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Am I At Peace?: A Deeper Look into Identity Formation and Integration

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“Do not be too hard, lest you be broken; do not be too soft, lest you be squeezed.”

- Ali ibn Abi Talib

In an increasingly global world, many students in higher education have been exposed to multiple cultures through moving, being members of multicultural families, or relating with people from varied cultural backgrounds. Our perception of others and ourselves is affected by these various group affiliations (Stevenson, 2010). These experiences are successfully processed by integrating divergent information, “from cross-cultural experiences, a multicultural environment, or being born to a multi-ethnic or multi-racial family” (Hoersting & Jenkins, 2011, p. 1). This process, however, may also cause difficulties in a person attaining a “solid cultural, ethnic, or racial identity” (Hoersting & Jenkins, 2011, p. 1). Keith (2011) suggested forming a multicultural identity gives individuals the potential to enhance their lives because it creates a sense of self-efficacy, in addition to developing a sense of identification with one’s heritage. We used the definition established by the American

Psychological Association (2002) for culture as the “belief systems and value orientations that influence customs, norms, practices, and social institutions, including psychological processes (language, care taking practices, media, educational systems) and organizations (media, educational systems),” when initially selecting the participant. However, during the study, we encouraged the participant to define culture in her own words and according to her own experiences.

An in-depth exploration of one person’s experiences with the process of integrating different cultural identities provides valuable information to educators and counselors alike. Having a better understanding of this process is vital in our movement towards becoming more multiculturally competent and raising awareness of biases rooted in society (Arnett, 2009; Sue & Sue, 2008). Therefore, we¹ posed the following research question for this study: What does the integration of multiple identities look like for a Saudi Arabian female in Higher Education? In the following sections, we provide a

¹ Throughout the paper, we will be using “we” and “I” in order to clarify the researchers’ roles in each section. This study was conducted by Annette with Maria’s supervision and guidance.

brief background of the participant's cultural heritage as a Saudi Arabian and Muslim, describe the initial and current study, and present findings in the areas of cultural integration. We conclude with a call for counselors and educators to advocate for groups facing injustice in order for them to be who they are.

Contextual Background

At this point, a brief contextual background is warranted. While the participant in this study, Fatimah, has her own unique experiences, these were initially formed within a Saudi Arabian context and her religious background as a Muslim. Saudis descend from ancient nomadic tribal peoples of the desert (Arabia and the Arabs, 2000; Saudis, 2009) which, while a rich and vital heritage, comprises much of the romantic side of today's Western stereotype of citizens of the current Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) as "oil rich, desert nomads, and camel back riders" (Hilal & Denman, 2013, p. 25).

Today, KSA represents about four-fifths of the Arabian Peninsula. The community (*unmah*) in which Saudis participate does not overtly base its decisions for social action, political behavior, and economic organization on race, ethnicity, and national origin (Cole, 2001), but instead on religion (i.e., Islam). Race and ethnicity are said not to be as significant because the identity of Muslims exceeds the borders of states and has precedence over all other identities (Cole, 2001). The official language spoken in Saudi Arabia is Arabic, with many distinctive dialects (Cole, 2001; Saudis, 2009). Saudi Arabia is officially an Islamic state and does not

allow other religious practices (Cole, 2001; Saudis, 2009).

According to Islam, women and men "have an equal footing before God" (Nassar-McMillan, 2008, p. 988). This means the right to own and inherit property and obtain an education. However, in some Arab countries, government restriction and local or familial religious interpretations may prevent these rights from being realized (Nassar-McMillan, 2008). While women have recently been granted the right to vote, there are major social restrictions on women in Saudi Arabia culturally explained as protective of a woman's honor and virtue. For example, women are not allowed to drive cars (Eggers al-Harthy, Hatrash, & al-Mansour, 2013), which is said to protect them from the disgrace of driving in public. Furthermore, women are not allowed to interact with men outside the family, including in educational settings.

As part of the culture of respect, chastity and sexual modesty are highly valued. Key parts of the expression of this value occur through gender separation and covering of the female body. Saudi women most often wear traditional clothing that varies from region to region. A Saudi woman's dress covers the body from head to toe. These inner dresses can be embellished with embroidery, coins, and brightly colored fabric. When out in public, Saudi Arabian women are expected at a minimum to wear a covering on their head, and clothes, which depending on family expectations, may include a face veil. Arab American women also sometimes wear a cover for their head called a *Hijab*. The Hijab is primarily worn by Muslim women, but some

Christian Arab American women also wear head scarves (Arab World Immigration, 2004). Some people believe Arab women are not required by religion or culture to cover their heads, while others believe it is mandatory to wear a Hijab (Arab World Immigration, 2004). Some Saudi women also wear a black outer cloak called an *abaya*.

A central component for Saudis is the family. Extended families often live together in the same house. Saudis value generosity, hospitality, and helping those in need. Society is tribal in nature, and members of the tribe, groups or relatives traced through males, take interest in one another's well being, and those who are more wealthy aid the impoverished when needed. For Saudis, hospitality is important. Generosity and respect are shown through events such as dinner parties, where the host or hostess acts as a server and generously refills plates. This serving the guests is known as *al-mubashara* (Saudis, 2009).

From a global perspective, female advocates state Saudi women face extreme legal discrimination, although not all Arabic or Saudi women would agree with this (Saudis, 2009). Women are not allowed to engage in work, travel, study, or marriage without consent of a male guardian. These restrictions are justified on the basis of Islamic principles (Saudis, 2009). Saudi women are beginning to protest restrictions even though protesting is banned in the Kingdom of Saudi. One of the women's rights groups has petitioned King Abdullah for the right to drive vehicles and compete in international sporting events (Amnesty International Report, 2013; Saudis,

2009). The government indicates they are willing to allow women more rights, but so far no policies have been put in place to end the discrimination. Saudi Arabians cite instances such as two females who were recently in the Olympics, increased ability to walk in places such as a mall unveiled, and the first woman movie director as examples of the broadening of female rights over the past decade (Eggers et al., 2013).

As in many wealthy countries, there are divisions in society between local citizens and guest workers. The working class is mostly composed of temporary immigrants. Major variation in income and wealth also exists. However, "a strong ideology of egalitarianism is traditional among Saudi Arabians, whose social and verbal patterns of interaction stress equality and siblinghood rather than status differentiation" (Cole, 2001, p. 1934).

Education in Saudi Arabia is highly valued and is an important aspect in family and community life. Education ranging from preschool to university is free. Females and males are separated in the classroom, women who attend University watch the lecture on a TV monitor in a separate room. Recently, the KSA government has opened a Science and Technology University where genders may interact in moderation (Hilal & Denman, 2013). Our Saudi friends report that international students make up the primary enrollment for this new type of education.

Over the last decade, the KSA government has implemented an immense international scholar program, the largest of its kind, the King Abdullah Scholarship Program, which has allowed

over 120,000 Saudi Arabians to pursue higher education overseas in countries such as the United States, Australia, and England. The program was established partly to combat terrorism and conservative religious elements (Hilal & Denman, 2013) through an increasingly global and educated citizenry. Little research exists on this program, with Hilal and Denman (2013) being the only research we could identify. Fatimah, the participant of this study, was a member of the scholar program.

Multicultural Perspectives on Identity Formation

Research on identity has primarily been the examination of a single concept of identity within mainstream culture identity or outside of main culture identity. While identity researchers have acknowledged that people have several identities at one time, some of which may be insider or outsider identities, research has been primarily in discreet areas of identity (Roccas & Brewer, 2002). There is an increased call for attempts to examine what has been described as the complexity of identity that for all persons is the nexus of gender, age, race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, orientation, etc., but this connection becomes even more complex when two or more major cultural positions such as race or gender are straddled by one person simultaneously (e.g. being a Saudi Arabian female) (Benet-Martinez & Haritatos, 2005). Thus, our approach considers the intersectionality of these various positionalities (Hancock, 2007). When discussing cultural identity formation and integration, it is important to consider the process of

creating a culture, the struggle to fit-in, and the six themes discovered in the study (Peters, 2012) from which this case study stems (i.e., race, language, education, cultural appreciation, education, and dominant culture). These topics help shed light on the complex process of cultural identity formation. For the purpose of this study, cultural identity formation refers to the process of integrating one's different racial, ethnic, and national cultural groups into either one identity or multiple identities. In this study, we sought for the participant to shed light on all these constructs. We explored the participant's own understanding of her identity and cultural groups. In exploring the participant's cultural identity process, we particularly observed the role of her race and gender and how these constructs impacted her journey of self, which aligns with a critical race feminism perspective (Wing, 2000).

Creating a Culture and Sense of Self

In creating our cultural identity, we are forming our sense of self. The ways we think, write, and talk about ourselves vary historically, culturally, and temporally. Human identity changes over time and place and is constructed within interpersonal exchanges (Burkitt, 2011). In western society, the exploration of a sense of self often occurs with looking inside oneself. However, in order to do so, we must also look at contextual variables such as culture and the process of creating our own culture that aligns and influences our sense of self (Burkitt, 2011). While none of the terms used in

the literature to describe the process of creating a culture seem positive or appear to completely capture the tension in this construct (e.g., cultural homelessness, between cultures, bicultural, multicultural), a review of the literature is valuable. Cultural homelessness, a term used by Vivero and Jenkins (1999), describes the experiences and feelings of multicultural individuals who face cross-cultural tensions within the family and between the family and its culturally different environment. These multicultural experiences can cause emotional distress and psychological vulnerabilities for individuals. However, when conditions are favorable, an individual might benefit from these experiences by gaining personal strength such as cross-cultural adaptation, greater flexibility, and less ethnocentric attitudes (Vivero & Jenkins, 1999). Furthermore, cultural homelessness can be both the perceived and actual social and emotional isolation that "creates a sense of 'wanting to be home' but not knowing where 'home' is or how it feels" (Vivero & Jenkins, 1999, p. 13). This does not mean individuals are confused about their self-identity; rather, it means they do not belong to any one culture (Vivero & Jenkins, 1999). When discussing cultural identity, the individual determines what aspects are important in constituting her or his sense of self (Watzlawik, 2012).

Multicultural individuals may face a desire or feel pressure to fit in with mainstream cultures while also feeling a similar stress to identify with their original and host cultures (Sue & Sue, 2008). Sue and Sue (1999, as cited in

Sue & Sue, 2008) developed a Racial/Cultural Identity Development (R/CID) model that describes these attitudes and beliefs individuals may experience in the process of forming a sense of self. The R/CID model defines five stages of development "oppressed people experience as they struggle to understand themselves in terms of their own culture, the dominant culture, and the oppressive relationship between the two cultures" (Sue & Sue, 2008, p. 242). This tension and conflict is especially true in societies where there are clear religious or ethnic divisions. Specifically when immigrating, people may face the conflict of trying to be like their host culture while staying true to their original culture. This is a challenge that may result in peer rejection for being different and anger and punishment from the original culture for attempting to assimilate (Vivero & Jenkins, 1999). In educational settings, culture has also been examined closely, especially as it relates to multicultural education as a national issue (Ogbu, 1995). Ogbu (1995) described how culture is a framework within which we behave according to standards that we deem acceptable. These values are incorporated in our day-to-day living. Naturally, having cultural diversity in an educational setting is important to consider in regards to how students behave and learn. Furthermore, there can be tensions in the educational environment of what students are asked to do in terms of acculturation. Ogbu discussed those who come to the U.S. as immigrants are aware that they need to learn English in order to attend school and thus are able to learn it as a second language. Therefore, as we discuss the

process of forming a cultural identity or identities, it is important to consider the cultural and educational context in which this process takes place.

Previous Study

In a previous phenomenological study (Peters, 2012), Annette investigated the process of cultural identity formation and integration with ten self-identified multicultural individuals through semi-structured interviews. The sample consisted of 10 undergraduate and graduate students (four males, six females), ranging from 19 to 48 years old. Participants came from a variety of cultural backgrounds, with some growing up in multicultural homes and others having experienced immigration. One in-depth interview with each participant, lasting from 30 to 60, minutes was used to gather the data for this study. During this process, six themes emerged: race, language, religion, cultural appreciation, education, and dominant culture. In this expansion of the study, we focused on extending the study in-depth with one of the participants, investigating how the six themes played out and whether or not these themes were accurate descriptions of her experiences.

Methodology

Case Study

Case study has been demonstrated to be a valuable way to study social and psychological multicultural research issues in education (e.g. Calderon, 2012; Li & Vazquez-Nuttall, 2009). Case study research involves studying an event or case within a bounded system (Creswell, 2007). According to Yin (1994), a case study is an “empirical inquiry that

investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (p. 18). Stake (1995) stated the purpose of a case study is to capture the complexity of a single case. Following the terms of these various definitions, this research study is categorized as an intrinsic, holistic case study (Stake, 1995). It is an intrinsic case study because the participant was purposively selected for her unique experience of forming her cultural sense of self. It is also holistic because the participant’s overall experience is captured in a holistic manner. In this study, the case and bounded system is the participant and her experience with her cultural identity formation. This case study method was used because it allowed me to focus on a particular phenomenon, which yielded descriptive data that allows the reader to have a better understanding of the phenomenon (Merriam, 1998).

Theoretical Perspective

The theoretical orientation utilized for this study was critical race feminism (CRF), which stems from critical inquiry and critical race theory (CRT). Critical theory’s (CT) historical roots are grounded in the Western European Marxist tradition, which purports “the notion that...researchers should not only seek to interpret social reality but also aim to make positive social change” (Thomas, 2009, p. 55). More recently, CRT arose as a form of oppositional scholarship in order to challenge “the experiences of white males as the normative standard” and thus ground its conceptual framework “in the experiences of people of color”

(Thomas, 2009, p. 55). CRF stems from CT and CRT. CRF arose because minority women felt excluded by males and white women. Theorists from this movement, from its beginning, have argued for a "deeper understanding of the lives of women of color" (Thomas, 2009, p. 59). CRF attempts to understand and integrate how race and gender structure social inequality (Dua, 1999). This theory differs from CRT in the rejection of blanket essentialism of all minorities (Wing, 2000). According to critical inquirers, "critical forms of research call current ideology into question, and initiate action, in the cause of social justice" (Crotty, 1998, p. 157). We identify with this theory and its goals: freedom and equity for society and the agenda of social justice.

Researchers' Personal Stance

Annette: It is important as a researcher, as a part of reflexivity (Hertz, 1997), to ask myself the identity questions I asked the participant in this study. As a White woman and German citizen, I became interested in this topic through my own personal experience. Growing up, I had the opportunity to live for protracted periods of time in several different countries, such as Germany, Netherlands, Switzerland, and the U.S., because of my father's work. These moves gave me the opportunity to experience new cultures, languages, and experiences. As much as I enjoyed these experiences, at the same time, they made it hard for me to fully form an identity. "Who and what was I?" When individuals would ask, "Where are you from?" I wanted to explain my background because a simple answer was not enough. This process taught me many people *expected* me to give a

simple answer, to put myself in a box. Throughout the years, I have integrated and learned how to acknowledge my different cultural parts without feeling I could only be one. For me, cultural integration is a continual process. As such, I have conducted multiple research studies in the area of diversity and find this will be a research line of mine. As part of this work, I took extensive coursework with Maria and found we have different paths to similar research interests.

Maria: I first met Annette in a graduate introduction to qualitative research course. Annette went on to take other courses with me, and I became a member of her dissertation committee. Since my area of research tends to be focused on diversity (e.g., Lahman, 2011a, b), I was interested in the research topics she conducted, with my direction, as a professor. As a White woman with U.S. citizenship, my diversity path has been primarily through that of a religious minority, Mennonite. Traditionally, Mennonite women do not cut their hair and wear a covering, which while more symbolic in nature than the Saudi's literal covering of the hair, has still caused me to be profoundly aware of the curiosity, ignorance, and prejudice women who cover may be exposed to. We wish to note here Annette conceived of the study and completed all aspects of it with some minimal direction from me. My work occurred primarily as we moved the research into an article. Therefore, when we use the word "I" in other sections of the paper, it is referring directly to Annette's original work.

Participant & Setting

In order to recruit the participant I used purposive sampling (Creswell, 2007). Furthermore, the participant represents the case and bounded system. The participant is a Saudi Arabian female adult, in her 20's, who identifies her race as Middle Eastern² and her ethnicity as Arab. She is fluent in Arabic and English and comes from a middle class background. The participant is attending a university in the U.S.

Data Collection

Over the course of 6 months data were collected, including semi-structured and informal interviews, demographic information, observations, and a photo journal (Stake, 1995). The participant was interviewed and observed at various locations, including her work and social settings (i.e., restaurants, on campus, and off campus). Questions used for the interview were designed to better understand and explore the lived experience of the participant (Moustakas, 1994). Five in-depth interviews lasted from 30 minutes to an hour, with most interviews lasting an hour. Eight observations over the course of 6 months lasted from 1 to 2 hours, with an average length of 1.5 half hours. The photo journal (see Appendix

A for example pictures) contained ten pictures from the last 2 years. To protect the participant's confidentiality, she chose a pseudonym. All interviews were transcribed. During the transcription process, quotes were lightly cleaned for distracting and/or confusing language (Poland, 2002).

Trustworthiness

To establish trustworthiness, I employed several techniques recommended by Merriam (1998) and Creswell (2001): triangulation, member check, peer examination, and self-reflection. A major strength of case study is the multiple data sources employed in order to triangulate data. In this study, interviews, observations, demographic questionnaires, photo journal, and literature were used to meet this criterion. A member check was conducted throughout the study, as well as at the end when the participant had the chance to read the final results and paper. Themes were discussed and evaluated with colleagues during peer examination. In addition we consulted extensively with Saudi and Muslim colleagues regarding how to appropriately, culturally respectfully, and accurately portray the KSA context and the participant. During the data collection and analysis process, I attempted to bracket my experience to help increase trustworthiness and make my biases transparent. I did this by reflecting on my own cultural integration process both in writing and in discussions with peers.

Analysis of Data

Data analyses followed Stake's (1995) recommendation of categorical aggregation. Thus, I, as a researcher, looked for issue-relevant meanings to

² It is important to note that the label Middle Eastern is an imposed outside term traced to colonialism and specifically an American Naval Officer (Hilal & Denman, 2013). Therefore, we recommend being as specific as possible, such as saying Gulf Arabs (Hilal & Denman) or as we do here, Saudi Arabian. Indeed, even these terms encompass a vast amount of specific tribal roots and immigrated groups. We also wish to note that Middle Eastern is typically not considered a "race" but a category of the race Caucasian. This is how Fatimah identified. It would be interesting to know if Caucasian Americans, in the context of increased tension with Islamic countries and heightened hate, understand Saudi Arabians are from the same "race".

emerge. Furthermore, I established patterns from the data corresponding with categories/themes I found to be emerging (Creswell, 2007). In the final step, I developed naturalistic generalizations from the analysis, in hopes readers will apply the case to populations that fit their own use (Creswell, 2007).

During data collection, I reflected on the interviews, before and after reading transcripts of the recorded interviews, as well as on observation notes and the photo journal. This process helped me become sensitive to the information gathered and allowed me to identify quotes and sections of transcripts that were most salient. I reviewed the demographic questionnaire, transcripts, observation notes, and responses from the participant several times to help identify themes as well as assess themes found in my previous study. I read, reread, and then coded the interviews for themes, which helped me identify patterns. After all transcripts were completed and themes from this case were identified, I asked the participant to review the themes found and identify what was applicable. She made no additions. At this time, I wrote about what and how the participant experienced the process of cultural integration. The naturalistic generalization incorporated rich descriptions of the participant's experience.

Findings

In order to enter the university's International Center (IC), I walked through a short, narrow corridor that opened into a central office. I noticed comfortable-looking couches with a

desk behind them where a student worker in charge of international travels was located. To the left of this area was Fatimah's workplace. Fatimah is responsible for helping international students with a variety of tasks such as translating and explaining tasks to those students who are learning to speak English. Students speaking Arabic especially valued Fatimah because she can be an important link in building communication between them and a teacher or administrator.

The IC was decorated with art pieces from all over the world; some are gifts from previous students. Seated next to Fatimah's desk, I faced five clocks showing different times in various countries. The fifth clock displayed the time for Saudi Arabia. Fatimah shared she feels comfortable in this office, with its rich decoration and representation of various cultures.

Fatimah has a vibrant personality, which is evident when she is at work and spending time with her friends. On the first day of observation at her work, Fatimah was wearing dark dress jeans, stylish brown boots, and an elegant blue top. Fatimah identifies as Middle Eastern and moved a few years ago to the U.S. in order to attend school. Her straight brown hair crowned her head and fell below her shoulders. She wore subtle make-up, highlighting her rich brown eyes and fair skin. She greeted me warmly, gesturing I should make myself comfortable. I appreciated my observation spot, as it was hidden away enough to allow me to write notes discreetly, while located in such a way I could naturally observe Fatimah and the office. The only setting change that occurred was a month into my

observations, when the usual table at which I sat was switched with the computer table to make the office appear less crowded.

Several categories were created from the data that appeared to be important in Fatimah's process of integrating her different cultural groups. Some of the categories identified were unique to Fatimah's experience (e.g., gender and changing person), while the other categories were supported by findings from the previous research study (i.e., language, race, religion, education, and dominant culture; Peters, 2012).

Gender

Fatimah is an outgoing person who does not represent what she feels is a typical Saudi "girl." First of all, she talks to men who are not her father or brothers, which is forbidden in her culture, especially back home in Saudi Arabia. Fatimah illustrated this uniqueness, saying, "I could guarantee you that if another Saudi girl worked here she would not be like me, she would not want to talk to the men." Furthermore, Fatimah has both female and male friends, which is not common in Saudi Arabia, nor for the Saudi women with whom Fatimah interacts in the U.S. "You know like I said, I have got both male and female friends. That's just who I am. I like having male and female friends and as a matter of fact I prefer having more male friends because ... females clash from time-to-time."

Fatimah also feels she has a different attitude and outlook compared to other Saudi women she knows in the area: "I am independent, most of the girls here rely on their

husband or call me to help them

When I moved here I was alone, I had to figure out how to buy a car, etc. Most girls rely on their husbands." This was evident and is a unique function of Saudi culture, as I observed on numerous occasions Saudi men coming into the office to fill out paperwork or pick up paperwork for their wives. I asked Fatimah about it. Fatimah shared this was typical and she was not surprised by it because it highlighted her belief Saudi women are dependent on their husbands. It is of note that while there is no law against women driving, there is a deep cultural restriction that continues today (Eggers, et al., 2013). Therefore, when Saudi women drive in the U.S., it is generally for the first time.

Changing Person

Fatimah identifies herself as having what she terms a U.S. mentality, which for her represents equality among gender, independence, and determination—defining her own path in life. As much as Fatimah feels she has a U.S. mentality, certain cultural components from her home country are incorporated in her everyday life: faith, generosity, and respect. It is hard for Fatimah to differentiate what is cultural and what is her personality.

Fatimah is free spirited and independent. Her expression of her free spirit and independence can be impacted and changed according to her surroundings, which has made the process of integrating her different cultural groups more difficult. For example, one day at work she jammed out and danced to the song, "Teach Me How to Dougie." This is something she felt comfortable doing in an office in the

U.S. However, she explained, had a Saudi person walked in she would have stopped dancing out of cultural respect. Fatimah shared she feels her personality does not change when she transitions between Saudi Arabia and the U.S., but she cannot openly be who she is in either place, but especially in Saudi Arabia. Illustrating this tension Fatimah shared the following:

When I was in Hawaii with my sister I was so happy. We would say *aloha* to anyone who would listen and we would dance to "I'm Sexy and I Know It" because we were so happy that's because that's us, because that's how we are, we like to express [ourselves]. In Saudi Arabia there is no way on earth I could do that even if I wanted to. So going back home you are forced to change who you are.

Overall, Fatimah felt it is difficult transferring cultural components she appreciates and with which she identifies from each country to the other.

It has been difficult [incorporating different cultural groups] because I tried to bring back the things I learned here to Saudi Arabia. A lot of people don't accept it, my independency, my talking to everyone. I love talking to everybody... even to the workers. People in Saudi Arabia don't talk to the workers ... so it's been hard when I go out to dinner with my family and I have a conversation with the waiter. It's unacceptable you shouldn't talk to the waiter

Whatever my [Saudi] culture recommends we do, like respecting elders and being generous, people [in the U.S.] are like, "Oh why did you get me this dinner? Or why did you ... lend me your car?" Whereas in Saudi Arabia it's like normal ...".

Two important subthemes emerged as Fatimah talked about her gender and changing person: generosity and respect.

Generosity. "People in my country are very generous I try to go out of my way to be generous to show people I care I don't ask for money back when I give it I don't expect anything in return." Fatimah's generosity was demonstrated during the observations in several ways, such as when she offered to buy people coffee, a simple act meant as a friendly gesture. Even though most people in the office do not take her up on it, some people do and appreciate it. Fatimah finds it frustrating that people complain about being broke, but then go out drinking alcohol. She does not understand why others are not more generous. Fatimah also demonstrates her generosity by lending out her car to friends who need it. I further noticed her generous behavior included having an attitude that included other people. This to me was apparent by her offering to make a cup of tea for others at her workplace, including me, when she would make herself one. Thus, it appeared generosity did not simply include lending or buying, but more understanding and being aware of the needs of people around. This also explained her dislike of the "me, myself,

and I” attitude in the U.S., because it does not include other people.

Respect. Respect is another topic that came up frequently for Fatimah as something she keeps from her Saudi Arabian culture. Respect for her is “valuing somebody’s beliefs and opinions, treating somebody with dignity and uhm, just respecting how they think, what they think, what they like, what they dislike, where they come from, even if you don’t agree with it.” Respecting elders, especially grandparents, is crucial. “I cannot joke around with an older Saudi man” said Fatimah “even if it is part of my personality, I cannot. This one man, he is like the “father” to all Saudi guys. Even though I have known him for years I cannot joke with him. I have to be serious.” This is an example of Fatimah modifying her personality to comply with aspects of her culture she deems highly important.

Race/Ethnicity

In our final interview together, I conducted a member check of the findings with Fatimah. I also asked her about the categories I had identified in the previous study (Peters, 2012), in which she had been a participant, and whether she felt they applied to her. When I asked her about the role of her ethnicity and how it has impacted her cultural integration, she responded it did not impact her and she did not feel race played a significant role in her cultural integration process. While contrary to U.S. cultural beliefs, this seems to fit with the Saudi Arabian attitude that being Muslim supersedes race or ethnicity.

Cultural Appreciation

For Fatimah, cultural appreciation does not play a large role in her integration process but rather encompasses the respect or tolerance she has taken with her from her Saudi culture. She feels the respect she tries to show people is her way of being open to new beliefs and ideas. She clearly stated this:

There is nothing I would do that would show that I appreciate any culture. It comes back to respect. I wouldn’t go out of my way to try Chinese food because the person is Chinese, but if he did that thing like that [bows] I would do that back. I’m not the kind that seeks more knowledge about a culture; I’m not going out of my way to learn more about a culture. Not going to try to make somebody happy by learning about their culture, but I will be respectful. That’s it.

Education

Fatimah expressed her enjoyment in educating people about the different cultural groups to which she belongs. This was evident when we were out to dinner with some of her friends from school. She shared with us a blessing to say before we ate, *Bismil Allah*. She also incorporated other small cultural aspects over the course of the evening that exposed us more to her Saudi culture by teaching us other phrases (i.e. *Alhamedallah*, which means “Thank God” and is appropriate to say after the meal) and sharing experiences she had in Saudi Arabia working at an International School. Fatimah is more than happy to tell people about both countries and what is happening there.

She finds it extremely important to educate people when the media does not portray either country accurately.

Anybody that is interested ... I will talk about my culture. In Saudi Arabia people ask, "What's it like? Is it true what you see on TV?" Here [U.S.] they are more curious about religion as a culture. So yes, I love to express ... the media as wrong; I think it's my duty to make sure that people understand that's wrong. Yes women are oppressed, but not as oppressed as the media makes it look like. Just like America has good and bad people so do we in Saudi Arabia.

However, as much as Fatimah enjoys sharing about the different cultural groups to which she belongs, she did not identify it as an important part of her process of integrating her different cultural groups. She shared that educating others about her cultures is not an important part of the process of forming her sense of self because "I know who I am." Furthermore, she does not agree with half of what she tells people about her Saudi culture:

The things that I say about Saudi Arabia, it's the truth, but I don't agree with maybe 50% of what I say [what I explain].... So whatever I talk about when it comes to Saudi Arabia and my culture has nothing to do with the way I integrate both cultures together.

Religion

As a Muslim, Fatimah shares her religion is a source of comfort yet at the same time can serve as a source of conflict and difficulty. She feels grateful the people at her work are supportive and offer their office when she needs a private place to pray. As part of her faith, Fatimah prays five times a day facing Mecca. She carries with her a prayer carpet and prayer clothes so she can pray wherever she is. "You know they [people at work] are very friendly and respectful about my culture and religion ... I love where I work Praying in public is a big no no, cause all I'm thinking about is who is watching me."

Fatimah invited me to one of her prayer sessions. She pulled her white prayer clothes over her normal clothes. The prayer cloth covered her exposed skin and hair. She pulled out her pink prayer carpet and spread it on the floor facing northeast. It was the second prayer of the day. She began whispering her prayer standing, kneeling, and bowing. After a few minutes, she finished and packed away her prayer clothes and carpet. We walked back to her workstation, and she explained how the prayer time changes with the changing sunlight. I asked her whether she feels discriminated against for her faith. Fatimah shared she feels accepted and respected. She mentioned that it does help that she does not wear the *Hijab* (head scarf), and thus most people would not know right away she was not a Christian.

Language

Fatimah warmly greets students and faculty as they walk into the IC and makes sure they are helped. She knows many of the students who walk in who need her assistance with their studies.

Because Fatimah is bilingual, students whose primary language is Arabic especially seek her out. Over the several weeks I observed Fatimah, I noticed that these students had memorized her schedule and made a point to come in when she was working. Following regulations, she always started her conversations with students in English and would then switch to Arabic when students were struggling to understand. When a casual friend would swing by, she would automatically talk to him or her in Arabic.

Fatimah made smooth transitions between the two languages and did not seem to struggle with switching languages at short notice. Fatimah learned to speak English when she lived in the U.S. during middle school. Fatimah later told me she believed language was powerful and she felt empowered by being able to communicate with anyone she wanted in either language. She felt it made it easier for her to build relationships. "Many of the Saudi guys don't have American friends not because they don't know how to form relationships, but because of the language difficulties," said Fatimah. When I asked her about whether language has been a source of stress for her cultural integration, Fatimah responded:

A lot of people don't know I'm not American. They think I'm a mixture, but they think my first language is English. So they don't really notice my accent so I never really had a problem with English or anybody giving me a hard time because of my English. However,

had I been born and raised in Saudi Arabia all my life and then came here, it might actually have been totally different. I'm sure a lot of my friends would say, "You know we have had difficulties communicating with people and people not understanding us or getting frustrated with us." But me personally, if somebody comes in and they don't know English, I get frustrated even though I know exactly what they are going through.

Fatimah shared that she expressed her emotions in English and feels she has a harder time expressing them in Arabic, which is difficult when she is in Saudi Arabia, as not everyone understands her. "When I'm on the basketball court and I get angry, a lot of them don't know English and I'm like screaming, 'Go get the ball!' When it comes out in Arabic it sound stupid because I'm literally translating English to Arabic, but you have to say it in a different way." Overall, Fatimah felt language was empowering and helpful in integrating her different cultural identities; however, she acknowledged if she were not bilingual, it would most likely serve as a stressor.

Dominant Culture

Fatimah described her struggles to fit in with each culture. She believes she fits in well in Saudi Arabia, as she was born and raised there; however, she does not like all of her culture, so it is hard for her to be who she is when she is at home. When she is in the U.S., she feels she can be herself, but she also feels pressured by cultural norms to fit in.

Fitting in is socializing and having to drink ... there is no alcohol in Saudi Arabia The first time I went out, people were like, "You have to drink." ... I tried it and it was horrible ... it was hard to fit in with people because I didn't drink ... and hard to talk about because we had different knowledge [culture, current topics, etc.] In Saudi Arabia it's not hard to fit in because I was born there and grew up there.

When I asked Fatimah whether she feels she has a sense of peace or balance in regards to belonging to more than one culture, she responded by describing aspects of both cultures:

Absolutely not ... I hate my culture with a passion—I hate how they think, I hate how they treat each other, I hate the whole arranged marriage—I cannot marry someone I met and fell in love with. It has to be someone I don't know. I hate how women can't drive in my culture. I hate how a woman gets in deep trouble but men don't ... how the father always has the say...

Regarding the U.S. culture, Fatimah also has areas for which she does not care and that make it difficult for her to belong.

I hate many things in America as well, the whole me, myself, and I ... how OK it is to be with many different partners. Having sexual stuff and going to bars and seeing women getting drunk and going out with any man who talks to them. That's why I respect Islam, that's

why we don't drink, that's why many women don't mingle for pleasure purposes: because of reasons like this. I totally respect that. But I am also contradicting myself. I like going out to party with men. I don't drink, so I control myself. I don't go out with any man. Here they encourage women to, "Drink, drink, drink If you want to have fun you have to drink." If you don't drink you don't have fun. That's one thing I don't like. How the women like to act.

All together, a sense of peace is missing for Fatimah. Summarizing the interview question, she responds definitively, "Am I at peace? No I'm not. There are some good things and there are some bad things."

Photo Journal

Fatimah compiled ten pictures (see Appendix A), taken over the last 2 years. Two pictures were not included out of cultural respect to the people in the picture. She tried to capture what is important to her and what she feels represents her, as well as her belonging to two cultural groups: Saudi and American. When I asked her how she chose the pictures, she responded with the following:

The first thing that went through my mind was friends. So I went on Facebook and I saw ... this one [points at image 1]... Perfect! I scrolled down and saw the next picture, which shows two different cultures but the same concept: friends. I wanted you to see it I chose this picture [picture 4] because it's the only family picture I

have. [Picture 5] ...shows me having fun with friends and because I am wearing my headscarf (*Hijab*). Why this picture? Because it's the first that popped up." [Picture 6] ...is the only picture I have with my mom—literally. She doesn't like taking pictures I chose this one [picture 9] because I'm helping people I have other pictures of helping where I am posing after we are done. [Picture 10] ...had my teammates all together with the basketball I wanted to take a picture of dancing, something I love doing ... but I couldn't find one that I liked. I tried to get everything that covers my life ... nothing else ... matters too much.

The pictures encompass Fatimah's support system: family and friends, playing basketball, and her favorite place in the world, the beach. They also show an important glimpse of the process of beginning to integrate the cultures that have impacted her. The pictures also captured her transition from wearing the *Hijab* (head covering), which she is still wearing in Picture 5. She decided to stop wearing the *Hijab* in the U.S. 2 years ago, which is close to the time period Picture 5 was taken. Furthermore, the pictures show her activities in both countries, including having both male and female friends in the U.S., while only having female friends in Saudi Arabia.

Conclusion

The following recommendations for persons working in mental health professions and education are based on the findings. Understandings and

expressions of gender are complex and highly impacted by one's culture. Saudi women and women in general may need support in finding creative and meaningful ways to express themselves while continuing to honor their families and religions. There is a tension between the global and the local where "people need gradually to become world citizens without losing their roots" (Hilal & Denman, 2013, p. 38). Furthermore, it is important to recognize that even when people do not embrace all aspects of their original cultures, they are nonetheless highly impacted by these original cultures. Hilal and Denman (2013) identified this tension in their work with Gulf Arabs and taking from Delors (1998), have described this as tradition and modernity or "how it is possible to adapt to change without turning one's back on the past" (Delors, 1998, p. 17). These tensions were amply illustrated in Fatimah's willingness and ability to describe her culture yet statement that she does not agree with many aspects of it.

Fatimah shared several strategies that helped her through the cultural integration process. Her strategies involved her support system, especially her sister. Furthermore, her attitude and beliefs guided her in making the best out of a situation, as well as being open to new experiences when she encountered them. Support systems as well as one's attitude are important indicators of how the individuals will process cultural integration. These coping strategies were also found in the larger study.

Fatimah's experience in her process of integrating different cultural groups is

still ongoing. Themes unique to her and those from the previous study seem to indicate each individual has unique experiences as well as shared experiences. Fatimah's personal struggles with religion and gender, while unique, also exemplify the larger experience of women historically and currently. Her struggles of transitioning between countries with different degrees of freedom for women especially make the cultural integration process more difficult for Fatimah.

Even though Fatimah personally did not struggle with language, she confirmed language can serve as a barrier for many individuals whose primary language is different from the country in which they are residing. Having a better understanding of what the process of language integration looks like will allow educators, psychologists, counselors, and other mental health professionals to better help and empathize with individuals belonging to more than one cultural group.

Further research also needs to be conducted regarding challenges and supports for cultural integration. It would be helpful to explore further what support has been helpful in overcoming barriers and challenges. In understanding the resiliency and the strength required in the process of integrating multiple cultural groups, educators, psychologists, and other mental health professionals will be better able to help individuals in their journeys of belonging to more than one cultural group.

Overall, this study supports change needing to take place to better help individuals belonging to more than one

cultural group. As the opening quote from a famous Saudi Arabian indicates, achieving balance between two extremes is difficult but an important part of success. It is important for people in the mental health field and educators to be aware of the struggles multicultural people and people with cross-cultural experiences face. As psychologists and educators, it is our role to advocate for groups facing injustice in order for them to be themselves.

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Appendix A: Photo Journal

The participant, Fatimah, compiled ten pictures to which she already had access from the last two years. Pictures 2 and 6 are not included for the following reasons: Some of the girls in Picture 2 would not want their pictures out in public, as well as their husbands not approving of their picture being published. Picture 6 is not included because Fatimah does not believe her mom would be comfortable with such a direct picture of herself out in public. Picture 7 was removed to maintain the participant's confidentiality.



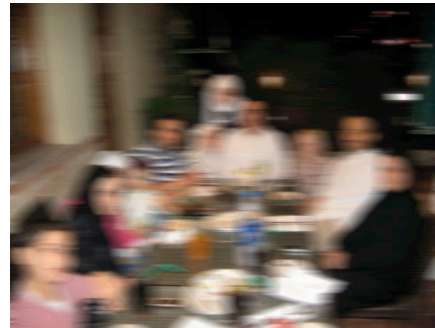
Picture 1 (friends)



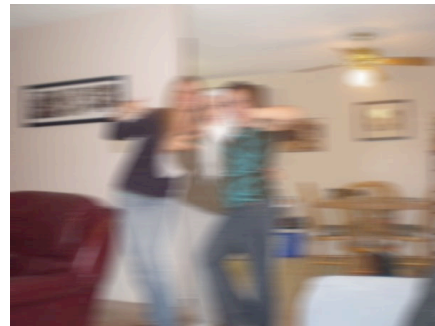
Picture 2 (female friends in Saudi Arabia)



Picture 3 (coffee)



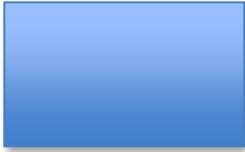
Picture 4 (family)



Picture 5 (fun)



Picture 6 (my mom)



Picture 7 (me with my sister)



Picture 8 (the beach)



Picture 9 (volunteering)



Picture 10 (basketball)