one of the challenges in today's societies. Due to the changing of economic, ecology and the politics, learning personal stories organically will connect our sensitivity while adapting to changes in today's environment.

Limitations

This study was a phenomenological study; the results were rich and extensive; however, they cannot be viewed to serve all Arab Muslim immigrant women. All the women were middle-class and educated at the high school and above level. These six women are distinguished from other Muslim Arab women who may come from poorer and uneducated backgrounds. It is a snapshot of individual lives in particular historical moment; therefore, generalizations about these women's experiences can be examined only connections between theories and implications of people's daily lives. There are more stories that need to be told if the complexities of populations are to be revealed. The study was limited by the choice of participants from other countries in the Arab League. There was an attempt to include Arabic women who came from countries in Middle East; adding others would add more diversity to study.

The time constraints were a limitation of this study. The interview data collected from

these women represent only a small part of their lives. These data are certainly essential to

analyze for understanding their respective of living in a new country. However, in order to truly

understand the acculturation process, the evidence should be collected overtime within ethnic

groups and across generations. These women's lives were influenced by their ethnic

communities with limited exposure to the mainstream community. This study can only focus on

the individual level of their experiences, thinking and behavioral characteristics analysis. The

limitations of this study can be addressed in future studies. I would argue the data can be looked

at and be further developed different studies in many areas.

Recommendations for Future Research

Recommendation for future studies will be presented in four areas: identity, the

relationship between educational attainment and cultural adaptation, and cultural groups'

stratification. This study has established an understanding of women's conceptualizations about

their identities, their family values, their views about education, and their lives in a new country.

The Islamic values and traditional cultures have influenced how these women live their lives

before and after their immigration. The identity formation requires the determination of the

nature and extent of the different interpretations held by each individual. The conceptual needs

to accommodate potentially conflicting points of view are reflected in their practice of Islam and

association with their ancestral cultures. The critical dialog has served the purposes of

answering the research questions about thoughts of identity, cultures, education and experiences

in the new country. Based on this study, there are a few recommendations for future research.

Identity. This study serves as foundation of identity study of immigrant women who

come from a deep traditional cultures and religion enclaves. The identity formation could be

different for immigrant women who come from different backgrounds. I would like to
recommend three studies about identity to be conducted in the future:

- Study identity relationships at home, community, and global levels: Researchers (Kirk
  and Okazawa-Rey's research, 2010) state that; identity is shown in three different levels;
  the micro level at home; the meso level of community recognition, expectations, and
  interactions, and the macro levels of social categories, classifications, and structural
  inequality of global levels. A study about women's identities based on these three
  different levels would worth further investigation. Based on these three levels, the value
  of developing cultural identity with the mainstream community and a multicultural
  identity can be examined.

- Comparison study on different ethnic cultures and different religions: An exploration of
  the similarities and differences of cultures and religions among different ethnic groups in
  how religion and culture influence identity.

- Comparison study on immigrant women among different countries/religions: Focus on in
  what ways the choices about education, employment, and acculturation can be ascribed to
  individual or communal choices about identity.

Educational attainment and cultural adaptation. The empirical studies suggest that
education is associated with a positive adaptation experience. Researchers (Ajrouch, 2012,
Berry, 1997, & Bourdieu, 1986) argue that education is viewed as a credential that can
compensate the status loss for immigrants when they move to a new country and a resource of
employment status and higher income. The view of educational attainment could be different in
different ethnic groups, which could affect the acculturation results and adaptation experiences.

The relationships between educational attainment and cultural adaptation for men and women would be a good topic to study in the future.

Factors of acculturation. How do people live their lives when they move to a different country? There are factors to be examined before the immigration, during the immigration, and after the immigration. Acculturation is complex because the phenomenon occurs when two or more cultures interact in the same environment at the same time. The dimensions are involved in a group level and an individual level. The outcome can no longer to be expected as assimilation. A comparative study can be conducted in different context of geography, gender, age, educational level, and socio-economic backgrounds.

Reflections and Final Thoughts

This study begins with a reflection of my own experiences as an immigrant woman. It was difficult for me to detach from these women while I conducted this study. As humans, we want to make meaning to choose how we want to live in our communities, how we can contribute to the community, and how we want to make lives better for ourselves in a new country as an immigrant. This study was conducted with very special individuals. They are students, housewives, and professionals living with a similar goal to take care of their families. During the interview, I did not question differences; instead, I expected that differential experiences existed for each individual. I focused on the dialog and storytelling. These women faced multiple and simultaneous effects of culture, education, their responsibilities to families, and expectations from themselves and from their families. They cannot be understood simply by focusing on gender issues. I utilized the conceptual lenses to examine the intertwine effects of women's experiences in the community. I was grateful that they were willing to share with me freely about the ways they live their lives, the ways they encounter family and traditional

cultures in a new country. They told their stories by reflecting between their past and their

present lives. Through these critical dialogs the women shared very personal matters. I looked

back on my own experiences during the time that I wanted to assimilate to the community at the

same time I wanted to protect my own ethnic and cultural identity. Identity and acculturation

formation are influenced by our own attitudes, conceptualization, policies and community social

support. There are individual factors (willing to pursue and accommodate) and community

factors (willing to provide positive policies and allow immigrants to pursue their lives in the new

community) to determine the experiences and integration outcomes.

The contributions of this study reside in the women's personal lives both in the

communities of their home countries and the communities they live in now. They maintain their

traditional cultures and religion from their home countries, which is the foundation of their lives

here in the United States. There are very limited conflicts for these women themselves in their

daily lives in the new community, although the stress during the immigration process is

inevitable. They negotiate with their children and the expectations from their home communities

to maintain traditional cultures in the new environment. They advocate their views in this new

environment. With the support of the community, they do not feel rejection from citizens in their

communities. They are able to find support from their husbands and comfort from the new

communities.

This study began with my curiosity about how other people live in this county. Living in

a diverse community such as Dearborn enriches my personal experiences. My adaptation

happened as what Bourdieu describes as habitus (1986). These women's behaviors of habitus

are happening slowly with their acceptance. A question arises during this study without a

conclusion at this moment: To what extent might these women want to adapt more to new

cultures in this new place? Immigration is not the end of the journey of their lives. The

continuous process is taking place daily as intercultural encounters happen in their daily lives by

living in a foreign country. Their strong ties to their religious beliefs and to their traditional

cultures keep them close to their own communities. At the same time, they are surrounded by a

larger mainstream community. They inhabit two worlds. This phenomenon is complex. The

similarities of experiences that I and these women share include the need for supportive

communities, recognition of the values of education, and values of traditional home culture. My

experiences with these women underlined the importance of maintaining traditional home

cultures for the next generations. I also learned that these women sacrifice their own goals to

fulfill their responsibilities to their children. Living in the United States, they have more

opportunities to develop themselves freely. While the community gives them a safe place to

live, at the same time, it should provide them with an affordable formal educational opportunity,

helping them develop into more open-minded individuals, encouraging them with activities that

expose them to United States values, norm, and culture. I remain curious about these women

and hope to continue learning from them. During the interviews, these women promised to

connect me with other women from different backgrounds; they were all interested in learning

more about other women's lives in the United States. As immigrants, we all have more stories to

tell as we evolve in this foreign land and we continue to live meaningful lives for the good of

ourselves, the next generations, and the world.

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Appendix A

Consent to Participate in a Research Study

Arab Muslim Immigrant Women's Experiences: In Cross-cultural Perspective

You are invited to participate in a research study about the Arab Muslim immigrant women's post-immigration identity, educational experiences and cultural transformation experiences in the United States.   If you agree to be part of this research, you will be asked to answer a set of interview questions.   The interview will take place with several meetings. Each meeting should not exceed more than 90 minutes.

The purpose of this research is:

- To analyze Arab Muslim immigrant women's identity during the transition in the new country
- To examine the experiences of Arab Muslim immigrant women in the Detroit Metro area including the city of Dearborn
- To examine how and what formal educational attainment might impact an Arab Muslim immigrant women's identity development

Data will be collected by audio recordings so we can clarify and discuss the experience in further detail during the research. All data will be coded for anonymity. The data will be stored electronically on a password-protected folder in my computer throughout the duration of this research. Only I will be the only person to access the data. The information will only be used for this research purpose.

There is no foreseeable risk to your participation in this research.   Participating in this research is completely voluntary. Even if you decide to participate now, you may change your mind and stop at any time. You may choose not to answer any interview question for any reason. If you decide not to take part of the research you can withdraw from your participation.   If you have questions about this research, you may contact me at any time.

Emily Wang, Doctoral Student

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I, _____verify that this study has been explained to me and that I agree to participate in the study. I also agree to being audiotaped. I understand that if I have any hesitation I reserve the right to discontinue my participation in the research at any time and may request that all information that has been provided be destroyed.

Appendix B

Interview Questions

Thank you for participating in this interview. It is very nice to meet with you. I hope that after today's meeting you will agree to meet with me again for this research. In today's meeting, I would like to acknowledge three things: (1) I would like to explain to you about this study, (2) I would like to get to know you and would like to ask you about your homeland and coming to the United States, (3) I would like to learn about your home and reason(s) for immigration. If you agree to participate in this research, we will have subsequent meeting(s) in a few days. As you know, you have the right to refuse to answer any questions if you feel that something is too personal. You have the right to end this interview at any time. There are no consequences to you if you do decline a question or decide to end the session.

Questions at the First Meeting: Life in the Homeland and Immigration

1. Do you have any questions about this study?

2. What is your country of origin? Could you tell me who you are?

3. Could you tell me about your educational background? Where and when did you receive your education?

4. Could you tell me when did you move to the United States? Did you come to Michigan directly?

5. Could you tell me what are the reasons for you moved to the United States?

Questions at the Subsequence(s) Meeting: Life in the United States

Culture

6. What do you find are the differences between your home country and the United

    States? Do you feel disconnected from your homeland (Gualtieri, 2009)? How?

7. Do you have the opportunity to practice your culture and your religion in the United

    States? How do you practice your culture and religion? How is religion affecting your

    life in the United States? Is it important for you and your family to practice the cultural

    traditions and religion? If it is (or is not) important, please tell me why?

8. Are you able to keep your cultural traditions while living in the United States? Please

    give me some examples.

9. What are the challenges of living in the United States? Do you think these challenges

    arise because of cultural difference or religious difference?

10. How would you compare your life in the U.S. and back in your home country?

11. Who takes the role of upholding tradition in the family? Would you impose your culture

    and tradition into your daughter? Do you feel that as a woman you are provided more or

    less power and privilege in the United States? If yes (or no), please tell me why?

12. Are you working outside of the home? If the answer is yes, continue with the following

    two questions. Why do you work outside of the home? (If the answer is no, skip question

    13 and 14 and continue with the question 15)

13. How important is it for you to have other Muslims at the workplace?

14. How do you fit your traditional role into your work environment and home?

15. Would you consider working outside the home if you were given the opportunity? What

    would your family think if you worked outside your home?

Identity

16. How would you describe yourself now? Do you think that your identity has changed? If
    yes, how has your identity changed?

17. Outside your home, how do you connect with others? What would you like people to
    think of you (identification)?

18. Do you make friends with people from different ethnicities? Do you think it is important
    to make friends from different ethnicities? If yes (or no), please tell me why?

19. How important is it for you to have other Muslims living in your neighborhood?

20. Is there anything else that you would like to share with me?

Thank you!