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Negotiating Acculturation: A Qualitative Study of Muslim American Women

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NEGOTIATING ACCULTURATION: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF MUSLIM

AMERICAN WOMEN

A Dissertation Presented

by

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ABSTRACT

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The estimated population of Muslims in the United States ranges from 3 to 7 million

(Bukhari, 2003; Pew Research Center, 2017; Strumm, 2003), with an estimated 69-75% of

Muslim Americans being 1st or 2nd generation immigrants (defined as those born abroad and

those with immigrant parents, respectively), hailing from over 80 countries (Bukhari, 2003;

Pew Research Center, 2017). Thus, most Muslims are navigating the complex processes of

acculturation, which is the adaptation of behavioral, cognitive, and affective aspects of one's

cultural functioning, which result from consistent contact with different cultural contexts and

groups (Driscoll & Wierzbicki, 2012). Research has noted how women in immigrant

communities, and Muslim communities in particular, are often expected to serve as the preservers and conveyors of culture, tradition, and religion (al-Huraibi & Konradi, 2012; Ozyurt, 2010), while also being "agents of integration" or "bridge builders" between host country and country of origin cultures (Ozyurt, 2010, p. 296). Hence, the current study is a phenomenological qualitative study that investigated the lived experiences of 1.5 and 2nd generation Muslim American immigrant women in their negotiation of acculturative processes while holding multiple intersecting identities. The study employed open-ended individual interviews with 12 women. The findings showed four main themes that indicate negotiating cultures, identities, experiencing pervasive otherness and marginalization, and experience of Muslim American women of immigrant descent as they navigate acculturation at the intersection of two cultures, a minoritized and vilified religion, and womanhood. The study expands the acculturation literature and literature on Muslim American women of immigrant descent broadly, providing us with knowledge around acculturation within this population, as well as clinical considerations.

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committee members, thank you for providing invaluable learning and expertise to this work and to me with genuine care and passion for this project.

Lastly, to my powerful and magical participants: thank you for letting your voices be heard, for validating my own experiences, and for allowing our communal experiences to be heard, seen, and documented. The time and energy you offered to this study will have a multitude of ripple effects, uplifting women like us for years to come

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CHAPTER 1

SPECIFIC AIMS

The current study expands upon previous research by seeking to investigate the lived experiences of 1.5 and 2nd generation Muslim American immigrant women in negotiating acculturative processes, while holding intersecting identities. This broad question aimed to allow for all aspects of participants' experiences, including strengths and positive outcomes. The generational immigrant statuses are defined as follows for the purposes of this study: 1.5 generation immigrants are those who were born abroad, immigrated to the U.S. before age 6, and were raised in the U.S. (Amer & Hovey, 2005; Terriquez & Kwon, 2014), and 2nd generation immigrants are those who were born and raised in the U.S. and have at least one parent who was born in another country and migrated to the U.S. as an adult (i.e., is a 1st generation immigrant; Sirin, Ryce, Gupta, & Rogers-Sirin, 2013; Terriquez & Kwon, 2014). The primary research question was: What are the lived experiences of Muslim American 1.5 and 2nd generation immigrant women in negotiating acculturative processes while holding their intersecting identities? I employed a phenomenological qualitative approach to learn more about the lived experience of these phenomena and to amplify the voices of these women and shed light on the range of experiences held by them.

The estimated population of Muslims in the United States ranges from 3 to 7 million, a number that is rapidly increasing each year (Bukhari, 2003; Pew Research Center, 2017; Strumm, 2003). An estimated 69-75% of Muslim Americans are first or 2nd generation immigrants (defined as those born abroad and those with immigrant parents, respectively), hailing from over 80 countries (Bukhari, 2003; Pew Research Center, 2017). Thus, the majority of Muslims therefore are likely to experience stress related to acculturation. Acculturation is the adaptation of behavioral, cognitive, and affective aspects of one's cultural functioning, which result from consistent contact with different cultural contexts and groups (Driscoll & Wierzbicki, 2012). Acculturative stress refers to the state that arises when internal or external demands of cultural adaptation and negotiation affect the capacities of one's own resources (Berry et al., 1987). Research consistently suggests that acculturative stress can have a negative impact on mental health among minoritized and marginalized groups, including Muslim Americans (Ahmed et al., 2011; Goforth et al., 2014; Sirin et al., 2013a; Sirin et al., 2013b).

There are various factors that exist prior to migration which may influence the experience of acculturation, such as gender, age, education, economic status, reasons for migration, personality traits and/or personal factors, and cultural distance between original culture and culture of settlement (Berry, 1997). Berry (1997), one of the leading scholars on acculturation who has been both revered and critiqued for his work, suggests that gender identity may play a role in how immigrants experience acculturation. Women may have a qualitatively different experience than those who hold other gender identities. Additionally, the literature highlights the phenomenon of immigrants, and Muslim communities in

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particular, often expecting women to serve as the preservers and conveyors of culture, tradition, and religion (al-Huraibi & Konradi, 2012; Ozyurt, 2010), to take on the role of "intergenerational transmitters" of culture, religion, language, while also being "agents of integration" or "bridge builders" between host country and country of origin cultures (Ozyurt, 2010, p. 296). Bearing this responsibility or expectation to serve as the preservers and conveyors of culture, religion, and tradition may uniquely complicate the experiences of Muslim immigrant women in negotiating acculturative processes.

Acculturation is experienced in a social, cultural, and political context, and scholars have found that both policies and broader attitudes of the receiving national context impact immigrant experiences (Stuart et al., 2016). For example, the socio-historical-political climate of the U.S. where anti-immigrant sentiment levels are high (Deaux, 2006) and the Muslim community has been consistently vilified, is relevant to consider. The particular social location of the broader Muslim immigrant community living in the West (i.e., Europe and the U.S.) has been described as "living on the fault lines of global conflict" (Sirin & Fine, 2007, p. 151). Khan (2015) noted that Muslim identity has been "crystallized and mapped…not only as a religious ideology, but also as the homogenized Islamic 'other' in the national landscape" often obscuring other aspects of Muslims' identities (p. 397). Ong (1996) suggests that the Muslim American identity is a unique identity which has been essentialized and is subject to navigating the complicated relations with the United States and its hegemonic determination of belonging and inclusivity.

Muslim women, in particular, are systematically stereotyped in the American media as submissive, passive, veiled objects (Falah, 2005, Haddad et al., 2006, Mohamadi, 2019).

Such forms of stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination are associated with higher levels of acculturative stress and negative mental health (Ahmed et al., 2011; Aroian, 2012; Aprahamian et al., 2011; Berry et al., 1987; Berry, 2006; Faragallah et al., 1997). Further, at present, the detrimental impact of prejudice and discrimination are particularly salient given that at the time of this study we were midway through President Trump's administration, during which the President had perpetuated an atmosphere of anti-Islamic and anti-immigrant sentiment through consistent expressions of bigotry, such as employing executive orders to issue a "Muslim Ban" in immigration policy, banning asylum-seekers at the southern U.S. border, and drastically reducing annual refugee admissions to the U.S. In their 2018 Civil Rights Report, the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) found that there was a 17% increase in anti-Muslim prejudice incidents and a 15% increase in hate crimes against Muslim Americans from 2016 to 2017, a time period that aligns with the election and inauguration of President Trump. Unsurprisingly, 68% of Muslim Americans reported that Donald Trump makes them worried (Pew Research Center, 2018).

As a result of the current climate, Muslims are vulnerable to various forms of prejudice and discrimination, not only nationally in the United States, but globally (El-Haj, 2007; Moradi & Talal, 2004; Naber, 2006). Experiences of prejudice and discrimination are components of the acculturation process which can contribute to acculturative stress (Berry, 1997; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001). Such a climate can create an environment where Muslims often isolate themselves and limit their engagement with larger society, thus negatively impacting their acculturation process (Ozyurt, 2010), while others may respond by seeking to further integrate themselves, such as increasing involvement in the political

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process. Although the focus of the current study was to inquire broadly about the experiences of negotiating acculturative processes as a Muslim American woman of immigrant descent, and not specifically to inquire or investigate the experiences of Muslim American immigrant women in relation or in response to discrimination or this socio-historical-political context, it is inextricably and inherently embedded in the overall experience. As Berry (1997) asserted, if research neglects to tend to the variables associated with the dominant society, such as its sociopolitical climate, the understanding of acculturation and how it's experienced would lack essential information, and therefore be incomplete. Hence, I wish to acknowledge the significance of the current sociopolitical climate in both the U.S. and across the globe and the role it may play in the experience of Muslim American women of immigrant descent. Although the broader climate has a poignant impact on the experiences of the American society, other factors also interact with and influence the experiences of the population in question. Factors such as region of residence in the U.S., local attitudes and perceptions of Muslims and their relations with city and state offices, social class, upward mobility, parents' education levels, residence in an ethnic or ethno-religious enclave, among a host of others will bear an impact on the experiences of the participants of the proposed study.

Apart from the sociopolitical climate, the cultural context is also an important factor, as Berry (1997), whose work and its critiques we will discuss in further detail later in this paper, notes that cultural distance can influence the experience of acculturation as well. Cultural distance is how dissimilar two cultures are in various factors, such as language or religion. Greater cultural distance may lead to more cultural shedding and more cultural learning, and these differences have the potential to induce more cultural conflict, ultimately

leading to poorer adaptation (Berry, 1997). Cultural distance might be a particularly important factor in acculturation for Muslim American immigrant women given that Islam and its practices are often considered to be culturally distant from mainstream American culture. Muslim immigrant women may hold a range of racial and ethnic identities, sexual identities, and socioeconomic statuses, further complicating and contributing to the variety of experiences they may hold. Holding this intersection of identities as immigrant, woman, Muslim, and American, alongside other various other aspects of identity, lends itself to a complexity and heterogeneity of experience that may be challenging to investigate and quantify, and therefore is currently lacking in the literature.

Current literature examining this population focuses on very specific variables or outcomes, such as coping with discrimination (Zaal et al., 2007), managing state and community surveillance (Marouka, 2008; Vyas, 2008; Zaal et al., 2007), veiling or wearing of the hijab (Marouka, 2008; Mohibullah & Kramer, 2016; Naderi & Vossoughi, 2018; Rangoonwala et al., 2011), or the role of mosques in acculturation or cultural integration (Ozyurt, 2010). Many studies also investigated specific experiences related to such topics but choose to focus on a particular racial or ethnic group within this community. The available qualitative studies often use semi-structured approaches, again, focusing on specific topics of interest among individuals who hold these intersecting identities. The current study will not be limited to a particular racial or ethnic group, and moreover, will contribute to the literature by highlighting participant-driven themes in relation to acculturation. Further, there is extensive evidence for the mental health consequences of acculturative stress. However, there is a lack of research investigating other aspects of this experience, including the

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positive outcomes or strengths that exist and result from it. Consequently, we have little information about the range of lived experiences of Muslim American immigrant women. The current study employed a phenomenological qualitative method to develop an understanding of the lived experiences and associated meanings that Muslim American immigrant women hold in regards to acculturative processes.

CHAPTER 2

BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

Muslim Immigrants and the Cultural Contrast with "Western" Society

Religion and religious identity bear a significant impact on the experience of

migrants. Zolberg and Woon (1999) note that this is particularly true for Muslim immigrants

to Western host societies, as their religious affiliation becomes the main characteristic by

which they are defined, and constrained, in the context of the host society. This may be

related to the host society's sociopolitical climate, which is relevant particularly for the U.S.

where Muslims have become racialized, which contributes to seeing them as a monolithic

group defined by their religious identity. In addition, the high levels of anti-Muslim

sentiment and discrimination Muslims face can lead to this identity being more salient for

Muslims, as well (Ghaffari & Ciftci, 2010). Further, there is evidence that Muslims in the

U.S. find their shared religion to be a prominent thread that connects them with other

Muslims (Ozyurt, 2013). Other researchers have discussed the evidence which suggests that

immigrants become more religious in the host country than they were in the country of origin

(Williams, 1996) and the various explanations as to why this may be. Some suggest that

religious practices may offer a "familiar, cyclical rhythm" (Ozyurt, 2013, p. 1620;

Tiilikainen, 2003), while religious communities can offer other forms of support, not only

spiritually, but also emotionally, socially, and practically (Ozyurt, 2013). These forms of

support are particularly important given the potential stressors of navigating a new country.

Saroglou and Mathijsen (2007) also note that conflict between religion and acculturation is

not necessarily specific to Muslim individuals but may be a relevant factor in the psychology

of religion and immigration in general. However, evidence suggests that the acculturative

experiences of Muslim immigrants in the U.S. have unique characteristics.

For example, one study showed that there were clear differences in the acculturative

patterns, experiences, and mental health symptoms of Arab Muslim and Christian

immigrants, such that Muslim immigrants appeared to face more challenges integrating into

mainstream American society (Amer & Hovey, 2007). The researchers also aptly suggest that

this could be related to the climate (e.g., forced separation and discrimination) and

perceptions of the mainstream society as being culturally distant from the principles of

Islamic faith (Amer & Hovey, 2007). However, this finding is also likely due to Christian

privilege, which constitutes a "seemingly invisible, unearned, and largely unacknowledged

array of benefits" enjoyed often unconsciously by Christians (Blumenfeld & Jaekel 2012,

p.128). Hence, these advantages may foster a less challenging acculturative experience for

Arab Christian immigrants versus Arab Muslim immigrants. Further, the extension of

Christian privilege to Christian immigrants who do not also hold White privilege (e.g., South

Asian Christians), among other privileges (e.g., social class and racial privilege), may not benefit the same way that Arab Christian immigrants, particularly those who are not coded as White by most people, would. This is likely because the acculturative process would be complicated by other factors such as racism, ethnic discrimination, and xenophobia for those who are not coded as White by most people.

Christian privilege and the dominance it confers to its community, while marginalizing non-Christians, is a relevant and important aspect to consider contextually as we delve into the acculturative experiences of Muslim immigrants in the U.S. The systemic inequities manifest as the Christian way of being becoming the "norm" or the "standard," therefore privileging Christians and Christianity, and neglecting the needs, practices, and life experiences of non-Christian individuals (Blumenfeld, 2006). Both explicit and implicit at times, "Christian hegemony is oppression by intent and design, but also it comes in the form of neglect, omission, erasure, and distortion. (Blumenfeld, 2006, p. 196). If we consider the impact of Christian privilege, we can quickly recognize that the Christian norms in many Western countries, specifically the U.S., create an overall cultural environment and sociopolitical climate which will likely contrast with *and* neglect many of the ethnocultural and Islamic norms, practices, and needs of many Muslim immigrants.

While the long-established Christian privilege and dominance remains, the U.S. is experiencing increasing trends of secularism or movement away from religious affiliation more generally, as indicated by the 30% of Americans who endorse being religiously unaffiliated in 2020, in contrast to the 64% of Americans who identify as Christian and the Jews, Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists who make up only 6% of the population (Pew

Research Center, 2022). It remains to be seen how this impacts the overall landscape of Christian dominance, as well as the acculturative experiences of Muslim immigrants, but it is relevant to acknowledge the contemporary shifts related to religion. Additionally, I will continue to discuss in more detail the sociopolitical climate and its impact on Muslim individuals throughout this paper, although I did not inquire specifically about this in participant interviews, as the goal of the present study was to inquire broadly about participants' experiences to create space for them to share what they determine as salient aspects of their experience.

Scholars have also highlighted some aspects of Islam and Islamic culture that indicate a distinctive acculturative and immigrant experience, which supports the need for studying Muslims in particular. Asvat and Malcarne (2008) note that Islamic cultures are generally marked by hierarchical family systems which tend to involve extended family, conservative values rooted in religion, and an interdependent framework with regard to relationships. They describe the contrast between this and the general cultural system of Western societies, which typically features more egalitarian and nuclear families, various value systems, and a more individualistic perspective on relationships (Berry, 2005; Haddad & Lummis, 1987). The authors also assert that two central challenges typify acculturation for Muslim migrants to Western countries: (1) That Muslim immigrants in the West often come from a non-Western culture of origin that typically substantially differs from mainstream Western culture, and (2) Muslims typically share a culture informed by and rooted in the beliefs and values of Islam, which differs in many ways from the values of Western mainstream culture, as well as the predominant Christian faith. Therefore, it is possible that Muslims in Western societies may

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experience a significant cultural clash, potentially exacerbating acculturative stress, and consequently increasing risk for negative mental health consequences (Asvat & Malcarne, 2008). These differences are certainly not universal and therefore, the complexities should not be simplified or reduced as such. This simplified yet relevant understanding of two key challenges for Muslim immigrants in the West (Asvat & Melcarne, 2008) is enhanced with the nuances demonstrated by the findings of a study which investigated how 1st and 2nd generation immigrant Muslim women in the U.S. and Netherlands negotiate their various identities. The results revealed that the majority of Muslim American women expressed that they saw the ideals of the American civic culture and the religious and cultural ideals of Islam as highly compatible, although they also felt that the popular mainstream culture of the U.S. does not align with Islamic values and beliefs (Ozyurt, 2013).

Ozyurt's (2013) findings and Asvat and Melcarne's (2008) descriptions of some of the common challenges for Muslim migrants to the West are noted here to acknowledge existence of some broad, general differences perceived by many who affiliate with either or both the Islamic faith and Western culture, which may contribute to different experiences of acculturative processes. This is also due to the significant complexity in affiliating and relating to both the Islamic faith and Western culture, and therefore, generalizations should also not be made about Muslim American identities, as they are not homogenous or static (Mishra & Shirazi, 2010). Affiliations and identities may shift based on contextual factors. Further, affiliations may often be labels that lack information and promote generalizations. For example, affiliation with Islam or the label/identity of Muslim do not communicate the individual's level of connection to the faith or that identity. In labeling someone or oneself

Muslim, we lack essential information and understanding regarding that person's commitment to the practice of the faith or the values of the faith. Hence, the label of Muslim immigrant does not necessarily delineate a specific set of challenges or strategies in navigating acculturation. The focus of this study is important for this reason as well, to demonstrate the heterogeneity in the experiences of Muslim American women of immigrant descent (MAWID), as well as the complexity and nuance in experiences of those who identify as Muslim, among other identities.

In summary, the various factors and pieces of evidence described above together offer a call for continued research on immigrants who identify as Muslim. Hence, my study focused on amplifying the voices of and shedding light on the lived experiences of 1.5 and 2nd generation immigrant women who identify as Muslim as it relates to acculturation.

Why Muslim American Immigrant *Women*?

The experiences of Muslim women of immigrant descent are especially important to focus on for several reasons. First, Muslim immigrant women demonstrate a unique understanding of and approach to acculturation and cultural integration and we lack a thorough understanding of these unique experiences (Ozyurt, 2010). Further, as mentioned previously, the literature highlights the ways in which women are constructed in "oppositional terms," being expected to both bear the responsibility of serving as "intergenerational transmitters of cultural traditions, religious values, customs, and mother tongues," and at the same time, as "agents of integration who can act as bridge builders" between the heritage culture and the host culture (Ozyurt, 2010, p. 296). This concept was

reinforced by the narratives of 2nd generation Yemeni American women who described their experience of belonging to two cultures and many of whom collectively endorsed the importance of their roles as the "bearers of culture" (al-Huraibi & Konradi, 2012). These expectations, responsibilities, and roles indicate that the experiences of Muslim immigrant women have the potential to be qualitatively different and unique given their gender identity, hence the need for further investigation. Moreover, this study seeks to learn about the lived experiences of such individuals without a focus on any one particular aspect of negotiating and navigating more than one culture to address the homogenizations and oversimplification of the experiences of women in this community. Hence, this study aims to acknowledge the variation and diversity of experiences held by women holding these identities.

Aside from the role assignments, scholars have also observed the ways in which Muslim women experience "double scrutiny," a policing and surveillance both from their own communities and the dominant one (Mir, 2014, p. 3). While being watched by both the U.S. and around the globe with often bigoted, fearful eyes, young Muslim immigrant women have also been found to consistently negotiate their families' concepts of honor, shame, and self-respect (Haghverdian, 2010; Zaal et al., 2007). Research has documented the increased suspicion and surveillance Muslim individuals generally faced in the post 9/11 era (Maira, 2004).

In a qualitative study, young Muslim women shared several stories of being watched, suspected, and discriminated against in the political climate of increased surveillance, particularly after the PATRIOT Act (Zaal et al., 2007). They discussed being treated as 'outsiders' with less freedom, despite being American themselves. This example illustrates

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one aspect of the scrutiny and surveillance Muslim American women are subject to from the state. In addition, Mir (2014) noticed several phenomena that she describes in her book on Muslim college students. She found that immigrant daughters face more parental pressure to maintain cultural expectations than sons do. Along with this she identified the experience of Muslim women often being caught between conservative Muslim and mainstream or majority expectations. She described the tension between the various forces pulling young Muslim American women of immigrant descent by noting the ways in which conservative Islamic ideologies demand that women fit into a prescribed idealistic uniform community, thereby constraining their identities, while orientalism diminishes Muslim women to hyper religious and hyper feminine existences (Mir, 2014). Similarly, Mahmood (2005) describes the ways in which Muslim American immigrant women are often tolerating the potential stress of living in a world that "demonizes them for their religious affiliation, equates Islam with terrorism, and simplistically labels them submissive or rebellious" (Zaal et al., p. 165; Mahmood, 2005). Both of these eloquent assertions succinctly explain and reinforce one of the important reasons that fueled my interest in this group, asserting the existence and impact of both the marginalization and demands placed on these individuals, as well as the oversimplification of identity and experience that result from both.

Nevertheless, scholars have noticed the various ways in which women of these communities have responded to these pressures, often questioning the expectations of maintaining collective honor, and using Islamic religious practice to cope with the sexism and restriction they may face (Ajrouch, 2004). Some researchers suggest that these women are typically "keenly aware of the weight of living 'between' and 'within'" multiple cultures

and selves (Zaal et al., 2007, p. 169). Scholars have also observed Muslim American women as defying dominant meanings and constructing new ones through their own daily lived experiences (Mishra & Shirazi, 2010; Sarroub, 2005). Others found that in order to grow and assert themselves as individuals, Muslim American women have worked to find and create spaces within each of their communities, although they may encounter "conflicting expectations, resistance, triumph, compromise, and surrender" along the way (Mir, 2014, p. 3). Even with stereotypes and tropes leaving Muslim American immigrant women on the margins, they are building an identity which keeps them connected to their countries of origin, while remaining rooted in the U.S. (Khan, 2015).

Despite the important information researchers have described above, there is still a dearth of literature in this area. Currently, the literature offers work in a few specific areas of inquiry among Muslim American immigrant women, including but not limited to: post 9/11 era and surveillance (Marouka, 2008; Vyas, 2008; Zaal et al., 2007), discrimination (Zaal et al., 2007), veiling and dress code (Marouka, 2008; Mohibullah & Kramer, 2016; Naderi & Vossoughi, 2018; Rangoonwala et al., 2011), college adjustment (Rangoonwala et al., 2011), and identity and/or identity development (Khan, 2015; Mishra & Shirazi, 2010; Ozyurt, 2013; Rangoonwala et al., 2011; Stubbs & Sallee, 2013; Vyas, 2008; Zaal et al., 2007). Additionally, there are several studies that focus on acculturation, acculturative stress, and mental health symptoms, which I discuss in another section below. Many researchers have conducted studies in these or other areas of inquiry in which they have narrowed their sample to include only a specific racial or ethnic group, or to focus only on 1st generation vs. 2nd generation immigrants (al Huraibi & Konradi, 2012; Hassouneh & Kulwicki, 2007; Ross-

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Sheriff, 2001; Zaal et al., 2007). Further, there are some qualitative studies, which I will discuss later in this paper, that investigate related topics, but largely use a semi-structured approach which leads to gathering information that the researchers interested in specifically. This study aims to fill a gap in the literature by using a qualitative approach to learn about the lived experiences of Muslim American immigrant women in negotiating acculturative processes, leaving space for them to define what is most important in this process, rather than the researcher deciding a priori.

Researchers have called for academics to focus on this population, given the need for more information regarding their psychological wellbeing, identity development, acculturation processes, mental health and mental health treatment, experiences with discrimination, and other relevant issues (Nadal et al., 2012). This, along with the areas of inquiry researchers have explored, are deeply valuable to the literature. However, the focus on said specific areas of inquiry also contributes to oversimplification of the experience of this population and reduced opportunity to illustrate the complexity and heterogeneity. Therefore, I aim to use this study to shed light on the diversity of experiences within this community that exist simultaneously with the common threads and identities that tie them together. In addition, many studies employ an explicit or implicit deficits approach, often investigating stressors and their consequences in this community. In doing so, researchers offer extremely important information about the vulnerabilities and needs of this community. And yet, this approach leads us to neglect the strengths and assets of the women who hold these identities, as well as the potential positive outcomes of negotiating the complex layers of identity and acculturative processes. While their intersecting identities, vulnerability to

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acculturative stress, and marginalizing sociopolitical climate together elicit concern and our inclination to conduct the types of research we have conducted thus far, this study will contribute to the literature by gathering information about the spectrum of experiences and perspectives Muslim American women of immigrant descent hold, both positive and negative, as well as everything in between. This will be facilitated by the phenomenological approach, a tradition that has been underutilized in learning about the experiences of this population. In this way, the study aims to fill an important gap in the literature. Below, I highlight some of that literature to further contextualize what scholars have learned about women of immigrant descent in the Muslim American community.

A qualitative study of Yemeni American Muslim 2nd generation immigrant women highlighted their experience of belonging to two cultures (al-Huraibi & Konradi, 2012). This study investigated the identity formation, how ethnic enclaves evolve as cultural settings, and how 2nd generation immigrants pursue higher education (al-Huraibi & Konradi, 2012). Findings showed that the participants viewed their culture of origin as an equal counterpart to the American "mainstream," and selectively adopted components of mainstream culture that was useful or valuable to them. This allowed them to not feel that they had disowned their original culture when rejecting aspects of it (e.g., differential treatment for genders), as well as not feeling like they disowned American culture when they rejected aspects of it (al-Huraibi & Konradi, 2012). The authors also noted that these women were secure in their Muslim identities, and as a result of feeling part of strong familial networks, they were able to push boundaries. They used Islam and its progressive notions to resist sexist practices in their communities (al-Huraibi & Konradi, 2012). Although this study is focused specifically

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on identity formation and seeking higher education in a specific ethnic sample, it sheds light on the ways in which these participants negotiated the two cultures they belonged to. Further, the findings indicate the role their Muslim identities played in navigating certain aspects of their cultures. Lastly, the authors also remind us that the majority of research focused on Muslims and gender identity have missed the voices of Muslim women (al-Huraibi & Konradi, 2012).

The diversity of views that Muslim women carry became clear in another phenomenological study, further defying the homogenization of Muslims in the mainstream American narrative (Rashid, 2017). Through interviews, this investigation highlighted the complexities of struggles that young Muslim American women (n = 15, ages 18-22) who had attended an Islamic high school, and lends further support to the proposed study, which also uses the phenomenological approach to create space for learning what the participants deem to be relevant or important to share. Consequently, this will facilitate expression of the diversity of perspectives and experiences held by the participants. Rashid's (2017) findings also reveal a common thread across participants. That is, their behaviors were often "dictated along patriarchal lines" (Rashid, 2017, p. 492). Relatedly, another important theme Rashid (2017) discovered in the findings was what she called the "Politics of Being a Muslim and a Woman." Within this theme, she found that the participants consistently noted that their behaviors were influenced by concerns and a conscientiousness about how they would be perceived within the Muslim community. The participants noted that this was also a way in which the experience of Muslim women was distinct from that of Muslim men (Rashid, 2017). Rashid's (2017) sample includes some Muslim women participants who were not of

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immigrant descent. The results of this study highlight the distinct and unique experience that often ensues for Muslim women in particular. Finally, Rashid's (2017) findings highlighted another important issue, specifically, the discrimination and marginalization that Black Muslims and LGBTQ Muslims face within the Muslim community (Rashid, 2017). Rashid's (2017) study did not exclude immigrant Muslims who are Black and/or LGBTQ from participating; however, it is important to acknowledge that due to the marginalization these individuals often face within their religious community, it is possible that this would be a barrier to participation in a study focused on Muslims.

While Rashid's (2017) findings highlight the unique experiences of holding intersecting identities as women and Muslim individuals, another study illustrated the role that religion can play for women in the process of identity development in the face of acculturation. In this study, Ozyurt (2013) studied how Muslim immigrant women (n = 85) negotiate their traditional and modern identities and self-representations, and ultimately construct a coherent self-narrative about their bicultural existence. Muslim 1st and 2nd generation immigrant women in both the U.S. and the Netherlands were found to often use religious values and resources as a means to selectively integrate into broader society (Ozyurt, 2013). Further, Ozyurt (2013) found that 2nd generation Muslim American women were more likely to draw from their religious identities than their ethnic identities. Moreover, her findings indicate that the integration outcomes of these particular women are a result of their response to the marginalization of their community in the post 9/11 era (Ozyurt, 2013). Given this added layer of marginalization and vulnerability to stress, it is important to invest resources and energy in researching and better understanding members of this community to

better support them, as well as to work to dismantle the social and structural injustices enacted upon them. Further, this marginalization and vulnerability to stress should not define our understanding of the experiences of women in this community.

The literature has offered invaluable information by investigating various aspects of the experiences of Muslim American women of immigrant descent. However, the current study sought to inquire broadly about the experiences of Muslim American 1.5 and 2nd generation immigrant women navigating acculturative processes while holding their various identities. To learn what was important and relevant to the participants, I approached the study with efforts to reduce the imposition of my own biases and expectations of their experiences. These efforts will be discussed in detail in the Methods chapter Hence, employing the phenomenological tradition was an ideal fit for my study with the goal of creating space for their unique experiences and voices.

Why 1.5 and 2nd Generation Muslim American Immigrant Women?

Literature suggests that there are differences in the way that 1st generation immigrants experience acculturation, when compared to 1.5 or 2nd generation immigrants (Rumbaut & Ima, 1988), and that 2nd generation immigrants interact with their religious faith and identity differently (Ozyurt, 2013; Mohammad-Arif, 2000; Zine, 2004). First generation immigrants are defined as those who immigrate to the host country as adults (Sirin et al., 2013; Terriquez & Kwon, 2014) with a second parent who is also either a 1st, 1.5, or 2nd generation immigrant.

Since first generation immigrants are defined as those who immigrate to the host country as adults (Sirin et al., 2013; Terriquez & Kwon, 2014), this suggests that they have developed largely in another cultural context. Therefore, their acculturation process may involve components that are not relevant to 1.5 or 2nd generation immigrants, such as: learning or engaging with a second or different language, obtaining employment or housing, navigating other financial or economic hurdles, developing social relationships, orienting to a new geographical location, among other things. Further, 2nd generation immigrants do not experience the actual immigration firsthand, and while 1.5 generation immigrants may have memories of the experience, it would likely differ significantly from that of adults who are navigating the process of immigration. The discussion throughout this paper focuses on immigrants who are not refugees or asylees, hence it may not be representative of or capture the experiences of those who hold those statuses as well as their broader 1st or 2nd generation immigrant status.

Researchers have found that 2nd generation women carry the task of traveling between and among cultures, constructing and re-constructing culture throughout interactions with family, educators, peers, strangers, and their own selves (Ayala, 1998; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco 2001; Wiley et al., 2006; Zaal et al., 2007). According to the findings of a quantitative study on 2nd generation Arab Americans (n = 120), it appears that 2nd generation Arab American women do not experience acculturative stress the way their mothers experienced upon immigrating (Amer & Hovey, 2007). Another ethnographic dissertation study investigating identity construction in 2nd generation immigrants, specifically South Asian Muslim American women, highlighted the uniqueness of their experience (Marouka,

2008). Specifically, Marouka (2008) was examining the practice of veiling in various social contexts in the post – 9/11 era and found that veiling is a thoughtfully constructed form of negotiating conflicting values and practices. Further, the study illustrated how the veiling, which is assumed to be in opposition to American practice, is informed by these women's enactment and internalization of core American ideologies of democracy, economic success, capitalism, and feminism (Marouka, 2008). Moreover, the practice of veiling was found to be a response to the various forms of marginalization they encounter, while also an avenue to express and develop a new 2nd generation pan-ethnic sisterhood identity (Marouka, 2008).

Second generation Muslim American women have also been suggested to be more likely to politicize religious identities and engage in political activism, and to be able to synthesize their religious and civic allegiances to create a unique Muslim American self (Ozyurt, 2013). Some scholars have also noted that 2nd generation Muslim American immigrants are more likely to draw on their religious identity than their ethnic identity, and that there is the experience of a "return to Islam" that may facilitate the bridging of any gaps between cultures (al-Huraibi & Konradi, 2012; Cainkar, 2004). Further, this return to Islam or assertion of Muslim identity among 2nd generation immigrants has been found to be less unquestioning compliance with rituals, but instead an engagement and reinterpretation with and of Islamic texts rooted in their own contextual experiences (Mohammed-Arif, 2000; Zine, 2004). Some studies have also concluded that 1st generation immigrant adolescents have higher levels of acculturative stress and mental health symptoms, which also may be a result of the way acculturation and acculturative stress is measured, with a potential focus assessing the experience of a navigating a new country on various levels (e.g., coping with

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loss due to immigration, major life disruptions, learning and navigating new country, different language, and culture; Katsiaficas et al., 2013; Sirin et al., 2013b; Rogers-Sirin et al., 2014).

The various findings of these studies taken together convey the ways in which experiences of 1.5 and 2nd generation immigrants can be distinct from those of 1st generation immigrants. Although few studies compare 1.5 generation immigrants specifically, it can be inferred that their experience is more similar to 2nd generation immigrants than 1st generation immigrants due to immigrating before age 6 (Amer & Hovey, 2005; Terriquez & Kwon, 2014), and growing up predominantly in the host country. Given the range of differences that have been indicated in the literature, as well as those that may be intuitive, this study focuses specifically on 1.5 and 2nd generation immigrant Muslim American women.

Acculturation and Related Constructs

There are several ways acculturation has been defined, including the aforementioned definition: the adaptation of behavioral, cognitive, and affective aspects of one's cultural functioning, which result from consistent contact with different cultural contexts and groups (Driscoll & Wierzbicki, 2012). In this section, I first focus on some of the ways Berry (1997, 2005), one of the prominent scholars in this area, has defined and discussed acculturation. I will then discuss the critiques and address some of the controversy regarding the construct of acculturation. Next, I discuss the literature on acculturation with Muslim samples. Following that, I discuss other related constructs and selected literature, with Muslim samples in

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particular, such as cultural integration, cultural adaptation, and transculturation. By doing so,
I attempt to locate this study on a spectrum of these related constructs.

Berry (2005) and his work on acculturation are seminal to the acculturation literature,
however, Ward (2008) notes that Berry's work has been essential in shaping how we
conceptualize acculturation processes broadly, it has also limited the ways we understand
these processes. Below I discuss Berry's work, as well as some of the associated critiques
and limitations. Berry (2005) has described acculturation as a process of cultural and
psychological change *between* groups or individuals. He claimed that this is a process by
which immigrants must negotiate a "new culture" while simultaneously deciding whether to
maintain aspects of their heritage culture (Berry, 1997). Moreover, he said that acculturation
also refers to the cultural changes which occur as a result from these group interactions
(Berry, 1997). He further distinguished acculturation from psychological acculturation and
adaptation, suggesting that the latter refer to "psychological changes and eventual outcomes
that occur as a result of individuals experiencing acculturation" (Berry, 1997, p. 6). Later,
Sam and Berry (2010) further discriminated the construct of adaptation and defined it as the
psychological wellbeing of an individual and how individuals cope socioculturally and
therefore, it is a result of acculturation.

Berry (1997) has also outlined four acculturation strategies in his acculturation
framework, which have been contested by many scholars. However, there is also empirical
evidence to suggest that they have substantial relationships with positive adaptation (Berry,
1997). He described specific strategies, what they entail, and their success rate. *Assimilation*
is used when a person does not choose to maintain their heritage cultural identity and is

described as "intermediately successful" (Berry, 1997, p. 24). *Separation* refers to an approach in which individuals value maintaining connection with their original culture in some form, while also seeking to avoid interaction with other cultural groups. *Integration* is described as typically the most successful strategy in which the individual has an interest in maintaining their original culture while also engaging in daily interactions with other cultural groups as well. Finally, *Marginalization* is used when individuals have little interest in cultural maintenance and relations with other cultural groups, both of which can be a result of enforced cultural loss and exclusion or discrimination respectively (Berry, 1997).

Berry (1997) acknowledged that these strategies are not applicable in all situations, such as in the case that the dominant group enforces certain types of acculturation. He also noted that the strategies may be used more or less prominently depending on the setting, such as home versus workplace. Finally, he asserted that the broader national context and atmosphere (e.g., welcoming or marginalizing) impacts acculturation strategies used as well (Berry, 1997). Ward (2008) notes that these strategies provide us with an "orderly framework" (p. 107), however, this framework does not provide information regarding the processes which leads to a particular strategy or whether these strategies are static or not.

Several scholars have critiqued and raised concerns regarding the construct and research on acculturation. Acculturation as a construct has been discussed as a potential crisis in the research (Chirkov & Landis, 2008), and some scholars have criticized the key conceptual frameworks and noted the limitations of the most prominent methodological approaches (Poortinga, 2010). For example, Chirkov (2009) criticizes Berry's (1997) four strategies as oversimplified. Other scholars note that choice of acculturation strategy does not

exist in isolation and tends to be affected by the expectations of an individual, the ethnic

community, and the society at large (Kunst & Sam, 2013). One issue highlighted In the

research itself is the use of standardized scales as the main form of studying acculturation

(Chirkov, 2009a). Chirkov (2009a) asserted that this is flawed, and other methods must be

incorporated, such as qualitative approaches, including ethnography, participant

observations, and qualitative interviewing, among others. Ward (2008) comments on the

ways in which acculturation strategies have often been measured as static outcomes or

predictors of adaptation, with the process aspects of the experience itself remaining neglected

or unmeasured. Moreover, acculturation research has also been criticized for its lack of

connection to immigrant groups and the minimal practical utility it has for immigrants, as

well as those who work with and/or for them (Chirkov, 2009b). Berry (1997) also noted that

the original meaning of the concept has been eroded, and at times used as synonymous with

assimilation. However, researchers have come to the consensus that acculturation is

multidimensional, such that it consists of the attitudes, values, behaviors, language, *and*

cultural identity, and that acculturating individuals are not disregarding country of origin

values but may instead engage in adjusting and adapting to those of the new host society

(Thomas & Choi, 2006; Van Oudenhoven et al., 2006).

In response to the criticism of the construct of acculturation, other constructs have

been developed and differentiated, including but not limited to: bicultural acculturation,

biculturation, bicultural integration, cultural integration, adaptation or cultural adaptation,

cross-cultural adaptation, and transculturation. There are also related constructs concerning

identity negotiation and development in the context of acculturation, such as biculturalism, third space, hybridity, as these are relevant to the research question.

Bicultural acculturation is understood as either an individual or group response to consistent contact with both heritage and mainstream cultures (LaFramboise et al., 1993; Szapocznik et al.,1980). Hence, someone who is engaged in the mainstream or host culture and does not maintain ties with the heritage culture would be considered not to engage in bicultural acculturation. The theory of bicultural acculturation was developed by Tadmor and Tetlock (2006). They assert that the first principle is accountability to both cultures, and given this accountability, biculturating individuals may face cognitive dissonance when making social choices (Tadmor & Tetlock, 2006). This construct emphasizes a particular type of engagement with the process of acculturation that may come up in the findings of this study. Similarly, Jalali (2005) defines biculturation as an effort to integrate two cultures, in which ties to the heritage culture are maintained alongside adapting productively to the host culture. Both biculturation and bicultural acculturation align with Berry's (1997) concept of integration. All of these constructs allude ultimately to the healthy integration of two cultures in one's life and identity, although they may differ in other aspects. Noting the ways in which all of these constructs refer to the same broad concept, we can see how the scholarship can facilitate confusion and issues in research by using various terms which are operationalized *and* measured in different ways.

Ortiz (1995) introduced the concept of transculturation, which he suggested may be a more fitting term than acculturation. This is because it refers to encounters between different cultures and to the process of shifting from one culture to another. Further, the concept of

transculturation also includes the "loss and uprooting of a previous culture" which he called

"deculturation" (p. 102), thereby acknowledging the tension and anxiety that may exist in

this process. Ortiz (1995) noted that acculturation is often used to describe to this same

process, in conjunction with its numerous social consequences. Sociocultural adaptation is

another construct which is investigated through the framework of culture learning theory,

which focuses on the social psychology of intercultural encounters, as the individual's

"ability to fit in or negotiate interactive aspects of the host culture" (Ward & Kennedy,

1992, p. 178; Masgoret & Ward, 2006).

Homi Bhabha, a prominent postcolonial theorist, (1990, 2004) developed the

construct of hybridity, which comes up in research on both immigrant and Muslim immigrant

experience, Hybridity is understood as the identity space where individuals consistently

negotiate intercultural practices within the context of differential power relations (Kraidy,

2002). Hence, hybridity is often talked about as the 'in-between third space,' where diasporic

individuals negotiate their various identities (al-Huraibi & Konradi, 2012). This idea is

illustrated in the findings of the previously mentioned study on 2nd generation Yemeni

American women, where the authors described the participants as developing hybridized

identities through various processes, such as their understanding of Islam, the history of their

country of origin, and the dynamics of their ethnic enclave community in the U.S. (al-Huraibi

& Konradi, 2012). Although these ideas of hybridity and third space refer to identity, they

often result from and strongly relate to acculturative processes. Hence, it is possible these

constructs will be relevant given that this study seeks to inquire about the experiences of

Muslim American women of immigrant descent in negotiating acculturative processes *while* holding their intersecting identities.

The current study is based on the theoretical framework of acculturation as a multidimensional experience and construct, and by employing a qualitative and phenomenological inductive approach, the study sought to gain knowledge about the experience of this phenomenon in all its multidimensionality. The goal of this study was to create space for participants to share any and all aspects of their experience of acculturation. Included in the definitions noted in this paper are the cognitive, affective, behavioral, cultural, and psychological components of shifts resulting from intercultural encounters, all of which were of interest in this study. The design of the current study aligned ideally with this multidimensional definition. Therefore, despite the often flawed and limited use of the construct, I chose acculturation given the range of dimensions and complexity that is acknowledged in its definition. Further, I selected this construct given its relevance to the experiences of Muslim American women of immigrant descent.

Acculturation and Muslim Immigrants. Acknowledging the limitations and concerns noted above, I review the literature on acculturation, specifically with Muslim samples. In exploring their process of acculturation and the use of internet-based media, fourteen 1st generation Muslim American immigrant women were found to use various forms of media to build and create relationships in their new communities, while also using such media to communicate with family and friends abroad (McKelvy & Chatterjee, 2017). The findings of this grounded theory qualitative study also showed that social media allowed participants to express parts of their identities. The study showed the role media played in

their process of acculturation, and that their maintenance of their relationships both abroad and locally seem to contribute to creating balance in their lives, ultimately allowing them to prosper in their new communities, as well as at school and at work (McKelvy & Chatterjee, 2017). Given that the participants appeared to engage with both their country of origin and the mainstream culture, it follows that the researchers designated the participants of this study with the integration level/strategy from Berry's (1997) model of acculturation. Another quantitative study investigating issues of assimilation, acculturation, and radicalization with Muslim Americans from twenty-five American mosques found that Muslim American mosque attendees are economically and civically well-integrated and acculturated into American society but are resisting full assimilation of intrinsic religious values and customs (Bagby, 2009).

One study used mixed methods and found that young Muslims aspire to achieve success in the various domains in their lives, including religious and social, and that they seek to balance the potentially competing demands from family, friends, Muslim community, and the larger society (Stuart & Ward, 2011). The study sought to explore the acculturation experiences of thirty-six Muslim youth of immigrant descent in New Zealand in order to address some of the key limitations of acculturation studies. Two of their primary foci were to inquire about the participants' meaning, definition, and achievement of success and the process of negotiating multiple social identities. Most participants alluded to balance across culture, religion, and New Zealand society as the primary motivator for achievement. This is one of the few studies that approached their research with a positive psychology paradigm. Further, for many of the participants, balance was seen not necessarily as an outcome of

acculturation, but instead as the process that allowed for one to minimize the risks of managing various orientations and meet the conflicting demands placed on them (Stuart & Ward, 2011). For "young people seeking balance, acculturative changes were made in order to fit into the new culture, but these were not at the expense of compromising the self" (Stuart & Ward, 2011, p. 259). Although there are various possible experiences in relation to religious affiliation and international context Muslims immigrants across the globe may share, it is important to note that there are various contextual factors that impact our ability to reasonably compare Muslims of immigrant descent in New Zealand with those in the U.S.

In a study of Arab Americans (n = 42), participants who identified as Muslim (n = 12) reported considerably less satisfaction with life in the U.S. compared to the Christian participants (n = 27, Faragallah et al., 1997). In this study, the researchers sought to explore family satisfaction and satisfaction with life in the U.S. as indicators of successful adaptation to immigration. Acculturation was found to be positively associated with satisfaction with life in the U.S., but negatively associated with family satisfaction. Overall, findings showed that longer residence, younger age at immigration to U.S., not recently having visited country of origin, and identifying as Christian, were all variables associated with greater acculturation to U.S. and greater satisfaction with life in the U.S., but with reduced family satisfaction (Faragallah et al., 1997).

A study that investigated mental health symptoms in relation to acculturation found that personal acculturation is related to depression among Muslim college students of immigrant descent in Canada and the U.S. (Asvat & Malcarne, 2008). More specifically, the findings showed that participants who identified more highly with mainstream culture

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reported higher depressive symptoms in the past year, while those who identified more highly with their heritage culture reported fewer depressive symptoms in their lifetime, but not in the past year. Together, these findings indicate the potential of one's personal identification with mainstream or heritage culture as being related to their experience of depressive symptoms. Further, the study also examined participants' perception of how their families identified regarding mainstream or heritage culture. They found that those who perceived their family as identifying highly with the heritage culture, but personally had low identification with the heritage culture had a significantly higher average of depressive symptoms in the past year than any other group (e.g., the group of participants who had both high perceived family heritage culture identification and personal heritage culture identification; Asvat & Malcarne, 2008).

Another study investigated mental health symptoms in relation to acculturation and found that identification with heritage culture, a measure of acculturation, was one of the strongest predictors of depressive symptoms among seventy Muslim American elderly immigrants in the U.S. (Abu-Bader et al., 2011). Greater separation from American culture and greater maintenance of heritage culture was significantly associated with higher levels of depression. Overall, the results showed that high levels of depression among older Muslim immigrants are a function of low cognitive status, greater affiliation with one's own culture compared to American culture, poorer physical health, and less endorsement of internal health locus of control (Abu-Bader et al., 2011). The findings of this study suggest that being more oriented towards one's own heritage culture can make one vulnerable to mental health symptoms, specifically depression. However, this is not a generalizable and global

conclusion. It is possible that the orientation to their heritage culture made living in the host culture more challenging for the participants in this study, in conjunction with the various other challenges they were facing related to aging.

The aforementioned studies illustrate the range of factors that have been investigated in relation to acculturation, including life satisfaction, mental health, the role of mosques or media, etc. I have included these here to help place the current study within the spectrum of research available on this construct and the Muslim immigrant population in particular. This study did not focus on any particular factor but instead aimed to elicit the factors deemed relevant or important by the participants themselves. Another important aspect of my decision to choose to use acculturation for the purposes of this study was its continued presence in the discipline of psychology, however, I acknowledge its limitations and the ways in which other constructs may address these limitations, although they may be lacking in other ways. Given the multidimensional nature of acculturation, as discussed above, the related constructs mentioned below address aspects of this various dimensions, as well as other perspectives or ideas on acculturation.

Acculturative Stress and Mental Health among Muslim American Immigrants

Acculturation theory suggests that the act of crossing cultures is typically stressful (Berry, 2006; Ward, 2011). Acculturative stress refers to the state that arises when internal or external demands of cultural adaptation and negotiation exceed the capacities of an individual's own resources (Berry et al., 1987). Further, Berry (2006; Berry et al., 1987) posited that acculturative stress occurs when an individual encounters challenges with the

process of acculturation and those challenges are perceived to be problematic because one cannot deal with them easily. Other scholars have noted that acculturative stress involves psychological and social stress that results from lack of compatibility between the beliefs, values, and other cultural norms of one's country of origin and host country (Cabassa, 2003; Cuevas et al., 2012; Sanchez et al., 2014; Schwartz et al., 2010). Unsurprisingly, the role of acculturative stress is considered essential to understanding the general mental health and well-being of immigrant individuals (Sirin et al., 2013b).

With regard to the psychological health of immigrants, Berry (1997) claims that the long-term consequences of the acculturation process vary greatly depending on social and personal variables that exist in the host and origin society, as well as those variables that exist before and during acculturation. Some of the factors that are thought to potentially influence the acculturation experience that exist beforehand include gender, age, education, economic status, reasons for migration, personality traits and/or personal factors, and cultural distance between original culture and culture of settlement (Berry, 1997). This reinforces the significant individual differences in the psychological experience of acculturation, even among individuals who share the heritage culture and live in the same host culture (Sam & Berry, 2010). The sheer variety of ways in which people acculturate and how well they adapt to acculturating are the two most consistent findings in the literature (Sam & Berry, 2010). Acculturation may be most stressful and lead to vulnerability in the psychological functioning of individuals when differences between the heritage and host cultures are at the greatest level. This alludes to the idea of cultural distance, discussed earlier in Chapter 1, and the ways it may affect the experiences of Muslim Americans in particular because Islam and

Islamic culture can be perceived and experienced as culturally distant from mainstream American culture. Given the many different factors that influence acculturation and acculturative stress, it follows that how and why each individual experiences acculturative stress may vary greatly.

There is a plethora of research showing that acculturative stress can have a negative effect on mental health among minoritized and marginalized groups, including Muslim Americans (Ahmed et al., 2011; Goforth et al., 2014; Sirin et al., 2013a; Sirin et al., 2013b). Moreover, acculturative stress has been linked to decreases in wellbeing and increases in psychological symptoms, including depression, anxiety, and psychosomatic concerns in immigrant and ethnic minoritized groups (Jibeen & Khalid, 2010; Miller et al., 2011; Park & Rubin, 2012; Romero & Roberts 2003). According to Berry (1997, 2005), depression has been proposed as one of the primary negative mental health outcomes associated with acculturative stress. Below, I briefly highlight some of the literature that shows the relation between acculturative stress and mental health symptoms in this section.

There is extensive evidence that suggests that increased acculturative stress likely contributes to negative mental health consequences among immigrant individuals in general. In a sample of first and 2nd generation immigrant adolescents, higher levels of acculturative stress predicted significantly more withdrawn/depressed, somatic, and anxious/depressed symptoms (Sirin et al., 2013a). Acculturative stress was also positively related to internalizing symptoms (anxiety and depression), such that individuals with more acculturative stress reported more internalizing symptoms in another study focused on of first and 2nd generation immigrant adolescents (Katsiaficas et al., 2013). Latina young adult

immigrants with higher levels of acculturative stress also showed higher levels of psychological distress (Da Silva et al., 2017). Among Arab American adolescents, those who had more acculturative stress also showed greater levels of psychological distress, including depression, internalizing, and externalizing symptoms (Ahmed et al., 2011).

Further, there is consistent evidence that higher levels of acculturative stress negatively influence mental health among Muslim immigrants as well. Acculturative stress predicted more psychological symptoms, as well as a lower level of life satisfaction in a sample of Muslim immigrants in New Zealand (Adam & Ward, 2016). Similarly, another study of emerging adult Muslims in New Zealand and the United Kingdom showed that acculturative stress predicted decreases in life satisfaction, as well as increases in behavioral problems (Stuart et al., 2016). Among Muslim Arab American adolescents, both acculturation and acculturative stress significantly predicted psychological problems (Goforth et al., 2014)**.** Likewise, acculturative stress was positively associated with internalizing symptoms among a Muslim Arab American sample of first and 2nd generation immigrants (Goforth et al., 2016).

The Current Study

The current study is an important addition to the literature, as it builds a basis to better understand how Muslim American women of immigrant descent negotiate acculturative processes *and* their identities at the same time. Specifically, the current study approached this goal through the phenomenological tradition from a constructivist-inductive perspective. Therefore, the study did not offer hypotheses or specific areas of inquiry outside

the primary research question. The primary goal was to allow the participants to share their lived experience of this phenomena, while actively working to reduce the impact of my preconceived notions and assumptions (while also acknowledging that eliminating this impact is not possible). In doing so, we are able to learn more about the range of experiences of this population.

In making efforts to reduce the impact of my biases regarding their experiences with acculturative processes or their intersectionality, I attempted to foster an environment in which participants were able to inform us as to what is important to them and their experience. In this way, we improve on previous studies by not distilling or simplifying their experience to certain components or factors that we determine as important. This in itself is addressing a gap in the literature, by amplifying the voices of a group that is heavily marginalized, by *not* assuming that their marginalization defines them. Further, this study may be the first of many to come that can begin to address this gap, and ultimately inform practitioners and academics in order to improve cultural sensitivity and awareness. Moreover, this study works towards a broader, more important goal: beginning to dismantle stereotypes, as well as anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim sentiment in the American culture, aspiring towards social justice for this population and all others.

CHAPTER 3

METHOD

The purpose of the present study was to describe the lived experiences of Muslim American women of immigrant descent (MAWID) in negotiating acculturative processes, through a qualitative phenomenological study design to amplify the voices and shed light on the heterogeneity of lived experience in this group. Further, the study aimed to learn about the meaning MAWID ascribe to this experience. The central research question this study aimed to explore was "What are the lived experiences of Muslim American 1.5 and 2nd generation immigrant women in negotiating acculturative processes while holding their intersecting identities?"

The current study was designed in a way that addresses the previously discussed limitations that arise when investigating acculturation. First, the methodology of the current study employed phenomenological, open-ended interviews and did not use any standardized scales to measure or evaluate acculturation. The study did not seek to ascertain any predictors or outcomes based on the data, but instead to learn about the lived experiences of the participants. By doing so, the study aimed to be cognizant of the dimensions or complexities

that may arise in the experiences of the participants. With the methodological approach, detailed below, the study inherently sought to amplify the voices of this group, to learn about their experiences, without imposing academic assumptions on them. Ward (2008) argues that it is possible to "think outside of the Berry boxes" (p. 264), and this study sought to do just that, while acknowledging the scholarship that although flawed, has contributed to our understanding of this construct as well. Hence, Berry's work is discussed above.

Research Paradigm and Philosophy of Science

The study was conducted in alignment with my philosophy of science of inductive, constructivist qualitative methods. In approaching the study from an inductive perspective, I sought to spotlight the participants' lived while attempting to reduce the limiting nature of predefined or constrained assumptions of the phenomenon. Although it is not possible to eliminate such assumptions, efforts to impact of researcher assumptions, expectations, and biases are detailed below. Constructivism assumes that reality is socially constructed, which means individuals develop subjective meanings of their experiences, and therefore multiple meanings and understandings exist (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). This approach also seeks to understand the particular phenomenon contextually, while acknowledging that the researcher's own experiences will shape their interpretation of the participants' experiences. Through the lens of constructivism, the researcher aims to generate knowledge inductively, specifically by developing meaning from the data (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). As a phenomenological study aligned with the constructivist *and* inductive perspectives, I aimed

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to prioritize the participants' lived experience of the "phenomenon," without preconceived ideas or hypotheses of what this experience is like for my participants (Hanson et al., 2005).

More specifically, I used interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) and thematic analysis (TA) in this study. Interpretive phenomenological analysis is a qualitative tradition which focuses on the study of participants' lived experiences and their perceptions of these experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Smith & Osborn, 2009). Interpretive phenomenological analysis recognizes and addresses the researcher's interpretation in the analysis process as complicating the data, thus highlighting that this approach involves a "dual interpretive process" (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 181). In IPA, the participants first share and reflect on their lived experience, and during data analysis, the researcher subsequently interprets these reflections, resulting in the 'dual interpretive process' (Smith & Osborn, 2003, 2009). Therefore, I sought to co-create meaning with my participants in this 'dual interpretive process,' while explicitly bracketing the influence of my own assumptions and biases. IPA acknowledges the way in which the researcher's analysis impacts the interpretation of the participants' experience. Consequently, the results are a not presumed to be representation of the "true" experiences of the participants, but instead that the results are a reflection of their lived experiences that include the researcher's subjective interpretation.

I employed TA in conjunction with IPA as well. Thematic analysis seeks to identify some common themes within the lived experiences of participants, which can help to inform future research as well as clinical work with this group. I selected TA to allow the study to provide researchers and clinical providers with an understanding of the complexity and

heterogeneity that exists within this phenomenon, while also establishing some patterns that my exist across participants.

Researcher Positionality and Researcher – as – instrument-statement. As the primary investigator, I identify as a 1.5 generation Pakistani American Muslim immigrant woman (born in Pakistan and immigrated to the U.S. at age 2), which are the specific social identities that have led me to have a strong interest in better understanding the experiences of other women who identify as Muslim American and are of immigrant descent, particularly in how they negotiate holding these identities and how they experience processes of acculturation. In addition to these social identities, I also identify as a heterosexual, upper middle class, able-bodied, cisgender woman, as well as a mother, with no developmental or mental/emotional disabilities, with American citizenship privilege and English language fluency. It is important to acknowledge these identities and abilities, as they influence my experience of this phenomenon significantly. Other women who share the Muslim, immigrant descent, and woman status with me, but differ in other identities, statuses, or abilities, may have vastly different experiences, likely influenced by the American landscape of cultural and systemic oppression.

As an individual whose experiences were often misrepresented or not represented at all in media and fictional literature I read growing up, I sought to amplify and empower the voices of other women who share these identities, in an attempt to demonstrate the complexity and heterogeneity of experiences within this community. Moreover, I sought to highlight the consistent reduction and oversimplification of this population's experiences which dominates not only the academic literature within psychology, but various other facets

of larger society, including media and mainstream cultural perspectives. My lens is influenced by my own multitude of complex experiences in negotiating these processes and holding these intersecting identities. In particular, I have faced and continue to face consistent challenges throughout various moments in my life, in making decisions that align with either my ethnic culture and/or identity, my religion and/or religious identity, or my American culture and/or identity. I often find myself carrying these various identities and making considerations using each of them or one of them separately, or a decision that is rooted in the combination of all these identities. I was and am deeply curious about how women who hold similar identities experience acculturation. Therefore, my interest in this topic was and is both personal and professional, as I am deeply invested in better understanding the lived experiences of this group, including their strengths and any potential needs. My experience with MAWID population however is entirely personal. As a MAWID myself, I live in community and connection to many other MAWID, and as such, my personal social circles consist of other MAWID, women of immigrant descent, and women of color. It is important to note that I do not have academic or research-based experience with this population, although I do have clinical experience working with a handful of MAWID. My observations and felt experience during the interviews lead me to believe that my positionality facilitated my ability to foster an environment in which participants and I were able to have strong rapport. My positionality and shared identities with the participants also likely impacted the ways in which participants chose to share what they did, as well as the ways in which I interpreted this information ecologically.

It is possible that I hold biases that assume that such experiences are challenging and complex, and I used reflexivity and verification strategies to work to reduce the impact of this bias and others that I recognize in this process. One of my biases is that American culture and my own experience of Pakistani Islamic culture are often contradictory, thus the negotiation of these cultures and identities has sometimes been very difficult for me. Another important bias to note is that my experience of Islam and my ethnic Pakistani culture has often felt restrictive to me in many ways, so at times I've held the assumption that other women who share these identities with me will have also experienced a restrictive version of these cultural realms. Additionally, due to my own experiences, I recognize that I hold the assumption that other MAWID like me, particularly those who appear phenotypically non-White and do not wear hijab, likely experience a sense of not fitting in and a lack of belonging. These are some of the biases and assumptions that became clear to me through my process of reflexivity, which I discuss further in the section below.

My approach to my own subjectivity is rooted in my belief that as a researcher I am not inherently objective. Hence, using IPA allowed me to acknowledge clearly that my own subjectivity is integrated into my research process, especially my data analysis and ultimately the results I find. Further, I employed the use of reflexivity strategies noted below to navigate my own subjectivity. I repeatedly returned to the research question and goal during data analysis to ground myself in the inquiry and purpose of this study and guide my analysis process. Repeatedly returning to the research question provided a constant re-evaluation of the data and which data should be included and analyzed. Seeking consultation with my research team was another essential strategy to navigate my own biases and their impact on

my data analysis. I was able to bring my biases, assumptions, and related questions to my team for discussion and consultation. Relatedly, it is important to highlight that my experience with qualitative research involved and is limited to conducting and engaging in data analysis of one other qualitative research study and receiving mentorship and workshop-based lessons on qualitative research through my dissertation chair and committee members.

Reflexivity and Verification. To minimize the impact of subjective researcher bias and to emphasize the voices of the participants on any and all aspects of the research process, I used reflexivity as a strategy for verification using the following approaches: (1) I had one of the members of my research team interview me using the same interview protocol to extract and document my own expectations, experiences, and biases prior to the beginning of data collection. I memo-ed about the possible themes and biases that arose in my interview, so as to use the awareness from this process to reduce the imposition or influence of my biases upon the data collection. I returned to the interview and memos prior to data analysis to review and ensure the data analysis process was protected as well. (2) I used a research journal to memo throughout all phases of the research process to record the evolution of my thoughts, reflections, expectations, and biases related to the study. Through memoing and my own interview, I aimed to bracket or set aside my own beliefs, feelings, experiences, or perceptions of the phenomenon, in order to be more open to the participants' lived experiences and to reduce biases that would influence my interpretation and the presence of my voice in the analysis of the data (Colaizzi, 1978; Streubert & Carpenter, 1999). I attempted to increase my own reflexivity by engaging in these processes. (3) Lastly, I used

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my research team and dissertation committee members as a resource to consult when questions or conflicts related to reflexivity arose.

Finally, I employed member checks to verify my data. For this process, I conducted the following procedure: during the interview, I asked participants if they would be willing to be contacted to review the preliminary data analyses. I contacted those who agreed to this by email to share preliminary data analyses. I offered them the opportunity to respond to the question, "Is your experience reflected in this data?" via email within a 2-week time frame. I did not receive any responses from the member checks, and therefore this process did not directly influence data analysis. Additionally, I engaged in external auditing via support of my dissertation committee members, who reviewed my findings, data examples, and queried any discrepancies or unclear differentiations. Following this, I used the auditing feedback to minorly revise my themes.

Participant and Recruitment Strategies

Participant inclusion/exclusion criteria. IPA encourages studying small homogenous samples: the logic is that in using purposive sampling, the researcher aims to find a more "closely defined group for whom the research question will be significant" (Smith & Osborn, 2009, p.56). The inclusion/exclusion criteria were selected in part to recruit a homogenous sample within the population being studied (Eatough & Smith, 2010). Participants were required to meet the following criteria:

- Between the ages of 18 – 31.

- Self-identified as Muslim and woman

- Self-identified as fluent in speaking and understanding written and spoken English, for the purposes of comfortably participating in the study, all aspects of which were conducted in English

- Self-identified as having been raised solely as a Muslim and solely in a Muslim family context (this excluded families or contexts that are also affiliated with religions other than Islam).

- Has an immigrant background as either a 1.5 or 2nd generation immigrant from country or region of origin that is either Muslim dominant or has a predominantly Islamic ethno-religious community or context. This means the participant must have either (1) Been born abroad, immigrated to the U.S. before age 6, and raised in the U.S., an operationalization established in order to capture immigrants who were largely socialized into U.S. society from an early age and likely did not have as much socialization outside of the family (e.g., schooling) until immigration (Amer & Hovey, 2005; Terriquez & Kwon, 2014), or (2) Born and raised in the U.S. and have at least one parent who was born in another country and migrated to the U.S. as an adult (i.e., parent is a 1st generation immigrant; Sirin et al., 2013; Terriquez & Kwon, 2014) with a second parent who is also either a 1st, 1.5, or 2nd generation immigrant. This criterion is included to ensure that individuals have a more homogenous experience of being raised in a household predominantly influenced by an immigrant experience.

- Did not hold refugee or asylum-seeking immigrant status, nor did the referent parents

- Were currently living in the U.S. and lived majority of life in the U.S.

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The inclusion criteria were developed as such for several reasons, some of which are indicated above. The study was focused specifically on emerging adult and young adult women firstly, to align with the IPA approach in recruiting a homogenous sample. Further, this ensured that the participants were in the shared developmental stage of emerging adulthood and/or young adulthood. Secondly, this age range included individuals who were no older than 13 during the September 11, 2001 attacks. This time period marked a significant shift in the racialization of Muslims and establishes that participants in the study would have experienced and grown up during the sociopolitical shifts that occurred at that time, or that they had grown up in the already shifted sociopolitical climate, despite not having experienced 9/11 or the change in climate at that time. Additionally, data collection was conducted in English, hence the requirement of English fluency from the participants. Further, given that 1st generation immigrants (who immigrate to the U.S. as adults) likely have qualitatively different experiences than 1.5 or 2nd generation immigrants, the criteria required that participants identified as either 1.5 or 2nd generation immigrants, particularly from regions or countries that are Muslim dominant or host largely Islamic ethno-religious communities. Additionally, different causes for immigration and immigration status (e.g., undocumented, asylee, refugee) play a significant role in the kind of stressors and experiences an immigrant likely encounters. Given the qualitatively different experiences of refugee or asylum-seeking immigrants, I anticipated that the current study would be able to inadequately address such factors unless it were expanded to reflect a comparative methodology, and therefore the study excluded those who hold such statuses to prevent

unsaturated data resulting in an inadequate discussion of the various factors affecting refugee and asylum seekers' experience.

Participant recruitment. Participants were recruited and data was collected during the spring and summer of 2020. The recruitment process was impacted significantly by the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. As a result, recruitment efforts were entirely electronic and were not limited to Muslim-specific forums, in an effort to access a broader diverse, national sample. I used targeted recruitment methods to identify diverse participants whose experiences addressed the present study's goals, tapping into my personal and professional networks to facilitate this. These included personal and professional ties via social media, leading to various individuals using their accounts to disseminate the electronic study flyers, allowing me to recruit a broad sample. Recruitment was therefore done primarily through social media platforms, specifically Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook. Electronic flyers were distributed by email to the UMB clinical psychology doctoral program, UMB research study listservs, women-based organizations at UMB, UMB Muslim Students Association (MSA), as well as Tufts University MSA. The latter two MSAs were selected due to personal access to the organizations and/or their leaders. Given the rapid pace of recruitment, further recruitment efforts across other MSA's did not prove to be needed, hence only the UMB and Tufts MSA were contacted for recruitment. To ensure diversity reflected among the participants in terms of sexual orientation, I developed and distributed recruitment materials specific to LGBTQ Muslim communities that were disseminated in all aforementioned settings and platforms. The use of Zoom for interviews, as discussed below, facilitated the inclusion of participants from different regions of the U.S.

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Confidentiality. Participant confidentiality was maintained across all stages of the study and after study completion. Qualitative data derived from individual interviews is maintained in a secure online database. All interview transcripts were de-identified so that any information that had the potential to identify participants (e.g., names, locations) was removed. Audio recordings of the interviews were only accessible to the primary investigator, faculty advisor, and research assistants (only for transcription purposes), and all recordings will be destroyed after the completion and approval of the dissertation study.

Participants

Data was collected in summer of 2020, including a national sample of participants. The literature on interpretive phenomenological analysis suggests that interviewing 10 individuals who have experienced the phenomenon is at the higher end of most recommendations for sample sizes, however the mean number involved in IPA has been quoted at 15, according to Reid, Flowers, and Larkin (2005; Smith & Osborn, 2009). The selected research participants included 12 Muslim American women of immigrant descent (1.5 or 2nd generation immigrants), which is a sample size that falls within the recommended range for IPA. Participants' ages ranged from 18 to 31, with a mean age of 25. They identified with various ethnic identities: Pakistani (n = 4), Bengali (n = 3), Palestinian (n = 2), Indian (n = 1), Egyptian (n =1), and Algerian (n = 1). Regarding their sexual orientation, participants predominantly identified as heterosexual (n = 10), with a minority of participants who identified as queer (n = 2). In terms of education level, six participants had graduate or professional degrees, two had college degrees, and four had completed partial college

degrees and were currently still pursuing completion of those degrees. Participants were living across the United States from 8 different states at the time of the interview, including: California (n =1), Illinois (n = 1), Maryland (n =1), Massachusetts (n = 3), New Jersey (n = 3), New York (n = 2), Texas (n =1), and Virginia (n =1). In terms of income to ascertain economic status, participants' current annual income of all earners in their household is as follows: \$0 – 15,000 (n = 0), \$15,001 – \$25,000 (n = 0), \$25,001 – \$35,000 (n = 2), \$35,001 – \$50,000 (n = 3), \$50,001 – \$75,000 (n = 2), \$75,001– \$100,000 (n = 2), \$100,001 – \$200,000 (n = 0), \$200,000 and greater (n = 2). Please see Table 1 for a review of participant demographic information corresponding with participant pseudonyms.

Procedure

All individuals who were interested in the research study participated in a brief online screening questionnaire to confirm their eligibility to participate based on the inclusion criteria described above. Potential participants accessed the screening questionnaire through a web address which was provided on all recruitment materials. At the end of the questionnaire, eligible participants were prompted to provide their contact information (i.e., phone number and email address) to be contacted by the primary investigator if they wished to continue participating in the study. The primary investigator or a research team member thoroughly reviewed the screening questionnaire answers from each potential participant to determine whether the participant was eligible to participate in the study. Eligible participants were then contacted via phone or email by a research team member to confirm eligibility and schedule the interview.

Individual interviews. The primary and sole means of data collection were individual interviews. Interviews were conducted by the primary investigator by video using a secure online video calling software, Zoom, due to COVID-19 global pandemic in 2020. Interview data was transcribed via the Zoom software technology and then thoroughly reviewed and edited by this researcher and a research assistant.

The twelve interviews were open-ended, lasting between 30 minutes to 1 hour and 55 minutes long (mean = 68.25 minutes), including technical difficulties that may have arose in internet connection or Zoom software connection After eligibility was determined and the interview was scheduled, a research team member emailed a link to the IRB consent form and the demographics questionnaire (University of Massachusetts Boston Comprehensive Demographics Questionnaire – Revised, Suyemoto et al., 2016) that participants completed prior to the interview itself. Participants who did not complete the demographics questionnaire in advance were asked to do so following the completion of the interview. At the beginning of the video call session, participants were given the opportunity to raise any concerns or ask any questions. Participants were also asked to refer other potential participants to the study. Each participant was compensated $30 for completing the interview and $5 for completing the demographics questionnaire via Venmo or CashApp.

In terms of areas of inquiry, participants were asked open-ended questions inquiring about what their experience in negotiating their cultural worlds as Muslim American women of immigrant descent is like. This included the following general areas of inquiry: (1) Description of their cultures – this included asking participants for their experience of their specific cultures, the role of those cultures in their life, and what it's like to be a woman

within the context of these cultures. This initial area of inquiry served as scaffolding for the next section. (2) Acculturation processes related to the interaction between and/or role of the various cultures they hold (e.g., family culture, ethnic culture, Islamic culture, American culture, immigrant culture). This section related to the larger research question in asking about their negotiation of the various cultures they identify with and what it's like for them to negotiate them. (3) Related experiences of coping or managing – this area of inquiry was an optional addition, which was only used for participants who acknowledged or endorsed challenge or difficulty in the acculturative processes discussed prior. This included asking about what ways they cope with the related stress, and what it's been like for them to cope or manage the stressors related to acculturation. The interview protocol is included in Appendix 1.

I developed the interview protocol over the course of multiple iterations with my dissertation committee. This included discussions related to the research paradigm, philosophy, goal, and question, and the way in which each of these should impact the interview questions. Please see Appendix 1 for further details regarding the interview questions.

Measures. Participants were asked to complete the *University of Massachusetts Boston Comprehensive Demographics Questionnaire – Revised* (Suyemoto et al., 2016). This questionnaire is a comprehensive self-report questionnaire inquiring about various aspects of participants' background, which was modified and reduced for the purposes of this study. It was used solely for the purposes of describing the sample.

Qualitative Data Analysis

The data analysis was conducted with both IPA and TA. From the perspective of IPA, the results are understood to include the researcher's impact on interpretation of the data and its analysis, suggesting that the results involve a co-construction of meaning via the participants' description of their lived experience along with the researcher's interpretations. Meanwhile, thematic analysis focuses on identifying common themes among the lived experiences of participants in an effort to inform future research and clinical implications and/or work with this population. I also used the rigorous and accelerated data reduction (RADaR) technique (Watkins, 2017) which is a technique that that allows for organization, reduction, and analysis of qualitatitve data. It involves using spreadsheets of raw, textual data on Microsoft Word or Excel, rather than a qualitative data analysis software, to then revise the data repeatedly, reducing the data quickly and efficiently via an iterative systematic analysis to ultimately develop a condensed, concise presentation of only the data that answers the research questions. This technique fosters a more user-friendly and manageable approach to navigating the raw data, while offering a rigorous approach to the data analysis by virtue of requiring repeated systematic analysis of the data during each step of the process (Watkins, 2017). This approach allows for an organized, systematic, fast-paced coding process for qualitative data analysis in alignment with any particular qualitative data analysis method, in this case, IPA and TA (Watkins, 2017).

Data analysis started as transcriptions were completed. This involved reviewing transcriptions with the respective audio of the interview, ensuring the transcription reflected participants' verbal expression. I started by jotting down preliminary thoughts, notes, and

potential codes and themes as I reviewed each transcription. I also consistently engaged in journaling about transcriptions as I reviewed them initially, noting my own biases, reflections, and subjectivities throughout.

I attempted to follow the general analytic approaches to phenomenological data analysis outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) and Creswell (2007), and at times modify as needed to adapt to the emerging data. I engaged in the steps described as follows, influenced by the aforementioned scholarly guidelines, as well as the RADaR technique (Watkins, 2017). Following the completion of data collection and the completion of transcriptions, I initiated my preliminary review of the transcriptions. I read and reviewed the data and extracted significant statements about how participants experienced the topic. During this process, I marked thoughts and ideas preliminarily for coding and generated initial lists of ideas about the data. After preliminary review of all transcriptions, I developed the Phase 1 spreadsheet of all data, in accordance with the RADaR technique (Watkins, 2017). This involves incorporating all of the data in every single transcription into a spreadsheet. I then proceeded to review the data in the spreadsheet, deleting any data that did not relate to the research question and align with the goals of the study, as indicated by the RADaR technique (Watkins, 2017). Each time I went through the full dataset and deleted data that did not answer the research question, I saved it as a new document denoted with a "phase" number (see Appendices 1 & 2 for examples of the data spreadsheet in Phase 2 and Phase 10). This was an iterative process, and continued for about ten phases, meaning that I reviewed the full spreadsheet of raw data at least ten times, while continuously reading and evaluating the data, deleting that which was irrelevant, in alignment with the RADaR approach (Watkins, 2017).

This allowed me to immerse myself very deeply in the data, while returning repeatedly to the research question in the process. I engaged in journaling and bracketing throughout this process as well. I also employed the use of consultation with my research team to get input and feedback on whether certain pieces of data should be included.

At the point of Phase 9, I started developing an initial list of potential codes and themes based on the data that remained after nine phases of data reduction. At Phase 10, I continued to develop this list of potential codes and themes, condensing potential codes, creating subthemes and broader domains. After the completion of data reduction at the final Phase 10, I shifted to a focus on thematic analysis with the final set of data from the final spreadsheet. I did this by formulating meaning from the significant statements and phrases (which were extracted from the data), and subsequently clustered the meaning units into themes, ultimately facilitating the development of themes common among participants. Following development of a collection of themes and sub-themes, I collated the corresponding coded data extracts into each theme. I engaged in an iterative process of reviewing themes and their respective data extracts, as well as uncoded data, to ensure that each data extract fit appropriately with the theme, and that both the data extracts and themes answered the research question. In doing so, I engaged in a constant process of assessing the themes and corresponding data to make determinations on whether themes should be reworked or supplemented.

Following the data being coded and placed into themes, I created names for each theme and wrote descriptions of each theme to help detail what that theme represented and the kind of data it involved. During this process, when I found a theme that only had 2 or less

cases supporting it, I examined the theme and data conceptually and in relation to other themes, at times subsuming the theme under a larger theme if appropriate, or excluding the theme altogether (e.g. if not differentiated, relevant, or well developed), given that my goal was to present themes that could be found across multiple participants in using TA. This was the only situation in which I allowed the number of cases to potentially influence my decision-making around the theme development. This process allowed me to develop my preliminary data analysis document that included themes and theme descriptions, which was sent to participants for member checks. I then reviewed themes to ensure there were clear distinctions between them. This step included reviewing the coded data extracts within each theme to ensure that they fit in the assigned theme. Following that, I also reviewed the entire data set to assess whether the themes fit with the data set and to code any additional data that was missed in earlier stages into themes.

Next, I worked to define and refine the themes and the data within them. I did this by working to identify the essence of what each theme was about and what aspect of the data each theme captured. This process allowed for ensuring that the themes reflect the data and vice versa. I used various themes to develop a description of the phenomenon in order to illustrate the "essence" of the experience, offering "what" the participants experienced. I did not receive any feedback from member checks during the designated timeframe (2 weeks) to be incorporated into the results. The final results reflect the content offered by the participants and were aimed to be rooted in the data itself, as expected with an inductive approach.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

The data analysis revealed four main themes describing participants' lived experiences of negotiating acculturative processes while living at the intersection of multiple cultures as Muslim American women of immigrant descent (MAWID):

(1) Negotiating Cultures: Connecting, Reshaping, and Coping

(2) Traversing Multiple Identities: Being Oneself

(3) Experiencing Otherhood: Pervasive and Burdensome Marginalization

(4) Navigating Sexism and Patriarchy: Inextricable Component of Acculturation as a Woman

Within each theme, subthemes highlighted the complexity and nuanced layers of experience the participants had. Each theme and subtheme is discussed below, illustrated by quotes from participants. (See Table 2 for complete list of themes, subthemes, and subcategories).

Each of these themes were intimately connected to the others. Negotiating cultures via connecting, reshaping, and coping (Theme 1) naturally connected to the experience of having to traverse and negotiate multiple identities and find ways to be oneself (Theme 2). In

living these experiences, participants simultaneously experienced Otherhood ubiquitously (Theme 3). Finally, navigating sexism and patriarchy (Theme 4) was the thread that existed across all contexts and cultural realms for MAWID as they negotiated acculturative processes.

Theme 1: Negotiating Cultures: Connecting, Reshaping, and Coping

This theme encompassed various components of how participants thought, felt, and operated while navigating the intersection of multiple cultures as MAWID. This included the following subthemes: (1) Relating to and negotiating ethnic and American cultures: Blending and Reshaping, (2) Intrapsychic and relational challenges: Emotional responses and coping, (3) Valuing and appreciating multiple cultural worlds and experiences. These subthemes involved experiences regarding how participants related to and connected to their ethnic culture, their American culture, and the conflictual and contradictory nature of navigating these cultures while being Muslim, female, and of immigrant descent. Further, they discussed the various challenges they encountered living and moving through this intersectional space, as well as the coping strategies and tools they used to manage these difficulties. Regardless of the challenges, several participants noted how much they value having this experience.

Relating to and negotiating ethnic and American cultures: Blending and reshaping.
This subtheme represented many core aspects of acculturative processes that the MAWID participants experienced. It involved the ways in which participants described connecting to ethnic culture, engaging with and relating to American culture, the presence of clashing

cultural systems, and finally, navigating them by ultimately blending and reshaping their cultures. Participants described interacting desires, efforts, outcomes, and manifestations of connecting or *not* connecting to their ethnic culture, with corresponding emotional experiences. They also described their experiences of being American and engaging with American culture, as well as conforming to American cultural expectations. Participants also described the conflicting expectations, values, norms, or guidelines across multiple cultures, and how this presence of clashing cultural systems contributed to the difficulty in navigating said systems. However, participants were not only passively impinged upon by conflicting cultures, they were active in negotiation and described unique manners in which they integrated their cultures into their own lives: reshaping, compromising, shifting, and various efforts to engage in all of their cultures in their own particular ways.

Regarding how they connected to their ethnic culture, some of the participants' narratives included efforts to improve fluency in their language of origin, feeling guilty for not fulfilling certain cultural familial expectations, or adhering to cultural dynamics within family structure. Although this theme may appear to focus on solely participants' relationship to ethnic culture, participant narratives showcased the ways in which the relationship to ethnic culture was inextricably linked to acculturative processes and connection with the other cultures they were a part of. For example, Hafsa (see Table 1 for participant demographics) highlighted the ways in which Pakistani culture and dynamics were a part of her life:

> I think it's really just about like, like how involved, your family is with your life and decisions … like in the two [romantic] relationships that I told my parents about, like everyone was like up in my business about it, older brothers wanted to give their opinion, which like, cause that's just a thing in our culture, they're very involved in

every aspect of your life, there's no, like, "Oh, how's that going?"..just, "Oh, yeah, like, I support your decision," that, there's none of that, so like, in that way of just like, "live your own life." Like, that's not a thing.

As a result of the juxtaposition between Pakistani and American culture, Hafsa experienced the ethnic norm of her family's involvement in her life as different, almost opposing what she perceived as typical American norms, which she later discussed in more detail. Meanwhile, Aleena noted the ways in which she interacted with cultural and religious norms by not entirely abiding by expectations, and instead also aligning with American cultural norms around clothing and modesty:

> I'm like pushing the boundaries on like wearing sleeveless clothes, sleeveless tops around my parents…

However, she illustrated her unique engagement with acculturative processes when she said:

> …but like, I'm still never going to wear like shorts or-or shorts or like really any of that right, um, it's just so funny because like, it's something that so many people just don't think about (laughs) And it's like, it's like consuming for me, especially at home, it's like, it was always making sure that like you're doing the appropriate thing.

In specifying that she would explore sleeveless tops but not shorts, she exhibited an acculturative process of aligning with both cultures to a very specific, personalized, and intentional degree. She had seemingly organically determined the level to which she would push some boundaries while maintaining others. Apart from this, her quote illustrated the added energy and cost of ensuring she is operating in alignment with what is considered appropriate culturally, and likely religiously, in her home. This nuance of evaluating what is acceptable and appropriate in her own particular context was another important aspect of her acculturative processes, demonstrating the cognitive and emotional load often involved with negotiating multiple cultures and their respective norms and guidelines.

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Another aspect of connecting or disconnecting to culture emerged as culture of origin language fluency. Many participants noted weakened connection to their ethnic culture through language, such as Hina who said "I get really sad when I think how I don't know my own language…," and similarly Raajiya when she said, "I don't have anyone to speak [Arabic] to…I don't want to lose that." Nai'mah noted that she doesn't speak Arabic as well as she used to and "…now I feel like there is a disconnect."

Participants also spoke of their desire and efforts to preserve and maintain connection, and even identity, to and with their ethnic cultures. Some participants noted they were doing this by strengthening their language skills. For example, Hina noted "I feel like I'm still staying true to myself by learning my culture's language," while Na'imah mentioned that she felt disconnected from Arabic and therefore "made the choice in high school to learn it in school for four years." Similarly, Raajiya mentioned, "…I started watching Arabic TV shows… just so I hear it all the time…But I want to go to Palestine, and I want to take a bunch of Arabic classes there."

Participants' stories demonstrated another important component of acculturative processes, consisting of connection, or lack thereof, to culture of origin and the associated emotional experience, as well as their interest and efforts in strengthening their connection to culture through language.

In discussing the ways they related to being American and American culture, participants described both pride and patriotism in being American, as well as struggling to feel patriotic due to the enactment of social injustices in and outside of the U.S., such as American support of Israel's occupation of Palestine and the many oppressive systems

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operating within the U.S. They discussed various ways of engaging with American traditions and the American political process, as well as their appreciation for American individualism. The MAWID participants expressed a range of ways they related to Americanness as an integral aspect of their experience in negotiating acculturative processes as MAWID who are of various ethnic backgrounds.

For example, participants discussed the ways in which an aspect of being and engaging with Americanness was conforming or acting "White" in some way, "…I had that struggle, trying to be more White," "I've been literally trained my whole life to act White enough," "…I had to conform a certain way," "…like if I straighten my hair, 'You're trying to act more White,' yeah, because that's what they want." As illustrated in some of these quotes, participants also equated American-ness with Whiteness, although I had inquired about their experience of American culture, rather than their racialized experience. This illuminated an important component of the acculturative process, which is conforming and performing in alignment with the host culture, in this case, American culture, to be accepted and survive and thrive, and the ways that racialization is related to acculturation. While participants described these inclinations or expectations to conform, participants also alluded to their struggles with being patriotic towards the U.S., "…it's hard to be proud of a country that has done so many bad things," and "…it's really weird…feeling patriotic and feeling American when I know all this happens against my people, and also just people in general."

Participants also shared narratives that offered insight into acculturative processes while being and engaging in their Americanness. Tanjila noted her increasing comfort in

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connecting with American culture and her American identity *because* it is an integrated

bicultural identity.

> I think that um, getting older I feel more comfortable, um, I don't want to say
> assimilating, but like becoming, like understanding, or like being more comfortable in
> like, the role that I am. I am who I am, but that doesn't make me any less American. I
> am, I'm a, I'm a blend. But like my American-ism isn't being American, my
> American-ism is being both.

Further, she noted that her identity is multidimensional, that none of her identities took away

from or diminished the others. Specifically, she highlighted that her American identity in

itself is being all of her identities. This acknowledgement of multidimensionality of her

identity is likely correlated with her membership in multiple cultural communities and her

negotiation of these cultures, specifically, her acculturative process.

Maeda also exemplified being and engaging in Americanness and how it is embedded

in participants' acculturative process. She narrated her experience of recognizing that

American cultural values are not inherently bad simply because they conflict with Palestinian

cultural values, despite having herself been demeaned for aligning with American culture.

> … understanding that just because there are certain American values that are different
> doesn't make them bad, because it contradicts my upbringing doesn't make them bad.
> So definitely that whole like, individualistic like, when do you go out on your own,
> and do your own thing, and pursue your own hopes and dreams and values, build a
> life for yourself in that way. And how to, how to balance that with this holding onto
> your cultural roots because if you don't, then you're accused of being too American,
> that's hurled at you like an insult. What does that even mean for someone who grew
> up in America (laughs)? How else am I supposed to be…

This cognitive process reflected a nuanced acculturative process. She intentionally

considered specific American values that she personally aligned with and how to negotiate

engaging with them while also balancing her contradictory Palestinian values. Moreover, she

highlighted the illogical nature of being insulted for behaving in an American way given

being American and being raised in the U.S., which is a burdensome addition to an already challenging acculturative process.

These narratives demonstrated the complexity of participants' connection to being and engaging in their Americanness as a key ingredient of their lived experience as they amalgamated and acculturated with their cultures and religion. They illustrated another ingredient of the experience of participants negotiating their cultures, which involved at times intentional consideration of how to connect with one of their cultures (American culture and their corresponding Americanness), while also connecting to origin culture, and further, being perceived negatively at times for being connected to Americanness and American culture.

As participants negotiated multiple and sometimes clashing cultures, they developed a range of ways to engage in acculturative processes and integrate these cultures into their own lives, including reshaping, compromising, and shifting. For some, this looked like aligning with many ethnic and religious values but disagreeing with and rejecting others. For others, this looked like compromising and making choices as needed depending on the context. Participants also reported integrating and reshaping cultures, sometimes offering examples of what this could look like:

> So it's kind of just like reshaping the parts of a culture that I don't agree with… – Dena

> …sometimes, I try to separate, sometimes it's like I should be both of something. Maybe I should be Bengali American, be more Islamic or more Bengali, so, I have to compromise a lot… – Shanjida

> Like, I can be in a bar, I can have fun with you guys, I can dance with you guys, and I'm not going to drink. So, like, I'm still like holding on to like my Muslim identity, but also my American identity… – Raajiya

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These quotes highlighted that the experience of our MAWID participants in living at the

intersection of multiple cultures and negotiating acculturative processes involved developing

and executing their own unique strategies. Raajiya, a participant who identified as a

Palestinian MAWID, shared a strategy her mother taught her about how to navigate

acculturation.

> My mom always taught us…take the best from American culture and the best from the Arab culture and you leave the bad behind from both. And that's how we were always raised when we were kids.

Raajiya shared various examples throughout her interview of how she followed this method

of keeping the best of each culture as a part of her life. Despite the clarity and simplicity of

this statement of guidance from her mother, it is of course a subjective process to select the

"best" from each culture. Hence, this recommendation may not entirely elucidate a clear path

to navigate acculturation but reaffirms the subjective and highly personal nature of

acculturative processes.

> Maeda illustrated her efforts to engage with both Arab and American culture below:
>
> … I'm wearing a shirt that is like a Palestinian woman, raising her middle finger. And so, like it's been kind of fantastic to like, see this like, meshing of cultures and all of these like Arab people like using their art to like express themselves by kind of Westernizing the symbols. And it makes me feel more connected to my, to my roots, because I can, I can perform my cultural experiences in a way that fits with my [Palestinian] and Western upbringing. Rather than compromise one or the other, I can do both. Like, that doesn't, that doesn't translate well all the time. And so, right, um, the clothes I want to wear, my parents don't agree with, this shirt being one of them. Um, my- the food that I want to eat…I try to buy like certain ingredients, it's like, "Well, why do we need this?" Like I actively get pushed back every time I go grocery shopping for myself, because it's like, "Why do we need soy sauce? Why do we need like pepper jack cheese?"…

Maeda highlighted the additional layer of managing the pushback from her family while

engaging in her own acculturative processes, some of which are reflected in her clothing and

food choices. Receiving negative feedback in addition to working to navigate acculturative

processes demonstrated another complicating layer of acculturating for MAWID like Maeda.

The above quotes illustrated some examples of the specific process of acculturation

itself, demonstrating what it looked like to attempt to engage in, combine, and operate with

multiple cultures. More specifically, the participants highlighted the subjective and very

personal nature of acculturation in which the amalgamation of cultures is often intentional

and purposeful, as well as unintentional and organic at times. They provided insight into how

they made choices about acculturative processes and what that may look like, allowing us to

gain deeper insight into the first main theme of Negotiating Cultures.

Several participants also explicitly noted the presence of clashing cultural systems

that contribute to the difficulty in navigating said systems. For some, these difficulties

presented as challenges in balancing identities and cultures and making decisions due to

differing guidelines. Participants alluded to the ideological differences of individualism and

collectivism that often exist between their American culture, Islamic culture, and their ethnic

culture, frequently resulting in some cost to the choices they make. This experience of

conflictual, contradictory, clashing values is in ways specific to MAWID and those whose

origin cultures may be deemed more collectivistic.

For example, Maeda noted the following:

..I think there are still certain values that I have as an American that contradict those
values that I was raised…I mean.. American society is all about, like.. this
individualistic society where, not just Palestinians, but a lot of immigrant
communities are a lot about the collective experience and what's right and best for the

group, regardless of what you, you as an individual, want to do. And so, there's definitely that like, butting heads. So, like while I do want to move out and go to law school and do my own thing, I feel tremendous guilt over leaving home and leaving my siblings behind. Which, if I forget that I'm supposed to feel guilty, I will be reminded of (laughs), "Oh, you're gonna leave," and "What are we gonna do without you?" and "You can't leave."

Maeda spoke of the clashing or contradictory cultural values that exist in her American and Palestinian cultural worlds, alluding to the broader fundamental differences that can be generally attributed to individualistic versus collectivistic cultural frameworks. Further, she illustrated how this may appear in her own life, feeling caught between her own desire to pursue law school and her family's desire for her to not leave. She experienced "tremendous guilt" as a result and exemplified the difficulty this can create for her in making the decision to go to law school when it was seemingly not aligned with her family cultural expectations, while it is aligned with American individualistic norms.

Multiple participants also discussed how difficult it was to live within and at the intersection of cultures that conflict or clash with one another, as well as the various consequences they may have faced as they negotiated the contradictory aspects of their cultural worlds. A couple of participants acknowledged the difficulty of this experience: "it's always hard" and "it was probably one of the hardest things I've ever had to do." Others highlighted some of the emotional consequences of navigating clashing cultural systems, "…I felt scared…," "…I feel tremendous guilt…" Hafsa alluded to the one of the consequences individuals of immigrant descent may face in managing clashing cultural systems.

> …it's weird, like growing up, I felt like, and I think a lot of like Pakistani or Muslim or just probably immigrant children feel this way, where they have to like bottle up that aspect of them…but then I do feel like I tend to like go towards one extreme, or

the other. It's really hard for me to find a balance of both the same time um, because they're so clashing…

She also highlighted the ways in which balancing conflicting cultures was challenging, and for her, resulted in aligning strongly with one culture or the other. Hafsa's narrative reflected another dimension of acculturative processes, in which individuals may shift between aligning closely with one particular cultural realm at a time.

These processes of navigating clashing cultural systems represented one of the significant challenges of acculturation with the particular identities and cultural/religious worlds our MAWID participants are negotiating. These narratives exemplified the uniqueness of negotiating cultures as a MAWID by illustrating the presence of cultural distance and dissimilarity. For MAWID, negotiating origin culture, American culture, and Islamic culture is unique because of the often fundamental differences between these cultures. Therefore, the navigating clashing cultural systems was a significant aspect of their experience of negotiating cultures overall.

Intrapsychic and relational challenges: Emotional responses and coping. This subtheme represented experiencing and coping with challenges of negotiating cultures, with an emphasis on the corresponding emotional experiences. Participants noted challenges in finding balance between cultures, in the mental load of trying to operate according to many different cultural (and religious) guidelines, as well as in reconciling the different identities and relational expectations associated with their cultural worlds. They described a multitude of emotions on an emotional rollercoaster, including resentment, frustration, grief, exhaustion, overwhelm, and fascination. The participants illustrated the various difficulties that they have experienced, currently experience, and may continue to experience throughout

their life as they continue to live at the intersection of American culture, their ethnic culture, Islam and Islamic culture, as MAWID in the U.S. Further, participants discussed the various strategies they used to cope with these challenges. The participants reflected the ways in which they have developed skillsets and tools to navigate any difficulty they may face in living at the intersection of various cultural worlds. The MAWID participants' coping methods further highlighted their resourcefulness and resilience.

Several participants noted that negotiating acculturative processes and multiple cultures was generally emotionally challenging: "It's hard, it's not easy," "it's not easy," "I have a really hard time like combining them all," "..some days it's easier than other days...," "it's very difficult to sort of balance the two [cultures]…, " "…at times, it's definitely been like, overwhelming." Maeda spoke in more depth about how she experienced the challenging nature of acculturative processes as a MAWID:

> The term cognitive dissonance comes to mind right. It's hard to hold all of it together at the same time, it's hard to, it's hard to make sense of all that, at the same time…Like, I can navigate being queer when I'm in queer communities. I can navigate being raised Muslim when like, when it's Ramadan and we're sitting down for iftar. And I can navigate being Palestinian when I'm at a Palestinian wedding. That's easy, you know, but then when it's just me sitting in my room, thinking about all of the different, all my different experiences, thinking about all of my, thinking about my friends, seeing different issues on the news across all social media and trying to like understand it all, it's hard to get through a thought…So, it's like a just trying to get through a thought you have like seven disclaimers because there's-there's so much layer and complexity to the issues which is good… But it just feels impossible. I feel impossible to hold it all at the same time…

Maeda noted the difficulty of holding multiple cultural worlds and identities at once while navigating daily components of her life, such as social relationships and current events. In the following quote, Tanjila expressed the loss of self that is involved in making certain decisions aligned with one culture or the other:

"It's hard. It's not easy. Um, because…you have to still respect what you're like, it's like in-ingrained in you, is like the idea that you have to respect your parents. And so, it's hard when you have to give up or ignore or um, wash away anything that is like integral to them. So, but like sometimes it'll just be not applicable to the world that we live in…you know if there's two ways of doing things sometimes, it's like you just have to do it, the American way. And it's really, it's hard because, you know, it's like you are kind of like giving up a part of yourself."

She noted the idea that leaving behind cultural or religious components may also feel like neglecting something that is important to her parents, highlighting the relational intergenerational challenges or differences acculturative processes can create. In a similar vein to Tanjila, Nida said: "…you have to put up a facade sometimes, and is like, pretty, it can get like emotionally or like mentally tiring."

Raajiya speaks about the challenges she faced and the ways in which others who did not grow up in the U.S. did not understand the difficulty:

… it's hard to be a Muslim in this country. It is very hard and people from overseas also don't understand that…when they like try to like, ask us, like, "Oh, like you're not as religious, or you're not as into your culture." And I'm like, "Well, you don't get it because you don't understand how it was to grow up here, but like, you don't understand everything that we've gone through since we were kids, and how we just [starting] in elementary school had to explain ourselves and [figure out] how to fit in, and all that."

Raajiya's narrative highlighted the ways in which the challenges of being a Muslim American of immigrant descent started in childhood and often garnered judgment and questioning from other Muslim or ethnic community members who did not understand her experience. She alluded to the developmental nature of negotiating cultures, underscoring that the challenges persisted over time and were often misunderstood by those who did not have the same experience. Moreover, her narrative showed that the lack of understanding

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from others, as well as the judgment, is an added layer of difficulty atop those that she had already been navigating.

This theme encompassed the participant narratives which illuminated the aspects of acculturative processes they find challenging. The array of challenges underscored the very personal and unique nature of acculturative processes, as well as the common experience of facing some form of adversity as a result. This subtheme also included the coping strategies for these challenges that participants described.

The coping strategies shared by participants included talking to others with shared identities or experiences, using therapy, and finding intentional ways to connect to their ethnic cultures, among other approaches. Several participants expressed coping by accessing social support through others who have shared experiences or backgrounds: "..my most relaxed state of being… is with my Muslim friends," "I like making sure I have people that understand it [acculturative processes] so we can talk about certain things," "One of the best ways for me is to talk to other people who've also had similar experiences," "I definitely have like certain people that I talk to about different things." These narratives underscored the value and importance of social support and community, being among those who can relate, empathize, or connect to their experiences, as a coping method that is effective: "It validates what I've gone through," and "I don't have to put on a facade of any kind."

Other participants shared coping strategies unique to their experience. Aleena expressed the importance of not concerning herself with the judgments of others as she navigated her own process of acculturation and existing at the intersection of multiple cultures:

..I think that just by like honestly, trying to care less about what other people think…
And I can like, just try to not hold other people's judgment…

Tanjila acknowledged that she doesn't necessarily have an answer to how she copes with the

challenges of acculturative processes:

It's not easy. And to be honest, I don't think I have an answer. It's really, it's kind of
like a lot of trial and error. And sometimes you'll do something, and you'll feel really
guilty about it, and you're just like, what did I do? And then sometimes I will do
something and you're just like the world did not explode.

Tanjila's quote exhibited her use of trying different approaches to assess what worked for her

in making decisions and engaging in behaviors as she negotiated different cultural systems

and their corresponding guidelines and norms.

Valuing and appreciating multiple cultural worlds and experiences. This

subtheme demonstrated the value participants placed on having the unique experience of

being a part of multiple cultural worlds and having related experiences. They expressed

gratitude for the richness this brings to their lives, including the challenges and adversities

noted above. In spite of the challenges, they noted that they would not choose to give up the

opportunity to live the experience of holding multiple cultural worlds and identities if they

had the option to do so. Although participants discussed the challenges in depth, this theme

demonstrated that these challenges do not necessarily lead to a perception of an overall

negative experience, but instead, an enriching, positive, valuable experience, even is

acknowledged to be difficult.

This subtheme emerged and was important to amplify the voices of MAWID

participants who shared the multidimensional experience of negotiating acculturative

processes with multiple cultures and their religion. This multidimensional experience

included gratitude and wholeness. Two participant quotes, with almost identical statements, illustrate this below:

> I wouldn't, I mean I wouldn't have it any other way, it's brought so much richness to my life, much beauty like I met so many beautiful people. Um, I'd rather have my eyes open then not, and the only way to know them in my case was to experience them all firsthand. – Maeda

> I wouldn't like, well, I wouldn't have it any other way…I think probably when I was a kid it was like, oh man, I wish I wasn't so different, and now you know, I would hate to not be this, I feel like it makes me like a much more whole person to have you know all parts of that. – Samah

Maeda and Samah both expressed the significance of having these experiences and holding these identities. Although both Maeda and Samah, and many other participants, reported various challenges, they offered key insight regarding the value their lived experience held in their lives and who they are. In studying these participants' stories, it is essential to integrate this sentiment in our understanding of their lived experiences.

The first theme of Negotiating Cultures and its subthemes encompassed the multidimensional components of the acculturative processes our MAWID participants experience. This included their relationships and interactions with their ethnic and American cultural realms and the strategies and approaches they used to negotiate multiple cultures and their religion, as well as the challenges and how they coped with them, and finally, the value they placed on having had these experiences. This theme encompassed the integral components of negotiating acculturative processes that emerged as patterns in the lived experiences of the MAWID participants of this study. This theme allowed us to begin to answer the research question, developing our understanding of what acculturation looked like in the lives of our participants.

Theme 2: Traversing Multiple Identities: Being Oneself

        The Traversing Multiple Identities: Being Oneself theme referred to the essential component of participants experiencing and negotiating multiple identities, as a result of also negotiating multiple cultures, and the corresponding multidimensional self in a variety of ways. While the first theme, Negotiating Cultures, addressed how participants related to and engaged with their cultures and acculturative processes, this second theme, Traversing Multiple Identities, addressed the ways in which participants experienced *being* their multidimensional selves, which was related to being embedded in multiple cultural worlds, each of which might lend themselves to participants having different identities or experiencing their self as having different "parts." This theme included the following two subthemes: (1) Negotiating the multiplicity of self, (2) Evolving Muslim identity and relation to Islam: Changing meanings and identities. Participants described navigating the challenges of being their authentic selves, intentionally highlighting or softening the visibility of identities as needed, and the shifting nature of their Muslim identity in particular. This experience of navigating the multidimensionality of who they are is one of utmost relevance to living at the intersection of multiple cultures and negotiating acculturative processes as a Muslim American woman of immigrant descent in the U.S., as illustrated by the participant narratives.

        Negotiating the multiplicity of self. This subtheme encompassed the breadth and complexity of participants' experience holding multiple identities, and in many ways was parallel to their experience of negotiating multiple cultures, as discussed in the first theme. Participants noted the challenges of holding and being all of their identities and selves at

once, particularly in all kinds of contexts and spaces, at times leading to selectively activating or making visible/invisible certain identities. They shed light on the difficulty of presenting their authentic selves consistently, and also described organic and strategic processes of how they presented which parts of themselves to whom and where. Participants described multiple layers of complexity, including holding additional minoritized identities. Although this theme largely consisted of participants describing the many challenges of navigating multidimensional selves, it also included participants talking about owning all parts of themselves, learning to be comfortable in all of their multidimensionality, and being confident in all of their identities regardless of the reactions of others.

Aleena described one of the challenges of negotiating her multiple identities and selves:

..how I do have a different face for my family, and a different face for like the outside world/friends, and so like, I've gotten better trying to reconcile those two, but like they are still very different….but then it's also a matter of like, the contract of like what is acceptable behavior, like informed by like, by our immigrant backgrounds, by our religions, by our culture, and so there's just like, many things that will just never be reconciled between these two, I don't know, like, different parts of me.

Her narrative illustrated that the experience of living within multiple cultural realms and at the intersection of them while negotiating acculturation contributed to different parts of her identity that feel contrasting and separate from one another. This demonstrated the impact of acculturative processes and holding multiple identities on the self. In another quote below, Hafsa noted a challenge that she will continue to experience:

I actively tried to like be more like authentic about things now, but I think it's going to be like an ongoing struggle… it almost makes me feel like a phony sometimes because I like very much like act a certain way around certain people…

Hafsa described a challenge very similar to that of Aleena's, experiencing and expressing authenticity across contexts and relationships. Dena detailed what this looks like for her below:

> And I think a lot of times, like one of those like identities kind of gets dropped, or like less of a priority, because it's kind of hard to simultaneously prioritize so many things, but then I think there are other times… where I feel very in tune with like, all of them at one, and those are like when I feel most myself…I think, a large part of like growing up, I guess, is figuring out like how much of each culture you want to be part of you, and then like ways to kind of balance that.

Dena gave insight into her internal experience of presenting and being herself in different spaces, as well as her perspective on how negotiating acculturative processes contributed to an intentional development of multidimensional self.

This subtheme reflected an important parallel process of navigating the self while engaging in acculturative processes. For these participants, it appeared that holding and negotiating multiple identities was another complex process that operated in tandem as they worked through acculturation in their daily lives.

One of the ways some participants negotiated the multiplicity of self was by amplifying or reducing the visibility of certain identities depending on the context. Decisions to do so involved considering the appropriateness based on the context. This may have manifested as dressing more modestly than usual at the mosque or identifying more explicitly with their ethnic identity and not their religious identity. Participants alluded to ways in which this was adaptive to navigate their many worlds and the varying social norms of different settings.

Several participants noted the way they shifted the visibility of their identities, or their alignment with a particular identity. One participant said, "I think it's easier for me to slip in

and out of it [Pakistani identity], so, like, I can do it when it's convenient…," which illustrated the ways in which participants activated an identity based on a particular context. And another participant reinforced this when she expressed, "…but I tend to just like pick like whatever I'm being more in tune with, who I'm talking to…or what the people around me are like." Contextual factors appeared to play an important role in how participants engaged with their own identities, as well as which ones they displayed or made visible to others. Aleena spoke about a particular motivation for how she engaged with and made visible which identity in which space:

> … I don't necessarily show like, that I'm Muslim because I feel like it's easier for me to be like Indian in an American setting, than it is really like Muslim in an American setting…

Unfortunately, Aleena highlighted the ways a social landscape that includes Islamophobia, impacted how she chose to present herself to others, such that she didn't feel as safe or comfortable to reveal her Muslim identity.

This subtheme indicated a unique component of participants' lived experience within the broader second theme of Traversing Multiple Identities: Being Oneself. It represented the ways in which participants organically and intentionally expressed certain identities and not others, given that they hold multiple identities and traverse various settings in their lives.

Evolving Muslim identity and relation to Islam: Changing meanings and identities. Participants described the variety of ways in which their Muslim identity shifted and changed, as did their relationship to Islam. This included the ways in which Islam had shown up in their life, how they have learned about Islam, how they have experienced changes in their practices, beliefs, and worship, as well as adherence to Islamic rules.

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Further, participants discussed how they made intentional choices in their religious practice. Several participants exemplified this by detailing how they intentionally chose to pursue engaging with Islam and their Muslim identity when they arrived at college, an environment in which family context could not dictate their level of practice. Participants also highlighted their own critical analysis and realizations related to Islam. For example, participants noted questioning the authenticity of certain Islamic messages they were taught, proposing the potential that biased male translators interpreted and disseminated Quranic texts in a sexist manner, as well as doing independent research and aligning their practice with what feels true to them. Others discussed realizing the immense influence of ethnic culture on how they have learned Islam, as well as the shame and fear-based teachings they experienced growing up. This subtheme highlighted various components of participants' evolving relationship to Islam, in addition to the evolution of their own Muslim identity through various phases of life.

Multiple participants spoke of their relationship to Islam shifting when they got to college, such that their practice of Islam became a more intentional, personal choice, rather than what they were raised with by their parents and families. The following participant quotes illustrate this.

> …then after I went to college, I think it was more so about like me actually doing it, like me actually thinking about myself or like figuring out how this is going to like play into my life so, I'll go through phases where I was like better with praying for example, or like drinking, stuff like that would happen at like different times, um, but, um, I feel like it's always just been an evolving thing. – Hafsa

Dena also noted the eternal presence of Islam in her life, regardless of her changing relationship to it:

…so, once I got to college, I think, is when I started to like shape it for myself [referring to Muslim identity/relationship to Islam] so I think for me, like being a Muslim has gone through like phases where there are times where I feel most attached to it, but I think it's always been something that informs me whether it's in like a positive way, or like not a positive way. I think it's always there.

Samah also discussed college as a significant moment in the evolution of her relationship to Islam:

..when I got there freshman year, I was like okay well now nobody's actually like watching what I do and it's not like my parents' choice anymore, so I can do what I want. So, I could either like go crazy.. or I could just kind of stick with it, (laughs) and it became like a totally more like a personal decision. So, at that point, I was, I was like okay I guess this is really who I am (laughs) And I did kind of choose the more religious route in life.

Participants' relationship to Islam and Muslim identity represented the religious and spiritual aspect of themselves, noting how they relate to their faith and engage with this identity; hence it is an integral component of this second theme, Traversing multiple identities: Being oneself. This subtheme reaffirmed the complexity and range of experiences associated with holding a Muslim identity and engaging with religion, specifically Islam, alongside multiple other identities. The subtheme also emphasized the developmental nature of identity, while also demonstrating how religious culture may be transmitted familially, but there is also an individual aspect of autonomous agency and commitment. Further, the subtheme underscored the unique layer of negotiating acculturative processes while navigating one's faith and minoritized religious identity in the current American sociopolitical landscape.

Theme 3: Experiencing Otherhood: Pervasive and Burdensome Marginalization

The Experiencing Otherhood: Pervasive and Burdensome Marginalization theme, and the subthemes within it, reflected participants' experiences of being othered in a variety of

ways. The following two subthemes emerged in the data: (1) Being othered: Experiences of prejudice and discrimination, (2) Responding to Othering: Explaining and defending. For the participants, navigating most contexts involved navigating being or feeling othered, given their multiple marginalized and minoritized identities. This process consisted of experiencing prejudice and/or discrimination, both subtle and overt, which typically asserted the idea that one was "Other." It also included the intangible sensation of not belonging, further reinforcing feeling *and* being othered. And finally, this theme shed light on participants' experience of fielding questions and explaining many aspects of themselves and their cultural and religious worlds. This theme demonstrated that experiencing "Otherhood" was an integral and burdensome component of the MAWID participants' lived experiences as they negotiated acculturative processes at the intersection of multiple cultures.

Being Othered: Experiences of prejudice and discrimination. Participants shared numerous unfortunate experiences of prejudice and discrimination in various forms over the course of their lifetime as a result of being seen or perceived as other, in terms of their race, their ethnic culture, or their religious identity[1]. They had a range of experiences, from threats of physical assault and slurs, to microaggressions and being positioned as the spokesperson for their community(ies). This referred not only to the personal stories of discrimination shared by the participants, but also the resulting emotional responses and emotional impact. The emotional realm of their experiences included a range of feelings, such as anxiety, frustration, anger, and sadness.

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[1] Othering experiences that were gender-based were all coded in Theme 4: Navigating Sexism and Patriarchy and not here, in Theme 3: Experiencing Otherhood.

Participants also shared stories of experiences in which they were subtly, implicitly, and unintentionally other-ed and marginalized. These stories included moments of not being understood due to ignorance, not fitting in or feeling like they belonged in most spaces, existing in predominantly White spaces, and many times, being marginalized through the reactions to their Islamic or ethnic ways of being from people of shared *and* non-shared identities. Participants described a variety of experiences, including being tokenized by others, sensing negative responses to their cultural or religious ways of being, and not being perceived as American in the U.S. or as their ethnic identity in their country of origin. Participants' stories involved rejection, confusion, hypervigilance, fear, adversity, hope, and resilience. The narratives exemplified these women's experience of straddling multiple cultural worlds, while often wondering when and where they would actually feel like they belonged.

Several participants described overt and explicit experiences of discrimination as well as their emotional responses. Two participants described anti-Palestinian sentiment from teachers in school and noted how harmful this was:

> ..I remember I had said in my music class, oh, my country is currently at war…And then she [teacher] yelled at me in front of everyone. I was six, six or seven, I was in first grade…She was like, "It's not your country, that's my country, those are my people, it's not your people, they don't deserve to be there!" Like screaming in my face, and I-I did not understand like what was going on… it was traumatizing because obviously a six-year-old was just, I couldn't understand like why my teacher was yelling at me. – Raajiya

> …And I was 14, in US history class…and she [teacher] stops me and she says, "What do you think about what's going on over there [Palestine]?..Well, I have friends who are Israeli and there are two sides to every story." And I still don't understand what that had to do with me, and why she felt that it was important for her, why she felt like she had the right to impose that on a 14, on a child, and so it makes me feel really

angry to this day. Yeah, it still makes me feel pretty emotional because I think because it's not right. – Maeda

Both Raajiya and Maeda noted the emotional impact of these experiences, underscoring the emotional burden of being othered. Mina shared another overtly discriminatory experience and the resulting emotional impact on her:

…I saw him [brother] get a message from a kid in my grade about me saying nasty things, and I just remember like crying…it really started to like, sow some seeds of, like, why you don't belong and like, people are- don't like you, just sort of like, what color you are and what you look like.

Mina's story illustrated the direct association between discrimination and feeling and being othered, reinforcing the core message of this theme.

Apart from the various content examples of prejudice and discrimination participants encountered, the following are some examples of the resulting emotional responses they experienced, in addition to the experiences of confusion, trauma, anger, and crying in the stories from Raajiya, Maeda, and Mina above: "I think I was just incredulous," "feeling really nervous," "it was definitely kind of overwhelming," "me and my sister both got pretty like, aggravated." This range of feelings participants experienced further emphasized the emotional burden and impact of prejudice and discrimination.

Prejudice and discrimination experiences contributed to and reinforced feelings of otherness for participants and those who hold marginalized social identities. Encountering these discriminatory experiences and bearing the toll of them contributed to the burden of otherhood that MAWID carry, as the broader theme, Experiencing Otherhood: Pervasive and Burdensome Marginalization suggested.

Participants also detailed a variety of experiences in which they were other-ed without overtly and explicitly experiencing prejudice or discrimination, which contributed to a general sense of not belonging or fitting. Aleena described the feeling of being in a space where she didn't feel that she belonged:

> I remember going to this like pizza, pizzeria in DC…and everyone was White. I felt like such a sore thumb…like it was still just like enough of a jarring like, I feel very out of place, I-I know that I don't look like everyone, or I know that like I'm gonna give you a fake name because you can't handle my name..I know all of these things and..that's when I felt very much like, oh I-I now know what this feeling of belonging is like, and I know that it's not here.

She noted the various factors at play in leading her to feel like she did not belong, such as being phenotypically different, as a woman of color, than the majority of people there and having to modify her name for it to be accessible. Both of these factors contributed to a feeling of otherness. Maeda noted how she felt this lack of belonging in both her country of origin and the U.S., "You end up being a foreigner in both lands…it's an interesting kind of line to straddle to be in between both worlds." Lacking the sense of belonging and being perceived as other in both geographical spaces that she and her cultures belong to reaffirmed otherness, not belonging, and not fitting. The aforementioned quotes illustrated the various ways participants encounter otherness, and further, the multiple ways that reaffirmed and reinforced that they are other. Finally, Samah noted the impact of continuously having these encounters: "…you get so used to being just like different from everyone, and not fitting in anywhere…"

The participant narratives of experiencing lack of belonging and not being understood, again highlighted the pervasive and burdensome nature of being othered,

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aligning with the broader theme, Experiencing Otherhood: Pervasive and Burdensome Marginalization.

Responding to Othering: Explaining and defending. This subtheme included participants' multiple stories of explaining to others things like Islamic practices, cultural norms and ways of being, dietary restrictions, family norms and dynamics, as well as how and why they function uniquely in relation to all of their identities and cultural worlds. Participants alluded to the exhaustion and frustration of explaining to others, as well as the xenophobic undertones that often underlied the questions and curiosities they received. This constant experience of being asked to explain themselves contributed to a persistent feeling of not being understood, of being other.

Hafsa discussed the nuances of feeling further othered as a result of trying to explain various Islamic practices or principles she abided by:

> … And then like it's awkward because like you're explaining something that's so foreign to them. So it's just like this weird like, you know, they don't understand, but they're genuinely asking you to tell them, and then like, you can just feel that they're just like, "Oh, that's weird," or like… "Oh, that sucks," and I'm just like, "Oh no, but like, I believe in it"…

In noting the responses of those she had explained to, she highlighted the underlying messages she received that reinforced being and feeling othered.

Responding to Othering: Explaining and Defending denoted a specific experience of being and feeling othered that several participants described. This subtheme illustrated the burden of having to explain and defend oneself, one's cultural worlds, and ways of operating, while feeling and coping with being othered. As a result, it reaffirmed the overall theme of experiencing otherhood as pervasive and burdensome marginalization.

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Theme 4: Navigating Sexism and Patriarchy: Inextricable Component of Acculturation as a Woman

This theme and the subthemes below highlighted the omnipresence of sexism and patriarchal culture in participants' lived experiences, within all of their cultural realms and across multiple settings. The two subthemes are as follows: (1) Living with sexism and patriarchy, (2) Not everything (Muslim) is sexist. The sexism and patriarchy, as described by participants, exists in American, ethnic, and Islamic cultures across family, community, and workplace settings. Further, this theme included the mental, emotional, and behavioral energy associated with experiencing and navigating a landscape of inequality that is not unique or limited to any one particular culture or identity but is instead a ubiquitous part of life as a woman. However, the experiences participants shared also underscored the compounding nature of being a woman *and* a member of multiple cultures and a minoritized religious community in the United States.

In negotiating acculturative processes with multiple marginalized identities at the intersection of multiple cultures, my MAWID participants were additionally burdened with sexism and patriarchy. Further, sexism and patriarchy were a pervasive part of participants' experience, as evidenced by the narratives coded in this theme. As they engaged in acculturation and their multiple cultural worlds, they encountered sexism and patriarchy from each, which added a complicating layer to how they had to engage with acculturation. The subthemes below denoted components of what this experience is like for participants.

Living with sexism and patriarchy. Participants described various experiences of living within sexist and patriarchal culture, some in the form of gendered expectations and

norms rooted in American culture *and* their respective ethnic cultures, many in the

workplace, as well as manifestations involving persistent awareness and concern around their

own physical safety. Participants expressed awareness of sexist treatment in its many forms,

noticing differences between how their male counterparts were treated professionally and

personally within their communities and families, as well as the ways their behaviors,

clothing, career paths and professional lives, romantic relationship and marriage prospects

were impacted, and many times policed. They described experiences of sexual harassment,

street harassment, judgment by community members for things ranging from their physical

appearance to their outspokenness. They spoke of the ways that they managed these

situations, pushing and setting boundaries, fighting for the salaries they deserve, speaking

their mind, being cognizant of escape routes and physical safety, and at times modifying their

behavior. Some participants also mentioned keeping their ethnic cultural norms and

guidelines in mind when responding to sexist or patriarchal experiences, such as maintaining

a respectful tone based on the context.

Encountering overt and covert sexism from across settings and cultural communities

contributed to further marginalizing MAWID, while they were already navigating the

complexities of acculturative processes. Maeda exemplified this when she said:

> … it's just an interesting way to balance, kind of like our own like American values of
> this idea that you're supposed to find yourself. Oh my god, you have to like, find
> yourself, who are you like, no one gives a shit who you are, (laughs) like no one
> cares. And especially as a woman, no one cares who you are.

Maeda demonstrated the intersection of negotiating cultural values, sexism, and patriarchy,

and the lack of support or care in "finding herself," given her gender identity. Hafsa and

Dena also both spoke on the universality and pervasiveness of sexism and patriarchy, as noted below:

> I think regardless of cultural influence, I think there is always an expectation that women will be more obedient and quiet. And, um, you know, serve their man, find a man. - Hafsa

> I think it's just a constant issue of like, women are always like, spoken over… I think it's not even uniquely American, it's kind of just like being a woman anyway (laughs). But it's interesting because I think like, Americans like to think of themselves as like really progressive and like, beyond the curve, and like there's a lot of things that are pretty much the same… – Dena

Meanwhile, Raajiya demonstrated the mental and cognitive load of being a woman, particularly one who doesn't adhere to stereotypical gender norms and boundaries:

> I think trying to be a strong, independent woman is very, very difficult and you push a lot of boundaries in that way, um, which is unfortunate because the men don't get the same type of pushback. So, being a woman, I think, is hard...you know, constantly figure out the way that I need to dress, the way that I need to speak, the way, you know if I'm in a room full of men, should I leave because it's all men? And, you know, you just you don't feel comfortable. Like do I get in a car with my boss if we're going to go to court or get my own? Very simple things like that, we're always like, constantly thinking about how- again, men don't-don't think about that and don't have to worry.

These participant narratives illustrated the way that acculturative processes were complicated significantly by also having to negotiate a widespread landscape of gender inequity. Hence, this final theme, Navigating Sexism and Patriarchy: Inextricable Component of Acculturation as a Woman, was an essential element of the lived experiences of the MAWID of this study. This subtheme reflected the pervasive and insidious ways in which patriarchy and sexism showed up in various formats in the lives of my MAWID participants, as well as the layered effect they had on how participants thoughtfully and strategically chose to operate in

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different settings. Hence, the subtheme indicated the ways in which these experiences were an inextricable aspect of MAWID navigating acculturative processes.

Within this subtheme are two additional sub-categories that represent specific ways several participants spoke about living with sexism and patriarchy, specifically (a) Marriage-related expectations, and (b) Cultural concerns around reputation, discussed below in this subtheme section.

Marriage-related expectations. Several participants discussed their experience of the cultural emphasis and expectation regarding marriage. This included families and communities explicitly expressing the importance of marriage and building a family, as well as consistent pressure to pursue marriage. Further, multiple participants noted the expectation and pressure to prioritize marriage over other personal goals, such as education or career. This included participants' various emotional responses of frustration at their family and/or community's pressure on them to prioritize and focus on getting married.

This subcategory emerged as a significant aspect of the participants' lived experiences; despite the variety of origin cultures the participants descend from. Mina, a Pakistani MAWID, expressed frustration related to being pressured to pursue marriage:

> ..but like every time I talked to my mom, pretty much, she wants to like hear that I'm getting married soon. She wants to hear like she wants a grandbaby, so like she really wants me to marry. I've been hearing about these-these like comments, since I was maybe 22…why do I need a man to take care of me, even though I'm obviously doing all this stuff on my own? I'm like, my parents aren't like, fully proud until I get married, have a kid. I'm 31, and I feel like my family like, feels really bad for me…

Dena, an Egyptian MAWID, reported similar pressure from her parents:

> In my family there's a lot of like pressure to get like married on the earlier side, and like that's not something that I'm prioritizing right now, yeah, like it's something I

want to do eventually, but it's not something that I like, for example, factor into my career timeline, whereas my parents expect me to.

Despite their differing ethnic cultural backgrounds, both Mina and Dena experienced similar pressure from their parents. This was true for Raajiya, a Palestinian MAWID, as well. She discussed this pressure and her personal priorities of education and career, like Dena. Specifically, she indicated the unique impact of her family's immigrant history on her priorities.

> Like, "Why are you in a JD/MBA program?" Like, "You're getting old, you're still single." Like, "You need to get married." It's like that same narrative and it's just like, well, my parents literally came from a different country so as to give us a better (life) and I'm gonna take advantage of education because why would I want to give that all up just to get married and have kids?…Like my parents sacrificed everything.

These quotes demonstrated another layer of navigating sexism and patriarchy alongside acculturative processes, and the energy expended in negotiating expectations around marriage for these MAWID. Further, these narratives reaffirmed that patriarchal and sexist values and expectations, specifically related to women pursuing marriage and building a family, were a significant component of navigating acculturation as a woman, particularly a MAWID. Hence, navigating patriarchy and sexism was inextricably connected with negotiating acculturation for my MAWID participants, reiterating the importance of this subcategory and its overall connection to the larger theme of Navigating Sexism and Patriarchy.

Cultural concerns around reputation. Participants described the concept of reputation as valued in many of their ethnic cultures and communities. They noted being reminded by family and community that how they are perceived by society at large was of high importance. As a result, they were often urgently reminded and expected to regulate their

own choices and behaviors with their reputation in mind, being cautious not to taint it to

avoid any consequences. Participants also noted their awareness that concerns regarding

reputation and the corresponding expectations they were subject to were typically only

applicable to women. This subcategory represented another specific aspect of the sexist,

patriarchal landscape MAWID traversed as they interacted with acculturative processes.

Hafsa noted the differing impact of concerns around reputation for women:

> …growing up, I mean, there was a lot of like, oh, well, what would people think, what will they, will they look at, because there was like, again your appearance and your reputation. And I think that's true for men and women, but I think it's especially true for women because we're, we were held to a different standard.

Hafsa alluded to the ways in which there is a gender-based standard that women are expected

to achieve, again making the experience of MAWID unique from those of Muslim American

men of immigrant descent. Like the subcategory of marriage-related expectations noted

above, the concept of reputation also existed across multiple cultures of origin. Raajiya noted

the high value of reputation, its sexist nature, and its absence within American culture below:

> Like [Arab] men can travel and go on these vacations and hang out with their friends, and they can, and they can *not* follow their Muslim identity, and they can drink, and they can have sex, and all of that. And all that is okay for them to do. And the reputation won't be ruined, but an Arab woman's reputation will always, always be ruined if she does any of that. And she makes any type of mistake… It's not just navigating the Arab, Muslim, and American culture, but it's also navigating your reputation, and reputation is like the most important piece because even if I follow something that's actually Islamically right, but if it's against my Arab culture, and I ruin my reputation, I ruin my parents' name, and that's something the American culture they don't really have to deal with nearly as much as the way that we deal with with our culture, so reputation is such a big thing.

Raajiya described the delicate and at times, fragile, nature of reputation, as it pertained to

women in her Arab cultural community. She highlighted the contradictions, the unfairness,

and the sexism that is reflected in the expectations of women related to their own reputation, as well as carrying the family name and family reputation.

Reputation and its sexist manifestation in participants' ethnic cultural communities added another layer of complexity as MAWID coped with sexism and patriarchy alongside acculturative processes. The pressure to consider reputation and the respect of their parents' name had the potential to generate additional stress or obstacles for participants in negotiating acculturative processes and was another aspect of our participants' lived experiences in these negotiations. In conclusion, this subtheme illustrated the unique component of the concept of reputation and honor endorsed by several MAWID. Given that this concept was gender-based, sexist, and patriarchal, particularly within the narratives of the MAWID in this study, it is appropriately subsumed under the broader theme of Navigating Sexism and Patriarchy. It further exhibited how interlinked sexism and patriarchy are in MAWID's experiences of acculturation.

Not everything (Muslim) is sexist. This subtheme represented the participants who described feminist experiences from their family context, debunking the myths and stereotypes that patriarchy, sexism, and oppression of women stem largely from Islamic or ethnic cultures.

Samah noted the strong expectation in her family for women to have careers alongside their families, a rejection of stereotypical gender norms:

> ..but like the idea of like a woman like staying home and raising the family was never a question in my family. It was like, never the thing that was going to happen. It was always like…it doesn't matter what the man in your life does, like you pursue your dreams, and you become successful, and you take care of your family, but you also work full time…

This example of not having an expectation to abide by gender norms was an important one to consider in the face of a starkly sexist and patriarchal landscape, as well as a social climate in which stereotypes and images of Muslim women as oppressed are widely circulated. Similarly, Aleena noted being raised with empowering principles.

> …My parents have never been like you're woman, you can't do this…They always like encouraged me to do whatever you want, always like told me, like… go study this, go study that, like for them, it was like, you are educated you need to like, do what you need to do, like it was more of like, you have a brain use it, like there wasn't really an aspect of like you are now woman, you must do this kind of thing…

These examples serve as reminders to avoid generalizing the experiences of MAWID, as mainstream American culture so often does.

Overall, the results illustrated the intricacies and nuances of negotiating acculturative processes at the intersection of multiple cultures, a religion, and female gender identity. They gave voice to the unique experiences of our MAWID participants, their courage, resilience, strength, and multidimensionality. The implications, contributions, and future research recommendations will be discussed below.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The current study is the first phenomenological study focused on the lived experience of MAWID in negotiating acculturative processes, to our knowledge. Literature on Muslim American immigrant women and MAWID has been limited to very specific areas of inquiry or specific ethnic groups, limiting the knowledge we have around MAWID's lived experiences in general and in regard to acculturation. Therefore, the findings of this study offer a significant contribution to both the acculturation literature and literature on the experiences of Muslim Americans, specifically those of MAWID. Given the constructivist and inductive methodological approach of this study, findings reflect what emerged as the subjective aspects of participants' lived experiences of negotiating acculturation. Through these four main themes the central findings of this study reflect multidimensional, complex, and layered lived experience of MAWID negotiating acculturative processes at the intersection of two cultures, a minoritized religion, and womanhood.

Discussing Theme 1: Negotiating Acculturative Processes

The first theme (Negotiating Cultures: Connecting, Reshaping, and Coping) encompassed some of the expected aspects of acculturation, in keeping with the acculturation literature. These aspects included engaging with connection to their origin and American cultures, as well as blending and restructuring these cultures on their own terms. Engaging in combining and restructuring their cultures also emerged as one of the essential aspects of negotiating acculturative processes. This aligns with the definition of acculturation presented in this paper: the adaptation of behavioral, cognitive, and affective aspects of an individual's cultural functioning as a result of consistent intercultural contact (Driscoll & Wierzbicki, 2012), as it demonstrates the ways in which various aspects of one's personal internal and external life and world as one persistently engages with multiple cultures. This finding of restructuring of cultures is a component consistent with the literature that has highlighted 2nd generation women as carrying the duty to travel between and among cultures, constructing and reconstructing culture through social interactions across all settings and individuals, personal, professional, intrapsychic, and internal within oneself (Ayala, 1998; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco 2001; Wiley et al., 2006; Zaal et al., 2007).

Further, the participants' narratives described experiencing challenges due to conflict and opposition between cultural realms. Scholars have discussed the ways in which this opposition exists between Muslim culture and American culture, acknowledging that although both cultures are very diverse and heterogenous, that it is fair to consider them different from one another, "if not completely incongruous" (Stubbs & Sallee, 2013, p. 452).

This is consistent with the literature detailed extensively in Chapter 2, which suggests that lack of compatibility between cultural norms of the origin culture and host culture can foster acculturative stress (Cabassa, 2003; Cuevas et al., 2012; Sanchez et al., 2014; Schwartz et al., 2010). Berry (1997) notes that "cultural distance," the dissimilarity between origin and host cultures, can ultimately lead to more cultural conflict and poorer adaptation, although the findings did *not* indicate poorer adaptation, they did demonstrate challenges and conflicts related to cultural distance.

Scholars have noted that high levels of cultural distance between origin and host cultures typically contribute to the highest levels of acculturative stress, and ultimately vulnerability to mental health consequences as a result (Berry, 2005; Thomas, 1995). My findings demonstrated that cultural distance impacted the acculturative processes and experiences of MAWID, such that it at times made navigating these processes difficult. However, the findings do not further offer information that suggests participants experienced the highest levels of acculturative stress as a result. Much of the acculturative stress literature focuses on Muslim American youth, young adults, and college students (Asvat & Melcarne, 2008; Sirin et al., 2013a; Sirin et al., 2013b; Sirin & Fine, 2007; Sirin & Katsiaficas, 2010; Stuart et al., 2016) however, our participants had a mean age of 25, ranging from ages 18-31. This extends beyond the previous literature to imply that acculturative stress may continue beyond adolescent years and into adulthood, particularly for MAWID.

Apart from the clashing cultural systems, participants spoke of the range of challenges they face in navigating acculturation. In addition to these challenges, participants described experiencing an array of emotions, as well as the emotional exhaustion that results

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from acculturative processes. The overall stress that the participants allude to is consistent with acculturation theory's assertion that crossing cultures is typically stressful (Berry, 2006; Ward, 2011), although the term "stress" is rarely used in the language of participant narratives. This finding reiterates the need for attending to the *potential* stress MAWID are facing. Lastly, this theme illuminated the value that participants place on holding multiple identities and negotiating multiple cultural worlds, noting the richness, beauty, and wholeness this allowed them to experience and feel, regardless of the challenges this experience of negotiating cultures and identities also involved.

Discussing Theme 2: Negotiating Identity

In tandem with negotiating multiple cultural systems, the second main theme of Traversing Multiple Identities: Being Oneself demonstrated that another integral component of participants' lived experience was navigating the identities that correspond with their cultural worlds. This navigation process appeared to be complex, involving intentionality and strategy about how to present oneself ("performing" identity), as well as more organic experiences of being oneself without concern about others, which typically appeared in spaces that were most comfortable. Further, participants noted the added layers of negotiating other minoritized identities on top of the MAWID identities. Alongside the complexity of this experience, participants spoke of their learned confidence and comfort in holding all of their identities regardless of how others may respond to them. They discussed their efforts to lean into authenticity, while some discussed their selective amplification or softening of identities as needed.

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The literature supports these findings. Prior scholars have discussed and research has demonstrated broadly the complexity of interacting with identity and multiple selves for Muslim immigrants and MAWID in particular (Britto, 208; Giuliani et al., 2017; Giuliani & Tagliabue, 2015; Khan, 2016; Sirin et al., 2008; Verkuyten, 2007; Vurkeyten & Martinovic, 2012; Verkuyten et al., 2012; Wang et al., 2020; Zaal et al., 2007). Further, concepts such as hybridity and the 'in-between third space' in the literature capture the presence of negotiating various identities for diasporic individuals, (al-Huraibi & Konradi, 2012). Relatedly, researchers have also concluded that acculturation is multidimensional, consisting of attitudes, values, behaviors, language, *and* cultural identity (Thomas & Choi, 2006; Van Oudenhoven et al., 2006). Similarly, Sirin and colleagues (2013) noted that for adolescents of immigrant origin, "identity development is also a process of acculturation or cultural negotiation between more than one cultural background" (p. 737). Taken together, the literature seems to suggest that an integral aspect of negotiating acculturative process involves the parallel process of negotiation of identity, consistent with my findings.

The results further revealed that in experiencing and engaging with the unique layers and dimensions of their identity, MAWID participants often intentionally and strategically navigated these "parts" of themselves based on context or other personal factors. This finding speaks to both the acculturative experience of moving through spaces that have differing norms and expectations, as well as what unspoken conditions must be met in order to be accepted as oneself. Participants noted spaces in which they recognized being Muslim would not be as accepted or comfortable for others, or when it was easier to not make their racial or ethnic identity visible in a particular situation. Thoughtfully selecting how to present one's

identity in each space also serves as an added mental load. Further, this finding reiterates the significance of the context: the landscape of American spaces that may involve xenophobia, Islamophobia, racism, sexism, and contributing to a consistent other-ing of Muslim Americans, which may naturally impact participants' relationship to their Muslim identity and their faith. The issue of socio-cultural-political climate mentioned above is also further discussed below as it pertains to second theme of experiencing Otherhood.

The last aspect of traversing multiple identities (theme 2) highlighted the evolving nature of participants' relationship to Islam and their Muslim identity, demonstrating the variety of ways MAWID may engage with and relate to their faith and religious identity. This finding exhibited the ways in which Islam and Muslim identity can serve as both a guiding force in the midst of complex acculturative processes, as well as a challenge to overcome when Islam and Islamic culture do not align with mainstream American culture in particular. This finding, consistent with the literature, illustrates the ways in which participants relate to Islam by engaging with and reinterpreting Islamic text through their own perspective (Mohammed-Arif, 2000; Zine, 2004). Together, the findings and literature highlight the very personal nature of one's Muslim identity and relationship to Islam, and the ways in which this identity has its own developmental process as individuals move through different chapters of life and contexts. This was demonstrated by several participants endorsing the shift to their relationship with Islam in college, where they first experienced the agency and autonomy they had in how they chose to practice (or not practice) Islam.

Discussing Theme 3: Otherhood in the U.S. as an American

A ubiquitous experience of being and feeling othered and the corresponding emotional and psychological toll emerged as a significant and integral component of negotiating acculturative processes as MAWID, as exhibited by the third central theme of Otherhood: Pervasive and Burdensome. This experience is reflective of the broader American socio-cultural-political context. Stuart and colleagues (2016) have noted that cultural and political contextual factors, such as policies and broader attitudes of the host country, influence the acculturative experiences of immigrants, which is consistent with our findings. Relatedly, scholars have noted that within host cultures and societies that inflict prejudice, discrimination, and rejection upon immigrants for their religious and ethnic backgrounds, the "task of coping with multiple cultural systems of reference is intensified" for them (Brewer, 2010; Giuliani et al., 2018). Although this study's focus was not on MAWID's lived experience in relation to the sociopolitical context or discrimination experiences, as discussed in Chapter 1, the landscape of American systemic and cultural marginalization of this and many other, minoritized groups is highly relevant and inextricable from the experience of acculturation, as evidenced by one of the main four themes of the results of this study which highlighted the omnipresence of prejudice, discrimination, and other-ing that our participants experienced. Liu and colleagues (2019) assert that the acculturative process is a form of racial trauma due to living with White supremacist contexts. They extend this further and note that acculturation theory is relevant to American-born people of color as well, as they are required to accommodate themselves to White culture from birth. This aligns with many of the narratives shared by our participants around

otherhood, and specifically about feeling the need to conform to Whiteness. My findings

support the assertions of Liu and colleagues (2019), ultimately demonstrating that being

other-ed and experiencing otherhood is indeed an integral component of acculturation.

Apart from the universality of experiencing discrimination, this theme also involves a

general experience of being othered, often lacking a sense of belonging, fitting in, or being

accepted. Unfortunately, this experience of being othered is not novel for Muslim Americans

at large. Scholars have discussed and documented the ways in which Muslim Americans feel

and are perceived as "fundamentally alien..outsider" (Khan, 2015), as well as "essential

foreigners," and 'Other'" (Islam, 2020). Islam (2020) alludes to Du Bois's work on double

consciousness (Du Bois, 1903; [The Souls of Black Folk]), which is the conscious awareness

that one's minoritized group exists both on the inside and outside of dominant society.

Although Du Bois's work was written for the Black community in particular, it can be

applied to Muslim Americans, and MAWID specifically. This double consciousness impacts

the individual's sense of self, such that it is shaped by this dual position in society, of being

both included and excluded, leading to the internal conflict of Twoness (Du Bois, 1903; [The

Souls of Black Folk]), in which one identifies with two groups or identities that seem in

contradiction with one another. The results demonstrated that many MAWID felt their

cultural worlds clashed with each other, as well as that they consistently felt like they didn't

belong despite being and feeling American. These results exhibit the ways in which Du

Bois's work on double consciousness can apply to MAWID as well. Relatedly, as noted by

Zaal and colleagues (2007, p. 169), Muslim American women are "keenly aware of the

weight of living 'between' and 'within'" multiple cultures and selves (Zaal et al., 2007, p.

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169). This awareness, this double consciousness, and the related layers of otherhood, manifested via discrimination and mainstream culture at large, is an onerous obstacle to contend with at all times for our MAWID participants.

In experiencing otherhood, MAWID participants also gave voice to their experience of having to explain, and at times defend, ethnic cultural and religious norms, practices, and ways of being. This experience of being asked to explain oneself can reinforce and reiterate the feeling of being other, of not belonging, of being unaccepted or unwelcome even. These conversations cost MAWID valuable mental and emotional energy and are often associated with emotional toll as well. This finding, alongside the overarching theme of experiencing otherhood, reinforced the problematic nature of the sociopolitical climate and context for MAWID and the toll these contextual factors take on MAWID and their wellbeing. Although, as previously mentioned and noted here as well, the literature is consistent with the findings reflected in the theme of otherhood, noting that in "Western" or secular parts of the world, such as the U.S. or parts of Europe, Muslims can be portrayed as "unassimilable" and as not belonging to their countries of residence (Laird et al., 2013, p. 356) and that xenophobic and racist landscapes consistently classify them as "perpetual outsiders" (Islam, 2020). This indicates the longstanding presence and impact of American systemic and cultural oppression and marginalization, and scholars have noted that the "broader attitudes of the receiving national context impact immigrant experiences" (Stuart et al., 2016). It behooves the broader American mainstream society to work towards dismantling our oppressive systems and marginalizing culture.

Discussing Theme 4: Sexist and Patriarchal Backdrop of Acculturative Experiences

The final central finding of this study was illustrated by the fourth central theme of Navigating Sexism and Patriarchy: Inextricable Component of Acculturation as a Woman, which showed how participants experienced sexism and patriarchy across all the cultural realms they were a part of as a persistent aspect of their lived experience. This was further evidenced by all twelve participants describing sexist and patriarchal experiences. The findings are consistent with past literature emphasizing the intersectional nature of racial and gender discrimination (Mukkamala & Suyemoto, 2018) and literature which has found that Muslim American women's behaviors have often been "dictated along patriarchal lines" (Rashid, 2017, p. 492). Further, in terms of acculturative processes, the backdrop of sexism and patriarchy has been documented in literature amongst Muslim immigrant communities and MAWID. For example, Mir (2014) found that daughters face more parental pressure to maintain cultural expectations from the culture of origin than sons do in immigrant families. The findings are consistent with this, such that many participants endorsed the experience of having expectations that were not also placed on boys or men in their Muslim families or communities.

However, at the same time, this finding aptly debunked the stereotypical perceptions of many immigrant and Muslim communities as uniquely sexist and patriarchal. This was because participants spoke equally about the sexist and patriarchal norms and discriminatory experiences in every cultural realm and setting they were a part of, including spaces that were predominantly White. Muslim women have been asserted as "oppressed" in mainstream media (Soltani, 2016, Muslim Women's Bodies section) and "submissive" (Zaal et al., 2007,

p. 165), in alignment with the "Western" and American perception of Islamic cultures being sexist, patriarchal, and backwards. Hence, the significance of this finding is that participants in fact noted the many ways in which they encountered sexism and patriarchal behavior within solely American settings. Further, the findings revealed that many clients experienced their familial upbringings (in their Muslim and ethnic cultural homes) as feminist, further rejecting the problematic stereotypes.

Within this theme of navigating sexism and patriarchy, results also revealed that marriage-related expectations were a common part of our MAWID participants' experience. By explicitly and implicitly being expected and urged to prioritize and focus on pursuing marriage, participants' personal goals, ambitions, or wishes may be sideswept by their own ethnic and Muslim communities. Often these expectations or goals their families have for them do not align with their own, creating a potential conflict they must navigate within their family and/or community systems. This conflict in many ways represents another potential acculturative stressor, negotiating the typical norms of the origin culture (e.g., prioritizing marriage at a particular point in life) with those of the host culture (e.g., more fluid norms around marriage timelines). Mir (2014) alluded to this phenomenon more generally, discussing the common experience amongst young Muslim women of immigrant descent and the ways that they are pulled between multiple forces, often then caught between conservative Muslim and mainstream expectations. However, while marriage-related expectations and cultural concerns around reputation were aspects of MAWID's experience of sexism and patriarchy within their ethnic and religious worlds, they are countered by the subtheme of Not everything (Muslim) is racist. This subtheme reminds us to check ourselves

prior to generalizing MAWID experiences that are also part of oppressive stereotypes as it included the voices of MAWID who noted that they were encouraged by their families to prioritize career, education, as well as empowered by their families to pursue whatever they wanted to. Further, despite having to navigate expectations to prioritize marriage, participants were still able to choose *not* to do so.

I am aware that this subcategory could be utilized to support stereotypes and White American and White European mainstream discourse that reductively describe Muslim cultures as patriarchal and sexist, perceiving and presenting Muslim women as oppressed and powerless by their own communities. This possibility ironically demonstrates the patriarchal and sexist nature of White cultures themselves, given that these narratives completely exclude the voices and perspectives of Muslim women and generalizes their experience without acknowledging the heterogeneity of this population. These and similar White European and American critiques not only oversimplify and generalize the experiences of Muslim women broadly, but also neglect to even acknowledge the deeply embedded patriarchal and sexist basis that is also the foundation of White American and White supremacy culture. This study effectively aimed to challenge both of these issues, by amplifying the voices and perspectives of MAWID, as well as by demonstrating how MAWID experience patriarchal and sexist culture through both American and Muslim cultural contexts persistently and overtly, and in intersection with racism, ethnocentrism, Islamophobia, and anti-immigrant stances from the dominant American context. Vilification of Muslim cultures as a result of some MAWID participants of this study speaking their truth

regarding their personal experience would be antithetical to both their perspectives and the results of this study.

Cultural concerns around reputation also emerged as a component of navigating sexism and patriarchy in the results, particularly as some participants noted that they feel the expectation to preserve reputation (by way of how they behaved or operated in their worlds) was placed on daughters or women in the family, while sons or men in the family were not subject to this expectation or the same consequences for not successfully protecting the family's honor and reputation. This contributes to a unique set of challenges and conflicts for MAWID to navigate in acculturating, suggesting that it might be different for many Muslim American men of immigrant descent. Further, this finding is also consistent with the literature which has documented cultural concerns around reputation, in which young Muslim immigrant women have been found to be negotiating their families' concepts of honor, shame, and self-respect (Haghverdian, 2010; Zaal et al., 2007). Relatedly, Rashid (2017) found that her Muslim American participants consistently noted that their behaviors were influenced by concerns and a conscientiousness about how they would be perceived within the Muslim community, which was an experience they felt was distinct from that of Muslim men. My findings are consistent with this, ultimately underscoring the presence of some form of sexism and/or patriarchy which impacts MAWID specifically due to their gender identities as women.

Overall, this theme offered an essential narrative that counters the mainstream stereotypes and perceptions of Muslim women in general, as well as MAWID specifically, highlighting the ways in which their upbringings at times included an emphasis on career or

empowerment by families to pursue their dreams and interests. This finding allows us to expand the sometimes reductive, oversimplified narratives regarding Muslim women in the literature by documenting the heterogeneity of experiences within this community. It also countered the mainstream narrative of Islam and Islamic culture due to participants noting the many sexist experiences they had in all of their primarily American contexts as well. At the same time, this finding reinforces the information documented in the literature around family honor and reputation via the subcategory of Cultural Concerns around Reputation. Lastly, this finding demonstrates the additional layer of gender inequality MAWID have to navigate within all of their communities and cultural worlds, emphasizing the very prominent injustice, including the aforementioned experience of Otherhood, that complicates their overall acculturative experience.

Methodological Strengths and Limitations

The present study had multiple strengths and limitations. A significant strength was the philosophical and methodological approach to the research question, specifically an inductive, constructivistic, phenomenological methodology which allowed for a broad, open-ended inquiry, ultimately creating space for participant subjectivity and lived experience. Relatedly, this allowed for an unconstrained area of inquiry, and instead for emphasis on the voices of participants and whatever their narratives asserted as relevant. Another important strength of the study was the sample not being limited to a specific ethnic or racial group allowed findings that have increased transferability, as we were able to find the common patterns via thematic analysis. Further, the ethnic and racial diversity of the group fosters

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increased transferability of the findings to other MAWID. A procedural strength was the use

of open-ended interviews instead of semi-structured, again by amplifying the voices of the

participants' and what they deem important. Finally, the focus of this study fills an important

gap in the literature, as noted by Nadal and colleagues (2012), who shared that the research

on this population is lacking information regarding their psychological wellbeing, identity

development, acculturation processes, mental health and treatment, experiences with

discrimination, among other issues.

In terms of limitations, this sample was highly educated, largely middle to upper class

socioeconomic status, and predominantly heterosexual. This is consistent with research,

which has demonstrated that the Muslim population in the U.S. is typically younger, more

educated, often with higher socioeconomic statuses than the U.S. population (Wang et al.,

2020; Nadal et al., 2012). These demographics are important to consider when thinking about

transferability, as they are likely protective factors that may buffer the many challenges that

have been highlighted in the findings of this study. Further, the experiences of individuals

with different social identities may lead to qualitatively different experiences in relation to

acculturation. It is worth noting that the education level is aligned with the broader U.S.

population of Muslim American women, which is generally a highly educated group (Gallup,

2009). Another limitation that may reduce transferability is that women who descended from

refugee or asylee immigrants were not included in this study. Hence, these findings may not

be transferable to individuals with asylee or refugee immigrant history and may not be

reflective of their experiences. Although this was noted as a strength, the ethnic diversity of

the sample may also be a limitation because each ethnic background and its corresponding

cultural norms may differentially impact acculturative processes for each individual. The study provides insight to the broader and general experience of these MAWID as they negotiate multiple cultures and identities but does not account for the way specific ethnic cultures impact or contribute to the acculturative processes of these MAWID differently and uniquely. As a result, we may lack a more nuanced understanding of these acculturative experiences due to the ethnic diversity of the sample.

Future Research and Clinical Implications

Given the dearth of literature regarding the lived experiences of MAWID, future research has a wide range of information to gather. Researchers should expand this study by conducting it with samples that include MAWID with other specific social identity factors, such as participants from specific racial groups, ethnic groups, sexual orientations, and socioeconomic statuses. This may also include focusing specifically on participants who grow up and/or live in ethnic enclaves vs. predominantly White areas. This would allow for learning about the ways in which participants' experiences are impacted by holding certain social identities and being a part of specific communities and worlds. Another important next step for research would be to implement similar studies in addition to an investigation of mental health symptoms and experiences, as well as a focus on strengths, positive experiences and outcomes, and ways that MAWID resist oppression or othering. For example, conducting studies that inquire about the experience of Otherhood as a MAWID negotiating acculturation, the mental health impacts of this, and the ways that they may resist this othering and oppression. Such a study could involve mixed methods as well. Another

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relevant study would be to inquire further about the experiences of navigating sexism and patriarchy in the context of negotiating acculturative processes, the potential mental health impact of these experiences, and the ways in which MAWID resist this marginalization. This would allow for researchers to begin to build a body of literature that offers understandings on the ways in which the experience of negotiating acculturation for MAWID impacts mental health and psychological well-being. This should ultimately lead into how to then effectively counsel and support MAWID in and outside of clinical settings, such as within mosques, university organizations, or other community settings.

Conducting research, particularly on the impact of this population's psychological and overall wellbeing is certainly important, however, our findings already point to clinical implications that suggest serious cause for concern regarding the socially unjust climate that affects these women immensely ubiquitously. Two out of four themes emphasize the persistent manifestations of social inequality that these MAWID are experiencing in relation to multiple identities they hold. Facing prejudice and discrimination and othering as such a significant part of their experience is urgently alerting us to the need for disseminating education and engaging in promotion of justice to reduce the harm of a systemically inequitable and oppressive environment. This suggests that our education system should integrate a stronger focus on increasing awareness related to the experiences of folks who hold minoritized identities. This may look like alerting students to Christian and White privilege at the elementary schooling level, integrating voices, stories, and images of individuals who are Muslim, of immigrant descent, and non-White, expanding the focus of subjects like social studies to include information about the current sociopolitical climate,

information about Islam and stories of Muslim Americans, all with a feminist perspective and acknowledgment of sexist and patriarchal historical influences on present-day American culture and political context.

This kind of information could also be incorporated as an integral aspect of community programming. Community programming could increase efforts to reduce bias, promote understanding, and advance social justice through workshops focused on understanding and strengthening allyship, providing basic education around various kinds of majority privilege, and offering opportunities for solidarity to promote justice and wellbeing. The aforementioned recommendations on integrating education into schooling curriculum should also be incorporated into college and university programming. Suyemoto and Hochman (2021) found that experiences in formal education were an integral part of ally development, specifically part of the learning processes that fostered allies' understandings of privilege and oppression, suggesting that educational workshops could play a role in promoting resistance to oppression and activism among individuals who seek to serve as allies to this community. Further, they also found that avenues outside of formal education were important to understanding privilege and oppression and one's development as an ally (Suyemoto & Hochman, 2021). These kinds of educational workshops could be included as required training for first year college students, as well as required annual workshops for the duration of a student's college enrollment. Further, interfaith programming within religious organizations both in community and university/college settings could promote dialogue about and with Muslim American communities.

Apart from a broader, community-oriented approach to the clinical implications, the findings of this study to suggest the importance of clinicians to attend to the potential psychological and mental health consequences MAWID may be experiencing as a result of navigating acculturation. The results clearly indicate various pathways through which acculturative stress can be experienced for MAWID, such as being othered, struggles with identity, and facing countless forms of sexism. Since again, two of four total themes highlight the significant presence of marginalization as a part of MAWID's experience with acculturation (Experiencing Otherhood and Navigating Sexism and Patriarchy), noting xenophobia, Islamophobia, racism, sexism, and patriarchy. This suggests that it would be very important for clinicians to be attuned to the potential presence and consequences of the various manifestations of intersectional marginalization, and of course, the possible mental health consequences of these experiences.

Clinicians should be aware and sensitively attend to the likelihood that MAWID clients may be experiencing sexism, racism, Islamophobia, xenophobia, and othering. Therefore, they should initiate discussions with clients to create space for these topics in a culturally sensitive manner. This may look like making efforts to not villainize ethnic or Islamic cultures (or gently explores possible internalization of these messages by clients), explicitly acknowledging the American cultural and systemic oppression MAWID experience, as well as addressing the potential of feeling like they do not belong or fit within and across all their cultural worlds. Further, clinicians can focus on helping clients to explore their own personal values and beliefs, regardless of whether they are consistent with any or all of the contexts, cultures, or communities they are a part of. Other sensitive ways to work

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with MAWID who may be experiencing some of what is noted in my findings would involve using frequent and genuine validation of oppressive experiences; exploring the use of coping skills to manage the stress that may result from othering and marginalization, such as the use of mindfulness, journaling, using social support networks; and encouraging or facilitating the development of social support structures that include others with shared identities, experiences, and awarenesses. Clinicians could also initiate conversations with MAWID clients to elicit the positive aspects and strengths of their experience in holding multiple identities and being a part of multiple cultural worlds, engaging in a strengths-based, positive psychology approach.

Further, clinicians should engage in self-education and ensure that they do not ask or expect clients to educate or explain to them broad, general information about their cultural worlds. This is supported by the subtheme of Theme 3, Experiencing Otherhood, which is "Responding to Othering: Explaining and defending." By requiring clients to explain ethnocultural or religious practices, traditions, norms, beliefs, clinicians risk enacting the very harm of othering we hope to avoid. Instead, clinicians can engage clients from an educated perspective, asking clients to share how certain norms or ways of being exist in their individual life. For example, "Some women at this stage of life are encouraged by their ethnocultural and/or religious communities to prioritize marriage. Is this something that you experience? If so, what is this like for you personally?" In this way, the clinician demonstrates some understanding of general norms that may exist in some of the client's communities, while recognizing that these are not universal and not assuming her individual

experience. This demonstrates the clinician's ability to understand how heterogeneous MAWID are as well, which can foster trust and connection between clinician and client.

It is also important for clinicians to maintain their overall commitment to social justice both broadly and within their professional fields, as well as continuing to grow in their knowledge and skills around cultural sensitivity and humility, so as not to enact the same harm many MAWID are experiencing outside of the therapy room. The mission to engage in this form of self-education and social justice efforts is one that should exist for clinicians in perpetuity.

Further, given the high level of education Muslim American women have (Gallup, 2009) it may be helpful for university counseling centers (UCC) to focus on outreach with MAWID populations. UCCs could also offer education and support to educators so that they are alert and aware and attend to potential MAWID students' distress, consequently encouraging them to seek mental health support from UCCs. Other mental health facilities, such as private practices and community mental health centers should make explicit efforts to target their marketing efforts towards MAWID as well. This is because there is clear evidence to suggest the presence of acculturative stress. This may look like including imagery on marketing materials that present women who appear phenotypically Muslim or are wearing hijab or use text or narratives that cater to individuals with immigrant backgrounds or Muslim identity.

Table 1

Participant Pseudonyms and Corresponding Demographics

Pseudonym	Age	Ethnic Identity	Education Level
1 Nida	18	Indian	Partial college + Full-time student currently
2 Tanjila	29	Bengali	Graduate/Professional
3 Aleena	30	Pakistani	Graduate/Professional
4 Hafsa	29	Pakistani	Graduate/Professional
5 Hina	24	Pakistani	College degree (B.A./B.S.)
6 Mina	31	Pakistani	Graduate/Professional
7 Maeda	27	Palestinian	College degree (B.A./B.S.)
8 Dena	22	Egyptian	College degree (B.A./B.S.)
9 Shanjida	18	Bengali	Partial College
10 Raajiya	26	Palestinian	Graduate/Professional
11 Na'imah	19	Algerian	Partial College + Currently full-time student
12 Samah	27	Bengali	Graduate/Professional

Table 2

Themes, Subthemes, and Subcategories

Theme	Subtheme	Title
Theme 1		**Negotiating Cultures: Connecting, Reshaping, & Coping**
	Subtheme	(1) Relating to and negotiating ethnic and American cultures: Blending and reshaping
		(2) Intrapsychic and relational challenges: Emotional responses and coping
		(3) Valuing and appreciating multiple cultural worlds and experiences
Theme 2		**Traversing Multiple Identities: Being Oneself**
	Subtheme	(1) Negotiating the multiplicity of Self
		(2) Evolving Muslim identity and relation to Islam: Changing meanings and identities
Theme 3		**Experiencing Otherhood: Pervasive & Burdensome Marginalization**
	Subtheme	(1) Being Othered: Experiences of prejudice and discrimination
		(2) Responding to Othering: Explaining and defending
Theme 4		**Navigating Sexism and Patriarchy: Inextricable Component of Acculturation as a Woman**
	Subtheme	(1) Living with sexism and patriarchy
	Subcategory	*(a) Marriage-related expectations*
		(b) Cultural concerns around reputation
	Subtheme	(2) Not everything (Muslim) is sexist

APPENDIX 1

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Do you have any other questions about the informed consent? As a reminder, I'm going to be recording this interview, so please do not not use any real names or anything that could identify you when you respond to the questions.

So, before we start, do you have any questions or concerns about the study itself?

I'm interested in learning about what it's like being a Muslim American woman of immigrant descent.

I want to hear what it's like and how you navigate it, whatever comes to mind, such as how this influences your choices, behaviors, experiences, identities, thoughts, beliefs, values, and so forth. What it feels like for you, how you understand it, make sense of it, things like that.

I know this is really broad and a lot. I'm envisioning this as a very open – ended interview, that's more like a conversation… I want to center this interview on you and your experience, and I would like to see it more as a conversation that you lead. I'm not looking for a specific answer or experience in particular, just wanting to know YOUR experience.

Section 1: Description and/or experience of cultures

For the first 30-40 minutes or so I would like to learn more about your experiences with the cultures that you're a part of as a *Muslim American woman of immigrant descent.*

1. Can you tell me about your cultures, however YOU experience them?
    a. *can you give me a specific example of that?*
    b. *"when that was happening, what thoughts and feelings did you have?*

2. Can you tell me about how you experience your ethnic culture(s)?
    a. Can you share a specific example that shows what you mean?
    b. Could you say more about how you relate to your culture?
    c. Could you talk about how your culture shows up in your life and who you are?
        i. Can you think of a specific instance that illustrates this?
3. Can you share a time with as much detail as possible in which you were very aware of being (*insert ethnicity?)*
    a. What was that like for you?
    b. What did that mean to you?

4. What about being really aware that you have an immigrant background?
    a. Can you walk me through an example of what that was like for you?

5. Can you tell me a bit about how you experience being a woman (or about your experiences as a woman)?
    a. Can you share a time in which you were very aware of being a woman?

6. What is it like for you as a woman in the context of your ethnic culture?
    a. Could you share a specific instance that highlights that, as well?

7. What about your experience of Islamic culture? Or What is your experience of being Muslim? What has that been like for you?
    a. Could you share an example of that?
    b. Can you remember how you felt emotionally?

8. Can you tell me about a time you were very aware of being Muslim and what that was like for you/what that meant to you?
    a. Could you share an example of that?
    b. When that was happening, what thoughts and feelings did you have?

9. What is it like for you as a woman in the context of being Muslim or being a part of Islam/Islamic culture?
    a. Could you share a specific instance that highlights that, as well?
    b. Can you remember how you felt emotionally?

10. Can you talk about your experience with American culture?
    a. Can you share a specific example with as much detail as possible that illustrates that?

11. Can you talk about a time you were very aware of being American and what that was like for you/what that meant to you?

12. Can you talk about what it's like being a woman in your experience of American culture?
    a. Could you give me a specific example or story that would make clear what you had in mind?

13. Could you share your experience with any other cultures that you identify with?

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I'd like to spend the rest of the time shifting a little bit to talking about the ways that you've navigated the multiple cultures you are a part of.

14. Can you talk about an instance where you felt like American culture, Islamic culture, and your heritage culture interacted?
    a. Could you walk me through an example of what happened?
        i. What was that like for you?
    b. Is this similar or different from other experiences you've had? (probe depending on answer)
    c. How do you think being a woman played a role in this, if at all?

15. Can you talk about an instance where you were aware of the multiple/many cultures you are a part of?
    d. What was that like for you?
    e. Is this similar or different from other experiences you've had? *(probe depending on answer)*
    f. How do you think being a woman related to this instance, if at all?

16. What has it been like for you to engage in several cultures at once?
    g. Can you give me an example of that?
        i. Can you share how that experience *(refer to example they offer above)* influenced you?

Section 2 (Optional): Related experience of coping or managing - in the case that participants endorse some stress or challenge or difficulty in negotiating, this section would focus on asking questions about their experience of coping or managing that stress/distress

Since you've mentioned some of the difficulty/challenges that have come up for you in this experience, I wanted to hear more about that…

- Can you share HOW you cope/manage with the stress/challenges/complexities (*use their language here if possible*) that come up for you in navigating the cultures you're a part of?
    o Could you share a specific example of how you've coped?
    o What has this been like for you?

Thank you so much for sharing your experiences with me. I'm extremely grateful to you for being a part of this study. Is there anything else I didn't ask about that you want to say or share?

Member checks request: Would you be willing to be contacted later this summer so that I can share the early data analysis themes with you? You would be able to review the themes and see if they are representative of your experience. I would email you the information and give you 2-4 weeks to respond to let me know if you see your experience reflected in the data. We could talk about it via phone or you could respond via email. I will use your responses to revise my analyses and results.

Great! Thanks so much. How would you like to receive your compensation? Venmo, Visa gift card by mail or online, cashapp?

Default expansion probes, used as needed:
- Can you say more about that?
- What was that like for you?
- Can you walk me through that experience?
- Can you give me an example?
- Can you tell me more about that?
- Checking meaning probes
    - What do you mean by x?
- Is there a specific incident you can think of that would make clear what you have in mind?
- Could you tell me what happened, starting from the beginning?
- Could you give me a concrete instance of that, a time it actually happened, with as much detail as you can?
- What were your feelings when that was happening?
- What did that feel like for you?
- What comes up for you?

APPENDIX 2

PHASE 2 DATA ANALYSIS SPREADSHEET (RADAR APPROACH)

Phase 2: AMINAS Data Analysis   2/11/22

RESEARCH QUESTION: What are the lived experiences of Muslim American (1.5 and 2ⁿᵈ generation) immigrant women in negotiating acculturative processes while living at the intersection of multiple cultures?

PRIMARY GOAL: Describe the lived experience of negotiating acculturative processes as Muslim American immigrant women and the meaning they ascribe to this experience.

Transcript	Question	Response	Notes	Code
AA	starting pretty broad, um can you tell me about your cultures, however you experience them?	I was born in America, so like I am part of like the American culture [Mhm], um, my parents are Indian, and I also really strongly identify with Indian culture [Mhm], and of course, like at the heart of all of that is like being Muslim [Right], so, I am like part of, like, all of those cultures [Mhm] so, like, I at like at school, obviously I like identify more with like, being American and trying to fit in with like, those norms [Yeah], whereas, like with like, my family like, my family friends that we might know through like the mosque or through my parents that would be more of like, Indian/Muslim [Mhm], but obviously like at school like, people know that I'm not like, white American [Right], so, there I kind of identify more as like Indian American [Mhm]. I don't necessarily show like that I'm Muslim because I feel like it's easier for me to be like Indian in an American setting, than it is really like Muslim in an Americans setting.	1.being muslim is at the HEART for her 2.Identity shifts with context! Contextual shifting? Code-switching? 3. Strategic emphasis on one identity because of challenges in being Muslim in American settings	
AA	do you have any examples or stories um, that you could share that would exemplify like your experience of any of those pieces of your culture, or just the way that you've described them so far?	I remember like she would always ask why I was wearing jeans (laughs) on like hot summer days [Ugh (sighs)]. She's like, "Aren't you like so hot [laughs], why are you wearing jeans?" and it didn't even like cross my mind up to that point that like, I felt like probably more hot than like, the other kids did [Right]. And I, I didn't really know like how to explain it. I was just like, yeah, like I just, I prefer jeans.	Being "othered" through physical appearance/choices, such as clothing, struggling to know how to navigate that as a kid, struggling to figure out how to EXPLAIN this	
AA	Can you tell me about how you experience Indian culture in particular?	Um, well, some of the Muslims I know are Indian or like even if they're not Indian like, I also have like Pakistani friends and like, it's pretty similar culturally, like we view, we can talk about like music or movies or stuff, but at school there were like a lot of Indian people I knew, not a lot of Muslim people, at least in my high school, so like we would maybe talk about like we would maybe like joke about like Indian stuff, but like it wasn't really, it didn't really correlate to like my Muslim side [Mhm]	1.Muslims she knows are Indian and Pakistani; but then also knows Indians who are not Muslim, so often connecting with non-Muslim Indians over Indian culture — context influences which part of	

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PHASE 10 DATA ANALYSIS SPREADSHEET (RADAR APPROACH)

Phase 10: AMINAS Data Analysis

4/2/22

What are the lived experiences of Muslim Amer (1.5 & 2nd gen) immigrant women in negotiating acculturative processes while living at the intersection of multiple cultures?

Transcript	Question	Response	Notes	Potential Themes/Codes
A	starting pretty, broad, um can you tell me about your cultures, however you experience them?	…I am part of like the American culture, my parents are Indian, and I also really strongly identify with Indian culture and of course, like at the heart of all of that is like being Muslim	1.being muslim is at the HEART for her	2.Identity-Related: Context-based activation of identities
A		…at school, obviously I like identify more with like, being American and trying to fit in with like, those norms whereas, like with like,,, my family friends that we might know through like the mosque or through my parents that would be more of like, Indian/Muslim but obviously like at school like, people know that I'm not like, white American so, there I kind of identify more as like Indian American…	2.Identity shifts with context! Contextual shifting? Code-switching?	3. Identity-Related: Context-based activation of identities SIG STATEMENT
		I don't necessarily show like that I'm Muslim because I feel like it's easier for me to be like Indian in an American setting, than it is really like Muslim in an American setting…	2 & 3.Code-switch/context-based identity shifts -identity shifts/emphasis on certain identity based on convenience/ease	
A	What is it like for you um, as a woman in the context of Indian culture?	…Indian culture is kind of similar to like American culture in that like, people can be creepy (laughs) so like, with like, when like with the uncles we kind of have to be careful, and you're just like "Hi." Like some uncles will like really just be like, Oh, like, "Hello," you know, I just very like over excited to see you in a way that's like uncomfortable. And you don't know what their intentions are …and that's also part of like being like Muslim, like just try to like, be very calm and not like respond to it.		1.Navigating cultures as a woman: Sexism and patriarchy
A		…um, and also at like school …like some guys were weird because like I think like I'm Indian, but I'm like a lighter skin Indian, so they have this like one guy…like he didn't specify that it was for being lighter skinned, but I feel like that might have been the reason he's like, "Wow, like I think you're like the best looking Indian in the school." … it was like an unsolicited opinion that I've heard very often from this one person…		2.Navigating being other: Experiences of prejudice/discrimination AND navigating cultures as a woman: Sexism and patriarchy
A	What about just your experience of being Muslim or your experience on Islam and Islamic culture like, what's that been like for you just generally?	…when I came to like college, when like, my friends were like openly drinking, and I think like the intersection of being Muslim, but also being American is that even though like I know like that I would never do that, but I have to be accepting of my friends who are… I'm like making an individual choice, but I didn't want to like make my friends feel judged. And also I would lose friends if I were to make them feel judged. So like, it's kind of like a fine line, you have to walk of like being outside of it, but not being critical of it.		Challenges of negotiating cultures
A	What do you feel like it's-it's been like for you to be kind of engaging, or navigating several cultures at once all the time??	And also, yeah, but sometimes I also do kind of have to like push away like parts of my identity, like when I'm with like people who are Indian but not necessarily like muslim, I don't really like talking about being Muslim or I try to like maybe… hiide that I'm Muslim, because like I know that they don't accept the Muslim part of me, but they will accept like the very Indian part of Indian culture.		Identity-Related: Context-based activation of identities - HIDING
A	can you talk about kind of how you manage or cope with some of like the	I think I try to like seek out like Muslim stuff where I go like, at college I didn't become super involved with the MSA, but like I did have like a Muslim friend who I would like talk to occasionally about stuff and like we would kind of like laugh on the side about certain things and I also like try to find like Indian stuff where I go, so like we, I went to like this like, South Asian Society meeting and that was interesting as well…		1.Coping with challenges of negotiating cultures (not highly interesting)

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