

# KEEPERS AND EXPLORERS: AN ACCULTURATION CASE STUDY OF THE MULTI-FACETED IDENTITY OF PAKISTANI GRADUATE STUDENTS NAVIGATING US CULTURE

Author: Maheen Haider

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Boston College

The Graduate School of Arts and Sciences

Department of Sociology

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MULTI-FACETED IDENTITY OF PAKISTANI GRADUATE STUDENTS  
NAVIGATING US CULTURE

MAHEEN HAIDER

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Title:

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Abstract

The research explores the influence of US culture on Pakistani graduate students studying in the US. I investigate how the students navigate through the different elements of US culture, while adhering to their pre-existing ideals of the home culture. I examine the role of gender and inter-generational differences of the students, in the process of interaction with the host culture. I use qualitative methods and conducted twenty-eight life history interviews across the students from both F1 and J1 visa categories, while maintaining the gender ratio. The duration of their stay spans over a period of 5 months to 5 years. I argue that the students adopt a *keepers* and *explorers* approach while navigating the different cultural elements of the host culture. The explorer approach is further facilitated by a *select* and *drop* mechanism, developed by the students, as they navigate the different elements of US culture, while using the value system of the home society.

***Keepers and Explorers: An acculturation case study of the multi-faceted identity of Pakistani graduate students navigating US culture***

***Introduction:***

The research explores the influence of US culture<sup>1</sup> on Pakistani graduate students studying in the US. This particular group makes an important case for studying the acculturation<sup>2</sup> experience because; a) US and Pakistani culture have distinctive political, social, cultural and religious traditions, and on arrival to the US, the students experience these differences. *I investigate how the students navigate their every day lives in the host culture while being aware of the pre-existing ideals of the home culture?* b) The bilateral relationship of both countries is at the center stage of the global war against terrorism, and the students are aware of this political situation and the prevalence of anti-Islamic sentiments in the host culture. *I analyze the student's experience of racialization and examine its influence, in the process of integration of the Pakistani graduate student in the host society?*

On arrival to the host culture, Berry (2005, 705) proposes that two processes are likely to be adopted by the immigrant population “*maintenance of heritage culture and identity*” and “*relationship sought among groups*”. These two axes form the basis of the four-fold typology on acculturation psychology: integration, assimilation, separation and

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<sup>1</sup> As a researcher I am aware that US culture is a broad category and can encompass many aspects. For the purpose of the study, I have defined the term at a broader level. I operationalize the term as my respondents have done so, and use the narrative of the participants in the study to define US culture. The term US culture can be broken down into the following elements: socializing and dating, travelling to other parts of the US, wearing western clothes, going to bars or clubs, watching local sports games (college/national), and participating in various celebrations like Halloween, Thanksgiving and Christmas. These elements can be debated among academics, but these aspects seem quintessentially “American” from the perspective of my participants.

<sup>2</sup> Acculturation is “*the dual process of cultural and psychological change that takes place as a result of contact between two or more cultural groups and their individual members*” (Berry 2005, 698)

marginalization<sup>3</sup>, and has been used widely in acculturation studies. (Berry 1984, 2001, 2005, 2009). Pakistani graduate students also experience these two axes on arrival to the US. But I focus on the *processes* developed by the students to navigate the US culture and investigate how they struggle to adhere to their pre-existing ideals, in the liberal settings of the host culture. I analyze their experiences as they interact with the different elements of the US culture, while taking into consideration their gendered, religious and racial identity and how do these experiences vary in terms of their duration of stay in the host culture?

#### Literature Review:

Notable models have been based on the four fold taxonomy to understand the migrants acculturation experience; Multidimensional individual difference acculturation model, MIDA (Rasmi et al, 2009), Interactive Acculturation Model IAM, (Bourheis et al, 202), Concordance model of acculturation CMA, (Piontkowski et al 2002), Relative acculturation extended model RAEM, (Naves et al, 2005). (Smith and Khawaja 2011, 701). However, these models have been largely critiqued because of the rigidity of the four strategies and their underlying assumption that individuals are incapable of changing their approaches while navigating the host culture. (Bhatia & Ram 2001; Chirkov, 2009; Weinreich 2009, 178; Cabassa, 2003).

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<sup>3</sup> *When individuals do not wish to maintain their cultural identity and seek daily interaction with other cultures, the Assimilation strategy is defined. In contrast, when individuals place a value on holding on to their original culture, and at the same time wish to avoid interaction with others, then the Separation alternative is defined. When there is an interest in both maintaining ones original culture, while in daily interactions with other groups, Integration is the option. Finally, when there is little possibility or interest in cultural maintenance (often for reasons of enforced cultural loss), and little interest in having relations with others (often for reasons of exclusion or discrimination) then Marginalisation is defined” (Berry 2005, 331*

Among the models above, only the MIDA model has been applied on understanding the international student experience, and acknowledges the weakness of the approach, as no gender differences were found while analyzing the acculturation experience. (Rasmi et al, 2009). Another trend common among the acculturation studies, is that they have often been centered on psychological adaptation focusing on depression and stress, (Ward and Kennedy, 1993; Berry et al, 1993; Searle and Ward 1990; Smith and Khawaja, 2011; Chataway and Berry, 1989; Russel et al, 2008) which indeed are important, as the students experience stress and homesickness in the new culture, but this is only one small piece of a multidimensional process.

I argue that models are indeed useful in explaining the immigrant experience to a certain extent, however they offer more of a result-oriented approach i.e. they are helpful in explaining the choice of the immigrant on interaction with the host culture. Focusing on the international student acculturation experience, they don't address the processes deployed by these individuals as they navigate their everyday lives in the host culture and how does the duration of stay in the host culture affects the individual choices of the this population while integrating in the host society? These questions are equally relevant on the migrant acculturation experience, but I focus on the international student experience only.

Earlier work by Herskovitz (1937) and Spiro (1955), stressed the importance of the religious preferences, family values and historical context to understand cultural changes, the positivist epistemological tradition of the discipline has seldom taken these into consideration while understanding the international student experience (Lopez et al, 2011, 1556.)

Chirkov analyzed 42 articles on acculturation psychology and found that only 88% of the studies operationalized culture as ethnicity, nationality or both, 5% added language to the definition, 2% lacked any operationalization of the term and the remaining 5% acknowledged cultural values, and the difference of the host and home society (2009, 98). I argue that it is important to make the distinction among the cultural elements of the host culture. As cultural and religious traditions of the home society can influence the processes adopted by the students to navigate the host cultural elements and they can navigate each cultural elements differently.

Using the case study of Pakistani graduate student studying in the US, I attempt to address the gaps in the acculturation psychology literature, through a sociological lens. I explore the socio-psychological processes and the symbolic interaction mechanisms adopted by the students to navigate US culture. I analyze the lived experiences of the international students taking into consideration the historical, religious and cultural differences of the Pakistani and the US society. (Smith and Khawaja 2011; Berry 2009; Chirkov 2009; Rudmin 2003). I analyze the role of gender and intergenerational differences as the students interact with different elements of the host culture. I also acknowledge the temporary migrant status of the Pakistani graduate student, studying in the American university, because this influences, the student's decision to stay or leave the US on completion of the studies and investigate whether visa difference plays a role as the students interact with the host society.

I have used qualitative methods for the study, and conducted 28 life history interviews over a period of 8 months. The interviews were carried out in informal settings using Urdu and English, depending upon the comfort level of the respondent. In order to



study gender differences; I interviewed 15 male and 13 female students studying in graduate programs across the US.

I propose four sociological theoretical frameworks additively to analyze the experiences of Pakistani graduate students studying in the US. Encompassing the issues of religion, political history, gender, race and identity, I examine how Pakistani graduate students in the U.S transform and conform to their Muslim identity while interacting with the US culture? I also examine how this varies systematically with variation in their family backgrounds, age and gender and how they draw upon different cultural material around them to make sense of their world in the new culture.

*Religiosity and the perception of the self in the midst of Islamophobia:*

Pakistan is a predominantly Muslim majority country encompassing 95% of the Muslim population and small percentage of Christian and Hindu minorities. (CIA, 2012). The majority of the Pakistani students that come to the US are Muslims. In his essay "*The Social Psychology of the World Religions*", Weber demonstrates how the identities of religious communities are shaped by the confluence of at least two forces: their doctrinal starting points, each possessing its own inner logic, and a set of practical real world challenges that need to be met. This confluence of doctrine and circumstance creates an inflected identity for religious communities such that, for example, communities who believe their own doctrine and are also militarily powerful insist on conversions while similarly convinced communities that also suffer a pariah status eschew converts. I am using this insight about the convergence of belief and circumstance analogically, to frame my study of Pakistani identity transformation in the world of the American university.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Notes Pro seminar Classical Theory- Professor Eve Spangler

Since the 9/11 attacks there has been a rise in anti-Islamic sentiments and heightened hostility towards Muslims in the US. (Council on American- Islamic Relations, 2008). Pakistani graduate students arriving to the US are very much aware of these anti-Islamic sentiments around them due to the complexity of bilateral relations between the US and Pakistan intertwined by the war on terrorism and coupled the capture of Osama bin Laden in their country. Pakistani graduate students are aware of the negative stereotypes surrounding them. Their religious identity coupled with their Pakistani identity can be elaborated through Dubois' work on double consciousness. Dubois' work is informed through the experiences of Black Americans who encountered and countered centuries of institutional and systemic racism. He wrote “ *it is a peculiar sensation this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at ones self through the eyes of others, of measuring ones soul by the tape of a world that's looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness, an American a negro; two souls, two thoughts, two reconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn sunder*” (Dubois 1903/1982,45). This concept, combined with Weber's religiosity, can be extrapolated to explore the perceptions of the self in the case of Pakistani graduate students. How does this particular group see themselves through the eyes of the American people? They don't only have a religious identity but a Pakistani identity that is part of their national identity. My research explores how this double consciousness shapes their experiences in the US and how and when does their double consciousness activates as they transgress inside and outside of the academic worlds?

*Transformation of identities at the intersections of the new culture (US culture)*

Geographically, Pakistan is part of South Asia, but in international politics the country is coupled with the Middle East, specifically on the discourse of terrorism. On arrival to the host culture, the national identity of the Pakistani graduate student is transformed into a racial identity. I argue that there is no one identity of the Pakistani graduate student studying in the US. Pakistani's are multifaceted because they are simultaneously gendered, religious, racial, academics, and are temporary migrants<sup>5</sup>.

I will refer to this multifaceted identity as the *GRRATM identity*, and draw upon the concept of intersectionality laid forth by Crenshaw and Collins. Collins while exploring the simultaneous notion of race and gender in structurally oppressed women writes, "*Intersectionality opens up the possibility of seeing and understanding many more spaces of cross cutting interests. It implies that social categories are not bounded or static*" (2000). Both Crenshaw (1993) and Collins (2000) work on intersectionality comes from black feminist thought, investigating the gendered, racial and oppressed identity of black women. I draw upon their theoretical framework and investigate how the GRRATM identity influences and functions at the cross sections of intersectionality while navigating through different elements of the US culture? Intersectionality here is important because it signifies that these multiple identities are fluid and constantly being influenced by cultural and social contexts. I analyze to which extent is the multi-faceted identity influenced by the host culture?

The research expands the notion of intersectionality by exploring the GRRATM identity of this particular diaspora and I investigate which identity is activated and

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<sup>5</sup>I have purposely neglected the class identity here because their class positioning in the US converges to the student's class. The students represent the privileged class of the Pakistani society and have access to either/all social, cultural, economic resources that has enabled their journey to the US.

reinforced most strongly across the spectrum of familiar and unfamiliar social and cultural circumstances. Stryker's work on identity theory and symbolic interactionism is pertinent to the discussion here because the GRRATM identity is not static but is constantly being influenced by the new cultural material of the host society.

Stryker makes clear, "*Society impacts self impacts social behavior. Social behavior is specified by taking role choice the opting by persons to meet expectations of one role rather than another... Persons are seen as having multiple identities. Self is understood to include affective and conative as well as cognitive aspects, with persons having as many personal identities as there are organized systems of role relationships in which they participate.*" (Stryker 2008, 20). There is an ongoing battle of the self as the pre-existing cultural norms come into conflict with the new cultural norms of the host culture.

I conceptualize race and culture as outside of individuals and are used by social actors to construct personal interpretations of their evolving self within a new social context (i.e., the U.S.)<sup>6</sup> In other words, perceptions of religion and culture provide a "*tool kit*" of images, representations, and world-views (Swidler 1986, 273). I use the "*tool kit*" approach to make sense of their evolving identities and to suggest how Pakistani students navigate through their lives in US. The new culture provides '*cultural components*' that helps conceptualize the '*strategies of action*' to resolve the ongoing battle of the self in un-familiar terrain. (Swidler 1986, 273).

Swidler in elaborating the tool kit approach uses two models of culture, the settled culture and the unsettled culture. (1986, 283). The former for the case of Pakistani graduate students is the Pakistani culture that has played a significant role in '*constructing strategies of action*' and these actions have been inline with the strategies

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<sup>6</sup> Seminar notes Race Class and Gender- Professor Shawn McGuffey

of the home culture while existing in the Pakistani society. (Swidler 1986, 281) Hence these individuals have had a stronger social identity that has been formed from the cultural material in their home cultures prior to coming to the US. This social identity is based on the group membership and associated with the ‘*social category (e.g. nationality, political affiliations, sports team) into which one falls, and to which one feels one belongs, provides a definition of who one is in terms of the defining characteristics of the category a self definition that is part of the self concept*’ (Hogg et al 1995, 259). In Pakistan these students reinforce their social identities and ensure their group commitment by using their native culture and hence strengthening their social identities.

Additionally, Swidler points out that in ‘*settled lives*’ it is also problematic to ‘*disentangle cultural and structural influences on action*’ hence the social identities of Pakistani graduates students while in Pakistan are constantly being reinforced knowingly or unknowingly (1986, 281). However, on arrival to the US the cultural context is reversed and now they find themselves in a new unsettled culture and a new social structure. The same cultural space is a settled culture for a native US citizen<sup>7</sup> but it is the unsettled culture space for new migrant arriving to the US for the first time and in this case the Pakistani graduate student. With the change in social context, the new culture is no longer reinforcing prior social identities but now these temporary migrants exist in an unsettled culture and are in the process of learning new modes of actions. (Swidler,182).

This unsettled culture provides an unfamiliar environment hence the GRRATM identity becomes more pronounced. GRRATM identity continues to be influenced by society but in the unsettled culture the self has more control to be “*active creator of*

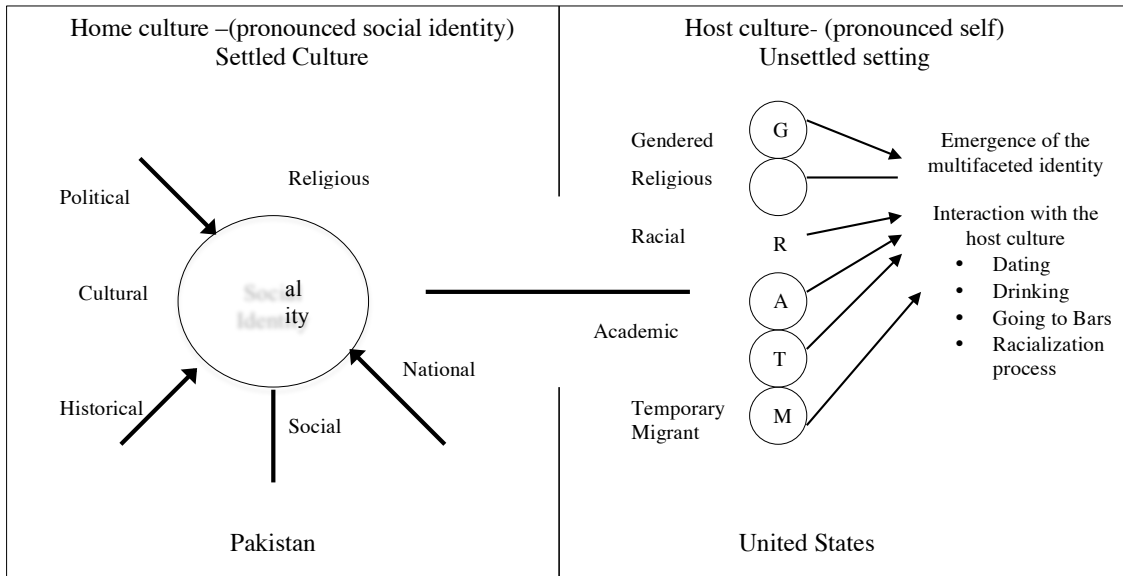
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<sup>7</sup> This can be contested, however as a researcher I only make this generalization in order to point to the contradictory experience for the new migrant versus a experience of a native

*social behavior*". (Stryker 1980, 385). I would like to elaborate here that the identities of the Pakistani graduate students have been formed by the continuous influence of the cultural and social and structural context of the home culture, and hence on arrival it is not that abandon those pre-existing concepts. However, the pre-existing culture, using Parson's terminology provides "value orientations", which serve as benchmarks for selection of new cultural material in the unsettled culture. (Swidler 1986, 274).

Pakistani students use their pre-existing religious symbols and cultural world-views and the new cultural components to understand their changing lives. These pre-existing cultural symbols however, are used selectively for strategic purposes (Bourdieu 1990; McGuffey forthcoming; Sewell 1992). I explore which elements of US culture; socializing and dating, travelling to other parts of the US, wearing western clothes, going to bars or clubs, watching local sports games (college/national), participating in celebrations Halloween and Thanksgiving and Christmas, Pakistani graduate students chose to select while they stay in the US and how their selection process while controlling for age and gender.

Figure 1: Formation of the GRRATM Identity



The first box on the right shows the formation of the social identity, which is formed by the reinforcement of the religious, cultural and social, historic, political and national ideals of Pakistani society. However on arrival to the US the self is more pronounced and becomes the GRRATM identity and, in the unsettled culture the self has more control in navigating the different elements of US culture.

**Methodology:**

I use qualitative methods to explore the influence of US culture on the lives of Pakistani graduate students studying in the US. I have adopted the life history method approach in order to document the social, cultural, institutional and ideological transformations that are occurring and have occurred in the lives of these students. (Thomas & Znaniecki, 1927). Life history interviews bring into consideration the hidden information that may not have been made public by the participating individuals

otherwise. (McCall and Wittner, 1990). I draw upon the narratives of these students to form the theoretical framework by using grounded theory methods developed by Glaser and Strauss.

The study explores the ways in which Pakistani graduate students battle with their pre-existing cultural values while experiencing the new cultural elements in the US. Hence observation of the emotional elements is critical to the research. The informal setting of the life history interviews enabled me to observe these emotions through the participants facial expressions, reflecting uneasy, conflicting or proud and happy moments while talking about their experiences in the US. The observation of emotions was one of the primary reasons for adopting qualitative methods, and the life history approach in particular. So even if the respondents were hesitant about their personal lives, their facial expressions relayed the conflict.

#### *Why graduate students?*

Pakistani students arriving to US to pursue their academic interests, belong to the upper quintiles of the population. Hence they are not a true representation of the masses due to the economic and cultural costs<sup>8</sup> involved in the process of arrival and staying in the US. Both the undergraduate and graduate students studying in the US belong to the privileged class and have high cultural, social and economic capital. However, graduate students tend to have higher cultural and social capital and lower economic capital than their younger counter parts (Bourdieu, 1986). Because, unlike undergraduate studies, the chance for scholarships and outside funding is a larger possibility in graduate programs in

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<sup>8</sup> I use the term cultural costs here because Pakistan is a conservative society and the ideologies of classes vary drastically with the dominant groups being flexible of enabling women to study abroad alone but the poorer classes hindered by their economic and conservative settings, making it difficult to make such bold decisions.



the US, hence enabling young adults from varying social groups and financial backgrounds to pursue their academic interests. Students pursuing a masters or doctoral degree generally take two routes. Either they join the graduate program immediately after the completion of undergraduate studies or they take a break for a couple or several years to pursue their professional interests. This leads to the multiplicity in age, professional and personal backgrounds for this particular group. Pakistani graduate students arriving to the US follow a similar pattern and offer diversity not only in their intergenerational differences, but by having varying experiences. They also have relatively stronger pre-existing cultural values of the home countries than their younger counterparts. This spectrum of diversity is essential to explore the influences of US culture on the lives of Pakistani graduate student as I was aware that it would provide pronounced narratives to view the conflicts of the GRRATM while experiencing the new host culture.

*Sample size and dynamics:*

The sample consists of 28 Pakistani graduate students studying in the US and takes into account four underlying factors: *type of temporary migration status, varying duration of stay, equal representation of gender and intergenerational differences* that can shape the influence of the US culture on the lives of Pakistani graduate students studying in the American university. Table 1 provides a summary of the 28 respondents based on these 4 categories and the type of graduate program and state.

*a. Temporary Migrant status*

Pakistani graduate students arriving to the US as international students are categorized into F and J visa categories under US immigration laws. The former visa category enables the students to have the option to legally stay in the US for work

purposes on completion of their studies. Their temporary migration status can evolve into work visa category and later into a much more permanent status by becoming US citizens<sup>9</sup>. They eventually join their predecessors; the highly skilled migrant community of Pakistani's living in the US today, who also contribute predominantly to the foreign remittances in Pakistan.

The latter group on the other hand is sponsored by national or international scholarships and is bound to return home and serve the funding organization or join the work force depending upon the terms and conditions of the sponsoring organization. The students in the sample on J-1 visa category are Fulbright scholars, which is organized through the United States Education Foundation in Pakistan funded by US- Aid. For my sample, I have taken the temporary migrant status of the students into account, as it can affect the respondents experience in the US. In my sample I have 15 students from F-1 visa category and 13 from J-1 category.

*b. Varying duration of stay:*

I purposely chose students having varying duration of stay in the US for the study, as I wanted to compare the varying influences of the US culture on the lives of the graduate students depending upon the duration of their stay. The participants have been studying in the US over a period of 5 months to 5 years; this has provided me with variation in perspectives of the Pakistani students based on their period of stay. Thirteen respondents in the sample have been in the US for less than 1 year and the remaining have been studying here, over a period of approximately two to five years. I was able to

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<sup>9</sup> Migration aspects are only discussed here to provide an understanding to the reader about the basic differences, necessary to understand the student experience. However, I will not discuss the migration debate associated with these groups as it is not the focus of the study but it is part of another research project that I shall pursue soon.

interview three respondents who had been in the US for approximately five years. Students, who have been in the host culture, longer, have more nuanced understanding of their changing environment and their narrative provides a transforming GRRATM identity than their newer counter parts that are still in the settling phase.

*c. Gendered perspectives:*

Another consideration in my sample is the gender ratio. It is important to include both male and female perspective as it can explain the gender differences in experiencing the culture in the US. This is an important part of the study. However I was unsuccessful in obtaining a half and half ratio. Instead my sample consists of 13 women and 15 men. The inclusion of gender is an important consideration in the debate as gender dynamics vary in the new liberal US culture as compared to the pre-existing conservative settings of the Pakistani culture. I attempted purposely to achieve equal gender representation across the two visa categories. However I wasn't able to achieve an equal ratio but there is a balanced representation of both genders across the two visa groups. Of the 15 students from F1 category 8 are male and 7 are female. In J-1 category 6 students are female and 7 are male.

By taking gender into consideration I was able to explore the varying approaches of men and women while interacting with the different elements of the US culture. The gender variation is more pronounced when participants spoke about their dating experience and their thoughts on going to bars and alcohol consumption for socializing purposes.

*d. Intergenerational Differences:*

The participants in my study range from 23 to 40 years old. While female respondents have the minimum and maximum age, for male respondents the minimum age was higher i.e. 24 and maximum age lower 38. This provides variation in their experiences of the US cultures and also signifies the differences of planning to coming to the American university. I have purposely ensured that I am able to maintain the gender spectrum across the age spectrum in my sample. The mean age of the sample is 29, mode age is 25 and the median age is 27. Table 2a shows the age variation while controlling for gender. Table 2b provides the age variation while controlling for visa category also. Table 2c provides the age variation while controlling for age and gender. This variation of age has provided diversity in the experiences and these varying backgrounds have provided more nuanced boundaries in the changing GRRATM identity in the US culture.

	#	Mean age	Mode	Median	Min age	Max age
Female	13	29.69230769	25	27	23	40
Male	15	28.33333333	25	27	24	38
	28	28.96428571	25	27	23	40

Visa	Mean	Median	Mode
J= 13	31.61538462	27	25
F=15	26.66666	25.5	25

Gender	F-1	Mean	Median	Mode	Min	Max
Female	7	26.28571429	25	25	23	31
Male	8	27	25.5	25	24	38

Gender	J-1	Mean	Median	Mode	Min	Max
Female	6	33.66	27	25	25	40
Male	7	29.85714286	29	25	25	38

The data reveals that students in the F1 visa category are relatively younger to students in the J-1 category. This finding of course cannot be generalized to the entire Pakistani student population studying in the US. However, it clearly implies that students in the J-1 category come from relatively stronger professional backgrounds and thus older than their younger counter parts in F-1 category.

*Gaining access to the Pakistani graduate students:*

This specific population is an extremely under researched population in the US. There are 4,600 Pakistani students studying in the US.<sup>10</sup> They are sporadically spread across different states, in order to make the links, I made connection with the international student body at Boston College and mapped out Pakistani student associations in US universities. I emailed several of these student bodies specifically South Asian and Islamic association bodies across the US to get in touch with the graduate students. However, the most affective means of accessing the graduate students was through the

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.iie.org/Research-and-Publications/Open-Doors/Data/International-Students/All-Places-of-Origin/2010-12>

word of mouth of the respondent themselves. The word of mouth generated a snowball sample of the Pakistani graduate students studying in US institutions. Since they are so dispersed across the country the snowball sampling helped point to the hidden population that might not have been accessible otherwise. (Mile and Huberman, 1994). I found the word of mouth approach more efficient and built upon the already prevalent networks of Pakistani graduate students to locate participants for my study.

Over a period of 7 months I was able to interview 28 graduate students of which 15 are male and 13 female. On receiving the emails, I was contacted by 5 male students voluntarily to be part of the study, of which I included 3 of the male students in the study<sup>11</sup>. The remaining 10 respondents were contacted through the word of mouth and were friends with each other or knew their peers from the undergraduate years. My aim was to include equal representation of female respondent in the sample. Even though I was able to get in touch with 20 female students, only 13 women consented for the interview. Three female students approached me voluntarily on receiving my emails through different forums. However they denied the interview and were willing to fill in an online survey. The remaining four female students that were contacted through the word of mouth initially postponed the interview to summer due to their busy academic schedules. However, I approached them in summer when their schedules were less busy but the female students denied the consent without justifying any reason. As a researcher I assume it's primarily because they were un-comfortable with the interview process and opening up to a stranger on life history questions. This contradictory response of hesitation of women versus the forwardness of men towards the research reverberates

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<sup>11</sup> The two students were excluded because I had already reached the maximum count for male respondents

through out different components of the study and raises questions on self-esteem, cultural variations discussed in the finding sections.

The male respondents were possibly more interested in my research as I was a female Pakistani graduate student. Hence my gendered positionality as a female indeed was an advantage for including male respondents in the research. One of the male respondents after the interview added “ *by the way, I gave you my interview because I wanted to meet you in person because its hard to find people from our country here* ” Clearly emphasizing the significance of my gender role and my shared identity. Another reason why the male respondents helped me more was based on their patriarchal and protectiveness ideals of being a fellow Pakistani citizen, the gentlemen dynamic of helping a lady in distress. One of the male respondent who had a number of friends studying in the US institutions added “*You wont forget what a nice person you have met, don’t worry, I will help you connect with Pakistani’s studying here, I have a lot of friends here so what kind of students are you looking for?*”

However it would be interesting to explore how the sample gender ratio may have varied had I been a single male researcher? Needless to say my gender role also helped connect better with female respondents in the study who were not very sociable with men and the US culture in general. I think one of the main reasons for the hesitation of the female respondents to be part of my study was possibly more because of the fear of how I would perceive them while they narrated their experiences? Since the interview covers their personal experiences and relationships before marriage are considered a social taboo in the Pakistan culture. It may have been that they chose not to participate in the

interview, as they did not want to reveal any information. These factors may have accounted to the hesitation of female participants in the study.

My positionality as a Pakistani graduate student played a significant role in connecting with my focused population. Though, I was an outsider to the participants our shared national identity and my native knowledge of Urdu eased the respondents immediately. I mostly used Urdu in the conversation so they could easily relate to me as and they would use statements like ‘ *you know how it is there*’. Even though this was followed by question from my end like what do you mean? to elaborate what they meant and not to base their responses on my perception only. But my shared identity, my knowledge of the native language and culture played a profound role in making the respondents feel comfortable and talk openly about their experiences and struggles in the host culture.

#### *Interview guide and approach*

The interviews lasted between 1 to 2 hours, depending upon the participant’s narrative of the experiences. Before conducting the interviews I developed a comprehensive interview guide that consisted of three sections: life before the US, life on arrival to the US and current situation, encompassing questions on education, family backgrounds, personal lives including romantic relationships, interaction with the US culture, social and cultural experiences, likes and dislikes and plans on completion of the study. I did not take the interview guide at the time of the interview but framed it around an informal conversation using Urdu as major mode of communication so that the participant felt more comfortable in sharing his/her experiences. I purposely asked basic introduction and background sections in the beginning of the interview and slowly moved



to the personal, cultural and social experiences. This approach helped the respondents feel less formal and they slowly warmed up to the interview process, opening up about their experiences in the US. It was only then that I asked more personal questions on their romantic lives<sup>12</sup> and how they approached the drinking of alcohol<sup>13</sup> culture. The intention was to keep the interview process as casual as possible so the respondents could easily reflect on their experiences in the US. Often at the end they would say ‘*You know you made this interview fun, it didn’t feel like an interview at all*’ ‘*I like your interview style you don’t judge at all its easy opening up to you*’. I also asked extra questions that I would like to call here as the *buffer questions* like how many roommates do you have? Did you have lunch or breakfast or dinner? depending upon the time of the interview. I asked these buffer questions to make a stronger connection with the respondent so that they feel the process more personable as if they were talking to friend rather than a researcher analyzing their responses. The buffer questions also helped generate random conversation on politics or their past experiences that helped me understand their struggles and making decisions of choosing a particular path with in the new host culture.

#### *Privacy and confidentiality*

In order to ensure the privacy of the participants, I followed the IRB protocols for conducting interviews and received signed consent forms from the participants prior to the interview. Since graduate students are spread across the US. I was able to conduct physical interviews with respondents in the Boston area only and used Skype- video call,

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<sup>12</sup> Since most of the respondents are grounded in their Muslim identity sex outside of marriage is forbidden in Islam and is considered a social taboo. However I wanted to acquire about their romantic relationships and followed a more cautious approach of not talking about sex directly.

<sup>13</sup> Alcohol is forbidden in Islam and considered a social taboo, so I was aware that students might not be able to talk about it so easily

for conducting interviews with my remaining participants. The interviews were recorded and I made the participants aware when I began and stopped the recording. I attentively listened to the use of English language by the Pakistani students in the study and any formation of the American accent while they narrated their experience. This is an important observation in the study as it is a direct influence of the US culture and the increased interaction with the American people. The names of the all the respondents have been changed and if they have referenced their friend's names in the conversations I have used pseudonyms also to ensure complete confidentiality.

*Limitations of the approach:*

The snowball methodology played an important role in gaining access to the Pakistani graduate students. However one of the limitations of the approach is most of the respondents knew each other prior to coming to the US, or have gotten to know each other in the US during their academic tenure. They were sometimes hesitant about talking about their personal information because they thought I might tell their friend, or they assumed that I probably would know about a shared experience while interacting with the host culture. I often had to remind them of the confidentiality clause in the consent form and assured that the information was kept private and requested them to go over the shared experience again. It was also hard to include respondents in the study who had been in the US for longer than three years and even more difficult to maintain gender ratio across the duration of stay and while accounting for the differences in the visa categories.

*Coding and Analysis:*

I individually transcribed the interviews and also made notes of the day of the interaction with the respondent. The notes include the type of clothes worn, appearance of cleavage and familiarity towards the surrounding if the interview was conducted face. These are all necessary elements of understanding the respondent's positionality in the host culture. I adopt Miles and Huberman's analytical inductive approach to organize the data. (McGuffey, 2008) After coding I collated the common and conflicting patterns in the emerging themes based on the respondents different categories.

The emerging themes arising from the coding are, immigration experiences before and after arrival to the US, experience with academic facilities, settling down phase, interaction with US cultural elements, transition to the western attire, socialization from going to bars, dating, sports games, experience with local festivities and the racialization process of the Pakistani graduate student. However due to the limitations of the scope of the paper I will focus of themes relating to the cultural and social experiences of the Pakistani graduate students as they navigate their GRRATM identity in the host culture.

### ***FINDINGS SECTION:***

The findings are focused on the *cultural and social* experiences of the students as they adopt different processes to interact with the host culture. I investigate the fluid approaches that the students deploy to maneuver their every day lives across different elements of US culture.

Based on careful analysis of the findings, I divide the categories of the Pakistani graduate students navigating through the US culture into two broad groups. The '*Explorers*' and the '*Keepers*'. The *explorers* are students that have a curious and exploratory approach while interacting with the host culture. Explorers adopt an *inclusion*

*mode* as they participate in the host culture's every day traditions and integrate into the host society. The explorer approach is further facilitated by the *select* and *drop* mechanism developed by the students. While using the value system from the home culture, the students tend to select or drop different aspects of the cultural elements of the host culture while integrating into the host society. The *keepers*, on the other hand, are hesitant in exploring the different elements of the new culture. The keepers do not integrate into the new culture rapidly, adopt a dismissive approach, and do not participate in the local cultural traditions that don't fit their values and norms. This approach is based on the hesitation and the need to adhere to their own Pakistani identity. The subsequent sections will indicate that self-isolation from the different cultural elements is a symbol adherence to their Pakistani identity. My findings highlight the struggles of both the keepers and the explorer's as they formulate the GRRATM at the cross sections of the US culture.

The approach adopted by keepers and the explorers is not concrete, but fluid and constantly evolving in the liberal settings of the host culture. Respondents from the following the keepers approach may choose to adopt a more relaxed approach towards interacting with the new culture, depending on their duration of stay and positive experiences with the host culture or vice versa for the explorers. The keepers and explorer approach of the students becomes prominent as the students respond differently at the cross section of US cultural elements, as going to bars, dating, watching sports, travelling, participating in celebrating local holidays Halloween, Thanksgiving and Christmas.

The keeper or explorer outlook towards the US culture cannot be correlated to the visa categories (F and J).<sup>14</sup> But the differentiation is dependent on their family backgrounds, social environment of the home society and life histories that have influenced their personalities over the course of time and have resulted in formulating their respective approach. However, intergenerational, gender differences, and duration of stay of the respondents in the host culture affect how students respond to the different elements of US culture. I elaborate these differences in the upcoming sections.

The finding section is organized as follows: I first discuss American university as a symbol of success for the Pakistani graduate students. Followed by the interaction with US cultural elements which includes a) transition to the western attire b) socialization in bars c) socialization - romance and dating. Due to limitations of the paper I excluded their experiences with sports and participation in local festivities. The last section is on the racialization process of the Pakistani graduate student.

### ***The American university as a symbol of success***

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<sup>14</sup> This itself is an important finding as the respondents coming on the two-visa category have different processes of arrival. One of the primary differences among the visa categories is the funding of the academic studies and the expense of the stay in the US. As mentioned in the methods section the students in the J-1 visa category, both masters and doctoral candidate are fully covered by the Fulbright scholarship program. However, for the students in the F-1 visa category all doctoral students and few master students have been able to receive teaching/research assistantships from the host institution. But the students in the masters program are also dependent on their families for financial support as their stipends are not fully able to cover their living expenses. Based on the respondent's response, it appears as if students in the F-1 category in the masters programs have families that are financially better off than their counterparts on J-1. Since masters degree is mostly a two-year program and students in F-1 category find local campus jobs also later on to help cover their living expenses but they need their families financial support in the first term at least to enable them to sustain their expenditures. I base this finding on comparison of students doing their masters in both the categories as students.

There is variation in response to the settling in phase upon arrival of the incoming Pakistani graduate students. Students reported varied experiences in the immigration process before and on arrival to the US, which was influenced by their gender and visa differences. However, I have intentionally chosen not to include these findings in this paper, but my focus is to investigate whether the journey to the US signified something important or was it just a casual event in their lives, and why did they choose to come to the US for graduate studies and what factors from the home society influenced their decision to come to the US.

*Mahmood<sup>15</sup>:*

*As soon as I got out of the airport I updated the Facebook status 'checked into the US' and then I got my taxi later*

*M: So you updated your Facebook status first?*

*Mahmood: Yes, (and laughs) well I had come to the US and I wasn't ashamed of it I was happy and proud! (And laughs more)...*

*Ali<sup>16</sup>:*

*Very proud to be here, I was obsessed with my academic institution and my wife can tell you that my obsession was almost unhealthy, and I had told her if don't go to this academic institution I wont really study anywhere in the US. I have loved the US for a long time*

*M: why do you love the US?*

*Ali: I continue to admire Bill Clinton while growing up, I would read his speeches and also when I was studying for my bar I studies their constitution.. so I am a fan of this country I have always admired it and continue to. But I have a problem with the way they treat their homeless, and they are obsessed with getting ahead in life.. its harmful.. I mean its ok if that's how they want to live their lives.. I think there is a culture of excess and thats why recession happened but there is a culture of excess here.*

*Areeba<sup>17</sup>:*

*I was so happy to see the surroundings around me, the roads, bridges, tunnels, I wanted to see America since, my childhood and that dream came true, and I was over joyed to be here. I felt like I was part of some movie or those American series like twenty one and mean girls ....There was a perception in my mind that the Academic institutions of the US are the best .. so I wanted to come here*

*M : What about the UK?*

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<sup>15</sup> Male, Masters in business student J-1, 27 year 1 year and 8 months

<sup>16</sup> Male Masters in Law- visa: J1- 30 year- duration: 8 months

<sup>17</sup> Female PHD- visa-: F1- 23 years – duration: 8 months

*Areeba: No not really.. I don't know how I had this perception but I have always somehow felt and have had this idea that the US colleges offer the best academic environment*

*Seema<sup>18</sup>:*

*Well I had in my mind somehow that US is way better than England when it comes to PHD. So that is why I came here.*

*Zobia<sup>19</sup>:*

*I had no plans of studying abroad or wasn't even fascinated to live in the US. But when I started teaching in college Pakistan, I realized that if I have to succeed professionally then I need to do a PHD from the US. Because all the professors that were good in my college had their doctorate degrees from the US. I always felt that the US degree is a best degree. I also got scholarships for doing PHD in UK and Sweden but I got the Fulbright scholarship for the US and that was my priority.*

*Rohail<sup>20</sup>:*

*No I didn't want to go to the UK and their market is very bad because of the recession and all. The US institutions in this city are very good and this city has a good job market and my brother is also in the US.*

The prospects of education from an American institution and arrival to the US signify a milestone in the lives of the Pakistani graduate students. The respondents prefer the American education system to the United Kingdom. The message is clear: Pakistanis in this study place higher value U.S. educational institutions. Thus, it is more prestigious and valued in the home country to study in the U.S. as compared to studying in Europe. Most of the respondents like Areeba have reported this perception of the United States offering the best education in the world and Pakistani students adhere to this idea strongly. The US institutions here serve as a sign of higher prestige as compared to the institutions in the UK and Europe. The job market is also considered better than the UK as pointed out by Rohail.

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<sup>18</sup> Female – PHD -visa: F1- 31 years- duration: 4 years and 10 months

<sup>19</sup> Female – PHD -visa: J1- 31 years-duration: 4 years and 11 months

<sup>20</sup> Male- MSc -visa: F1- 27 years- duration: 8 months

The excitement revealed by both Ali and Mahmood are the evidence of the influence of the United States on Pakistan, not only on the political spectrum but also on the society and at the individual level. They relate admiration and fan like behavior towards the host culture, which they developed from their home society. Seema, points to the fascination with the developed infrastructure of the US. Signifying the weaker infrastructure facilities of the home society. The immediate action of Mahmood to update his Facebook status on arrival and the reaffirmation remark of pride on arrival, signify that US is acknowledged as a sign of success by the home society. It promises professional and academic achievements in the future. Ali's use of the term *love* for the US shows familiarity and longing to explore the new culture.

The incoming Pakistani graduate students echo the belief in the American dream. Coming to the US for higher education is a symbol of success embedded in the minds of all the respondents, a message acknowledged by the Pakistani society

### ***Interaction with US cultural elements***

#### ***a) Transition to the 'western attire' men vs. women:***

Jeans, Pants, T-shirt, Skirts, shorts etc. These are considered as Western attire in the Pakistani society. The national dress of Pakistan is shalwar qameez (lose fitted and a longer shirt and lose pants) and is worn by the masses. Women accompany the dress with a scarf across the chest. Men in the urban areas of Pakistan, however, are accustomed to the western styles of dressing and wear it regularly when going to work, college or formal or informal gatherings. However, this is not the case for women in the home society, and is influenced by class, social environment and age.

The incoming Pakistani graduate students are not an accurate representation of the masses and belong to the upper three quintiles of the society; hence I expected the



familiarity of the new dress code for them. The male respondents in the sample didn't report any difference or a hassle in their wardrobe in the host culture. However the keeper and explorer approach becomes evident in the responses of the female respondents.

Tanzeela<sup>21</sup>: (37 years)

*I don't think I had any issue. I used to wear trousers / jeans with kurta in Pakistan. Not daily but quite often. So wearing trousers and jeans with half sleeves or full sleeves top is ok for me as per the weather conditions. Yes wearing these heavy coats in winter seems hard*

Seema: (31 years)

*I never wore pants at home, I insisted on wearing shalvar kameez with dupatta here. I did that for a long time. So I felt comfortable in wearing shalvar kameez. It took me three years to transition into the life here, slowly I found my self-wearing Kameez with pants and then t-shirts but it took me three years to adjust. I don't wear anything revealing (When I met her, she was wearing a loose sweater and jeans, I would not have been able to guess her struggle with the western attire from her appearance.)*

Mona<sup>22</sup>: (25 years)

*I used to wear jeans with frocks (which is similar to a frock/ long western dress) in Pakistan. Normally I wear, t-shirts here. Rarely (random mood) I go to campus in a long frock & tights. I didn't use to wear t-shirts in Pakistan though.*

Sara: (26 years)

*I am just the same person as I was in Pakistan, the things I do in Pakistan I do the same here, the things I didn't do in Pakistan I don't do here. I wear the same clothes as I did in Pakistan. I don't wear anything revealing its just the way I am its not that, I am too Islamic or something (and pauses)...so by the way my family is a very liberal family, My mother is far more liberal than most people I know, I wore jeans till the last day I was there I didn't have restrictive life over there..*

The clothes is a silent yet an important cultural symbol of transition to the host culture. The four responses underline the struggle of the keepers and the transition of the explorer in the host society by choosing the way they dress. The essence of their religiosity is deeply enrooted in their response, however it is not explicitly implied in all responses. But the female respondents expected me to know the non-revealing aspect of

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<sup>21</sup> Female, PHD, visa: J-1- 37 years- duration: two years and six months

<sup>22</sup> Female MSc- visa F1 -25 years- duration 8 months

clothing already. The women adhere to their Muslim identity, by wearing the western clothes ensuring they don't reveal any skin that's considered promiscuous by the standards of the home society. They use the terms *non-revealing*, *long frocks*, to stress that they cover the upper and lower torso and thighs.

Sara and Tanzeela both were accustomed to wearing the same clothing in the home society, Sara 26 emphasizes that she is the same person as she was in Pakistan by stressing *she wears the same clothes as she did in Pakistan*. Implying that coming to the US has not influenced her identity as it was in the home culture though she has been in the US for two years, her identity is the same as it was in Pakistan. She acknowledges the *liberal* outlook of her mother enabled her to wear the same clothes in the home society and that her western wardrobe was different from the masses. This helped her transition swiftly into the host culture and found her life in Pakistan unrestrained by the larger conservative narrative of the home society. She assumes that someone coming from a restrictive setting would have broken all forms of barriers, but she has retained her identity. She also has a keeper approach as she continues to dress the same way and affirms that her identity has not changed. She denies her religiosity by adopting a secular outlook and states that even though she doesn't wear anything revealing its because of her 'self', not religion. This can mean two things as she wants to express that religion has not hampered her choice of clothing, also that she battles with the conservative narrative of Islam surrounding her in the host society and separates herself it, by justifying her choice as choice of the self.

Seema, on the other hand didn't want to let go of her Pakistani clothes and wore them for three years as she associated it to her identity. She stuck to a keepers approach

and as she settled in the new cultures slowly, it was apparent from her change of clothes to jeans. She develops an explorer approach over time transitioning from the keeper but continues to acknowledge that she still doesn't wear anything revealing. Seema adheres to her religiosity but also embraces the host clothing at free will.

The dichotomy of the response of Sara and Seema's responses show two contradictory experiences of the women and highlight the keeper explorer approach. They both have the same visa category, highly educated and similar financial situation as they are both dependent on college stipends to sustain their living and academic expense. But their varying family backgrounds and social environments of the home culture have deeply influenced their approach of navigating the US culture.

Tanzeela and Mona though separated by 12-year age gap, show a similar response in their transitioning to the newer clothing, they both were familiar with western clothing but they joined the explorers and wear more variety of the new clothing while adhering to their religiosity. With the exception of two females, most of the women above thirties in the sample reported difficulty in transition to the western clothes as compared to women in twenties. This intergenerational difference also highlights the influence and exposure of the western culture in the Pakistani society over time.

The keepers and explorer approach of the respondents is fluid. The students have also developed a process of '*select*' and '*drop*' to negotiate their GRATMM identity in the host culture and in specific their gendered and religious identity. Selecting elements of the new culture by wearing regular T-shirts and longer shirts. The drop mechanism of choosing not to wear anything that shows too much skin, which is acceptable to the host society but unacceptable to the home society. The students continue to use the value

system from the home culture to navigate through the different cultural elements of the host society.

*b) Socialization in Bars- Alcohol*

The Islamic faith strongly forbids alcohol, with 97% of the society as Muslims in Pakistan, the ritual of non-drinking is a common tradition and publicly endorsing the idea is strongly seen as a social taboo. However the decision to publically forbid alcohol was put forth nationally in the 1977s under Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's Presidency.<sup>23</sup> There are no bars but the substance is available to non-Muslim dealers and available for consumption in elite hotels, often hosting foreign nationals. However, there is a large underground market and alcohol is accessible to those who wish to drink it, but will not publically display the action unless within their circles.

In the US, however, alcohol and bars are a regular element of the society. Once in the host culture, the respondents are free from the social control of the home culture, and can choose to consume if they wish to do so. The keeper and explorer approach of the respondents becomes prominent at the cross sections of socialization: going to bars and drinking alcohol.

Tanzeela:

*I do not drink but I have been to a bar only twice. If I am going with friends I won't mind. It just happened that we never went very often.*

Zohaib:<sup>24</sup>

*No, I don't drink, I am married, I have never tried and have never been tempted to try, my friends from Pakistan they do drink but I don't look down upon them. Its not that am a religious person not at all, I didn't even go to my Friday prayers but I just chose not to drink. I go out with friends, I just don't drink.*

Faiza<sup>25</sup>:

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/dec/27/alcoholism-boom-pakistan>

<sup>24</sup> Male: MA- visa: J1-38 years-1- duration 10 months

<sup>25</sup> Female: PHD- visa: J1- 25 years: duration: 2 years and 4 months

*Well I tried once less than a sip, I remember I was trembling when I asked to try my colleague's drink at a bar. I couldn't really do it you know, it's just that we are so set in habits and values now that we can't change*

Sara:

*I don't smoke, I don't drink I don't hangout till late or go out to clubs or something I just don't feel the urge too*

Mehwish<sup>26</sup>:

*I don't drink not at all,*

*M: Have you ever tried?*

*Mehwish: Yes I have tried it, that was a long time ago when I was a teenager and laughs*

*M: so that was in Pakistan*

*Mehwish: Of course (and laughs) all vices happen in Pakistan. One adopts these bad habits in Pakistan; when you go abroad you stop smoking, stop putting sugar in tea...*

*Well I guess my friends used to drink so I used to drink with them vodka mostly, I haven't tried wine or beer, we went to parties it was there*

Mohsin<sup>27</sup>:

*Drinking I have never tried it once. I have strict rules for my self and I stay with in the boundaries of these rules, they are not flexible and they are my principle and I will not drink. I have been to clubs and they are really not sure what's happening to them when they are drunk, I don't really understand that if you are not in control of your senses in two hours then why do u drink, I am really close with a female white American friend and when we go to a bar she always asks me to drink. I don't drink so I feel bad and it becomes socially awkward. Its like when I invite her over for dinner and I want her to try it but she wont so I understand it's a different culture.*

*M Have you ever been to a bar?*

*Mona: Why should I go there for? Even the two friends (Nepalese and Indian) I know also avoid going to the bar. ... Its right outside my apartment I have never been .... when at 3:00 am I hear some one loud that's when am really curious what is going on in there?*

Hayyat<sup>28</sup>:

*In the beginning, I didn't usually go to the bars because of school priorities but later I realized, that international students as well as Americans like to socialize in bars. So, after that I go almost once every other week. But of course, I never go alone. I check whether my friends are going, I go with them. And that's how I got to know more people. I occasionally drink, so you can consider me as a social drinker. I might have a drink or two when friends are gathered to celebrate. But on a normal night, I would not drink at all. Because, frankly speaking, it doesn't attract me that much. So despite going to bars*

<sup>26</sup> Female MA -visa: F1 -31 years - duration 8 months –

<sup>27</sup> Male-Msc- visa:F1- 25 years- duration: 1 year 8 months

<sup>28</sup> Male:Msc- visa F1 – 24 years –duration 1 year and 8 months

*fairly often, I would say maybe I would drink 1 out of 10 visits to a bar. At a bar, everyone seems to be a bit more relaxed (of course, drinks have an effect as well). The same person if you meet during the day on campus will be totally different at a bar. During the day, everyone is rushing with their own schedule. But at night, everyone is relaxed and exchanging idea.*

*Mahmood:*

*I go a lot to the bar, I don't drink but I go, if I had come here as an undergrad, then I may have started drinking... its not the first time I have been exposed to alcohol I worked in sales before and had to travel to Dubai and East Asia, my manager told me that if I don't drink then I wont be able to make sales. I said well we will have to see wont we ! Actually the way I resist is that I am a very social person and really really outgoing person, I don't do this that I don't go I think this would hit me in a more bad way coz if I will not go then I will feel bad and the others will also feel bad but of course everyone drinks here.. I enjoy with them and enjoy the music and hang out with them and then drive them all back in the car because they are all drunk and laughs*

*M: so that makes you an important asset to them*

*Mahmood: oh yes I am a really important asset that way and laughs*

*M: Do you drink?*

*Ali: yeah when am outside Pakistan, I drink*

*I mean I used to drink when I was in London and then I went to Pakistan for three years I didn't drink and had left it and then I came here I have started drinking here socially to socialize only I just drink*

*M: so you don't buy alcohol for home?*

*Ali: No not at home*

*M: Is your wife ok with it?*

*Ali: well umm yeah she is ok with I mean our policy is that I will never drink at home and bring it there because there is no point drinking alone at home its just depressing alone, I gave her a simple logic when I came here that I am drinking because at a place like this a lot people who are here now will be in powerful positions in matter 10 to 15 years and hence networking is very important and to build connections. I call people at the bar and buy a drink. Every weekend there is a bar that I go there are international nights so I get to meet people and Americans from all over,*

*Zobia<sup>29</sup>*

*There is social hour here, Thanks to Allah, I don't drink, I do my prayers, there is no concept of alcohol or going to bars for me, and smiles I don't want to go to a bar*

The choice of drinking alcohol brings into question the religious identity of the Pakistani graduate students. There is also a striking difference of the men versus the women's approach to going to bars and drinking alcohol. However there seems to be a

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<sup>29</sup> Female PHD- visa: J1- 31 years- duration 4 years and 11 months

general consensus among the respondents that alcohol plays an important role in socialization in the host culture. The presence of alcohol in the host culture is not new to the respondents but they were familiar with the availability of the substance in their home society also but chose not to drink it.

All the female respondents, with the exception of two, have never tried alcohol and are not fond of going to bars and socializing in bars. Mehwish who has tried alcohol doesn't drink anymore but was used to drinking in parties during her school/college years in Pakistan. She belonged to upper elite class of the Pakistani society, relative to rest of the respondents in the sample. Faiza, on the other hand, who has never tried it in Pakistan trembles as she takes the sip of drink. She acknowledges her settled habit of not drinking from her settled/ home culture.

Majority of the women tend to adhere to the keeper approach of not going to bars and also not talking about it. Mona is surprised by my question of the thought of going to the bar, the tone of her answer reflected the idea of how could I as a fellow Pakistani female, ask the question of going to bars. Even though she is curious, but she dissociates herself from it by not going. There is an explorer category of the females going to bar but not drinking, but this exploratory attitude is less prevalent among the female respondents. Women tend to adhere to their puritan Islamic values carried from the home society by choosing not to go to bars. They adhere to their religiosity and reject the going to bar culture element of the host culture. Also avoiding the social stigma associated with drinking and detaching themselves from the action.

The male respondents on the other hand are more exploratory about going to bars than the female respondents. The explorers of this category adopt two kinds of

approaches, the choice of going to bars for socializing but either not drinking or drinking. They use the select and drop mechanism to navigate through this cultural element.

Mahmud, who chooses not to drink but goes to bar, because he is of the view that bars provide a platform to socialize and if he disassociates himself from it, he will find himself in more problematic situation of isolation. Here he adopts the select and drop mechanism of selecting the element of going to bar but dropping the element of drinking and suffices with a non-alcoholic beverage. However, there is a sense of guilt among the students in this category of not reciprocating the gesture. On the other hand those who drink alcohol base their decision on the means to socialize with people and enhance their social and cultural capital while in the US. They feel that by drinking alcohol they are reciprocating an important cultural element of socializing with their fellow peers in the host culture. However at a personal level, they don't like drinking but do it for broadening their professional and social network. By choosing to drink they are creating the identity of the *self* for *the other* to appear as more *other* like. The question here is that to what extent the *other* relates to this identity of the Pakistani student mimicking the cultural element of drinking as a social drinker?

The value system for dealing with alcohol is embedded deep in the consciousness of the incoming students and their adherence to non-drinking reconfirms and reestablishes their puritan values and the Islamic faith indirectly. This action of dropping to drink or even try alcohol is part of the select and drop mechanism as adopted by male respondents who don't chose to drink it. However there are stark gender differences, as the female respondents expected me to understand they do not drink alcohol and adopt more of a puritan approach, immediately isolating themselves from the social stigma



associated with drinking alcohol. They make use of the norms and values from the home culture while making the decisions in the host culture

*c) Socialization- Romance and Dating:*

Of the 28 respondents, 7 of the respondents were married, of which 3<sup>30</sup>, chose the spouse for themselves with the consent of their families, and the remaining 4<sup>31</sup> met their spouse through their parents. In Pakistan, the first method is commonly referred as the love marriage<sup>32</sup> and latter as arranged marriage<sup>33</sup>. The median and average age for the respondents in the former category is 37 and 36 respectively. While both the median and average age for the respondents in the love marriage category is 29, much lower than their married counterparts. This shows that the younger generation leads the initiative of choosing the spouse. However, this finding is challenged, as four respondents, relatively younger, (three female and one male) are engaged in the sample through the arranged process. The median and average age for this category is 26 and 27 respectively. This may be due to the limitation of the sample and variation among the access to different forms of capital among the privileged class.

However of the remaining 17 respondents only three male respondents acknowledged of having girl friends, while no female respondent was in a relationship with the exception of those who were engaged or married. Regardless of their

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<sup>30</sup> Married respondents: Ali and Mehwish married to each other both pursuing their graduate degrees, Rohail's wife studying in UK

<sup>31</sup> Married respondents, Hafeez, Junaid, Zohaib and Zobia

<sup>32</sup> The couples initiate the decision of marriage

<sup>33</sup> The parents initiate the decision of marriage and introduce the couple, the couple may or not have known each other prior to the marriage as acquaintances, cousins or friends. In the sample except Zobia, the male respondents knew their wives before marriage as their cousins and were also friends or were friends through family connections.

relationship status I asked all the respondents about their personal preference of dating and marriage while in the US.

I have segregated the male and female responses purposely, as there are marked differences in the student's response towards dating while controlling for gender. The gender differences also influence the keeper and explorer approach of the respondents as they navigate this particular cultural element of the host society.

Views of the Male Respondents:

*Zohaib (married but I asked him about dating)*

*Zohaib: Yes I would have dated American woman, and when I break up with her I don't have sense of guilt.*

*M: So you will not marry an American woman?*

*Zohaib: He pauses and thinks and says oh you mean dating for the purpose of marriage well, I will prefer a Muslim Pakistani woman for marriage, (and justifies that) reason being that the American family institution is losing its value or may be my male chauvinism is getting in the way....*

*he paused and said I don't know what will you think of me after this,*

*M: I replied that everyone has right to express their own views*

*Qasim:*

*Well I had opposite and much different views on this in Pakistan but not any more though. If I date then she is not a Muslim or I am not a Muslim. The marriage will be arranged the implications of mixed marriages will be worse, even if she is a Muslim because if language is not shared then relationship is not long lasting.*

*Naveed:*<sup>34</sup>

*Well I have been on several dates, if you count going to dinner with a girl as a date. When I was new here, I went out with an American girl and she was quite interested in me but I was afraid of inter-racial stuff at that time. So it basically never worked out. After that I went out with another American and later two Chinese girls but things didn't progress further. I don't have any issue with interracial relationships but I will prefer to marry a Muslim girl, even better if she comes from Pakistan.*

*Saad: (he hesitated and paused a lot while framing his thoughts and didn't want to disclose)*

*Well I have been involved with girls in Pakistan before but it didn't work out. I was approached by two American girls and a Chinese girl, but you see the problem is that when I got romantically involved, I couldn't really take the next step... it's complicated*

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<sup>34</sup> Male –PHD- visa: F1: 26 years – duration: 2.5 years

*because I have these limitation ....and I can't take the next step. For me if the girl is from Abrahamic faith I am willing to marry her if things become serious but to be honest Pakistani girls are the best and then there is the issue of my parents also.*

There are three narratives emerging from the male graduate students and intergenerational differences are highlighted. Qasim's (25) response are stricter as compared to the remaining three, having been in the US for 8 months, he has had a drastic change in his views on the subject. Though he acknowledges the concept of dating in the home culture but the liberal settings of the host culture have questioned his own views and he immediately establishes the link with his Muslim identity and has come to the decision that dating a woman will make him non Islamic.

Naveed (26) and Saad (25), of the same age group, on the other hand contradict this very view and have dated intermittently, but they also acknowledge their religiosity and the preference of belonging to the Abrahamic faith is an important one specifically when it comes to marriage. However they are open to the idea of inter-racial relationship for dating and marriage. The duration of stay also has influences the keepers approach, as reported by Naveed, who was hesitant about the idea of inter racial relationship initially but over the period of time, he is more open to this concept.

Zohaib (38), clings on to both the keeper and explorer approach depending upon dating or marriage. Though he is open to the idea of dating in the US, but his views on marriage with a Pakistani Muslim woman are quite concrete. While talking about drinking he had adopted a secular approach to the choice of not drinking but on the issue of marriage he is grounded in his religious identity. The question is hypothetical as he is married and committed to his wife in Pakistan but he is aware of his masculine views and makes a judgment on himself calling them misogynistic on not taking inter racial

relationship seriously. These ideals have been informed the male hegemonic ideals of the home society.

Intergenerational differences are also highlighted among men adopting the explorer approach, Zohaib's views represent a subset of men from his age group in Pakistan; who is not open to the idea of inter-racial relationship for marriage contradictory to the relaxed views of his younger counter parts. There is an ongoing struggle among the respondents of being grounded in their religious identity but simultaneously trying to be in harmony with the pre-existing ideals of the host culture. We seem emergence of two conflicting views of how dating is viewed in the Islamic faith, this brings the question of the social environments and family backgrounds of respondents in question that have lead to the formation of these views. However in all these views, the male respondents have a preference to marry/and or date Pakistani women, primarily due to the commonality of the cultural traditions.

The male respondents are confident in talking about the subject but the shyness and hesitation in Saad's response is evident, as he battled with both his religiosity and his values that conflict with the host cultural settings. He was unable to *take the next step*, in in the relationship, probably referring to physical intimacy and acknowledges the limitations but he is grounded by his religiosity. Saad is free from the social control of the home society however he uses the select drop mechanism by choosing to be romantically involved but conflicted as he choses not to take the *next step*.

Views of the Female Respondents:

*Sara:* (She didn't talk about dating talked about inter racial marriage instead)  
*I think that interracial marriages produce the prettiest babies in the world. I think if you like somebody and he is a good human being and your parents are not completely against*

*him, then you should be able to marry him, it does not matter what race, as long as he is Christian or Jew it can be ok .....but may be I have liberal views, But religion tells you that men can marry Christian and Jewish women..I wouldn't marry a Christian or a Jew but had it been, it would have been ok as long as he believes in God*

*Humera<sup>35</sup>:*

*Q. Has anyone ever approached you romantically?*

*Yes, several Indian guys have approached me. However I am not interested in them, as I want to be with someone from Pakistan. Whenever someone asks me out I say I have someone in Pakistan waiting for me. I say this because you can't say to someone that you are not interested in someone because they are from a certain religion or country. It's clear in my head that I have to go back to Pakistan and get married there. No American guy has approached me though.*

*Tanzeela: "I haven't been approached by anyone but I am open to the idea of dating for marriage as long as he is from the Abrahamic faith, my family has rested this decision with me.*

*Faiza*

*Well there have been guys who have been romantically interested in me. There were two American boys but I politely refused. One Pakistani guy that I know here proposed to me respectfully through his mother but I refused because I have a pact with my mother that I will marry within my family wishes. I recently got engaged and it's a complicated situation.*

The female respondents were reluctant to talk about their dating experiences in the US. None of the women have dated anyone in the US. This is not the case for their male counterparts. However they have been approached romantically on several occasions. Their views on the subject are grounded in their religiosity and, they are inclined to be in relationship with a man from Pakistan. Women tend to couple the topic of dating to marriage directly. The female respondents associate the decision to be in relationship with their families' approval. They offer the keepers approach and are willing to explore the concept of dating with the possibility of marriage with the consent of their families. Sara's response battles with the idea of religiosity and shares her thoughts loud, going back and forth with the idea of settling down with someone

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<sup>35</sup> Female- PHD-visa: F1- 22 years duration – 1 year and 8 months

belonging to the Abrahamic faith other than Muslim but contradicts her own thought as she is grounded in her religiosity and prefers a Muslim.

Intergenerational differences among the women respondents are also highlighted. Female Respondents, in their thirties mentioned that no one had approached them romantically, but they were open to the idea of dating for marriage with someone from the Abrahamic faith. This view is related through Tanzeela's response, more relaxed as compared to their younger counterparts. It is not clear if this view has been influenced by the duration of stay, instead age plays a prominent role and their views on marriage have become more relaxed and flexible based on their life experiences.

None of the women talked of having prior relationships except two women one of them was divorced and the other had a broken engagement. This is an important finding as women are either shy in disclosing their personal life to a stranger and are not comfortable in disclosing any relationship which has not been officially acknowledged as an engagement or marriage. The primary reason for the female respondents not being comfortable about the subject is because of the social stigma associated with a relationship with someone other than a husband or fiancé, is seen as a taboo for a woman in Pakistani society.

The women continue to use the value system of the home culture and are conscious while narrating their views on the subject even in the host culture. They adopt a keepers approach adhering to the norms of the home culture. Women only talked about the past relationships only if it was publically acknowledged and socially acceptable while men on other hand were open about their past relationships. It is important to point out that these are independent women and flourishing intellectuals. Still they voluntarily

acknowledge the desire to adhere to their family values in making decision about their romantic life and are inclined to dating for the purpose of marriage alone. The women while expressing their views on dating and romance negotiate their gender identity grounded in their Pakistani and religious context as keepers relative to their male counter parts who exhibit an explorer actions

### ***The Racialization experience of Pakistani graduate student***

While interacting everyday with the host culture the Pakistani graduate students battle with the social constructions surrounding Pakistan, associated with terrorism in the host culture. This is not surprising for the students, because they are aware of the complex bilateral relationship between the both countries. Their national identity coupled with their religious identity is transformed into a racial identity, which is in continuous conflict, with the islamophobic settings of the host culture. In the sample, men reported more racial incidents as compared to the women, probably because most terrorist attacks across the globe have been by men. Women also anticipated that their male counter parts probably experienced more racism than them because of the male identity. Student's visiting or living in the southern part of the US, reported more racial incidents than their counter parts living in other parts of the US.

Saad: (has been in the US for 8 months, recalled his experience during a group discussion at his department)

*“There was a discussion going on benefits of new research on developing this new technology that could help improve precision in target killing. My American professor said, ‘this will kill terrorists in Pakistan’. My advisor (Korean professor) interrupted, ‘we have a Pakistani student here’ and then American professor rephrased the incident ‘as oh I meant it will kill the bad people and I am sure you are not from the bad part of Pakistan’. I felt extremely uneasy and frustrated by this and said yes this software is very important because it will improve accuracy and then the drones can stop killing innocent children and people in Pakistan and kill terrorists only”*

Faiza, (has been in the US for 2 years and 4 months)

*Well the people are nice in general but when I came here, I used to wear a headscarf and that was my person decision only. Shortly when I came to the south, that week 3 American girls had embraced Islam and I used to wear scarf and one day when I was doing laundry and came back to pick up my clothes somebody had thrown my scarfs on the floor and I was left a note don't ever wash your scarf's here. I told my mother about this incident and she told me that if this is creating complications for you so don't wear it. After that I decided to take off my scarf and its my personal decision and I don't regret it.*

Ali ( has been in the US for 8 months) :

*"I feel the animosity of the Americans towards Pakistan but this is because of lack of understanding. I was in the south visiting a friend and we were in a car driving when some guys stared shouting slurs at us"*

Ayesha (has been in the US for 5 months) narrates an incident while travelling:

*"Well once I was in New York with my friend at a train station and there were some American women sitting next to us. They started speaking to my friend who is French so they assumed I was French too but while I was talking to one of the women, I told her that I am Pakistani and she was taken aback. I immediately felt a change in their behavior they all completely ignored me in the conversation and only spoke to my friend. In the mean while a guy was running besides the track bare feet, he was well dressed and everyone was puzzled so I just said that may be got mugged. So one of the women was like yeah you know everything right! and I felt really awkward and when we were about to catch our train she muttered something bad about me. It was not a good experience.*

Seema (has been in the US for nearly 5 years)

*Americans have a huge misconception of Pakistanis, even bigger than the Pakistanis misconception of Americans. But not all Americans have these views. I remember once I was taking taxi to airport, and on the radio, there was talk on the possibility of the US war with Iran. The American taxi driver could see I was wearing a shalvar kameez (Pakistani dress) or may be couldn't. He said next will be Pakistan. I was shocked and kind of scared and was very silent through out the ride and thanked God that he is not the one making decisions.*

Naveed: (has been in the US for 1 and a half year) He is the president of the Pakistani student group at his college and has held various events on Pakistan

*"People here think that we are very backward and the perception of Pakistan as if a war happening all the time, I don't feel offended but they are misinformed and I tell them that I am also a product of Pakistan and at the same academic level as them. So there is a lot of good in the country also. When Osama was captured my colleagues thought it was very near the capital, I explained that no the demographics cant be compared to that of the US and the war is on the border not in Pakistan.*



These different incidents reported by students display how the students are continuously aware of their national and religious identities that can become pronounced by social awkwardness as well as the external events surrounding them. Being in the host culture they have developed a narrative of prevalence of misconception among the Americans and their peers regarding Pakistan. The students battle the racial incidents by labeling as the host culture as being misinformed of their reality. The explorer approach of the students is not influenced by these incidents as most of the students who reported racial incidents specifically men, had an exploratory approach while navigating the different elements of US culture.

Only one male respondent had a beard in the sample and didn't allow his interview to be recorded because he had been racially profiled and experienced discrimination at several occasions. Students also experience direct and indirect form of racism, Faiza and Ali experienced direct form of racism, while the remaining respondents experienced indirect racial incidents. Faiza's incident of the scarf didn't make her retaliate but think of her own survival and safe experience. She chose not to cover her head again as she didn't want to instigate any animosity that may exist. Ayesha's incidence on the other hand can be racist and a non-racist act. It may be that the American woman was more interested in the French woman, however Ayesha felt that by revealing her identity she experienced a change in the woman's attitude and attributed this to her racial identity.

It is important to point here that the racial acts are more pronounced, whenever there is a political incidence between the two countries or anything negative that is associated with the Islamic world in the social media. As the social constructions are

being reinforced by the media and the Pakistani graduate students are immediately affected by experiencing racial incidents in the host culture. The racial experiences didn't make any of the students have an animosity against the people in the US, but it was something they had expected to happen in the host culture. This relates to the first finding of how American university is considered as a symbol of success for the graduate students and regardless of their conflicting experiences with the host culture they continue to acknowledge the gap in understanding on Pakistan that exists in the host culture.

### **Discussion, Limitations and Future Research**

The findings provide an in-depth insight on the choices made by Pakistani graduate students navigating their GRRATM identity across the different elements of US culture. The American university is hailed as the symbol of success and admiration, and this perception plays a profound role in enabling the decision to study in the US. The prestige associated with the US institution by Pakistani's is not undermined by the social constructions of terrorism and Islamophobia in the US. The students while aware of this, continue to exhibit a sense of excitement, while narrating their experience of choosing the US, for pursuing academic interests.

This finding is aligned with the push-pull model proposed by McMahon (1992), the weaker economies of home countries act as push factors and influence the students to study abroad, in this case the US. (Zheng 2012, 3). According to OECD statistics, over half of all the tertiary international students choose to study in the US in 2010. (Smith and Khwaja 2011, 700)

The narrative of the preference of the American institutions over the UK institution is also prevalent among the Pakistani students. They tend to immediately make the comparison to the UK institutions. Primarily because the UK is the second most a popular place for studies, among international students, after the US. (OECD. 2010). The students have been constantly receiving this message directly or indirectly from their educational institutions and social environments in the home society. This is an important finding, as Pakistan has colonial roots, and the alternative private education system in school and colleges replicates the British education. But this shared history plays no role when it comes to academic preference for graduate studies. This can be due to the recent recession in the UK as noted by some of the respondents and the lack of jobs, however the US was also hit by recession, but is preferred and considered to have a better job market by the students.

Secondly, the availability of Fulbright scholarships and better funding opportunities for academic pursuits in the US, are important driving factors. Respondents in the sample who had been to the UK for education had more admiration for the academic environment in the US. The US degrees, is looked upon as a higher symbol of success relative to European institutions in the Pakistan society. This is an important push factor motivating the students to pursue their academic interests in the US.

Coming to the US for education is an important cultural symbol of accomplishment, acknowledged collectively by all Pakistani's. This brings respect and honor in the society to the families who have their children studying the United States. It also represents progression to financial success for these young adults in the near future. Besides its importance as a symbol of success, it is not the intention of all the students in

the sample to migrate to the US. Before arrival, the visa differences of the students (F1/J1) defines, whether all these students want to stay in the US or not, on completion of their academic program.

Students in the F1 category pursuing their masters degree, preferred to stay in the US, on completion of their studies, for the purpose of work experience only. However students in the PHD programs in the same visa category were not sure of their future intentions. Primarily because their current focus was on finishing the program and, those who were closer to finishing their doctoral studies, were also unsure about the probability of finding the job in academia and already had some attractive job offers from Pakistan. They all preferred their life and the living standards in the US but acknowledged the importance of family on making the final decision when the time came. But F-1 students are inclined to stay in the US depending on the opportunities prevalent the time of their graduation.

Further research should explore the perceptions of under-graduates towards the US and whether they too perceived it as a better education environment than other places. From the perceptions of the graduate students one would expect this to be the case, but it would be interesting to find if the schoolteachers were also sending the same message and whether this message varied while controlling for public versus private schools. Also, to what extent is the role of the ongoing politics of the two countries, to have made the American university a symbol of higher prestige than other western institutions?

One would expect that having so much enthusiasm for the journey, the Pakistani graduate student would embrace the US culture on arrival, without hesitation, and follow Berry's acculturation typology of integration or assimilation. However the process

undertaken by the students is much more complicated and cannot be explained by the use of four-fold typology alone. Because the students make use of their multi-faceted GRRATM identity, as they navigate the different elements of US culture. Gender, religious, racial and intergenerational differences, each plays a critical role in the processes adopted by the students, towards the host culture.

The keepers and explorer approach, developed by the students, enables the students to understand and interact with the US culture with their own pace and time. It is not that the students are aware of themselves as keepers and explorers, but this is a framework, I propose as a researcher to understand the psychological acculturation experience of the Pakistani graduate in the US.

The approach itself can fall under the four-fold typology presented by Berry and his colleagues, but it contradicts the model, as the keeper and explorer approach varies across the different cultural elements. It is not necessary that an individual will chose to integrate or assimilate across all the different cultural elements of the host culture and thus will be an explorer or keeper at all times. The cultural elements of the host society, the value system and cultural norms and the social environment of the home culture and the individual self, they all influence how the students navigate their GRRATM identity and integrate in the host culture.

Among the responses, Faiza adopted an explorer approach, as she wanted to try alcohol and took a sip, while being aware of it being a social taboo in the home culture. However, while talking on her experiences of dating, she adhered to the keepers approach and refused to date any one outside her family's wishes, even though she was approached by Muslim and non-Muslim men. Simultaneously, she exhibited explorer approach while

choosing to wear the western wardrobe, yet making use of the select and drop mechanism of not showing any part of cleavage that would create conflict with her religiosity.

The GRRATM identity is informed by the pre-existing social, cultural and religious norms of the home society. However it is a social identity in the home culture, which has continuously been reinforced by the structural, cultural and religious settings of the home society. However on arrival to the '*unsettled culture*' (Swidler 1986, 182), the self becomes more pronounced and in absence of the social control of the home culture, the students deploy their GRRATM identity to navigate the host culture. (Stryker 1980, 385) The pre-existing values informed by the home culture are used as a reference framework, in Parsons terms "*value orientations*" by Pakistani graduate students, to make sense of their every day lives in the host culture.

The role of each of the GRRATM identity becomes prominent across the different elements of the host culture and influences the keeper and explorer approach adopted by the Pakistani graduate student. This approach is further facilitated by the select and drop mechanism as the students navigate the different elements of US culture. Gender and Religious identity of the students plays a profound role as the female respondents adapt differently to the western attire. The male respondents reported no difficulty in the change of attire, however the female respondents on the other hand, were constantly aware of their religiosity, in choosing how to dress in the host culture. The duration of stay in the US also influenced the approach of the women towards the western attire. Though all the Pakistani women in the sample were familiar with the western wardrobe, however the frequency of wearing the wardrobe in the home culture influenced their transition towards it in the host culture. Both Seema and Sara represent two antithetical

cases of approaching the attire in their unsettled surroundings. Seema, struggled for three years, until she was able to embrace the pants and t-shirts. She associated this transformation to adjusting to the host culture also. She chose to wear the Pakistani clothes in the first two years, thus adhering to the keeper ideology, but slowly transitioned to the casual wear of the host culture. Thus becoming an explorer.

Sara on the hand was accustomed to wearing the western clothes even in Pakistan, and found no change in this context in the host culture. She exhibited both the keeper and the explorer approach reflecting no change in her identity. The respective social environment and family backgrounds of the host culture has influenced how these women adopt the western clothes. The women adopt the select and drop mechanism in the explorer category as they chose the type of clothes best fit for them, based on their value system informed by the home culture. By consciously opting for dresses that don't reveal any cleavage, thus adhering to their religiosity. They deploy the tool kit model and select the wardrobes that are in line with their religiosity and gendered identity (Swidler 1986, 273)

Among the women, besides the social environment and family background, age was also a controlling factor of adjusting to the western wardrobe. Women in their twenties, reported less difficulty or no difficulty in the transition to the new attire as compared to the women in thirties and above.

The secular narrative is also apparent as the respondents draw a line between the self and the self-informed by the religious doctrine. Sara justifies her decision to wear the clothes in an orderly fashion as a personal decision, segregating her personal decision from the Islamic doctrine. Faiza's decision to wear the headscarf in the beginning and not

to wear the scarf after the racial incident is also labeled as a personal decision only. The women in both the incidents seem to be defying the narrative of Islam oppressing women. The women label it as a personal decision consciously; to signify the independence of the self and segregating themselves from the social constructions of women oppression in as stereotype for women in Islamic cultures. This draws attention to a larger narrative at work, where these women are not being hampered by their religiosity but acknowledge it more as a decision of the self and they purposely label it as a personal decision and insist on making that distinction.

For the purpose of the study, I lumped all the students into the privileged class of the Pakistani society. However, there are differences in access to economic resources among the privileged class also. I was not able to gather the annual salary information of the family's salary of the students, due to limitations of the study. However it will be important to look at the class differences, and to what extent they influence the women's approach on adopting the western dress.

It will also be interesting to compare the experiences of Pakistani females, studying for their under-graduate degrees in the US, towards the western wardrobe. Specifically, the undergraduate students, funding their academic program in the US. I expect that class and intergenerational differences may play a role, as the graduate women in their twenties experienced little or no trouble in adjusting to the western attire. This also raises the question of the influence of the western culture on the Pakistani society and how this has changed over the recent years, based on globalizations and the connectivity of the mass media



The process of transition and approach of the Pakistani graduate student, selecting the western wardrobe is an important yet a silent cultural symbol of interacting with US culture. The acculturation psychology literature at large has overlooked the transition of the clothing adopted by the international student arriving to the host culture. This is possibly because the western wardrobe is indeed popular attire across the world. However students coming from Africa, South Asia and the Middle East experience different attire on arrival to the West.

Gender and duration of stay in the host culture plays an important role in the processes adopted by the students. This process of embracing the western clothes over time can also be applied to immigrant population arriving to the US or other Western parts of the world, using a similar value system of as the Pakistani graduate student. The transition to the new wardrobe represents an important cultural symbol of interaction of with host culture and the first step towards integration in the host society. This transition is relatively much complicated for women as compared to men.

The explorer and keeper approach is evident as the students experience socialization in bars (alcohol). However, the students navigate this cultural element not only being aware of their religiosity but also use moral values set by the home culture. It is important to point out that all the Pakistani graduate students are familiar with the drinking culture from their home society; hence it is not a cultural shock for them. Being aware of the social stigma associated with alcohol in the home society, the students are conscious and base their choice of not drinking alcohol on moral and/or religious reasons.

The socialization in bars and drinking makes an important cultural elements as it challenges the norms and ideals of the home culture, as they come into conflict with the

host culture. The intersectionality of the GRRATM identity is highlighted, as the student's gendered, religious and racial identity informed by their national identity comes into play and the pre-existing ideals that inform each identity influence the way Pakistani graduate students approach the going to bar culture in the US.

Gender differences are highlighted, as the female respondents are more hesitant to going to bars as compared to the male respondents that exhibit an explorer approach. Only two women acknowledged drinking and one of them did it while it in the US only, and that too was a sip. Both these women haven't had alcohol (since the first time) or intend to have it ever again. I argue that the reluctance of women towards going to bars points to a larger process of social stigma associated with the act in the home culture, and women are more cautious than man while navigating this terrain. Women often responded with the reason that why would they need to go to bars and recalled their religiosity in the conversation. Female respondents largely followed the keeper approach.

However there are keepers in both the male and female category that don't go to bars, while strongly adhering to their religiosity in the host culture. The students adopting both the approaches all acknowledge the importance of alcohol for the purpose of socialization. The select and drop approach is apparent from the responses, as the students (majority male respondents) chose to go to bars but don't chose to drink or label themselves as social drinkers and only drink to create social and cultural capital.

The question however arises if those students who drink, are creating a perception of the self which is more relatable to the host culture or the insiders of the host culture; then whether the insiders of the host culture find these individuals more relatable regardless of them being non- native to US culture? Going to bars plays an important

role as it's a cultural symbol for socialization, the students who choose to go to bars but don't drink and feel the guilt of not being able to reciprocate the action of drinking. The students in this category have been in the US for less than three years, the question rises if this guilt of non reciprocity would push them to start drinking in the coming years or would they adhere to their drop mechanism of, the not drinking act, but continue to go to bars only? Or these individuals will transition to the keeper approach and chose not to go because of the conflicting norms of the home and host culture.

The secular approach is also prevalent again, Zohaib, while referring to his explorer approach of going to bars but not drinking made two associations, one that he is married and the second that he is not religious and he didn't even offer his Friday prayers. The personal choice is not informed by religiosity but instead the moral norms of the home culture define Zohaib's choice to not to drink. He uses his marriage as a shield as because he is married and sincere to his wife, he will not drink, Again coupling the act of drinking to social stigma and other ills that may be lead by the act.

This prevalence of secularization of the act is an important separation from the religiosity associated with the self of the Pakistani graduate student. Students, following the secular approach, justify their choice by labeling it as moral. It is important to point here that the moral values of the home society have been informed by the religious ethics. However students adopt the secular approach and immediately distance themselves from religion, be it the option to cover the head or drink alcohol. This may also be because of the element of double consciousness; they make the distinction from a radical Islam as marked by the social constructions surrounding them. Hence they don't call the decision based on their religious identity but on their moral values.

The symbolic interaction of the Pakistani graduate students with the cultural element of dating and romance in US culture, echo's the conflict and struggle of the students while navigating their religiosity and gendered identity, in the liberal settings of the host culture. This again brings in the notion of intersectionality, in the conversation as the GRRATM identity comes into play as the students experience dating in the US. (Crenshaw1993; Collins, 2000) The gendered identity plays a pronounced role as respondents narrate their experiences of dating in the US. The female respondents while talking about dating brought marriage in the conversation. They strongly adhered to their religiosity while talking of anything romantic in their life. None of the women acknowledged any past relationship except the two women who had experienced a broken engagement and failed marriage.

It was also surprising to find that, no female respondents had ever dated in the US or before This may be because the female respondents were hesitant to open their personal life to a stranger. Women only spoke of past, socially acknowledged relationships, because of the social stigma, associated with romantic association with the opposite sex in the home society at large. However, needless to say the dating culture is prevalent in the home society because the male respondents acknowledged of dating women in Pakistan

The Pakistani women use the social norms of the home culture, and are firmly established in these ideals, and adhere to the keeper approach on the subject. The important point is that, these are independent strong women pursuing their graduate studies in US, free from the social control of the home society. But these women value

the norms and ideals laid out by the home society, and don't feel restricted or oppressed while adhering to the keeper approach.

The intergenerational differences were also highlighted among the women; the female respondents in the mid thirties were open to the idea of being in a relationship for marriage only with men from Abrahamic faith. However the younger female respondents were closed to this idea and favored Muslim and Pakistani men only.

The above findings can be possibly replicated to female students from other Islamic and non Islamic cultures that characterize women dating to be social stigma. However the role of social class should also be explored in further analysis. It will be interesting to compare the response to the under graduate female respondents from Pakistan studying in the US and how they approached the process of dating and going to bars and alcohol? And whether their social class from the home society can play a role in the process of navigation of these elements in the host culture.

I was unable to find any longitudinal changes in the process of navigation of the cultural element of going to bars and dating among respondents who were in the US. This may be due to the limitation of the sample and should be further explored.

The male respondents on the other hand exhibit both the keeper and explorer approach. The keepers strongly adhered to their religious identity and chose not to opt to date any women in US. However though they were open to the idea of dating in home culture but on experiencing the liberal settings of the host culture, these individuals opt for the keepers approach more strictly. The male respondents in the explorer category have dated women in the US and are open about their past relationships also.

There are intergenerational differences among the male respondents when talking of dating for marriage. Men above the mid thirties were more adamant about marrying Pakistani and Muslim women only. However the younger men, though exhibit a preference for Pakistani women, are open to marrying women with in the Abrahamic faith of different ethnicities. Male respondents who opted secular approach while talking about the bar culture, adhered to their religiosity while talking of marriage to Muslim women only.

There is an ongoing struggle experienced by the Pakistani graduate students, while navigating the romantic relationships in the US. They make sense of their religious ideals and social norms of the home culture, which come into conflict with the liberal settings of the host culture. Both men and women, value the family's support in making the decision when it comes to marriage. But men are more confident than women in choosing to narrate their experiences and open ideals on dating. The students make use of their gendered and religious identity while navigating the cultural element.

The symbolic interaction of the Pakistani graduate students with the concept of dating in the US, pushes and questions their own perceptions of the self, informed by the home culture. The liberal settings of the host culture induces a struggle and conflict with in the GRRATM identity, and the students under go a journey of self as they tend to adhere to their ideals from the home culture, while experiencing the host culture.

There is also the phenomenon of a reinforcing the home culture more strictly. A possible explanation for this is that the contradictory settings to the home culture, enforces the individuals to adopt a more strict and restrictive approach. Even though the individual is relaxed about the same subject in the home culture the same subject

becomes a source of conflict for his internal self, and the he/she adopts a stricter view. Possibly because he/she continues to feel that the ritual of going to a bar alone as contradictory to the norms of the home society and the acceptance of the host society.

The analysis shows clearly that the processes adopted by the students, to navigate the cultural element of drinking in the host society, are deeply informed by the value system of the home society. The family backgrounds, class differences and social environments of the international students of the home culture influence the students approach of navigating the host cultural elements and this has often been overlooked upon in the acculturation psychology literature. It is important to gain a deeper understanding of the family backgrounds and the social environments of the home culture of the students. The group itself represents a privileged class in Pakistan, who has access to cultural, social capital and value the importance of education. However there access to financial resources varies. Further research, needs to done to understand what factors with in the home society, enable or disable the explorers and keepers approach in the host culture.

Another aspect of the research is the *process of racialization* experienced and internalized by the respondents during their stay in the US. After 9/11 attacks international students, have reported higher incidents of discrimination in the US (Ruble and Zang, 2013; Lee and Rice; 2007). The findings reflect the presence of anti-Islamic sentiments in the host culture. This sentiment is not surprising for the Pakistani students but they expect, that during their stay in the US, they will have to battle the social constructions of terrorism surrounding their national identity. Regardless of the students relation to Islam itself the host culture, racializes them as part of the Middle East. The

students being aware of the racialization process, experience Dubois notion of double consciousness. (1903/1982, 45)

The students are constantly aware that they will be racialized, the incidents reported by Saad, Faiza, Ali and Seema are the examples of direct racism. However, Ayesha's incident can be interpreted as a racial as well as non racial or a form of indirect racism. She doesn't experience any harsh comments but experiences a change in the attitude of the woman, who refuses to acknowledge her presence, soon after she reveals her Pakistani identity. It is a possibility that Ayesha may have been subject to a discriminatory and racial attitude by the American women, however it may also be that the women may have been more interested in her French friend. But Ayesha perceives this as a notion of double consciousness, as she also looks at herself, through the lens of the social constructions surrounding her. I do not suggest here that the students will mark all unpleasant incident as racial, however such experience do trigger their racial identity and reinforce the notion of double consciousness.

In the sample, women reported fewer cases of racism as compared to the male respondents. This also speaks to the larger narrative of the social media where terrorists are mostly male, hence Pakistani men tend to be racially profiled based on their religious identity in the US.

Any news of terrorism or the Middle East in the international politics triggers the racial identity of the Pakistani graduate students. (Lee and Rice, 2007) The mention of US war with Iran on the radio or the capture of Osama bin Laden in 2010 triggered the racial incidents experienced by the Pakistani graduate students. However, the students tend to adopt a resilient approach and feel responsible, to battle the negative social



constructions surrounding them. There is a common narrative among the students of how misinformed the host society is at large about Pakistan. Both the keepers and the explorers have developed resilience and navigate the racial acts around them as a misconception of the host society. They narrate an egalitarian side of Pakistan, to their peers and don't deny the problems of terrorism in the country, but relate a side that they have experienced while living there.

Those adhering to the explorer approach are not influenced by the racial incidents and continue to interact openly with the different elements of the US culture while using the select and drop mechanism. Based on limitations of research, I was not fully able to explore to what extent do racial incidents enforce the keeper approach. But the keepers on experiencing the racial incidents become more hesitant on interacting with US culture. For some respondents, the duration of stay plays an important role in enabling the students to understand the new culture and besides the experience of racial incidents, they have showed exploratory attitude towards some elements of the host culture.

As reported in acculturation studies students from the Middle East have experienced similar racial experiences in the US, however it would be important to explore whether they too adopt a resilient approach and whether these incidents influence their explorer – keeper approach while navigating the US culture.

### **Conclusion**

The project contributes to acculturation literature and bridges the gap in acculturation psychology by using a sociological approach in understanding the processes developed by international students coming from opposing cultural settings of the host culture. The acculturation experience, of Pakistani graduate students, studying in the US

provide an in-depth and rigorous case study of the processes developed by the students as they navigate the different elements of US culture.

The *keepers* and *explorers* approach presents, an elaborate and alternative insight in how the international students make use of their values of the home society as they interact with the new elements of the host society. They *adopt a select and drop* mechanism to situate themselves in the new cultural settings as they continue to adhere to their pre-existing ideals.

The concept of the multi faceted identity GRRATM plays a significant role as the students interact with the host culture and highlight, the gendered, religious and racial differences while experiencing the same cultural elements. The Pakistani graduate students use their pre-existing social, cultural and religious norms in order to make sense of their changing lives in the host culture.

While there is always room for improvement, the explorer and keepers approach and the concept of GRAATM identity, can be applied to understand not only the international student experience but also the immigrant acculturation experience in the different settings of the host culture.

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