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The Lived Experiences of Immigrant Arab Muslim Women in the United States: Implications for Counselors and Other Helping Professionals

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The Lived Experiences of Immigrant Arab Muslim Women in the United States: Implications for
Counselors and Other Helping Professionals

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
University of New Orleans
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy
In
Counselor Education

by

Iman En-Nabut

B.S., Tulane University, 2000
M.Ed., University of New Orleans, 2003

May 2007

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ABSTRACT

As the demographic landscape of the United States continues to change, counselors along with other helping professionals are going to be challenged to find ways to meet the varying personal, social, and academic needs of an increasingly multiracial, multi-religious, and multicultural population. This study was an attempt to document and explain through an ethnographic study the experiences of six immigrant Arab Muslim women, ranging in age from 21 to 35, living in the United States. Data were gathered in the participants' natural setting, utilizing ethnographic interviews. The general research question was "What are the lived experiences of immigrant Arab Muslim women in the United States?" Secondary questions were:

- (a) How do Arab American Muslim women perceive themselves culturally?
- (b) How do Arab American Muslim women describe their specific cultural experiences?
- (c) What barriers, if any, do Arab American Muslim women experience in their daily lives?
- (d) What do Arab American Muslim women describe as their support system?
- And, (e) What are Arab American Muslim women's viewpoints on seeking counseling?

The findings reveal that the six immigrant Arab Muslim women participants have difficulty assimilating in a society that differs in values and beliefs from their culture of origin. From a multicultural and feminist point of view, I found that the experiences of the Muslim women can lead to a counseling curriculum that educates and informs in-coming counselors and encourages the seasoned mental health professionals to target their services toward this group. Support from friends and family or lack thereof, played a major role in the women's integration. By learning about the experiences in their day to day lives, what they need, how they feel and react to those experiences, counselors and other helping professionals are more informed and better equipped to recruit, retain, and assist Arab American Muslim women in counseling.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Rose Hamdan is as American as they come. She drives a Ford station wagon, leads a local Girl Scout troop, shops at The Gap and just attended her 10-year high school reunion.

From this brief description of Rose, readers may have formed a particular picture of her in their minds. If they were told, however, that Rose Hamdan wears a head scarf in keeping with her Muslim faith, that picture might change drastically. She's Muslim? Images of suppressed, meek, black-enshrouded women submitting to the demands of their dominating husbands may come to mind. Because Rose is a Muslim woman, it is difficult not to have some preconceptions of her which are based on the treatment of women in some Islamic countries and images portrayed by the Western media.

Rose is a Muslim woman originally from Palestine. She has been having marital issues resulting from financial hardships. She has three children (two boys and a girl). Recently, she has been feeling sad and unappreciated. She has a degree in biology and thinks it would be a great time to go back to work, now that her children are older. Before having children, she worked at a retail shop and really enjoyed it. Her husband believes it is too dangerous to go back to work and that it is better for her to stay at home with the children. She is seeking counseling for the first time.

Considering the recent tragedies that have occurred (e.g. ,World Trade Center bombing, September 11, Iraq war, and the most recent Israeli/Lebanese incidents), this is a very difficult time for Muslims living here in the United States, particularly for women dressed in *Hijab*. The slanted views and opinions presented in national newspapers and other media have serious counter-transference implications for counselors. Can Rose receive the appropriate help she seeks from someone outside her culture and faith? Will her ideas and beliefs be respected?

This example suggests the significance of this study. My interest in studying Arab Muslim women is two-fold. First is to shed light on a population that is often misunderstood in United States society. Second, I wanted to show how socially-based misunderstandings can negatively affect the counseling process if the counselor is not suitably aware, and finally, I hoped to resolve internal identity conflicts of my own. This study was a means of growth for me and the participants. My hope is that by reading the participants' stories, this study serves as a means of growth for the counseling profession and other helping professionals interested in working with this group.

An overview of the study is presented in this chapter. The first and second sections provide the purpose and rationale for the study. The conceptual framework is discussed in the third section. The research questions are introduced in section four. The final three sections present an overview of the methodology, limitations, and the definitions of terms.

Purpose of the study

The United States has one of the most ethnically diverse populations in the world, and minority groups comprise an increasing portion of this country's population (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1990, 2000). Members of racial/ethnic minority groups are expected to comprise more than half of the United States population within the next 20 years (Fujimoto, 1998). Over three

million Arab American Muslims live in the United States, and more than half are women (Nassar-McMillan, 2003). Although some minority groups have been researched extensively, Arab American Muslims' participation in research studies has been minimal. As a result, little is known about this group. The purpose of this ethnographic study was to describe the lived experiences of Arab American Muslim women so that counselors and other helping professionals are better able to provide services to this group.

I decided to conduct research with this population because there is a strong need for increased understanding of Arab American Muslims, particularly Arab American Muslim women. Since September 11, 2001, Arab American Muslim men have been under a microscope, their every move watched and recorded for various reasons. Yet, Arab American Muslim women also are suffering from racial slurs, profiling, and discrimination. Arab American Muslim women are living a life in silence with a sense of detachment and alienation from both societies, East and West (Nadir, 2003).

Although Arab Muslim women share certain characteristics, they are far from a homogeneous group (Nassar-McMillan, 2003). When faced with a multicultural encounter, counselors may rely on their default mode of thinking, their conditioning (Vontress, 2002). This type of thinking may stem from family of origin issues or textbook knowledge. It is important to note that there are distinct differences within groups, including Arab Muslim women (Vontress).

Because this study focused solely on Arab Muslim women, it was important to understand the potential significance of Islam in their lives. The Qur'an and Arab culture established that women must be protected and cherished, and they must be obedient and committed to the will of their parents (Hijazi, Tatar, & Gati, 2004). For many, even at a young age, Islam is a total way of life integrated within their daily activities. They define themselves as

Muslim first and then as American or by their culture of origin (Nassar-McMillan, 2003). Islam and being Muslim is their entire way of life. In fact, one study indicated that Arab Americans equate their life satisfaction in the United States with their religiosity (Faragallah, Schumm, & Webb, 1997). This helped me think about my own experience growing up as a Muslim female in American society. To this day (after 20 years in America), I refer to myself as Muslim first, Palestinian second, and last as American. This is used as a means of self-definition and of establishing a specific identity; it is very apparent that Arab Muslim women are multidimensional creatures and that many variables come into play when forming our identity (culture, religion, gender). A certain degree of awareness is necessary to truly define the self; only when this is accomplished can one truly achieve inherent liberation. For some, this may never be reached.

As Arab American Muslim women get older, they may begin to face social and emotional challenges unknown to many groups. On one hand, they would like to maintain their cultural capital as Arab American Muslim females, but on the other hand, they feel the pressure to “do what it takes to fit in.” One of the major social challenges they face is dating. Dating is forbidden in Islam. Another salient issue faced by Arab American Muslim women is isolation, and having no real sense of belonging. For most, this relates to the fact that there are very few Arab American Muslim women with whom to associate, but even more significant, there are very few Arab American Muslim women whom one can trust. Dress and physical appearance is another important social element that affects the way these women adjust to American life. Some limited knowledge about the experiences and/or challenges of younger Arab American Muslim females exists (Nadir, 2003). What happens to these women as they become educated and reside in America longer?

Rationale for the Study

Gaining knowledge about Arab American Muslim women is essential, as the Muslim community is growing throughout the United States (Ahmed, 1993). Muslim women are overcoming various challenges as they endeavor to respond to changing social conditions as an underserved minority and religious community (Saliba, 2002). Counselors may be called upon to assist these women with social services and social justice issues and will need to become familiar with the beliefs, traditions, and practices of this growing population in an American context.

As Denzin (1997) noted, profound changes are occurring in our society. We are becoming more multinational and including more cultural groups in our changing demographics. These factors have created a system of power, prestige, privilege, and authority that serves to marginalize individuals of different socio-races and ethnicities in our society. Interest in these groups and the issues they present has begun to surface among educators, policy makers, and researchers (Luna, 1993; Mays, 2003; Nadir, 2003; Nassar-McMillan, 2003; Zentani, 1986). I believe a thorough qualitative approach, ethnography, will best depicted the depth of the needs and desires of Arab American Muslim women as they related to receiving assistance, services, and basic understanding from others.

Conceptual Framework

Feminist theory evolved from the feminist movement of the 1960s. The feminist movement allowed women to actively articulate their dissatisfaction with their second class citizenship in a patriarchal social system (Herlihy & McCollum, 2003). As the feminist movement grew, many women formed groups for the purpose of consciousness-raising and to discuss their lack of collective voice in politics, the work place, economics, education, and other significant socio-political arenas (Kaschak, 1992; Kirsch, 1987). As the

therapeutic value of consciousness-raising groups became evident, and the need for more structured groups grew, the 1970s marked the beginning of feminist counseling as a recognized approach to psychotherapy (Enns, 1997). This early phase of feminist counseling was predicated on the assumptions that women had shared experiences of oppression and victimization and that, for counseling to be effective, a proactive approach was needed.

Since the late 1980s, there has been a movement within feminist theory that acknowledges feminine potential, focuses on equality, and acknowledges that many shared problems of women are created by a society that does not value them or allow them to exercise their free will (Enns, 1993). It is essential to recognize that women and men are socialized differently and that gender role expectations begin to influence human development from the moment the child is born (Herlihy & McCollum, 2003). This was quite evident with my Arab Muslim women participants. They believed in the usefulness of and need for gender roles.

Feminist research recognizes gender and gender relations as social constructions. Goffman (1987) stressed “sex-class” as “a category that is purely sociological...and not...biological and gender as a way of characterizing society” (p. 22). The fact that human experience is gendered is central to feminist theory, which is grounded in women’s lives and aims to analyze the role and meaning of gender in their lives and in society. Feminist research aims to illuminate aspects of gender relations, the interaction between the individual and society in the construction of gender, and the dynamics of power relations and in particular power inequalities between women and men (Personal Narratives Group, 1989). Utilizing a feminist perspective, I made every effort to conduct interviews in a way that did not further oppress or victimize the participants. This was ensured by having them listen to the audio tapes and read the transcripts; by doing so, I actively involved the participants in the research process as much as possible.

New Para feminist researchers work within the wider women's liberation movement and toward the overall aim of all women being free from any type of oppression. Traditional research methods advise against conducting research in which the researcher is emotionally involved, in the assumption that this will minimize the supposed objectivity of the study (Agar, 1986; Creswell, 1998). Throughout the entire process, I, on the other hand, felt that a close and equal relationship to the research participants led to an acquisition of more significant data. The interviews gave a deeper, more complex knowledge of the issues. Feminism is primarily a movement for social change and only by delving under the surface can I discover what needs to be changed and how it can be changed.

The overall goal of feminist researchers is to seek to make visible the lived experiences of women. This was accomplished in the present study by utilizing an ethnographic research design. Smith (1987) argued that feminist research should never lose sight of women as actively constructing, as well as interpreting, the social processes and realities that constitute their everyday lives. Smith examined how the production of discourses and ideologies colonizes the material realities of women's lives. Many researchers, especially men, have failed to recognize that gender makes a difference in ethnography (Lent, 1994). Some reasons for the apparent dismissal of gender from ethnographic studies are that feministic ethnography is considered less objective (associated with emotions), confessional literature, outside the generic "he," and outside the gender neutral "neopositivist paradigm" (Lent). The experiences of oppression due to sexism, to which both researcher and researched are subject, can create a unique type of insight and an ability to decipher "official" explanations. These insights taught me not only about gender relations, but also about society as a whole.

Research Questions

The research questions that guided this study could not be thoroughly addressed through quantitative methodology. A limited number of quantitative studies have investigated the experiences of Arab Muslims in American universities (Luna, 1993; Zentani, 1986). Several qualitative studies were found that examined the experiences of Arab Muslim women living in America (Abraham, 1989; Boosahda, 2003; Cainkar, 1988; Mays, 2003; Shakir, 1997), but most were rich in historical data and limited in scope when describing the lives of this invisible group. Mays' (2003) qualitative study, for example, examined Muslim students' experiences, in a university setting. This research study documented and interpreted the lived experiences of immigrant Arab Muslim women in the United States, with the highest degree of collaboration among participants, utilizing an ethnographic approach.

The aim of this study was to gain an understanding of the lives of six young immigrant Arab Muslim women living in the United States. The general research question was "What are the lived experiences of young, immigrant Arab Muslim women in the United States?" The following sub-questions were addressed: (a) How do Arab American Muslim women perceive themselves culturally? (b) How do Arab American Muslim women describe their specific cultural experiences? (c) What barriers, if any, do Arab American Muslim women experience in their daily lives? (d) What do Arab American Muslim women describe as their support system? (e) What are Arab American Muslim women's viewpoints on seeking counseling?

Method

Utilizing a feminist ethnography, I explored the daily experiences of Arab American Muslim women, applying qualitative research methods. As stated previously, the literature to

date has offered little information concerning the lives of immigrant Arab American Muslim women. For that purpose, Spradley (1979) suggested that participants be examined within their social settings and be observed in their daily activities. In an effort to learn more about Arab American Muslim women, it was necessary to see them in relation to the everyday pattern of life. As such, a qualitative approach was especially appropriate for this study. I chose this approach for several reasons. Arab American Muslim women were not likely to provide responses about their lived experience in questionnaires. Second, much of the information required could not be gathered through the use of questionnaires. Finally, a study such as this was best undertaken in the participants' natural environment.

Ethnography was most appropriate for this study because it was the principal means by which feminists have sought to achieve the active involvement of their participants in the construction of data about their lives (Graham, 1984). Ethnography provided a way of giving these women greater visibility, not only within their group, but also in society, by documenting the women's own accounts of their lives.

Spradley (1979) stated that the essential core of ethnography is the "disciplined study of what the world is like to people who have learned to see, hear, speak, think, and act in ways that are different." Rather than studying people, ethnography means learning from people. As a participant-observer, I saw the lives of these women through their eyes: what life was like for them, and how they made meaning of their world. Ethnography documented the existence of alternative realities and described these realities in their own terms (Spradley). Data were gathered in the participants' natural setting by using demographic questionnaires, semi-structured interviews in combination with participant journaling, and observations of members' daily activities and interactions.

Participants

As a member for 17 years of the small Muslim community in a parish in southeastern Louisiana, I am familiar with the families who reside there. The six participants in this study were immigrant Arab American Muslim women between the ages of 21 and 35. I chose this age range because it is typically around this time that Arab Muslim women become a little less dependent on family and begin to think independently about their purpose and their direction in life. Research shows that the longer persons reside in America, the more likely they will assimilate to Western culture (Mays, 2003; Zentani, 1986).

The participants of this study included Maiba (21- year-old Palestinian college student), Zeina (22-year-old Iraqi college student), Samia (27-year-old Palestinian), Manza (33-year-old Egyptian), Aysha (35-year-old Palestinian), and Fatmeh (29-year-old Palestinian). The results of Mays' and Zentani's studies could not necessarily be applied to Maiba, Manza, and Aysha who gripped tightly to their culture and religion. All the participants have resided in America for at least five years. Initially, the goal was to have the participants all come from a middle-class background [describing people who have a degree of economic independence, but not a great deal of social influence or power in their society (Baker, 2003)]. I decided on middle-class SES because I did not want economic status to be a confounding variable. This was not possible considering the demographics of the area and the limited willingness to participate in this study. Two of my participants came from a wealthy background (upper SES); two were from middle-class backgrounds; and two came from a very low SES. Economic status proved to be a significant variable in describing the participants' experiences in the United States. I decided on five years as the minimum for residency so as to avoid major language and other barriers to socialization.

In the proposal stage of this study, I anticipated that the participants would be of Egyptian, Palestinian, and Syrian descent, considering the demographics in Louisiana. I also anticipated that I would have the most difficulty acquiring participants from a Palestinian background, considering my ethnicity. This proved to be inaccurate. Initially, I believed Arabs from a background different than my own, would be eager to participate and more forthcoming, but the opposite resulted. I had extreme difficulty connecting with Egyptians, Syrians, and Iraqis to explain the purpose of my study. This resulted in having a limited (in number and diversity) sample. The study included four Palestinian women, one Iraqi, and one Egyptian woman.

Most of the participants regularly attended religious gatherings. This was another important criterion for selection. All but two of the participants attended the same religious class, yet they were not all conservative Muslims (e.g., dress, thoughts). As such, they had a similar background (baseline), but they differed in experiences and perspectives. The gatherings proved to be helpful because trust and rapport between the women already existed, prior to the interviews. This type of sampling was purposeful because I intentionally selected the participants as a means of providing information-rich data. I thought my participants were a homogenous sample because Islam united them, disregarding their other differences. I was reminded by their stories that this was not the case. The participants may have shared a common religion, but they were not homogenous. It is important for counselors and other professionals to remember this when working with this group.

Data Collection

In order to gain access to the participants, I contacted the gatekeeper, A.H., a Palestinian American Muslim female who was very well-respected in her community. She held religious

gatherings at her home every Saturday from 12 pm to 4 pm. Although I was not a regular attendee, I have attended several of the gatherings and I have been introduced to most of the current members. I made contact with A. H. and asked to meet with her before the gathering. At that time, I explained the purpose of my study, and provided her with an introduction letter along with a consent form.

Observations

To make sense of the immigrant subculture, I adopted a participant-observer approach to gathering data. Marshall and Rossman (1989) posited that participation-observation demands first-hand involvement in the social world chosen for study. Participating in the religious gatherings and attending lunch with two of the women who would agree to participate in my study was the first-hand involvement that allowed me to hear, see, and begin to experience reality as the participants did. This technique for gathering data is basic to qualitative research studies.

Interviews

The research design included three rounds of audio-taped, semi-structured interviews with six participants. Each interview lasted approximately 90 minutes. All raw data obtained via this method were transcribed, coded, and analyzed in a manner consistent with ethnography procedures. The rationale behind this ethnographic study, as suggested by Barritt (1986) in Creswell (1998), was to heighten awareness of experiences which have been forgotten and overlooked. By heightening awareness and creating dialogue, this study leads to a better understanding of the way things appear to someone else and through that insight leads to improvements in practice (Creswell).

Demographic Questionnaire

The demographic questionnaire requested information including participant's name (pseudonym was used), age, race, ethnicity, birthplace, length of residency in America, marital status, socio-economic status based on family income, and level of education. The answers proved helpful in noting patterns and themes among participants (such as themes relating to gender and class).

Data Analysis

Spradley (1979) defined ethnographic analysis as a search for the parts of a culture, the relationships among the parts, and their relationships to the whole. In this study, data analysis was ongoing as I looked for the parts and relationships significant in the lives of Arab American Muslim women. I portrayed the words of the women as extensively as possible. Initially, the plan was to utilize Spradley's (1979) approach to ethnographic analysis. Spradley identified four kinds of ethnographic analysis: domain, taxonomic, componential, and themes. I found it difficult to utilize Spradley's (1979) approach for two reasons. My understanding of the four types of analyses was limited. Second, I felt my need to utilize the four types of analysis forced participants in specific categories. This was not only unethical, but I also felt it distracted me from the data. . Instead, data analysis was guided by the work of Van Manen (1990). Van Manen suggested considering text (data) "in terms of meaning units, structures of meaning, or themes" (p.78). I approached the data from different directions to uncover themes.

After transcription, my first steps included placing my observations and comments on color-coded index cards, assigning a specific color to each participant. I then focused on reading the entire text of all the interview transcripts, observations, and documents to learn meanings from the reading. During the reading, notes were made on the text to record potential themes that

appeared in the data. I also read the text another time and highlighted portions that seemed relevant to the categories that I chose from the review. During this detailed reading, I looked for meaning in each sentence or cluster of words. The highlighted portions were also labeled to provide a concise statement of meaning. A third selective reading was done to look for specific instances of themes that were prevalent. To further develop and unite the themes, I created classification schemes.

The coding process was tedious and it involved bringing together and analyzing all the data including all factors (social class, level of education, marital status) associated with finding the themes. At various times during the analysis, the developing themes became the focus of questions in follow-up interviews. Such a recursive process allowed me to determine whether the theme was essential to the meaning or incidental. Adding to this process, I went to peers for a different perspective on my speculative themes. I discussed the themes with a friend from the college of education and a professor whose multicultural experience was very much appreciated. I used this to expand, modify, reevaluate, or eliminate a theme.

Definitions of Terms

Arab: A member of a Semitic people inhabiting Arabia, whose language and Islamic religion spread widely throughout the Middle East and northern Africa from the seventh century.

A member of an Arabic-speaking people (American Heritage® Dictionary, 2003).

Arab American Muslim women: Muslim (denoted from birth) females from an Arab country (where Arabic is the main language), who have resided in America for at least five years.

Hijab: an Arabic word that describes Muslim women's entire dress code, which includes a veil. It is adopted at puberty - an age when Muslims say children should become accountable for their actions. The term '*Hijab*' itself includes not only dress and covering the body, but methods of

behavior before members of the same and/or opposite sex, promoting privacy for females and prohibiting loose intermingling between males and females, and thereby encouraging modesty, decency, and chastity (*Islamic Dictionary*).

Immigrant: a person who comes to a country to take up permanent residence (American Heritage® Dictionary, 2003).

Islam: The word "Islam" means "peace" in Arabic; Islam is a monotheistic religion characterized by the acceptance of the doctrine of submission to God and to Muhammad, (PBWH)as the chief and last prophet of God (*Islamic Dictionary*).

Middle-class: A social and economic class composed of those more prosperous than the poor, or lower class, and less wealthy than the upper class. Middle-class people have a degree of economic independence, but not a great deal of social influence or power in their society (Baker, 2003).

Muslims: The people who practice Islam.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, a review of the literature relevant to the study is presented. In the first section, an introduction is presented of Arab immigrants, Islam, Muslims in the United States and, more specifically, Arab Muslim women in the United States. This information establishes the significance of the study. The second section introduces Rose and the multiple cultural identities of Arab Muslim women working from a feminist and womanist framework. In the third section, an overview of multicultural competence and ethical counseling practice is presented for professional counselors when working with clients. The final section includes relevant research studies on similar groups, and discusses the need for an ethnographic study.

Arab Immigrants

Arabs, people who speak Arabic as their first language, number more than 200 million worldwide (American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee [ADC], 2005). The “Arab world” consists of 22 countries in the Middle East and North Africa where Arabic is the principal (although not the only) language spoken (Arab American Institute Foundation [AAIF], 2002). Arabs are united by language, culture, and history, but they are religiously diverse: most Arabs are Muslims, but there are also millions of Christian Arabs and thousands of Jewish Arabs.

Arabic-speaking people have come to the United States in several major waves, beginning in the late 19th century. Although they share a common linguistic and cultural heritage, Arab Americans are a highly diverse group. The majority of Arab Americans today are of Lebanese, Syrian, Egyptian, or Palestinian descent (AAIF, 2002). The women in the present study are from

Palestinian, Egyptian or Iraqi descent. About three-quarters of Arab Americans are Christians (Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant) (Arab American Institute Foundation), many descended from the first major wave that consisted mainly of Syrian and Lebanese merchants (AAIF). Only about a quarter of the Arab American population is Muslim. However, a second wave of Arab immigration that started after World War II is predominantly Muslim, making Muslims the fastest-growing segment of the Arab American community (Badry, 1994).

Although the 2000 census reported about 1.25 million Americans of Arab ancestry, other researchers put the total at around 3 million (Arab American Institute Foundation, 2002). The vast majority (82%) of persons of Arab descent in the United States are U.S. citizens, and 63% were born in this country (AAIF, 2002); contrary to the stereotypes, Arab Americans are by no means completely or even mainly an immigrant group.

The Arab American population is overwhelmingly urban, and Washington, D.C., is one of the top five metropolitan areas where this population resides; the others are Los Angeles, Detroit, New York-New Jersey, and Chicago (AAIF, 2002). As a group, Arab Americans are relatively young, have education and income above the U.S. average, and work mainly in white-collar occupations (Samhan, 2002).

Islam

Although Arab Muslims are not a homogeneous group (coming from many countries in the Middle East), they share a bond. Islam is what binds Arab Muslims together (whether they are practicing Muslims or not) in unknown territory (e.g., USA). Hence, becoming more knowledgeable about Islam is the key to gaining entry in this oftentimes guarded group.

It has long been believed by those who practice Islam, and those who study the religion, that Islam has not fared well in the perceptions of many people who stand outside the religion. Islam is viewed by many people as a radical religion. Those individuals who follow Islam often are viewed as violent people willing to do anything to advance the cause of the religion. Bloom and Blair (2000) stated that

To most Americans at the end of the second millennium, the word “Islam” evokes a range of negative images, from turbaned terrorists to stern faced mullahs exhorting the faithful to shun the temptations of Western civilization. News reports from Jerusalem and Gaza hint that the Muslims there are somehow essentially different from “us.” The constant barrage of inflammatory news reports, designed to make news even when there isn’t any, has colored Western perceptions of a faith followed by over a billion, approximately one fifth of the earth’s population. Even in the United States, Islam is the fastest growing religion, and there are now more American Muslims (over four million) than Episcopalians (p.11).

It is easy for the actions of a few members of a religion to color the entire religion in a negative light. The actions of a radical minority are exacerbated by constant media coverage that often is filled with misrepresentations of the religion. This was evident in the media coverage during the months following the terror attacks of September 11, 2001. During this time, it dawned on me that, in all of the media coverage that I had ever seen or heard that pertained to Islam, I had never heard or seen a positive report. The focus of most of the media coverage pertaining to Islam focused solely on the violence that was done by Muslims in the Middle East or abroad. Islam is much more than the Arabs and much more than what is portrayed in the media. According to Bogle (1998):

While the Middle East, where it originated, continues to provide the impetus to Islam, more than half of the world’s Muslims reside outside of that region. And although Islam’s association with Arabs is well founded, it is in fact misleading in modern times. For instance, almost as many Muslims live in Indonesia as in all the Arabic-speaking countries combined. More Muslims live in Iran and Pakistan than in all of the adjacent Arabic-speaking countries (p.xi).

In its religious context, the word *Islam* refers to the complete submission and obedience to God (Allah). Mawdudi (1980) writes that “According to the Qur’an (the Holy Book for Muslims), among every people and in all ages there have been good and righteous people who possessed this attribute – and all of them were and are Muslims” (p. 17).

Contrary to popular belief, Muslims do not believe that Islam was founded by the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). Muhammad (pbuh) is believed to have been the prophet that God (Allah) raised up to teach God’s words and to live an exemplary life. Muhammad (pbuh) is considered to be historical proof of what man or woman can accomplish in the realm of virtue and excellence. Islam as a religion is believed to have been founded by God, back in the days of Adam, and is thought to have always existed in one form or another. In this view of the founding of Islam, the literal concept of submission to God is not new and predates the birth of Muhammad (pbuh) in 570 A.D.

Bloom and Blair (1989) made a very important point regarding the Arabic name for God (Allah). They contended that the media reinforce contemporary stereotypes that make a distinction between what Muslims believe and what is believed by other monotheists. “Allah is simply the Arabic name for the one God worshiped by all monotheists” (p.12). By using the Arabic name, rather than the common English one, Western writers inadvertently create a difference rather than underscore the similarities and relationships between the great monotheistic religions. Muslims do not see any difference between Allah and the God whom Christians and Jews worship.

The most common understanding of the founding of Islam is that it came into existence in Mecca back in the seventh century A.D. It is believed that, in the year 610 A.D., at the age of forty, Muhammad (pbuh) received his call to prophecy during the Month of Ramadan. While

meditating, Muhammad was informed by the Archangel Gabriel that he was the Messenger of God. Fearing that he was becoming insane or taken over by an evil spirit, Muhammad (pbuh) contemplated throwing himself off the mountain. When the evil spirit moved closer and repeated the message, Muhammad (pbuh) was reassured of his revelation (Bogle, p.7).

In an act of submission to the will of Allah, Muslims perform obligatory duties of worship, which are known as the Five Pillars of Islam. Included in these Five Pillars are the a) ritual observance of prayer, b) fasting, c) alms giving, and d) pilgrimage to Mecca, all of which are embraced by e) the simple profession of faith, the *shahada*, “There is no God but Allah and Muhammad (pbuh) is the Messenger of Allah” (Waines, 1995, p.89). Each pillar has importance in Islam and helps to sustain the Muslim’s life of worship to Allah.

The *shahadah*, one of those pillars, is the only profession necessary to become a Muslim. Although the process of becoming a Muslim might seem oversimplified and unsophisticated to people who come from some other religious traditions, Muslims believe strongly in the *shahadah*.

Prayer (*Salat*), according to Zepp (2000), “is pure devotion; it is unconditional praise of God where nothing is asked for, nothing is sought but God alone” (p.80). Before salat begins, ceremonial bathing occurs (for men, this can occur in the forecourt of the mosque; for women, this usually occurs at home). Without the ritual washing, a symbolic restoration of the believer to original purity and balance, the salat is not valid (Zepp).

Fasting (*sawm*) is done during the month of Ramadan by healthy adults from sunrise to sunset. During this time, one must abstain from all bodily pleasures (e.g., food, drink, and sexual relations). The month is important because it serves as a period of reflection and spiritual discipline, of physical endurance and sharing with others (Waines, 1995).

Almsgiving (*zakat*) is an example of Islam's concern for the poor. Zepp (2000) indicated that it is "a kind of social security system and organized welfare program which helps a Muslim society share its wealth and maintain an equitable society" (p.89). Zakat is a tax of 2.5 percent of one's annual savings- what remains after personal and business expenses (Zepp).

The fifth pillar is the pilgrimage to Mecca (*hajj*). For those Muslims whose personal means permit, the trip to Mecca is required at least once in a lifetime. Hajj is a return to one's origin, to one's roots, to the beginning (Zepp, 2000).

There are various sects within Islam, which arose after the death of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh): Orthodox Muslims, Sunni Muslims (centered in Iraq), and Shi'ite Muslims who came to rise following disputes over political leadership (Ahmed, 1988). Sunnis, according to Denny (1987), represent the majority of Muslims, who believe that any good Muslim can be a leader. The Shi'ite, which literally means party of Ali, believe that Muhammad (pbuh) designated his son-in-law, Ali, to succeed him as leader of the *Umma* (community) of Islam. The Shi'ite community numbers up to 20 % of the total Muslim community (Denny).

The Qur'an (which means reading) is the Holy Scripture of Islam. It was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) by the angel Gabriel back in 610 A.D.. The Qur'an is considered to be a dialogue between God and humanity (Ahmed, 1988). It is a book of about 300 pages divided into 114 chapters called surahs. The tone of the Qur'an is somber and meditative. Zepp (2000) talks about the Qur'an as a "holistic experience" for Muslims. He suggested that:

Muslims experience the Qur'an; they do not simply read it or study it, although both are stressed. Their experience is a holistic one- intellectual, auditory, visual, and devotional...The Qur'an is important not simply because it tells us everything we need to know about God and human nature...What distinguishes the Qur'an is that it is the presence of God in our midst (p.43).

Islam is the second largest religion in the world behind Christianity (Hunter, 2000). Some 18% (1.3 billion) of the world's population practices Islam as their religion of choice, while Christianity has an estimated 2 billion adherents (Hunter). The Middle East is considered the Islamic world because of the large concentration of Muslims in the region. It is possible to find Muslims living in many countries outside of the Middle East. In fact, one would be hard-pressed to find places in the world where there are no Muslims. Muslims are everywhere, representing a broad ethnic cross-section, and every color known to humanity. One cannot tell a Muslim by appearance, except when he or she is wearing some type of traditional garb (hijab).

Muslims in the United States

Islam and those practicing Islam (Muslims) are not new to the United States; in fact, Muslims' history in America goes as far back as the African slave trade to the New World (Diouf, 1998). U.S. Muslims were estimated to number around three million in 1985 (Mead, 1985), and by 1990 the number had grown to more than six million (1990 World Almanac). These numbers emphasize the need for educators and counselors to take notice of the needs and concerns of Muslims (Banks, 1997).

The majority of Muslims in the United States are immigrants or descendants of immigrants, not only from Arab countries but also from places like Pakistan and Eastern Europe. In addition, a substantial number of African Americans and a smaller number of White Americans have converted to some form of Islam. The numbers are growing rapidly. Yet Muslims are unknown by many Americans or are classed indiscriminately with "terrorists," an association understandably resented by American followers of Islam.

Hassan (2000), in her book, *American Muslims*, provides a description of American Muslims. She stated:

Some of us are from the Middle East and the Far East, from Africa, and, like my family, from the Indian subcontinent, even Muslims from Vietnam and Cambodia. A majority of us are African-American Muslims, as well as Native American and Hispanic, who have been here for generations- some as recent as last year from Bosnia and some maybe even before Columbus discovered America. Everyone in America has a dream, right? The dream of six million of us is to be American and be Muslim, and we're doing it... We speak different languages and have different cultures. Even though we're not all alike, we are all Muslim and American (p.4).

One indicator of just how much Islam has become a part of the American fabric is the large number of books published on Islam in America. Smith's (1999) *Islam in America*, Haddad's (1991) *The Muslims of America*, Haddad and Esposito (1998) *Muslims on the Americanization Path*, and Haddad and Smith (1993) *Mission to America* are examples of these texts. Despite the solid increase in the number of Muslims who call the United States home and the increase in literature on Muslims in America, the experiences of Muslim women in the United States have not been studied.

Arab Muslim women

Who are Arab Muslim women and what do they experience in the United States?

Three anecdotal cases are provided below to illustrate true stories of real women who continue to suffer in silence.

Enas

Enas married a man named Mohamed. They were married for several years. Throughout this marriage, Mohamed abused Enas verbally and physically. Enas often was beaten by her husband. When Enas attempted to speak with her local Muslim community leader, she was made to feel that the abuse was her fault: if she was a better wife, Mohamed would not have to beat her. She also was told not to discuss her marital problems with other people, and that it was

important for her to stay married at all costs to preserve the family. Mohamed would quote the Quran to justify his abuse. As a result of being told by her local Muslim leader that the abuse was justified and having the Quran quoted to her to reinforce it, Enas began to believe it was justified. She was abused for years. Finally, she feared for her life and she left her home and her husband, seeking refuge in a local (non-Muslim) battered women's shelter. There she received the assistance that she needed to put her life back together. Mohamed was convicted in U.S. court for spousal battery. When Enas appeared at Muslim functions, she was shunned. She was viewed as a woman who had left her husband for no reason. Mohamed, on the other hand, was viewed as the victim of a broken marriage and as a victim of the U.S. criminal justice system. He was greeted by the Muslim community with open arms. Enas found no support from the Muslim community. She continued to go to non-Muslim agencies for support, and she finally stopped attending Muslim functions.

Enas's story, unfortunately, is not an uncommon one in the United States. Victims of domestic violence have little support from the Muslim community, and the support they do receive, while well-intentioned, is often unorganized and ineffective. The lives of domestic violence victims are often in danger, and their only recourse is to turn to non-Muslim organizations that are prepared to deal with this issue.

The story of Shereen and Jumana shows the abuse of the polygamy system in Islam.

Shereen and Jumana

Shereen married Majed under the laws of the United States and the state in which they lived, and under Islamic law. Majed later took a second wife, Jumana. However, Majed could not marry Jumana under U.S. law because he was already married to Shereen, and polygamy is

illegal in the United States. So, Majed married Jumana under a 'supposed' Islamic tradition which includes simply a marriage proposal and an acceptance of that proposal in front of witnesses. Jumana, the second wife, who was a convert to Islam, learned Islam mostly from Majed and he convinced her that they did not need to be married under U.S. law; Islam would sufficiently protect her rights. While this is true in the theoretical sense, in the United States, there is no framework to enforce that belief.

Majed had children with both of his wives--his first wife Shereen and his second wife Jumana. Both marriages failed. Shereen and Majed divorced. Majed refused to pay any support to Shereen or their children. Majed was obligated under Islamic law to do these things but he refused, and Shereen, not living in an Islamic state, had no recourse other than the laws of the U.S. But, thankfully, Shereen was married to Majed under U.S. law and could take him to court. Jumana, on the other hand, had no legal recourse. Majed shirked his responsibilities under Islamic law, refusing to give her or their children anything, even though he had assured her before the marriage that he would. Jumana could not do anything under U.S. laws because they were not legally married. Jumana was not able to get financial support from Majed because there was no legal institution compelling him to comply with Islamic law.

Finally, is the story of Heba. While her situation is not as physically or financially serious, it still is extremely emotionally harmful, and it is very common.

Heba

Heba is a university student. She is very active in her student government on campus. She has formed coalitions with other student groups and they do relief work for Lebanon, Palestine, Iraq, and other causes. She was elected to the student senate at her university. She wants to

organize similar relief efforts in her mosque, in her local Muslim community, and in other mosques in the area so that she can reach the larger Muslim population. She wants to post flyers and information on the walls in her mosque, but she cannot get to the men's section. She can distribute the information only to women, many of whom do not come to this mosque because their facilities are less than adequate or desirable. Heba does not have a brother, father, or husband to access the men's side for her when she needs to post information. She has approached men to ask them to help her. Many of them ignore her and leave, but on occasion, a man has helped her to post flyers and information on the walls. She cannot do this consistently because the next time she goes, she cannot find the same man, and she has to go through the same thing again and again.

She cannot make any announcements at the mosque about the work that she is doing. She wants to make an announcement after the Friday prayer, but she is told she cannot because she is a woman. She is getting fed up and she wants to make a change. Elections at this mosque are upcoming, and she wants to run for the board because it is a direct way to get involved and to make changes. She is, however, told she cannot run for the board because she is a woman. She is also told that she can join the women's committee and organize *Eid* (holiday) carnivals for the children and prepare *iftar* (breakfast) during Ramadan. As an activist, Heba is extremely frustrated. She, therefore, stops going to the mosque because she knows that she can do more through the non-Muslim human rights groups at her university.

As shown by Heba's story, Muslim American women are regularly excluded from leadership positions in the mosques and in Islamic centers. Women are allowed to participate only in certain areas, such as preparing food and organizing *Eid* festivities. Women are absent from educational or spiritual roles, unless they are teaching other women or children. Within the

centers, women are often relegated to areas with poor sound systems, or none at all, or noisy makeshift childcare areas. They are stuck in back rooms next to the bathrooms, and wherever they are put, they still cannot interact with the speaker or ask questions and have their voices heard.

Arab American Muslim women are not just excluded from leadership positions, but they are also excluded from mosques completely. This exclusion can be overt when they are told "you cannot go to the mosque, this is a men's mosque," or it can be subtle, when the facilities provided are inadequate and the treatment they receive is subordinate. All of this exclusion has some basis in the teachings of Islam, but not to the extreme that religious officials take it. It results from a poor interpretation of Arab culture and tradition (Bloom & Blair, 1989).

Perhaps no other cultural area on earth compares with the Arab-Muslim Middle East, in particular, and the Islamic world in general, in terms of the perceived low status of women. In popular images, the Arab-Muslim woman is perceived as veiled, passive, docile, and dominated by men; the seeming antithesis of her Western, seemingly emancipated counterpart. The contradictory stereotype of the exotic belly dancer, which is also a Western view of the Middle Eastern woman, is somehow understood to be more romance than real and, perhaps, part of the larger set of stereotypes associated with the "Hollywood Arab" (Shaheen, 1986). But the former view of the dominated Arab-Muslim woman has an aura of reality and validity about it, and has broad acceptance in Western society. This view served as the springboard for this study.

Historically, Muslims have argued that Islam holds women in high regard. Men and women are religiously equal in terms of basic responsibilities and accountability on Judgment Day. Those parts of the Qur'an that portray women as subordinate--a step below men and in need of male protection and support--are closely tied to Muslim concerns for the family. Hence,

Muslim religious scholars affirm that it is precisely because men are invested with the responsibility of taking care of women, financially and otherwise, that they are given authority over the females of their families. And that, affirm many Muslim women today including the participants in my study, is exactly the way it should be. Women, like men, are expected to fulfill the five Pillars of Islam--professing faith in the singularity of God and Muhammad's role as prophet; worshipping five times daily; almsgiving; fasting during daylight hours during the month of Ramadan; and making the pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in a lifetime--though there are some modifications for women, often related to their family responsibilities. For example, women generally pray in their homes rather than attend communal prayer services in the mosque on Friday, as men do, and women who are menstruating, pregnant, or nursing are excused from the most rigorous demands of fasting during Ramadan.

Arab American Muslim women are a diverse group. A significant number are secularized, practicing Islam to some degree in their homes, while others are very strict and traditional in their observation of Islamic law. Also, Muslim women vary in the degree to which they follow a traditional Islamic dress code, one of the most obvious signs of religious identification. Some practice full hijab while others like me are content with modest street clothes or put on traditional dress only for worship and other religious occasions.

In today's society, Arab Muslim women are facing greater conflicts and difficulties than ever before. Arab Muslim women are different from many other ethnic minority groups in that they suffer from a collective, confused cultural identity (Nassar-McMillan, 2003). There seems to be a sense of confusion and a feeling of being misunderstood or not understood at all. Arab Muslim women are discriminated against by both non-Muslims and Muslims in America. For instance, women who wear *hijab* often are taunted at work and on the street, although only

Fatmeh made mention of this in this study. They are obvious targets--they are obviously Muslims, and because of this they bear the brunt of the ignorance about Islam. They face sexual harassment, and often their actual physical safety is jeopardized. Their dress is modest and conservative, and they feel they do not fit in with Western culture. Arab American Muslim women yearn for more personal freedoms, yet they disapprove the generalized view (transmitted mainly from media) of American women and their behaviors which are perceived as “promiscuous” (Nassar-McMillan).

In addition, Muslim women often face discrimination from their own Muslim community. Muslim women who choose not to wear hijab are looked down upon by religious leaders or other women who wear hijab. They are thought of as being less religious than their appropriately dressed “sisters.” Discrimination by Muslims primarily results from ignorance about Islam and the introduction of cultural attitudes that demean women. Islam is sometimes interpreted in ways that are sexist and not true to the true teachings of equality in the Qu’ran and the model provided by Prophet Muhammad, (pbuh). Qu’ran and hadith (the teachings of Prophet Muhammad) are taken out of context and used to justify certain behavior.

Some of the other challenges faced by Arab Muslim women are related to general indecisiveness due to the gap between their own psychological needs, high familial expectations, and the low societal expectations of them (Pryce-Jones, 1989). An Arab woman is expected to attribute higher importance to her roles as a mother and a wife than as a career person (Sa’dawi, 1990). Socialization messages from school, peers, and family members affect Arab women’s self esteem. As compared to males, Arab females reported higher feelings of inferiority (Sa’dawi). Abraham (1993) stated that, although there have been some changes in the status of Arab women

in recent decades (e.g., more legitimization for success in the academic field and the workplace), their basic standing within the family structure and in Arab society remains stable.

With a brief introduction on Arab Muslim women and some of the difficulties they face, how can a counselor go about working with Rose (introduced in chapter one)? Reading the information provided in this chapter would not render a counselor competent and prepared to work with Arab Muslim women. Rather, my hope is that this brief snapshot would inspire helping professionals to seek more information. The vast diversity in the Muslim experience may be impacted by a number of variables including country of origin, indigenous or immigrant status, and level of religiosity. In this context, counselors must keep in mind that all Muslims are not all Arabs and that not all Arabs are Muslims. On the other hand, counselors may come to realize that even non-Muslim Arabs at times share similar values and worldviews with those of Muslim Arabs. To fully understand this group and to practice ethically, further research and knowledge are needed.

Multiple Cultural Identities of Arab Muslim Women

With regard to Rose, there are many levels to consider (e.g., her country of origin, age, religiosity, psychological needs, societal and cultural expectations). Working with Rose requires that the counselor first establish rapport. This could be problematic because many “ethnic minority Americans find it difficult to trust a counselor who represents the majority system” (Ho, 1987). Defining one’s role as counselor clearly and early in the initial session will set the stage for a future relationship. Rose obviously values and respects her religion, and asking her to try something that may go against her religious teachings will only turn her away. Knowing that family is very important, asking about her role in her family might prove to be useful. This may possibly assist in finding out which direction she would like to take. We cannot make the

mistake of assuming that her husband is dominating and controlling her, that she wants a divorce, or that she has no voice. These are the types of misconceptions turn women away from counseling (Nassar-McMillan, 2003). It is also of major importance to try to understand the interaction between gender differences on aspirations for career achievements and the broader socio-cultural norms that shape males' and females' attitudes and behaviors (Cook, 1993). The interaction of gender with socio-cultural context may produce different lifestyle opportunities and demands for men and women (Cook).

It is essential to recognize that women and men are socialized differently and that gender role expectations begin to influence human development from the moment the child is born (Herlihy & McCollum, 2003). The fact that human experience is gendered is central to the radical implications of feminist theory, grounded, as it is, in women's lives and aiming to analyze the role and meaning of gender in their lives and in society. Feminist research aims to illuminate aspects of gender relations, the interaction between the individual and society in the construction of gender, and the dynamics of power relations and in particular power inequalities between women and men (Personal Narratives Group, 1989). These considerations are critical when working with women clients.

Although gender plays a major role in the experiences of women, there are several other dimensions to consider when studying the proposed population. Immigrant Arab Muslim women have a distinct and separate culture encompassing multiple dimensions such as race, culture, and religion. A difficult part of this study was attempting to dissect the different dimensions and find relationships and interactions among various dimensions.

Although feminist theory provided a theoretical foundation for the study, gender is not the only relevant cultural dimension. The population in this study is multi-dimensional including

race, religion, and social constructs. In 1993, the *American Heritage Dictionary* defined womanist as: "Having or expressing a belief in or respect for women and their talents and abilities beyond the boundaries of race and class; exhibiting a feminism that is inclusive."

Womanist and womanism were adopted by, and often used in description of, African American women's struggle for self-determination and community, past and present (Walker, 1983).

Womanism helped give visibility to the experience of African American and other women of color who have always been on the forefront of movements to overthrow the sexual and racial caste systems, yet who often have been marginalized or rendered invisible in history texts, the media, and mainstream movements. Womanist theory attempts to articulate the experiences of women of color, including Arab Muslim women, by addressing the complexities involved in experiencing life through the lens of multiple oppressions (race, religion, and class).

According to Hamilton (2004), "Selecting appropriate theories for understanding the needs of women [of color] should be based on their cultural, personal, and social contexts, which clearly differ significantly from those of men and women who have not experienced racial and gender oppression (p. 21)." What is life like for young Arab Muslim women who live in the United States? What gives them strength and support? How do they cope with being members of an underserved and oftentimes misrepresented minority group? What role do social networks, family, and their religion play in helping them to cope with discrimination and other day to day challenges?

To answer these questions, womanist theology employing Walker's (1983) definition of womanism was considered. Womanist theology is a critical reflection upon a woman's place in the world that God has created and takes seriously women's experience as human beings who are made in the image of God (Thomas, 2000). The categories of life with which these women deal

daily (that is, race, womanhood, and political economy) are intricately woven into the religious space occupied by women of color, including Arab American Muslim women. Therefore, the harmful and empowering dimensions of “the institutional church,” culture, and society impacts the social construction of womanhood (Thomas). Womanist theology reveals the complexity of our experiences and the many variables at play in the formation of our identity; it is only when we can define ourselves that we are truly liberated (Walker, 1983).

Marshall and Read (2003) examined identity formation among Arab American women. They studied the relationship among ethnic and religious identities of Arab American women and feminist orientations to determine if a strong ethnic and religious identity undermined feminism. The researchers found that Arab identity was positively associated with feminism, while religious identity was inversely associated with a feminist orientation. Religion (Christianity and Islam) influenced the views on feminist thought of the Arab American women in the study. Marshall and Read reiterated the importance of further exploring multiple identities within individuals. Because the experiences of the women in this study were constructed as a result of and related to religious, ethnic, racial and gender identity, a careful review of the dimensions and a theme-based approach to data analysis was necessary.

Multicultural Competence and Ethical Counseling Practice

Considering the recent tragedies that have occurred (e.g., World Trade Center bombing, September 11th, the Iraq war, and the Israeli/Lebanese incidents), it has been a very difficult time for Muslims living here in America, particularly for women dressed in hijab. The views and opinions presented in the newspapers and other media have serious implications for counselors. Let us return to the example of Rose. She is an Arab Muslim women living in the United States. Is it possible for Rose (who looks distinctly different) to receive the appropriate help that she

seeks from someone outside her culture and faith? Will her ideas and beliefs be respected? Is it possible to provide adequate services to clients without understanding who they are and where they are coming from? Can Rose receive help from someone who knows nothing more about Arab Muslims than what she or he hears or sees in the media?

It is indeed possible to provide services to clients without being knowledgeable about their background and culture; however, it is far from being ethical practice. “Color blind” therapists or counselors with a universalistic approach who believe that all people (clients) should be treated equally without acknowledgement of race or culture misunderstand their clients because they choose to ignore important information (Acton, 2001).

Multiculturalism and ethical standards both emerged during the 1960s as fundamentally separate areas of development within the counseling profession (Watson, Herlihy, & Pierce, 2005). Multicultural counseling evolved out of a growing awareness that discrepancies between counselor and client were resulting in ineffective treatment and early termination for ethnic minority clients (Atkinson, Morton, & Sue, 1998). The development of a code of ethics grew out of the struggle to establish counseling as a separate and distinct profession (Remley & Herlihy, 2005). It is only recently that these two areas have been acknowledged as interrelated entities (Watson, et al.).

As such, some scholars have asserted that counselors in today’s diverse society must be multiculturally competent in order to practice ethically, and that ethical codes and multicultural competence are inextricably related. The literature, along with the updated ACA code of ethics (2005), has clearly established that it is unethical for counselors to provide counseling services to clients who are culturally different from themselves if the counselors are not competent to work effectively with these clients (Corey, Corey, & Callanan, 2003; Herlihy & Watson, 2003;

Lee & Kurilla, 1997; Pedersen, Draguns, Lonner, & Trimble, 2002; Ponterotto & Casas; 1991; Remley & Herlihy, 2005; Robinson & Howard-Hamilton, 2000; Vontress, 2002). Multicultural competence, directly addressed as an ethical obligation in the literature and in the ACA code of ethics (2005), refers to an appreciation and an understanding of different cultures especially in regards to values, beliefs, race, gender, language, and education (Lee & Kurilla, 1997).

Practicing without this understanding is unethical. The updated ACA code of ethics, adopted in July 2005, represents a continued commitment to multiculturalism and diversity. In the ACA preamble (2005), it is noted that one of our responsibilities as professional counselors is to recognize diversity in society and embrace a cross-cultural approach in support of the worth, dignity, potential, and uniqueness of each individual. The code (ACA, 2005) also requires that counselors practice only within the boundaries of their competence; yet, this does not mean that we cannot and should not work with people and issues that are unfamiliar to us. What it does mean is that counselors should demonstrate a commitment to gain knowledge, personal awareness, and skills pertinent to working with a diverse client population (ACA Code of Ethics, 2005). The ethical responsibility to gain awareness is addressed in Section A (The Counseling Relationship): counselors are encouraged to learn how their own cultural identities and biases impact their values and beliefs about the counseling process. This is very significant because counseling is not composed of people who are valueless nor does the profession purport to be valueless. Our personal lives are intertwined with our professional lives. Ethics are an attempt to help us determine which values we must collectively hold in esteem, and they charge us to examine our own convictions and how they match our own profession's norms and customs (Stone, 2005). Socrates said, "The unexamined life is not worth living." Ethics require that we push beyond habit, the familiar, and our own needs, and explore our values and the implications

of our values on others (Stone). By becoming more self-aware, we are making room for learning about others. The ACA Code of Ethics includes the statement that counselors actively attempt to understand the worldviews of diverse clients, keep current with the diverse populations they serve, and continually maintain competence in their skills for working with diverse populations.

Knowing that the counseling profession has embraced multicultural competence as an ethical mandate (Herlihy & Watson, 2005) and knowing that ethical hazards emerge when counselors deal with clients from different cultural backgrounds while dismissing their uniqueness (Hijazi, Tatar & Gati , 2004), *how* do we go about helping those who are different from us? We know that society is changing as people are changing. We know that educational systems are becoming increasingly multicultural (Hijazi, et. al.) We also know that research has considered counselors' work with heterogeneous client populations. Specifically, strategies have been proposed for counseling approaches with racial and ethnic minorities (Atkinson, Thompson, & Grant, 1993), immigrant children and adolescents (Kopala, Esquivel, & Baptiste, 1994; Tatar, 1998), and international and foreign students (Khoo, Abu-Rasain, & Hornby, 1994; Leong & Choung, 1996; Tatar & Horenczyk, 2000).

Relevant Research Studies

Over the past two decades, scholarship has begun to challenge homogenous representations of Arab women by revealing considerable diversity in women's experiences in the Middle East and abroad.

The diversity among Muslim women is rarely seen in photographs, in newspapers, magazines, or on television. Rather, Americans are more familiar with images of Arab Muslim women, who are viewed as homogeneous, than with American Muslim women. Most non-

Muslims know very little about American Muslim women, those who convert to Islam, those who have been Muslims for several generations, or about the largest group of Muslims in America who are Arab American (Sachs, 2002; Wood, 2002).

For the most part, what most professional counselors probably know about Arab Muslim women may come from the media and from what has been taught to them. In multicultural counseling textbooks, generally one or two chapters discuss a few minority groups. The groups that are often included are Native Americans, Hispanics, African Americans, and Asian Americans. Arabs are sometimes classified under Asian Americans, although a few multicultural counseling books have begun to include Arab Americans (Jackson, 1995, 1997). Students learn general concepts that may potentially apply to members of a particular minority group. It is rare to see specific information about women. Considering this may be all the knowledge professional counselors are receiving about Arabs and other minority groups, it is easy to see how difficulties can arise in the counseling relationship.

Bint Arab: Arab and Arab American Women in the United States presents a personal yet highly informative ethnographic survey of three generations of Arab American women. Shakir (1997) introduces her grandmothers, who came to the US in the nineteenth century. She discusses their motivations for immigrating (opportunities) and how they and their cohorts adapted to the new country. A central figure in the book is Shakir's mother, a successful businesswoman, who is presented as an example of the first American generation. Shakir describes how second generation Arab American women sought to find places for themselves between the Arab and American cultures, and how third generation women connected or reconnected with their heritage. In the last part of the book, Shakir turns her attention to more recent arrivals (since 1948), mostly Palestinians, and the reasons why they have assimilated less

to American culture. Shakir makes it evident that all three generations of women wanted to hold closely to their cultural identity, and yet have the same opportunities available to them. All three generations met with challenges and obstacles throughout their journey, but what carried them through was their family support and their strong cultural identities.

Mays (2003), in a qualitative study, explored the lives of 25 Muslim students at an American University (Brandeis University). In this ethnography, the goal was to gain greater insight into the experiences and needs of the Muslim college students attending the Jewish-sponsored University (Mays). The study was conducted immediately after the September 11 attacks. Considering the fear that some Muslims displayed after the attacks, it was surprising that the students were eager to participate and share their feelings. Because Mays was a student at Brandeis during the study, he was able to build rapport and trust with the Muslim students. He made it a point to interact and visit with them as often as possible, so that the students were willing to “buy in” and participate. During the study, Mays learned that wherever people go they are looking for signs of community and ways to connect with others. He also discovered that although these students were all Muslim, there was a high degree of variance in their behaviors and views. This finding supports the assertion that differences exist, even within the most seemingly similar of groups.

Luna (1993) conducted a quantitative study with Muslim college students. She administered a 132-item inventory designed to discover the perceived problems that Muslim students have on college campuses. Her findings indicated that the needs of Muslim students are not being met on college campuses. The concerns that were prominent included: relationships between men and women; sexual customs; attitudes toward skin color; religious practices; and materialism, discrimination, and loneliness (Luna). Social adjustment and financial aid problems

were also prominent in this study. Implications for professional practice included having appropriate transitional and orientation programs for Muslim students focused on religious and social adjustment. Solutions to the financial problem included the formation of special loan funds and the granting of waivers. Community based support for Muslim students was suggested as another alternative. Luna (1993) recommended that her study be replicated and improved by the addition of qualitative methodology providing a much wider focus.

Finally, Zentani (1986) conducted a quantitative study on the impact of the United States educational experience on Muslim students' attitudes toward their own culture and beliefs. A 74-item inventory was mailed to 291 Muslim students at the University of Missouri-Columbia. Of those, 153 participated in the study. Zentani examined three independent variables: length of residence, interaction, and adjustment. The results indicated that the longer students stay in the United States and the more interactions they have with American students, the more they undergo a negative change in their attitude towards various aspects of their culture and beliefs. Adjustment to the American environment was not found to have much effect on students' attitudes toward their own culture or beliefs. Zentani suggested that future research be conducted collecting longitudinal data, and, to completely understand Muslim students' attitudes, incorporating qualitative methodology.

Current research on the issues facing Arab Muslims in the United States is limited although this population faces serious issues (Nassar-McMillan, 2003). The most serious of these problems include: domestic violence, abuse of divorce and child custody laws, abuse of the polygamy system, and isolation and exclusion from various aspects of Muslim and American life (Hathout, 1995; Nassar-McMillan).

Nassar-McMillan (2003) has discussed the day-to-day problems that Arab Muslims face and has made recommendations for counselors who work with Arab Muslims. In working with Arab American clients, Nassar-McMillan sees a counselor's role as more than just advocate. She recommends that counselors explore and consider the social, political, and economic contexts that have impacted the Arab American community so that they can resolve the more humanistic, existential issues, such as worldview and cultural and ethnic identity.

Finally, immigrant Arab Muslim women were chosen for this study for several reasons, but mainly to shed light on an understudied and often misunderstood group. In an effort to gain deeper understanding, the study presents collaboration between the researcher and six immigrant Arab Muslim women living in Louisiana.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

In this study of immigrant Arab Muslim women in Southeast Louisiana, an ethnographic approach was utilized with a feministic paradigm (Herlihy & McCollum, 2003) providing the framework. To gain a greater understanding of immigrant Arab Muslim women's experiences in an American context, semi-structured interviews, a demographic questionnaire, and observations were the research methodologies. The goal was to increase counselors' awareness and willingness to target their services toward Arab Muslim women. The hope was that the findings would shed light on an underserved and often misrepresented group. In this chapter, an explanation is provided of the methodologies. The sample and the process for conducting the semi-structured audio-taped interviews and observations are described, as well as the process for transcribing the interviews, coding, and analysis.

Rationale for the Use of an Ethnographic Approach

Ethnography was most appropriate for this study because it provided the principal means by which feminists have sought to achieve the active involvement of their participants in the construction of data about their lives (Graham, 1984). Any other design seemed inadequate considering that ethnography provided a way of giving these women greater visibility, not only within their group, but also in society, by the documentation of their lives.

Spradley (1979) stated that the essential core of ethnography is the "disciplined study of what the world is like to people who have learned to see, hear, speak, think, and act in ways that are different (p.2)." Rather than *studying people*, ethnography connotes *learning from people*

(p.3). As a participant observer, I experienced the lives of these women through their eyes: what life was like for them, and how they made meaning of their world. Ethnography sought to document the existence of alternative realities and described these realities in their own terms (1979). Data were gathered in the participants' natural setting (e.g., home, my office, book store) by using demographic questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and observations of participants' daily activities and interactions. Prior to beginning the study, I had hoped to conduct a focus group, including all the participants. However, five of the six participants were completely against the idea because confidentiality could not be guaranteed. The fear that someone in the group would share their personal issues with the community was a significant concern.

Van Manen's Approach

Because the study was aimed at a rigorous effort to understand the real life world of participants from the perspective of the participants, I believe that van Manen's approach met my objectives. Van Manen (1999) believed in the importance of describing people's lives exactly how they appear and to let things and people speak for themselves. The "facts" of lived experiences are always already meaningful experiences (p.180). Van Manen further explained that as researchers, we cannot separate theory from life, the public from the private (1999, p.151). Dilthey (1985) affirmed that "a lived experience does not confront me as something perceived or represented; it is not given to me, but the reality of lived experiences is there—formed because I have a reflective awareness of it" (p.223). Thus, a lived experience cannot be understood "in its immediate manifestation, but only reflectively...as we relate particular to the universal, part to whole, episode to totality." (van Manen, 1990, p. 36).

Research Questions

The general research question was “What are the lived experiences of young, immigrant Arab Muslim women in the United States?” The following sub-questions were addressed: (a) How do Arab American Muslim women perceive themselves culturally? (b) How do Arab American Muslim women describe their specific cultural experiences? (c) What barriers, if any, do Arab American Muslim women experience in their daily lives? (d) What do Arab American Muslim women describe as their support systems? and (e) What are Arab American Muslim women’s viewpoints and sentiments on seeking counseling?

Sampling

Sampling, according to Mertens (1998), “refers to the method used to select a given number of people (or things) from a population... [and that] the issues surrounding from whom you collect data are what sampling is all about” (p.25).

The criteria for selection involved purposeful sampling. Earlandson et al. (1993) suggested that:

Central to naturalistic research is purposive sampling. Random or representative sampling is not preferred because the researcher’s major concern is not to generalize the findings of the study to a broad population but to maximize discovery of the heterogeneous patterns and problems that occur in the particular context under study. Purposive and directed sampling through human instrumentation increases the range of data exposed and maximizes the researcher’s ability to identify emerging themes that take adequate account of contextual conditions and cultural norms (p. 82).

The gatekeeper for this study was A. H., a well-respected member of the Muslim community in a specific area of Louisiana. A. H. is a Palestinian American Muslim. She was a 21-year-old married woman and was attending an area community college. She founded and has headed numerous programs for Muslims, particularly Palestinian Muslim women in suburban

areas of a Louisiana city. A. H. was known and highly respected by young and old for the work she did to help Muslims. Although she was young, A.H.'s experiences in advocacy, religious groups, and social justice issues began at a very young age. A.H.'s mother started taking her to the mosque to pray at the age of 5. She was submersed in the culture and religion early on in life. The sample for this study was drawn from religious/social gatherings held either at the gatekeeper's home or at an Islamic Mosque in Louisiana. Before making contact with any of the participants, I contacted the gatekeeper, who held religious gatherings every Saturday from 12pm-4pm. Although I was not a regular attendee, I had attended several of the gatherings and I had been introduced to most of the members. I met with A. H. before the gathering. At that time, I explained the purpose of my study. I also provided her with an introduction letter along with a consent form. During this meeting, I expressed my interest in gaining participants for the study.

Participants

As a member for 17 years of the small Muslim community in a parish in Louisiana, I was familiar with the families who resided there. The participants in this study were all immigrant Arab American Muslim women between the ages of 21 and 35. This age range was chosen because it is (typically) at this time that Arab Muslim women become somewhat less dependent on family and begin to think independently about their purpose and their direction in life.

Research shows that the longer persons reside in America, the more likely they will assimilate to Western culture (Mays, 2003; Zentani, 1986). This was not evident in my research. Research also shows that newer immigrants are less likely to assimilate and more likely to select the best of both cultures (Rodriguez, 2002). This was quite evident with three of the participants in my study.

The participants were from Egyptian, Palestinian, or Iraqi descent. The participants regularly attended the religious gatherings mentioned above, although I met one participant at a luncheon we were all invited to attend. I tried to carefully select the participants so that I had the most representative sample possible considering demographics and personal backgrounds, but it was quite difficult. Results would have been more fruitful had I included a more diverse sample. I was surprised that I had four Palestinians who agreed to participate, considering that I am Palestinian. Before the study, I believed that Palestinians would fear speaking to someone from the same culture, especially regarding very personal issues. However, this was not the case. The participants in this study had resided in America for at least five years and had varying socioeconomic status. I chose five years as the minimum for residency so as to avoid major language and other barriers to socialization.

To make sense of the immigrant subculture, I interviewed each participant individually (Interview Protocol included in Appendix B). Each participant was interviewed three times. Two participants were called upon for additional interviews for member-checking or further clarification of data. Each individual interview lasted approximately 90 minutes. I had hoped to gather all the participants together to conduct a focus group, but most participants disagreed. The focus group would have served as a sounding board for participants and as a strong filter of information that could have possibly been quite different from what these women would say in private with confidentiality.

Data Collection

Demographic Questionnaires

The demographic questionnaire (see Appendix A) was designed to solicit basic information about the participants (name, age, ethnicity, and citizenship status) and their level of education, religious classification (practicing- non-practicing), birthplace, length of residency in America, and marital status. The questionnaire proved helpful in giving me a sense of who my participants were. It was sent with introductory and consent letters (see Appendix C) via email to all persons contacted by the gatekeeper. Once consent forms were signed and questionnaires were completed, I scheduled individual interviews with each participant either by phone or email.

Observations

According to Angrosino and Mays de Perez (in Denzin & Lincoln, 2000), observations are “the fundamental base of all research methods” in the social and behavioral sciences...and are “the mainstay of the ethnographic enterprise” (p.125).

Cohen and Manion (1994) suggested that there are basically two types of observation—participant observation and non-participant observation. In participant observation the researcher participates in the activities of the group being observed. The non-participant observer stands outside the group being observed and has no interest in becoming a member of the group.

Spradley (1980) identified five types of participation. They are: 1) nonparticipation (this observer has no involvement with the people being studied; 2) passive participation (observer is present at the scene of action but has very limited interaction with the people being studied); 3) moderate participation (this observer seeks to maintain a balance between being an insider and outsider in the research setting); 4) active participation (this observer seeks to do what the people being studied are doing with the intent of learning the accepted cultural rules of behavior), and 5)

complete participation (observer is studying a situation in which he or she is already a participant).

I took the moderate participatory observer role according to Spradley's criteria. Although I was familiar with many women in the Arab Muslim community and even more familiar with those involved in the religious gatherings, I wanted to have limited interaction with them while in group. I was present and I observed their interactions, but I did not participate. I did not want my thoughts or ideas to influence the participants in any way and as a result to influence the study.

Interviews

In qualitative research, the researcher has many choices for the type of interview which best fits the study. Cohen and Manion (1994) stated that there are four types of interview techniques that can be used as research tools: structured, unstructured, non-directive, and focused. According to Cohen and Manion, the "structured interview is one in which the content and procedures of the interview are organized in advance" (p.30). They identified the unstructured interview as "an open invitation" (p.30). It, unlike the structured interview, is said to have "greater flexibility and freedom" (p.31). The non-directive interview is characterized by "minimal direction or control exhibited by the interviewer and the freedom the respondent has to express her subjective feelings as fully and as spontaneously as she chooses or is able" (p.31). The focused interview "focuses on a respondent's subjective responses to a known situation in which she has been involved and which has been analyzed by the interviewer prior to the interview" (p.31).

Spradley (1980) indicated that there are two types of interviews: informal and formal. "An informal ethnographic interview occurs whenever you ask someone a question during the course

of participant observation... A formal interview usually occurs at an appointed time and results from a specific request to hold the interview” (p. 55).

Because the participants in this study had unique stories to tell, a semi-structured, open-ended interview seemed best. It was unlikely that any other approach would capture the depth of the participants’ experiences. Schensul, Schensul, and LeCompte (1999) highlighted the many benefits of this type of interviewing. They believed semi-structured, open-ended interviews were beneficial in helping the researcher operationalize key research factors.

For the purposes of this study, audio taped, semi-structured interviews were utilized. The research design included approximately three rounds of audio taped, semi-structured interviews with six participants. Each interview lasted no longer than 90 minutes. Once the participants for the study were identified, I set up a time for each of them to meet for a face-to-face interview. I explained to each of the participants that the purpose of the interviews was to help me get a better understanding of what life was like for them here in the United States. Knowing that some participants would be apprehensive, I assured each of them that their identities would not be revealed at any point during or after the research study.

My research questions comprised the questions for the first round of interviews (see Appendix B). The actual questions for the second and third interviews were driven by the findings in round one of interviews. The purpose of the second and third rounds of interviews was to provide participants an opportunity to further elaborate on information obtained in the first interview. The second and third interviews also enabled me to conduct member checks and delve deeper into the participants’ lives.

The interviews were held in my home office, a private room in a book store, or the participant’s home. My office was located approximately five minutes away from the

gatekeeper's home and the Islamic Mosque. My office was located on the first floor of my home with separate access from the main home entrance. The office walls were painted calming beige and soft brown carpet covered the entire floor. Along with a desk and two bookcases, there were two leather chairs and a sofa. The chairs were positioned in such a way as to allow for comfortable conversation. There was open space in the middle to allow for the recorder to be placed comfortably during the interviews.

Data Analysis and Coding

Spradley (1979) defined ethnographic analysis as a search for the parts of a culture, the relationships among the parts, and their relationships to the whole. In this, data analysis was ongoing as I looked for the parts and relationships significant in the lives of Arab American Muslim women. In reporting the findings, I used their own words as extensively as possible. Initially, the plan was to utilize Spradley's (1979) approach to ethnographic analysis. Spradley identified four kinds of ethnographic analysis: domain, taxonomic, componential, and themes. I found it difficult to utilize Spradley's (1979) approach for two reasons. My understanding of the four types of analyses was limited. Second, I felt my need to utilize the four types of analysis forced participants in specific categories. This was not only unethical, but I also felt it distracted me from the data. Instead, data analysis was guided by the work of Van Manen (1990). Van Manen suggested considering text (data) "in terms of meaning units, structures of meaning, or themes" (p.78). I approached the data from different directions to uncover themes.

After transcription, my first steps included placing my observations and comments on color-coded index cards, assigning a specific color to each participant. I then focused on reading the entire text of all the interview transcripts, observations, and documents to learn meanings from the reading. During the reading, notes were made on the text to record potential themes that

appeared in the data. I also read the text another time and highlighted portions that seemed relevant to the categories that I chose from the review. During this detailed reading, I looked for meaning in each sentence or cluster of words. The highlighted portions were also labeled to provide a concise statement of meaning. A third selective reading was done to look for specific instances of themes that were prevalent. To further develop and unite the themes, I created classification schemes.

The coding process was tedious and it involved bringing together and analyzing all the data including all factors (social class, level of education, marital status) associated with finding the themes. At various times during the analysis, the developing themes became the focus of questions in follow-up interviews. Such a recursive process allowed me to determine whether the theme was essential to the meaning or incidental. Adding to this process, I went to peers for a different perspective on my speculative themes. I discussed the themes with a friend from the college of education and a professor whose multicultural experience was very much appreciated. I used this to expand, modify, reevaluate, or eliminate a theme.

Data Sources

Role of the Researcher

The researcher is an integral part of qualitative research (Lentin, 1994). As an immigrant Arab Muslim woman born in Palestine and raised in America, I believe my experiences are unique and different from those experienced by other groups, including Arab American Muslim men. I believe it is important to describe the unique experiences of Arab American Muslim women in detail so that their voices are heard. The information I gained from this research

enables me to better assist counselors and other helping professionals who may not be familiar with this population.

An important turning point of this was getting the participants to “buy in.” Fear, mistrust, and lack of knowledge were cited by minority respondents as the main reasons they did not participate in research (Corbie-Smith, 2004). Ethnographers such as Glesne and Peshkin (1992) cautioned researchers about studying a site or people “in whom one has a vested interest.” Research that involves one’s “own backyard” is questioned because of the potential to severely compromise the value of the data (Glesne & Peshkin). Unless there is a compelling argument, researchers advise against it (Creswell, 1998). Realizing and understanding this, I employed very specific and precise data collection techniques, and I monitored my subjectivity by utilizing reflexive bracketing (Ahern, 1999). This included the completion of a self-reflective record of my thoughts, feelings, and ideas in a journal; the examination of my personal assumptions and goals through a peer de-briefer who was knowledgeable about the population, but not as invested; and the clarification of my individual belief system and subjectivities (Ahern). The goal of these activities is “to turn the researcher's gaze back upon oneself for the purpose of separation and differentiation” (p.100).

The need for researchers to improve communication and strengthen trust between researcher and community members is one of the biggest barriers to data collection. Counselor educators need a more active role in seeking relationships within the Muslim community. Without community “buy-in,” the Arab American Muslim community is less likely to participate. Minority participants, including those in this study, may express suspicion about the motives of research investigators. They are concerned that the knowledge gained by the researchers might be motivated by their drive for money, status, and prestige (Corbie-Smith et

al., 1999). My objective, as a result, was to use my insider's knowledge to gain the trust of participants by reaching out to a notable and respected person in the community (i.e., gate keeper). Consequently, having the same background as the participants was helpful rather than a hindrance in this situation.

Assumptions

I addressed the following assumptions from the beginning to enhance the trustworthiness of the research process.

1. My background and group membership was beneficial in increasing data collected from participants.
2. This research and the participants' ability to voice their concerns was empowering and facilitated identity development.
3. My personal experiences heavily informed my research questions.
4. The experiences of Immigrant Arab Muslim women in America are unique compared to other groups, including immigrant Arab Muslim men living in America.

Through the study and considering these assumptions, I found evidence of stressors exclusive to Immigrant Arab Muslim women.

Trustworthiness

Lincoln and Guba (1985) claimed that three activities- prolonged engagement, persistent observation, and triangulation—increase the probability of producing credible findings. By getting to know the participants and by being an active player in the study, rapport was built and the participants learned to trust me.

As I made sense of the data and validated my findings, I repeatedly conducted member checks (Linclon & Guba, 1985) with participants to enhance credibility. The participants provided feedback as to the accuracy of the data and made clarifications, whenever necessary.

One strategy that I incorporated to enhance my study's transferability was the triangulating of multiple sources of data. This assisted me in the interpretation process. My visits into the community and the religious gatherings offered me the opportunity to test my findings and to document the transferability of the findings.

Marshall and Rossman (1995) suggested that investigators want to apply the findings about the population of interest to a second population believed or presumed to be sufficiently similar. My trip to Palestine this summer (2006) involved meeting with Muslim women who once lived in America.

Conducting audits (Miles & Huberman, 1984) with the gatekeeper (A. H.) was another strategy that I utilized. A. H. had a working knowledge of the immigrant women.

Summary

This study addressed the research question, "What are the lived experiences of immigrant Arab Muslim women in the United States?" Data were derived through demographic questionnaires, observations, and semi-structured interviews with six women who have lived in the United States for a minimum of five years. An ethnographic study guided data collection and analysis with the purpose of understanding the lives of immigrant women from their point of view.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

The purpose of this chapter is to present the thoughts and experiences of six immigrant Arab Muslim women regarding life in America. The general research question was, “What are the lived experiences of young, immigrant Arab Muslim women in the United States?” The following sub-questions were addressed: (a) How do Arab American Muslim women perceive themselves culturally? (b) How do Arab American Muslim women describe their specific cultural experiences? (c) What barriers, if any, do Arab American Muslim women experience in their daily lives? (d) What do Arab American Muslim women describe as their support systems? (e) What are Arab American Muslim women’s viewpoints on seeking counseling?

Utilizing a feminist ethnography (Abu-Lughod, 1993), I explored the daily experiences of Arab American Muslim women, applying qualitative research methods. Findings presented in this chapter reflect my interpretations of their experiences as shared in individual interviews. This chapter begins with the profiles of six Arab American Muslim women who assisted me by sharing their deepest thoughts and experiences.

Given the shared backgrounds of the participants, I was surprised to note that they took different sides on some issues. It was clear that the women shared Islamic faith and traditions rooted in religious doctrines, but realized that they could not reproduce their traditions in an environment different from their home-of-origin. This chapter presents the recounted experiences of the participants as they found themselves between two cultures, the traditional and the Western, taking from each what worked for them.

What the participants said was enriching yet saddening for me. I enjoyed the interviews, not only because of the data I collected, but because the process gave me the opportunity to get closer to my participants, feel their emotions, dream their aspirations, and admire their courage and resilience. Bruner (1990) stated that logical analysis “proves” an idea or concept to be right or wrong, while “narrative negotiates passages between what we understand and what we do not understand but to which we are attracted. In short, narrative-living...is a chief vehicle for helping people grow and expand their horizon” (p.55).

Participant Profiles

Participant profiles were created to provide a detailed description of each member who agreed to participate in this study. These profiles were compiled from information provided by participants in response to the demographic questionnaire that was utilized at the beginning of interviews (see Appendix D) and from additional information gained both verbally and non-verbally throughout the duration of each interview. To protect each participant’s confidentiality, I selected a pseudonym before the interview. All personally identifying information has been omitted. A group profile is presented to provide an overall picture of those who participated in this research (Table 1).

Group Profile

Six immigrant Arab Muslim women between 21 and 35 years old chose to participate in this study. Three participants were married with children, one participant was single with a child, and two were single (never married and no children). Four of the participants were originally from Palestine, although from widely different areas within Palestine; one participant was from Egypt; and the final participant was from Iraq. Participants’ educational experiences varied.

Three of the participants had finished high school, one participant had left high school in the ninth grade, and two participants currently were attending college. All of the participants had lived in the United States for a minimum of five years; three had lived in the United States for more than ten years; and the other three had been in the U.S. between five and ten years. During the study, all the participants resided in southeastern Louisiana. The sample was as diverse as possible considering the demographics of the region and the limited pool of potential participants. I searched for differences and similarities that existed among the six participants. Common elements that they shared were their Islamic religion, citizenship status, residing in America, and the tension they experienced with acculturation, particularly around familial issues. All participants knew English; some were more comfortable using it than others. During the interviews, all the participants used Arabic and English interchangeably. None of the participants had ever had any experience as a client in counseling, and only one participant (Maiba) had any experience with the interview process. Maiba, a 21-year-old Palestinian, had been interviewed by several newspaper editors while she was in college. She described that experience as very positive. In addition to this group profile, individual profiles were constructed to reveal more in-depth information about each participant. Table 1 below includes a brief snapshot of the six participants in this study. The table assisted in constructing the individual profiles for each participant. As noted in the table below, four of the six participants were Palestinian and all were citizens of the United States. Table 1 also provides information about marital status, length of residency, socioeconomic status, age, education, level of religiosity, and feelings about seeking counseling in the future.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Participant	Pseudonym	Age/Educational Level	Country of Origin	Marital Status/children	Practice/Level of Religiosity Hijab?	Length of Residency	SES	Citizenship	Future Counseling?
#1	Maiba	21 College	Palestine	Single	Yes/High Yes	5.5yrs	Middle Class	Yes	Yes
#2	Zeina	22 College	Iraq	Single	No/Low Yes	7yrs	Wealthy	Yes	Yes
#3	Samia	27 Dropout	Palestine	Involved 1 girl	No/Low No	12yrs	Poor	Yes	Yes
#4	Manza	33 HS	Egypt	Married 2B/1G	Yes/Medium No	14yrs	Middle Class	Yes	Uncertain
#5	Aysha	35 HS	Palestine	Married 3G/1B	Yes/High Yes	12yrs	Wealthy	Yes	No
#6	Fatmeh	29 HS	Palestine	Married 3G/1B	Yes/Medium No	10yrs	Poor	Yes	Yes

Individual Profiles

This section is intended to introduce each of the six participants individually as well as share their personal experiences. As often as possible, I have used the participants' words in an attempt to convey their meaning rather than my own words or my meaning. This was done to help the reader attain a clearer understanding of each participant and her unique experiences.

Their stories are testimonies of what it has meant and what it means to be a Muslim and an Arab in the United States. At times, it was necessary to translate participants' statements from Arabic to English.

Participant #1: Maiba

Maiba is a 21-year-old Palestinian female. She is a second-year college student studying journalism. I met Maiba at the *Eid* (Islamic holiday after Ramadan) prayer a year ago, and we had seen each other at the Saturday gatherings from time to time. She is a single young lady who wears hijab. Maiba has lived in the United States for five and a half years. Maiba's extended family has been living in America for many years, but her father recently decided to make America home for financial reasons. Work was extremely hard to find in Palestine, especially in Jerusalem (where Maiba and her family lived) due to the constant fighting and war zones. Because Maiba's father was the sole provider and the future looked bleak overseas, they decided to try building a future in the United States. Considering the short time Maiba has been in the States, her English was impeccable. From my observations, Maiba appeared to be popular among all her friends, and she was proud of her hijab and religion. Maiba is the oldest of four children. She has two sisters and one brother.

When asked to participate, Maiba did not hesitate. Maiba's pride for her culture and Islamic faith was evident in her eagerness to participate in this and other research studies. Maiba had published two articles in very well-known journals relating to Arab culture and her experience in the United States. Our first interview was completed at my home office; Maiba arrived 15 minutes early. After the first 15 minutes, it was quite clear that Maiba was extremely concerned with what others would say or what they would think in response to my questions about struggles, challenges, and barriers associated with being an Arab Muslim female living in

America. Statements such as “It’s not the religion...” “...it’s the culture...” “it’s the people...” reiterated her concern for the misrepresentation of Islam and its people. Although Maiba was not a regular mosque attendee, her religious beliefs were strong. She struggled with parental expectations and decisions made on her behalf that were deeply rooted in culture but enforced under the guise of Islam.

Maiba had been communicating with an Arab Muslim man for over a year through email and by phone. They met online through a Muslim site, and met one time in person. Throughout the entire time, no one was aware of her “secret,” including her parents. She described feelings ranging from being in love with this man and wanting to marry him, to feeling confused about his hesitation, to feelings of anger and guilt associated with concealing the secret and possibly getting caught.

Who do I tell about this? Honestly, I can’t tell anyone. I can’t trust anyone with this. I can’t believe I’m telling you this right now, but I have to...I’m tired. I’m about to blow. I know I haven’t done anything wrong according to my religion...it’s just talk...all very harmless, but I don’t have the kind of relationship that I would like to have with my parents. I can’t talk to them. I can’t be with him...I hate hiding this from my parents, but they won’t understand. My mom says to me, ‘you can talk to me about anything,’ but you know she doesn’t mean it. I’ve tried it before. She only starts screaming and yelling...it’s so different for my brother! And, then, this guy that I’m talking to, he tells me he has an illness- like polyps or something...I love him, but he says he doesn’t want to put me through this and he keeps telling me to move on. How can I do this? I hate this!

I tell him to call my parents and ask for my hand in marriage, but he keeps telling me about his illness...it's a serious disease, and he doesn't want to put me through it.

Maiba seemed to be very alone in this situation. According to her, if she told her parents, they would kill her. If she talked to any of her girlfriends, they would tell others and gossip about her, which could lead to her parents finding out. Maiba seemed to treasure our interviews because it was one of the few moments when she was able to be "real."

Participant #2: Zeina

Zeina is a 22 year-old Iraqi female, wearing hijab. She is a third-year pharmacy student considering a possible change to psychology. I met Zeina at an informal lunch gathering with a group of Arab American females. Zeina was withdrawn and very reserved. When approached, however, she was very friendly and eager to learn about my research. Zeina's family came to America in search of financial freedom and peace. Zeina has lived in America for seven years. She has been wearing hijab for most of her life (since the age of 12), but Islam does not guide her everyday decisions. Our first interview was conducted at a library, in a small room reserved for studying. What made this interview different than most of the other interviews was that Zeina appeared more seriously invested in the interview and more "in need." I had to make several calls and send numerous reminders to schedule the other interviews. Scheduling Zeina's interviews, however, was effortless. Zeina made initial contact with me after our lunch. She called me to schedule our second and third interviews. Zeina even expressed an interest in introducing me to her mother and other family members. My impression was that she wanted to shed some light and provide an opportunity for others to be heard.

I began Zeina's interview in much the same way I began the other interviews. After reviewing the consent form and interview protocol, I asked Zeina to tell me a little about herself:

I compare my life with my mom and how she was raised and now,
like the way she is, don't do this, don't do that and I'm like why
can't I do this or why can't I do that?... It's, you know, a lot of stuff like that,
that I really want to do, but you know, I guess my parents realize that they can't
keep on with no, no, no, no, no, no...that, you know, they have to loosen up a
little. It's America. It's different.

It was during this interview that I reconfirmed the need to shed light onto this group. Zeina began by telling me that four years ago her life was changed forever. She described living her life in a home filled with anger, hatred, silence, and isolation. She described what is often described by many Westerners as the "elephant in the middle of the room," referring to a topic, event, or person that no one wants to acknowledge or discuss (hoping it will just disappear). Similar to Maiba, Zeina saw this interview experience as a means to "let it all out." Zeina described her parents' relationship and its effects on the family:

He [her father] is just never home. He's home, but isn't. I don't know. My dad
kind of like he is not really involved in my life I guess, because my dad has two
families. There is my family and then he has another wife and two kids.
And he is not home every day because I guess he feels bad for what he did.
I remember the day like...because I before was ... my daddy's little girl. I
loved my dad to death and I remember it was maybe when I was about in 7th grade
or something like that. I remember because my sister had cancer at the time and
she doesn't have it any more...but when she did, I remember my mom was

always in the hospital with my sister and my dad was always home with us, but he was never home. We found out by mistake, my poor mom. He was married, with two children, living three houses down. Leading a separate life...with us and with them.

Zeina described anger towards her mother for being “so weak” and refusing to leave her father after finding out about his second family down the street. She also described anger towards her father for his betrayal, “not once, but so many times.”

We live there [with father, in his home] just because he makes a lot of money. I’m upset with my mom, but I know...I know she can’t go get a job or anything. I know she has to stay.

Zeina explained that her mother’s situation motivates her to stay in school and to become successful.

I am going to make it big! I’m not gonna let a man do that to me! I don’t care that he’s my dad. He’s nobody to me. I would never accept that from anyone.

Zeina further explained that her father hurt not only her mother, but also her oldest sister.

My sister had a big crush on one of our distant guy cousins. They were talking for a while, and sometimes they even saw each other places. Well, this one time my cousin came over to our house. He was hanging around my dad...they were just relaxing, doing guy stuff. My cousin starts talking to my dad about this girl he likes...my dad gets all excited and says...

‘Yea—Yea—Yea—if ever you need a place, here take these keys, why don’t you take her over there one night...have yourself a good time! HaHaHa...’

Zeina explained all this during the first interview with tears rolling down her face. She explained that Zeina's cousin takes the girl to her father's "special place" and is intimate with her.

He took my sister there and slept with her! And then, left her! Not one word after that. My sister was left used. Now what? Who is she going to tell? You know what happens when a girl loses her virginity. He lied to my sister... promising that he would marry her. I know my dad knew...he gave him the keys! He did this to his daughter. I know he knows...but how can he live with himself?

Zeina was never one to consider counseling before our interviews began, but was able to see the many benefits at the conclusion. "I would go to counseling...and I'm going to get my family to go too, especially my mom. We need it."

Participant #3: Samia

Samia is a 27-year-old Palestinian Muslim woman with a 7-year-old daughter. She has lived in the United States for about 12 years. She is about 5 feet tall, with dark black hair and a dark olive complexion. She works as a cashier at a local convenience store. She had a bluish-black bruise under her right eye. Samia is an unmarried Muslim mother and she does not wear hijab. Samia was very Western in dress, appearance, and communication. It was difficult setting up an initial interview with Samia because she needed someone to look after her daughter. We met at a local bookstore for our first interview. Samia was eager to participate in the research, and even more eager to meet others in her "situation." When asked to tell me about herself, Samia started to cry. She began with: "I know...it was my fault. It's the biggest regret I have. I did it. It's my fault..." I knew nothing about Samia's "situation." This was my first encounter with her and her story. She began to tell me about her life with her live-in boyfriend, and his

jealousy. Her story created a feeling of unease within me. This was unexpected to me. Samia ran away from home at the age of 19. She gave her reasons:

I didn't have a life. My life was to go home and to go to work at my dad's store. That's not a life! They wouldn't let me do anything! I had five sisters and two brothers, no one cared. Everyone was doing their own thing. Everything was really bad when my brother died...He was shot by accident. Ever since then...

Samia is now living with an African American man, her daughter's father. She described feelings of depression and isolation.

I'm just trying to make it. I work from 10 am to 8 pm, six days a week. I have one day to spend with my daughter, and to be honest, even on that day, I don't spend it with her. I stay in bed all day.

She also described being disowned from her family, living with her daughter's father, working to survive, and her regrets.

I wish I could go back (home). I was stupid, but they won't take me back. No one wants to have anything to do with me. I ran away with a guy and I got pregnant. They are ashamed of me. I left thinking I had it so bad at home...yea, right. My life is worse now...I know you're wondering about my eye...he hits me sometimes. We fight a lot. I'm trying to save money, I want to leave.

When asked about her support system and whether or not she would seek counseling, Samia replied:

There's really no one to talk to. Sometimes I can talk to the people I work

with, but sometimes they gossip. I hate it when people know my business.

People don't need to know everything about me. I wish I could go to counseling.

I would, I know I need it. I want to change.

Participant #4: Manza

Manza is a 33-year-old married, Egyptian woman with three children (two boys and one girl). She is about 5'8" with an olive complexion. Manza was not wearing hijab. She appeared very Western in dress, appearance, and communication (although she did have a slight accent).

Manza was 16 when she got married. Her husband is also Egyptian and is about ten years older than her. They married in Egypt and came to the United States shortly thereafter. They have been in the United States for 14 years. Manza was very assertive and open and forthcoming with information.

Our first interview was conducted in my work office. Manza began the interview by telling me about her sister's death and explaining that it was the turning point in her life. She lives her life in fear, and awaiting her own death. She explained to me her health concerns. Her sister died of cancer at the age of 35. Manza stated that she was very happy with her life, but wished for so many things. From the interview, I sensed feelings of emptiness and regret. As she took photos out of her purse, Manza described an unfulfilled life with little support:

I don't trust anyone...not even Arabs. That's why I moved here [describing a community away from the city], there are no Arabs here. I would like to have friends, but they only let you down, and really I just don't have time for it. I take care of my children and my husband...When they're at school and my husband is at work, I just sit and cry sometimes. No one helps me, I'm expected to do it all...whether I'm sick or not. I wanted to be a lawyer, you know...I don't know,

I guess things were different at that time.

From her outside appearance, one might believe that Manza had everything she wanted. She was a very strong woman, physically and mentally. She had no difficulties speaking her mind and voicing her opinions and that surprised me. From our interviews, she obviously wanted more time to talk and sort through her life. I sensed that the interview process evoked a feeling within my participants of “I could have.” When asked if Manza would ever seek counseling, she said yes. Manza explained that counseling would help her get over her sister’s sudden death. When asked about her support system, Manza replied:

I have my mother-- I can call her any time. Even though we don’t get along all the time, she helps me. And if I really need to talk, I can call my mother-in-law. But before my sister’s death...I would talk to my sister about everything. We were very close.

Participant #5: Aysha

Aysha is a 35-year-old Palestinian woman, with four children (three girls and a newborn baby boy). She is 5’2,” small framed, and has a light complexion. She was married to a very well-educated Jordanian man at the age of 22. He worked in architecture before moving to the United States, only to find employment as a cigarette franchise owner. Aysha finished high school and met her husband in the States. After the wedding, Aysha decided to wear hijab. Both their families immigrated for financial and educational reasons. Our first interview was conducted in Aysha’s home. She was unable to leave home to meet with me because she had just had her baby boy about three weeks ago. She insisted that meeting in her home would not be a concern and that it would not affect her ability be open with her responses. We sat in her living room area, with her husband and four children in various other rooms throughout the home.

Initially, Aysha appeared very nervous and I suggested that we could reschedule the interview. Aysha brushed it off and said she wanted to participate, but was nervous because she did not know what to expect. I began the interview in much the same way I began the others, by asking Aysha to tell me about herself and her life.

I have a good life, Alhumdillah. I have everything I need. I'm so happy that I have my baby boy now too! My life is good. You know, no complaints.

Aysha found it difficult to expand on her answers. She answered only the questions asked and expanded very little, offering little insight into her life. When asked about struggles and challenges faced as an Arab Muslim woman in America, Aysha responded:

Oh yea...there are lots! But, you know, it's from us. It's from our own people.

There's no trust, and people don't want the best for you. You know what, I don't have friends. I only have associates. I have learned that is the best way to keep away from people's negative side [the "ein" (evil eye)].

Participant #6: Fatmeh

Fatmeh is a 29-year-old, married Palestinian woman. She has four children (one son and three daughters, all under the age of nine). Fatmeh was married in Palestine and came to America shortly thereafter. Fatmeh and her husband met through family. She was well traveled and had been to many places in the Middle East and Europe. Her husband has lived in the United States for most of his life; she reported that he went to Palestine only to find a wife. For Fatmeh, starting a life in the United States posed many struggles; as she put it:

It had little to do with America. I struggled because here I was married, pregnant, with a new family, in a new place, having to learn a new language and try to fit in. It was very stressful, trying to compete with the women here... You know your

husband looks...I just wanted to be everything and to do everything right.

Fatmeh wore hijab in Palestine. As soon as she arrived in the States, she decided to take off the hijab:

My husband didn't make me do it, but I wanted to. I wanted to fit in. Everyone looks so good here; I wanted to look good too.

Fatmeh is a very attractive woman. She is 5'4" with long caramel-colored hair, big brownish eyes, and a very light complexion. She was born, raised, and educated in Palestine. It seemed to me as if she had one life over there [Palestine] and another completely different life here [America]. When expressing this to her, she replied: "It's not like I changed who I am. I'm just trying to fit in. I'm trying to keep my husband interested." Fatmeh was very self-conscious, emulating celebrity styles. Fatmeh explained that her husband is very flirtatious and is attracted to American girls:

I get headaches sometimes because I try so hard. I make things worse because I spend money that we don't have so that I can look good for him. He gets really mad when I spend money on clothes or makeup, even though he knows I do it for him. I think he likes blondes so I did my hair close to that color.

The first interview with Fatmeh was conducted in my office. She arrived early and when asked to tell me about herself, she spoke readily.

I'm a good person. Deep inside, I would do anything for anyone. People know this about me. They know I would do anything to help another person out. I have children. I don't want any more...it's just so hard to take care of them, especially since I had them so fast, right after one another. I kept trying because they [in-laws] wanted me to have more boys. I don't know what they wanted me to do. Sorry, but

only one boy. But, I'm happy with that...I'm happy with what I have. Sometimes, though, I hear his family [husband's family] asking him to tell me to try for more children. No, I'm not. Are they going to raise them? You know... you have to have time for yourself...they just don't understand that. See, that's the problem...

Fatmeh stated that her biggest struggle is with her husband's family. They interfere with her life and the decisions she makes for her children.

Sometimes I feel like they start fights between me and my husband on purpose.

It's almost as if they enjoy it. I think they enjoy it when he hits me.

When asked if she would ever go into counseling, Fatmeh said "Yes, but someone like you...someone you could trust..., someone that understood us."

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

Data collection consisted of a demographic questionnaire (see Appendix A); three rounds of face-to-face interviews with six immigrant Arab Muslim women who agreed to participate in this investigation; and my own thoughts, observations, and reflections as recorded in a research journal maintained throughout the data collection and analysis process. The interviews were semi-structured and utilized the questions identified in the interview protocol (see Appendix B) to explore what life was like for the participants in America and their perceptions of counseling. Each of these interviews was scheduled at a time that was mutually agreeable for the participant and the researcher and was conducted in a manner consistent with the guidelines set forth in the research proposal. Each of the 18 interviews lasted no longer than 90 minutes, was audio-taped, and was later transcribed for data analysis. Impressions noted in my research journal served as a secondary form of data collection. These notes helped me recall immediate impressions of each

participant, reactions to each interview, and my initial impressions regarding each interview. The data collected via these methods were analyzed in a manner consistent with feminist ethnography procedures and guided by the work of Van Manen (1990). Initially the plan was to utilize Spradley's (1979) approach to ethnographic analysis. Spradley identified four kinds of ethnographic analysis: domain, taxonomic, componential, and themes. I found it difficult to utilize and apply Spradley's (1979) approach with my population. Instead, data analysis was guided by the work of Van Manen. Van Manen suggested considering text (data) "in terms of meaning units, structures of meaning, or themes" (p.78). I approached the data from different directions to uncover themes.

Transcribing and Editing

The information gathered during the semi-structured interviews provided me with valuable information that gave me a deeper understanding of what life is like in the United States for Arab Muslim women. My first task was to transcribe the audio-tapes. My challenge at that point was to transcribe the interviews verbatim. The challenge of transcribing was greater than I had anticipated. A 60-minute interview took up to 12 hours to transcribe, while a 90-minute interview took up to 18 hours to transcribe. Although the process was taxing, I was confident that each transcription accurately represented what the participants said. I also felt confident in my understanding of the points that each participant was trying to make.

Added to the challenge of transcribing the interviews were two uncontrollable facts: the women were naturally soft-spoken, and some spoke mainly Arabic with heavy accents. Although most of the information provided in the interviews was clear, in some situations the microphone on the tape recorder did not pick up when a voice dropped in volume. In these cases, I found

myself playing the tape over and over again just trying to make out one word. When I continued to have difficulty, I contacted the participant to get clarification.

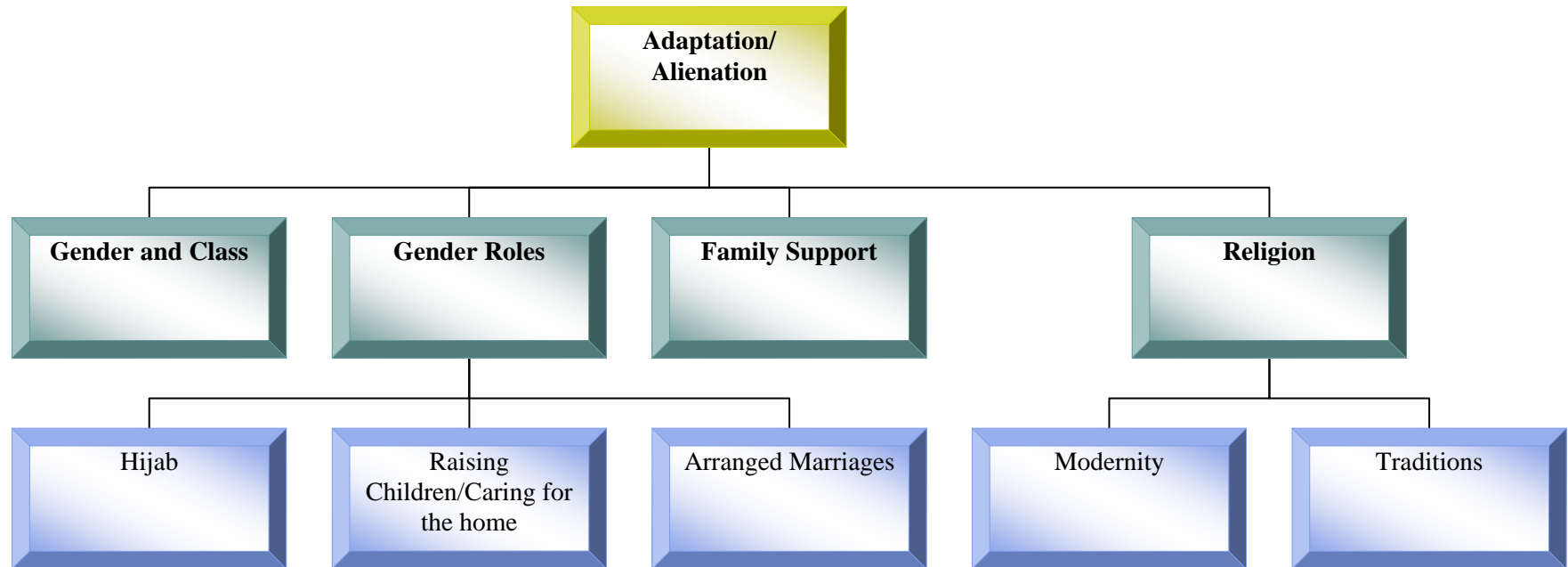
By the time data had been collected and transcribed, I had read and reviewed each interview at least twice. Before the third review of the transcripts, I placed my observations and comments on color-coded index cards, assigning a specific color to each participant. As I read through the transcripts a third time, I kept track of themes, hunches, interpretations and ideas by taking notes in the margins. As I came across anything significant that I wanted to include that described one of the participants, I wrote it on her specific color-coded index card. The fourth time I reviewed the transcripts, my focus was on what was noted in the margins. At this point I used different colored highlighters to search for a higher degree of specificity within the recurring themes (each color represented a similar answer or idea). For example, “lack of communication,” “high expectations,” and “feeling alone” were frequent responses to “describe some barriers or challenges you face here in America.” As I went through the notes in the margins, I highlighted similar ideas and thoughts in the same color.

To further develop and unite the themes, I created classification schemes. One classification scheme or typology related to how the women conceptualize themselves and others in their lives. By studying the themes, constructing a classification scheme, and relating the different pieces of data to each other, I was able to draw interpretations.

The coding process was tedious and it involved bringing together and analyzing all the data including all the themes, ideas, concepts, and interpretations. I did this by listing the final themes and concepts by category on a large white poster board. Once I identified the major categories, I reviewed the list to ensure there was no overlapping. I then assigned a number to each category for sorting purposes. After sorting through the data manually (cutting notes and

quotes from transcripts and gluing them on color-coded index cards) and placing each category in a separate file folder, I began refining and tightening up my ideas. This resulted in the final emergent themes.

Figure 1. Themes regarding Arab Muslim Women's experiences in the United States



Emergent Themes

The interviews with the six women participants provided me the opportunity to identify certain patterns and themes that appeared frequently. Document analysis entailed making sense and meaning out of the data I collected. I had a choice to either analyze each biography at a time or organize document analysis around themes that I found in common among the participants. I chose the latter to reach a deeper meaning. I found it important to begin with descriptions of every participant as background to the themes. When I started studying the transcripts, I had no idea how similar these women would be. From the considerable data that I collected, I found commonalities with issues concerning the following major themes: gender and class, gender roles, family support, and religion (keeping traditions/embracing modernity). It appeared to me that adaptation or alienation was dependent on the success or failure in maintaining what meant the most to them.

Within each theme are specific categories that the participants found to be significant in their lives. For instance, within gender roles, (see Figure 1) participants discussed their views on wearing hijab, taking care of the home and the children, and arranged marriages. Again, it seemed to me that whether the participants felt alienated or whether they felt they had adapted well to American society was dependent on their success or failure in maintaining what meant the most to them. Regardless of the result, most of the participants believed they could benefit from counseling. After the discussion of major themes, the participants expressed interest in working through their struggles by communicating with a trusted professional, as done in counseling. To me, this meant they were ready for their voices to be heard.

Gender and Class

Two themes that were related to one another were gender and class. The six participants were women from an Arab culture where, traditionally, women were not encouraged to earn or share in the income of the household or to get an education. Maiba and Zeina were allowed and encouraged to continue their education and work outside the home, but Aysha, Manza, and Fatmeh were not allowed. All three of the latter women described feeling a sense of dissatisfaction with their current lives, often yearning for more out of life. Initially, they believed that marriage and immigration would lead to the life they wanted and dreamed about, disregarding the challenges they would face in a new society.

Samia, on the other hand, was unable to sit back and wait for life to begin. She appeared eager to gain more control over her life. Samia seemed to react to the feelings of isolation and depression, not considering the consequences of her decisions. Samia made the decision to drop out of high school and leave her family to live with her boyfriend, ultimately ending all ties with her family. Such decisions can mirror how social class and levels of education are affected by gender. For some participants, gender and class were positive issues in their lives. Both Maiba and Zeina had college educations; their families secured education and had high expectations for their daughters. From the demographic questionnaire (see Appendix A) completed at the beginning of the initial interviews, I learned that Maiba was middle-class, indicating a family income between \$35k and \$50k. Zeina's family was in the upper-class/wealthy range (\$150k+) socioeconomic status (SES). Their social class seemed to help them integrate and adapt more easily, as they were less intimidated in the new environment. Being in the upper-class range may have made adaptation easier, which suggests an inter-relationship between class and

acculturation. Zeina felt that the United States was her true homeland and she never considered going back to Iraq.

Gender affects how people socialize, and how they are treated and judged by others and by themselves. Prieto (1992) stated that “when socially constructed ideas about gender conform to a totally different environment (as the case with migration), migrant men and women may resist, change, or adapt their beliefs to the new situation” (p.186). When my participants found themselves in a new culture and encountered new aspects of freedom, they adapted in different ways. Those who came from educated and well-to-do families seemed to find new meanings for being women in a democratic society. Zeina stated:

I don't know why people have anything against America; it's just a location, a place you live. I don't know about anybody else, but I like it here. To me it's better than Iraq. I have more freedom. Really, I can do so much more than they allow women in Iraq. I go to school, I have my own car, I get to go places freely and have good friendships. I'm not saying that they can't have these things in Iraq, but you have to answer to so many different people. It's hard being independent, making your decisions there [Iraq]. When I came and lived here for a few years, and I was told I could vote, I was excited. It wasn't the voting that necessarily excited me; it was more that I mattered...my thoughts mattered. I was now an important person. And, if I chose not to vote...that was okay too. I like having options. If I want to do something, I can. If I don't want to do something or be involved in something, I don't have to. The decisions I make rest solely on my shoulders.

Others like Aysha and Manza, who were less educated, but in the middle to upper socioeconomic range, seemed to decide to follow what they were traditionally taught. Aysha commented:

I married young, and I know that has something to do with how I grew up. My family values the traditional culture. Here [America], people are after the dollar. They kill people for money, they run around on each other [refers to cheating], and it disgusts me...I love my life here but it's only because my family and I stay away from those things. Life seems to be a little easier here [America] mainly because no one [referring to other Muslims] is in your business. I get up, take my kids to school, come home and clean, visit with friends and family, shop, cook...It's really up to me how I spend my day. But I keep Islam in our home. My kids can all speak Arabic and can recite certain parts of the Quran. They too will adopt our beliefs about family; I will make sure my family stays together. We all fast together during Ramadan, and we try and pray together. This is what we're supposed to be doing. This is how we will be judged on Judgment Day...I mean, what else really matters? You can't live your here [today and America] thinking this is it. This life is just a test. It's my goal to do my best and raise a good, caring, Muslim family so that I may pass the test in enter Jenna [heaven]...

Manza stated,

...You hear about it more and more now [referring to families breaking up or divorce]...even with Arab Muslims who have lived here [America] for a long

time...It makes me fearful of what's really going to happen to us [Muslims].

Life isn't always easy, but you have to make it work...you can't be selfish.

You have to think about your kids.

Thus, the participants' experiences differed due to their level of adaptation, education, and class: the upper class and the educated, from any country, are better equipped to adapt more easily and to succeed more quickly in their new environment. However, success is defined differently in every culture. Being a full-time mother at home is seen as being as successful to some people as is holding a profession outside the home. Although Zeina and Maiba may have adapted well to their new environment by continuing their education and working, their age and marital status need to be considered. Zeina (22) and Maiba (21) are younger than the other participants and they are both single. Being young and single, regardless of cultural or religious background, affords time for going to school and working.

Gender Roles

The participants in this study, regardless of their age, levels of education, class, and countries of origins, acknowledged their primary role as mothers and wives and they trusted in arranged marriages. Sabbagh (1996) stated that "there are one billion Muslims in the world today and the Arab-Islamic world alone exceeds two hundred million people living in 22 Arab countries. Each country interprets women's rights under Islam somewhat differently, and within each country social class is a determining factor in the way in which women's personal rights are treated" (pp.xv.-xvi). However, when it comes to their roles and responsibilities towards their families, all the participants in the study held deep traditional values of the roles of women in Islam.

Aysha affirmed that gender roles were assigned by the Muslim society to protect and to involve all. Aysha had four children, and believed that her role as a wife was to keep the house clean, prepare the food, manage the household, and raise responsible and productive Muslim children. Even those participants who were not married or had no children (Maiba and Samia) believed that women needed to be at home caring for the children and being a “good wife.”

Behind the Hijab: Significance and Meaning

The hijab holds different meanings in the Arab world and its significance depends on location, traditionalism, values, and level of religiosity. Speaking about hijab to a Muslim woman in Afghanistan during national unrest is different from speaking to a Muslim woman in France after laws have been passed to restrict hijab. While both may choose hijab, the reasons and times are quite different. In the West, hijab often is viewed as a means of male domination of Muslim women, but from the traditional perspective it is also a divine order to protect women. The participants in this study reflected the many meanings they held for wearing hijab, and for choosing not to wear it. My participants can be grouped into four categories: participants who chose to wear hijab in the United States and not before (Aysha, Zeina, and Maiba), participants who chose to change their habit of wearing hijab in the United States (Fatmeh), participants who believed in wearing hijab and its protections, but chose not to wear it due to fear and misconceptions (Manza), and Samia, who considered wearing hijab as a symbol of oppression and backwardness. Participants’ views on hijab varied from modesty to social significance, to historical tradition, to the importance of identifying oneself as Muslim, to a symbol of rejection of aspects of modernity.

The issue of the hijab has been debated in literature (Abraham & Shryock, 2000; Taber, 2004), history, and society ranging from Islamic, to Arabic, to Western. The belief that hijab is a

requirement was debated among my participants as well. They all agreed that hijab is meant to promote privacy for females and to prohibit the intermingling of sexes. Hijab also is supposed to ensure modesty, decency, chastity, and above all, respect and worship. Hijab is a symbol of purity that intends to send a message to the observers. For example, when a woman rejects hijab she is, indirectly, rejecting traditional authority. It is the men who say that the hijab protects a woman's purity. It is the outsider who judges the status of women in hijab. When a woman wears hijab, the Muslim observer says she is pure. The hijab has a figurative significance that is both cultural and social. Maiba stated that she "felt naked without hijab. Modesty is a requirement. Physical attractions are distractions....We hear stories of rape because women are wearing miniskirts, shorts, and bathing suits." Aysha emphasized that she was "not flexible with hijab, [she] covers everyday when [she] leaves home...it is [her] identity as a Muslim female...[she] believes in it. All the females in [her] family cover their heads...[she] sees herself wearing hijab all through [her] life." Many of the women felt that wearing the hijab was a message for men not to harass or think they were available. For Maiba and Zeina, it was a comfort for their parents as well. Despite their views about the hijab and their current choice, five of the six women agreed that the hijab is a demand from Allah. Maiba assured that "without the hijab I can be anybody. With it, I am Muslim and I am obedient to Allah." All the participants in the study expressed that they find value not in modern dress but in keeping conservative family values (e.g., dressing modestly). Hijab is just one aspect of having conservative family values.

Arranged Marriages

The majority of participants, regardless of their levels of education, class, countries of origins, and levels of adaptation when in foreign lands, were unwilling to commit to marriages

without the consent of their parents and without the collective advice of both families involved. The participants in the study acknowledged their trust in arranged marriages and gave reasons that were rooted in their conservative culture and in the social communal interests of the individuals. Aysha stated that “arranged marriages proved to be more successful and lasting than the romantic ones.” However, other reasons were as important. When parents arrange marriages on behalf of their children, the marriage is not to be built on ‘blind love’ or on physical attractions, but on compatibility. A marriage is not a contract between two individuals who decide to get married, but is a familial or communal rather than an individual affair:

Officially, a marriage has been perceived as a mechanism of reproduction, human survival, reinforcement of family ties and interests, perpetuation of private property through inheritance, socialization, and achievements of other goals that transcend the happiness of the individual to guarantee community interest (Barakat, 1993, p.107).

Manza explained how she felt about arranged marriages:

I do trust arranged marriages. My parents had an arranged marriage and my friends had arranged marriages. The two families that arrange the marriage, they understand and know each other. The spouses both trust their families, and know that their mate is well-chosen. For example, one of my friends, she saw her husband for the first time on the wedding night. They were both nervous, but they were patient with each other. I appreciate that very much, because they both understood what each other was going through and weren't selfish. You keep thinking about the other person, not just yourself. Behavior and manners come first, before your own needs. This is pressure, also, and

stressful, but women are coping with it very well in my country.

Zeina, on the other hand, saw arranged marriages differently:

Although I still believe they are much better than what they have in America, I don't think it's the best way to meet a husband. I mean, look at my parents! Their marriage was arranged, in a way. My father and mother were introduced at a school event, by my uncle. Who would have guessed that my dad would be such a loser? Not only has he had affairs before, but he now has a separate family with two more children. In this situation, arranged marriages don't work. And, why does the divorce rate look low? I wonder if there are more people like my mom who just put up with it because they have no other choice?

When asked if she would be open to an arranged marriage, Zeina replied:

I never close doors, but I would want to spend lots of time with the guy. I'm not going to make a split-second decision like they want you to. I want to ask around, I want to ask him questions, I want to get to know him. I guess that wouldn't be an arranged marriage? I don't know, but you just have to be careful now...guys are different nowadays....they want to take advantage of you. I can't trust any of them.

The idea of an arranged marriage was seen positively by most of the participants because they believe it offers protections. Although the women expressed some measure of independence and freedom, they realized that in an arranged marriage they would find more guarantees and a sense of security within the family, and not necessarily outside it.

Family Support

Samia's and Fatmeh's experiences differed in comparison to the other participants. Both Samia and Fatmeh came from low socioeconomic status and had little education. They had resided in America between 10 and 12 years, but felt "alone," and "unheard." Samia described her experience:

...I guess I just wanted more. I don't know, but I thought he [boyfriend] loved me. Ever since we came here [America], my family has changed. We started making a little money, and then it was like we were spending our lives in that store [family business]. Yeah...we were together, but the funny thing is we never talked to each other...It's not like I woke up one day saying 'hmm... I think I'm going to find me a guy to date, have sex with, and run away with. I was stupid...I guess I wanted someone to come and take me out of the situation...[working in the family business]. When I wasn't in school, I was at the store, and if I wasn't at the store, my mom made sure I was at home cleaning or doing something for the family... then I would see my American friends having a good time, talking about what they did during the weekend, just having fun. Most of them weren't doing anything horribly wrong, but whenever I even expressed the desire to do things with them, I was a 'bad person' or I 'wanted to be American'...Why does it have to be like that? Why can't I have fun, be a good Muslim, work in a decent job, have a family and still considered to be a good person?...but you know, no one really wanted to hear that...To make things even worse, my brother died here. He was only 17, and was shot...he was at the wrong place at the wrong

time. That's when I couldn't take things anymore...that's when I had to just leave...

Fatmeh's experience was similar to Samia's in that she related feeling lonely, unheard, and powerless in this new society.

...My husband only came back to Palestine to find a wife...I don't think he could make it there [Palestine]. He's a good guy...but he makes it very difficult for me here [America]. We don't have a lot of money...and it's hard. I'm trying to be the best wife..., but his family puts things in his head. I think it would be different if I had my family here with me. I would have people to talk to and help me with the children...Sometimes I feel like I'm not even married. I feel like I'm a widow, raising the kids on my own...and his family, they only talk with me or pretend to like me when he's around...Okay, I want to say that's it not America that makes people this way, but I don't know...

Samia's and Fatmeh's experiences appear to be slightly different in comparison to the other participants because of low SES, lack of education, and non-existent familial support.

Religion

A major theme among the women I studied was the importance of religion in their lives. All the participants credited their parents and their community for the amount of knowledge they had of the Arabic language and also the religion. Maiba related how she "learned to recite verses in the Holy Qur'an by the age of five and used to pray with my mother five times a day. That was all before I went to school." Aysha also explained that if her children "learned nothing more than the Qur'an," she would consider herself a success as a parent.

All six participants showed commitment to their religion in different ways and on different levels. Two participants showed complete involvement in the mosque, two attended occasionally, and two (Zeina and Samia) separated themselves (although Zeina did so subconsciously) from the mosque and the Muslim community. Because I was not able to generalize as to why my participants chose certain attributes of Islam to practice, I focused on what it meant to them individually to be religious.

Maiba trusted religion to guide her in all aspects. “I am not very religious, but what religion I do know, I understand. I’m proud of being a Muslim female, and I know it’s hard sometimes here in America, but I would never change who I am.” Aysha trusted religion to guide her life. “It was an especially difficult time for me after I started to have children. I would begin to question whether I would ever have a baby boy. It’s so important in our culture...and I would just place all my faith in Allah.” Aysha gave birth to a beautiful baby boy in October. Manza, although not very religious [she did not attend the mosque regularly or wear hijab], felt it was her duty to show her husband and her children the “right” way to religion.

It’s a mother’s job to keep Islam in the family and in the home. I would fail as a mother if my children did not have deen [Islam] in their life.

How else will I make sure they [children] make the best decisions as they get older? This is the only way I trust my children will have a chance here [America].

After Manza’s husband and children saw her insistence and her dedication, they all started praying and fasting.

Zeina learned more about religion in the States because she was encouraged by Muslim friends to learn, even though both her parents were Muslim and she was raised in a traditionally

Muslim home. Although they identified themselves as Muslim, Samia and Fatmeh slowly began to move away from religious practices. Samia described the moment she briefly contemplated changing religions.

I tried going to a church with my boyfriend to see what it was like; I felt bad. I knew it wasn't right. I was thinking about everything I had done in my life...I didn't make the best decisions, but this would be bad. I would have to be outta my mind! I know God wouldn't forgive me for that. I know I'm not the best Muslim, but I am a Muslim. You really can't change that. It's who I am.

When asked what religion her daughter would practice, Samia emphatically responded, "Yanee [of course], what do you think? I would never allow her to be anything but a Muslim." Later in the interview, Samia began to cry as she realized that how she raises her daughter was not completely in her control.

The younger participants (Maiba and Zeina) felt a greater comfort and an understanding among other Muslims than among those from different backgrounds or religions. Maiba stated, "I favor Muslim friends because I feel I have more in common with them and that I can be more of myself with them, without stress." Zeina remembered:

There was a time in school when my friend—an American- started laughing and said...'I thought you were going to be totally different, but you weren't, you were cool...' It's just different because you don't have to try hard with other Muslims...they know what you can do, what you can't. I don't have to keep explaining why I can't stay out late or why I can't go to a party with them or why I can't drink...After a while, you just get tired of explaining.

As these Arab Muslim women learned to adapt to their new environment, feelings of stress, fear, isolation, and tension become apparent in their lives. Many resorted to social and religious support. Three of the participants became more religious in the States than they were in their homeland: Aysha, Maiba, and Zeina decided to commit to wearing the hijab in the United States, a decision that seemed to ease their tension and give them a sense of identity and security.

Based on his work with immigrants from India and Pakistan, Williams (1988) concluded that:

Immigrants are religious—by all counts more religious than they were before they left home—because religion is one of the important identity markers that helps preserve individual self-awareness and cohesion in a group. In the United States, religion is the social category with clearest meaning and acceptance in the host society, so that emphasis on religious affiliation and identity is one of the strategies that allow the immigrant to maintain self-identity while simultaneously acquiring community acceptance (p.29).

The majority of my participants' choices supported Williams' conclusion; however, there were differences in the extent to which they followed religious practices. A few of the participants felt like Fatmeh:

It's just so hard here...[America], you can't call attention to yourself, and the best way to do that is to fit in. That doesn't make me less Muslim. I do admit that not wearing the hijab makes me feel bad, but I think to myself... you have to be a strong person to wear it and put up with those ugly comments and stares! I'm just not that strong yet.

When asked if Fatmeh's parents were aware of her decision, she replied:

No, not yet. I know they'll be upset. I think my husband's family doesn't like that [decision to take off the hijab] either. My husband was fine with it. It's just different here, people are different. I can't walk around here in hijab and feel comfortable. I know other women do it, but I don't know, it is so hard...

Keeping Traditions, Embracing Modernity

Many of my participants did not have a negative view of the United States (as is often implied in the media), but they did not wish to live its modern ways entirely or lose themselves in the process. They resorted to traditions that helped them choose what was harmonious in their society, community and faith. It was very interesting, yet very frustrating, to note that during the data collection process I had an extremely difficult time setting up interview times with participants. I began the data collection at the end of September, and I did not resume (entirely) until the end of November, with many cancellations. In October, many of the participants could not be interviewed because of Ramadan (Holy month in Islam). Many of the women stated that they were too tired to participate because they were fasting all day; others had to prepare meals for the family and participate in religious activities. Ramadan ended November 22nd. I started making contact again, and still some of the participants were unable to be interviewed. They gave reasons such as, "It's Thanksgiving, and we're getting family together. It's almost Christmas time." It was quite interesting to hear these Muslim women talk about their plans for the Christian celebrations.

During hard times, alienation from modernity appears to increase as modernity advances, especially for those who try to reject the present. This may explain why Aysha and Maiba started committing to Islam and to hijab after residing in the United States, and not before. It appeared

that modernity, to them, is not what they wear and how they look, but is a conscientious change in selecting what fits best for their culture and life. Their goal was to maintain the tradition.

Aysha would not consider American-style independence for herself:

Here women are more independent even if that will affect their homes and family. They want to be independent from a younger age, which leads to living alone, going to parties, and doing whatever they want. We have limits and this protects us women. People protect them from an early age. This does not affect and change my view of how women should be treated and my religion gives women all rights, more complete than other sides without the need for [those] modern ways.

Maiba, on the other hand, felt modernity was okay, within limits.

I think life here [America] is different...my mom can't just say no to everything. That's not being realistic. And, I'm not asking to do anything that is against my religion [Islam]. I'm just asking to have a little more freedom. I'm just asking that they let me do what they let my brother do... See, that's not the religion, that's more what they were taught. That's the culture, the old ways.

All the participants kept the five commandments [pillars] of Islam—declaration of faith, prayers, zaakat, fasting, and the pilgrimage to Mecca – but on different levels. One major factor for maintaining these religious traditions was based on knowing the Arabic language. Aysha, Manza, and Fatmeh dutifully took their children to the mosque every week to keep in touch with the language and traditions. When I asked Aysha why she sacrificed a lot of money to send her children to an Islamic school, she emphasized that

The Islamic school is very expensive, \$180 per month, and \$170 for the

second child. If you ask me why I spend so much money every month it's because I want them to learn Arabic, then they can understand the language when we visit back home and they can understand and read the Quran. I try and teach as much as I can at home, but it's not enough. They need more and so I sacrifice sometimes to keep the religion and the language.

Equally important to those participants who did not have children was the belief that knowing Arabic kept them close to the culture and the religion. Even Samia had hopes for teaching her daughter Arabic, although she did not speak it at the time of the interview.

I really never wanted her to speak English. I knew she would learn English at school; Arabic is much harder to learn as you get older.

But what could I do? This was my destiny. Eventually, if I don't teach her Arabic, she'll hopefully want to learn it on her own.

I try and bring her Arabic movies and cartoons. I want to hold onto it [Arabic language] as much as possible.

Adaptation /Alienation

Adaptation

On the theme of adaptation, many immigrant Muslims face significant problems when they find themselves in a society in which values and customs are sharply different from those in their native cultures. They either slowly drift away from their faith and completely integrate into the American society, as was the case with Zeina, Samia, and Fatmeh; they adapt to the new ways, but also commit to new Muslim communities to affirm their traditional identities as did Maiba or

as Aysha and Manza, they maintain their Arab Muslim identities by isolating themselves from both worlds, the East and the West.

Maiba stated:

Yes, things are different here in the United States, but different can be good sometimes. I've met more people here than I would have anywhere else. Most of my friends are Muslims. Honestly, after high school, I really don't even associate with anyone that isn't Muslim... I mean don't get me wrong, in school [referring to college], I am friendly with everyone, but I don't have any close American friends. Most of my friends are Muslims. That's who I get along with the most. We have much more in common, and we can understand where the other person is coming from. For example, very few people know about what I told you... [referring to the guy she is in love with]. If I talked about that situation with anyone that wasn't Muslim, they would look at me like I'm crazy. I know...because I tried. The person I told kept asking me 'why can't you be together'? or made comments like 'forget it and just do what you want, it's your life.' That's not what I want to hear, because I know that's not going to work... Sometimes I just want my friends to listen. They know what is allowed and what isn't. They would never advise me to do something that could seriously affect me or get me killed.

When asked about how she maintains these friendships, Maiba replied:

That's pretty easy. My parents are much more willing to allow me to do things with my Arab girlfriends than they would with anyone

from some other group. Sometimes we go out to eat...we usually go to this awesome Middle Eastern restaurant. We go to the movies together, we even spend a little time in each other's homes...although you know most of our parents don't really like that too much either...just in case they have brothers and all. But we have fun...and my favorite time is Ramadan, because we all take turns inviting each other somewhere to break our fast. After, we spend the whole night at the masjid [Islamic Mosque] praying and having fun.

Manza and Aysha held on to their traditional identities, but isolated themselves from other Muslims.

...Trust is a big thing for me. I don't trust anyone...not even Arabs. They are always in your business here, and they don't want to see you doing well. If they see you as being successful, they don't like you any more, or they create problems for you and your family. Arabs are just jealous from one another...They don't wish well for each other. I'm not competing with anyone, but that's how it seems sometimes. They are trying to see who's better than who, who has a better house or a better car. You know what they should be comparing? ...who has the best behaved children, who has children who speak Arabic fluently and who know the deen [religion]. ...I don't know, but I feel that if I stay away from the gossip, the issues, then I'm happier. During holidays and major events, I interact with other Muslims, but I don't do so on a regular basis.

Aysha agreed:

...Sometimes it's just better to see each other occasionally so that trouble doesn't start. Think about it...especially with us women who don't work outside the home. We take care of our children and our home, I guess you can't help but compete with the other Muslim woman next door. Who has more money? Which one has the husband that takes her out?...Maybe it happens in every culture, but you know it happens with us [Muslim women]. You can really see it when it's time for summer vacation, and everyone is at the airport with their bags and their gifts. Who is going to prove that their journey to America wasn't a total loss? ...You know your family will find out if your son is in trouble with the law or your daughter is dressing skimpy, or if you've lost control of your family...they know all this...That's all they [Muslim women leaving America to visit their home country] do while they are there. They'll give everyone updates on how you and your family is doing in the big, scary, United States...

None of my participants came to the United States on their own; they followed their families or their husbands. However, in their lives as Muslim women, they all took on new roles and had more independence and freedom. Some of the participants handled the independence and freedom well. Even Manza, who knew little English and who could not drive, assumed new responsibilities by helping her husband in the store. She felt that her husband had started listening to her more, "not as in Egypt," as she frequently told me. New responsibilities for the women included shopping, taking the children to school, dealing with medical systems, and sometimes taking a job to help with the family finances. Fatmeh started teaching religion at a

nearby mosque to help with the family finances. The activities in which the women participated helped them all become more involved in the community and seemed to facilitate their knowledge and awareness in the new environment. Manza, Fatmeh, and Aysha volunteered in their children's schools to learn how the educational system worked and how they could better understand it.

For two participants (Samia and Zeina) the changes that came from adapting Western ways seemed to create more internal struggles and challenges with family. After living in America for several years, Samia noticed a change within her family. Samia believed her family's concern for money, business, and material possessions overpowered their vision. She emphasized the loss of attention, connection and support from family members. This, according to Samia, pushed her into the arms of her boyfriend causing even more conflict with herself and her family. As a result of the shame placed on Samia's family (for running away, moving in with a man and getting pregnant), she was disowned.

Zeina struggled with the deceit of her father and the apparent hopelessness and powerlessness of her mother. Zeina expressed anger and disgust toward her father. Having knowledge that her father married and had children with another woman besides her mother and was leading a separate life, and mom's refusal to leave him, confused and frustrated Zeina. The feelings she harbored inside for so long and her inability to trust others appeared to push her further away from Islam and closer to liberal, open values.

The concept of the melting pot proved to be unrealistic because the immigrant women came to a new environment with their own culture, faith, and objectives. Samia was the only participant who seemed to assimilate entirely to the American environment, although with many regrets. In Samia's case, it is important to consider the level of religiosity with regards to level of

adaptation and assimilation. Even though it was only Samia who seemed completely integrated in the American culture, the other participants all integrated on different levels, following the metaphor of the “salad bowl” in which immigrants remain culturally plural and ethnically unique.

Adaptation and integration into a new physical environment and social contexts proved easier for participants who were familiar with the language and the laws and whose social class prepared them better to face the cultural shock. Rhinesmith (1985) described culture shock “as a behavioral, emotional, mental, and physical response to the unfamiliar [which] is derived from both the challenge of new cultural surroundings and loss of a familiar environment [including] the loss of family...ability to communicate...understanding what is expected, and performing at levels of excellence” (p.148). For proper adaptation, and to ease the cultural shock, support is needed. Fatmeh seemed to continue to experience culture shock because she lacked support.

I know everyone has problems... I’m okay right now, but I guess things could be better. Arab women come to the U.S. all the time, and make it. I just thought it would be different...maybe it [relationship with her husband] wouldn’t be this hard if I talked to more people.

Alienation

One major objective of the study was to understand how Arab Muslim women feel as they attempt to be a part of a new culture. The new language, laws, and customs are sufficient to keep many women unsure of their skills and abilities, which leads to “downward social and occupational mobility” (Williams, 1988, p.21). As a result of losing family ties, Arab Muslim women also may feel alienated from all that is familiar including the social and religious

affiliations and acceptance. Samia stayed 15 years trying to be accepted in a community (the Muslim community) that had “high expectations and didn’t let me be me.” Samia described herself as, “I come off really bossy and mean, but all I ever wanted was to be accepted, to be needed, and to be loved. I would have done anything for them...” She continued:

I know I made a mistake. I know all about guys and dating and sex. I know was wrong. If I could, I would change things. This is something I will always regret.

Why was I so stupid? I had it good over there [her parents’ home]. I guess I was just looking for someone to love and to love me back....My family was big.

No one had time for anyone. I’m not making that mistake with my daughter.

Samia has spent another 12 years in a community that continues to judge her today. They judge her due to her strong accent, height, and skin color. Her feelings of rejection have discouraged her from pursuing many opportunities (provided by her employer and her boyfriend’s family) to go back to school and move past working in a convenience store. Even though Samia has lived in the United States for 12 years, she still feels inadequate and confused about her identity.

...I feel ugly. I feel like I this is how my life is going to be forever because I went against my parents’ wishes, against my religion. Every day I am reminded of my big mistake, and every day I feel like I am being punished.

I used to be a smart student you know..., and my boss has tried to get me to go back to school, but something keeps stopping me...I want to leave from from where I live and go back home, but I keep lying to myself. This will never happen... I really have nothing to offer anyone, you think an Arabic man will ever want to marry me? No way...you know what they want. They want a light skinned, pure girl who has large eyes and is beautiful. They want her to come

from a good family too. My family is good...I'm not. When people [Arab Muslims] find out who I am and my history, I get a look of disgust from them...And Americans, the people around me are just as bad, even worse. They pretend to want to help and then I end up in a much worse situation...I feel used by them [American men who she feels pretended to help her]. I feel like I have something written on my forehead that says 'It's okay to make fun of, disrespect, and use me'...

Fatmeh wished to work as a saleswoman, at the make-up counter in a retail shop, located near her home in southeastern Louisiana. Fatmeh's feelings of inadequacy about the rules and procedures stopped her from trying. Her insufficient knowledge of how to apply for a job, what to expect in an interview, and what to ask for, were all obstacles that discouraged her. Feeling inadequate to search for a job, Fatmeh decided to teach Islam at the mosque. She was able to do this only part-time.

Table 2 provides a concise view of the struggles the participants face in the United States. The women in the study had similar challenges. All the participants struggled with feelings of isolation and emptiness, describing a lack of emotional support from friends, family or a spouse. All six participants emphasized the fear of losing the Arabic language and the challenge of holding onto the Arab culture. All six participants also discussed their difficulty in making and maintaining relationships because of their inability to trust others. Four of the participants felt a loss of control in their daily lives (Maiba, Zeina, Samia, and Fatmeh). Three of the six participants felt their problems were caused by money and that their family had been destroyed by chasing the American dream. Table 2 includes further challenges the participants described as having an impact on their lives in the United States.

Table 2

Participants' descriptions of their struggles in the United States

- no [emotional] support from husband/ family (all)
- destroyed by money /destroyed by chasing the American dream (2, 3, 6)
- language/accent (3, 4, 5, 6)
- lonely/ isolated/emptiness (all)
- lack of communication with parents/family (1, 2, 3, 6)
- high expectations/ too many demands (1, 2, 3, 6)
- inability to be self (1, 2, 6)
- non-existent husband/ always working(6)
- non-existent father (2)
- loose values (4, 5)
- raising respectable, moral and religious children (4, 5, 6)
- lack of control over situations (1, 2, 3, 6)
- maintaining innocence/virginity (2, 3)
- hijab (3, 4, 6)
- Abuse (2,3, 6)
- few people to trust/ difficulty making and maintaining relationships (all)
- holding on to the culture (all)
- holding to the Arabic language (all)
- inability to grieve loss of loved ones (3, 4)
- depression/anger (1, 2, 3, 6)
- financial (3, 6)
- finding work/ understanding policies (3, 6)
- health concerns (3, 4)
- lack of help/ (around the home) (3, 4, 5, 6)
- unfulfilled dreams (3, 4)
- flirtatious husband/cheating father (6, 2)
- maintaining a Western appearance/ fitting in (2, 6)
- relationship with in-laws (6)
- education (1, 2, 3, 4)
- arranged marriages (2, 3)
- self esteem (3, 6)

Note: (#) represents participant number

Support, finding a voice, and counseling

The participants agreed that it is not total and complete separation that they want. They want, however, to find an outlet of support where they are encouraged to keep their faith and

traditions and, at the same time, find new avenues to help them adapt to the American way of life. Maiba summarized:

...I just think we all want to know that we are accepted here [America], and that we are going to be given the same opportunities without having to change who we are and what we believe. I really think that's possible...Life would be easier if we had someone, especially a woman we could turn to for help, and I don't mean like a religious woman, like a sheik's wife or something. Sometimes you need to talk to someone, and it really doesn't necessarily have to do with religion, and even if it does, it shouldn't matter...I guess what I'm trying to say is that we need women to talk to that are true, and don't gossip or judge you... maybe like a counselor, like what you do...

Table 3 describes the participants' views on seeking counseling before the initial interview and after the (3rd) final interview. Before this study, the women all agreed they had never considered seeking counseling. However, following the conclusion of the study, four of the six participants saw the benefits of receiving such help.

Table 3

Participants' views on seeking counseling

Before 1st interview

- Never really thought about it (all)
- If I really needed to, I'd go to counseling/serious problems (1)
- I'm not sure they would understand me (2)
- It won't help me (6, 5, 4)
- I don't like putting my business out in the open (5, 4)
- It would be hard for them to help me (2, 3)
- Fearful of judgment (all)

After 3rd interview

- They might think I'm crazy (2, 3, 4, 6)
- Uncertain / I don't know if I can trust them to help (4)
- I don't need to go to a counselor, I can go to my family (5)
- Yes, I think it would be helpful for me (2, 3, 6)
- I plan on seeking counseling/my family could benefit (1, 2)
- I would go to counseling with someone like you [Arab Muslim female] (6)
- It might even be better to go to someone who's different (1)

Note: (#) # represents participant number

None of my participants had ever sought counseling or had even considered seeing a counselor prior to this research study. When participants were asked about their perceptions of counseling and what it entails, Zeina defined counseling as, “sometimes you go through rough times, and it’s hard to handle on you own... so you go to counseling to solve your issues by talking through them with someone so they can help you deal with them.”

The participants in this study shared a lack of support from family and friends. When asked who they would go to for support, only Aysha and Manza were able to offer names of persons to whom they felt comfortable going with their personal problems. Aysha seemed to have the most support:

My mom is always there for me and so is my sister. I can probably go to my sister before my mother on the most personal of issues. I also talk to my husband...but still that’s limited. I’d say sister for everything. I think she knows everything about me.

Manza stated that she always felt that she could go to her mother for help and support, but yet did not always feel completely understood.

...My mom is so good wallah [promise to God], but she doesn’t listen well without giving me her opinion. And if I make a decision about something and it’s not what she wanted or what she would do, oh forget it, I won’t hear the end of it. She loves me, but I don’t always feel like she understands where I’m coming from or what I need...

It seems that, regardless of familiarity with counseling, participants shared a fear of judgment associated with seeing a counselor. While Manza, Zeina, Samia, and Fatmeh thought that they might be perceived as “crazy” if they sought personal counseling, there was comfort in

knowing it was an option for them to consider. I believe the thought had not even crossed their minds prior to this study.

Another issue that my participants discussed with regard to counseling was concern for confidentiality. Aysha suggested that, “Some people just don’t want to open up and share their feelings with other people; they just don’t want anyone to know their business.” Thinking about this, Maiba stated that she would not mind having a counselor from a background completely different than her own. Maiba stated, “As long as they knew all about my culture and understood where I was coming from, who knows...I might even feel more comfortable.”

Despite these concerns, all the participants believed counseling would be beneficial and could help them grieve their loss (Manza, Maiba, Zeina) and communicate their needs with their spouses and other family members (Aysha, Fatmeh, and Samia). Two of the participants approached me after the interviews for referrals.

Conclusion

This chapter presented the words of Muslim Arab women who immigrated to the United States and their experiences as they struggle to live and attain life-goals in the United States. What the six participants shared with me reflected their views, practices, beliefs, and feelings as they experience and cope with life in America while trying to maintain their religious culture. What I learned from my participants is that some of the issues they face and problems they deal with stem from familial pressures, arising within the home. The challenges faced by these six participants often seemed to stem from a lack of communication with family members (parents and spouses). Reasons given shared a theme of “they’re always too busy, and they wouldn’t understand.” Another challenge experienced by all the women was the high familial expectations

placed on them in the new society. Many felt that these expectations were not directly placed by the society, but by their family members now living in this new society. Fatmeh explained it as:

...I like it here in America...I don't think it's America that we have to blame for changing us. I think it's us. We come here...we want a lot from America, and we don't think about how all that changes us...If my parents knew that I didn't wear the hijab here, they would be very mad...They didn't make me wear it [hijab] there [Palestine], but I did anyway. Why do they care if I wear it here?... They worry that we're going to turn bad...show our bodies..., but they don't know how it is here...My husband didn't make me take it [hijab] off, but in a way, he did...Maybe if he didn't look at those girls [American], I wouldn't feel like I had to take it off...I don't know...you have so many things going through your head...you don't know what to do or who to listen to...

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Introduction

This qualitative study explored the lived experiences of six immigrant Arab Muslim women in the United States. Through the use of a demographic questionnaire, three rounds of semi-structured interviews, and participant observations, I sought to answer the following research question and sub-questions:

What are the lived experiences of immigrant Arab Muslim women in the United States?

- (a) How do Arab American Muslim women perceive themselves culturally?
- (b) How do Arab American Muslim women describe their specific cultural experiences?
- (c) What barriers, if any, do Arab American Muslim women experience in their daily lives?
- (d) What do Arab American Muslim women describe as their support system?
- (e) What are Arab American Muslim women's viewpoints on seeking counseling?

This chapter begins with a summary of the lives of the women who participated in the study, as seen through their eyes. Conclusions and themes that emerged through the data analyses are discussed. Limitations of the study and implications for counselors, counselor educators, the counseling profession, and future research are suggested. The chapter concludes with my reflections and closing remarks.

Discussion

Immigrants need to adapt, assimilate, and acculturate on different levels, causing tension and life transitions. Immigrant Arab Muslim women must deal with challenges common to other immigrants such as language difficulties, raising children in a minority faith, adjusting to a non-collective society, and searching for religious and familial fulfillment. The participants in my study shared in common the cultural tension they experienced as new immigrants, and many still experience this tension even after decades of living in the United States. Their stories of struggle, isolation, and unhappiness unfortunately failed to contradict societal stereotypes about Arab Muslim women. This was disappointing to me because I had hoped to hear more stories of strength and empowerment. Maiba, Manza, and Aysha did, however, did appear to demonstrate empowerment and a conscientious level of integration that is in harmony with their beliefs. It seemed to me that Zeina, Fatmeh and Samia were still struggling with the expectations of the new society and the expectations of their families and community.

Themes

The participants emphasized the importance of gender roles, family support, faith (maintaining traditions vs. modernity), and class in facing the struggles they experience as immigrants. They held different values toward the hijab, arranged marriages, and integration. Shedding light on the lives of the participants is a way of acknowledging value in their experiences and of highlighting Arab Muslim cultural and social views. Thus, the study was designed to further counselors' understanding of Muslim women who live in the United States. Eventually, perhaps, this and similar studies will lead to a counseling curriculum or training program for counselors that targets this underserved group.

Gender Roles

The findings suggested that the women in this study had difficulty adapting to American society because there was conflict between what parents and spouses expected them to do (e.g., raising children, maintaining household) and what others (Americans) were doing around them (e.g., working outside the home, interacting with the opposite sex). Although all the participants were American citizens, many did not feel that they belonged or fit in, even after several years of living in the United States. Manza expressed how she thought that Americans viewed her:

No, I don't think that they [Americans] consider me one of them [an American]. I feel that I am a stranger, kind of. Even if I want to think about it seriously, I have the same rights, but we are looked at differently.

We are not total strangers, but not as equal as they are.

Findings suggested that Arab Muslim women shared the stressors of adapting and integrating in a new culture. Many struggled to keep the traditional values of their faith while at the same time saw the need to try to function in American society with their husbands and families. The Muslim participants spoke about the loss of the familiar, coupled with the need to confront new situations. Issues that emerged strongly in this study were the need for relationships, the need to feel loved, and the need to communicate with others.

The findings suggested that some conflicts may be rooted in misunderstandings of how Arab Muslim women live and understand life. Many in Western society fail to consider that the beliefs and ways of these women are deeply rooted in history; my participants, regardless of the extent to which they adhere to religious practices, behaved in a similar conservative manner. It is through modernity, education, and different interpretations of religion that other women have changed. The participants in this study, however, held onto the belief that Islam, one's religion,

should not change and does not change, and therefore, one's values and beliefs should not change (regardless of the era).

The participants described how many Americans assume that Muslim women are submissive and weak because they value their roles as mother, wife, daughter, and sister. The Muslim women I interviewed did not express feeling oppressed or degraded. I believe they had the same issues that many other Western women would have when marrying young and moving to a new society with a different value system. Indeed, the priorities of the Muslim women I interviewed were consistent with the traditional Arab Islamic views of women's roles. Manza emphasized that her priority is her "home, husband, and children." Aysha and Fatmeh had the same feelings of taking care of their husbands' needs before their own. Such an attitude, to Muslim women, is not oppressive but is a major part of their duties as Muslim wives. The husbands have similar duties.

An interpretation that some Arab Muslim women have is that they have come to a country that attempts to tell them there is conflict between Islam and the West and that they will be free here if they give up their traditions from the East. This seems to mean that they have to give up what they used to hold to be true and appropriate. Although Samia and Zeina underwent somewhat of what I interpreted to be a "cultural attack," they felt that it was truly impossible to expect them to completely throw away who they were as cultural beings in order to become someone else. They believed that is what they were being asked to do, conform.

So, how do we reconcile the two perspectives? Immigrant Arab Muslim women may reconcile the two through experience (informal and formal education). Four of the participants expressed that they would be interested in entering into a counseling relationship. Aysha and Manza made clear that, although they themselves were not ready to enter into counseling, they

could see the potential benefits. Reconciling the conflict between Islam and the West is a way to help Muslim immigrants integrate into the current experience. I feel that many immigrants may benefit by realizing that their beliefs and values do not need to change as a result of a move. I also believe that Americans could benefit from realizing that not all immigrants are interested in conforming and “becoming liberated,” as defined by the West.

Family Support

All the participants expressed concern about the loss of relationships and the loss of communication among family members. Samia, Zeina, and Maiba (the youngest of participants) felt the pressures of the West and explained it as the loss of connectedness with parents. According to these participants, the loss of connectedness was blamed on their family’s need to make money, lack of time, and their parents’ failure to understand what they were going through. Maiba, Zeina, and Samia engaged in relationships, without their parents’ knowledge. All three described seeking acceptance, love, and attention.

Maiba’s parents both worked full time. Maiba’s father was a pilot and her mother worked at a clothing shop. When she was not at school, Maiba was at home on the computer. Although she had many Muslim friends, she wanted the attention of a male. Maiba felt she was getting older and feared she would never marry. Eventually, Maiba fell in love with an Arab Muslim man she had met through the internet. As the relationship with this young man progressed, she realized that he was feeding her excuses about his health and he was never going to approach her parents. During the final interview, Maiba explained that “he was lying” and “just wasting time.” After days of crying and heartache, Maiba decided to do some investigating. She discovered this man with whom she had communicated for almost a year, was married with children. She wanted to tell her parents, but feared major consequences. Instead, she vowed to wait and “never

trust another guy again.” When asked if her parents knew she was ready for marriage, Maiba replied in the negative, stating “they would think I didn’t like it at home...I don’t want them to think badly of me.”

As with Maiba, Samia and Zeina also had a difficult time communicating with their parents. Samia placed the blame on the fact that her parents were always working and “worrying about money.” She also emphasized that time was a big issue because everyone was always at work. Zeina found it difficult to express her feelings to anyone in her family because “everyone was already hurt.” She also expressed that “it wouldn’t do any good.” Zeina felt that her father could not be trusted and that her mother had no other options (due to her financial situation).

Fatmeh, Manza, and Aysha expressed disappointment in the many long hours that their husbands spent at work, and the little time the husbands spent with them and the children. Although the women wanted to be in America, they had not realized the sacrifices their families would have to make. They emphasized the toll it took on their relationships. They wanted to go out to the movies and to dinner, and participate in activities outside the home, but they were tired of doing it alone or with friends. They married young, had children young, came to America, and never truly had time with their husbands. It seemed to me that they yearned for a life with their husbands.

Fatmeh missed spending time with her family, and she mourned the loss of the opportunity for her children to grow up with cousins, aunts, and grandparents. Samia lost the warmth of her “easy life” back in Palestine. Unhappiness about minor things at times became so great that some of the immigrant participants reported becoming “depressed and frustrated” in the new environment.

Religion: Modernity vs. Tradition

How might one become modern when one was not, could not be, or did not want to be Western? The participants had different views on modernity and traditions. They expressed a willingness to be modern, but they were against giving up their traditions and their values. The participants were all proud of their Islamic culture and history, and many felt it was their duty to protect Islam and its culture; “I’m proud to be a Muslim and an Arab” was a statement made by many of the participants. The participants in this study did not oppose the West, but they did not wish to live its modern life. All except for Samia and Zeina, the Arab Muslim participants turned to traditions that helped them stay in harmony with their society, community, and faith. Modernity, to them, was not what they wore and how they looked; it was pride in Islam and a conscientious change in selecting what fit best with their culture and life. The participants had different definitions of freedom and modernity, but all expressed how they valued freedom in America. For Zeina and Samia, freedom meant being able to make decisions on their own without having to consult anyone. For Maiba, freedom meant liberation from traditional responsibilities at home and being able to communicate freely. For Manza, Aysha, and Fatmeh, it simply meant being able to leave home alone.

Major decisions: hijab, raising children, language, and religion

Most of the participants dressed conservatively, but only three actually wore hijab (Maiba, Zeina, and Aysha). The way a women dresses in Islamic culture is based on the principle of female modesty. According to Maiba:

I always wear hijab. I feel weird if I don’t, almost like I’m naked. I have worn it for a long time now, and my mother has always worn it. I feel very free in wearing it...I feel modest and I feel like a Muslim. There’s

really no mistaking me for anything else, and that makes me feel good.

Anyhow, showing hair is a distraction...and we know that men get easily distracted. We know that's not needed.

Those participants who wore hijab felt "protected."

Other stressors that Arab Muslim women faced were their concerns about how to raise their families, especially their daughters, in a liberal society. Aysha described how she feared for the future of her daughters; she had concerns about peer pressure related to dating, partying, drinking and wanting to live on their own when they "become of age." Fatmeh voiced similar fears for daughters leaving home or even sleeping over with friends: "It's scary to even think about one of my daughters wanting to live on their own."

Findings illuminated how these female immigrants made decisions about cultural behaviors, socialization, religious practices, and educational choices for themselves and their children, and their roles as Muslim women in a modern society. All the participants practiced selective integration, picking and choosing behaviors to retain from their cultures and behaviors to refuse from the new culture.

Manza and Aysha described how their faith and beliefs protected and helped them, providing comfort with the losses and managing new challenges. Zeina and Maiba felt much comfort and solidarity around Muslim friends, to the extent that both decided to wear hijab at a very young age. Zeina saw hijab as support that helped strengthen her resilience. All other participants described how their belief in Allah (God) guided them in some way and filled them with hope. Samia, although she did not know how to read Arabic, asked me for a Quran to keep close to her bed and gave one to her daughter to keep her faith and to help them stand against hardships and challenges. In this study, religious growth emerged as a central aspect of

resilience. These findings support previous observations that immigrating to America often sparks an “awakening” in Muslims, offering them an opportunity to strengthen their faith, to build a closer relationship with God, and to rediscover and redefine their personal, familial, social, and cultural identities in positive, empowering ways (Haddad & Lumis, 1987; Haqu-Khan, 1997).

Some of the participants expressed unhappiness about their lack of communication in the new environment. The findings suggested that social class and education affected the participants’ decisions for their children’s education. For many of the newcomers, not knowing the language imposed limitations and negatively affected their self-esteem. Aysha struggled to understand how the educational system worked and what rights she had as a parent. She decided to enroll her children in a private Islamic school near her home:

I sacrificed to keep the language. It was important for them to be able to speak with my family back home and to speak with other Arabs here. Also, since the subjects at the Islamic school are in Arabic, it was easier for me to teach them and to keep check on their homework. They also needed friends and the feeling that they belonged. That was important for me. Not knowing English well enough, I could not help them socialize with American friends.

The participants discussed the fact that many Arab Muslim women still could not drive although they had been in America for years. Manza described their difficulties:

Their husbands don’t teach them, and some won’t allow their wives to ride with strangers so that they can teach them. Their husbands come back from work late, and so they are too tired to teach them.

Those who don't drive have to wait for their husbands to do everything for them including the shopping...and then if they do learn to drive, trying to understand the rules and road ways, and the signs...they are confusing.

The participants reflected on what would have helped them adapt better. According to the participants, knowing about how to find a doctor, obtaining insurance, applying for credit cards, reading directions, information about taxes, and help with learning English would have helped them adapt better in the United States.

Discussion

The primary themes that emerged were significant and revealed aspects of the lived experiences of a largely hidden population in the United States. Looking through a feminist lens at gender roles, family support, religion, and class it is suggested that feminist researchers and counselors explore issues of identity formation among Arab American women. Marshall and Read (2003) studied the relationship among ethnic and religious identities of Arab American women and feminist orientations to determine if a strong ethnic and religious identity undermined feminism. The researchers found that Arab identity was positively associated with feminism, while religious identity was inversely associated with a feminist orientation. Islam influenced the views on feminist thought of the Arab American women in their study. The findings of my study support the findings of Marshall and Read. During the interviews, I felt that the more religious the women were, the less they wanted to hear about liberation and rights. Those participants who were not overtly practicing Islam were more open to feminist views. Marshall and Read reiterated the importance of further exploring multiple identities within

individuals because the experiences of the women in this study were undoubtedly constructed as a result of and related to religious, ethnic, and gender identity.

Mays (2003), in a qualitative study, explored the lives of 25 Muslim students at an American University (Brandeis University). Mays learned that wherever people go they are looking for signs of community and ways to connect with others. The Arab Muslim women in my study expressed a similar need for attention from their spouses, and the need for connections and support from others. Mays also discovered that although these students were all Muslim, there was a high degree of variance in their behaviors and views. The findings of the present study support that individual differences exist, even within the most seemingly similar of groups.

Finally, Zentani (1986) conducted a quantitative study on the impact of the United States educational experience on 153 Muslim students' attitudes toward their own culture and beliefs. A 74-item inventory was mailed to Muslim students at the University of Missouri-Columbia. Zentani examined three independent variables: length of residence, interaction, and adjustment. The results indicated that the longer students stay in the United States and the more interactions they have with American students, the more they undergo a negative change in their attitude towards various aspects of their culture and beliefs. Adjustment to the American environment was not found to have much effect on students' attitudes toward their own culture or beliefs. This was apparent with my participants as well. Regardless of how long the women lived in America and how well they adjusted, their attitudes and feelings about their own culture and beliefs were not heavily influenced.

Limitations

Although more than a billion individuals in the world are Muslim and Islam is the fastest growing religion in this country, the research literature concerning Muslim-Americans has been

limited. Obviously, this study could not represent every Muslim immigrant in America. Considering that Arab Muslim women are an understudied group, I tried to achieve a thorough understanding of this group by purposefully delimiting the participants to Arab Muslim women with different educational experiences and socioeconomic statuses. The sample of participants was small and future research needs to include a larger, more varied sample, possibly including a mixed-method design to add triangulation as a means of gaining more information. To achieve a more evenly distributed sample, I would have liked to include, at minimum, one participant from each predominantly Arab country. However, the demographics in Louisiana and reluctance to participate did not allow for this. Instead, this study includes the stories of four Palestinian women, one Iraqi woman, and one Egyptian woman. Furthering limiting the study is the fact that all the participants lived in Louisiana, and had some connection with the gatekeeper (e.g., friends). This study included conservative Muslim women who believed that men and women should not share the same spaces, and Muslim women who believed in their rights to work and participate in American society. However, the limitation of the number of participants could not allow a clear-cut distinction between those who were conservative and those who were not. A larger, more diverse sample would help in gaining more in-depth information about this group.

Implications for counselors, counselor educators, and the counseling profession

Considering Rose Hamdan's (introduced in Chapter 1) story and her need for counseling, how would a counselor work with her? Rose is an Arab Muslim woman living in the United States. Is it possible for Rose (who looks distinctly different) to receive the appropriate help that she seeks from someone outside her culture and faith? Will her ideas and beliefs be respected? Is it possible to provide adequate services to clients without understanding who they are and where

they are coming from? Can Rose receive help from someone who knows nothing more about Arab Muslims than what she or he hears or sees in the media?

Initially, a feminist counselor, in particular, may find it difficult to work with Rose's strong beliefs in Islam and her role in the family. A feminist counselor who approaches Rose with the counselor's own ideas related to liberation, equality, independence and free will might possibly lose Rose as a client and turn her away from counseling. As many participants in this study articulated, what they would like is someone to listen and understand them (and not necessarily someone who is going to change them). That is not to say that feminist counselors cannot help Arab Muslim women. However, they need to be aware of their beliefs and assumptions (as any counselor would) and to bracket their feminist perspective.

Feminist researchers and counselors could also assist Arab Muslim women by working from an international perspective, which would permit them to see the connections among women's struggles across the world (Jennie, 1997). By listening to and reading about the experiences of women who are from other countries and those who practice a religion different from their own, feminist counselors may become increasingly respectful of other cultures and less likely to interject ideas and beliefs of their own in the counseling session.

Nassar-McMillan (2003) has discussed the day-to-day problems that Arab Muslims face and has made recommendations for counselors who work with Arab Muslims. In working with Arab American clients, Nassar-McMillan sees a counselor's role as more than just advocate. She recommends that counselors explore and consider the social, political, and economic contexts that have affected the Arab American community so that they can resolve the more humanistic, existential issues, such as worldview and cultural and ethnic identity. According to Jennie (1997), global capitalism has created a new class of disenfranchised people (immigrant women),

and it is through counseling (international feminism perspective) that we can help these women and reduce their economic inequality.

Muslim communities are growing all over the country. As the findings suggested, there is a growing need for counselors in the Muslim community. As Muslims reside in America longer, the stigma associated with seeking mental health services is decreasing, especially if it “prevents the girls from running away.” In our pluralist society, it is imperative for counselor educators to know more about Islam and Muslims, specifically Muslim women. Knowledgeable counselor educators can develop counselor-training programs that recognize and respect differences and that promote cultural pluralism. To train more effectively, counselor educators need to understand and appreciate differences, and they must “respect the cultural and religious identities of all groups and manage their classrooms accordingly” (Ahmad & Szpara, 2003, p. 399). As a means to diversify counselor education programs, counselor educators might visit Muslim communities and recruit Muslim students. Having the few existing Muslim counselors train current students would most likely increase awareness and knowledge of the Muslim community. With this increased awareness of the Muslim community and the issues facing this group, other counselors will be better equipped to help.

In a society that is diverse, multicultural, and democratic, there is a need to include all immigrants in the process of integration. The Arab Muslim women’s experiences and the problems they face require an urgent educational response, to help minimize the trauma in the integration of new immigrants. Culture is a totality of ways that certain people live their lives the way they do because that is how they understand the world (Dewey, 1966). While a people’s understanding may change over time, especially after living in a new culture for a time, they remain attached to their culture of origin, for a very long time if not for a lifetime. However, a

majority of Muslims who live in the United States are American citizens and so were all the participants in the study. Including them, and realizing their rights in the community, is a moral obligation.

I hope that this study may lead to Arab Muslim women and their families ultimately seeking counseling for the issues and problems they encounter daily. I also hope that this study may lead to a counseling curriculum that includes substantive information about Islam, Islamic countries, and the people who practice Islam. Including knowledge about Arab Muslims in counseling curricula is an inclusive mission for the common good of a society seeking multicultural education. September 11, 2001 left many Americans wondering who Arab Muslims are and overnight “Arabs and Muslims have become the most visible, the most targeted, and the least understood ethnic group in America” (Guindi, 2003, p.634).

Recommendations for future research

I believe that this research has laid the foundation for better understanding of Arab Muslim immigrant women in the United States. Future researchers may wish to explore the diversity among Muslim women to understand more deeply their lived experiences. A longitudinal study examining how new immigrant Muslim women would integrate when counseling is provided for them would be particularly enlightening.

Current research on Arab Muslims in the United States is limited, although this population faces serious issues (Nassar-McMillan, 2003). The most serious of these problems include domestic violence, abuse of divorce and child custody laws, abuse of the polygamy system, and isolation and exclusion from various aspects of Muslim and American life (Hathout, 1995; Nassar-McMillan). Abuse, polygamy, and domestic violence were not addressed in detail in this study; future researchers might look at these issues in greater depth.

Future researchers, especially those who are not members of the Arab Muslim community, interested in conducting research with Arab Muslim women would need to expand their repertoire of design and analysis. These researchers would also need to attend to their own cultural conditioning that could translate into preconceived notions of what is salient. In effect, researchers would have to become culture centered, taking into account that their own personal life experiences cannot be objectively suspended. Research is also needed to understand counselors' possible biases and attitudes toward the Arab Muslim population before attempting to enter this community. Research into counselor biases also has implications for counselor training, especially within the area of multicultural and community counseling.

Final Thoughts

Islam is very present in Western awareness as a result of immigration, politics, and conflict. Arab Muslims have experienced a history of distrust of the western colonizers, have faced failure of secularism, have witnessed the dangers of capitalism, and have defended their culture from Eurocentric and American perceptions of them. I believe that the challenges now are even greater than they were years ago. Many immigrants, like myself, struggle to find a balance between history, religion, beliefs, and new life in America. Presently, many Arab Muslims view America as a liberal, open, and permissive society, full of economic opportunities but shameless in the degree of liberty it accords to women. Some Arab Muslim women fear such freedoms; many of them are mindful to practice a conservative lifestyle to help in keeping their identity. They do not easily welcome or encourage change.

When I decided to study Arab Muslim women in the United States, my biggest fear was that Muslim stereotypes would be reinforced once again. I also considered how the image of Arab Muslim women in the West has been categorized and politicized. Malti-Douglas (1992)

argued that “the image of women languishing under the yoke of Islam titillates the Western observer and permits him to place himself in the superior position. Women and their role become a stick with which the west can beat the East” (p.17). In novels, images of Muslim women and issues such as harems, rapes, forced hijab, and honor killings highlighted by the media leave some in the United States in a position of feeling superior to a culture still widely unknown to them. Focusing on the ills of a culture that spreads over a large part of the world does not “result to form bonds of sisterhood across cultures, nor to depict the happy and unhappy realities of women’s lives, nor to liberate Arab women, but rather to establish the superiority of Western women’s lives and, through them, Western cultures” (Sabbagh, 1992, p.xiii). I hope that the narratives of the participants have provided different views of the lived experiences and viewpoints of women.

When I was asked what I intended to do with the study, I had to find an appropriate answer that related to my field, counseling. From my own experiences in America and those I hear about from relatives and friends, I concluded that Arab Muslim women are in need of counseling. From the time I began this research till now (almost two years), I have witnessed four divorces, and have heard about two runaways and one attempted suicide. These issues are becoming more and more prevalent. For this reason, I believe this group needs an outlet, a source to communicate with, without fearing judgment and disowning from family and friends. I have also realized that the issues faced are not solely associated with women, but they include entire families. The expectations that families place on their children are high, and they are not communicated effectively nor are they presented realistically. Counselors can effectively help with the transitions and the family dynamics, ultimately creating more opportunities for dialogue among parents and children. This, I believe, is what is truly needed to live peacefully and

according to “the traditional way,” honoring parents’ wishes and fulfilling their expectations, and at the same time, allowing one to find oneself in the new environment.

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APPENDIX A:

Demographic Questionnaire Arab Muslim Women

Thank you for your willingness to complete this questionnaire. The information that you provide will help me have a better picture of what the Muslim community looks like. The information will be used to increase awareness and understanding of Arab Muslim women and their experiences here in the United States.

Name: _____

Phone number: _____

Age: _____

Educational Level: _____

Major (if appropriate): _____

Ethnicity: _____ U.S. Citizen? _____

Length of residency in the U.S. _____

Are you a practicing Muslim? _____

What sect of Islam do you belong to? _____

Would you describe your family as () poor () middle class () wealthy ?

Signature: _____ Date: _____



APPENDIX B:

Guide for Semi-Structured Interviews Interview Questions

- I. How do immigrant Arab Muslim women perceive themselves culturally?
 - a. With which culture do they seem to associate themselves more? Explain.
- II. How do immigrant Arab American Muslim women describe their specific cultural experiences?
 - a. What has life been like for them in America?
 - b. How do their experiences here in America compare with their homeland experiences?
- III. What barriers/struggles, if any, do Arab American Muslim women experience in their daily lives?
- IV. And what do Arab American Muslim women describe as their support system?
 - a. What does their support system look like? Who does it include/leave out?
- V. What are their experiences with Counseling and their sentiments towards those who seek counseling.

More specific questions will be asked depending on the interviewees' responses and the direction taken during the interview. Topics to be visited and discussed (Social, emotional, and academic areas):

- Life---- Past (What was life like?); Present (What is life like now?); Future (How do you see your life in years to come?)
- Family
- Religion & beliefs
- Education
- Dress
- Freedom(s); independence vs. dependence
- Abuse
- Voice
- Social life: isolation, friendships, dating, marriage, sex
- Expectations



APPENDIX C:

Informed Consent Form

1. Title of Research Study

The lived experiences of immigrant Arab Muslim women in the United States.
Research question: What are the lived experiences of immigrant Arab Muslim women in the United States? What are the implications for counselors and other helping professionals.

2. Project Director(s)

Iman En-Nabut, Doctoral Candidate, Department of Educational Leadership, Counseling, and Foundations, University of New Orleans, New Orleans, Louisiana 70148. Cell: (504) 931-4626. This research study is in partial fulfillment of the Ph.D. Counselor Education requirements, and under the supervision of Dr. Zarus Watson and Dr. Barbara Herlihy. Please contact **Dr. Watson or Dr. Herlihy** in the Department of Educational Leadership, Counseling and Foundations, 348 Bicentennial Education Bldg., University of New Orleans, Lakefront Campus, 2000 Lakeshore Drive, New Orleans, LA 70148 **(504) 280-6661** for answers to questions about this research, your rights as a human subject, and your concerns regarding a research-related inquiry.

3. Purpose of this Research

The purpose of this research study is to learn more about Immigrant Arab Muslim women and their experiences in order to better serve them. I will do this by obtaining demographic information and conducting three rounds of semi-structured interviews. The information gathered will be used to encourage further research with this underserved group. This information may also be used to market counseling services to these women and to develop more culturally sensitive interventions to enhance the multicultural counseling relationship.

4. Procedures for this Research

Participants will voluntarily participate in the interviews, lasting approximately 90 minutes each (total of 3 interviews). Interviews will be conducted in person, in my home office.

5. Potential Risks or Discomforts

Participants may experience slight emotional distress in the process of recalling unpleasant or difficult experiences. There is also the possibility that participants may become fatigued during the process. Participants will be encouraged to take breaks if needed. All aspects of participation are voluntary and the participant may choose to conclude the interview at any time. Participants who would like to discuss these or other potential discomforts may contact the Project Director listed in #2 of this form.



6. Potential Benefits to You or Others

The results of this study may be used to assist counselors and other mental health professionals in understanding the needs of Immigrant Arab Muslim women in America. As such, with greater knowledge comes understanding. This is an effort at enabling helping professionals to become more accommodating and effective when working with this group.

7. Alternative Procedures

Participation is entirely voluntary and individuals may withdraw consent and terminate participation at any time without consequence.

8. Protection of Confidentiality

Participants' names and identifying information will be kept confidential at all times. The signed consent forms and any other materials related to this project will be maintained in a secure and confidential manner by the Project Director. If the results of this study are published, participants' names and identifying information will be disguised.

9. Signatures and Consent to Participate

I have been informed of all procedures, possible benefits, and potential risks involved in this investigation. By signing this form, I give my permission to participate in this study.

Signature of Participant

Name of Participant (print)

Date

Signature of Project Director

Name of Project Director (print)

Date

***University Committee for the Protection
of Human Subjects in Research
University of New Orleans***

Campus Correspondence

Zarus Watson, PI
Iman En-Nabut
ED 348

9/19/2006

RE: The lived experiences of immigrant Arab Muslim women in the United States

IRB#: 03oct06

Your research and procedures are compliant with the University of New Orleans and federal guidelines.

Please remember that approval is only valid for one year from the approval date. Any changes to the procedures or protocols must be reviewed and approved by the IRB prior to implementation.

If an adverse, unforeseen event occurs (e.g., physical, social, or emotional harm), you are required to inform the IRB as soon as possible after the event.

Best of luck with your project!
Sincerely,

Laura Scaramella, Ph.D.
Chair, University Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research

SAMPLE
“Zeina” Interview
1/18/07

Q. The first thing I wanted to ask you is, how did you feel after you left here the last time, after the interview?

A. I loved it. I felt like relieved, like I got a lot off my back.

Q. Good, good. You felt like it helped?

A. Yes, it does help. I don't know. Like even though I go and I talk about it--- I talk this much I sometimes get the feeling that people get sick of hearing it.

Q. Uh-huh?

A. So you stop talking about it.

Q. You kind of feel like your breaking me in?

A. Yes sometimes, you know. So when you tell it to somebody new it's like that relief just goes away again, I don't know.

Q. Yea...

A. It's not that bad....I don't know....That's what I told my sister....I said “you guys should just go to her....”

Q. Hey, good, good. Did you --- And you felt comfortable telling your sisters the news that you were coming ---

A. Yes.

Q. To get interviewed tonight? What were their reactions and ---

A. They were like.....ummmmmmm what did you talk about? How --- did she start? At first I felt weird because she was just like --- “start talking about you”, you know. I said you can't just start you know.

Q. Yes.

A. just kind of picks up and you just start talking.

Q. That's the process. They always say just trust the process.

A. Yes.

Q. What about your mom? Does she know, or?

A. She knows yes. She was like, I want to meet this girl. I was like mom, you should go talk to her.....I swear to God.....it'll help! (Laughter) She started laughing at me. She was like, “Who is she?” I said a girl that I knew. She was like, she was thankful.

Q. Good.

A. She was like, “You just told her.” I was like, “Yes. I was like I don't care. I mean I was like everyone else knows....I don't care..... I don't care.”

Q. You know it's very confidential, completely confidential. I mean my parents, when I'm telling them I'm coming home from work I just say, “I have an interview.”

A. (Ha-ah slight laughter)

Q. They don't know --- They respect that.

A. Yes.

Q. Because you know, it's a very important part of being a professional.

A. Exactly.

Q. Never something you have to worry about. The second round of interviews (Yanee), what I would like to do is to get you to focus on --- living here in America and how if anything at all has an affect on you being a Muslim female? If you have any challenges as a result of being a

Muslim and a female in America? Are there any challenges? Do you think it would be any different if you weren't dressed in (hijab) and that people didn't know automatically that you were a Muslim or ---

A. I think it does still make a big difference. I don't know because I started wearing it when I was like seven.

Q. Wow.

A. That's very young, very, very young.

Q. By choice?

A. Yes by choice. I've been wearing it for about fifteen years. That's very young but like I've been getting like --- since to be that young and for like you know, kids don't understand everything. In class I remember all the comments that I used to get. "Do you take a shower with it, were you born with it?" like all the stuff like that. Like I don't know, like you realize like how much people always look at you right away. It's just like when you walk in a store, everybody looks at you. It's like you do anything everybody automatically you know, stares or something. Because they think something's wrong with you but the second they get to know you they're like oh, you're okay. Like I even have friends like in high school because when you go to private school, they say oh-h, like White people you know ---

Q. Uh-huh.

A. You don't see a mixture.....nothing like that. So ---.

Q. Not diverse....

A. right... not a lot of diversity, very little.

Q. But I remember like you know, it was hard to meet people to be friends with them. Once I was friends with them..., like my senior year and I remember like my friends have said to me like wow like freshman year I didn't think you were like cool and you hear stuff like that. I was like, "what do you mean I wasn't cool?" So like, "I don't know I thought you were different?" I was like "What do you mean different?" I was, "I'm just like you. You just have to get to know me." They're like, "Yea I know, you really are cool."

Q. Wow.

A. Yes like you get a lot of it.

Q. So what exactly did they think you were like? Did they --- Were they so different?

A. They thought at some point I was maybe religious or they thought maybe I was being like different because they were --- but like they thought I was raised here so I'm very Americanized. Like people say I am, but I don't think I am. Like I'm ---.

Q. But you can still be Americanized ---

A. Right and still ---

Q. And yet still wear hijab.

A. Exactly you know.

Q. Okay.

A. But people just don't understand that yet. They're like you know why ---They think that just because you wear hijab that you're religious. Just like those people they see on T.V.

Q. Uh-huh

A. Or you're like bad or whatever just let you do anything you want to do. Like I don't know. Or they don't know why I wear it or they don't understand stuff like that. Even though they still don't when I tell them I can't go out, I can't do this, they still like ask, and I keep telling them the next day after they still don't get it. But still like they you know understand me. And they see me like I'm regular, like I'm a normal person.

Q. They accept you more?

A. Yes.

Q. What made you decide to wear it at seven?

A. (Laughter)...I don't know...

Q. I mean like seven is really not required....

A. Really not, exactly. So it's like at nine.

Q. Puberty, yes?

A. Puberty, yes. I don't know. Like me and my oldest sister wore it at the same time. I was like in second grade. It --- my family, I have a lot of older cousins and they were all starting to wear it. You know they were older than me but like just seeing them wear it like made me want to wear it. Then one day I was sitting like in my house and my uncle came up to me and he was like, you know you're getting to be big when are you going to start wearing it? You know I was like, you know what I want to start wearing it now so I started to wear it!

Q. Did you feel pressured at any point?

A. No.

Q. By him asking you?

A. No, not at all. like I was old or something. I wonder what I get to wear like you know. Like you know I just --- you know like I want to be like them, look like my cousin and stuff like that.

Q. Okay. Well, and your mom wears hijab?

A. Yes.

Q. And your older sister too?

A. Yes. Me and her wore it at the same time. Like my little sister, she didn't start wearing it until she was like twelve so. That's like a big difference from like me and her and like--- Me and my older sister, I was seven and she was eight so. We start doing it at the same time. Like I used to wear like a "habla" like with shorts and a t-shirt.

Q. Right.

A. It doesn't really ---

Q. Right.

A. But surely you probably--

Q. I guess training you?

A. Exactly.

Q. Getting you used to doing?

A. Exactly and then you know, year by year you start you know.

Q. Adding some?

A. (With laughter) Adding a piece of clothing you know. It just got easier. I don't know. But I used to get so many comments. I remember like when I was in elementary school that like a little boy in my class pulled it off me and---.

Q. Oh, wow!

A. I cried. I was like --- I felt like the world ended on that day.

Q. What grade were you in?

A. I think I was like in third grade, like fourth --- third or fourth grade something like that.

Q. Okay.

A. It was my first or second year wearing it so I was like really proud to be wearing it and if anybody touched me you know?

Q. Uh-huh.

A. Well, and then really him pulling it off and I felt like I don't know, like the end of the world.

Q. Did you say anything?

A. I cried! I screamed! I was like -- I didn't know what to do and the teacher yelled at him I remember. I think he got suspended that's what happened to him.

Q. Well do you feel like it was handled appropriately?

A. Yes.

Q. Taken care of?

A. Yes.

Q. Okay, great.

A. But you always get like bullied you know after--- especially after like 9-11. People still don't accept you because --- I remember one day I was driving and my mom's sitting next to me and we were like at a traffic light and just sitting in the car talking but my windows are rolled down. Like my windows are dark so like they were rolled down at the time. It was pretty outside. Not the car next to me but the car behind it next to ---like they could see me and all of a sudden he gets out of his car and starts cursing me and my mom out like you --- like "Raghead", Blaa-bla-bla-bla, they just start cursing. I'm just like looking at him like I can't believe this guy got out of his car just to do this. Like it just, like ---

Q. And this was right after 911?

A. Yes. Like --- Well, not right after but maybe a couple months after. But you know like after that time period.

Q. Yes.

A. And I was just like --- people are so ignorant. They don't like you know, think before they do. I was like --- I had to pretend like he was so stupid Yane. I don't get out of the car because I see somebody and you know and start yelling at them like they--- this was like at a traffic light you do this? I looked at him and then I just like sped off and like turned off, like I went away. And like after that --- if my windows weren't dark --- but like it just makes you more protective of yourself. Like now my windows are limo and double limo you know. Like I hate it when people look inside the car and can't stand like anything you know. I just don't want anybody looking. Looking just makes you protective. I don't know. Like you always feel like people are watching you or they're judging you.

Q. They Judge you like that?

A. Yes. So like even like as passing so many times --- I'm sitting like at a traffic light and someone, a person over there is staring at me and they'll see like I wear hijab and they like decide to curse and yell or they yell at me or they actually look at me like I'm weird or something.

Q. Even till this day?

A. Even till this day.

Q. Wow!

A. I remember like three months ago, four months ago, like this happened. I was sitting like --- It was on (name of street) and I was like sitting in my car and my sister was like sitting next to me. I see this girl like, I was the second car she was like the first car and she was like looking at me in the mirror. So I just like looked around and she like started sticking her tongue out, making faces and sticking her middle finger. I was just --- What's she doing, oh, but I don't

know her. You know like I look like --- What is she doing? And then she looked at me, she like pointing at my head and stuff and I was like ---Oh! My God. People are so stupid these days.

Q. And usually is it someone that is white American ---

A. White.

Q. Young, old?

A. And young. Like younger generation, not young, young but like you'll see that they look like white, like people like white trash. You know like you know the car won't be nice....

Q. They're not like maybe, not someone that is middle class or upper class?

A. No it'll be like white ---.

Q. I mean like educated?

A. No they are not educated..you can see. They wouldn't do this if they were educated.

Q. Uh-huh

A. I don't understand why it would bother them because it's not like I'm racist against them ---.

Q. Exactly!

A. Right.

Q. So even though it still happens now, how do you deal with it?

A. I know. (Laughter). I have my windows darkened. (Laughter)

Q. Yes.

A. And you go back. But when it happened to me the first time and my windows weren't tinted and then I went and got them limo tinted. And the second time it happened I was like you know, the limo tint is not even doing it. I did it over again so I had double window tint.

Q. Isn't it illegal?

A. (Laughter) I am illegal. Yes. I haven't gotten a ticket yet, alhumdillah (knocks on wood).

I got limo tint because I had a car before this one, before the hurricane, I had a mustang and I had limo tint. It was a black car so it was very obvious that I had limo tint on it. And I don't know, a cop stopped me one day and he was like, did you know your windows are tinted? I was like, "They're tinted?" Oh my God like I can't believe I did it. It's not my car it's my dad's. He could tell because he could see the car was in my dad's name. I was like well I'm just borrowing it. I just got this car this week. He gave it to me. I was like I didn't know they were going this on it. He was like I would take this tint off. I was like, "all right." (Laughter) So I was like, what ever. But in this car like it's not that obvious because it's mirror tint.

Q. Uh-huh

A. But I was like --- And I hope I don't get a ticket but. That's what I thought when I did it the second time. Like I got it like double limo tint. I was just like --- Like you're asking for it. He was (my dad) like ignore them. I was like yes but it's aggravating for people. Like I'm not even in their business. I'm in my own car driving, going wherever I want to go like you know. They keep on you know?

Q. Well it sounds like you are ignoring them?

A. Yes.

Q. You see like tinting your car?

A. (Laughter).

Q. So, but it does get you angry?

A. Yes it does. It really does. You know I didn't do anything to you. You can't automatically judge me. You don't know me.

Q. Uh-huh...

A. If you can't --- If you say because I have on hijab that it automatically makes me some like ---

Q. Terrorist?

A. Yes or something like that you know. Like when I go to work, working with a whole bunch like ignorant people living in the ninth ward. And you get a lot of people like --- Why you know? You're living in America. You don't have to--- I'm like, yes. I know I don't have to but I think one of the --- you know --- it's freedom of religion? But my freedom of religion I'm been feeling a lot like, stop like pressuring me. I feel like telling. Exactly. I don't have to but I want to.

Q. It's almost like they trying to liberate you. They think that ---

A. Exactly. Like I'm oppressed or stupid. I don't know the laws or some thing like that. I'm like no. I know it's freedom of religion so let me have it. Nobody's forcing me to do this. I'm doing this on my own.

Q. But do you believe that is a typical belief among Americans?

A. Yes.

Q. Someone must be forcing you to wear hijab?

A. Yes exactly and it's not.

Q. And like with your mom and your dad ---?

A. It's all my choice. Even my dad, like my mom and dad worry. "You sure you want to?" I'm like, "Yes. I want to wear it." I would wear it. I was so proud of it. Everybody would laugh at me. I was like, so what leave me alone. And then it went day-by-day you know and it got better and better.

Q. Wow.

A. And then people are like actually like it surprises me. I really didn't think you were like this. I have to be honest with you. I was like what? She was like you know, when I met you I was scared to be friends with you but you know now that I'm friends with you, she's just like you're just like us I swear to God. I'm just like, I'm just like you like what do you think. What did you think I was different or something? We are still friends till now. She always like laughs at me every time I remind her of this. I'm like you remember when you told me that? I'm like how am I different, tell me how am I different? She's like I don't know I just thought you were different like you know. I was like you see because of people like you who think that way. Like people are afraid to get close to you. They think like something is wrong with you. You have some kind of disease. But you know when you walk inside a grocery store like I swear to God, so many times. Like anybody can walk into the store but the second I walk in, everybody starts staring.

Q. Hum-m.

A. Like it's --- I hate it. I'm like stop looking at me, stop looking, stop looking you know.

Q. And that's interesting because supposedly and correct me if I'm wrong because again I don't know if I'm not um-m-m really familiar with the religion, you know with as much as I could be?

A. Uh-huh.

Q. But uh-h --- One of the reasons for dressing in hijab is to actually uh-h-h make all the muslimen recognizable.....

A. Uh-huh.

Q. Uh-h-h --- Recognizable as Muslim.

A. Yes.

Q. You automatically when you see somebody dressed in hijab, you know she's a Muslim?

A. Yes.

Q. And also you know it's for protection and modesty and all that.

A. Exactly.

Q. I've heard that, that if you are wearing it in America then you're not like everybody else. It's almost like you're creating uh-m-m ---

A. But sometimes you just don't want like you know..attention because it's like for other reasons and then it's like --- especially with what's going on in the news today. Everybody automatically assumes you're something bad. They don't think of you as something good or something different. They think of you as something bad. That's automatic.

Q. So do you think that maybe it's not a good idea to wear hijab in America because you're calling for attention?

A. I don't think its not a good idea..... I just think that people need to be like more open about it. They shouldn't be negative about it. I don't know ---. They shouldn't be so judgmental. They're very --- you know it's like they think we're something bad, they don't think we're something good. You know like anywhere else you'd go?

Q. Uh-huh

A. Like I've been to London. I swear like people wearing hijab were "adee" People would want to stop you know.

Q. And normal?

A. Very normal. It was like "adee" nobody even cares but like here everybody like stares at you like yes, because they don't see much of that I think. I don't know.

Q. What is that about?

A. I don't know.

Q. Why is it hijab associated with mystery or evil or something?

A. I think it is the news.

Q. Media?

A. Media.

Q. aha...

A. They think u know --- Their husbands beat them and all that stuff.

Q. aha

A. Like no, it all depends on the man.

Q. Yes...

A. (Laughter) They have no idea. (Laughter).

Q. It's not necessarily the religion?

A. Exactly. If a man's psycho.....you know he's going to end up doing that --- I was like sometimes you know. You can't just say Arabic men hit their wives you know. I'm like there's a whole bunch of American people here. Don't even like deny it. White guys I see it out in public. Like people hitting their wives. Like so don't automatically assume this because.... you know.

Q. But based on --- it isn't just in one religion?

A. Yes.

Q. Or one culture?

A. Yes or that you know we don't have any rights or something like that. I'm like I have rights just like anybody else. Maybe my parents don't like you know. --- Like mine --- especially like in the middle (80's) and stuff like that---

Q. Uh-huh

A. But now days we feel like they're --- not felt like it was but like back then. Like I don't know especially ---Like my aunt, she has her own job, she's like you know --- they're more open. They're not like they used to be.

Q. Right...

A. You know like my dad always says, "Now you got to appreciate it. My sisters, we made them drop out of school in sixth grade and you know they had to clean the house and this and that." I'm like well, I just can't help their generation ...don't tell me about that....." Because it's none of my business...I don't care...

Q. Uh-huh

A. Like my parents are more you know. I want my own rights.

I have like cousins that aren't raised here. They didn't finish school or they --- some of them finished but you know. Their life was different than ours. They ... Like you know I have like one cousin that finished but parents let her finish school and stuff like that but like the way they treat her and the way they treat brother who is younger than her. It's like --- Even though I'm like --- my brother does get more you know freedom and stuff than we do but like I get more freedom than she does you know. Her freedom is like nothing. She has no freedom like that's it. But like my parents --- like her parents they don't let her go anywhere. I'm like, "I don't know how you do it." Because if my parents made me stay at home all day, every day just school and back I would like die. It goes like that. And she probably just as an example, knows how to cook.

Q. Whereas when we talked about it ---

A. Yes. I clean but I can't cook.

Q. Yes, yes so where as over there they train them. For instance if you're a female you have to learn how to cook and clean ---

A. Yes. By a certain age because they're prepping you for marriage. That's the only thing.... nothing else.

It seems like --- I do have like you know friends here that are --- their families are like that. Like just so-o ---Like they've lived here for a while like they have --- like one friend like she lived here for like seven years and her parents are still you know like --- they used to be from back then. Like when I tell her the way I think about a situation. She go like well that's because you're Americanized. I go like "I'm not Americanized. I just like have my own mind. My parents can't tell me what to do like they can't like make up my mind for me because I think this way. Like in this specific situation that happened. Like my friend, she --- I have two friends. One of them, like her parents are very strict and stuff like that and she's the kind of person who like whatever her parents tell her she'll listen to them....she doesn't care if she's going to be unhappy the rest of her life. She's like as long as I'm pleasing my parents. (A beating on the furniture in exclamation) And my other friend, she's like you know, she's like confused... she doesn't know what to do. She's like in love with this guy but her parents don't like him.

Q. Uh-huh

A. And they're like you know --- "there's no way. I don't care because he's from this town I don't want him no matter what." And I'm like you know, whether my parents like it or not they're going to have to accept him no matter what. Like I'm the one who's going to be

married to him, I'm the one that has to live with him the rest of my life so they're going to have to accept it whether they like it or not. Like if I say I want to marry this guy that's it then they have to get it. They can't tell me no. Like they can't tell me you have to marry this guy, you can't marry like --- I don't think it's fair.... Yea they have to live with him to be his brother or son-in-law and stuff like that. But they can't make me like do something that I don't want to do. And she was more like, "No you have to listen to them.....even though I suffer for the rest of my life. I'll find somebody else. I'll fall in love again. Like --- (a firm bang on the table). That's not going to happen.....and she's like it's because you're Americanized. Like I'm not Americanized. I have my own mind like you know.

Q. Does that bother you??

A. Yes it does. Because every single time, any situation that happens she always tells me oh, I'm Americanized. I'm like, "I'm not Americanized. I'm like, my parents are a little strict." Like they're strict but they're not stupid. Because like my other friend, she doesn't want anybody else and her parents can't understand that to where she's like hurting herself. Like she you know, she almost killed herself because of this.

Q. Oh...

A. Like yes and she had to go to the hospital and everything. Like she's going through a lot. And my other friend is like just leave him. Like why are you doing this? Just please your parents..... I'm like her parents don't understand that this girl is willing to kill herself over this guy. They should like let her be happy like they're going to end up liking him. He's not even a bad guy. Just because he's from a certain city????!! Like that's ----

Q. It's a city over seas?

A. Yes. It's like a different city than they're from so I was like that's stupidity from her parents to see like their daughter suffering like that and they so-o don't want him. I don't blame her. I blame her parents because they should like... Like "it's killing your daughter."

Q. Uh-huh.

A. "You understand that." She was like, "No she should wait. It's not like he's the last guy." I was like "Yes but it's the only guy she wants so why you making a huge deal out of it.... I know that my parents if I told them that like you know yes, they'd say no, no, no but in the end they're like you know...I'm gonna tell them.."this is it, end of story whether you like it or not." You have to... you know give in you'll end up liking him then in the end."

Q. For you, you feel like your parents will eventually ---

A. Exactly. They have to.

Q. Will accept it. Because it'll be something that you want?

A. Exactly they have to accept it because if they don't then like you know, I'm not living your life. Even if that like happened to you... You can't make me live what you want. It's my life. I get to do what I want. She's more like "No. You have to respect your parents, you have to do" --- I'm like "Yes I am respecting my parents but they have to respect me in the same way." They can't make me do something I don't want to do. That's not fair to say it mildly. What happens if they die tomorrow and I have to live the rest of my life with somebody I hate?

Q. Right.

A. I'm like, I'm not going to do that obviously there's no way that's going to happen. She was like, well you think that way because you're Americanized. I'm like I have my own mind. I don't like you know---

Q. Speaking with your own mind?

A. Exactly. I'm-m-m Americanized, having my own opinion. She was like "Yea."

Q. hmm...

A. Yes. This was a situation that just happenedI was really aggravated about it...I was like "Oh My God."

Q. Going back to the girl..., because that's a serious issue.... and you seem very close to her--- has she been open with her parents and told them ---"this is what I want..."

A. She says that she has but I don't think that she has like in a way like she says --- no she told them the reason that she wants to marry is that she's talked to him before and stuff like that but she sounds like she'll say --- Like I always tell her go talk somewhere, go be friends with your mom, go tell her mom listen. She says this, she can't do this because her parents don't want to listen to her. You see.

Q. Don't want to listen to her period or don't want to listen to her about this situation?

A. Don't want to listen to her about that situation like at all. They're like you know, we've made up our mind that's it. And I don't think that's fair. I was like still--- Go talk to your dad separately. Go talk --- Don't together, just you know?.

Q. Uh-huh.

A. You know ?.

Q. Talk to them apart?

A. Yes you know. This is the way I am. Like I'm like there's no way they're going to make me you know. I was like, " Especially if you really want this don't go drag yourself and try and kill yourself. Like that's crazy, don't do that. I was like, first of all that's haram.. don't do that. And sure you did it so it's like."

Q. She already attempted? Yes.

A. Yes attempted and she like she took like a lot of pills and had to take her to the hospital.

Q. They have to obviously realize this. ?

A. Yes. It's like now and her mom still won't give in no matter what. She's like I don't care I won't go to the wedding, I won't like be a part of this but her dad is like no, I'm like okay with it. You can marry him. Like uh-h, I don't care. You're happy. This is not mine you know. But her dad gave in but her mom and her brother are like no way, hell no, no way in hell. I'm like look as long as you got your dad like on your side your mom will end up like you know, giving in later on in life. Like even though not now. She might not go to the wedding but she'll end up regretting it later. I was like don't do this to yourself. I was like, you are like --- you know, don't hurt yourself over this. I was like if anything you know, they're going to have to agree they can't like stay like this forever. Like even if they wanted you to be married every guy comes, they bring, just keep saying no to and you know eventually they have to make you marry him you know. But she already did it and now they --- she's in the hospital and they say since you tried to kill yourself she has to go to a psychiatric place which sucks you know....---

Q. Right.

A. which sucks!

Q. I'm glad that she at least has you to talk to.

A. Exactly.

Q. So you're her support system?

A. Yes. I support her but then my other friend's like, " No, just leave him." I'm just like, "you can't do this---" because you're like, "I'm saying one thing, you're saying the other thing." So like ---.

Q. She'll become confused.

A. Yes. I was like “you can’t like – why are you not letting her have her own opinion. Let her have her own mind. Like don’t let her do what her parents want to do. I was like what does that do. I was like you’re saying that now but watch how unhappy you’re going to be later on in life. Like, I was like just because you guys think like I’m more independent. Like they weren’t born here....they were both born in Palestine.....One of them has lived here longer than the other..., but still you know.....I’m this way....not because of where I was born.....I’m this way because I have my own mind.!

Q. Uh-huh.

A. But they can’t hear that.... Like I don’t know, I just think nobody can make me do what they want.

Q. Like they want?

A. Like what they want. Like they can’t force me to do something no matter what. I was like, and let them be unhappy. It’s my life.

Q. That’ll be interesting to see if the way you feel and think has anything to do with just your experiences, you’re --- you know with your family?

A. It probably will have something to do with it.

Q. Being here in America or not because these girls ---

A. Yes.

Q. Obviously were born over there ---

A. Exactly.

Q. And lived there for a little bit ---

A. Yes.

Q. And then came here?

A. Yes. Like one of them, like the girl, the other girl who’s like, “Always listen to your parents.” She’s like very --- Like her family is very, very strict. Very, very, very, very strict. The other girl (who tried to kill herself), the family isn’t strict but they’re, like they’re open like mine. Like her parents are like mine. They’re not --- they’re just religious and they’re not strict, strict really, they let her go out. They let her do whatever she wants. They, you know they let her have American friends whatever. But the other girl...her parents won’t even let her have American friends. no, hell no. Like no. American friends.....!!!!They are very, very strict. Five o’clock, you better be home. I’m like, “Five o’clock, yea right.” (Laugh together.) I don’t know what five o’clock y’all are talking about. I was like Ten o’clock that’s it. I was like Ten o’clock is good..... like at Nine o’clock, Okay? You know I was like, something like that and that’s how the other friend is. But her parents ... like this situation. I don’t know why they were like --- She has her own mind. She does what she wants but still like I don’t know. It was like with this situation like her mom and dad just ---.

Q. And her siblings aren’t supporting her, yannee?

A. Her younger sister, her younger sister does support her like a million per cent but her older sister and her older brother are like with their mom. So she only has little sister’s support and her dad right now that’s it.

Q. And yours?

A. And mine. I’m like a million percent. I’m with you. I don’t care. I was like, because I’m all for your life. Like I don’t care like you know. I’m not saying go run away with the guy but I’m just saying like try your hardest but don’t kill yourself. Something else. Like talk to your parents. Try and convince them that you know this is what you want that no matter what else that they do like it’s not going to work. Obviously because you have to have your

opinion, I mean don't shut up and you know don't go marry somebody they want. And you know live the rest of your life unhappy.

Q. Obviously, I mean, not every girl will feel like you?

A. Exactly.

Q. Or think like you?

A. (Laughter) Very little girls think like me.

Q. You know? I think your experience, at least from my perspective Yanee is ---

A. I think, yes. I think it has a lot to do with what happened to my parents..

Q. Yes?

A. Yes because like my parents weren't in love before. Like my mom didn't want my dad. (Small giggle) So I think it has a lot like to do with that because like they met randomly and just got married you know. It was like all fast. And I'm more like the person like I got to know the person for a while, and maybe fall in love with him... and if I really like him then you know....

Q. Uh-huh.

A. I love him and nobody else. I don't want you guys to just throw any guys at me because you guys just got married and y'all don't know each other and look what happened between you guys.

Q. Uh-huh.

A. You know like I don't want something --- Like I want to be able to choose the guy, I don't want somebody --- Even though my mom and dad, nobody made them get married. But still like I'm just, very cautious. I wouldn't marry "anybody". .

Q. Right and understandably so?

A. Yes.

Q. Yes I mean it makes sense.

A. Yes I have a right to.

Q. Right very much so. So I think a lot of the things that happen in life and the route, and the direction that we take ---

A. Yes.

Q. Is based on you know our experiences? Um-m ---

A. Yes. Then like another situation happened like, like with you know, choosing the right person. I know a guy like I was in love with him like FOREVER!! but he's like engaged to somebody right now because his mom wants that girl, end of story. And he's like my friend here who's like respect your parents and do what your parents say.

Q. Uh-huh

A. But he loves me and he's like "I'm willing to" --- Like he's like "I have to listen to them." I'm like, "So you're willing to live the rest of your life unhappy. Like you know, be with somebody who you say supposedly you like." He says, "Like one day eventually I'll fall in love with her." I was like if I was that girl and if I knew that you were in love with somebody else, I wouldn't want to marry you, I'm like you know.

Q. Right.

A. I went like if that happened to me if I was --- just think if my parents brought me a guy and say I want you to marry him and I found out he was in love with somebody else. I don't want somebody who's in love with somebody else, I want somebody who's in love with me.

Q. Right.

A. And he was like---

Q. So obviously this girl doesn't know this?

A. Yes. (??) But he has best friend who the same situation happened to him. He was in love with this girl, even got her pregnant. And --- I don't think she was Arabic she might have been like Spanish or something. He was in love with her too like death. He was in love with her so much. He got her pregnant and his parents wanted him to marry somebody else.

Q. Uh-huh

A. They didn't care about his whole situation, not one cent and he made the girl he loved have an abortion.

Q. Uha

A. And give up the baby and left her and went and married the girl like his parents wanted. And he's married to her and he cheats on her every single night and his wife knows about this.

Q. Oh, my.

A. I'm like "Your wife was stupid to say yes to you in the first place to know that you were in love with somebody else and now she has to live with you going out every night being with different girls. I wouldn't want to be your wife. Like why do I want somebody comes home to me every night you know, "I have a daughter from you now." Like you know, that doesn't make any sense to me like you know. You know I wouldn't want that at all like that just shows somebody you don't love what happens and then. I wouldn't want to be treated that way. And I told him I would hope because he's best friends with him I said that's what 's going to happen to you.

Q. And what did he say?

A. He didn't say anything. I was like, "Because he has a big influence on you and watch you end up like him." He's just like, "No. Hopefully you'll find someone good and stuff like that." He was just saying that. I was like "Yes." I was like I don't want you anymore because you took somebody else over me but because you did that I can't make you marry me, I can't make you like be with me but you know since you want to respect your parents and stuff like that I don't see twenty years from now like how happy you're going to be.

Q. How does that make you feel?

A. Sad. I hate it.

Q. aha...

A. Because it hurts.

Q. It hurts. Yes.

A. Yes. It hurts a lot but---

Q. How long have you known him?

A. About like six years. That's a lo--ng time. (and really) We were like in love for ever but like you never really ---.

Q. How did you know? How did you know that it was him?

A. You know, like I know it was like, day one. I use to talk about him day and night. I even use to tell my mom like jokingly. Because he used to like own a store. Like my dad owns....

Q. Um-m.

A. He is like five years older than me. But I remember the first day I ever saw him I was like, "Oh my God, I love this guy. I really do." I was really young at the time I was just like, "Oh my God, I love him a lot, lot, lot, lot, lot." And I'd go there purposely, go give him mail or speak to him every day you know and stuff.

Q. Find a reason..... (Laughter)

A. Yea. Find a reason just to see him. And then when I started driving, I'd park purposely right in front of his store.

Q. (Laughter)

A. And you know everytime I got a new car or something like that or needed something. I always made sure I was right in front of him. He like --- he just loved it. He like thought it was the best thing on earth. But I mean you can't do anything And then --- I even used to like joke around with my momma. "Momma he's the one I'm going to marry." "Go find him, go tell him hello and marry and stuff like that." And then one day --- I don't know we just started talking, and getting closer and stuff like that. And then one day I find out like he's engaged. And I was just like ---"that's great!" I don't know but you can't do anything about it now. Even though it's not too late ... I still have like one like piece of hair of you know, like hope he would come back to me and I probably would give in to him. Because the girl he's marring is like his cousin and she was engaged to somebody else and his parents like made her leave him so they could marry him. Like so they could get married also. So she left somebody for him so he can't do that. He can't leave her because he feels like responsible that he made her leave somebody else.

Q. Oh

A. Even though he didn't, but his parents did....

Q. So it's almost like.....she really wants someone else and he really wants someone else?

A. Yes but they got to be together.

Q. But the parents are getting them together?

A. Yea....see this is why I don't agree with it!!!!?. The reason I don't agree with --- agreeing with like going with your parents even though I like I a hundred per cent believe in always respect your parents like and stuff like that. I respect my parents like a hundred per cent like all the time no matter what but you can't like --- you can't like let them rule your life. It's not their life to rule. Yes, they can like tell you what's right and what's wrong. What you know they like, what they don't like and you don't have to listen to them. Like ---

Q. In the end you're saying that you have your choice?

A. Yes exactly. You have a choice and most Arabic people don't like don't see it like that. They only think you know, what they say that's what you have to do..

Q. Uh-huh

A. Which like I ---

Q. And often times they're basing it on religion?

A. Yes.

Q. And according to religion and according to the deen---?

A. aha.....but haram.....you're not suppose to force anyone to marry. And it's supposed to be a free choice? ... uh-h, I mean and then ISLAM frowns on divorce...

Q. That should be a last resort.

A. Exactly.

Q. You don't go into a marriage thinking ---

A. Yes.

Q. I have to do it and if it doesn't work out I'll ---

A. Yes, exactly. That's how the people these days especially who go in thinking you know it'll work out later on. But I'm like --- a year later you see them like divorced and I was just like, "Why did you do that?" Like ---

Q. I don't know if you've been hearing but ---

A. Yes.

Q. The past --- I actually heard that there are four new divorces?

A. yesss.

Q. in the community.....like people ---?

A. Yes.

Q. Around this area four people are getting divorced?

A. That's like really bad. You see that's what happens. This is why I don't agree with what's going on like at all. I cannot I'm --- My parents --- if guys come like all the time. I'm like, "No, no, no, next, no, no, no." Like let me bring a guy.....!!! I'll tell you the guy I want!! - -- Even though they don't agree with that but still like you know. I still will find the guy. (???).

Q. Now has this guy like come and asked for your hand?

A. Uh-uh. He has not because you see when we started getting closer and stuff like that, he was --- His parents were looking at somebody else and I kind of found out like he was somewhat engaged. But --- Well every time I asked him I'm like, "Are you or are you not" and he would be like, "Well my parents want this girl" but he's like "I haven't made a decision yet" he was like, "I still have you know, time and stuff like that." But he wasn't totally honest like he already said yes to her.

Q. Um...

A. But you know she can't come here. That's the thing and his parents want her even if she can't come here. But he doesn't want her if she can't come here. And ---.

Q. She's ---?

A. Yes she's been trying to come here for two years and she can't come.

Q. Um-m.

A. So I don't know. Although he did say --- One time I heard this from another guy because I was kind of talking --- I wasn't talking but I kind of like had a crush on one of his cousins (laughter) Yes-s. It seems like this big mess. He like moved across the street and I would like say hi to him and you know whatever. And so he told one like other guy that you know I would never marry her because she used to talk to this guy, like talk to my neighbor or whatever. Like that's not true because he never even cared. I remember because when I used to talk to him and tell him you know. I was like a hundred per cent honest. I told him you know remember your cousin what's his name. I didn't talk to him like we were friends and stuff like that for a while. He was like "I don't care" and stuff like that but like for other friends he told me that he kind of likes me and I don't like him.

Q. Uh-huh

A. But he's trying to get me to hate the other guy.

Q. Yes, the other guy.

A. Like whatever, you can't get me to hate him. As much as I try and hate him, like I've tried a million times. Like even told myself you know, he lies. He does stuff you know, he's bad. He does what people --- Like I do so much to try and hate him more like at the end of the day I don't even know how to do that. Like I tried a million reasons.

Q. Why have you tried?

A. Because like I just want a reason to like move on.

Q. Let go?

A. Yes. Move on to let go so like to be able to like choose somebody else. Like where now every single guy --- Like if my parents would bring home a guy and I see someone I like I always compare him to him. Like oh, he's not like him, he doesn't have that, he doesn't do this, he doesn't like (??) --- And I'm like why am I doing this. Why am I trying to get somebody exactly like him? I think it's because like I've been in love with him for so long that even before we like started talking I was just like --- I used to tell my friends I'm like --- Oh, you know this guy is cute but he's not like what's-his-name. You just have to meet him to see what kind of guy he is. But you're not even with him they would say.... One day I will, don't worry. I'm like, I used to be in love with him for the longest time. But I guess it was bound to end I think....

Q. And you're okay with that?

A. No.

Q. Do you think you will be?

A. Maybe one day. I don't know. If I see him happy maybe I don't know. Or if I see like --- But anyhow the thing that kills me is that I know he loves me because he has not like even till this day like given up on me. Like giving up, like talking to me, finding out --- like I won't talk to him. Like we don't talk but like he loves my little sister to death. Like loves her. He thinks like he's --- like she's his little sister. He loves it. He won't talk to me but he talks to her all the time to ask about me and she won't tell me. But like you know, one day I was like looking through her phone and I was like why are all of these messages from him. Like what are you doing? She was like --- he told me never to tell you and la-la . I'm like I'm your sister and you're suppose to tell me no matter what. And she was like okay, okay he always asks about you...and he wants to know if like you're okay and stuff like that. I'm like, "Till now?" She's like every week he'll come ask. I'm like you know he's not like given up.

Q. Uh-huh

A. Like a year and a half later. You know he's still like thinking, it's still in the back of himself like. Even to where like he'll like ask people I don't even know, like that go to school with me. His brother --- He'll ask his brother who he doesn't know I know but I met like through school and stuff like that. I know him. He'll ask like, "Oh, have you seen this girl around school?" Your brother doesn't even know me. Like why would you, you know ask about me? And his brother's like, "Oh, the other day yes, my brother was asking about you." And I'm like what?

Q. He's thinking about you?

A. Yea. That's why ---.I always have that like little bit of hope because it's probably why I'm like every single guy I've had I say no, no, no, but like I ---.

Q. Is that being fair to you though?

A. No. And that's the thing...I'm not being fair to myself and it's killing me.., but I feel like I can't say

Q. At the same time to just to show you similarities. Last interview, last time we spoke, how you talked about your mother and your father's relationship but how your mom kind of just stayed.....withstood everything.....

A. Yes, yes they did.

Q. And just staying in there and everything because she had her own reasons. And ---?

A. That's how I am and ----

Q. And how you're really feeling and holding on to something. Of course if you're right or wrong, you go with what you believe and how you feel. But Um-m just to kind of ---

A. Yes that's the same exact thing. I can't walk...it. It's like even though he's done soo much stuff. Like he doesn't hurt me, "No way." Like he's been the sweetest guy on earth. Where he hasn't done stuff that's bad but he'll go out, he'll do this, he'll do that. Like with all that I'm still like you know "I don't care." I'm still going to live with it. Even though if he came and asked for me, my parents would be like "Hell No."

Q. Really?

A. Yea.

Q. Why?

A. Because he's bad. He's like a bad boy type of guy. I don't know, he's a bad boy. (Laughter) Yes like I don't see him being like good. It's like no way. My parents are --- especially my dad oh my gosh, you know. Like I don't care if they have to agree because I like, that's who I wanted. But my mom probably like from a little that because she thinks he's nice, and he's good and he like makes his own money, he owns his own store, he buys his stuff like he does. He's independent he doesn't need anybody to rely on, you know?.

Q. Uh-huh

A. That's why my mom likes him. You know my dad always used to say oh, look at you know, what's-his-name. Because he, like I said, owned a store near my dad and my dad would always compare us to him. My dad would say: "look at him he stands and works all day long and he bought his own car with his own money." He didn't ask his dad for money. He's like not like you guys. You guys are like "Dad buy me a car". I'm like, "Oh my God" you know. And I went back and like told him, my dad said this so stop showing off in front of him. Stop --- Like he would even like every time he bought a car he would go ask my dad. He'd like "What do you think of this car. Is it nice and stuff like that?" I'm like, "Don't do that like because you're killing us." Because my dad's like going back ---

Q. Comparing?

A. Yes, you know and I'm like "Dad don't forget he's you know, how many years older than me." I was like plus he you know he didn't really finish school which is a big you know for my parents.

Q. Yes. They want someone who's finished school for you?

A. Yes.

Q. What do you want? Do you want that?

A. I'm afraid I don't really care as long as I finish school I don't care about him, like if he finished school but he can't be like a bum. Like he has to have his own job. He's not like working like he has to like go on his own thing --- He has to be able to support what ever I want. Like buy.... you know.

Q. Okay.

A. For me....like my parents you know?

Q. Because it would be different....

A. Somebody who can you know, yes. Who can't give me every thing I want. Because I'm going to go like why did I marry you?

Q. (Laughter)

A. No, no, I'm not like being you know --- Even my dad's like --- "You're never going to find anybody this way...gives you everything you want...." Okay dad..thenthat means I'll be living with you for a while.

Q. That is a common thing..... (Laughter) My dad has told me that before too. He said enjoy your time in your parents' home. Because, when you go to your husband's house there are no guarantees.

A. Yes there are no guarantees exactly.

Q. But I mean you really can't but that's where your education comes in at?

A. Yes, exactly. That's what I want. That's why I really don't care. And look like he has to just make good money no matter what. Like I don't want him to be working like a cashier something like that. Like I want him to own his own thing, do his own thing. I don't want somebody who is I don't know, doesn't do anything. Like work for somebody else, you know what I mean.

Q. Uh-huh

A. And he used to own his own store. He owned two stores..... that was pretty good. I was like "Yes" but it didn't work out so I don't get it. You know my friends are like, "Give up, you know like move on". I'm like I can't move on to somebody else because like you always compare them to him, always, every thing."

Q. Which is normal?

A. Yes, I know.

Q. What would happen if your parents found out?

A. That the guy --- Like I started talking to him and stuff like that?

Q. Uh-huh. And how you feel about him and that you like him and?

A. They probably wouldn't agreed with him. They would feel like "No". .

Q. Would you get in trouble?

A. Like yea. I probably would get in trouble like ---.

Q. Like what would happen?

A. My dad wouldn't do anything. My dad would act like he didn't know about it.

(Laughter).

Q. He would ignore it????? Why do you say that?

A. He really would. Like my dad --- if somebody told my dad : " Oh-h I saw your daughter with what's-his-name or something like that." Like he'll act like he never heard it and he never ever confront me, ever.

Q. Really? Why wouldn't he?

A. Ever, yes, he would never.

Q. Because why?

A. He just doesn't want to like feel responsible for anything because he doesn't want to - --.

Q. Because of what he did or is that how he's always been?

A. I can't remember if he's always been this way but he always rather uh-h not to blame on my mom but like ---.

Q. Take responsibility?

A. Yes like he won't no matter what. Like this has happened, like he found out something my sister did. Like she was with this guy or something like that and he totally act like he never heard about it. Then like this guy --- This guy came ask my dad for like --- he was like my second cousin or something like that. But he was like kinda talking to my sister and he was asking my dad like you know I like this girl. My dad automatically assumed that it's not my sister and he thinks it 's like some random girl. And he's like ..."if you need a place...a place to stay with the girl you know you can always use mine. (Laughter) Exactly.

Q. (Loud Laughter)

A. And never mind it is my sister. And then a year --- two years later he finds out it is my sister and he's still???

Q. What does your mom say?

A. My mom always like yells at my dad. She's like you see when he came and talked to you he wanted to tell you that he likes your daughter and everything. You said oh-h if you need a place to stay, you know and stuff like that. My mom always gets my dad backlike ever since then. Like ever since then.....my dad...totally...nothing at all.....

Q. Kind of shut down?

A. My mom you know, she won't do anything. They don't hit. My parents don't hit. They're not like mean. They're not like --- I don't know. My friends are like, "Oh my God! If my parents found out about you know my brother --- Like I was talking to this guy that they would like kill me you know. I'm like my parents would kill me too but they'd get mad. Like my dad would give me like the silent treatment for like years. I don't know how long that would take but my mom would probably complain --- not complain you know but like talk to me this is wrong, you're doing this is wrong, don't do this. She'll just lecture me a lot. She probably won't let me out the house ever again. But you know ---.

Q. Right but nothing more than that?

A. No they won't.

Q. Because they --- you've heard honor killings and all that?

A. Yea.

Q. Not like that would happen??

A. Yea, no. They wouldn't. Yea. They'd probably like take my car away.

Q. Take your freedom?

A. Yes my freedom basically. My car IS my freedom but you know. They probably would just take that away. (Beginning of other side?) --- My friends like the way they are with the guys and the parents like what they say. I'm like I've never really experienced like you know --- Like I'd never even go tell my parents all that stuff about guys for instance --- If I ever talk to a guy I'm not going to go talk to my parents. I'm sorry because they're going to get mad so I'm not going to go tell them.

Q. Right

A. So I'd just rather you know see how it works out. If it works out good then I mean maybe if I see he's really ---.

Q. Interested?

A. You know like interested in me and wants to like really do good. Like you know, not just to talk.

Q. No.

A. You know they just talk to be talking. Like "Yes I'm going to marry you. Yes I love you." I'm like "You love me, you don't even know me. Don't say you love me. Like ---

Q. Right.

A. I don't even know who you are. I can't even tell you that I love you. I've had that happen like so many times I'm like okay, next.

Q. Arab guys?

A. Yes. I don't talk to like other guys. My sister does. She likes talking to all guys. Like she doesn't care but me, no. I'm like more like stick to those because I'm not going to waste my time.

Q. Uh-huh because it would be a waste of time if you talked with other guys.....

A. Yea, yea. Because I know my parents aren't going to agree. My sister is like -----.

Q. That's interesting though. So if your parents --- knowing that your parents won't agree to a non Muslim, you know that so you don't even pursue it?

A. Yes.

Q. Okay.

A. Yea.....which is like...ohh...ohhh.... like my sister always tells me. I don't know I don't like --- Not that I don't like them but I feel like they don't get it. They don't understand like if I tell them. I never had to tell them but my sister I've seen her...I was scared like she was going out with other guys, like different you know. Like you know whatever, she doesn't care. But like she's --- like the guys are always "You don't give me enough time. You don't bla-bla." I was like every time I talk to an Arabic I don't think a guy's ever told me I don't give them enough time. Because that's something hey, If I have to go, and hey I have to go and the end of story you know and don't ask me any questions. I mean like my mom's right there you know or you know?

Q. Uh-huh

A. Like if I can't talk all night, can't let them come to our house, I can't go out with them all the time--- I just tell them and stuff. They get it they're not stupid because they can't do the same thing. You know they're going to be like the same way with me.

Q. Right.

A. That's why I like it better some ways plus it's not like you know every day I have to see you, everyday I have to talk to you.....

Q. Keep your space?.

A. Exactly.... Keep your space...I don't want that. Like I don't want some guy like nagging on me every single day. Do this, do that, do this, do that. .

Q. Uh-huh

A. No, I don't want a guy telling me what to do and stuff like that. But ---

Q. So you know you want a --- You know you want an Arabic guy?

A. Yes.

Q. So ---Your sister though on the other hand seems to be different?

A. Yes. She's like --- well you know like she likes an American guy a lot right now. He happens to be like in the army and he knows like Arabic and stuff like that. He talks Arabic. My sister's like "I'm going to get him to try and want to marry me like you know eventually and then I'm going to make him convert and then I'm going to tell my parents. (Laughter) I'm like, "You're so stupid!" I said because actually --- I said what makes you think that he was going to convert and stuff like that. She's like --- "Well he was very loose so you know maybe? You never know and stuff like that. I was like you can't get your own guy.

Q. This is your older sister or your younger?

A. Yes this is my older. My younger sister, she's still good....., hopefully she stays that way!!! Hopefully!! But my older She was like ---She doesn't like Arab guys. I don't know. She just doesn't. She was like, "I don't want to get married to an Arab guy, they're all strict. They always tell you know, they tell you what to do. I don't want anybody telling me what to do. I'm going to do whatever I want to do and stuff like that. So she sees like American guys are more open to that. I don't know.

Q. More open minded, more ---

A. Yea.

Q. Lenient I guess.

A. Yea.

Q. I wonder if that's because of her experience.

A. Yea.

Q. You know?

A. Probably. She's --- she's only gone out with two guys.

Q. And when you say, "gone out" Like?

A. had a relationship probably with like two guys. I've had way more but. It's not like a wrong but it's like --- but like they're just you know --- "whatever"

Q. So what --- what do y'all do. --- Do y'all go places ---

A. Yes we go out....movies... We talk. I don't know we just park you know.

Q. Do you, do you Um-m --- Are you afraid that somebody will see you?

A. Yea. Oh, yea..., but for some reason....I.

Q. Really?

A. But I don't know why like for some reason I started going out with guys when I found out about my parents.

Q. Uh-huh, oh..

A. It'll be four years ago when --- that's like the first guy that I've ever gone out with. And ever since then I've always been talking to some guy. I've never been like --- not talking to a guy. I think it has something to do with --- but remember I told you --- Like I always want somebody --- like something to do to occupy my mind because if I'm not then I always --- Like I feel like I'm fat or depressed, so something's wrong with me.

Q. You go back.....

A. Yes you know like being a certain way.... So I always feel like if I have a guy there then he's always like telling me sweet stuff...

Q. Making you feel good?

A. Making feel good, making me feel like I'm important and making me forget that I've always had a guy. Like on the other hand, my sister she like started talking to this one guy, the Arabic guy, and he ruined her life.....

Q. Um-m

A. Yes, so she had like such a bad experience with him. She like never --- like she was with him for like a year and a half or something like that.

Q. How does she feel that she ruined his life or he ruined her life?

A. Cause he kind of like ---I don't know, slept with her. so she like was scarred. I've never like gone that far with any guy no matter what. .

Q. Yea

A. I've never gone that far with any guy...I don't care..... No guy can make me. If he wants that then he has to marry me. If he doesn't want to marry me then it's not worth it. .

Q. Uh-huh....

A. That's fine, it's the rest of my life.

Q. Uh-huh?

A. It's like --- I get you know. Guys won't marry me if I do that but he kind of like messed with her mind and she kind of gave in. So --- like she ---then he left her. So-o ---.

Q. Obviously that ----?

A. She doesn't like guys.....now... So she like got to the point where --- like that's the same guy who you know : "If you have a girl...you can use my place....."that my dad told this to...

Q. Oh, my goodness.....SILENCE

A. So my sister had a really badlike a really like bad experience with that because so she's like, "I hate guys. I hate every guy. They're like all the same." But she was like I don't know, she was like scarred for like two years and then she like met this guy, this American guy. He's a really great guy from here but ... I thought he doesn't get it, he's not the same.

Q. Did anybody ever find out? Your family or have you ---?

A. Yes, my mom found it out but you see cause she couldn't keep it in any more. She felt like she was --- Remember I told her like --- Okay, you want to get married it was like five years ago before anybody knew about it. I would remind her....if you say anything, you'll get into so much trouble! I was just, "You still want to get married, you still don't want anybody to find out but I would just go do it. Because they have the surgeries now. I was like, I could go do that and just never let anybody know. But yes you're going to be scarred and you're still going to you know mentally not be stable and stuff like that but don't still if you could like --- move on. You know what I mean. Like if you can try and just move on. She tried but she couldn't handle anymore. His parents found out but his parents never ---They always denied it.

Q. Uh-huh. How did they find out, did he tell?

A. Yea he told his cousin. His cousin told his parents you see. They never approached my parents like ever, ever. Like they never approached my parents but they always like treated us differently. Then one day my sister, she couldn't handle anymore. She told my aunt and my aunt asked me about it. I was like "I don't know what you're talking about she never did that. Like I would deny no matter what because I told her "You were wrong for telling my aunt because you know she's going to go back and tell my mom." .

Q. Uh-huh....

A. I was like I told you don't tell anybody because if you tell anybody, you're going to suffer. Not me? Not anybody else but you're the one my parents are going to punish. You're the one that's going to get in trouble for all this. So whenever my aunt like approached me about it, I was like, 'I don't know what you're talking about it. She never did it, she never whatever. Like yes she talked to him, maybe kissed him...., but like nothing else. I don't know what you're talking about." Like I always denied it. Even when my mom asked me I was like, "I don't know". I didn't know anything. .

Q. Right. It wasn't for you to tell...

A. Exactly because if I was to go say yes I know about it, my mom would get mad at me. "How come you didn't say something about it before.?"

Q. Right.

A. Because I was like, I was respecting her. If she wants to tell, she can go tell, if she doesn't want to tell then that's her business not mine. Like I can't go telling her business. .

Q. Uh-huh

A. And my aunt, my other aunt my mom got real embarrassed Then my mom like approached their mom about it, --- she says that she denies it and the guy denies it. And I say you're denying something but you know it happened. Like how are you denying it. Like --- No way and ---.

Q. And forever these two families are never going to ----?

A. Yes They're like forever separated. Even my mom the other day she told my dad. My sister started freaking out. She knows that my dad like he doesn't want to go through this like he's not --- Like he wouldn't want somebody to do this to his daughter you know?

Q. Right?

A. But I thought my dad's reaction to it would be different. but my dad was like ---I don't know. And my dad was always like "No" if my sister wanted to go away to college and stuff and they wouldn't let her no matter what. Well my dad now is like I don't know he's like different. It's just weird that he's that way.

Q. What kind of reaction did you expect?

A. I did expect him to get mad. I don't know like I was

Q. But he didn't?

A. He didn't. He didn't do anything and it's something that like killed me because it like you know --- That's your daughter. And my sister's like, "Yes what are they going to do. Make me marry him? I'm over him. I don't want to marry him." I don't know what, are you going to deny something that happened. He made me suffer for like three years. She's like, "I don't want him" She's like, I don't want to marry somebody that I hate." I was like whatever.

Q. Well if you consider the options I mean, what could he do? ?

A. Exactly there was nothing he could do. It's just like weird the way it all happened. I don't know. But you know my parents don't trust my sister anymore as much and they're like you know. If she goes anywhere they're always suspicious and that's the things that she got and I don't like it. And then if my parents let me do something then my sister will be like "How come you let her do something and you don't let me do something?" And my parents will be like, "Well you did something wrong." And my sister is like, "She does to." Like I do something but I didn't go all the way, now I didn't do the whole nine yards. Like I didn't do that, there's no way any guy in the world will make me do that. Unless he was asking my parents today can I marry her and then maybe that might work but otherwise then no way. If you're not willing to give like little things than why should I give you ---

Q. So it sounds like you learned from your sister's experience.

A. Yes.

Q. Well , it's good your sister could come to you

A. Me and her knew from day one but ---

Q. She would come tell you?

A. Yes.

Q. So you guys have that relationship?

A. Yes. Hopefully. We like know everything about each other. My brother because he's a boy and it he doesn't ---.

Q. Uh-huh

A. He'll probably --- I don't know --- React differently. But us three we like never tell on each other no matter what. Like we won't tell on each other. .

Q. Uh-huh

A. But if you're willing to tell on yourself of your problem then don't get me into it because if I --- Like if would say like I knew about it. Then I'd get into trouble because my mom would be like, "Why did you know about it and you never told me?" .

Q. Then that would affect you as well...

A. Yes exactly. Now that's because I didn't agree with her even till now. I don't agree with her. It changed a lot of stuff for her to where now she's like, "I don't want to get married, I

don't want to get married, I don't want to get married no matter what." I'm like you keep saying that then we can start believing you. And you know deep down inside you really do want to get married so stop saying that.

Q. Does she feel like she will never get married because ----

A. She does, yes.

Q. Because of that situation?

A. Yes. She feels like she's not ever going to get married. You know honestly I don't believe in that because I have like you know friends who have like slept with other guys and still like guys ---.

Q. Like them regardless.

A. Yes. It's just like guys today just --- not don't care but they're not as strict or like you know --- Slept with somebody one night or something like that.

Q. You think so? ?

A. Yes because I know the guy, that I told you I'm in love with because he was telling me about something, about someone else but like the same guy with the conflict, I don't know. Depends on the guy and how cool he is? .

Q. And maybe how close he is to his family? That and I think that's pressure from the family.

A. Yes and they're really you know, I don't know. Care about her a lot. Look there's people who are not like as strict as him. Like my other friend she got married and her family are so-o-o strict, so, so strict. And I didn't even know that this guys going to marry this girl. There's no way this guys going to marry this girl on earth But it's "like no way." And he married her as he like walked her to death. And they have like three kids. He lets her do whatever the hell she wants to do. She does anything and everything and he likes buys her stuff like crazy. And I'm like if you're cool to do that? I have friends, like their husband knew about it. Like they saw this before. And sometimes they felt keeping is how they felt ----getting her back for that and you remember that or what ever. But he's like so-o ---- like he'll buy her like --- thousands and thousands of ---.

Q. Maybe he doesn't know?

A. No, he know. Like --- she told him before. Like one day we were at --- before he even asked her but he still like --- he was still like a Muslim that he didn't care.

Q. Yea....

A. Some guys are more open. I don't know. .

Q. Yea

A. I said I don't know if it makes like a difference, I don't know. .

Q. What do you mean??

A. Like I don't know. If the guy gets to sleep with like a thousand girls. How come a girl can't --- I'm not saying I would but you know.

Q. It's double standard.

A. Yea

Q. In terms of religion?

A. Yea

Q. It's not allowed in both.

A. Yes but they do it anyway.

Q. It's very, very common?

A: Yea... if a girl does it, all hell is raised...she's killed and all that. If a guy does it, it's like "Oh...he's a guy...so what??? He's a guy.....I'm a girl..."I'm not saying I would do that, but still....whatever rights he gets I should get....it's not fair...I've heard people say...oh, guys need it....it's different....I'm like....what?

Q: "He needs it?" You've actually heard ppl say that?

A: Yea....I'm like what? My mom would tell me that.....guys like....they need it more....I'm like I don't care..... You know what....my dad would be so proud of my brother if he went and did that....I'm like proud of what???

Q: You've heard him say that?

A: Yea.....

Q: I guess he sees it as a sign of manhood?

A: Yea...it's stupidty.....if I'm gonna get killed....he better get killed too?

Q: do you think your feelings or experiences would be different?

A: hmmm...I don't know...., but it kinda depends on where.....when I go to IRAQ....they are so sheltered and they are good...when they hear about me....they are like DAMN.....maybe I shouldn't have told them (my cousins)...., but I don't see what I'm doing as wrong.....and see that's the difference....when I have kids...especially my daughter...., I want her to know wrong and right...., but I'm not going to say "don't do this...don't do that...."

Q: It's almost because of an extreme? Because they are always telling you "to not do this...or not do that"....it's almost like...

A: Like you're rebelling.....even thought that's not what happened with me...., but yea....they're too strict....and see I would be okay with my daughter talking to boys....I mean no kissing and all...., but I would be okay with all that.....

Q:aha...

A: But you know what.....I'm thinking the guy came at a time when I was soooooo weak....and I just needed the attention and the distraction....to be occupied....

Q: and like you said...., to hear sweet words....

A: yea....and it's like when I'm not talking to him...., I feel sad and I get depressed....it's bad....it's wrong....Not wrong...., but bad because...

Q: because...

A: I'm relying on a guy, and I don't want to do that....because that's what I tell my mom....don't rely on a guy...., and I feel like I'm relying on him....I don't need...but

Q: you need a support system definitely...someone who isn't going to judge you...., someone who will make you feel good about yourself....and ...

A: exactly...

Q: but maybe how you're going about doing it isn't the best way for you....

A: exactly....yea...I don't know man.....I wish I could stop talking to him altogether....I really wish...but I can never do it....I don't know how to....

Q: I think...., just from what you're telling me...you just don't want to....if you wanted to, you would...., but you don't....

A: aha...you're right....

***She continues to talk about the guy she loves, and how he continues to listen to his family and says he has no choice and is going to marry the girl his family wants him to marry. She states how she can't understand how someone (this guy and her friend) can feel like they have no other choice....that they would sacrifice themselves, their happiness for their families' wishes.

This is a very very common feeling among Palestinians. Both people discussed are Palestinian, with traditional Palestinian families. Family comes first, before individuality. She feels betrayed by him. Cries for days as a result of his choice to leave her. What's interesting is....she talks about the possibility of being married to any Arab Muslim, especially one from Palestine. However, is completely against someone from IRAQ. Marriage is seriously on her mind.

VITA

Iman En-Nabut was born in Jerusalem and came to America at the age of 5. Iman graduated from Tulane University with a Bachelor of Science degree in Psychology in 2000. She worked at *Depaul-Tulane Behavioral Health Center* for two years helping children cope with issues ranging from depression to abuse. She later attended the University of New Orleans and graduated with a Masters in Counseling in 2003. During that time, Iman worked at *The Center for Family and Youth Services* in St. Charles Parish providing individual and group counseling to school age children. In May of 2007, at 27 years old, Iman graduated from the University of New Orleans with a Ph.D. in Counselor Education.

Iman is a Licensed Professional Counselor. Her professional career as a counselor began in 2003 for St. Charles Parish Schools. Iman has a strong professional identity and those around her learn that almost immediately. She is an advocate for children, but also for the counseling profession. Iman is an active member of many professional organizations (American Counseling Association, American School Counseling Association, Louisiana Counseling Association, Counselors for Social Justice, Arab-American Anti-Discriminatory Committee, and Palestinian American Congress). Iman was elected to the position of President of the Louisiana School Counseling Association (LSCA) in July 2007.

Iman has been active in the St. Charles Parish community for four years. She is a guest speaker and presenter for clubs, schools, and organizations providing workshops on tolerance and various multicultural issues as well as issues relating to school age children. She plans to continue to provide counseling services to the citizens of St. Charles Parish through private practice.