"We Are The Hyphen In-between"

Muslim Arab-American Women and Education:

Intersecting Gender, Culture, and Religion

by

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Dedication

In the Name of God, Most Beneficent, Most Merciful

I dedicate this work to first and foremost, my parents. I would not be the person I am today without their love, support, guidance, and sacrifice. They uprooted their lives, as immigrants, and left behind everything they knew and loved to come to the United States to give me and my sisters better lives. To my parents, I am forever grateful and indebted. I also dedicate this work to my children, who have given my life purpose and meaning.

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Abstract

This phenomenological study examined the experiences of thirteen second-generation Muslim Arab-American women and the multiple intersections of their identities: gender, culture, and religion in relation to their educational experiences. This study included women from the Muslim Arab-American community in Southeast Michigan. This region is home to a large Muslim, predominately Arab, community that is religiously and culturally diverse. Drawing on interviews and a Focus group conversation, the data highlights the experiences of Muslim Arab-American women regarding education and the role the family and the Muslim Arab-American community plays in relation to female academic achievement. An intersectional theoretical framework was utilized to understand the multiple intersections of the women's identities. The findings from this study indicated the importance of familial support for female academic achievement as well as the role of the community's views and support of female academic achievement.

Keywords: Muslim Arab-American women, second-generation, culture, religion, gender, identity, intersectionality

Chapter I: Introduction

It is challenging to determine the exact numbers of the Muslims living in the United States due to the fact that the U.S. Census Bureau does not ask about religion and neither does the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (Pew Research Center, 2007). According to the U.S. Census (Asi & Beaulieu, 2013) approximately 1.5 million Americans identify as having Arab ancestry. Mistrust of government issued surveys as well as faulty classification methods may lead to difficulty in gathering exact data (Schopmeyer, 2011). Metropolitan Detroit, Michigan is home to one of the largest Muslim Arab communities in the United States. Metropolitan Detroit and the surrounding areas are home to a diverse Arab population with population estimates varying from 125,000- 475,000 (Baker & Shyrock, 2009). This area is considered to be the largest concentration of Arabs in the United States and is home to Lebanese Muslims, Yemeni, Palestinian, and Iraqi Muslims (Schopmeyer, 2011).

Muslim Arab-Americans, in particular the women, are often at the center of misunderstandings and generalizations that describe them as oppressed and voiceless. According to Hatem (2011) Muslim Arab-American women are often targeted by Islamophobia and Anti-Arab racism, yet often use their visibility to educate and positively promote their religion and culture. Jamarkani (2011) adds that the hypervisibility and stereotypical categories of Muslim Arab-American women removes the nuance and diverse voices of the women of the community. Jamarkani further writes:

Instead of resisting the politics of invisibility . . . we must mobilize it, thereby

reinventing and transforming that invisibility into a tool with which we will continue to

illustrate the brilliant complexities of Arab and Arab-American women's lives. (p.241)

This quote from Jamarkani illustrates the need to share authentic stories of Muslim Arab-

American women and to highlight their accomplishments as a means to overcome stereotypes

and generalizations.

Second-generation Muslim Arab-American women are in a unique position in which

they contend with multiple aspects of their identities: their religion, the culture of their parents,

American society, and their gender. The second-generation, according to Ajrouch (2000) is a

good population to study acculturation as it is within their generation the culture is either

transmitted or forgotten. To further complicate matters, Muslim Arab-American women may

also struggle to find their place in a society which misunderstands their religion and culture. In

researching the second-generation, one can gather rich accounts regarding the complexity of

their religious and cultural identities. This study uses the nuanced religious and cultural

identities of Muslim Arab-American women to seek to understand their educational perceptions

and experiences.

Globally, Muslims have the lowest level of educational attainment of all of the religious

groups due to economic factors in the Muslim world; however, there have been large advances in

recent years in educational attainment (Pew Research Center, 2016). While both males and

females are contributors to the rising educational rates, females have been gaining at a faster rate

than males (Murphy, 2016). In some Muslim regions, "Muslim women's gains in post-

secondary education were so dramatic that the gender gap has reversed . . . in the youngest

generation, more Muslim women than men hold college degrees" (Murphy, 2016, p.2). While

these statistics refer to the Muslim world, this would suggest that despite generalizations of Muslim women, there are advancements regarding the status and accomplishments of women in terms of academic achievement. Muslims who have immigrated to the United States, however, have a high rate of post-secondary educational attainment (Baum & Flores, 2011) and the second-generation is more likely to have higher degree attainment and a higher income (Pew Research Center, 2013). Females that come from immigrant families tend to outperform the males of their communities, partially due to parental expectations for their daughters (Feliciano, 2012). These statistics would indicate that the female daughters of immigrants, in this case Muslim Arab-American women, would have a high rate of academic achievement and high parental expectations to achieve academically.

As mentioned above, second-generation Muslim Arab-American women contend with the cultural expectations of their Arab parents. Majors of study and careers are often a source of conflict within Arab immigrant families; and there is a preference for fields which provide higher career success such as the sciences (Rasmi, Daly, & Chuang, 2014) due to prestige and economic stability. This conflict regarding fields of study adds another layer of complexity to the experiences of second-generation Muslim Arab-American women in relation to their education.

Purpose of the Study

Phenomenological research is a social science that aims to gather meaning from the lived human experiences of the participants (Van Maanen, 1990). The purpose of this phenomenological study looked at how the experiences of second-generation Muslim Arab-American women shape their perceptions about the role education plays in their lives as well as the role of education in the community. Secondly, this study sought to explore the factors which influence the participants' educational choices as well as the insight into their identities as

second-generation Muslim Arab-American women. By sharing the experiences of the women in this study and their perceptions of education it then provides insight into how to make education more relevant with respect to the women's cultural and religious backgrounds. In addition, this research adds to the sparse yet, growing body of literature on Muslim Arab-American female experiences.

This study focused on the Muslim Arab-American community in Southeastern Michigan. Metropolitan Detroit is home to a large predominately Muslim Arab community that is diverse both religiously and culturally. Therefore, Metropolitan Detroit provided a good access location for this research study. Culture, gender, race, religion, and social class all intersect to shape the lived experiences of second-generation Muslim Arab-American women. This study also explored other external factors that may influence higher education and the identity of Muslim Arab-American women such as Islamophobia and discrimination. These interactions were studied through the lens of the women who live them, through interviews and a focus group to investigate the phenomena and shared experiences of the culture and identities of Muslim Arab-American women as they relate to their educational experiences.

Critical Self-Narrative

I am a second-generation Muslim Arab-American woman. My parents immigrated to the United States from Egypt. My father immigrated in the 1960s from Egypt for educational and economic opportunities, and my mother immigrated after my parents' marriage in the early 1980s. My mother also took advantage of the educational and economic opportunities the United States has to offer by working in her field as well as obtaining a graduate degree. As a Muslim Arab-American woman with strong cultural and religious values, I often find myself straddling several identities and playing several roles within my daily life. In addition to the

daily challenges of any woman, I often find myself being expected to represent my religion and culture to clarify misconceptions of Islam. I grew up in an area that was not ethnically diverse, so I often felt like an outsider both as a religious and a cultural minority. When my sisters and I visited Egypt with our family times several times throughout our childhood, I also felt like an outsider among my Egyptian-born and raised relatives. I never felt like I could completely identify with either side of my cultural heritage and my sisters and I found comfort in the shared experiences of other American born children of immigrants as well as our mosque community. The second-generation American born children of the mosque congregants found solace in each other and our shared experiences and challenges. In essence, we felt as if we were part of our own culture: a Muslim-American culture with some remnants of our parents' cultural backgrounds including the music, entertainment, and language of our parents' homelands. At times, it felt like we got the best of many worlds; American values and Arabic values situated within an Islamic framework for guidance. I often found it difficult to understand my own identity, not unlike other young people living in their parents' homes. However, by struggling to find my place in American society, it added another layer of complexity in the understanding of my own identity. As it often does, with age, identity formation became increasingly easier.

Growing up, my parents placed a very strong emphasis on education similar to many of my peers who come from similar Muslim immigrant backgrounds. There was no doubt that I would go to college and ultimately continue to graduate school due to my parents' expectations. The road has not been an easy one as I have often struggled to find my place within society due to being a female of minority culture and religion. For several years of my early schooling career, I was an underachiever due to feeling out of place in my school and environment, which in turn impacted my self-confidence. I was one of the few Muslims in my school and my

teachers had little to no understanding of my cultural or religious background. I often felt out of place. Much of the information about Islam in our school curriculum, if at all, added to the misunderstandings and generalizations of Muslims and Arabs. Additionally, much of the prejudice I faced was often based upon misinterpretation of gender roles within my religion and culture.

Like other immigrant parents, my parents did not fully grasp the challenges that my sisters and I had faced in school and navigating our identities. My parents' understanding of education was based on the perception that science and math related fields only lead to achievement that sometimes lead to conflict regarding my future educational choices. In Egypt, like other countries in the Middle East, it is often the science and math related fields that secure well-paying jobs. In my experience, this particular educational perspective is common within the Muslim community as many Muslim immigrants of various backgrounds hold similar views on education and success. While my parents understand these differences in the educational model now, while I was growing up this added to the challenges of growing up with immigrant parents as a second-generation American.

Then came 9/11, and things became increasingly difficult as a visible Muslim Arab-American woman. While Muslims and Arabs were often ill-portrayed in movies and other media prior to 9/11, after 9/11 prejudice and generalizations increased. It has been sixteen years and Muslims are still often at the center of negative political and dominant discourses.   Like many other Muslim-American women that I know, I feel that I must always be a stellar representative of my culture and religion. Muslim-Americans are often called upon to explain and condemn the actions of other Muslims. Much of the time, I do not mind. However, there are times when being called upon to represent a religion and culture can be extremely taxing. It

can be very difficult and disheartening to listen to hateful incorrect rhetoric and those who purport to know about my lived identity and experiences. Like other Muslim Arab-American women, I find myself balancing several aspects of my identity: my gender, my religion, my culture, my place within my ethnic and religious community, and my place within American society while also balancing my daily life challenges. In part, this is why I undertook this study.

As a member of the Muslim community in America, I have often observed the discrepancies that occur regarding gender roles within the Muslim community. It is my perception that gender role expectations often shape the experiences and motivating factors of Muslim women in relation to higher education and subsequent career decisions. Based on my own experiences and observations, these discrepancies often stem from cultural interpretations of religious traditions. I have observed, that depending on the country of origin, religious interpretation regarding gender roles varies; as some Middle Eastern societies are seemingly more conservative or liberal than others. My family came from a background which highly valued education, therefore I felt like whatever limitations I may have experienced came primarily from my place within American society. However, also in my experience, the Muslim women I often encounter, both first and second-generation, are outspoken and well-educated. This is very unlike the stereotypes that Muslim women are voiceless and oppressed. This is not to say there are not issues and that some women are not struggling but to generalize all Muslim women in this manner only presents a single narrative, thus ignoring the voices and narratives of others. Therefore, there is a need to share the voices of other Muslim women and highlight the nuance and diversity within the Muslim-American communities.

I have lived the experiences as a Muslim Arab-American woman, but my experiences are my own. Like the women of my study, I am a Muslim Arab-American woman. While I share

aspects of my identity with my participants, their individual experiences and perspectives regarding culture and community are different than mine. I believe that my identity and experiences allow me access and unique insight into my participants' experiences.

Statement of the Problem

Read (2008) argued Muslim-Americans feel they have been excluded from the dialogue surrounding increased religious and cultural tolerance after 9/11; thus, indicating a need to include narratives of this particular population. Furthermore, women in particular are often at the center of generalizations of Muslims; Naber (2012) stated that there needs to be an additional analysis of the Muslim and Arab communities in America which move beyond the generalizations made about gender and women. Not only do Muslims and Arabs need to be included in dominant discourse as a whole in a more neutral manner, but in particular the women as the women are often subjected to generalizations and negative stereotypes.

Read & Oselin (2008) stated that "compared to research on employment outcomes, less is known about the effects of religion on women's educational attainments, particularly among U.S. ethnic and immigrant groups" (p. 296). This indicates a further need to study religion and its impact on women's educational goals in general. In examining the identities of Muslim Arab-American women a better understanding can be gained on how issues of race, gender, culture, and religion can impact educational choices. Muslim Arab-American women, like many females of cultural or religious minority backgrounds, often straddle several identities within society. Educational attainment is consistently found to increase women's support of gender equality (Read, 2003). Additionally, views of gender equality may affect educational choices. In order to examine these ideas fully, an intersectionality lens was used to gain insight views of gender equality as it relates to educational goals.

The Muslim Arab-American community in Southeastern Michigan is far from homogenous, as evidenced by the different waves of immigration and the push-pull factors which led to the migration, and the different cultures from which Arab-Americans originate. The educational achievements and socioeconomic status of the Muslim Arab communities in Metropolitan Detroit relative to other Arab and Muslim communities in the United States reflect different migration patterns (Read & Oselin, 2008). The religious and cultural diversity of the Muslim Arab-American community in Metropolitan Detroit has allowed me to gather rich and diverse perspectives of the females of the community.

Theoretical Perspective

Mainstream Western feminist discourse has not always had a space for women of color to include and describe their experiences beyond their gender alone, as it entails questioning power structures. While bell hooks refers to the experiences of Black American women when she discusses marginality, this sentiment can apply to those belonging to a racial or religious minority, lower socioeconomic status, or anyone else who feels as they are not represented or given voice in mainstream society. These individuals are living within society, but are not afforded the same opportunities as those considered privilege within society such as White men. Hooks (2000b) states of those living in the margin: "To be in the margin is to be part of the whole but outside the main body." Additionally, it can be difficult for women of privilege to speak out on issues of classism or racism when they have not experienced such issues first-hand (hooks, 2000b). Intersectionality, a term coined by Kimberle Crenshaw in 1989, is a theory that addresses multiple dimensions of difference, which make up the identity and experiences of women of color. Muslim Arab-American women also experience life on the margins similar to those experiences described by bell hooks (2000b).

Intersectionality, as a theoretical framework, was employed to thoroughly understand the perspectives and experiences of Muslim Arab-American women regarding their identities. This research study was used to gain insight into aspects of gender and the manner in which gender issues impacts educational choices and experiences. In order to understand the marginalization of Muslim Arab-American women; connections to Black feminism were explored. To further understand the complexity of Muslim Arab-American identities, intersectionality and its relation to culture and religion were explored. In researching these themes, insight was provided into issues of gender equality of Muslim Arab-American women and the way it impacts their identity and educational choices.

Women in the margin. Mainstream feminist movements proclaim that all women are oppressed, but by making such sweeping generalizations of all women it leaves out the diversity of women's experiences based on race, class, and religion (hooks, 2000b). Those oppressive policies and systemic problems that alienate and marginalize minorities also oppress women. Those living in the margins of society and non-privileged, are not always given voice or representation. Mainstream Western feminist discourse stems from a White context; therefore, the experiences of Black women are often overlooked when White feminists speak on behalf of all women (Crenshaw, 1989). Like other ethnic minorities, Muslim-Arab-American women have echoed the sentiment of feeling unwelcome in dominant feminist discourse, which often calls for an end to cultural or religious practices which are taken out of historical and political contexts (Abdulhadi, Alsultany, & Naber, 2011). Muslim Arab-American women feel as if they cannot speak on gender equality within the Muslim and Arab communities in feminist spaces due to the already negative stereotypes of the Arab woman (Naber, 2011).

Women who belong to lower socioeconomic groups or women of color would not consider women's liberation movements as a movement to gain social equity to men, as they are often reminded daily of their lower social status (hooks, 2000a). Not only are these particular women oppressed, but the men of their groups are often exploited or oppressed as well (hooks, 2000a). Patriarchy in minority communities not only adversely affects the lives of the women themselves, but it affects the lives of men in these communities (Crenshaw, 1991). When Arab-American women do speak out, they often do so in relation to the unfair treatment of their men through oppressive policies (Elia, 2006), which gives gender inequities less priority. The men in these communities are not afforded the same privilege as their White counterparts, therefore demanding social equality of men would still place women of color at a lower status than White women (hooks, 2000b). Women of color cannot be viewed through the lens of Western feminist discourse without taking into account the aforementioned factors.

Oppressive practices of women in certain communities are sometimes used to propagate negative stereotypes. Naber (2006b) states about this concept in relation to post 9/11 backlash towards Muslims: ". . . cultural essentialist or civilizational representations of the Muslim as Other were reinforced through a series of imagined hierarchies between Muslim men and Muslim women and American men and Muslim men" (p. 252). Furthermore, many members of the Arab community may also feel reluctant to speak up on topics relating to subjugation of their women when the community as a whole is being scrutinized socially, culturally, and politically (Darraj, 2011). These stereotypes and generalizations of Muslim-Arab women further racist practices, which generalizes a large population's experiences implying that they are a homogenous mass without nuance or diverse experiences (Naber, 2000). Together, these

concepts intersect to create a highly complex lens through which Muslim Arab-American women contend with the society in which they live.

Women of color often contend with several realities of their identities, which places them in the margins of society. Hooks (2000a) said that working against sexism and racism should not be in opposition to each other. She stated that to be feminist is not to be concerned with gender alone but to work to question power structures and hierarchies within society, which affects all groups and all people (2000a). This same social and institutional structure that creates sexism is the same social and institutional structure that creates racism (hooks, 2000a). There arose a need for a brand of feminism that encompasses other aspects of a woman of color's identity.

Initially, mainstream feminist discourse centered on demands of the same economic opportunities afforded to men; these demands often came from privileged women who wanted the same economic opportunities as the men in their social class (hooks, 2000a). Women were then able to contribute to the economy and had access to educational opportunities more than before; this did not seem to change the conditions of women of a lower socioeconomic status or of other races. However, White women seemed to benefit more from these economic demands more than women of color and lower social class women (hooks, 2000a). Women of color have other dimensions of their identity that have held them back from making the same economic gains as their White counterparts. In the case of Muslim Arab-American women, their stereotypes are often politicized, those of lower socioeconomic status are considered closer to terrorists (Naber, 2006b) and further ostracized by mainstream society.

Intersectionality. Intersectionality focuses on women who live in the margins and acknowledges that all women experience diverse lives. These diverse experiences and social

positions within society impact the way individuals view themselves and the way in which society interacts with them. According to hooks (2000a), for many years, White feminist thinkers were unwilling to address the issue of race as it relates to women's equality. Crenshaw (1989) states that feminism must incorporate analysis of race so that it may include the experiences of women of color. Intersectionality has its roots in Black feminism and Critical Race Theory (Carbado, Crenshaw, Mays, & Tomlinson, 2013). Intersectionality differs from traditional feminist discourse in that it does not focus on the different experiences of men and women within society alone, but the experiences of people of color with power structures are analyzed through the pursuit of social justice (Dill & Kohlman, 2012). Intersectionality, as it relates to identity allows us to gain insight into the ways people experience life, which is how people see themselves and how others treat them and that one cannot separate one dimension of an individual's identity from the other (Dill & Kohlman, 2012).

Intersectionality does not place women of color into a generalized narrative in relation to gender alone. Race-based discussions often do not take into account the gendered issues existent within non-White communities and are often written about through the perspectives of the males within these communities (McCall, 2005). The individual may belong to several groups and there are complexities and differences located within each group or label; therefore, the complexities of daily life of the members of these social groups cannot be ignored (McCall, 2005). While intersectionality arose to describe the experiences of Black women, the movement has been adopted by other minority groups and has also grown internationally (Carbado et al., 2013). By including the unique perspectives of their female members, minority groups can strengthen their work towards injustice within society.

Islam, Feminism, and Religious Identity. Western feminist discourse often wrongly

places Islam alone at the center of an Arab women's identity, when in truth religious identity

should be discussed within the context of other intersecting power structures such as race and

class (Naber, 2006a). Within their own ethnic and religious groups, Muslim women also find

themselves straddling between two brands of feminism: secular feminism and Islamic feminism

(Hatem, 2011). Like Western feminist discourse, Secular-based Arab feminism may consider

Muslim women overly conservative or backward that it is only those secular feminists that are

considered liberal or progressive (2011). Secular Arab feminists view Muslim women who

subscribe to the hijab or other modes of religious practice as backwards and oppressed, therefore

reflecting "the internalization of Orientalist views of Islam and Muslim women" (p.25). These

secular- based debates dominate the discussions on Muslim and Arab women as they enable the

dominant discourse about the oppressed Muslim women, and the figures of such movements

reinforce the negative stereotypes that American society already holds of Arab and Muslim

women (Jarmakani, 2011).

An issue with mainstream feminism is that it does not consider the importance of Islam

for women (Hashim, 1999). Many Muslim women have identified as feminists within the

parameters of cultural and religious understandings (Haddad, Smith, & Moore, 2006). Islamic

feminism, as defined by Hashim (1999) says that "in Islam, we as women have rights which are

stated in a source considered to be divine, and consequently much harder to refute . . ." (p.9) in

reference to *Qur'anic* text. Hashim (1999) further writes that in considering the perspective that

the *Qur'an* and Islam has given women rights, it allows Muslim women the tools to resist

oppression they may face through their own belief system. Haddad, Smith, and Moore (2006)

argue that "While roles and opportunities may differ between the sexes, the overall Islamic

prescription for gender relationships is fair and equitable" (p.19). Furthermore, attraction to

Islam for some converts is the interpretation of women's roles, and when confronted with sexism

within immigrant communities often "turn to serious study of the *Qur'an* in the effort to find

gender equity" (p.19). Islamic feminism allows devout women to be outspoken while

counteracting the conservative members of their community as well as Orientalist views of

secular Arabs and Muslims (Hatem, 2011) which asserts that Islam is oppressive to women.

These women work towards the suppression existent within their communities as well as secular

feminism, which misunderstands cultural and religious practices (Haddad, Smith, & Moore,

2006). It is through the Islam and Islamic identity that many Muslim women find empowerment

and agency.

      Islam and Female Empowerment. Muslim Arab-American women's belief structures

are complex and dynamic. While for some, religion could be seen as a structure that encourages

patriarchal ideals and oppression, there are many others who find religion as a source of strength

and empowerment (Ali, Mahmood, Moel, Hudson, & Leathers, 2008). By denying the role

religion plays to empower some women, it could lead to the devaluing of feminism in the lives of

the religious (2008). According to Marshall and Read (2003), Arab-American women tend to

respond positively and identify with feminist ideals, which is "product of multiple oppressions

derived from minority group status and the result of nontraditional socialization and access to

female role models within the family" (p. 887). In a study conducted on first-generation

Muslim-American women and gender identity, the participants "argued that Islam supports the

fundamental principles upheld by feminist ideology, and indicated that Islam has sufficiently

addressed the issue of gender equality" (Hu, Pazaki, Al-Qubbaj, & Cutler, 2009). This

perspective is similar to that of Ali et al.'s (2008) study in which several of the participants

indicated that Islam is a feminist religion and in their view, promotes the advancement of women.

In a study on Muslim British women and intersectionality, Mirza (2013) discussed the concept of 'embodied intersectionality:' "Islam was a conscious site of memory and belonging-a 'second skin' through which their ethnic and religious identity was embodied and lived out through their subjectivity and sense of self" (p.11). The women felt as if their bodies were racialized due to their identities. They were seen not as individuals, but as a collective body thereby always representing their religion and culture. The women in Mirza's (2013) study felt as if their hijab and religious and cultural practice identified them as an outsider within British society but was also a way in which they empowered themselves in their daily lives. The hijab was a choice the women made as an act of piety therefore it was "embodied gendered religious agency" (p.13). Bilge (2010) also discussed agency in the choice to wear hijab, by choosing the hijab and practicing their religion, women subscribe to a form of resistance and therefore "a symbol of contest, as well as a marker of self-authored difference and authenticity" (p.20). This is similar to what Hatem (2011) described as Muslim women's increased importance in the wearing of hijab "as an expression of their pride in a religion that was increasingly maligned in the United States" (p.23). Bilge (2010) asserted that by ignoring the personal decision of a woman to wear the hijab and the practice of Islam by feminists is a form of oppression it itself. In a related study, Weber (2015) addressed the adoption of Islamic dress and identity as a form of agency for Muslim women; that in choosing to wear the hijab Muslim women are expressing their autonomy in a society that often seeks to exclude them.

For some women, religious practice is a form of self-empowerment as well as an integral aspect of identity. Therefore, the importance of religious identity cannot be separated from the

woman and should be considered as an intersection of identity. In using an intersectional lens to conduct this research study, gender expectations and identity were explored within the Muslim Arab-American female community in relation to their educational experiences. The aforementioned themes were used to contextualize the educational choices and identities of Muslim Arab-American women.

Summary

This chapter provided an introduction with background information to this research study including the statement of the problem and the purpose of the study. My critical self-narrative offered background information to my interest in this topic as well as providing context to my role as a researcher. The theoretical perspective was also presented which forms the framework through which the research was conducted. The following chapter explores the literature which informed and further provides context on this research study.

Chapter II: Literature Review

This survey of literature was conducted to explore the literature and themes related to Muslim Arab-American second-generation females and their identities as they relate to their perceptions and experiences of higher education. In order to thoroughly review the literature relating to Muslim Arab-American women and their experiences relating to their identity and education, several topics will be covered. Immigration patterns of Muslim Arabs and demographics were used to understand the background of the community being studied. Education in the Middle East, as well as immigrant and second-generation academic achievement helped to facilitate context for the educational choices of the women in this study. In looking at the educational barriers and successes of the women of the Muslim Arab communities, one can gain better insight into perceptions and experiences of education into the population that was studied. Family, identity, religion, and culture gave insight into gender roles and norms existent within the Muslim Arab-American communities and how these factors have impacted identity. The aforementioned themes were explored in relation to educational choices for the duration of this study.

Immigration

American Muslims are one of the most diverse Muslim populations globally and about a third of this population is of Arab descent (Read, 2008). According to the Arab American Institute ("Demographics," 2014), there are about 3.5 million people of Arab descent living in the United States, the majority of whom originate from Lebanon. Exact numbers of Muslims are

elusive, but according to Pew Research Center (2007) there are about 1.4 million Muslims living in the United States with 24% identifying as being Arab. According to a survey conducted in 2010, there are estimated to be about 2.6 million Muslims living in the United States (Neal, 2012). Muslim-Americans represent a very diverse cultural population; South Asians represent about 32% of the Muslim population, 26% are Arabs, and the rest of various cultural backgrounds (Hatem, 2011).

There have been two major waves of Arab immigration to the United States, the first wave of immigration began in the 1870s and lasted until World War II and the second wave occurred after World War II (Suleiman, 1999). Other waves of migration occurred depending on war or political strife in the Middle East, such as post 9/11 invasion of Iraq in 2003 which further increased the number of Iraqi Muslims in Detroit and its surrounding suburbs (Schopmeyer, 2011). The first groups of immigrants were predominately Christian Arabs who were poor unskilled laborers whereas the second wave comprised of a more diverse group of both Muslims and Christians and of varying socioeconomic classes (Suleiman, 1999). Like other immigrant groups in the United States, Arabs came to seek better economic, educational, and political conditions, and many of these immigrants settled in Southeast Michigan.

Southeast Michigan/Metro Detroit. Michigan has the second-highest population of Arab Americans, second only to California (Arab American Institute, 2015). The automotive industry attracted many immigrants, particularly Arabs from Lebanon, Syria, and Yemen to the Detroit Metropolitan region (Rignall, 2000). As Arab immigrants began to open stores and businesses that catered to the needs of Arabs, such as grocery stores, they further attracted new immigrants from the Arab world (Rignall, 2000). Due to the already well-established Arab community in this region, refugees from countries such as Iraq have also populated Southeast

Michigan (Rignall, 2000). The Arabs who live in Detroit and the surrounding suburbs are made up of "almost half Lebanese, with another 42 percent made up of equal-sized groups of Palestinian, Yemeni, and Iraqi" (Schopmeyer, 2011, p. 39).

The waves of immigration, push-pull factors, and the different countries from which Arab-Americans originate contribute to the diversity of the Muslim Arab community in Southeast Michigan. The educational achievements and socioeconomic status of the Arab Muslim communities in Metropolitan Detroit relative to other Arab and Muslim communities in the United States reflect the different migration patterns (Read & Oselin, 2008). There is a great deal of diversity in the cultural and family practices of Muslim Arab-Americans living in Metropolitan Detroit.

Education

There are several factors which impact the educational experiences and perceptions of second-generation Muslim Arab-American women. In order to contextualize the educational experiences of the women in this study, this section will address education in the Middle East, female educational attainment in the Middle East, educational achievement in immigrant families, and possible barriers to female academic achievement.

Education in the Middle East. Much of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) operates on a similar secondary education and higher education system. MENA countries provide free public education, often including post-secondary education as well, but still perform below world averages (Salehi-Isfahani, Hassine, & Assaad, 2014) despite accessibility. Egypt and Lebanon's educational systems were looked at as examples of post-secondary education in the MENA region. Egypt and Lebanon, like most MENA countries, have a similar system for university admission and choosing a major of study. In Egypt, university-bound secondary

school students choose either an academic or technical track after a year of general curriculum in high school; within the academic track students choose to pursue a science-based curriculum or a language/literature based track ("The Egyptian Education System," 2015). Once the students have completed their secondary education studies, a national exam is administered which then determines which major will be studied in the university. Medicine, dentistry, engineering, and natural sciences accept the highest scores from the national exams and agriculture, arts, commerce, and law accept the lower scores ("The Egyptian Education System," 2015).

Lebanon, like other MENA countries, operates on a similar system as Egypt. Lebanon's educational system is based on a French system in which university-bound students choose a science or language/literature track for the duration of their high school studies ("Lebanon: An Education System," 2015). Like Egyptian students, Lebanese students must take an exam which will then determine their university admission and field of study. In much of the MENA region, unless a student studies in a private university, university education is subsidized by the government (Devarajan, 2016). Free university education increases enrollment and demand which in turn increases the need for high scores from the university admission exam; these high scores are often attained by students who have received better quality secondary education (Devarajan, 2016). Therefore, it's often the students who come from wealthier families who end up with the higher test scores needed to major in the higher paying fields such as: medicine, engineering, and dentistry. This would then lend itself to the prestige of science and math fields and academic achievement in general: "in MENA countries education is more than an intermediate input into income generation; it is often the most important measure of personal achievement and the path to social mobility" (Salehi-Isfahani et al, 2014, p.507). Immigrants

from the Middle East come to the United States with these ideas of education and may pass them onto their second-generation American born children.

Immigrant families and academic achievement. Immigrants, in general, often have high educational standards for their children. According to Baum and Flores (2011), 26% of children of immigrants come from homes in which neither parent has a high school diploma or equivalent compared to 8% of native-born parents. However, immigrants from the Middle East are more likely than native born Americans to be college graduates as more than two-thirds have at least a bachelor's degree (Baum & Flores, 2011). About one-fourth of Muslim-Americans hold a bachelor's degree or higher, which is not unlike the statistics of the general American population (Read, 2008) and aligns with the statistics of other immigrant populations in the United States. Therefore, these statistics indicate that Muslim Middle Easterners would have a high rate of educational attainment. Additionally, "immigrants are more likely than their native counterparts to enroll in post-secondary education, and most children of immigrants attain higher levels of education than their parents" (p.177). This would indicate that, in general, Middle Eastern immigrants are coming to the United States well-educated and their American born children are more likely to attain post-secondary education regardless of their parents' educational level.

Alternately, according to a study by Glick and White (2004) it was found that parents of immigrant teens often have higher educational standards for their children than second-generation and beyond. This particular study concluded that students whose parents had high expectations regarding academic achievement often went on to complete high school and college. This would suggest that high educational expectations from the family plays a large role in educational achievement. According to the Pew Research Center (2013), second-generation

adults have a higher median income and a higher percentage of college degree attainment and less likely to live in poverty than the first-generation. Furthermore, "More than a third (36%) have at least a bachelor's degree, compared with 29% of immigrants and 31% of all adults" (p.22). Despite their parents' educational and/or socioeconomic status the second-generation is more likely to do better than their immigrant parents, especially considering the high academic standards in immigrant families.

Female academic achievement and barriers. There is a great deal of diversity regarding views of female academic achievement within the Muslim Arab-American communities. In the previous section, the secondary and post-secondary education system in the Middle East was discussed to contextualize the views of Arab immigrant parents regarding education. Due to high test scores needed for entry into science/math fields of study in the university, there is a level of prestige given to those who enter those fields. This level of achievement also extends to females of the Middle East. In a study on secondary math and science scores in the Middle East by gender it was found that:

> In Algeria, Egypt, Iran, Lebanon, Morocco, and Turkey, the distribution of scores for boys and girls are basically the same . . . while in the oil-rich nations of the Persian Gulf, and in Palestine girls do significantly better than boys. (Salehi-Isfahani, Hassine, & Assad, 2014, p.497)

This study also found that even in Saudi Arabia, where women have the least amount of rights, girls did better than boys in math and science in 2007 (p.503). Furthermore, there is an increase of women entering science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields in the Middle East, with 60% of engineering students as women in the Gulf region compared to 30% female engineering students in the U.S and Europe (Durrani, 2015). While these statistics apply

to women in the Middle East, the cultural expectation for women to achieve in these fields would extend to Middle Eastern immigrants in the United States and their daughters.

Ahmad (2001) conducted a study on British Muslim women and academic achievement, the participants reported being expected to achieve high academic achievement, although none of them cited extreme parental pressure. The women in this study were taught to be ambitious at a very early age and were expected to achieve: "A daughter's education confers a certain level of social education to the rest of the family. Parents are thus able to describe themselves as modern and socially astute" (Ahmad, 2001, p.145). Ahmad (2001) further noted that for her participants, it was the fathers of the participants who encouraged their daughters to achieve, especially in families that did not have any sons. "Prestigious career choices such as medicine, dentistry, and law continue to be pursued and highly regarded within the South Asian communities" (Ahmad, 2001, p.148). The prestige careers within these communities align with those fields considered prestigious in the Middle East. While this particular study was conducted on British Muslim women, and who come from predominately South Asian parents, the indication that Muslim immigrant parents expect female academic achievement could be extended to second-generation Muslim Arab-American women and their communities.

There is indication that female academic achievement is highly valued within the Muslim Arab-American communities as Arab Americans have a high rate of female educational attainment but a low rate of female employment . . . nearly one-third hold a bachelor's degree or higher" (Read & Oselin, 2008, p.301). Read and Oselin (2008) write about a contradictory ideal regarding female academic achievement within immigrant communities. There may be family pressure to maintain gender norms thereby holding back female achievement, but the desire for upward mobility and integration may then inadvertently encourage females (2008). Another

consequence of gender role narratives, is that even if women were to choose higher education, family obligations may keep her from working outside of the home (2008). Therefore, if a woman were to know that she would not be encouraged to work outside of the home, it may impact the course of study in college thereby choosing a major which doesn't require long-term time or monetary commitment.

There are Muslim Arab-American women who have not found the same success in education. At times, there are restrictions placed on Arab-American women in relation to education and economic pursuits based on family honor in which their restrictions are a way to portray the family in a conservative manner (Darraj, 2011). According to the previously mentioned statistics, there is a great deal of female degree completion within the Muslim Arab-American communities and there is some diversity regarding female level of education, as highlighted in the studies conducted by Sarroub on the Yemeni-American population in Southeast Michigan. Sarroub (2002) wrote about the manner in which culture and religion is intertwined in Yemeni-American females; some of the girls in her study were knowledgeable of the Qur'an therefore eliciting respect from their religious communities. Within many Muslim Arab communities, the religious knowledge of a female is pertinent as it is often a source of honor for the family as it is considered to be the female who carries on religious education to her children (2002). The parents of these girls took particular pride in their daughters' piety and pride in their sons' academic achievements. The females in Sarroub's study managed academic life and family responsibilities situated within a cultural and religious community, which is not unlike other females who come from immigrant homes. Sarroub (2001) wrote that for girls, the loss of her good reputation could threaten her continued education by being forced into an early marriage. Related to the issue of female reputation, Naber (2006a) mentioned that many Arab

and Muslim families compare being Americanized to being a 'whore.' Guarding a female's reputation could therefore be a contributing factor to a lack of higher education for some women and/or impact the course of study if they do continue on to higher education.

The most frequently cited barriers by Arab women regarding higher education were: family obligation, Arabic culture, domestic chores, gender role, and finances (Rabadi, 2013). Due to family obligations of gender roles: marriage and child rearing, females within the Muslim community may even not choose higher education as a future goal. The idea that if they are not going to be given a choice to attend college they may feel as if it is pointless to even continue high school (Sarroub, 2001) which may lead to a level of complacency regarding degree completion.

As highlighted in the previous section, it can be gathered that due to the Middle Eastern educational system, there is often a preference of the study of science and math fields and females tend to excel. Immigrants in general tend to have higher educational expectations and Middle Eastern immigrants tend to have a higher level of education in general. However, there is some diversity in the Muslim Arab-American community in terms of female academic achievement.

Culture and Community

Culture is a complex construct with multiple meanings and interpretations. Geertz (1973) defines culture as "an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and their attitudes toward life" (p.89). Geertz suggested that culture is a way of life for people, and while not tangible, it is also not something that exists primarily in someone's head and that there are public manifestations of

cultural behavior (1973). He described cultural patterns as social and psychological processes which shape public behaviors (1973). Geertz also referred to religion as a form of culture as he considers religious rituals as a form of cultural performances in which the dispositional and conceptual aspects of religion intersect and can be seen by an observer (1973).

"The importance of religion lies in its capacity to serve for an individual or group as a source of general, yet distinctive conceptions . . . of the world, self, and relations between them . . . (p.123)

Based on this description of religion as culture, one can ascertain that like culture, religion serves as a manner in which to describe and/or categorize the behaviors and ideas of an individual or a group of people.

Banks (2010) describes culture as:

 consisting primarily of symbolic, ideational, and intangible aspects of human societies. The essence of culture is not its artifacts, tools or other tangible cultural elements but how members of the group interpret, use, and perceive them. (p.8)

Banks further wrote about the concept of microcultures which refer to the ethnic, racial, religious, and/or other group affiliations in which the individual relates within the United States (2010). Some of the values of the microculture may "be somewhat alien to the national core culture . . . some of the core national values may seem somewhat alien in certain microcultures or may take different forms" (p.11). Banks (2010) also stated that one's ethnic identity has the potential to become more important to an individual once they become part of a minority culture after having previously been part of a majority culture.

Schonpflug (2010) described the passage of widely held values, skills, knowledge, and behaviors from one generation to the next as cultural transmission. It is through cultural

transmission that Arab cultural values and Islamic religious values are transmitted. The religious and cultural identities form communities for Muslim Arab-Americans in which to transmit the cultural and religious values. According to McMillan and Chavis (1986) there are four attributes used to describe a community: membership, influence, integration and fulfillment of needs, and shared emotional connection. Integration and fulfillment of needs and shared emotional connection could describe the cultural and religious communities of Muslim Arab-Americans. The attribute of integration and fulfilment of needs includes shared values as "when people who share values come together, they find they have similar needs, priorities, and goals, thus fostering the belief that in joining together they might be able to satisfy these needs and obtain the reinforcement they seek" (McMillan & Chavis, 1986, p.13). The shared emotional connection aspect is based upon a shared history and their identification with this history which includes a spiritual bond (1986) which would relate to the religious institutions of Muslim-Americans.

Cultural and Religious Identity

Second-generation Muslim Arab-Americans are potentially influenced by the cultural identity of their immigrant parents as well as the American society in which they live. Religion also plays a role in the identity formation of second-generation Muslim Arab-Americans. The second-generation is described by Ajrouch (2000) as "the carriers through which the homeland ways are either transmitted or lost. The second generation becomes the critical point from which to examine the processes of ethnic identity formation and acculturation" (Ajrouch, 2000, p.450).

For some immigrants, due to the perception that the values and culture of the United States is in contrast to the values existent in their countries of origin; many either drift away from their culture and religion or find solace in holding tight to family values in cultural or religious communities (Raouda, 2006). While affiliation with a mosque and other cultural group activities

provide a sense of comfort for the new immigrants, stricter adherence to religious and cultural values also serves to provide a sense of protection for their children of perceived societal threats from opposing values in their host country (Raouda, 2006), and would then impact children and family dynamics. The reason that many Muslims and Arab families may choose to adhere closely to the cultural and religious values is that many feel as if information about the Arab world and Islam is not included in American curriculum (Raouda, 2006).

   Culture and religion in second-generation Muslim Arab-Americans. According to the Pew Research (2013) report on second-generation adults, the majority of second-generation Americans identify with parents' country of origin or some other ethnic or racial term despite seeing themselves as typical American. Naber (2006a) described the concept of Arab cultural "re-authenticity" in which imagined Arabic cultural ideals emerged due to hegemonic U.S. nationalism and policies which target Arabs and Muslims. Naber (2005) found that the Arab cultural norms were situated within a patriarchal framework, whereas the second-generation Muslim Arab-Americans used Islam as a broader theological framework. This seems to indicate that while the immigrant parents had both religious and cultural expectations, the culture of the parents seemed to diffuse by the second generation in which the Islamic identity was stronger in the second-generation.

   According to a second-generation Muslim Arab female participant in a study conducted by Naber (2005) "being Muslim and being Arab . . . were overlapping identities based on custom and were transmitted through birth and lineage, rather than ones chosen or acquired through rigorous study or individual commitment" (p. 483). The "Muslim first" label was used to situate the second-generation within a framework which identifies them with the religion in an American context instead of in an Arab cultural context. This indicates a shift in norms that was

more religion based, and also a way to contest family ideals by using Islam without ruining

family relationships (Naber, 2005). By using Islam as a framework with which to advocate for

their own personal rights as females, women contest patriarchal hierarchies without upsetting the

power structure within their own families, as an Islamic framework can be proven with textual

evidence (2005). "Young adults draw on normative U.S. concepts such as equal rights and

liberty, yet they weave into it their affiliation with Islam and an association between Islam and

modernity and equal rights" (Naber, 2012, p.124). It was also found that religion is a more

salient identification than the national origin of the parents in a focus-group study that was

conducted using Muslim Arab teenagers by Ajrouch (2004).

In identifying as Muslim first over the parents' Arab cultural ideals coupled with

education in the West, Muslim-American women would be able to reconcile gender roles that are

existent within the Middle East and brought by the immigrants. Gender roles in Muslim Arab

societies are thought to be a symptom of the educational system in these countries, which

promote memorization instead of critical thinking and creativity; this also applies to religious

teaching, as students are then discouraged from asking questions and delving into critical

discussions on gender roles in the religion (Hamdan, 2006). As well as high educational

expectations, gender roles could be passed down to the Muslim Arab-American communities.

Many reconcile these gender role narratives when exposed to Western educational systems.

Hamdan (2006) studied the perceptions of education and gender by immigrant Muslim women in

Canada who have completed higher education in Canada. Several of the participants have

attributed being more outspoken and questioning cultural gender ideals to their Canadian

education (2006), illustrating the importance of education in the advancement of women in the

Muslim Arab-American communities.

Arab cultural traditions contradict the teachings of the *Qur'an* that promotes equality of both genders and encourages the education of women (Hamdan, 2006). In Islamic-majority countries, the role women play may be more clearly defined; whereas in America a growing number of Muslim women engage in more diverse interpretations of religion and often attempt to distinguish what is cultural interpretation or strictly religious (Haddad, Smith, & Moore, 2006).

> Particularly in today's political climate it is urgent for Muslims to try to fashion a common identity whenever possible and to stress those things that do unite them in the bonds of Islam rather than separate them religiously, culturally, ideologically, or in any other way. (p.17)

It is through this unity that the formation of the dual identity of being a Muslim-American is formed; this dual identity is also considered to be supportive of the other ethnic and cultural identities of its subscribers (2006).

Islam has given women rights in a source considered to be divine, the *Qur'an*, and that it is important that Muslim women understand this knowledge (Hashim, 1999). Hashim further discussed that while the *Qur'an* gives women's rights, those who are illiterate or undereducated are more likely to misinterpret verses to subjugate women. In another study, the Muslim female participants indicated that it is the culture that impacts the view of women and gender roles (Ali, Mahmood, Moel, Hudson & Leathers, 2008). The women in this study further report that this cultural interpretation of religion can serve to either liberate or oppress women depending on cultural interpretation, and it is ethnic culture which oppresses women despite Islam giving women rights (2008). This idea is reiterated in a study by Marshall and Read (2003) which has found that "it is not the Muslim doctrine but religious practice and conservative cultural beliefs more generally that quash gender consciousness . . . (p. 887)."

"In-between:" Complex identities. The identities of second-generation Americans are complicated. The second-generation often learn of their parents' culture through their parents in a vacuum, through the home, but in a host culture (Padilla, 2009), the host culture in this case being American culture. According to Padilla (2009), the second-generation learns of the parents' culture in a limited scope while they are exposed to mainstream American culture everywhere else. "The second generation is positioned between the culture of the parents and the American culture" (p.198). The Muslim Arab-American women in this study are exposed to the Arab culture through the community in which they live as well. Padilla stated, "Pressure to conform to the home culture of the parents is often more challenging for immigrant and second-generation females than for males" (p.196). Therefore, if Muslim Arab-American women live in a community which has a large Muslim Arab population, the pressure to conform to certain values would arise from outside the family as well.

Second-generation Muslim Arab-American women are then in a situation in which they must contend with the expectations of their family and communities as well as American society. Sarroub (2002) describes this as "in between" -in between their parents' culture and religious expectations and the American society in which they live (p. 133). "In-betweenness attempts to create real or imagined boundaries to describe what people do to survive and get along with one another on a regular basis." (p. 145). Sarroub (2002) studied the implications of the dynamics of cultural identities of Muslim Arab-American high school students in the context of the social and academic environment of high school. The participants of this study were Yemeni and of a low socioeconomic status, therefore the cultural background of the females, represents only one of the many cultural groups within the Muslim Arab-American community. However, the in-betweenness that Sarroub wrote about in relation to Muslim Arab-American women, like other

female women of color illustrate the moving in and out of several cultural identities depending

on the context and social environment. The concept of in-betweennness describes the

experiences of the intersections of identity, culture, and religion both in public spaces and private

spaces. In-betweennness can be linked to Mirza's (2013) discussion on transnational

intersectionality and the 'diasporic spaces' of British Muslim women, where they reconstruct

their own identities based on British society and their own ideas of what it is to be a Muslim

woman. The diasporic spaces of Mirza's study and the high school in Sarroub's study gives the

women a space with which to negotiate their identities in between the cultural origin and the

society in which they live.

Ajrouch (2000) also wrote about similar concept to in-betweenness in a research study

conducted on second-generation Lebanese Americans. When interviewed, the participants used

the terms *white* and *boater* to describe the two ends of a cultural spectrum. In this study, *white* is

described as having both positive and negative attributes: positive including access to education

and negative includes no obligations and commitments to family and community, *boater* is the

word that the second-generation uses to describe immigrants. The participants of this study

found themselves identifying with a culture in between the two ends of the spectrum. The

women in this study, like many Muslim Arab-Americans, are living in a state of in-betweenness:

never fully immersed in the immigrant generation's culture nor are they fully immersed in the

dominant American society.

Gender and Muslim Arab-American Communities

Arab-Americans are a diverse group in relation to religious beliefs, socioeconomics, and

national origin; this diversity contributes to varieties in gender norms within each family (Abu

El-Haj, 2006). Some cultural groups move towards more egalitarian roles after immigration, and

others may seek to maintain these gender roles to hold strongly to cultural characteristics, which

often leads to a sense of moral superiority over the dominant culture, the dominant culture is the

mainstream American culture based on the perceptions of the immigrant parents (Ajrouch,

2004). The concept of moral superiority refers to when immigrant parents consider good

daughters to be ones who follow a more culturally traditional view whereas a bad daughter is one

who is more Americanized (Naber, 2006a, p. 92). The generalizations made about American

female behavior is also found in the way the Muslim Arab females label Arab girls who do not

behave in a culturally acceptable manner as 'white' (Ajrouch, 2004). These ideas reinforce the

complexity of the status of Muslim-American women in America, as they struggle to find a place

within American society while also coming to terms with their cultural identities and the

expectations of their immigrant parents.

Gender norms and identity vary in immigrant and second-generation Arab-American

cultural and religious communities. Female sexuality and female honor is often at the core of

many immigrant Arab or Muslim-American families' concerns and the "the ideal of reproducing

cultural identity was gendered and sexualized and disproportionately placed on daughters

(Naber, 2006a, p. 88). In many Arab and Muslim families, to be *Americanized* would indicate

that one is not a good girl and to be *Arab* is to stay pure and virginal; this is apparent in

statements made by parents such as "our girls don't stay out at night" (p. 92). Naber (2006a)

writes that by assigning either of two opposing labels, Arab families feel as if they are able to

control Arab-American female behavior. While the American mainstream discourse creates

another framework for which to view Muslims and Arabs, the Arab parents also other American

society in generalizing American females by using "Americanized" to indicate what they

perceive to be inappropriate female behavior. These ideas could potentially place pressure and boundaries on the females of these communities and impact their identities and choices.

Gender norms are influenced by culture and Muslim-American females belong to a type of subculture which arises from their family's ethnicity, religion, and the culture in which they live; therefore, gender norms come from several sources (Abu-Ali & Reisen, 1999). Muslim-American females may encounter conflicting ideas of gender norms from their culture and religion (1999). In a study conducted on gender role attitudes among Arab-Americans, Muslims and Christians and found that gender role traditions for both Christian and Muslim women were relatively equal to each other when the levels of religiosity and cultural engagement were high (Read, 2003). There were other factors that were taken into consideration in this study such as immigration status and whether or not the spouse was also an Arab (2003). In another study conducted by Read (2004) on gender roles and their impact on Arab American in the work force, it was once again found that it was the level of religiosity, and not religious affiliation (Muslim or Christian) which impacted Arab-American women's level of engagement in the work force. While this particular study was conducted on women in the work force, these ideas could be extended to educational choices which would impact future work force engagement.

The notion of culture influencing religious interpretation was also reinforced in a study conducted by Abu-Ali and Reisen (1999) on Muslim-American female students on what would be considered stereotypical feminine and masculine behaviors. They found that the girls who more strongly identified with their own culture of origin reported a higher level of femininity, whereas the females who identified stronger with Western culture reported higher level of masculine attributes that is defined as assertive or outspoken behavior (1999). Abu-Ali and Reisen (1999) also stated, "the practice of institutionalized Islam reflects traditional cultural

norms and attitudes towards women. These norms, rather than ideas found in the *Qur'an*, may exert a greater influence on the development of gender role identity" (p.191). In contrast, in a study conducted on gender role identity in first-generation Muslim-American women, all of the participants believed that while it is a husband's primary responsibility to provide for his family; financial decisions and child-rearing should be shared equally (Hu, Pazaki, Al-Qubbaj & Cutler, 2009). The working women in this study, like American women, expected their husbands' increased involvement in housework (2009). Thus, indicating a level of diversity regarding gender roles within the Muslim and Arab communities.

Discrimination and Islamophobia

Muslims and Arabs are often subjected to discrimination in society especially after 9/11 in which Muslims and Arabs found themselves thrust into the spotlight. The generalization that Islam and Arab culture is oppressive of the Muslim Arab women is often at the center of the Islamophobic and anti-Arab discrimination. The attitudes towards Muslims and Arabs in the United States are not new and have long been part of American history (Ghaneabassiri, 2013). According to Ghaneabassiri (2013), Islamophobia arises from both the treatment of racial minorities within American society as well as the historic process of assimilation of religious minorities within American history. Other forms of Islamophobia are shown in the ambiguous labeling of Muslim-Americans and Arab-Americans. The interchangeable usage of these labels is indicative of the othering of Arabs and Muslims by incorrectly labeling all Arabs as Muslims and all Muslims as Arabs (Elia, 2006). Thus, Arab-Americans and Muslim-Americans are often generalized and lumped in one group and are not distinguished from each other.

Similar to ambiguous labeling without nuance of Muslim and Arab-Americans, several researchers write about invisibility as another form of discrimination. Arab-Americans are

considered to be invisible due to inflated stereotypes and generalizations of the Arab and Muslim communities (Naber, 2000). Naber (2000) also described the concept of invisibility in terms of public policy and voice, in which those that belong to the Arab and Muslim communities strive for visibility in the public sphere. Muslim-Americans and Arab-Americans experience a racism, which is not based on biology necessarily but on politics and media misrepresentation (Naber, 2000). In many movies and media representations, Arab and Muslim women are represented as a homogenous group lacking nuance and diversity; and a White American savior with liberal values comes and saves these women from oppressive practices (2000).

The invisibility of Arabs and Muslim-Americans is also discussed by several researchers (Abu El-Haj, 2006; Elia, 2006; Jamarkani, 2011). Abu El-Haj (2006) wrote, "if negative images and stereotypes represent one problem for Arab Americans, invisibility has been another." Abu El-Haj (2006) related the concept of invisibility to education, in which Arab-Americans are excluded from the curriculum despite the long history in the United States. This inclusion within the curriculum should not only serve to dispel negative stereotypes but to empower the Arab-American and Muslim-American youth as well (2006). Jarmakani (2011) also reiterated the concept of invisibility but in relation to Arab and Muslim women: Muslim and Arab women nuanced analysis of gender justice is omitted and are then subjected to stereotypical portrays and sweeping generalizations of Arab and Muslim womanhood.

Arab and Muslim femininities are often at the center of anti-Arab or anti-Muslim rhetoric, where their cultural or religious practices are condemned for being an extension of Arab masculine patriarchal practices (Naber, 2006a). "The overt ways that anti-Arab racism operates-with and through the themes of family, gender, and sexuality-elucidate that these categories of oppression are linked and cannot be dismantled separately" (Naber, 2011, p. 90). For Muslim

Arab-American women, these intersecting identities are all categories of oppression, which must be addressed together and not separately. Anti-Arab racism and Islamophobia is propagated politically as the image of the oppressed Arab woman is often used to justify Western foreign policy (Darraj, 2011). While women are indeed marginalized in some parts of the Muslim world, these issues are used to highlight the fact that Arab and Muslim women suffer from oppression, often with a western spokesperson or political figure looking to liberate these women (Haddad, Smith, & Moore, 2006). Additionally, the voices of professional and outspoken Muslim women are not highlighted in the media (2006), thus re-iterating the invisibility of Muslims and Arabs. Like Darraj's assertions, Hammer (2013) wrote about the gendered aspect of Islamophobia due to Muslim women being perceived as voiceless and oppressed, and due to their hijab are often the targets of discrimination. Furthermore, she states:

> The focus of Islamophobic discourses on American women generates perhaps the greatest irony in how Muslim women are portrayed as in need of liberation from Islam and from Muslim men while simultaneously alienating and marking as foreign and unwelcome the very women they are trying to liberate (Hammer, 2013, p.122)

The gendered aspect of Islamophobia and discrimination has another negative consequence, that Muslim and Arab social justice organizations may focus on larger issues such as racial prejudice and stereotypes. This would then be seen to enable negative stereotypes as there is a belief that speaking out about some of these internal issues will fuel the anti-Muslim and anti-Arab rhetoric (Haddad, Smith, & Moore, 2006).

Muslim Arab women were seen to be a victim of their culture and religion; and many activists chose not to speak of issues within the Arab and Muslim communities so as not to reinforce the stereotype of the oppressed Muslim woman (Naber, 2011). This is similar hooks

(1990) commentary about issues within the Black communities: "It has been difficult for Black men and women to dialogue about gender issues, especially in the context of discussions focusing on racial uplift and Black liberation struggle" (p. 75). This also relates to the issue of political intersectionality in which women of color often belong to several groups pursuing particular and sometimes conflicting political agendas (Crenshaw, 1989) and can be used to contest power relations, which marginalize minorities (Cho, Crenshaw, & McCall, 2013). Belonging to several subjugated groups can be problematic in that each group does not confront the full scope of sexism and racism existent in the experiences of women of color. Muslim Arab-Americans are confronted with a political climate that is less than accommodating, and Muslim and Arab women find themselves having to balance speaking out against injustices towards their communities without undermining their gendered interests (Hatem, 2011).

Another consequence of pervasive Anti-Arab discrimination and Islamophobia is internalized oppression. When individuals and groups contend with their identities in the form of racial categories and stereotypes, they are denied self-identity and agency (Pyke & Dang, 2003). For some, this leads to a distancing from those in their own ethnic groups who may be considered stereotypical in an effort to appear more assimilated within American society (2003). This concept is termed "intraethnic othering" and it creates tension within an ethnic or cultural group (2003). "By discrediting coethnics who either confirm stereotypes of Asians as unassimilable or defy racial categories by attempting to merge into white society, a bicultural identity emerges that deflects stigma and defines the 'normals'" (Pyke & Dang, 2003, p.168). Internalized oppression causes one to harbor suspicions or feelings of guilt due to constant exposure to stereotypes and biases (Liebow, 2016). For those who belong to groups who are

subjected to negative stereotypes, resisting these stereotypes is often not sufficient to break the ties of internalized oppression (2016).

> Viewing oneself as a deviant member of the moral community can make a person feel capable and strong if this self-understanding is contrasted with viewing the self as a reduced agent. Similarly viewing oneself as a diminished agent can feel safe and nonthreatening in contrast to viewing oneself as morally deviant. (Liebow, 2016, p.724)

Muslim Women and Representation

As mentioned in the previous section, Muslim Arab-American women are often at the center of discrimination. A second-generation Muslim Arab-American woman may feel the need to represent her religion both within American society as well is within her community. The identity of Muslim women in the public space relate to the way in which their community and society views them, whereas the private space is where the connection between the culture of their parents and American culture intersect (Sarroub, 2002). "The interaction of public and private spaces allowed the girls to maintain cultural and religious norms and to indulge in the same texts, both oral and written, that other students did" (Sarroub, 2002, p.139). While Sarroub (2002) spoke about the relationship of public and private spaces related to the concept of literacy, this interaction of the intersection of private vs. public could be applied to many circumstances.

Muslim Arab-American women may feel pressure to behave or appear a certain way in public spaces. Mir (2009) described about the issue of gendered identity on college campuses in a study about Muslim-American female college students. Mir highlighted the social challenges the participants face regarding gender norms in social situations in college campuses. One of the female participants in Mir's (2009) study cited many circumstances in which she felt like she had to appear to be more religiously conservative than she truly was so as not to be labeled as a

liberal within the Muslim community. Mir (2009) mentioned two sets of dominant norms "official Islamic public norms encompassing a degree of sex segregation…and unofficial more liberal gendered practice" (Mir, 2009, p. 244). This dichotomy between the two sets of norms is cited often in this particular study, and relates to the issue of the importance of a good reputation in females. Additionally, "outsiders see Muslim women enslaved to Muslim faith and men, penned in within separate and unequal harem spaces" (p. 247). This perception of this behavior then enables the stereotypes that exist about Muslim women.

In another study, Mir (2014) further discusses identity in Muslim undergraduate women in college campuses. Mir (2014) stated, "my Muslim participants contextually constructed their presentation of self within the interaction between Muslims and others" (p. 45). While, researchers "identified class capital as a main determinant of status…race, culture, religious identity, and religiosity can trump social class in youth social cultures and relegate aspiring members of the cultural core to the periphery or semi-periphery" (p. 43). Often, Muslim-American women often struggle to find their own place and identity, struggling with the political and media perpetuated images of Muslim women while encountering the social aspects of being a normal American college student (Mir, 2014). Muslim women are often called upon to be representatives of Muslims in discourse that often happens in college campuses: "As Muslim women revised stereotypical images, they in the process perpetuated these images. And as they adopted their peers' vocabulary and attempted to correct it, my participants found they had become official representatives of 'Islam'' (p.182).

While Mir (2009; 2014) wrote about Muslim-American women feeling as they need to represent Islam on college campuses, Ryan (2011) studied this through the perspective of British Muslim women. The women in Ryan's study indicated that they often feel like they need to

demonstrate themselves as good people to represent Muslims, in general, in a positive manner. One of the participants spoke about having "to show that Muslims are good people and they do have something to offer" (p.1052). According to Ryan the women in this study found that this form of resistance of stigma and negative stereotypes is a form of performance. Muslim women often feel they have a responsibility to successfully interact with and represent Muslims in a multicultural society (Ryan, 2011). A consequence of representation is discussed by Pyke (2010) in relation to Black women and resistance. Representation and resistance is often burdensome as it requires constant strength:

> Mystifying the Black woman as super-resilient creates an undue strain by denying the psychological, physical, and spiritual costs of their oppression. It also contributes to self-loathing and self-disgust upon feeling one's knees give in to the weight of oppression and recognizing one's complicity with forces of domination too great to resist. (p.563)

While Pyke (2010) wrote about representation in describing Black women's experiences, the pressure and stress to represent could be applied to Muslim women who are often called upon to represent their religion.

Summary

In surveying the literature, one theme that was reiterated was the need for inclusion of more Muslim and Arab perspectives, particularly female voice. Specifically, there is a lack of literature regarding the educational choices of Muslim Arab-American women. Muslim Arab second-generation Americans are living in the margin of both their parents' immigration culture and the dominant American society's culture. These cultural differences are apparent in gender norms as well as identity. No doubt, the lives of Muslim Arab-American women are complex and diverse. In researching the second-generation Muslim Arab-American female population,

one can gain a better understanding of how living in between two cultures affects identities and educational choices. Metropolitan Detroit provided a good access location as it is home to a large and diverse Muslim Arab-American community.

Chapter III: Methodology

In chapter 3, qualitative research paradigm and phenomenological research will be presented as well as the justification for methodology used to answer the research questions of this study. An overview of intersectional research methodologies will also be presented. This chapter will also cover the site and subject selection, the management and analyzing of data as well as ethical considerations.

Research Questions

The central question guiding this research study was: What factors influence the development of Muslim Arab-American women's educational identity? The four sub-questions are as follows:

- How different are second-generation Muslim Arab-American women's educational aspirations from those of their families?

- How different are second-generation Muslim Arab-American women's educational aspirations from those of their community?

- How do Muslim Arab-American women perceive the purpose of education both individually and for the community?

- How do second-generation Muslim Arab-American women perceive themselves with regard to their gender roles?

The Qualitative Research Paradigm

According to Creswell (2014), qualitative research is used to understand and explore the behaviors and worldviews of groups or individuals that are ascribed to a particular problem or issue. In this research study, the views and experiences of the participants were essential to understand the way in which culture shapes second-generation Muslim Arab-American women's perceptions of their educational experiences. It is the participants' stories, experiences, and perspectives that have guided this research and answered the research questions.

In qualitative research, the researcher is a key instrument by observing behaviors and interpreting data by looking for emerging themes. In this particular study, reflexivity was key as the researcher shared the cultural and religious background of the participants (Creswell, 2014). The emergent design of qualitative research was essential to shape and guide the progression of the study. Through a qualitative research design the perspectives and experiences of Muslim Arab-American female identity were explored.

Phenomenology and Intersectionality

Phenomenological study originates from philosophy and psychology, where the researcher studies and describes experiences about a particular phenomenon as told by the research participants (Creswell, 2014). Van Maanen (1990) asserted that phenomenology is used to better understand the meaning of everyday experiences and to gain insight into the way we experienint1ce the world.

> As we research the possible meaning structures of our lived experiences, we come to a fuller grasp of what it means to be in the world as a man, a woman, a child, taking into account the sociocultural and the historic traditions that have given meaning to our ways of being in the world. (p.12)

Phenomenological research explores individuals' interpretations of their own experiences; and that every experience is complex and filled with nuance (Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2006).

In this study, the personal experiences of the participants as told to the researcher through interviews have provided insight into the nuances of religious and cultural identities existent within this Muslim-American community. The experiences of the participants were essential to explore these views as they relate to education. Interviews provide multiple perspectives, develop holistic descriptions and interpretations, and help to bridge intersubjectivities (Weiss, 1994). Through interviewing the participants over multiple meetings, themes began to emerge that identified the phenomena and shared experiences of the participants.

Intersectionality Research Methodology. Hancock (2007) stated that intersectionality cannot be simplified to state that it is a study of women of color; it is the analysis both within and across categories and dimensions of difference and identity. While Hancock (2007) wrote about this research paradigm through a public policy/political science perspective, it can certainly be applied to other disciplines. Hancock (2007) further stated that all categories are equally important and that the relationships between the individual and institutions are diverse and dynamic. Intersectional analysis bridges between structural and institutional problems through an individual analysis of multiple categories and group affiliations (2007). Intersectionality as a research paradigm includes analyses of categories both within and across multiple dimensions of difference; which provides a lens through which to view the individual's experience and within power structures. In this study, the individual's experiences of education and identity will be analyzed through an intersectional lens. By gathering the data of the individual's experiences

through interviews and observations (second-generation Muslim Arab-American women) the multiple dimensions of identity and educational experiences were analyzed.

Similar to Hancock's intersectional approach, McCall (2005) researched the intercategorical approach to intersectionality research. The social sciences often manage the complexities of intersectionality by indicating that an individual shares the characteristics of one group defining their place within society (McCall, 2005). A woman of color can only identify with a partial perspective of each group in which she identifies. "Thus, an Arab American, middle class, heterosexual woman is placed at the intersection of multiple categories: race-ethnicity, class, gender, and sexual" (McCall, 2005, p. 1781). McCall (2005) wrote about the intercategorical approach to intersectionality analysis, which begins with the observation of inequalities within already situated social groups and places this idea as the center of the analysis. This particular approach addresses several categories of analysis, that it is not just the intersection of race, class, and gender within one particular group but it is the relationships of several groups located within each of those general categories (McCall, 2005).

Similar to Hancock and McCall, Kerner (2012) suggested a three-dimensional account of instersectionality: epistemic, institutional, and the personal. The epistemic refers to "gendered racial norms and of racialized gender norms . . . the pluralization and internal differentiation of common diversity categories" (p. 211), which would indicate that the stereotypes assigned to Muslim Arab women would differ from women of other ethnic backgrounds or even of Muslim Arab men. The institutional dimension of intersectionality refers to the "interlocking of institutional racism with institutional sexism" (p. 212), which may not necessarily apply to this study. The personal dimension refers to the interconnectedness of racial and gender identity which his for example the assumption that Muslim and Arab communities subjugate their

women. In this particular study, three dimensions of intersectionality were used to inform interview questions and focus group questions as well as in data analysis.

In this case, the social group placed at the center of the analysis was second-generation Muslim Arab-American women, the works of Hancock (2007), McCall (2005) and Kerner (2012) were used as reference points throughout data collection and analysis. In analyzing the experiences of second-generation Muslim Arab-American women there came a deeper understanding of the political and the power structures within society and the influences of both the immigrant parents' culture, the Muslim Arab-American community, and of American society on the experiences of the participants. Each of these categories were included in the analysis and comparisons of other social groups. In the case of this study, the categories were used to code the observation and interview data in both initial and secondary coding cycles.

Timeframe of Study

I was introduced to a local mosque community in which I had site permission to recruit participants in September 2015. Interviewing participants began in November 2015 and continued until April 2016. I scheduled multiple interviews with each participant which included follow-up questions, clarifications, and member checking. A focus group was held on March 6, 2016 at the local mosque in which I had site permission. Data collection was completed in April 2016.

Data Collection

Data collection was collected through one-on-one interviews and a focus group. Interview questions were open-ended and theme based. Focus group questions were also open-ended and based upon interview questions. Data was collected from November 2015 until April 2016. There was a total of thirteen participants and twenty interviews conducted as well as one

focus group. Interviews occurred at a location of the interviewee's choosing, thus allowing the interviewees a level of comfort during the interview process. Interviews were recorded upon approval of the participants and interview questions were developed from a pre-approved interview protocol. The focus group was audio recorded after receiving participant approval.

Interviews. In a phenomenological research study, the interview process primarily serves two purposes: "gathering experiential narrative material that may serve as a resource for developing a richer and deeper understanding of a human phenomenon, and as a vehicle to develop a conversational relation with a partner about the meaning of an experience" (Van Maanen, 1990, p. 66). The interviews consisted of semi-structured open-ended questions and follow up questions related to interviewee experiences as second-generation Muslim Arab-American women. The women were chosen through purposeful and network sampling. The secretary of the local mosque in which I had site permission introduced me to several women who fit the age and background criteria for the study. I was also able to recruit a few participants through my own social network. The participants' lived experiences and their narratives were essential to answering the research questions. Therefore, interview questions were not limiting. Interviews were recorded upon consent and transcribed and field notes were taken throughout the interview process. The interviews lasted anywhere from twenty minutes to forty-five minutes.

Focus Group. According to Krueger and Casey (2009) focus groups are a useful form of qualitative as it allows the researcher to gather a range of views and perceptions across a group. When in a group participants tend to "portray themselves as thoughtful, rational, and reflective individuals" (p.13). This fact was useful in this particular study, in that I asked my participants about their lived experiences as Muslim Arab-American women. I had a list of topic prompts and semi-structured questions to guide and facilitate discussion, yet the focus group discussion

required very little re-direction from me. The focus group session lasted an hour and a half. The focus group session was recorded upon consent and later transcribed. Field notes were also taken during the focus group.

Description of the Site

The primary recruitment site was a mosque in Metropolitan Detroit. The mosque caters to both English and Arabic speakers, they have lectures and weekly talks translated in both languages. The congregants include first, second, and third generation Muslim Arabs and the mosque is diverse in terms of the countries of origin of the congregants. It is a predominately Sunni ideology mosque.

Participants

Participants for interviews and focus groups were recruited through the use of purposeful sampling initially through networking from a local mosque. Two purposeful sampling techniques in particular were used: homogenous and network sampling. In homogenous sampling, participants were chosen based on similar attributes (Lodico, et al., 2006). The attributes were as follows:

- Muslim Arab-American female

- Second-generation American

- 18-23 years of age

Second-generation, by definition, refers to those Americans who are born in the United States to at least one immigrant parent (Pew Research Center, 2013). The second-generation American population is often more educated than either the immigrant population or the American population as a whole (Pew Research Center, 2013), and in studying this population one can gain further insight into the successes and barriers the participants have faced regarding

education. Including first-generation immigrants may have fragmented this study due to the various reasons that lead to immigration and other factors that may affect education and identity. Therefore, including only second-generation Muslim Arab-Americans, the study was more focused.

The interview participants were thirteen second-generation Muslim Arab-American women between the ages of 18 and 23. Five of the participants were Yemeni-American, three were Palestinian-American, two were Syrian-American, and three were Lebanese-American. All of the participants were either currently pursuing higher education or have pursued higher education at the time of the study. Through the secretary of the mosque in which I had site permission, I received eight participants, the remaining five came from network sampling. I was able to recruit and interview thirteen participants, seven of whom participated in follow-up interviews: Layla was the first participant I recruited and she was interviewed twice, in November 2015 as well as February 2016. She was also in attendance of the focus group. Asma was interviewed in December 2015 and the second time in February 2016. Yusra was interviewed in December 2015 as well as February 2016. Maryam was interviewed once in December 2015. Rima interviewed was one time in January 2016. Maha was interviewed one time in January 2016. Dalia completed two interviews, once in January 2016 and another time in March 2016. Salma, who is Layla's younger sister was also interviewed twice, once in January 2016 and again in March 2016 and was also in attendance of the focus group. Manar was interviewed in January 2016 and again in March 2016. Lama was interviewed in February 2016. Aisha interviewed in February 2016. Noor was interviewed in February 2016 and April 2016 and then further communicated via email. Deema attended the focus group in March 2016 and then completed a follow-up interview later in March 2016. Interview participants did not receive

any form of monetary compensation for participating. Food and refreshments were provided to focus group attendees.

Description of Participants

At the time of this study, all of the women were pursuing or have completed some form of higher education. Five of the women were enrolled in a local community college but were planning on receiving their four-year degree upon completion of their pre-requisite requirements. Four of the women were enrolled in a local university. One woman, Maryam, had completed her undergraduate requirements and is currently working in her field of study. Dalia had completed her Master's degree and is working in her field, and Aisha had completed her undergraduate degree and currently in law school. Yusra was currently enrolled in an early college program and Maryam and Aisha had been previously enrolled in an early college program.

Community College. At the time of this study, Layla, Rima, Maha, Lama, and Noor were attending a local community college in the city in which they live. They all intended on transferring to a four-year institution in the future to complete their studies. Dalia and Deema, while not currently at a community college, attended a community college before transferring to a local university. Residents of the school district of the city receive a reduced tuition fee and all stated this as a motivation to enroll in community college before proceeding to a four-year institution.

Four-year university. Of the thirteen participants, only three: Asma, Salma, and Manar, did not attend a community college prior to enrolling in a four-year institution. The women cited funding, proximity to home, and their program of study as their primary motivations for choosing their university over another institution.

Early College. Maryam, Yusra, and Aisha had participated in a dual enrollment early college program. Early college programs are five-year programs in which students simultaneously take high school courses with college courses earning them up to 60 college credits and once admitted to a program it is free for the students (Higgins, 2015). Maryam and Aisha participated in a dual enrollment with a local community college, and Yusra did so with a local four-year university.

The families of the participants of this study came from a total of four countries in the Middle East. These four countries are represented in large numbers in Southeastern Michigan. The participants are studying a variety of majors as outlined in the chart below. I chose common female Arabic names as each woman's pseudonym and they were assigned at random.

Demographics of participants

Table 3-1

Pseudonyms	Age	Major	Parents' country of origin
Layla	20	Nursing	Yemen
Asma	20	Pre-medicine /psychology	Palestine
Maryam	20	Nutrition (graduated)	Syria
Yusra	18	Pre-dentistry/sociology	Palestine
Manar	19	Chemical engineering/pre-medicine	Yemen
Salma	19	Mechanical engineering	Yemen
Dalia	23	Masters in Secondary Education: English and biology	Palestine
Rima	22	Nursing	Yemen
Maha	20	Business	Syria
Lama	19	Pre-medicine/biology	Lebanon
Noor	21	Business administration/finance	Lebanon
Aisha	22	1ˢᵗ year law student/political science	Lebanon
Deema	21	English/psychology	Yemen

Data Analysis and Interpretation

     Data organization. Audio recordings of the interviews and the focus group were transcribed and stored electronically. Fields notes were hand-written and organized by pseudonym of the participant and date of interaction. Data analysis occurred simultaneously with data collection to look for emergent themes and produce follow-up interview questions.

     Coding. Transcribed audio of the interviews, transcribed audio of the focus group, participant correspondence, and field notes were coded and triangulated for emerging themes. Coding was done in several cycles based on Saldaña (2013) methods of coding qualitative data. Initial coding of field notes, interview transcripts, and focus group transcripts were coded in vivo. In vivo coding is particularly useful in studies that "prioritize and honor the participants' voice" (Saldaña, 2013, p.91). The first cycle of coding utilized in vivo coding in which lines of text were assigned categories. The categories were then grouped and color-coded into a chart into larger, related categories.

     Axial coding was used to code and analyze data in a secondary cycle of coding. Axial coding is "appropriate for studies with a wide range of data forms" (Saldaña, 2013, p.218. Redundant codes from the first cycle of coding were re-grouped and new categories were created. A third cycle of coding was guided by themes and concepts from the theoretical framework and the literature review.

Validation Strategies

The following validation strategies were employed to verify accuracy:

     1.) Triangulation of data- All data collected through interviews and the focus group were triangulated by comparing themes across the focus group, interviews, and field notes.

2.) Member checking- Interpretation of data was checked through a dialogue with the

participants throughout the entirety of this study (Creswell, 2014). Member checking

included follow-up interviews, phone conversations, and email conversations.

Role and Background of the Researcher

According to Van Maanen (1990), the phenomenological researcher may use their own

personal experiences as a starting point, being aware of these experiences may allow the

researcher to better engage with the phenomenon being studied. Van Manen (1990) also

described a potential problem with phenomenological research in that we, as researchers, may

know too much about the topic of study, therefore allowing us to not interpret the data based

upon our own biases.

Due to my own experiences as a second-generation Muslim Arab-American female, I had

to constantly reflect on my own researcher bias throughout the duration of the study. I also had

to engage in thorough member-checking with the participants of the study throughout data

collection. I do believe that my own identity as a Muslim-Arab American woman in hijab

allowed me easier access to the participants as well as a level of comfort while interviewing.

While there is a generational difference between me and the participants, shared identity traits

and experiences allowed me to delve into certain topics while maintaining cultural sensitivity.

Ethical Considerations

The nature of this study did not create any foreseeable risk to either the participants or the

researcher, and the researcher sought proper Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval prior to

carrying out this study. Each participant was given a pre-approved consent document outlining

the details of the study and were given opportunities to ask questions or to receive clarification

about the study. Participants were told that they could withdraw at any time throughout the

study without any negative consequences. All data that was gathered during the duration of this study was kept on a password-protected laptop computer. The data was de-identified and pseudonyms were assigned to each participant.

Summary

Chapter three presented the research methodology employed for this research study. The study participants were introduced along with demographic information. Data collection and analysis procedures were also presented in detail. Lastly, verification strategies, the role of the researcher, and ethical considerations were explained. In Chapter four, the data collected for this study will be presented as organized by the emergent categories.

Chapter IV: Data Analysis and Findings

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to gain an understanding of the experiences and perceptions of the education of second-generation Muslim Arab-American females. This study explored factors related to identity, gender, culture, and religion which impacted the educational choices and the identity of the participants. This chapter presents the qualitative analysis of the findings of this study.

Throughout data collection certain patterns and themes began to emerge. In analyzing the audio and transcripts from the interviews and focus group, it was apparent that there were some similarities in the experiences and perceptions of the participants related to their identities and educational experiences. The commonalities were related to family influence on educational experiences, community impact on educational experiences, discrimination, as well as gender roles. This chapter will be split into two parts: (a) participant profiles and (b) the findings which arose through the study participants' narratives from the personal interviews, the focus group, and my field notes.

Participant Profiles

Below are the profiles of the participants of this research study. The profiles are organized by alphabetical order.

Aisha is a twenty-two-year old law student whose parents are from Lebanon. Aisha completed a dual enrollment early college program which allowed her to complete her undergraduate program in three years where she majored in political science and sociology. At

the time of the interview, Aisha was finishing her first year of law school. Aisha shared, "I have always been interested in law and I like defending people. I also enjoy reading about cases and the history behind them" (Interview, 2/10/16). She felt that political science as a major would be a good path for her to prepare for law school. When asked if her parents were supportive of her field of study she stated "I have Lebanese parents and Lebanese parents encourage their children to go into law or medicine, so I chose the law path" (Interview, 2/10/16).

Aisha shared that she does not wear the hijab and stated, "I don't look Muslim and people think I'm Latin American until they hear my name, but I have not personally experienced discrimination myself" (Interview, 2/10/16). She also shared that she knows many Muslim and Arab women in the field of law and it has been helpful to have them as mentors.

Asma is a twenty-year-old undergraduate student whose parents are from Palestine and is attending a local university. Asma is currently working part-time in a retail store. She attended a high school in which Muslims were in the minority, which was a different experience from the rest of the participants in this study. She is majoring in psychology and completing pre-requisite requirements for medical school. Asma has two younger brothers, one of whom is also in college. Asma intends to attend medical school and to specialize in either neurology or psychiatry. She stated that one of her primary motivations in pursuing her future medical specialty: "we don't have many Muslims in general in this field because we look down on mental health" (Interview, 12/1/15). Asma said that her parents did not have preference to what field their children pursued as long as they received a college degree: "my parents didn't really care about what we went into they just wanted us to be educated . . . my dad has a master's degree and wants to get a PhD and my mom is going to get her second undergrad and a master's too" (Interview, 12/1/15). Asma mentioned that her mother had encouraged her to become a doctor.

Asma's mother introduced her to Muslim Arab female doctors so that she could speak to them about their experiences in the field of medicine.

Dalia is the only participant who has chosen the field of education, Dalia is twenty-three years old and her parents are from Palestine. She was also the only participant who had completed graduate school at the time of this study. Dalia has a Master's in Secondary Education with a focus in English and biology. She is currently working as a substitute teacher in a local school district. Dalia chose her field of study stating, "I have always enjoyed English. I am a quiet person and I have always found it easy to express myself in writing. I also enjoy science, I decided to go into education because I've always tutored and was passionate about teaching and the subject areas in which I majored" (Interview, 1/16/16). She further stated that studying English "expands one's world view and allows one to continue learning about the world and in studying English and literature it makes it easy for someone to continue learning about the world" (Interview, 1/16/16). She would like to eventually teach at the college level and believes that teaching high school would allow her to easily transition to teaching adults.

Dalia shared that while her parents encouraged her educational aspirations, her mother serves as a role model in particular for shifting gender norms. Her mother worked throughout Dalia's childhood, and she found her mother struggling to balance work and family expectations especially because her father was more traditional in terms of gender roles in the home. She stated, "seeing that my mom struggled definitely made an impact on me. And she was in a way someone who taught me what I didn't want to deal with. That definitely played a big role for me" (Interview, 3/4/16).

Deema is a twenty-one-year old undergraduate student studying English and behavioral sciences at a local university. Deema initially began her college education at a local community

college and then she transferred to a local university. Deema's future career goals include becoming a professor and researcher. She said that she would also consider working for the government with her behavioral science degree. She eventually wants to earn a PhD and become a professor. Deema's parents emigrated from Yemen. Deema spoke a great deal about her parents' encouragement of her and her sisters' educational aspirations. She shared that her personal definition of success is "making your parents proud I know that's cliché … they sacrificed . . . parents are everything in success" (Interview, 3/23/16). She said that due to her parents' lack of education they encouraged her and her sisters to pursue their education, "my parents didn't have a good education, my mom got up until middle school and my dad did two years of college here in America but his parents died the same year and he didn't have the push so he didn't finish college" (Interview, 3/23/16). Deema has two sisters, one is in pharmacy school and the other is preparing to apply to medical school.

Lama is a nineteen-year old pre-medicine/biology major. She is working on her Associate's degree in science and plans to transfer to a local university to complete her pre-medicine requirements. She is currently working in an immigration office that primarily services the Arabic speaking community and assists with translation and immigration forms. Lama is one of two participants who cited intrinsic motivation as a primary push to continue her higher education. She said that the reason she chose this particular field of study was that "I have always enjoyed biology and because medicine has a lot of biology it seems like a good fit" (Interview, 2/6/16). Lama said, "I've always been good in school and got good grades. From an early age, I showed that I did well in biology and science related courses so my teachers and parents encouraged me" (Interview, 2/6/16). She aspires to become a surgeon in the future, but

is still unsure of her specialty. Lama's parents are from Lebanon and she is the one of her siblings who is pursuing the medical field.

Layla is a twenty-year-old nursing student who is currently taking courses in a community college. Her younger sister, Salma, was also one of the research participants. Layla and Salma's parents emigrated from Yemen and their siblings have all pursued and/or are currently pursuing some form of higher education. Their father is deceased yet it was apparent that there was a great deal of familial support from their older siblings as well as their parents in terms of the pursuit of higher education. Layla also works at an after-school program as a tutor of middle school aged children at a community center that services the Muslim and Arab community. Layla spoke about issues impacting achievement in reference to her work at the community center and she spoke of some possible solutions including guidance counselors and workshops to help the parents as well as perceived barriers to education that others may encounter within the community. She stated:

> There's a [sic] lot of immigrants and they're not really sure how things work. They need
>
> people to tell them 'this is what's happening in the world, this is why you need to
>
> continue your education . . . I feel like if we had that, if we had bilingual counselors that
>
> could speak to the parents and talk to them. The parents just need someone to talk to,
>
> they need for someone to just hear them out. (Interview, 2/17/16)

Layla's future career goals include becoming a pediatric nurse. Layla listed several motivations for her to study nursing. She said that nursing is an economically stable field and there is a great deal of flexibility as well as demand for nurses. Additionally, she stated that one of her motivations to become a nurse is that she volunteered at a rehab center and the poor manner in which some of the nurses treated the patients made her feel as if she could do better.

Maha is a twenty-year old completing her associate degree in business administration. Maha attended middle school and part of high school in Syria. Her parents are originally from Syria. While she was in Syria, she studied Arabic and *Qur'anic* studies and is currently teaching Arabic and *Qur'an* at a local weekend school to young students. Upon completion of her associate degree, Maha plans to transfer to a university to finish her Bachelor's in business administration. Maha said that eventually she would like to attain a Master's in school counseling, as she feels that she is flourishing in teaching and counseling younger students. She would like to work in the corporate world for a few years before going into school counseling. Maha stated that her mother was an integral motivation in motivating her to Arabic and Qur'an as well as the female teachers she had in Syria. She said that while her father is hesitant about her field of study, business, her mother has been supportive of her daughter's choices. Maha also shared that another motivation to study business was an economics professor she had for a course when she was undecided: "he was the head of human resources and I was really interested in what he was doing, he really inspired me to continue in business" (Interview, 1/27/16). Maha said that she does not interact with non-Muslims and non-Arabs much, "Even where I go to school, half of the people I go to school with are Arabs so I don't interact with Americans" (Interview, 1/27/16). However, she later stated that when she does go into the corporate world, "I may feel uncomfortable at first, but I would have to get used to it and give a good example of who a Muslim woman is, I'm very passionate about that actually" (Interview, 1/27/16).

Manar is a nineteen-year-old student attending a local university. She is majoring in chemical engineering and pre-med. She said she chose the field of chemical engineering because she enjoys science and math and chemical engineering was the best combination of her two favorite subjects as well as providing a career with economic stability. In fact, she defined

success as "reaching social and economic stability" (Interview, 3/1/16). Manar, like many of the others, cited parental support as a motivator to pursue higher education. Her parents are from Yemen and her father has a medical degree and her mother is an accountant. She is unsure about the specific field of medicine she would like to study but she is currently leaning towards family medicine. Manar, spoke about her concerns not as a Muslim woman in her field of study but as a woman in general, "It is strange to be one of the few females in my classes. I don't think of having other Muslim or Arab women in the field of engineering because engineering is male dominated anyways" (Interview, 1/15/16).

Maryam is a twenty-year-old nutritionist who had graduated from a local university the previous winter semester and is currently working in a school district in her field of study. She had completed a dual enrollment high school/college program and therefore was able to graduate with her bachelor's degree in a shorter time frame. Maryam chose the field of nutrition because she was a picky eater when she was young and also had several vitamin related deficiencies. She went into the field of nutrition to help people and to benefit herself as well. She said that when the women in her community find out she is a nutritionist they get excited and say, "you can help us." She said she now mentors other females wanting to go into nutrition but says "there are too many people going into the field now" (Interview, 12/17/15).

Maryam's parents emigrated from Syria and she has older siblings who have or are pursuing higher education and she has younger siblings that are also enrolled in a dual enrollment early college program. When I asked her about who influenced her educational background she laughed and said, "not my family." She went on to say that her father would have liked her to pursue a different field of study that is more economically stable and her mother had also suggested better paying fields of study.

Noor is a twenty-one-year old student who is working on her Associate's degree in finance. Upon completion of her Associate's degree she plans on transferring to a local university to complete her bachelor's degree. One of her primary motivations to work in finance is that she "has always enjoyed math and has a managing mindset" (Interview, 2/6/16). She believes that with the economy's dependence on finance, that she could easily find a job. She is currently working full time in addition to attending school and her career goals include "working in airline management and dealing with sales. Noor's place of employment is one in which she encounters diverse groups of people and has not encountered any form of discrimination; therefore, she does not foresee any issues of discrimination in her future career. Noor's parents are from Lebanon and her siblings have all pursued higher education and are working in their respective fields.

Rima is a twenty-two-years old and in the third year of her nursing program. Like Layla, Rima is studying nursing at a local community college in which she plans to become a registered nurse (RN). At the time of the interview, she had just started working as a nurse's aide in geriatrics. When I asked her why she chose nursing she exclaimed, "I like to help people" (Interview, 1/18/16). Once she finishes her nursing program, she thinks she would like to work with either middle aged adults or young children, but is still unsure. Rima stated that one of her primary motivations in going into the field of nursing is that it is easy to find jobs in the field and there is a great demand for nurses and her motivation for attending school is that she is able to receive financial aid. She stated, "If I can afford it I go to school. Right now, financial aid is paying for me" (Interview, 1/18/16). Additionally, she said that many patients need Arabic translators and as an Arabic speaker she feels that she could benefit her patients. She relayed a story in which she was able to help an Arabic speaking patient with translation and the patient

was very grateful. Rima's parents are from Yemen and she has an older sister who is interested in pursuing something in the medical field and another sibling who plans on attending college the following year; she said that her sister is choosing a medical-related field due to economic stability.

 Salma is a nineteen-year-old studying mechanical engineering at a local university. Salma is Manar's friend, who is also studying engineering, and they both attend the same institution. Salma chose her field of study stating, "I have always been interested in the field and it is economically stable field and I know I can find a good job in the field" (Interview, 1/15/16). Salma was very open about issues of discrimination. She shared that she doesn't really think about how she is perceived as a Muslim woman because in her field of study there are a lack of women in general. In terms of discrimination, she doesn't let things bother her and said that complaining about discrimination, she said, "I wouldn't pull the race card. Always pulling the race card makes one weak. I know sometimes it can be a race issue but that's not how I handle things, assuming that it's always race." (Interview, 1/15/16).

 Yusra is an eighteen-year-old undergraduate student attending a local university. Yusra had taken courses in a dual enrollment early college program, like Aisha and Maryam had done in the past. At the time of the interview, she had completed the early college program and was transitioning to another university to complete her undergraduate coursework. Yusra is majoring in sociology and chemistry and she plans to apply to dental school upon completion of her bachelor's degree. Yusra indicated several times during the interview that she is intrinsically motivated to do well, "I'm a very self-motivated person, so I always want to do well. Of course, I want to make my family happy too. I think I'm just very self-motivated" (Interview, 12/29/15). Like Lama, she also enjoys science courses. When I asked her why she chose the field of

dentistry she said, "I don't know, I just like dentistry, and I think teeth are really cool" (Interview, 12/29/15).

Yusra's parents are from Palestine and she has older sisters who are in science fields as well as a younger sister who wants to attend medical school. She said her parents are supportive and content with her field of study, but didn't push her towards a certain field. Yusra is working part-time at her aunt's dental office to gain exposure to the field of dentistry.

Findings

The findings that emerged from the data can be grouped into five main categories: (a) family impact on educational choices, (b) economic opportunity and potential (c) community impact on educational choices, and (d) discrimination/Islamophobia and (e) identity. Each participant noted family encouragement to pursue higher education in general as well as parental views on particular fields of study. Economics impacted both the choice of school as well as the potential of the fields of study of the participants. According to the women, the Muslim Arab-American community values female higher educational attainment but there are certain fields that are considered more acceptable for females. Discrimination and Islamophobia have made an impact on the social and academic lives of the participants, and the majority of the participants view themselves as Muslim first over the Arab cultural identities of their families. The findings will be discussed below.

Familial Support and Encouragement Impact Academic Decisions. Throughout the interview process and during the focus group discussion, it became apparent that family views of education played a large role in the participants' educational choices and fields of study. Perhaps, the most salient themes in terms of parental influence or encouragement relate to the study of science/medical, technology, medical, and/or math related (STEM) fields. Every single

participant indicated family encouragement to pursue higher education. Five of the women

spoke about their parents' support in greater depth. Of the thirteen women, seven were entering

science/math fields. Whether or not the women were entering science/math fields, familial

support and encouragement played a large role in the academic decisions of the participants.

While all of the women indicated a degree of parental support, there were several that

spoke about their parents' enthusiasm and/or encouragement for their educational endeavors.

Asma, like several of the participants, is entering the field of medicine. When asked what

influenced her educational goals Asma said that her parents were the biggest influence on her

educational goals. While her father is happy with whatever she chooses to study, her mother has

always encouraged her to enter the field of medicine:

> For a long time, my mom told me I should be a doctor and I used to tell her no, and then
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> when I started my junior year of high school I really liked my psychology class as well as
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> the sciences. Then I found psychiatrists and I really liked the idea of that (Interview,
>
> 12/1/15)

She shared that her mother knows several Muslim Arab female doctors "and she also knows a

psychiatrist and she's let me talk to them and interact with them" (Interview, 12/1/15). Lama is

also entering the medical field and with enthusiasm spoke of her parents' support and excitement

of her entering the medical field, stating while laughing about her father's response to her field

of study "he loves it." While Aisha is not studying medicine, she is studying law, she said, "I

have Lebanese parents and Lebanese parents encourage their kids to go into law or medicine, so

I chose the law path" (Interview, 2/10/16). Manar also attributes her field of study, chemical

engineering and pre-medicine, to her parents. When asked, what prompted her to study medicine

she said, "my parents are both educated, my mom is an accountant and my father went to medical school" (Interview, 1/15/16). Manar further stated:

> In our culture, there is a strong push to fields that you are going to find a job in, such as ones related to math and science. White people allow their kids to explore more interests whereas Arab parents focus their kids more (Interview, 1/15/16)

Deema, like other participants, spoke a lot about her parents' encouragement and attributes her education and her sisters' education to her parents:

> My parents always tell us to finish our degrees, that we are smart, and to not care about marriage. . . as long as we have the degree we won't have to struggle like them. There are times when I'm tired and I don't want to go to school and even though it makes me sad they say 'do you want to become like us? (Interview, 3/23/16)

Despite Deema's parents' lack of higher education, she considered them to be her largest source of encouragement.

Family discouragement of certain fields of study. While all of the participants indicated familial support of pursuing higher education in general, several of the participants reported some family pushback regarding their chosen field of study as well as encouragement to enter into different fields of study.

While Deema cites parental support in pursuing higher education in general there is somewhat of a hesitation when it comes to her field of study. Deema, who is studying english and psychology, said that she added psychology as a major to appease her parents:

> They're very open but they want to see me get a job right after graduation even though I want to get my masters and PhD. That's hard for them to digest because they want

something now . . . I thought if I added a type of science like psychology they'll settle

down . . . and they got happy (Interview, 3/23/16)

Deema shared her father's reaction when she told him that she was thinking of pursuing a

job in the FBI after graduation: "just recently I told my dad I wanted to work for the FBI and that

I could use my psychology degree and he said 'I don't think that's a good job for you"

(Interview, 3/23/16). Deema said she believes his discouragement of an FBI career is related to

the distrust many Muslim Arab-Americans feel towards such organizations. Deema had also

contemplated entering into law and said:

> When I told my dad, he said 'you know you'll be fabricating a lot just to get your clients
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> to win your case. I told him I can take cases where I won't have to lie and he said 'how
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> do you know for sure? Sometimes you will get thrown a case you have to do and it will
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> go against your Muslim values. I thought about it and realized it's not for me. (Focus
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> group, 3/6/16)

Like Deema, Maryam, mentioned that her parents were not very content with her field of

study, nutrition. Her older sister is studying to be a physician assistant and her mom has

indicated to her on several occasions that it would have been better for her to become a physician

assistant like her sister. Her father says that he wishes she chose a better paying field. Maryam

mentioned, "I am not happy with my current job, I know I will have to do a Master's to get a job

that I am happier with" (Interview, 12/17/15). Maha, who is studying business, met with some

pushback from her family as well. Maha's parents are not encouraging regarding her studying

the field of business:

> My parents are very open, they wanted me to study whichever subject I find myself
>
> interested in, but business they think of as running a shop … it's not really like that, I'm

studying administration so I can get an opportunity to work in a hospital, in a school,

something more broad. (Interview, 1/27/16)

Maha shared that she believes her mother is supportive of her educational endeavors now,

despite the fact that she speaks of both of her parents' hesitations in her field of study. She then

said referencing her father: "until now he tries to convince me to study something else"

(Interview, 1/27/16). Maha said about her family and of other families that she knows: "They do

see their daughters as working as a doctor, a teacher, a nurse, a doctor or teacher mainly. They

don't see their daughters as engineers or in the business world or involved in volunteer work"

(Interview, 1/27/16). While Layla said that her mother supports her field of study, "my mom is

really supportive, she doesn't care what I study, she just says 'you do what you have to do, just

finish" (Interview, 11/6/15), however, like Maryam and Maha, Layla has family who try to

convince her to study another field despite parental support:

My brothers are like 'do you really want to do nursing, it's a dirty job, you have to wipe

people and stuff … you should do pharmacy, it's almost the same thing and you get paid

more . . . do something that will pay you more. (Interview, 11/6/15)

Layla also shared, "I like patient care and that one-on-one interaction, of course I take salary into

consideration but it's not that important. If I like it, I'm going to do it." (Interview, 11/6/15).

Like Layla who has parental support but pushback from other family members, Dalia shared that

she has relatives that do not approve of her field of study, education. Therefore, despite family

disagreement in some of the women's choices, it does not seem to sway them to choose another

field of study.

     Unconventional careers. Related to family expectations in chosen careers, during the

focus group the discussion turned to unconventional careers such as blogging and YouTube

personalities. While none of the focus group participants wanted to enter into such a field, their immediate concern about their parents' reactions is indicative of the importance of pleasing one's family in terms of fields of study. Deema shared an anecdote about her cousin who started blogging but once her uncles and father found out she decided to pursue web design and information technology (IT) as a field so that it would appease them: "if she does that full time [blogging] they will probably disown her, fashion blogging or mommy blogging or political blogging can't be a job" (Focus group, 3/6/16). When talking about a popular Muslim female YouTuber, Deema said, "I wonder what her parents thought of it and if they were ok with it" and Layla said that if she had chosen a career path such as YouTube or blogging her parents would say, "find a real job what the hell are you doing!"

  Working while in school. Family expectations do not only impact educational choices, but also females working certain jobs that are not related to their field of study. A discussion regarding the topic of Muslim women working while in school ensued during the focus group. Salma stated that "Many people want to work on the side, because they want the extra money for school stuff. There are a lot of expenses." Deema mentioned that when she had asked her father if it was acceptable for her to work while in school he told her that it is his responsibility to take care of her:

> I told him that I wanted to be financially stable and feel like I have my own potential, and
>
> he took it as an insult . . . they think if their kid is working, people will talk and they will
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> say 'did you see him, maybe he is poor, he is sending his daughter out to work. (Focus
>
> group, 3/6/16)

When Deema's father finally agreed to let her work with her mother's pleading, he put limitations on the type of job she can get: "my dad said, 'no grocery store, no this place or that

place' so now he's saying that we can get a job but there are limitations to that job." Salma stated, "it is socially unacceptable in some places to see women working, especially in our culture" (Focus group, 3/6/16). This discussion turned to family names and the perception that there is social class tied to certain family names from their parents' countries of origin and it often bleeds into the communities and families Muslim Arab-Americans. Deema mentioned that it would be considered low class or a dishonor for members of certain families to work in certain jobs: "your family name stops you from doing that [referring to certain jobs] . . . the parents will say 'this family is allowing that because their family is lower class" (Focus group, 3/6/16). Deema also shared that she feels that her father worrying about what people will say about his daughter working conflicts with some of his other views. She mentioned that he often says, "*tuz fil nas* [who cares what people think]" about certain things but stated that not caring what others think not apply when it comes to women working while in school. Salma and Layla agreed with Deema's sentiment that Arab fathers may take offense to their daughters working while in school which arises from cultural conflict: "I feel like it's so difficult because they were born in a different time yet they were living here, so they should know the culture of America." (Focus group, 3/6/16).

The previous section highlighted the family's impact on the educational experiences of the participants. Family views impacted the choice of field of study, the discouragement of particular fields, unconventional careers, as well as daughters working while in school.

Economic Factors Impact Choice of School and Field of Study. Family expectations regarding educational choices were often tied to economic opportunity and economic potential of the chosen field of study. As reported by the participants, fields with greater salary potential are held to higher esteem within Muslim Arab-American families and

communities. Economic factors impacted the choice of school, the fields of study chosen by the participants, as well as income being considered as a measurement of success by the family and community.

Affordability of school. Six of the women indicated financial considerations when choosing their school of attendance. Layla, Asma, Manar, Salma, Dalia, and Rima said that they would have considered attending a different institution had it been a financially sound decision. Layla said, "I couldn't get any scholarships at any big universities. I stuck with this community college as a start and then I was lucky they did have a nursing program so it was convenient for me financially because I get financial aid" (Interview, 11/6/16). Asma shared that attending a university "where it wasn't too expensive" was a top concern when choosing an institution of study. Manar and Salma, who like Asma, are attending a four-year institution also said that they would have considered another institution had they received scholarships. Dalia said, "I took general education courses and prerequisite courses at a local community college so that I could save money" (Interview, 1/16/16). Rima, who is currently attending a community college stated, "If I can afford it I go to school. Right now, financial aid is paying for me" (Interview, 1/18/16). Yusra, who is in an early college program, indicates that economic opportunity is a large factor in choosing an institution, she states: "Scholarships are hard to come by, and if you really want them, you will need to dig for them. While financial aid is helpful, it creates loans" (Interview, 2/20/16). Yusra further mentioned that while finances may be a burden on some but that "if you really want it bad enough, you will just do it" in reference to the motivation to attend school.

Potential earnings of fields of study. Salary potential and job security were taken into consideration with several of the participants when choosing their fields of study and future career paths. Rima chose the field of nursing because she knows that it would be easy to find a

job in her field upon graduation and her sister is considering a field related to medicine because "The medical field is safer for people to find jobs" (Interview, 1/18/16). Like Rima, Layla who is also studying nursing, shared that for her part of being successful and part of the reason she chose her field is "getting to the level of education where I have a secure job" (Interview, 2/17/16). Noor, who is studying finance, chose the field because not only because of her interest stating: "I knew I wanted something math based and the economy right now is based on money and rates" (Interview, 2/6/16). She continued to state that she feels she can easily find a job not only because of her prior work experience but also because jobs are plentiful in her future career.

Another aspect of the current economy as well as the cost of education, is that it would impact having a career while raising a family. Yusra said "with school being so expensive and with loans, I will have to work" (Interview, 2/20/16). Layla also spoke about working while raising a family and feels that the state of the economy is a motivating factor for women going back to school and/or work:

> The husbands realize that it's not how it is in the world right now; they may then need to pick up where they left off education wise . . . times are tough it's not just the man that has to work . . . what's the point of having your wife stay home when she can help you. (Interview, 2/17/16)

Manar shared similar sentiments as Layla and Yusra, when she said that "it would have to depend on whether the second income is needed . . . (Interview, 3/1/16).

During the focus group, the discussion turned to salary potential for choosing one's field of study. Salma began the discussion by stating, "People shouldn't waste their time. I mean if you're ok with it, that's cool, but don't waste your time" in reference to people who choose fields without considering the economic potential of their choices. Deema shared that money

shouldn't be the main concern and Layla answered "but it's something though. I look at money too even though I understand enjoying your field." Deema said "I feel like money should be there, but it shouldn't be the main focus even if our parents or whoever say 'do whatever pays well.'" Layla then clarified that people should do whatever they want, however if they are undecided then they should consider economic potential and said, "if you've got the potential to be bigger, go for it." Salma, who is studying engineering, said that people shouldn't waste their time, that they should not just enter a field of study without focus and without the potential to find a job. She went on to share:

> That's why engineering is nice, four or five years, and then you're done. A lot of us talk about that, how we are lucky to finish in four or five years and get a job that pays pretty well. I'm grateful for that. You only need a bachelor's too. (Focus group, 3/6/16)

As mentioned in a previous section, Layla's brother told her that she should do pharmacy and cited the better salary potential of pharmacy or encouraged her to do something that would pay more. Maryam's father was concerned that she chose the field of nutrition because he was afraid that she would not find a good job and wanted her to choose a better paying field. Deema's parents were also concerned about her future career path due to economic potential. While Dalia's parents are supportive of her study of education, she has family members who have made statements in relation to the pay potential of teachers. Dalia articulated:

> I don't know what happened to the teaching field but that seems to suddenly be considered so negatively. It's not as highly regarded as they used to be. So, I think that people's perceptions and the economy all play a role into why certain jobs are considered not that great. (Interview, 3/4/16)

She said she has family members or friends that say things like, "you're going into teaching, oh, why? That sucks!" in reference to the salary potential of being a teacher. However, when she states that she eventually wants to become a professor in a university they become more accepting of her field of study as being a professor holds a higher level of prestige than a teacher of young children within the community. While Layla is not studying education, she has a sister who is a teacher and said about teachers' low salary:

> Teachers have a lot of responsibility, and we look at salary which is how we measure success . . . teachers barely make any money but they deal with so much because they have that dollar amount representing them, they're not as appreciated. (Interview, 2/17/16)

Economic opportunity was considered when choosing the institution of study by six of the participants. Economic potential of their chosen career paths was often related to the family's educational expectations as well as the Muslim Arab-American community's views of certain career paths.

Muslim Arab-American Community Views on Female Education. In the previous sections, family expectations and economics were presented as shared by the participants and how those factors impact their educational experiences and perceptions. Another important factor is the role of the community on the participants' educational choices. The women of this study were all connected to the Muslim Arab-American community through their local mosque, their social circles, as well as the area in which they live which has a large Muslim Arab population. According to the women, female educational attainment was highly valued within their communities with certain fields valued more than others for females. The women were also

sometimes met with opposing messages from the religious and cultural community to which they belong.

The women in this study believe that in their communities, educational attainment for Muslim Arab-American women is highly valued. While all of the women of this study have obtained and/or pursuing higher education degrees, their families did not place barriers on them receiving an education. Asma said, "In this day and age, people are really encouraging women at least get an undergraduate degree, they always want educated Muslim women because they know how important it is to be teachers of Muslims" (Interview, 12/1/15). In a follow-up interview, Asma stated that, "It used to be that if women were educated at all that was looked down upon, but now you have to be educated, at least a little bit" (Interview, 2/24/16). Rima spoke of a perceived shift in her mosque community regarding female educational attainment and commented, "what encouraged people is seeing how other families are now open-minded which made it ok for their family to be open-minded." She further expressed, "I see a difference from when people [referring to the previous generation] would say things like 'back then we weren't able to do this' right now people are more open-minded which is really good" (Interview, 1/18/16). Therefore, Muslim Arab-American women were expected to attain an education yet there are concerns regarding the choice of field especially in relation to marriage.

Marriage and careers. While the participants stated that they believe that higher education is encouraged in the Muslim Arab communities in which they are affiliated, several shared differing views on educational attainment within their communities. Layla's family has not placed any such barriers on her, but her work with the Muslim Arab-American community has given her some insight. She explained:

I feel like a lot of Muslim Arab women stick to the traditional role of being a homemaker you know, getting married, let the man be the breadwinner, so I feel like we need more awareness and a kind of guidance to the youth, especially high school, like I feel like in high school they kind of get an idea of what their family expects of them, they don't really to aspire to higher things. I feel like that's an issue in our community. (Interview, 11/6/15)

In a follow-up interview, Layla spoke more on the issue of women choosing to raise a family over pursuing education, "I think in our community it's ok, it's looked at as 'she's doing the right thing' 'she's getting her family together'" (Interview, 2/17/16). Dalia, Deema and Asma also spoke about women choosing marriage and kids over education in their communities. Dalia shared opposing views within the community. Dalia shared:

I have relatives who did not go to school, I have a cousin, a few actually who just went straight into marriage and having kids. There were people who were disappointed especially now when there's a push for Muslim women to get their education because of society . . . there are some with the traditional mindset who say 'well that's fine' about choosing marriage over school. There are others who say 'you're young you could have gone to school, you have your whole life to continue and get married and have kids. (Interview, 3/4/16)

Dalia further clarified that if somebody does not pursue their education, then they should choose to marry and have kids, "If you don't do either of those things, you may not be perceived in the best way, what are you going to do sit at home for the rest of your life?" (Interview, 3/4/16). Like Dalia, Asma believes that if a woman in the community does not pursue her education and/or does not get married and have kids then she may be looked down upon within the

community. "I know one person not pursuing higher education. She's actually getting pretty looked down upon. She started out with higher education and then she didn't continue" (Interview, 2/24/16). Deema also shared an anecdote about a relative:

> I have a cousin who is 25 and she's still in community college, she's in and out of school and takes one class per semester. My dad tells her she needs to get her act together and she can't just wait for her prince charming to take her. If you're wasting your time, you're already 25, you might as well get a degree. She could have had a career by now. (Interview, 3/23/16)

While higher education seems to be encouraged for the females in the Muslim Arab-American community, several of the participants spoke about the discouragement of graduate degrees that would take too much time. Time in relation to schooling was a prevalent theme throughout the data, particularly regarding medical school. Layla, Asma, Maryam, and Manar all discussed the issue of amount of time as being a deterrent in pursuing certain graduate programs. Layla commented, "for medicine it takes a lot of school and time, to have a family while in medical school is like neglect for your family . . . if you can work it out for your family then that's fine" (Interview, 2/17/16). Asma, who is studying pre-medicine, said that time, "doesn't stop them from the beginning, but once they finish undergrad and they're going to pursue another degree it definitely stops them then" (Interview, 12/1/15). While Asma has had a great deal of support from her family and friends, she said that when people in her community find out she is studying medicine they tell her, "do you know how long this will take you?" Maryam, who is a nutritionist, said that while she enjoys science that medicine was out of the question for her as it was a "long time commitment." Manar, who is also studying pre-med, said that hesitations for females to study medicine is related to marriage and the work/life balance and

would be a deterrent for future marriage prospects: "These messages come from peers and within the community, but I don't let it affect me. People say, 'it's too much work or too long before you get married" (Interview, 3/1/16). She then explained that she believes that STEM fields are encouraged by families and the community for women but not graduate programs because of the amount of time it would take to complete a graduate program. Lama, who is planning on going to medical school, on the other hand has not had any issues from her community regarding her field of study.

During the focus group, the discussion turned to the medical field and women. Deema shared that she has a sister entering the field of medicine and said that many potential suitors and their families are often discouraged when they hear that she is studying to become a doctor because of the long hours and the possibility of getting a nanny to raise the children. Salma commented that she understands the hesitation "but they have a point, you can't deny they have a point if nobody is raising the kids. You want a generation of kids raised like that?" (Focus group, 3/6/16). Layla agreed with Salma on this point and Deema answered:

> If a woman is already on her path of education and a guy comes and they click and he
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> tells her to not work and she blindly says ok that she will eventually go back. Then she
>
> has a ton of kids, she's never going to go back. (Focus group, 3/6/16)

She further shared that her sister, who is studying medicine, has accepted that she will be older in age if she does marry and that she accepts this. Deema said she believes, "I think it stems from the parents of the man who tell them they shouldn't want a wife that is always outside and not raising the children." Salma answered in response:

> She accepts it now but in a few years, she won't, that's how it is . . . people who are
>
> under 25, don't think and care about marriage and kids but once we get there it's

different, they'll say 'my friends got married, I want to get married too. (Focus group,

3/6/16)

She further questioned, "do you want to dedicate your whole life to a job?" and her sister Layla

answered that, "if it makes some people happy then fine" and then Salma argued, "Yeah, but it's

human nature to want to get married and have kids, that's just how it is. I think that's how God

made us to be honest with you, it's a biological thing." Related to these views, in an interview

Salma had explained, "I would personally not work when I have young kids but I want the

choice and wouldn't want to be told 'you must work'" (Interview, 3/1/16). At the end of this

discussion, they concluded that if a woman were to enter medicine that she would need to choose

a specialty which involves a nine-five job and not specialties with long hours such as ER or

surgery so that she can better balance work and family life.

Fields not encouraged for women by Muslim Arab-American community. There are

several fields of study the participants have mentioned as generally not encouraged for Muslim

women within their communities which are the same fields not encouraged by their families;

those fields include business, politics, media, and law. The field of business is not encouraged

based on the cultural interpretation of business. Maha, who is studying business, stated that the

concern of Muslim Arab women in business is male-female interactions. Maha explained that

people have said:

We're told, 'you're going to be working between men,' I do feel like it has some type of

bad connotation when someone says that women are working in business. It does have

some bad connotation, when someone says that a woman is working in the business field

but I want to break that." (Interview, 1/27/16)

Later in the interview, Maha spoke about the manner in which culture may hold Muslim Arab women back, "Culture is a barrier, there are a lot of guidelines in culture that restrict women in what they can and cannot do, and if the parents hold tightly to their culture it creates barriers."

The concept of gender mixing concerns in the business field were discussed in the focus group. Deema said, "People will say that business takes a lot of interactions with men and what are other people going to say. Anybody can own a business but it's more the interactions" (Focus group, 3/6/16). Layla mentioned that male-female interactions are acceptable in healthcare fields in the community, "you can see change, you can see the person doing better." Deema said in response: "That's what the problem is they'll say doctor or nurse because you are helping people. They don't care about gender issues at that point but in a different field they'll say gender, gender, gender." Deema further explained:

> They'll say business is a man's job but [the wife of Prophet Muhammad] was a business
>
> woman and she was the essence of womanhood, she was the boss and people don't look
>
> at history and it makes me mad. (Focus group, 3/6/16)

Alternately, Noor, who is also studying business and a member of a different mosque community has not encountered any pushback from her community or family regarding her field of study and stated that there are many women in her community who are in the field of business.

Politics and media-based careers were also cited as a field in which Muslim Arab-American women are not encouraged to study both for a similar reason. Asma stated that politics is not encouraged for Muslim women because "you're out in the open and that's looked down on" (Interview, 12/1/15) and Maha stated a similar sentiment when discussing media-based fields for women that "you would be up front in front of everyone" (Interview, 1/27/15). The above statements indicate that the Muslim Arab community may consider it inappropriate

for women to display themselves. Deema said that politics is considered, "a dirty world and it's not fit for women which I feel is going against the religion where there are so many Muslim women in the past that have been advocates and activists" (Interview, 3/23/16). Layla also mentioned politics as a field that is not encouraged, "politics, I can understand because a lot can go wrong in politics like what you say or what you do can affect you and your family. So, I guess they just keep it towards the guys" (Interview, 2/17/16).

During the focus group, the participants spoke about Muslim women in media and that the hijab may be a deterrent in terms of getting a job, which was considered another reason to not pursue media-based careers. Deema spoke in reference to the media, "There have been Arab-Americans without hijab, but with hijab they'll think that "oh they're going to know you're Muslim we can't have that (Focus group, 3/6/16)." Therefore, pursuing media-based fields was not encouraged for two main reasons: difficulty in getting a job due to possible discrimination and judgment from the Muslim Arab community.

Law and law enforcement were mentioned by the participants as fields that are not encouraged by the Muslim Arab communities as they conflict with religious morals such as truthfulness and honesty; although there is a need for lawyers in the Muslim-American and Arab-American communities as mentioned by several of the women. Salma mentioned that the people she does know going into law are entering civil rights, human rights, or immigration law as anything else is considered to be a struggle between morals and values. In the focus group, Layla said in reference to the economic potential of law that "with law, it seems to be about who you know, less about how qualified you are" and Salma added "There's a lot to it and it's hard to get a job" and she went on to state that "religion creates the conflict" regarding certain fields of law. Aisha, who is studying law, however, indicated that she has had no conflict or issues from

her community, family, or her morals and "I know many Muslim and Arab women in law and it has been very helpful to have others in my field" (Interview, 2/10/16). Aisha does feel that law and law enforcement are difficult for women in hijab in particular. While Aisha does not wear the hijab, she did say about a classmate/friend that, "I have a friend in hijab in my law program and people often allude to the fact that she not be able to find a job in law in hijab" (Interview, 2/10/16).

Lama and Noor, made similar statements indicating that women create their own boundaries when pursuing education, which was different from the other women's views on education. When interviewing Lama, who is pursuing pre-medicine/biology, I had asked her if there were any fields which she felt she could not pursue because of community pressure and influence. She commented, "Many Arab societies discriminate between males and females that there are fields considered for women and others for males, any boundaries come from the females themselves. If they feel they can't go into fields because they are women, it's because they put their own borders" (Interview, 2/6/16). Towards the end of the interview, when asked about other barriers that she may have experienced and/or noticed in terms of women pursuing education she stated, "the females themselves really need to open their minds and move beyond those stereotypes." Later, when I asked Lama for clarification she stated that in her community, women work in diverse fields and it makes everyone in the community feel as if any field is possible for a woman. Noor, who is studying finance, stated that if any woman feels she cannot pursue a particular field that, "it comes from themselves and only you can bring yourself down" (Interview, 2/6/16). In an email, she clarified:

> Women work in diverse fields in the community in which I live which makes it feel like
>
> any career is possible . . . some people would be living in an open-minded community

and they would still choose to remain in their own boundaries . . . I do know women who

didn't pursue the education they want and I think it comes from themselves. They tend to

give attention to the group of people that limit them instead of looking beyond that. By

doing that, their own thoughts are standing in the way between them and their education.

(Email correspondence, 6/30/16)

As discussed in the previous section, with the Muslim Arab-American community there

is some diversity and differing views regarding the fields of study that are considered appropriate

for women.

Conflicting messages from the Muslim Arab-American community. As mentioned in

previous sections, fields which are based in science/math are more highly regarding within the

Muslim Arab community yet women who are entering the field of medicine are often met with

concern. While there seems to be a hesitation to encourage Muslim Arab-American women to

enter the medical field, several participants reported conflicting messages they have received

from members of the community regarding their field of study.

As previously mentioned, of the thirteen participants five were not entering STEM based

fields. Of those five, two noted negative reactions from community members regarding their

fields of study. Deema stated that when people from her community hear that she is entering the

social sciences and liberal arts they will ask her, "You're not going to be a doctor or a nurse?"

with surprise (Focus group, 3/6/16). She also shared that people still tell her, "You should be a

doctor, you should do something in the medical field." Dalia has also received similar message

and has been discouraged from the field of education and was told to enter the medical field by

members of her community:

I feel like there is a negative stigma of the field of education within the Muslim Arab-American community as they would prefer medical fields. I've had people tell me to go into medicine or other fields which make more money." (Interview, 1/16/16)

Asma, although entering medicine herself, said that several of her friends who are entering art related fields often receive negative reactions from community members stating. "Oh you're just going to be a housewife?" because people assume that they're not going to do anything with their career" (Interview, 12/1/15). Women who are not pursuing STEM fields are often treated with disdain from family and community members, yet as mentioned in a previous section are also expected to be the primary caregivers for children. If they enter into such careers, they are also expected to marry and have children as well as not take too much time in a graduate program. As evidenced in the discussion of the medical field in the focus group, if a woman were to become a doctor she would need to choose a specialty which would allow her to raise her children. Additionally, as several participants mentioned in other sections, higher education is encouraged for Muslim Arab-American women yet with the stipulation that it would not take too much time to complete.

Importance of Muslim female mentors. Several of the participants spoke about the importance of having Muslim female mentors in their fields of interest for support and guidance. Layla, Asma, Maryam, Yusra, Rima, and Aisha all stated that knowing other Muslim women in their fields of interest helps tremendously, particularly when encountering challenges. Layla mentioned, "I have a very close friend who is a nurse practitioner so if I ever have questions, need clarification or guidance I know I can talk to her" (Interview, 11/6/15). Asma, as previously mentioned, has been in contact with Muslim female psychiatrists through her mother which has helped guide her tremendously. Unlike Layla and Asma, Maryam has not had

mentors in her field of nutrition, yet serves as a mentor for others in her community who are

entering the field.

> I am now helping girls in my community who want to go into nutrition and I'm doing a
>
> lot of research I wish I had done prior to choosing this field. I wish that I could have had
>
> a mentor, I may have chosen a different track in my field." (Interview, 12/17/15)

Yusra, who has an aunt who has a dentist, has said it has been helpful to have someone to

refer to. Yusra also works weekends at her aunt's dental office, she said knowing people in her

field has helped "give motivation, and if you ever start to doubt yourself, they've been there and

they've been through it" (Interview, 12/29/15). Rima shared, "I have a friend who graduated

already from nursing. She's Muslim which helps me out a lot so that we can relate to each

other" (Interview, 1/18/16). Aisha, who is studying law, shared, "I know many Muslim and

Arab women in law and it has been very helpful to have others in my field" (Interview, 2/10/16).

Related to Muslim female mentorship is the increase of Muslim Arab female presence in career

fields.

   Increase in Muslim Arab female presence in certain fields. A concept that resonated

with a few of the participants was the need for an increase in Muslim Arab female presence in

many career fields. This increase in presence was mentioned as a motivator to pursue a

particular field which would in turn be helpful to the Muslim Arab-American communities. The

fields that were mentioned by the participants which need more Muslim Arab women include

mental health, media, and politics. Media and politics were mentioned by several of the

participants as ones in which the Muslim Arab-American community does not encourage

females to pursue. When interviewing Asma and discussing her future career goals of becoming

a doctor in the mental health profession, she indicated that there needs to be more mental health

awareness in the Muslim and Arab communities which is one of the reasons she is entering the field. She stated, "I think the Muslim woman would be more helpful to the other Muslim woman. They would feel more comfortable going to them" (Interview, 12/1/15) in reference to cultural and religious sensitivities. Layla also reiterated that Muslim Arabs would feel more comfortable with those like them in reference to counselors in schools, "A white American raised person is not going to understand where our immigrant families come from . . . having that knowledge where we come from, and what our culture is about is what relates to the students" (Interview, 11/6/15) was stated in reference to cultural and religious norms and values. During the focus group, Layla spoke further about the need for mental health workers who are culturally aware and sensitive. She told a story about a patient who was Muslim during a rotation:

> He didn't have anybody he could relate to religion-wise because he had requested a prayer calendar and nobody knew what he was talking about. He needed a therapist that could understand what he was talking about. He felt stuck. I helped him and told him to speak to a social worker and helped him with his spiritual and cultural needs. (Focus group, 3/6/16)

The need for an increase in presence in media and politics also arose during the focus group. Deema said that she had taken a journalism class and her professor had mentioned that there has been an increase in Arabs and Muslims taking journalism classes. She explained, "the reason is because they see the news portraying them wrong." In her interview, Deema spoke about a Muslim Arab-American female state representative and she shared, "I know she is one of us and she actually made it through all of that political nastiness and she's up there representing us, she is one of my role models, she encourages me every day" (Interview, 3/23/16). Deema also has a wish that Muslim Arab women's presence in fields such as politics and activism would

increase and that hijab would become normalized. That when a Muslim Arab woman speaks on an issue or applies for a job, that her culture and religion are irrelevant to her knowledge and that her hijab will not be a topic of discussion. When speaking about a Muslim female activist that has media presence in relation to her own goals she stated, "I thought if I am ever up there they're just going to put my name and I will just happen to wear a scarf and nobody will have to be told I'm Arab or Muslim or Middle Eastern" (Interview, 3/23/16).

Related to the increase of Muslim Arab female presence, several of the participants indicated a greater purpose for Muslim women to receive an education beyond their own personal aspirations; which is to better the Muslim/Arab community. Maha explained that, "Muslim women should be educated in different fields in a broad and general manner, and each of them should have their own specialty in one field. Together, they can build a more diverse and strong community." (Interview, 1/27/16). Noor made a similar statement regarding the purpose of education for Muslim women, "women in the Muslim world hold a purpose in everything, they hold an extra purpose in educating the world" (Email correspondence, 2/26/16). Asma said in reference to the Muslim Arab-American community: "The more people that are educated the more we can accomplish, so my end goal after education is to help war-torn and third-world countries. Education as a whole progresses our community" (Interview, 2/24/16). Along the same lines, Manar said, "the purpose of education is to empower Muslim women" (Interview, 3/1/16).

The previous section highlighted the views of female educational attainment within the Muslim Arab-American community. Those views were in relation to the discouragement and encouragement of particular fields, conflicting views of particular fields of study, as well as the need to positively contribute to the community through education.

Discrimination and Islamophobia's Impact on Social and Academic Decisions.

During the interviews and the focus group, the participants were asked about topics related to discrimination and their identities as Muslim Arab-American women. While none of the women reported experiencing explicit bias, they spoke about the impact their identities have on their academic and social lives. At the conclusion of many of the interviews, I walked out with the participant and our chats would often turn to politics and discrimination. Islamophobia and political discourse were at the forefront of many of my participants' minds. All of the women live and attend school in a city, which has a large population of Muslims and Arabs therefore according to them they were not confronted with discrimination directly. However, throughout the interviews and focus group it became apparent that Islamophobia and anti-Arab discrimination has impacted particular choices made by the participants. Several of the participants felt that due to Islamophobia they have to work extra hard to prove themselves academically. Several of them have also relayed the fact that they often feel like they have to always be representatives of their religion and culture.

Comfortable being around other Muslims and Arabs. Throughout the interview process, the word "comfort" was mentioned quite a bit by the participants. The participants spoke about the importance of being comfortable in the context of their school and work environment. The participants cited choosing to attend local institutions because of their level of comfort with the large Muslim populations. This seems to stem from the current climate in which Muslims and Arabs are often singled out, therefore, having a large Muslim and Arab population provides a level of familiarity and support. Rima, Aisha, Asma, Manar, and Salma all spoke about the importance of attending an educational institution in which they felt comfortable by having other Muslims at their university as well as diversity. Rima said in her interview,

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"Muslims are my comfort zone" (Interview, 1/18/16). Rima proceeded to speak of her lack of exposure of discrimination due to the city in which she lives, "I don't see it [referring to discrimination] but I know in other states it's really, really bad. The media targets everyone, us, blacks, everyone. I guess it's our turn now" (Interview, 1/18/16). Aisha, who is pursuing a law degree, said she likes having other Muslims and Arabs in her university as she believes, "it is a comfort because Muslims and Arabs stand together and it's motivating especially in the current political climate … it is a source of comfort to have others like you and understand what you are going through" (Interview, 2/10/16). Asma said that she feels, "Muslims in Michigan have the privilege knowing that in Michigan there were going to be Muslims regardless of the institution" (Interview, 12/1/15). She also spoke about her feeling comfortable in her university in contrast to her high school experience: "in high school it was more of a big deal because me and my other friend were the only ones in hijab." Salma and Manar both stated that they had contemplated attending a university in another area but chose to stay in Michigan because of familiarity of the area and the diverse campuses. Salma, however, did say that had she received a scholarship elsewhere then she would have taken it despite feeling comfortable in her current surroundings. Layla was the only participant who spoke about feeling comfortable in the context of a work environment in terms of practicing her faith openly. She explained:

> Sometimes you'll feel like not doing things such as praying, you may feel uncomfortable praying at work but if you have someone else there you will want to pray together. You will feel more comfortable and you can relate to that person. (Interview, 11/6/15)

The participants spoke about feeling comfortable in their environment. This idea of comfort was tied to having a large number of Muslims and Arabs at their institutions. The participants also spoke about the importance of diversity yet often referred back to the large

number of Muslims and Arabs at their institutions. Layla said that while there are many Muslims and Arabs in her nursing program, "in the educational process, everyone is in it together, there are some Muslims and Arabs but it's mostly white people and they come from different places" (Interview, 11/6/15). Yusra mentioned a similar sentiment in relation to her university environment, "I like diversity and it's nice to have others who understand where you're coming from" (Interview, 12/29/15). Dalia said that while she only had one other Muslim and Arab women in her program, "I had a very positive experience at an urban university. I was able to meet many different types of people and others were accepting" (Interview, 1/16/16). Lama cited diversity as being more important than other Muslims and Arabs, "diversity is more important to me than having other Muslims and Arabs, as long as people around me are ok then I'm fine, it really depends on the people you are surrounded with" (Interview, 2/6/16).

   Islamophobia and its impact on social and academic lives. Islamophobia was often mentioned by the women as a motivator to work harder academically. Salma said she feels, "Muslim women have to work harder because of the bad reputation in the media and society" (Interview, 3/1/16). Dalia commented, "we shouldn't have to feel this way, but getting an education is a good way to show that women in Islam are not oppressed or confined to their homes and housewife duties" (Interview, 3/4/16). Deema also believes that education is a way to take away the misconceptions of Muslims:

>   It takes away the misconceptions people have of Muslim women and they teach their own kids that 'women can do this' so it not only teaches future generations but also breaks boundaries in society . . . it's kind of a resistance again racism, if you are educated it can help take this mentality away. (Interview, 3/23/16)

Deema's father also tells her to "do something big because you can be the face of Muslim women or Muslims in general" (Interview, 3/23/16). Salma also made a similar statement about the purpose of education, "You have to prove yourself, Muslim women often do have to work harder than others so that they can prove themselves" (Interview, 3/1/16). Aisha also made similar statement regarding Muslim women and education, "especially now [referring to political and social climate towards Muslims and Arabs] it is extremely important to get an education and learn about others and interact with people of different backgrounds" (Interview, 2/10/16).

While Aisha does not wear hijab herself, she told a story about a friend of hers in law school who wears hijab and always feels like she has to work extra hard when it comes to academic or work success because of her visible status as a Muslim woman. While Maha shared that she does not encounter many non-Muslims and non-Arabs, she mentioned that she believes that many women are not confident in their hijab because of negative perceptions of Muslim women and, "it may affect them pursuing the jobs or studies that they may want to pursue" (Interview, 1/27/16).

A few of the women mentioned that anti-Muslim discrimination has impacted them more so socially than academically. Yusra said she wants to do well academically regardless so Islamophobia does not impact her academically yet it often impacts her social interactions with others. She feels like she has to be extra nice or polite with others otherwise they will judge her religion based on her actions. She told a story which illustrates this:

> Somebody on campus needed a book from me and then they proceeded to ask about my religion and culture, I felt like I had to be extra nice and polite to show them the opposite of what is portrayed in the media. (Interview, 2/10/16)

Layla too, mentioned that while she feels like Islamophobia doesn't impact her in terms of academics, she feels like she has to be careful with how she behaves in public or else her behavior may be used to generalize Muslims and Arabs. She said, "I sometimes have to stop and think 'I can't act like this or do that' but then other times I don't think about it, it just kind of happens" (Interview, 2/17/16). Asma also spoke about the social impact of Islamophobia, "I feel like most people only see the negative when they see Muslims so I feel like I always have to be smiling and talking and showing that not all Muslim women are oppressed and uneducated" (Interview, 2/24/16). Rima stated that while she has not had any issues regarding harassment, she does feel more comfortable around Muslims and Arabs, but she mentioned, "I hope that people are not afraid because they're Muslim just because we are targeted in the media. Don't be afraid, let people know who Muslims really are. Explain whenever you can, don't be aggressive, however, because that proves what the media is saying" (Interview, 1/18/16). When interviewing Deema on this issue, she shared several instances of having to prove herself and the expectation that Muslims are expected to constantly condemn violence and represent their religion:

> Why can't I just be me? Why do I have to condemn terrorists, I'm not a part of this. I had this period of time where people would ask me about it and I would say 'it's bad what happened, my prayers go out to them' but what am I supposed to do, I'm not a part of this. I then realized that being a Muslim is being compassionate, you need to be compassionate and condemn these things. I realized 'oh my gosh, I need to go back to my religion' so then now I say 'this isn't us, it's not what we believe in. (Interview, 3/23/16)

Three of the women have reported incidents in which people made assumptions about them upon seeing their hijab. Dalia said that when people see her hijab "they somehow automatically assume I am an English Language Learner even though I was born here and have no accent (Interview, 1/16/16). Deema has similar encounters as Dalia in that people assume English is her second language upon seeing her hijab, "people will ask me if writing papers all the time is hard for me…it's constant. I don't even notice I have these interactions anymore. I've come to terms with it, it's become the norm" (Interview, 3/23/16). According to Manar, "many people find me unapproachable because of my hijab or that they can't speak to me even though I'm very open" (Interview, 1/15/16). Maryam stated that she knows several women who have removed their hijab due to fears of being targeted due to their identity. She told a story of her mother wanting her brother to accompany her to take an exam in another city for her own safety, and she said that she knows other mothers who are concerned with their children's safety in this current climate. On the other hand, Maryam believes, "there are a lot of positives because it's allowing non-Muslims to approach Muslims and ask questions about Islam" (Interview, 12/17/15).

Alternately, Lama and Noor both stated that neither Islamophobia nor anti-Arab discrimination affects them. Lama said that she has not dealt with any harassment nor does she think much about it. She said, "Religion is for me and how I live my life and I don't use it to make me different or separate myself from others" (Interview, 2/6/16). Additionally, Noor also made a similar statement to Lama's regarding religion as a personal matter, she said that she has not encountered any issues regarding her religion or ethnicity and, "I pretty much just do me. I put my religion and race to the side" (Interview, 2/6/16).

As reported in the previous section, none of the participants reported experiencing explicit discrimination. However, Islamophobia and Anti-Arab bias has impacted the social and academic decisions of the participants.

Identifying as Muslim. When discussing the issue of identity in context of American society and cultural background, one of the most prevalent ideas that arose regarding identity was the idea that being a Muslim was more of an identifier than being an Arab. When asked about how they identify themselves, the majority said that they recognize themselves first as Muslim and then consider themselves more American than Arab. The majority of the participants wear hijab which identify them with being Muslim first when people first meet them.

Layla explained, "my hijab tells people I'm Muslim . . . but I will say Arab-American even though people think Arab and Muslim are synonymous" (Interview, 2/17/16). Asma also said that she identifies first and foremost with being a Muslim because that's what people see initially when they see her hijab; "I say Muslim-American plus when I say Palestinian, they're like 'Pakistan?' so that doesn't work, but Muslim is more of my identity anyways" (Interview, 2/24/16). Manar and Salma also reiterated the fact that they also identify first with being Muslim because of their hijab, but will clarify when somebody wants to know their ethnic background. Like the other participants, Dalia felt that she identifies first with her religion over her culture:

> It's just so much easier to go with 'I'm Muslim' because I know 100% that's me but I
> also know that I'm American and I'm Palestinian. I love to identify myself with Muslim
> first because that defines me more than my culture . . . it's the way I live my life . . . I
> follow Islam first before anything else. (Interview, 3/4/16)

Dalia further stated, "I feel like we really embraced the American culture while trying to maintain our Islamic values as well as adding our Arab culture to the mix…we are a mix of everything." Manar also spoke about the Muslim-American culture which she believes intertwines the culture of the first-generation, with Islam, and with American values. Manar believes that "In the diaspora more people are more religious than cultural . . . there is definitely a Muslim-American culture" (Interview, 3/1/16). Deema had a unique perspective on the complexity of her identity in her interview she said that she sees herself as multicultural because

I can't decide and I can't dismiss one or the other. I'm Arab, I'm Muslim, I'm American, I'm Middle Eastern if that's another category . . . but if someone forced me to choose, it would be hard but religion is very important to me and to be Muslim and to represent that….so I say I'm Muslim Arab-American multicultural . . . American has to be there, and Arab and Muslim has to be there. (Interview, 3/23/16)

Deema also spoke about her hope to normalize hijab and Muslim female identity and said in reference to speaking to a larger audience: "If I am ever up there, they're just going to put up my name and I will just happen to wear a scarf and nobody will have to be told I'm Arab or Muslim or Middle Eastern" (Interview, 3/23/16).

The topic of identity was discussed at several points during the focus group. It began with the participants speaking about the confusion some feel when describing their identity. Salma reiterated a point that she had made in a previous interview and said:

It's not confusing at all, I'm more American than I am Arab. I can't define myself as Yemeni, because there's nothing about me that's Yemeni. I have no Yemeni culture in me. It's more religion than culture, religion I do care about, culture really doesn't matter to me. (Focus group, 3/6/16)

Salma later said in relation to the way media and society view her identity, "Yeah I'm not going to change my religion, if they don't like it screw them" Later on in the session, the topic of identity and culture came up once again. Deema said, "We are the hyphen in between. We are not Arab we are not American. Islam is what is anchoring us. Muslim will always be there but it's the ethnicity that's changing." In response, Layla relayed her fear of the slow disappearance of Arab identity, but she did say in relation to Islam being primary identifier, "that's how it should be." The participants then discussed how only the positive aspects of the Arab culture may stay and Deema said she feels as if that's a positive in that many of the concepts of what is deemed appropriate for women comes from culture. Salma then made this statement regarding the changing dynamic within the Muslim Arab-American community, "I feel like it's all becoming one thing though, one identity, there isn't as much diversity as much as we think there is besides our skin color."

Summary

The focus of this chapter was on the factors that impact second-generation Muslim Arab-American women's experiences, perceptions, and choices regarding their education. All of the participants were currently or have completed their post-secondary education. While there were some nuances in the women's experiences, there were also many similarities in their experiences and perceptions regarding the role of education in their lives. As presented in this chapter, there were five main categories which emerged through data analysis: (a) family impact on educational choices, (b) economic opportunity and potential (c) community impact on educational choices, (d) discrimination/Islamophobia and (e) identity. In these categories, there were four major findings. All of the participants were encouraged to receive an education by their families, yet there was a strong preference for STEM fields and fields in which there was

more prestige, economic stability, and economic potential. In terms of the Muslim Arab-American community, there is a strong preference for fields of study which held higher economic potential such as STEM fields. There is a gender component regarding the fields of study encouraged or discouraged within the community. In relation to discrimination and Islamophobia, the women all reported not experiencing explicit bias yet indicated feeling comfortable in their environments in which there was a large Muslim and Arab population. The women indicated feeling the need to work harder due to their identity as Muslim Arab-American women as well as representing their culture and religion. The women also reported identifying as Muslim-American over their parents' Arab cultural values. All of these factors impact the educational choices and identity of the women in this study.

The findings of this study as well as discussion of the results in context of the literature will be explored in Chapter V. Implications of this research based on collected data, future research, as well as concluding thoughts will also be presented in the following chapter.

Chapter V: Conclusion and Implications

This phenomenological study sought to look at the factors that contribute to the experiences and perceptions of education of second-generation Muslim Arab-American women. This study focused on education, intersections of gender and identity, and their impact on the women's educational experiences. Despite the diversity in the experiences of Muslim Arab-American women, the women in this study had similar views on family and community impact on education, gender roles, and their complex identities as Muslim Arab-American women. The central question of this research was: What factors influence the development of Muslim Arab-American women's educational identity? The four sub-questions guiding this research were:

- How different are second-generation Muslim Arab-American women's educational aspirations from those of their families?

- How different are second-generation Muslim Arab-American women's educational aspirations from those of their community?

- How do Muslim Arab-American women perceive the purpose of education both individually and for the community?

- How do second-generation Muslim Arab-American women perceive themselves with regard to their gender roles?

In this chapter, the findings from this study are grouped by theme. To summarize, data were collected from thirteen women through a total of twenty semi-structured interviews and one focus group. There were four main findings that arose from this study: (a) All of the women

were encouraged to receive higher education and there was a strong family preference to pursue

STEM based fields; (b) According to the women, the Muslim Arab-American community seems

to prefer fields with higher economic potential. Yet, there are certain fields that are deemed more

appropriate for women; (c) The women reported no explicit bias or discrimination, yet felt more

comfortable in their predominately Muslim/Arab communities. The women also felt the need to

work hard as well as to represent their religion and culture within American society; and (d) The

women identified as Muslim-American first over their parents' cultural and ethnic identities.

This chapter concludes with limitations of the research, future recommendations for research, as

well as my concluding thoughts.

Family Impact on Educational Choices

The families of the women in this study all valued high academic achievement as

evidenced by their pursuit of higher education and their families' expectations regarding higher

education. The women's families encouraged them to pursue fields that would create higher

economic stability and potential with a preference for the study of STEM (science, technology,

engineering, and math) fields. Of the thirteen women participating in this study, seven were

pursuing STEM based fields. There seem to be several factors that contributed to the women's

families' expectations on educational choices. Those factors include the importance of education

in immigrant families as well as cultural preference for academic achievement.

The second-generation women in this study were all pursuing higher education despite

the diversity in level of education of the women's parents. Not all of the women shared

information regarding their parents' educational backgrounds during the interviews, but of the

six who did, four of them mentioned that their parents have at least a Bachelor's degree. This

aligns with research on Middle Eastern immigrants' educational level; which shows that Arab

immigrants tend to have high level of education (Baum & Flores, 2011). The push for high

educational attainment for the children of Middle Eastern immigrants aligns with research by

Glick and White (2004) in which immigrant families had high academic expectations.

Regardless, of parental educational level, the women of this study were expected to do better

than their first-generation parents which aligns with research by Pew Research Center (2013)

which indicates that the second-generation tends to be more educated than the first-generation.

This was best illustrated in Deema's story in which she shared that her parents encouraged her

and her sisters to pursue higher education so they do not struggle as they did for not having

college degrees.

As research suggests, immigrant parents have cultural expectations for their second-

generation children. In the Middle East, one's education level is the primary measure of social

mobility (Salehi-Isfahani, et al., 2014) which would explain the push to pursue careers with a

greater level of prestige and earning potential. I would argue that this view of social mobility

would impact the views of the immigrant generation which in turn is transmitted to their second-

generation children. The women in this study referred to their parents' views that education is

the primary means to receive a job with financial security and their own perspectives indicate

that the parents' beliefs were transmitted to their daughters. In the Middle East, females often

perform equally with their male counterparts in science and math fields and sometimes

outperform the males (Salehi-Isfahani, et al, 2014; Durrani, 2015) and Muslim communities in

other countries have high expectations for their daughters to enter prestige fields (Ahmad, 2011)

as well. This would account for Muslim Arab-Americans parents' expectations for their

daughters to enter such fields. Asma, Manar, and Lama are pursuing the medical field and

indicated parental enthusiasm for their fields of study. Asma, in particular, shared her mother's

push and encouragement to enter the medical field. As suggested by the literature (Ahmad, 2011; Rasmi, Daly, & Chuang, 2014), the medical fields are especially encouraged by Middle Eastern parents, therefore, this ideal would be ingrained into the cultural values parents pass on to their children.

The women in this study report that their parents and communities expect them to receive an education and to achieve academically. The expectation to achieve as a cultural ideal is reflected in Manar's statement when she said:

> In our culture, there is a strong push to fields that you are going to find a job in, such as ones related to math and science. White people allow their kids to explore more interests whereas Arab parents focus their kids more (Interview, 1/15/16)

If Arabs are accustomed to such norms regarding higher education, these views would be passed on to their children through the parents' culture. The higher educational structure in the Middle East as well as academic expectations of immigrants would impact the families' views of what constitutes academic success.

The women all reported familial support for their pursuit of higher education as well as to succeed in their future careers. As mentioned, there is a preference for fields that carry more prestige and are economically more stable. Deema, Maha, and Maryam were the only three who showed any indication of their parents' lack of contentment of their chosen fields of study. Deema shared that while her parents are supportive of her and her sisters receiving any education, they were hesitant about her choice of field of study which led her to add a psychology major to appease them. Maryam's hesitations regarding her chosen field, nutrition, may be a consequence of her parents' lack of enthusiasm of her field of study. Maha was the only one who despite her parents' hesitation regarding her studying business said that she was

adamant about continuing to pursue her chosen career path. The other women in this study indicated not only parental support for the pursuit of higher education but also of their chosen fields of study. The women reported that they felt free to make their own educational and career decisions, but they also acknowledged that their parents' beliefs and experiences had an impact on their choices. None of the women reported feeling forced to study a particular field by their parents. Parental views on education were passed to the women through cultural transmission which became ingrained into the women's own views on education and careers. Therefore, educational and career decisions were not compulsory but they were strongly influenced by family and community norms.

Community Impact on Educational Choices

The women in this study live in an area with a large Muslim and Arab population. Each woman in this study has ties to a local mosque, from which they were recruited to participate in this study. The mosques provide both social events as well as religious services. Through their mosques and the cities in which they live their social networks are formed thus providing a sense of community. The mosque serves as a place for those with shared religious values and identities to come together to provide religious and social support for the congregants. The mosque as a place of emotional support and shared values align with the attributes of a community as defined by McMillan and Davis (1986). Outside of the mosque, there is a large Muslim and Arab population which provides a sense of comfort as reported by the women which extends their sense of community beyond the walls of their mosque.

The mosque community and surrounding Muslim and Arab community serves as what Banks (2010) describes as a microculture. A microculture is described as one that forms when one's cultural or religious identity evolves from being a majority culture to a minority culture

upon immigration. The area in which the women of this study live serves as a microculture in that it is comprised of a large Muslim and Arab population which are both minority religious and cultural communities within the United States. This particular microculture is unique in that Arabs and Muslims are considered cultural and religious minorities in the United States but are of the majority in the city in which the women reside. The mosque community and surrounding area serves as a reinforcement of family values which arise from Arab culture and Muslim religious views. When the women referred to their community, they referred to their social networks that were formed through their mosques with those who adhere to the same religion and Arab cultural backgrounds.

Muslim Arab-American community held views of education impacts a woman's own views on education. As reported by the women, the women reported feeling that their communities support female educational attainment; yet, the women discussed several issues that impacts their perceptions on education and career choices for women. The women shared that they are expected to marry and have children and not take too long to pursue particular fields of study that would delay starting a family. The women shared that they were also expected to pursue prestigious fields of study as indicated in the data. These views created a tension that was best illustrated in the focus group discussion regarding work/family balance as well as the concerns of gender-mixing in particular career fields. As evidenced by the data, there were conflicting views regarding female educational attainment from the community and this often came across in the women's discussions. The importance of the community in shaping the women's views on education and career aspirations is also illustrated in Maha, Noor, Asma, and Manar's statements regarding their purpose of education. They all made similar statements in which they believe the purpose of education for a Muslim Arab-American woman is to

contribute to their Muslim Arab community. The women's desire to use their education to benefit their community is indicative of the obligation they feel towards their cultural and religious community. This view of the purpose of education also indicates the role Muslim women play in that their choices are expected to fulfill a larger purpose.

Preference of Certain Fields of Study

As previously mentioned, there is a preference for fields that are STEM based as they provide more economic stability, higher salaries, and prestige as evidenced by discussions of salary as a motivation to enter certain fields. There were a few fields of study that were discouraged by the participants' families in general, those being: business, law, media, and politics. The preference of some fields of study were based on economic factors as well as gender-based issues.

Two of the women, Noor and Maha were studying business. While Noor did not encounter any issues regarding the study of finance from her family or community, Maha did from her family. Maha indicated her parents' misinterpretation of the business field and mentioned gender-mixing as a concern as well as the assumption that majoring in business would mean "owning a shop." In looking at examples of the educational structure in the Middle East ("The Egyptian Education System," 2015; "Lebanon: An Education System," 2015) business majors are often pursued by students who tested lower on the national high school examination. Additionally, due to the prestige surrounding STEM fields and the lower test scores required to become a business major in the Middle East. The low-test scores required for business degrees in the Middle East and the resulting lower prestige in addition to business being perceived to be socially inappropriate are arguably the reasons that some of the women's families did not encourage business.

There were a few women who indicated conflicts regarding their fields of study and these were often related to economic opportunities. Maryam described some conflict from her family regarding her field of study, nutrition, in which her mother and father suggested entering a more lucrative field like her older sister who is studying to be a Physician's Assistant. Layla's brother suggested that she study pharmacy instead of nursing as she would be paid more in pharmacy. Dalia has family members who are concerned about the poor salary potential of a teacher. Maha, whose conflict was gender-based and not economic based, did not seem to be impacted by her father's perception of the field of business. Of those who indicated pushback and conflicting views on education, Maryam was the only one who seemed to be considering her parents' educational expectations. Maryam indicated concerns about her career choice and feels as if she needs to obtain a Master's degree in her field to get a better job. She also mentioned that she wishes that she had researched the field of nutrition more thoroughly before entering into the field so that she would have chosen a more ideal concentration due to her lack of contentment in her current position. It was unclear whether her parents' views impacted her views. Deema also mentioned to adding a social science major to appease her parents as there was initial concern to her studying literature. The women in this study expressed conflicts that are consistent in the literature regarding majors of study in Arab families in that Arab families prefer fields of study with higher level of prestige (Rasmi, Daly, & Chuang, 2014).

The field of law was also mentioned as one that is not encouraged by families by several of the women. However, Aisha, who is studying law, indicated that because of her Lebanese parents' expectations to enter either into law or medicine that they were content with her field of study. It is not clear why Aisha's parents view law as a prestigious field of study and why the other women felt that law was a discouraged field of study. During the focus group, Salma and

Deema discussed that certain fields of law would compromise the religious values of a Muslim because of the assumption that a lawyer would need to lie for their client. Salma shared that the law students in her social network are entering fields of law such as civil rights, human rights, and immigration law and therefore not seen as a compromise of religious values. Layla, on the other hand, feels that law is discouraged as she believes it is hard to find a job and therefore not as economically stable as other fields of study. Law, like business, is one of the fields that requires lower test scores than STEM fields on the national high school exams in the Middle East. Like business, I hypothesize that the low test scores required for law degrees and therefore lower prestige is the reason that some of the women's families did not encourage law. Ahmad (2011) mentions law as a field of study that Muslim women are encouraged to pursue due to prestige, yet the focus group participants indicated otherwise. However, Aisha shared that her community and family did not share the same perspective regarding the field of law. It could be attributed to mosque community differences, as Aisha does not attend the same mosque as the majority of the women in this study and has a different social network. This suggests that the perceptions of particular fields of study may vary depending on culture or community demographics. Further investigation is needed to understand the reason some families within the Muslim Arab communities would find fields such as law as prestigious and not compromising their religious morals and others do not.

Gender and academic choices. Gender-based issues also impacted the encouragement of certain fields of study for the women. According to the women in this study, the Muslim Arab-American community, in general, values high academic achievement for women. Fields of study that were encouraged were ones with a higher level of prestige as well as economic potential, much like the families' expectations of academic achievement. When it came to

Muslim Arab-American community expectations the discussion often turned to issues of gender. There were several gender-based issues regarding the fields of study deemed appropriate for Muslim Arab-American women which align with those fields discouraged by the families of the women. As previously mentioned, Aisha, Lama, and Noor attend a different mosque than the other participants and they made similar statements regarding fields of work for women in their mosque community. Lama and Noor both indicated that in their community, for the women, there was a great deal of diversity of career fields and that they didn't feel like there were fields of study women in their community were not encouraged to pursue.

In addition to the cultural expectation to succeed in prestigious careers, there were gender-based concerns regarding particular fields of study. The interpretation of the field of business in the Muslim Arab-American communities are often based on gender concerns. Maha, who is majoring in business, mentioned her father is concerned about her interactions with males in the corporate world. However, she did not allow this to stop her from pursuing the business field as she said she is passionate about breaking stereotypes of Muslim women in the corporate world. During the focus group, Deema and Layla spoke about others in the community misinterpreting the field of business in that it encourages gender-mixing. Similarly, in politics and media-based fields, the concern from the families and the communities is that the fields were not fit for women as the women would be "out in the open." The gender-mixing concern in business and the concern of women being visible in politics in media would indicate a fear of judgment from community members. This is also reflected in the discussion of women not being encouraged to work while in school as the families would be judged by others. These concerns would align with research on the protection of women's reputation within the Muslim and Arab communities (Naber, 2006a; Ajrouch, 2004) as well as research on Muslim women's concerns of

behavior in public in front of other Muslims (Mir, 2009) as the concerns with gender-mixing and how others view Muslim women seems to relate to others' perceptions of female reputation. Deema shared that she believes that for some gender-mixing is not a concern in fields such as in medicine or nursing as the women are seen to be helping others, whereas in business they are not. This view also relates back to the purpose of education shared by the women which is to improve the community.

Noor, however, who is studying finance, did not seem to have any issues regarding the pursuit of this sector of the business field like Maha did. Lama, and Aisha, who are also from Noor's mosque community, shared that their mosque community is diverse in terms of women and their fields of study and that there weren't fields that were discouraged for women. Noor and Lama made similar statements in which they said that the women in their mosque community who feel any boundaries to education or the pursuit of certain fields create the boundaries themselves. The other women in this study did not make such statements and mentioned several factors that would hold a woman back from pursuing particular fields of study. I hypothesize that the different perceptions of the field of business held by Lama, Aisha, and Noor are attributed to differences in community and social network views. These women shared that, in their community, women were in diverse fields whereas the other women in this study did not make such statements. Further investigation is needed to study the various perceptions and nuances existent within Muslim Arab-American communities.

Marriage, gender roles, and discouragement of fields of study. An issue that was explored throughout the study was that of marriage and gender roles and their impact on educational choices. The majority of my peer group when I was the age of the women of this study within the Muslim Arab-American community were either married, engaged, or actively

seeking a spouse. Based on my experiences with Muslim Arab-American communities I had fully expected that some of the women in this study would be married or engaged. However, none of the participants of this study were at the time of the study so they were not speaking from personal experience regarding marriage when the topic was discussed. They spoke based on the experiences with family members and friends from within their communities. When I asked them about navigating gender roles, working, and marriage the women did not speak in-depth on the topic as it did not currently impact them in the short-term. Several of the women had mentioned that a Muslim Arab female was expected to marry and/or pursue higher education, but that they are not considered mutually exclusive. Dalia and Layla both shared that if a woman did not seek higher education but got married and started a family it would be considered acceptable as she would be doing something that is with merit. This relates back to the purpose of education that Muslim women feel that they should improve the community.

In her own community, Layla has witnessed many females not pursuing higher education because their families often push them to marry young and therefore they feel there is no purpose in going to college as their husband will take care of them. Layla has also noticed that while several women in her community may choose the path of marriage and kids over education initially, that many go back to school in later years. On a related note, Maryam said that she has noticed that while some people in her community may still marry young many hold off on having children until they continue their education. Maryam's older sister, is married with children and pursuing a graduate degree. Salma said that many of her friends are marrying young because they saw that many in the previous generation who delayed marriage and are now struggling to marry as they are considered old. Asma said that based on those she knows early marriage will either stop someone from entering higher education to begin with or they may

complete their undergraduate studies but not pursue graduate education. This relates back to the discouragement of medical school in the Muslim Arab-American communities; as suggested in this study, pursuing medicine is seen to take too long and would delay marriage and starting a family. Layla, Asma, Maryam, and Manar all shared the same concern regarding the discouragement from those in their communities to graduate degrees that would take too long and delay marriage. While none of the women reported particular barriers to pursuing higher education in general, family obligations did impact the pursuit of certain fields of study as also reported in Rabadi's (2013) study. Read and Oselin (2008) have written that while there is a high rate of education within the community, there is low rate of employment; that there is often a contradiction of the desire for social mobility but a maintaining of gender norms within the family. This would indicate the reasoning behind the discouragement of fields which may be too much time away from the family and/or delaying marriage and starting a family. While the issue of marriage and raising a family did not impact the women of this study currently, the tension between the desire for social mobility and gender norm maintenance shapes the women's perspectives regarding their educational and career choices.

The concept of female obligation to her family was shown in the discussion regarding women working and raising children in the focus group. The concern was that women who worked too much, such as medical doctors, an example the women gave, would turn off potential suitors and either not get married or delay marriage. An additional concern was that women who worked too much outside of the home would not be able to raise their children properly. For instance, Salma and Layla suggested in the focus group that for a woman, working outside the home too much would be considered neglectful for their family. Salma also said that when she has young children at home that she does not plan to work, indicating that she believes that it is

the husband's primary responsibility to provide for the family. This view aligns with research by Hu, Pazaki, Al-Qubbaj, and Cutler (2009) which asserts that Muslim cultures believe that it is the husband's primary responsibility to provide for his family. While the data suggested that it was acceptable for a woman to work while raising a family, there should be a balance between work and raising children. These ideas of women being educated yet prioritizing their families align with research by Read and Oselin (2008) regarding high educational attainment and family obligations keeping women from working outside the home. So, while none of the women were engaged or married, the discussions regarding female family obligations indicate that the women believe that they should maintain a balance between work and family life and not allow others, such as nannies, to raise their children. The expectation for women to achieve academically yet raise children indicates that the woman's education is one that moves beyond economic gains. This relates back to the statements that Maha, Noor, and Manar made regarding the purpose of education for Muslim women which is to benefit the community and as a source of empowerment. While none of the women discussed the role of men in child-rearing during the focus group, it was suggested that it is the women's primary responsibility to raise children.

The idea of a man's primary responsibility to provide for his family could also relate back to the discouragement to not work while in school which ensued during the focus group. The women shared that many women they know are discouraged from working while in school by their fathers as it is his responsibility to provide for his family. Deema, Salma, and Layla all agreed that it would not be socially acceptable to be seen by other Muslims working in certain jobs. Deema shared that it would be considered dishonorable for the women to work in certain positions, such as in a grocery store, and the assumption other Muslims would make would be that their family is lower class or the father could not properly provide for his family. Deema

believes that this concept of honor comes from the parents' culture and home countries. This

discussion aligns with research on women's honor and the manner in which Muslim women's

behavior is held to a particular standard within the Muslim Arab-American communities

(Ajrouch, 2004; Naber, 2006a; Mir, 2014) as well as research relating to the concern of how

other Muslims may view Muslim women (Mir 2009; Mir, 2014; Ryan, 2011; Sarroub, 2002).

The women shared that they believe these standards are unfair during the discussion on family

honor and women's choices of work during the focus group. The women's views on this topic

indicate that there may be a shift in the future. The first generation are the ones that hold these

views regarding honor and what is acceptable and the women found those views unfair. Since

the women believe these views come from culture, acculturation of the second-generation may

filter out these perspectives. This is consistent with Ajrouch's (2000) views of the second-

generation which asserts that the second-generation have either transmitted or lost cultural values

from their parents' homelands.

There is an indication that there may be a shift regarding gender roles in the Muslim

Arab-American communities as mentioned by several of the women in this study. Rima's

mentions that families are more open-minded than they were in the past and, therefore, the

families in her community have encouraged their daughters to go to school. The research

indicates that there are high academic expectations for the women (Salehi-Isfahani, et al, 2014;

Read & Oselin, 2008).   Rima's statement alludes to previously existent barriers within Muslim

Arab-American communities regarding female academic achievement. These barriers, according

to this research, are related to Arab culture and gender norms (Rabadi, 2013; Sarroub, 2001;

2002). Sarroub (2001; 2002) writes about Yemeni-American females in the same city as the

women in this study who were not encouraged to pursue higher education. While this study did

not focus on countries of origin, there are findings of interest for the five Yemeni-American women in this study, including Rima. All five Yemeni-American women; Deema, Salma, Layla, Manar, and Rima were encouraged to pursue higher education unlike the women in Sarroub's (2001; 2002) studies. Rima was referring to the phenomena and/or the time frame that Sarroub (2001;2002) describes in her studies. This seems to indicate a shift regarding female educational attainment that occurred since Sarroub published her studies or other factors that would need to be further explored.

As suggested in the data, there is a great deal of pressure that falls on the women of the Muslim Arab-American community. There is an expectation to enter into fields with good economic potential such as medicine, yet there are constraints as mentioned above such as the time it takes to become a doctor which may impact marriage and childbearing. The women indicated that they were expected to succeed academically and to pursue fields with economic stability. The women were also expected to marry and have children. While women were encouraged to enter fields that are prestigious, there were also conflicts regarding the amount of time the studies would take away from starting a family. Additionally, if women were to pursue graduate studies and fields with high economic potential then they would need to properly balance family life with work life. There is also the discouragement of certain fields of study from both the families and their social networks which would limit the women in terms of their educational and career pursuits. The women also indicated the desire to enter fields which help others or benefit their community which seems to supersede the expectation to make a lot of money. All of the tensions regarding the desire to succeed academically, to be economically stable, as well as to balance family with career life shapes their decision-making processes. The women in this study have received messages from both their families and their communities in

relation to their identities and their future pursuits. An added factor to consider is their place within American society as a member of a minority culture and religion and as women.

Islamophobia

The women in this study all indicated that they did not experience or have not experienced explicit forms of bias or what they perceive as discrimination such as hate speech or negative comments due to their identities. However, several of the women suggested that Islamophobia has had an impact on their social and academic lives. The women indicated feeling more comfortable with other Muslims and Arabs and the need to be a representative for their religion in their social and academic lives. This comfort and the need to be a representative of their religion indicates that Islamophobia does indeed impact them socially and academically.

While none of the women said they have experienced any overt displays of discrimination, the concept of 'comfort' arose a great deal in the data. The women spoke about the need to feel comfortable in their work and school environments by having other Muslims and Arabs surrounding them. Rima, Aisha, Asma, Manar, and Salma all mentioned comfort as a motivator, in addition to finances, to attend an institution in the area. Aisha spoke about the importance of the need to feel comfortable by having other Muslims and Arabs in her university and cited the current political climate as a justification. Layla spoke about the need to feel comfortable in the work environment, as it would be easy to openly practice her faith and pray at work if there was another Muslim in her workplace. Asma was the only participant who had attended a high school in which Muslims were in the minority. She indicated that she did not have any issues and in fact believes that Muslims in Michigan are privileged due to the population and people's exposure to the religion and culture. This is in reference to the women living in an area which has one of the largest Muslim and Arab populations in the United States

(Schopmeyer, 2011). Yet, Asma said that she feels as if she always needs to smile to show that Muslim women are not oppressed. Manar also said that she has not outwardly experienced any discrimination, but also feels as if she may not be considered approachable due to her hijab. Related to the concept of comfort, is the desire for Muslim female mentorship. Layla, Asma, Maryam, Yusra, Rima, and Aisha shared that knowing other Muslim women in their field of study helps to guide them in that they can relate to the challenges they face as Muslim women in their field.

The women's desire to be around other Muslims and Arabs in their work and school environment suggests a fear of Islamophobia and an internalized form of discrimination. For instance, Maryam shared a story in which her mother sent her brother to accompany her for a test in another city for her own safety. She further shared that she knows several mothers who have these similar fears and she knows several women who have removed their hijabs out of concern. Rima also felt more comfortable around other Muslims despite having mentioned she has not felt any discrimination. The women's discussions about Islamophobia and the negative discourse about Muslims has been internalized by the women and impacts their academic choices and social behaviors. While they may state that have not been personally victimized by discrimination and Islamophobia, their desire to be around other Muslims due to shared experiences indicates that Islamophobia has an impact on their choices for social interactions, educational goals, and career pursuits. Muslim Arab-American women, in particular, are especially subjected to generalizations and stereotyping (Darraj, 2011; Jamarkani, 2011; Naber, 2006a; Naber, 2011) which accounts for the women's fears of discrimination and Islamophobia. All but two of the women wear hijab and are easily identified as Muslim which makes them more likely to be subjected to discrimination and Islamophobia.

Proving themselves and representing Islam. While none of the women said that they have experienced discrimination or bias due to their religion or culture, they cited having to prove themselves and work harder academically due to Islamophobia and anti-Arab bias. A few of the women also mentioned having to be careful in social situations so as not to portray Muslims or Arabs in a negative light. This perspective also relates back to Muslim women's purpose on education which is to educate others about their religion. Muslim women often feel a responsibility to represent their religion in a positive manner (Mir 2009; 2014; Ryan, 2011) due to the women's visibility regarding their hijab and manner of dress. As previously mentioned, all but two of the women wore hijab and are visibly identified as being Muslim. Like the issue of acceptable fields of study for Muslim women, and receiving an education to better their Muslim community, there is the added responsibility to be representatives of their religion and culture. The need to represent their religion and culture in a positive manner could also be seen in relation to improving the community. Therefore, there are two broader overarching ideals which impact the personal decisions of the women in this study-improving their communities and being positive representatives of their religion in an Islamophobic society.

Salma, Deema, Dalia, and Aisha related the purpose of education to representing Muslim women. Salma spoke of the need to work harder to prove herself in school to counter Islamophobia. Deema, Dalia, and Aisha spoke about this topic in reference to educating others about Islam and dispelling stereotypes. Deema's father told her that she needs to work hard and "to do something big" so that she can be a good representative of Muslim women. Deema has also shared that she wants to normalize hijab and work towards goals which would allow Muslim women to be represented positively in the media and dominant discourse. Maha spoke about representation in the work place, in which she said that she felt passionate about representing

Muslim women in a positive light by her behavior and job performance. Maryam recognizes the positives in Islamophobic discourse in that she believes it has made people more curious therefore giving her an opportunity to engage in meaningful dialogue.

Related to the previously mentioned studies Yusra, Layla, and Asma spoke about the issue of representation of their culture and religion in the social context. They shared instances in when they must be careful and not act in a certain way in public otherwise their less than stellar behavior will be used to generalize all Muslims and Arabs. There also seems to be a conflict in the women's own views on this topic. Salma, for instance, feels that Muslim women often have to work harder academically to help dispel myths and stereotypes of Muslim women. However, she mentioned in the focus group that if society does not like her identity that she will not change and "if they don't like it, screw them." Deema articulated the conflict regarding the pressure to speak for her religion and is best illustrated in this quote:

> Why can't I just be me? Why do I have to condemn terrorists, I'm not a part of this.   I had this period of time where people would ask me about it and I would say 'it's bad what happened, my prayers go out to them' but what am I supposed to do, I'm not a part of this.   I then realized that being a Muslim is being compassionate, you need to be compassionate and condemn these things.   I realized 'oh my gosh, I need to go back to my religion' so then now I say 'this isn't us, it's not what we believe in. (Interview, 3/23/16)

Deema's statement illustrates the dichotomy between wanting to be an individual and feeling the need to represent Islam and Muslims but at the same time accepting it not only as the norm but as part of what it means to be a Muslim. The women did not articulate the cost of representation in-depth on their psyches and identities. These conflicted feelings regarding representation is

discussed in literature by Liebow (2016) and Pyke (2010) in that by feeling the need to represent a group and dispel stereotypes it places a feeling of guilt on the individual for actions the he/she has not committed. By feeling the need to positively represent and defy negative stereotypes about members of their religion, the women have internalized society's views of Muslims. This adds another layer of tension of the identities of the women in this study in addition to their family and community expectations.

Salma expressed, regarding discrimination, that she would not complain about issues she may encounter in the work place as she says that, "pulling the race card" makes one appear weak. Noor and Lama made similar statements in which they both shared that their religion is a personal matter and they do not use it separate themselves from others. Salma, Noor, and Lama's statements arguably downplay the challenges some Muslim Arab-American women face relating to Islamophobia. Their statements suggested that discrimination is one that can be controlled by the individual and not as something that comes from the dominant society. This indicates a form of internalized oppression, as discussed by Pyke and Dang (2003), in that they separate themselves from others from their own communities who may experience or complain about discrimination. Noor and Lama also made statements that Muslim women who face challenges in pursuing an education do so because of self-imposed barriers. In making such statements they are engaging in what Pyke and Dang (2003) describe as "intraethnic othering." They are creating an 'us' and 'them' construct about women in their own communities who encounter challenges in pursuing their goals. In undermining the effects of Islamophobia and challenges that Muslim women may face, there may be the feeling of increased self-agency in addition to situating themselves as assimilated members of American society. These conflicts relate to Liebow's (2016) discussion relating to internalized oppression and agency in women

and Pyke's theory (2010) in which women of color sometimes downplay oppression and discrimination to protect themselves from the feeling of helplessness that arises from acknowledging oppression and discrimination. Additionally, the downplaying of people's experiences with discrimination and oppression is problematic in that it also excuses the behavior of those who engage in Islamophobic and discriminatory actions.

The women in this study indicated that they do not experience explicit acts of Islamophobia, yet the data suggests that it does impact their lives. The women say that they prefer to work and/or attend school with other Muslims and Arabs which has impacted their choice of institutions. Several have shared instances in which they feel they should work harder to prove themselves both academically and socially. A few of the women also related the purpose of their education to dispelling myths and stereotypes that others may hold of Muslim women as well as to be representatives of their religion.

Muslim First Identity

Throughout this study, aspects of identity were explored. The findings suggest that the women identify themselves as being Muslim first over other identifiers such as their parents' Arab culture. The women often referred to themselves as Muslim-American first as opposed to being Arab-American. Only when further probed about their ethnicity would they say they are Arab or a hyphenated version of their parents' country of origin (e.g. Yemeni-American). Second-generation Americans will often consider themselves American, yet use a hyphenated version of their ethnicity (Pew Research, 2013). In the case of the women in this study, they did not identify with their ethnicity but with their religious identity therefore making their hyphenated identity as "Muslim-American." This would indicate that they identify more so with their Islamic values than their parents' Arab cultural identity. Identifying with religion first in

the second-generation is supported by research conducted by Naber (2005) and Ajrouch (2004) in which it was found that the second-generation Muslim Arabs often identify with their religion more so than their Arab cultural background. Manar spoke about a Muslim-American culture which was formed in the diaspora, in which people are more religious than cultural. Dalia also spoke about the concept of a Muslim-American culture, which she describes as a mix of religion, American values, and Arab cultural values.

Identifying with religion primarily allows the participants to distance themselves from the cultural ideas that places restrictions on women that they believe are not grounded in religion such as women working in particular fields of study. For instance, Deema spoke in the focus group of the discouragement for women in the Arab community to enter into the business field yet cited the Prophet Muhammad's wife Khadija who was a business woman. Deema further spoke of this issue when she mentioned the hesitation of families to encourage Muslim women to enter politics, that in Islamic history there were many women in politics and activism and it is often forgotten. Maha also shared that Arab cultural practices are a barrier for women whereas religion is not. Lama also mentioned that Arab societies often place restrictions on women but indicated that it if women were to follow these restrictions here that it would be from themselves. Deema, Maha, and Lama's statements regarding culture aligns with research on the manner in which Arab cultural values impact the interpretation of Islam (Ali, Mahmood, Moel, Hudson, & Leathers, 2008; Hamdan, 2006; Hashim, 1999). By using the label "Muslim-American" as opposed to "Arab-American" the women are navigating the differences between culturally determined aspects of religion as opposed to ones mandated through *Qur'anic* evidence. According to Haddad, Smith, and Moore (2006) this form of interpretation is common among Muslim-Americans in which the religion is used as a means to investigate gender equality. The

manner in which the women indicated some community and family views regarding women's chosen educational and career decisions as unfair and attributed to culture.

Another theme that arose is the complexity of the women's identities, especially during the focus group. Deema described second-generation Muslim Arab-American women as such: "we are the hyphen in between. We are not Arab we are not American. Islam is what is anchoring us. Muslim will always be there but it's the ethnicity that's changing" (Focus group, 3/6/16). This complex identity is also best illustrated in Deema's quote:

> I can't decide and I can't dismiss one or the other. I'm Arab, I'm Muslim, I'm American, I'm Middle Eastern if that's another category. . . but if someone forced me to choose, it would be hard but religion is very important to me and to be Muslim and to represent that….so I say I'm Muslim Arab-American multicultural. . . American has to be there, and Arab and Muslim has to be there. (Interview, 3/23/16)

Dalia also described her mixed identity similarly to Deema. Dalia shared that it is much easier for her to identify first with her religion as she feels it is integral to the way she lives her life. Manar shared that this mix of cultures is common in the diaspora in which there is a Muslim-American culture which combines religion, Arab culture, and American culture. Asma, Manar, Layla, and Salma also feel that their hijab tells people they are Muslim first therefore their identities as Muslim-American is a given. Salma shared that she only considers herself Muslim-American as she cares about religion and not her Arab background. The reference to a Muslim-American culture relates to Geertz's (1973) description of religion as a culture, in which the women considered their Muslim-American identities as that of a cultural identity.

The women's views indicate the multiple intersections of identity existent within the women of this study. Deema's discussion on the hyphenated identity of a Muslim Arab-

American woman is consistent with research by Sarroub (2002) who describes the concept of "in-betweenness" in which second-generation Muslim Arab-American women find themselves in-between the culture of their parents and their American identity. Manar's statement on Muslim-Americans in the diaspora relate to research by Mirza (2013) who discusses the concept of diasporic spaces constructed by Muslim women in British society. In the case of the women in this study, the diasporic spaces would be within American society and also within their religious community.

Another aspect of identifying first as Muslim first, is the women's place within American society and its relation to Islamophobia. The women identified themselves primarily as Muslim-American, with 'Muslim' as the first identifier of their identity. All but two of the women in this study wore the hijab and are easily identified as Muslim. The women also had strong ties to a mosque community. The practice of their religion not only indicates that religion is the center of their identity as suggested by the data, but that there is agency in their choice to practice their religion. This aligns with research on intersectionality and agency in religious practice (Ali, Mahmood, Moel, Hudson, & Leathers, 2008; Bilge, 2010; Mirza, 2013; Weber, 2015). In choosing to wear hijab and identify as Muslim women in a society not always accepting of them, the women have empowered themselves and are pushing back against society's portrayal of Muslim Arab women.

Deema, Salma, Aisha, and Dalia indicated that a purpose of education for Muslim women is to educate others and dispel stereotypes about their religion. The women felt they need to be positive representatives academically and in social circumstances in their institutions. They are engaging in what Hatem (2011) has noted about Muslim women using their visibility to educate and positively promote Islam. The women in this study are educated and have indicated agency

in other aspects of their lives, as well as their choice in identifying as Muslim first. Also, in associating closely with a mosque and with others of their religious and cultural background there arises a source of solidarity in their shared identities. This is consistent with Haddad, Smith, and Moore's (2006) discussion on the importance of a shared Muslim-American identity, despite differences in culture, as a unifier in the face of Islamophobia. The women's ties to their mosque community and their social networks lend themselves to the creation of the shared Muslim-American identity.

Intersectionality and Islamic Feminism

The identities of the women in this study are complex, during the interviews they were continually negotiating expectations from their families, the immediate local community and the larger national and international community in which they exist. The tensions among these different sources of influence shape their views and choices about education, career, and family impacting their sense of self located within their community.

The women indicated that their families encouraged their pursuit of higher education and had high expectations regarding academic achievement. While the women never cited any barriers in the pursuit of higher education in general, the women did indicate barriers in pursuit of particular fields. The women received messages from their families and communities to pursue fields with a level prestige and greater economic potential such as STEM based fields. Economic potential was cited as a motivator for many of the women to pursue their chosen fields of study. For instance, Dalia has encountered negative feedback due to the poor salary potential of teachers. The women also received messages regarding careers that were deemed not appropriate for females. The women shared several instances where people have made statements about their field of study and how it would impact work/life balance in the future. As

suggested by the discussions on work/life balance in the focus group, the women indicated that it may be difficult for women to have a demanding job, such as one in medicine, while raising children. This conflict is reflected in the literature by Read and Oselin (2008) in which there is a contradictory ideal regarding female academic achievement, the desire for upward mobility, yet the maintenance of gender role narratives. Community expectations and the pressure to conform to community norms aligns with research by Padilla (2009) that indicates that community and family pressures fall primarily on Muslim women. The women described their career and educational choices as personal ones, while at the same time clearly identifying the influence of the community norms on their choices. The process of making their educational choices was embedded in their own sense of identity in the community.

Another level of complexity relates to the women's cultural and religious identities. As referenced in the previous section, the women in this study exist in a state of in-betweenness aligns with Sarroub's (2002) scholarship on in-betweenness, in which the women must find a balance between their religious identities, the Arab cultural expectations of their parents, and the American society in which they live. Dalia, Deema, and Manar described a Muslim-American culture which combines several aspects of their identities: their religion, their Arab culture, and being an American. In addition to their complex identities, are the issues of Islamophobia and discrimination. The women in this study shared that they are subjected to sweeping generalizations due to their identities which aligns with hooks (2000b) discussion of how stereotypes are often applied to women of color. These generalizations are related to the negative stereotypes people hold of Muslim women, ones which Naber (2006b) identifies as imagined hierarchies between Muslim men and women. Due to these generalizations, the women expressed that they feel they need to represent their religion in a positive manner both

socially and academically. The Muslim women in Mirza's (2013) study on embodied intersectionality found empowerment and agency in their religious practice despite being expected to represent their religion and culture as a 'collective body.' The women in this study have embodied the 'collective body' aspect of their identities in that it has impacted their academic choices in terms needing to work harder to be a positive representative of Muslim women.

Despite these pressures, the women indicated agency in their religious practice and their choices. For these women, their religion is the core of their identities as indicated by their Muslim first identifications, adherence to hijab, and their regular mosque attendance. By choosing to practice their religion and using religion to justify their choices they are displaying agency and autonomy both within their communities and within American society. Through questioning their parents' or community's interpretations of Islam the women are engaging in acts described as Islamic feminism which asserts that women have the right to make choices and they believe these rights are mandated from the religion (Haddad, Smith, & Moore, 2006; Hashim, 1999). Deema, Maha, and Lama made statements suggesting that Arab cultural interpretations of Islam were problematic and restrictive. While none of the women described themselves as feminists, the act of questioning others' interpretations of Islam aligns with Islamic feminism as described by Haddad, Smith, and Moore (2006). By placing their religion as a core aspect of identity, the women can pushback against what they believe to be restrictive Arab cultural ideals from within their religious communities.

By openly displaying their religion (through hijab), and therefore being recognized as representatives of Muslims in an Islamophobic society and adhering to a Muslim first identity the women are displaying empowerment and agency. This is not unlike the research on Muslim

women, in which Islam was found to be a source of empowerment, contrary to dominant discourse (Ali et al., 2008; Bilge, 2010; Hashim, 1999; Hatem, 2011; Hu et al., 2009; Mirza, 2013, Weber, 2015). As Naber (2006b, 2011) suggests religious identity cannot be dismantled from other intersecting structures in the case of Muslim Arab-American women. Through pursuing education, the women are partaking in what is considered an important aspect of Islam which promotes the education of women as discussed by Hamdan (2006). When the women have religious knowledge, they can fight against gender inequality in their communities as described by Hashim (1999) and Haddad, Smith, and Moore (2006) and they can also dispel common misconceptions that others hold of the status of women in Islam. The women used their religion to reconcile culturally prescribed notions on what are acceptable educational and career choices based on their gender. It is through using their religion as a framework that they are able to tease out what they consider to be unfair Arab cultural ideals on gender and question others' interpretations of their religion.

Due to the importance of religion for the women in this study, it is essential to include this intersection when discussing the women's identities. The intersection of religion with the women's identities is complex. It is through their religious identity and their affiliation with a mosque that community affiliations and expectations arise regarding educational and career pursuits. It is through their religious communities and their families that the women received messages to pursue fields with higher economic potential. The women also received messages through their religious communities and their families to start a family as Salma stated "…it's human nature to want to get married and have kids, that's just how it is . . ." Community and family interpretations of religious guidelines dictate the appropriateness of certain fields of study for women as well as work/family balance. It is also the women's interpretation of religion that

allows them to question other's interpretations that they deem unfair. The women's religious identity is the reason they are targets of Islamophobia and as previously mentioned, has impacted the social and academic lives of these women.

Intersectionality and the unique challenges of Muslim women. Muslim women, like other women in society, make educational and career decisions in relation to their identities. Many of the discussions of education, career choices, and marriage and child-rearing are not unlike the choices that other women of different backgrounds in society make on a regular basis. Muslim women, however, encounter unique challenges that impact their educational choices and their future career decisions. The women in this study were influenced by their families, friends, and their community in their identities and educational decisions. These influences are based on the Arab cultural background of their friends and families as well as Islamic religious interpretations. Adding to the complexity of the educational and career decisions of the women in this study is the manner in which society views Muslim women. Muslim women are asked to apologize on behalf of their religion due to society's misinterpretations of Islam and what it means to be a Muslim woman. Muslim women are viewed as a collective body as described by Mirza (2013) and this impacts the women's need to represent their religion in an Islamophobic society. This expectation to represent a religion while making decisions that many adults of different backgrounds make at this age adds a layer of tension to their decision-making processes. For some of the women, the purpose of their education is in relation to society's views of Muslim women and their desire to dispel myths and stereotypes of Islam. Three of the women also viewed their purpose of education as a way to better their communities. Muslim women must make complex decisions that others are not expected to make as the single decision of one Muslim woman is seen to represent a whole group.

Perhaps one of the biggest costs to representation is the loss of a particular aspects of identity and individuality. When Muslim women are viewed as a collective body, their individuality is lost. The women in this study indicated several motivating factors to succeed such as those related to economic stability, appeasing their family, and the desire to contribute to society. Several of the women have identified the need to defy stereotypes, educate others about their religion, and exemplify their religion and culture by excelling academically. One of the costs of being expected to represent a culture or religion is that it impacts the personal choices of the women. While, the women make educational and academic choices that many other women of different backgrounds make, there is the added concern of trying not to fit a stereotypical view that society holds of Muslim women. Several of the women also spoke of feeling the need to smile more and to be careful in their social interactions so that Muslims and Arabs are not judged. Therefore, even daily interactions become a source of tension due to the issue of representation.

All of the aforementioned factors: family expectations, religious and cultural views, gender norms, intersect to contribute to the choices the women have made in relation to their academic achievements as well as the formation of their identities. The women's complex identities fall in line with intersectionality as a framework which situates their place within American society and within their own religious and cultural communities. The academic and career choices the women of this study have made arise from these complex intersections of their identities with religious identity as its core.

This study highlights a new intersection that needs to be further explored. These women are situated as women, Arab-Americans, educated, from immigrant families, and Muslims. All of these backgrounds shape their educational and career choices and the ways that they situate

themselves in both the community and in their family. What we see in their experiences is that their families' Arab cultural heritage is marginalized by the need to identify primarily as Muslim in resistance to the anti-Islamic bigotry they experience from the larger society. At the same time, they draw on their own interpretations of Islam to renegotiate the role of women as it is defined by both their Arab family and cultural traditions and main stream American culture in ways that they see as empowering. This process is one where they value and integrate these different backgrounds while trying to construct their own individual identity.

Recommendations for Future Research and Limitations

This phenomenological study cannot be generalized beyond the women who participated in this study. The second-generation Muslim Arab-American women of this study live in an area with a large Muslim and Arab community; therefore, many of their experiences are unique to the region in which they live. The snowball sampling method employed to gather participants only identified women who had similar access and support in pursuing higher education both from their families and communities. Starting the sample from a different point or with different women would reach other networks and provide different perspective including women who did not pursue higher education and/or did not have access to the same level of support. The wording used to recruit the participants for this research focused the sample on women who were pursuing higher education. Therefore, only the perspective of those who are pursuing or have pursued higher education is included. For future research, it would be beneficial to utilize other networks to find participants who have chosen a different path other than education to gain their perspectives. Other perspectives are valuable and need to be included as part of future studies. By including the perspectives of women who did not pursue education, one could gain more insight into the factors which impact female academic achievement in the Muslim Arab-

American communities. These perspectives can be used to understand the factors shaping the experiences of women who have chosen not to pursue higher education, as those factors discussed were anecdotal and not based upon participants' direct experiences. In understanding these experiences, schools and communities can address common issues and barriers which impact female educational attainment in a culturally sensitive manner.

The women in this study all stated that their friends and those they surround themselves are also pursuing and/or have pursued higher education. This could indicate a shift within the women's communities or the mere fact that they choose to be around like-minded individuals. According to the women of this study, there is a perceived shift of gender roles within the Muslim Arab-American community. It is important to note that the participants of the study were pursuing higher education and had a great deal of familial and community support. The social networks of the women include others with similar views and similar experiences regarding gender roles. Further investigation is recommended to investigate gender norms within other social networks and other mosque communities. Gender norms could also be analyzed depending on the country of origin of the families. Furthermore, in order to fully investigate the women's choices and shifting gender roles a longitudinal study would need to be employed to investigate their career choices and family expectations. Additionally, to investigate a shift in gender norms the perspectives of the males of the Muslim Arab-American could also be gathered in future studies. In replicating this study with other groups one can gain a deeper understanding as to whether there is truly a shift of gender norms in terms of education and identity within the Muslim Arab-American community as purported by the women of this study.

There was some indication from the data that there are differences between the cultural groups existent within the Muslim Arab-American communities. Future research could further study and research the nuances of the different cultural groups within the Arab community. This study can also be replicated with other groups such as with first-generation Muslim Arab women, different age groups, as well as with other ethnicities within the Muslim community such as Southeast-Asian and African-American Muslims. The women in this study were of similar social class with access to resources which allowed them the opportunities to pursue higher education. Further research to explore the different social classes and levels of access to educational resources would need to be employed. In replicating this study with different populations, one can gather various perspectives in relation to gender roles, identity, and educational experiences.

Lastly, any further research which seeks to authenticate the voices of women's lives and in particular women who live in the margins would be of great benefit and could in turn educate society. By sharing the experiences and including the voices of Muslim Arab-Americans and in particular Muslim Arab-American women, we can hopefully move past generalizations and misunderstanding of the culture and the religion.

Concluding Thoughts

As described in my critical self-narrative in chapter one, like the women in my study, I am a second-generation Muslim Arab-American woman and have encountered many of the same challenges regarding my identity. I believe this shared identity and the fact that I wear hijab like the majority of the women in this study, allowed the women to easily open up to me and share their experiences. Due to the shared religious and cultural identity, I was able to contextualize their religious and cultural perceptions as well as formulate interview questions.

The women in this study indicated multiple factors which impacted their educational choices in addition to the challenges of their identities as Muslim Arab-American women. There was family expectation to succeed academically as well as the academic expectations from their own religious and cultural communities. As Muslim Arab-American women, they are often confronted with negative discourse, generalizations, and misconceptions of their culture and their faith from many sources. This study was carried out during an election cycle where a Muslim ban was being proposed by one candidate; therefore, there was a great deal of increased discourse related to Muslims and Arabs and the constant pressure to exemplify Muslim Arab women in both social and academic lives. Finally, the women's own personal goals and agency must be considered. All of these aforementioned issues intersect to inform these women's complicated identities and experiences.

Muslim women are often thought to be quiet, meek, oppressed, and voiceless and are often reduced to discussions centered around their head covering and the manner in which they choose to represent their religion by their dress. Yet, the women in this study indicate otherwise. In my interactions with them, it was apparent that despite being bombarded with generalizations and stereotypes through dominant discourse, the women were proud of their identities and their experiences. They were motivated to succeed with goals and aspirations of academic and career success as apparent by their academic choices. Many of the women shared that their education not only benefits their own personal goals for academic and career success, but that their education plays a larger role to benefit others. I recognize the difficulties and challenges of being called upon to represent my culture and religion, and it often takes its toll. The women felt as if they were not being confronted with explicit bias and discrimination, yet often spoke about society's portrayal of Muslims and Arabs and their need to be representatives of their religion

and culture. After each interview, as I walked out to my car with the women, the discussion often turned to the rhetoric that generalizes and stereotypes Muslim and Arabs. In particular, there was a great deal of concern surrounding the upcoming presidential elections and fear of the unknown. However, at the end of each of these discussions the women consoled themselves with the hope and promise that society will endure. Despite these difficulties and concerns, the women in this study, like many other Muslim women I know, seem ready and willing to take on these challenges. Speaking from my own experience, there is an acceptance of the call to represent the religion and culture. Negative discourse and generalizations arise from misunderstanding and misinterpretation of the lived experiences of others. It is through sharing lived experiences and through positive representation and interactions that things may change.

It has been extremely disheartening to watch those who do not understand my religion and culture to speak on my behalf and the behalf of so many others. Those who are given the opportunity to speak on Muslim and Arab issues are often those that perpetuate stereotypes and generalizations on Muslims and Arabs. There has been an increase in dialogue, community engagement, and educational initiatives which seek to move past the negative and create mutual respect and understanding. As described by Maryam, her identity allows her to engage in dialogue to dispel stereotypes and women such as Deema describe a sense of agency in representing Muslim women. These are only two of the examples of the many positives that arise out of the negativity surrounding Muslim female identity. There is a growing body of knowledge which seeks to include authentic Muslim and Arab experiences, particularly of the women. There is growing Muslim and Arab female presence in all fields and sectors of society. Slowly, things are changing and they will continue to change. Muslim women are often at the center of misunderstanding and generalizations and I hope that this research can highlight the

authentic voices of Muslim Arab women and to promote understanding of the complexity and nuance existent within the Muslim Arab-American community. I hope this research will highlight the need for continued research and inclusion of Muslim-Americans and Arab-Americans in both research and curriculum. However small, I hope this dissertation contributes to the understanding of Muslim Arab-American women and the complexities of their identities and their lived realities.

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Appendix A

The University of Michigan-Dearborn
INFORMED CONSENT
MUSLIM ARAB-AMERICAN WOMEN AND EDUCATION: INTERSECTING CULTURE, GENDER, AND RELIGION

You are invited to participate in a research study about Muslim Arab-American women's experiences related to culture, gender, and education.

If you agree to be part of the research study, you will be observed by the principal investigator and you may also be asked to participate in one-on-one interviews.

The goal of this research study is to gain insight into the lived experiences of second-generation Muslim Arab-American women related to culture, gender, and education.

Although you may not directly benefit from being in this study, others may benefit because in participating in this study you are providing insight into the lives of Muslim Arab Americans that can be used to help alleviate stereotypes. Additionally, in participating in this study it may pave the way for future research studies and policy changes which will benefit Muslim Arab-American females.

There are no foreseeable risks associated with this study. The researcher will take precautions to protect the data. Paper documents will be stored in a locked file and audio recordings will be erased one year from the conclusion of the study.

You will not be compensated for your participation in this study, participation is voluntary.

We plan to publish or present the results of this study, but will not include any information that would identify you. There are some reasons why people other than the researchers may need to see information you provided as part of the study. This includes organizations responsible for making sure the research is done safely and properly such as the Dearborn IRB.

To keep your information safe, the researchers will use an alias instead of your name and all identifying factors will be removed or kept separate from data collected from observations and interviews.

The data you provide will be stored in a password-protected laptop computer that can only be accessed by the principal investigator. All other data (observation notes) will be stored in a locked filing cabinet.

The researcher will retain de-identified data for no longer than ten years. At the end of those ten years the researcher will dispose of the de-identified data through the deletion of computer files and shredding of paper documents.

The data may be made available to other researchers but may be used in future studies by the principal investigator but will not contain information that could identify you such as your name, school, city, or place of employment.

Participating in this study is completely voluntary. Even if you decide to participate now, you may change your mind and withdraw by April 2016. If you decide to withdraw from this study, you may contact the principal investigator and the principal investigator will dispose of computer data by deleting all files and shred all paper documentation.

If you have questions about this research study, you may contact the principal investigator, Amira Shourbaji, at ashourba@umich.edu or faculty advisor, Christopher Burke, at cjfburke@umich.edu.

If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, or wish to obtain information, ask questions, or discuss concerns with someone other than the researcher(s), You may contact the Dearborn IRB Administrator in the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs, 2066 IAVS, University of Michigan-Dearborn, Evergreen Rd., Dearborn, MI 48128-2406, (313) 593-5468; the Dearborn IRB Application Specialist at (734) 763-5084, or email Dearborn-IRB@umich.edu.

If you agree to participate in this study, please sign your name in the space provided below; you will be given a copy of this consent form for you to keep. If you would like to learn the findings of this study, please email me at (your email) and I will be happy to forward that information to you. Thank you for your participation in this study.

I agree to participate in the study.

☐*I confirm that I am 18 years old or older and agree to participate in the study.*

I,_____verify that this study has been explained to me and that I voluntarily agree to participate. I understand that if I have any hesitation I reserve the right to discontinue my participation in the project at any time and may request that all information that has been provided be destroyed.

_____   _____
Signature   Date

My signature below verifies that I,_____, also agree to be audiotaped.

_____   _____
Signature   Date

Appendix B

Interview Protocol

Intro Script: Thank you for participating in this study about your experiences of education, gender, and culture. I would appreciate it if you would allow me to audio record our conversation today. Is this okay with you? You will be given a pseudonym to protect your privacy. I will be taking notes as we talk and you may ask questions or pause at any time during this interview.

Background Information:
-Background information will be on demographic questionnaire and will be used to probe for

responses during the interviews.

Personal:

1.) Tell me a little about your educational background

       Follow-up: Are you in school now? If so, are you also working?

       Follow-up: If they are not in school: what do you do now?

2.) What's your major?

       Follow-up: What prompted you to choose that particular major?

3.) What do you see yourself doing in 5 years in terms of your own future aspirations?

    Follow-up: What factors have influenced your educational goals and aspirations?

    Prompt: How do your goals fit into your parents' goals for your future?

4.) How has being a Muslim woman influenced your education?

       Follow-up: Tell me about your experiences as a Muslim woman in your previous

       schooling (high school, middle school)

5.) How is it going as a student?

Prompt: What are some barriers? What has been supportive?

6.) Do you have friends or community members who are interested in the same field as you?

Follow-up (Depending on above response): Do you feel as if it has been helpful to have others in your field of interest? Do you feel it has hindered you by not having others in your field of interest?

7.) How do you think you are perceived as a Muslim woman?

Why do you think that is?

Family

1.) Referring to questionnaire: I see that your father is a (_____) what does he think of your major or career choice?

> Follow-up: What does your mother think of your major or career choice?

2.) Referring to questionnaire: I see that you have (___) siblings, are they still in school? Are they working?

Community

1.) Are their particular fields that you feel you can or cannot pursue because of community pressure or influence?

2.) As a Muslim Arab woman, how important is it that there are other Muslim Arab women in your field of interest?

Follow-up: Do your choices feel your choices are shaped by the presence or lack of presence of Muslim Arab women in your field of interest?

3.) Do you feel like there are fields of study in which Muslim Arab women are not encouraged to pursue?

Follow-up How has this shaped your educational decisions and experiences?

4.) How important is it to you that you attend a university or work somewhere with other Arabs and Muslims?

Prompt: Could you see yourself going to a university in an area that doesn't have many Muslims or Arabs?

5.) What are some barriers that you may have experienced in terms of your education or that you may have noticed in general?

6.) What are some things that encouraged your education or would encourage others?

7.) What do you see the purpose of education to be as a whole, besides your future career?

Is there anything else you would like to say? Is it ok if I contact you later if I have another question or to make sure that what you said was correct? I appreciate your participation in this study.

Appendix C

The University of Michigan-Dearborn
INFORMED CONSENT: FOCUS GROUP
**MUSLIM ARAB-AMERICAN WOMEN AND EDUCATION: INTERSECTING
CULTURE, GENDER, AND RELIGION**

You are invited to participate in a focus group about Muslim Arab-American women's experiences on topics related to culture, gender, and education.

If you participate in this study, you will be in a group of approximately 10-20 participants. The principal investigator will facilitate discussions relating to Muslim Arab-American female identity and education, and will take notes on the ideas expressed within the group as well as audio recordings.

The goal of this research study is to gain insight into the lived experiences of second-generation Muslim Arab-American women particularly relating to identity and education.

Although you may not directly benefit from being in this study, others may benefit because in participating in this study you are providing insight into the lives of Muslim Arab-Americans that can be used to help alleviate stereotypes. Additionally, in participating in this study it may pave the way for future research studies and policy changes which will benefit Muslim Arab-Americans.

Every participant will be asked to respect the privacy of the other group members. All participants will be asked to not disclose anything said or shared within the context of the focus group discussion. However, it is important to note that others may not keep all information private and confidential.

There are no foreseeable risks associated with this study. The researcher will take precautions to protect the data. Paper documents will be stored in a locked file and audio recordings will be erased one year from the conclusion of the study.

Meals and refreshments will be provided to you as compensation for your participation in this study.

We plan to publish or present the results of this study, but will not include any information that would identify you. There are some reasons why people other than the researchers may need to see information you provided as part of the study. This includes organizations responsible for making sure the research is done safely and properly such as the Dearborn IRB.

To keep your information safe, the researchers will use an alias instead of your name and all identifying factors will be removed or kept separate from data collected from focus groups.

Data collected from focus groups (field notes and audio recordings) will be stored in a locked filing cabinet and a password-protected laptop computer.

The researcher will retain de-identified data for no longer than ten years. At the end of those ten years the researcher will dispose of the de-identified data through the deletion of computer files and shredding of paper documents.

The data may be made available to other researchers and may be used in future studies by the principal investigator but will not contain information that could identify you such as your name, school, city, or place of employment.

Participating in this study is completely voluntary. Even if you decide to participate now, you may change your mind and withdraw by April 2016. If you decide to withdraw from this study, you may contact the principal investigator and the principal investigator will dispose of computer data by deleting all files and shred all paper documentation.

If you have questions about this research study, you may contact the principal investigator, Amira Shourbaji, at ashourba@umich.edu or faculty advisor, Christopher Burke, at cjfburke@umich.edu.

If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, or wish to obtain information, ask questions, or discuss concerns with someone other than the researcher(s), You may contact the Dearborn IRB Administrator in the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs, 2066 IAVS, University of Michigan-Dearborn, Evergreen Rd., Dearborn, MI 48128-2406, (313) 593-5468; the Dearborn IRB Application Specialist at (734) 763-5084, or email Dearborn-IRB@umich.edu.

If you agree to participate in this study, please sign your name in the space provided below; you will be given a copy of this consent form for you to keep. If you would like to learn the findings of this study, please email me at (your email) and I will be happy to forward that information to you. Thank you for your participation in this study.

I agree to participate in the study.

☐ *I confirm that I am 18 years old or older and agree to participate in the study.*

I,_____verify that this study has been explained to me and that I voluntarily agree to participate. I understand that if I have any hesitation I reserve the right to discontinue my participation in the project at any time and may request that all information that has been provided be destroyed.

_____   _____
Signature   Date

My signature below verifies that I,_____, also agree to be audiotaped.

_____   _____
Signature   Date