TEN YEARS LATER: EXPLORING THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF COLLEGE-AGED MUSLIM AMERICAN WOMEN AFTER SEPTEMBER 11TH

A dissertation presented by
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Submitted to
The Department of Counseling and Applied Educational Psychology in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

in the field of
Counseling/School Psychology

Northeastern University
Boston, Massachusetts
April, 2012
Ten Years Later: Exploring the Lived Experiences of College-Aged Muslim American Women after September 11th

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ABSTRACT

Using the feminist ecological model (Ballou, Matsumoto, & Wagner, 2002), I explore the lived experiences of ten college-aged Muslim American women in the context of a post-September 11th United States in this qualitative narrative research study. The informants are individually interviewed and their voices, stories, personal experiences, and perceptions are brought forth in this study. Based on a critical review of the existing literature, the interviews address salient issues for coming of age as Muslim women after 9/11. I use thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to analyze the narratives collected in the interviews. I investigate the sociocultural contexts and structural conditions that enable the personal narratives provided. The resulting themes demonstrate that Muslim American women have diverse experiences of identity development influenced by their access to family and community, and their resources for coping with and reacting to discrimination and violence in their daily lives. Major factors that impact identity development include the practice of hijab, the power of media and government, and gendered stereotypes about Muslim women. This study provides a critique of multicultural research and literature in mainstream psychology by contrasting the personal narratives of my informants with existing knowledge about Muslim Americans and theories of cultural identity development and acculturation.

Keywords: Muslim American, women, college-aged, 9/11, qualitative, feminist
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the many people who supported me during this research project. I am grateful to my committee members, Mary Ballou, William Sanchez, and Chieh Li, for their guidance and encouragement throughout this challenging and rewarding process. I have appreciated learning and sharing ideas with all of you.

I would also like to thank my dear friends and family for all their help and love throughout my education, research, and training. To Tim, I am grateful for your humor, unconditional support, and patience. To my parents, thank you for being models of strength, hope, and persistence.

I dedicate this project to the brilliant young women who participated in this study. Thank you for sharing your stories with me and I wish you the very best in your future endeavors.
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Chapter One – Introduction

Topic Overview

The acts of terrorism that occurred in New York City, Arlington, Virginia and Shanksville, Pennsylvania on September 11, 2001 drastically and permanently changed the lives of Americans in the United States. There were both obvious and subtle changes in daily American life, influenced by changes in domestic and foreign government policies, media, education, and culture. Nearly ten years later, 9/11 continues to be a ubiquitous cultural reference for Americans across the US. The events of September 11th (9/11) have had a significant impact on the lives of Muslim Americans in the United States. This extremely diverse group has been subject to discrimination, surveillance, suspicion, deportation, and violence in its own country. Experiences that include involuntary government interviews, detention, racial profiling, daily harassment, and threats have excluded Muslim Americans from their local communities and from citizenship in the United States (Ali, Liu, & Humedian, 2004; CAIR, 2008; Cainkar, 2009; Sirin & Fine, 2008; Sue & Sue, 2008).

Immediately following 9/11, prevalent ideas about Islam and Muslims in the US emerged from both tremendous fear and a lack of knowledge. Stereotypes about violent, uneducated religious fanatics grew and flourished in a time of crisis and danger in the US. These stereotypes about Muslims or Arabs existed long before 9/11 and therefore caught on quickly and persist today as the United States continues to be involved in wars in the Middle East and South Central Asia and the fear of domestic terrorism still exists (Ali, Liu, & Humedian, 2004; Blank, 1998; Cainkar, 2009; Sirin & Fine, 2008; Sue & Sue, 2008). Stereotypical understanding of Muslim Americans
has both overt and covert forms. While the overt forms of discrimination and racism are condemned by government and in schools and communities, covert forms are perpetuated by government policy and media coverage and influence research in all disciplines (Abu El Haj, 2006; Cainkar, 2009; Leonard, 2003; Sirin & Fine, 2008).

It is in this increasingly racialized American landscape that a significant body of research and literature on Muslims in the United States has emerged in the ten years following the events of 9/11. The new information about Muslims has been added to an existing body of research that has grown over the last century ever since Islam came to United States in the 1910s (Leonard, 2003; Malek, 2009). The interdisciplinary literature is grounded in psychology, sociology, anthropology, journalism, and politics. Along with discipline, the literature varies by point of view. There are authors, researchers, and scholars that react to and condemn the exclusionary treatment of Muslims (Abraham, 2005; Abu El Haj, 2006; Ali, Liu, & Humedian, 2004; Cainkar, 2009; Leonard, 2003; Rehman & Dziegielewski, 2004; Sirin & Fine, 2007, 2008; Zaal, Salah, & Fine, 2007), while others diminish the influence of the US political climate on the experiences of Muslims (Ali, 2005; Britto, 2008; Britto & Amer, 2007; Carter & Rashidi, 2003; Sue & Sue, 2008). From different points of view, scholars have formed theories about the cultural identity of Muslims in the United States. In psychology, this literature is meant to inform psychologists and other clinicians about the cultural background of Muslims and how to effectively counsel Muslims seeking mental health treatment. A great deal of psychological research has focused on the identity development and lived experiences

**The Present Study**

The purpose of the present study is to explore the lived experiences of young Muslim American women who have grown up in a post-9/11 United States. Using a standpoint grounded in the feminist ecological model (Ballou, Matsumoto, & Wagner, 2002), I have critically reviewed the existing conceptual and research literature available on Muslim American women. Although the review is not exhaustive, I have drawn from diverse resources including multicultural psychology textbooks; broad racial, ethnic, and cultural identity development literature; immigration research and theory; peer reviewed articles with qualitative and quantitative research methods; political theory and research; news articles; and multimedia sources like online magazines, films, and television. Due to the significance of 9/11, most of the literature reviewed is from the last ten years with exceptions for books and articles that provide a historical analysis of Muslims’ experiences in the United States.

Given how recently the events of 9/11 occurred and the difficulty and effort required to conduct studies with diverse populations, contradictions and gaps in the
literature on Muslim American women are expected (Leonard, 2003; Sirin & Fine, 2008). Much of the literature adds to the richness of information about Muslim women, but there are occasional points of view that serve as a detriment and danger to these women’s experiences. The feminist ecological model offers a comprehensive framework for critically examining the contradictions and locating the gaps and biases. All of the literature is studied for its content and point of view. In addition, the impact of race, class, and gender are examined in the literature. The resulting review shows that while research that honors the lived experiences of Muslim American women exists, the dominant understanding of these women in textbooks, popular books, journal articles, and in the media often misrepresents their attitudes and their own understanding of their identity. These strong, empowered women are often labeled as uneducated, submissive, and oppressed in both blatant and subtle ways (Cainkar, 2009; Sirin & Fine, 2007, 2008; Zaal, Salah, & Fine, 2007). This review sheds light on these biases in the literature, in order to reveal a holistic and contextual understanding of Muslim American women, grounded in the social and political climate of the US right now and over the past ten years. Central to the review is an investigation of the historical and current forces in the government and media that discriminate against these women and exclude them in their own country. In addition, there is an intensive focus on how these women react and stand up against powerful forces through education, activism, and community engagement (Opotow, 2004; Opotow, Gerson, & Woodside, 2005; Sirin & Fine, 2008).
Based on the emerging themes from the literature review, I created research questions to facilitate conversations with young Muslim American women in different communities across Massachusetts. The young women self-identify as Muslim American, but come from a variety of different backgrounds, including country of origin; religious sect; community and geography; socioeconomic status; and expression of their religious, ethnic, and cultural identities both personally and in their communities and families. I interviewed college women, all between the ages of 18 and 25. At the time of 9/11, these women were aged eight to 15 years old and have experienced their adolescence and identity development in a post-9/11 United States. As informants in my study, these women are the experts on their own experiences. Together, we explored their lived experiences as informed by themes gathered from the literature review and confronted the contradictions and biases in existing research. The goal of the research is to construct an understanding of their Muslim American identity, grounded in their own attitudes, experiences, and actions.

**Research Questions**

The first two questions that emerged from the literature review are: **Who are Muslim American women in the United States? How does the dominant understanding of racial, ethnic and cultural identity development and acculturation fit for young Muslim American women?** While the answers to these questions are attempted by many researchers and scholars, I raise them for my informants as well. Many authors focus on demographic characteristics of different Muslim groups, while others provide a detailed explanation of the tenets of Islam.
Many authors conceptualize Muslim Americans by their ethnicity (African American, Arab, and South Asian) while others contend that the religion of Islam is the most salient identity characteristic (Abu-Ali & Reisen, 1999; Abudabbeh, 2005; Ali, 2005; Al-Johar, 2005; Ahmed, 2009; Amer & Hovey, 2005, 2007; Haboush, 2005; Jalali, 2005; Nath, 2005; Leonard, 2003; Sue & Sue, 2008). Many articles mention the impact of discrimination on Muslim American women in the past ten years. Few articles focus on how drastic changes in government policy and in the media have influenced discrimination against Muslims and fewer still discuss the historical immigration policies and patterns that contribute to the current hostile environment for Muslim Americans (Abu El-Haj, 2006; Sheridan & North, 2004; Sirin & Fine, 2008). Many articles conceptualize Muslim American women through existing racial, ethnic, and cultural identity development and acculturation models, listing the following factors as most important: veiling, gender roles, family conflicts, and religious conflicts in schools and communities (Ahmed & Ezzeddine, 2009; Amer & Hovey, 2007; Haboush, 2005; Jalali, 2005; Nath, 2005; Sue & Sue, 2008). I explore the existing themes to discover if the dominant understanding of Muslim American women in psychology and other disciplines fit the experiences and attitudes of my informants.

Along with a focus on existing theories and research, I explore the question:

**How do Muslim American women construct their lived experiences in the context of a post-9/11 United States?** This question assumes that the most valuable information comes from the women themselves. From a feminist ecological
perspective, listening to women is the best way to understand how they make sense of their worlds. By exploring this question with my informants, their voices, stories, personal experiences, and perceptions come forth in this study, along with the structural conditions that contribute to their personal narratives. In the interviews, my informants discussed how women stand up and confront oppression in their daily lives (Ballou, Matsumoto, & Wagner, 2002). As part of this discussion, we explored the following specific factors that influence their lived experiences: the practice of hijab; gendered experiences; family role; community impact; religiosity; cultural influence; global war and violence; and the role of race, ethnicity, and class.

As stated above, much of the literature mentions that Muslim Americans face discrimination in their daily interactions and fear government discrimination in the form of racial profiling, deportation, and surveillance. There are theories about how women cope with this discrimination and some researchers have asked Muslim Americans about their coping strategies (Ali, 2005; Carolan, Bagherinia, Juhari, Himelright, & Mouton-Sanders, 2000; Carter & Rashidi, 2003; Chaudhry, 2005; Maira, 2004; Sirin & Fine, 2007, 2008; Zaal, Salah, & Fine, 2007). Ten years after 9/11, this question continues to be very important. In my conversations with the women in this study, we explored this question in depth: What strategies do Muslim American women use for coping with and reacting to discrimination they encounter in the government, media, and their interpersonal interactions? We discussed the many strategies for coping including turning to friends, family, and religion and participating in activism and education. Although the impact of
discrimination on how Muslim American women think about futures is not directly explored in existing research, there are indicators that their future orientation has been shifted by their worry, fear, and dissenting opinions about government choices and policies (Abraham, 2005; Abu El-Haj, 2006; Sirin & Fine, 2007, 2008; Zaal, Salah, & Fine, 2007). We explored this question in our discussions: How does living in the context of surveillance and discrimination, both governmental and interpersonal, impact the future-oriented thinking of Muslim American women?

The final two questions that I incorporate into this research have little context in the existing literature, especially in psychology: How does ethnic background influence Muslim American identity and experiences of discrimination and racial profiling? How does violence and war in their or their family’s country of origin impact the lived experiences and mental health of young Muslim American women? As an emerging area of research, it is difficult to understand how different racial and ethnic backgrounds (African American, Arab, and South Asian) and national origins (Pakistan, India, Syria, Lebanon, Iran, Iraq, Egypt, and more) influence the identity of Muslim American women in different ways. Furthermore, the impact of the current climates in these countries, which may include violence, civil war, terrorism, and protests, on Muslim American women is largely unknown.

Definition of Terms

There are a number of terms and labels in use in this study, for which the definitions are fluid, evolving, and contested. It is helpful to provide clarity about how these terms are defined within this study. These terms are based on socially
constructed concepts and there are likely disagreements about how I have chosen to use these words (Suyemoto & Dimas, 2003).

The label of Muslim American has emerged as a relatively new concept in past few decades and has been spotlighted as a result of the sociopolitical climate post-9/11. For some, this term refers to specific racial, ethnic, and national categories. However, in this study, Muslim American is a self-identified label and can be used by anyone who chooses it openly and freely. Within the definition of this label is recognition for a great deal of diversity among Muslim Americans, based on race, ethnicity, national origin, class, and many other factors (Sirin, Bikmen, Mir, Fine, Zaal, & Katsiaficas, 2008; Sirin & Fine, 2008). This label is often used incorrectly and negatively. These situations are part of the discussion with the women in this study.

The term cultural identity is a significant aspect of the literature review in this study. In psychology, it is defined as a multidimensional construct that refers to membership in one or more groups, including religion, culture, ethnicity, and national identity. It is a broader term than ethnic identity and allows for numerous aspects of ancestry, history, and traditions to influence identity development (Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006; Britto & Amer, 2007). It is a prevalent construct used for understanding Muslim Americans and other diverse groups because they are often negotiating several cultural backgrounds and identify with more than one ethnicity or national origin.
Race is a socially constructed term that is used to externally classify people based on their physical characteristics, without consideration for their cultural heritage, geography, and national origin. The categories of race in the United States are defined differently than in other countries, but they often take on powerful meanings due to the pervasive and historically constructed idea that they are true, permanent, and biological (Omi & Winant, 1994). Here in the US, these categories result in unequal power distributions that benefit white and European Americans (Suyemoto & Dimas, 2003) and result in the moral exclusion and “othering” of nonwhite groups (Opotow, 2004; Opotow, Gerson & Woodside, 2005; Said, 1978; Sirin & Fine, 2008).

Ethnicity and ethnic identity are also socially constructed concepts and can also involve external classification, but they are grounded in the culture, values, and traditions shared by a group with a common national origin or geographic location (Suyemoto & Dimas, 2003; Waters, 1990). The boundaries of ethnicity are broader and more flexible and the definition of ethnic identity and cultural identity often overlap.

Racism and discrimination are used throughout this study. Their definitions for the purpose of this study are more expansive than in most other psychological literature. These do not refer to only interpersonal hostility, harassment, and violence that individuals witness and cope with in their daily lives. They also refer to a history of governmental and institutional exclusion of Muslim Americans from full participation and privileges in their own country. Racism is enmeshed in the US
social order, thus exclusion of Muslim Americans appears natural and normal to people in society (Ladson-Billings, 2000). This exclusion is accompanied by social prejudice and media stereotypes.

Muslim Americans fall into a long line of immigrant groups that have experienced **moral exclusion** from full citizenship in the United States (Opotow, 2004; Opotow, Gerson, & Woodside, 2005; Sirin & Fine, 2008). Many authors and researchers conceptualize moral exclusion as the process that facilitates the denial of civil rights of nondominant groups, described here:

Those who are inside this boundary for fairness are *morally included* and seen as deserving fair treatment. Those outside are *morally excluded*, beyond our moral concerns, and eligible for deprivation, exploitation, and other harms that might be ignored or condoned as normal, inevitable, and deserved. In escalated, destructive conflict, moral exclusion routinely justifies human rights violations and genocide. (Opotow, Gerson, & Woodside, 2005, p. 305)

Muslim Americans have been morally excluded from US citizenship throughout their immigrant experiences and their community building and continue to experience exclusion in a post-9/11 world.

**Theoretical Perspectives**

One of the major components of this study is a critical review of the viewpoints that influence research and literature about Muslim American women. Therefore, I would like my own point of view, a driving force in this study, to be transparent to the reader. The guiding theoretical perspective for this study is the
feminist ecological model (Ballou, Matsumoto, & Wagner, 2002). This model draws from multiple theories to organize the multiple factors that interact together to influence women’s lives. Pulling from critical theory, transformative multicultural theory, ecological theory, and feminist standpoints, the feminist ecological model not only provides a framework to explore multiple layers of influence, but it also challenges the dominant ideas and categories that exist in mainstream psychology and other disciplines. Inherent in the model are several principles that are embodied in the present study: women’s lived experiences, pluralism, influence of external forces, a critical perspective, and knowledge gathering from multiple disciplines. These principles can help uncover and acknowledge oppression that is perpetuated in the lives of nondominant groups, often through social inequalities at a structural systemic level. The feminist ecological model goes farther and insists we confront oppressive forces and advocate for necessary change to eliminate oppression. In the present study, I build a critical understanding of how social, political, and historical forces have impacted Muslim American women’s cultural identity, followed by conversations with women to both listen to their experiences and attitudes and check if my understanding captures their experience.

The feminist ecological model is multidimensional and includes four spheres of influence on people’s lives: individual, micro, exo, and macro. It also includes additional levels that look at planetary/climatic conditions and time/history. The following coordinates intersect all levels of the model: sex-gender, race-ethnicity, age, and class. The individual level is the focus of most traditional psychology and
includes one’s biology, emotions, cognitions, spirituality, growth, and development. These factors of the self intersect with race, ethnicity, economic status, gender, and age causing each individual to experience life differently. The present study focuses on these intersecting factors to understand how Muslim American women have experienced their identity development during a time of crisis, hostility, and fear in the United States. This is in sharp contrast to mainstream psychology, which often provides models of identity development that are removed from political and social context. The microsystem level includes the daily interpersonal influences of family, school, work, church, neighborhood, and friends. Often embedded in interpersonal interactions with other people and with social systems may be norms and values that perpetuate oppression and discrimination in Muslim American women’s lives. As children of immigrants, these women may also negotiate between old and new environments that have different and even contrasting expectations for them. At the exosystem level, the impact of regional and national institutions such as federal, state and local government, school systems, professional groups, media, and religious institutions is evaluated. It is often federal, state, and public policies and the pervasive influence of the media that trickle down into the day-to-day interactions where Muslim American women experience discrimination. Finally, the macrosystem level focuses on worldviews, ideologies, values, and political, economic, and environmental forces. A critical analysis of economic and political structures (Ballou, Matsumoto, & Wagner, 2002) demonstrates how domestic and foreign policies of the
United States and the Western world are impacting the health and safety of Muslim American immigrants.

Social constructionism has impacted the feminist ecological model and plays an important role in how research is conducted in the present study. Social constructionism focuses on how dominant narratives, considered objective truth, are products of social beings at a particular place and time in history as opposed to the products of nature, scientific fact, or the will of a higher power. As such, social constructionism holds that dominant narratives cannot be discovered through bias-free, objective experiments and rational reasoning because these narratives do not exist either permanently or separate from social interactions. Dominant narratives are conditioned by power over others and although they are the creation of particular interactions among a group of people, they are so powerful that they appear to be essential, permanent, and objective truth. Over time, these narratives become separated from the particular people and events that created them and instead appear to have always existed (Ballou, Matsumoto, & Wagner, 2002; Espin & Gawelek, 1992).

There are many dominant narratives about Muslim women discussed in the existing literature that are not situated in any social context. They paint a picture of Muslim women that only speaks to their oppression by way of religion, community, and men, when in fact, there is research that contradicts these very ideas. To challenge these narratives, I have conducted a historical analysis of how and by whom such knowledge was produced and became privileged. The historical approach
demonstrates that the dominant narratives are historically situated and situation specific (Bhavnani, 1994; Brah, 1994). With a standpoint grounded in social constructionism, I examined the structural conditions and sociocultural context that produced the dominant narratives about Muslim women (Cainkar, 2009). I carefully investigated the many conditions that produced the social construction of Muslim American as “other.” Specifically, I analyzed the pervasive forces of history and politics that have created many of the dominant narratives about Muslim women and I have spotlighted the many contradictory and dissenting narratives that also exist about these women.

**Method of Inquiry**

Along with a historical and political analysis of existing literature on Muslim American women, I used a qualitative research design, specifically narrative inquiry and thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), to facilitate the conversations I, the researcher, had with young Muslim American women. As explained by Daiute and Lightfoot (2004),

> Narrative [research] is a mode of inquiry based in narrative as a root metaphor, a genre, and discourse…narrative analysis relies on themes, mostly drawn from literary theory, to explain the vicissitudes in the drama of interpreted lives, including time, truth, beauty, character and conflict. Narratives are also…culturally developed ways of organizing experience and knowledge. (p. xi)
Narrative research has allowed me to examine the lives of Muslim American women holistically and as situated among social, cultural, political, and historical phenomena. It aligns well with the guiding theoretical perspectives of this study: the feminist ecological model and social constructionism. By contrasting the dominant narratives about Muslim American women and a post-9/11 United States with the personal narratives of the Muslim American women in this study, the conflicts and contradictions emerged. The complexity that resulted is not reduced or simplified in this study, but instead presented as a range of experiences and attitudes. Some of the resulting themes are grounded in the existing literature, while others contradict and challenge the dominant understanding of Muslim American women in mainstream psychology and other disciplines (Daiute & Lightfoot, 2004; Zaal, Salah, & Fine, 2007). There are also themes that emerged from my conversations with my informants that do not have any voice in the existing literature, but are important to the women in the study.

**Importance of Study**

My hope is that this study adds to the existing research and literature on Muslim American women, specifically how Muslim American women construct their own cultural identities across multiple contexts in a post-9/11 United States. Furthermore, my hope is that this research helps clarify how discrimination impacts identity development and lived experience, as well as evaluate and critique existing theories of identity development by spotlighting the effects of social and political context. I hope that the voices and lived experiences of Muslim American women in
this study challenge popular notions that Muslim women are submissive and uneducated. I hope it sheds light on the diversity among Muslims and Muslim Americans, in terms of race, ethnicity, class, gender, country of origin, religiosity, and many other factors. Most importantly, my hope is that this research shows the interactions between Muslim American women and their many environments, which include how they shape their communities and take a stand against injustice.

While this is a study about Muslim American women, I hope that information I have gathered here will be useful for other minority groups who are also negotiating their identities in environments where they face discrimination. Many racial and ethnic minorities in the United States travel between two or more countries and therefore must decide how they will construct their identities across multiple contexts. Just like Muslim Americans, they have to honor their families and communities, all while attending American schools and working in American businesses and jobs.

I hope that this research benefits clinicians and trainers in the fields of counseling and school psychology. Discussion of the feminist ecological model will hopefully increase awareness of the multiple layers of influence involved in constructing one’s identity. I hope that a better understanding of the complex lived experiences of Muslim American women will help therapists be more empathic with their Muslim clients, especially around issues of discrimination. Hopefully, the focus on social and political context in this research demonstrates how vital advocacy and outreach are for clients with minority backgrounds and those who face discrimination.
Finally, my hope is that this study helps therapists to examine their own points of view about Muslim Americans in the United States. I hope this research challenges therapists to consider their feelings about global Islam and the events of 9/11 as they relate to their feelings about Muslim Americans.
Chapter Two – Literature Review

The following literature review positions my study in the context of the existing body of research. I do not provide an exhaustive review, but instead showcase the range of perspectives and standpoints that are present in the literature about Muslims in America and specifically, young Muslim American women. I focus my review on creating a historical and political reference for understanding young Muslim American women’s lived experiences after 9/11. The review is structured by questions for each section. These questions inform the discussion topics for the interviews I conduct with Muslim American women, presented in chapter four. This is a conscious decision to demonstrate that there are no permanent, singular answers to these questions and there are no generalizable answers or facts that apply to all Muslim American women. The review that follows showcases the many tensions and contradictions that are present in the existing literature. This is an important finding, especially in a psychology study, because the field relies heavily on concrete, permanent information to treat individuals. This study demonstrates that such knowledge does not exist for the diverse and ever evolving population of Muslim women in the United States.

What is the Historical and Current Context for Muslim women in the United States?

An integral part of understanding Muslim American women’s lived experiences after 9/11 is examining the historical and current context for their lives in the United States. Setting the context goes far beyond their demographic
characteristics and their interactions with community and family and extends to their immigration experiences, their lives and their families’ lives in their country of origin and the variety of world events that influence the ever changing political climate both globally and domestically. The lived experiences of young Muslim American women can only be understood and interpreted accurately through a detailed and critical analysis of these factors (Ballou, Matsumoto, & Wagner, 2002, Bhavnani, 1994; Brah, 1994). The level of detail required is often missing from psychological texts and research and it is my goal to bring a contextual understanding of Muslim Americans to this study. In this section, I provide a history of Muslim immigration into the United States, information about Muslim communities in the US today and the current geopolitical context of Islam, including US government, media and education. Given the scope of this study, I cannot provide an exhaustive history and instead limit the information as it relates to Muslim Americans during and after the 9/11 attacks. There is a variety of perspectives about the history of Muslims in the United States and most certainly about the global Islam and Muslim countries. These perspectives vary depending on discipline. Some conservative scholars see an innate clash between the cultures of the secular West and Islam, ranging from moderate to radical (Ajami, 2006; Huntington, 1993; Pipes, 2001a; 2001b) and make the case that Muslims in the United States can be an inherent threat to both an American way of life and the safety of American citizens. Other scholars support US foreign policy and the promotion of democracy in Arab countries, both to serve the citizens of those countries and to serve the economic needs of the US (Lewis, 1990, 2002). Strong
among the standpoints is the historical perspective that demonstrates how the post-9/11 backlash against Muslim Americans is grounded in a history of discriminatory practices during their immigration and the establishment of their communities and citizenship in the US. I draw from this perspective in the following section.

**Muslim immigration to the United States.** There are three main Muslim groups in the United States: African Americans, Arab Americans, and South Asian Americans. Each group has its own immigration history into the United States. Although the earliest Muslims were forcibly migrated to the United States as African slaves, the practice of Islam did not survive slavery in the US. Islam came back to the United States in the early twentieth century through expositions and writings that attracted African Americans to components of Islam that rejected their existing identities as Negros, slaves, or second-class citizens. Early African American Islamic movements focused on black nationalism and alternatives to Christian white America. These early movements were racially driven and the Nation of Islam, founded by Elijah Muhammed, created a separatist version of Islam that often barred whites and South Asians from their mosques. However, there were other African Americans that converted to Islam as a result of South Asian Muslim missionaries, specifically the Ahmadis. Ahmadi Muslims in the US, entirely separate from the Nation of Islam, include both African Americans and South Asians. There are other smaller groups of African Americans that have found Islam through missionaries and immigrant Muslim communities and have no connection with the Nation of Islam. However, most African American Muslim communities in the US are grounded in the Nation of
Islam and continue to be ambivalent about US government, Christianity, and whites and other racial groups. They tend to be almost exclusively African American and often carry a different political agenda than other Muslim communities. The religion of Islam is just one part of the identity of these African American communities. They are also focused on making positive changes in urban black communities, defending the rights of black men in prison, and establishing an empowered African American identity in the US. Not only do African American Muslims combat historic racism from white Americans and American institutions, but they also face racism inside the Islamic community from immigrant Muslim groups, including South Asians and Arabs (Leonard, 2003). As the most distinctive of Muslim groups in the United States, African Americans are not covered in this review or in this study. Given their unique history and separate perspectives, it is beyond the scope of this research. Instead, this study focuses on more recently immigrated Muslim groups: Arabs and South Asians.

Early Arab immigrants to the United States were mostly Christians. They came to the US in small groups and settled into urban areas like New York, Chicago, Boston, and Detroit around the turn of the 20th century. Following their migration, a series of restrictive and racialized immigration policies in the US limited Arab immigration to the US throughout the 20th century. Beginning with the National Origins Quota Act of 1924, which preferred white immigrants from northwestern Europe, immigration to the US became inextricably connected to race. Immigration of Arabs to the US did continue in the early 20th century, but included mostly
relatives of Arabs already in the US and wealthy individuals with higher education. Finally, with the advent of the US Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965, which ended the favoring of white European immigrants, large numbers of Arab Muslims immigrated to the United States. The backdrop to post-1965 migration included the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, oil crises in the many Arab countries, Ayatollah Khomeini’s victory in Iran, and increased religious orthodoxy in many Arab countries. These world events closely followed the formation of the state of Israel and the predominantly Muslim Palestine in 1948. Many Arab immigrants to the US escaped civil war and violence in their countries of origin and settled into large Arab communities in the US, which were often clustered by nationality. Arab immigrants from the following countries watched as the US became increasingly involved in the affairs of the Arab world, often producing a strong anti-American sentiment for their country people: Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt, Iraq, Syria, Yemen, and Palestine (Cainkar, 2009; Leonard, 2003; Malek, 2009; Reimers, 2005; Sirin & Fine, 2008).

Similar to Arab immigrants, South Asians began arriving in the US from the British colonized Indian subcontinent around 1900, but due to the restrictive US immigration policies until 1965, few South Asian Muslim communities formed across the US. Following changes in immigration in 1965, a large wave of South Asians came from Pakistan, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, and India to the US. With the partition between Hindu India and Muslim Pakistan in 1948, there were political and religious conflicts between the immigrants of these countries, but they also shared a common history of subordination under British rule and many cultural practices. In addition,
unlike Arab immigrants, South Asians are a fairly homogenous group in the US today, with similar socioeconomic levels and educational attainment. As the largest Muslim ethnic group, South Asians have taken leadership roles in both religious and political arenas for Islam in the US (Ibrahim, Ohnishi, Sandhu, & Daya, 1997; Leonard, 2003; Reimers, 2005).

US immigration policy in the twentieth century has had negative consequences for Arab and South Asian Muslim immigrants. Racial identification has always been a significant part of their immigration history. As new groups in the US, Arabs and South Asians defied existing racial classifications and throughout the twentieth century, have been defined as both white and nonwhite. These definitions were often used as a way to exclude these groups from immigrating to the US prior to 1965. In the last half century, these definitions have been shaped by the amount of monetary, educational, and political success that these groups have had, as well as the amount of racism they have faced. The perpetuation of the Asian “model minority” myth have often grouped Arabs and South Asians with whites, despite the continued racism and discrimination they face. Racially-driven restrictive immigration policies fall in a long line of government actions that have excluded nonwhite people from American citizenship, thus portraying them as the “other” (Opotow, 2004; Opotow, Gerson, & Woodside, 2005; Said, 1978). Muslim Americans have followed in the legacy of Native Americans, African Americans, Americans of Mexican descent, and Japanese Americans; all groups that have suffered exclusion and racism as a result of government action. By racializing these groups, they are easily perceived as both
threatening and foreign and can become targets of social prejudice, public backlash and indiscriminate violence (Leonard, 2003; Sirin & Fine, 2008). As the “others,” they are subject to harm and exploitation that serves the perceived security of the protected group (Opotow, 2004; Opotow, Gerson & Woodside, 2005; Sirin & Fine, 2008).

Another consequence of US immigration policy for Muslims is a negative attitude toward Muslim women. Waves of immigration often saw Muslim men arriving first in the US to work, followed by their wives and families, who would be sponsored to come into the country. Women were often dependents of their husbands and worked at home. A combination of their different dress, veiling, and the idea of the “other” perpetuated an exaggerated image of Muslim women as subordinate and oppressed. Although complementary gender roles are common among the majority of American families, Muslim dress and their immigration history created the popular idea that Muslim women were subjugated and therefore different and “un-American” (Brah, 1994; Cainkar, 2009; Leonard, 2003). Misunderstood ideas about arranged marriage and polygyny and media coverage of the treatment of women in Islamic countries further enabled the idea of Muslim American women as foreign and threatening to American culture (Brah, 1994; Cainkar, 2009).

**Muslim American citizenship and communities.** Muslim Americans are a diverse group, varying in terms of class, race, education, political affiliations, religiosity, Islamic school, and numerous other factors. The diversity among the group is difficult to quantify because there are no questions on census forms that
capture religious affiliation and there are many Muslims that either do not practice their faith or do so in their private homes. As such, estimates of the Muslim population in the US vary from one million to about eight million (Sirin & Fine, 2008). According to the US Religious Landscape Survey (Pew, 2008), Muslims are approximately one percent of the United States population; women are 46 percent of the total Muslim American population. Islam can be a very personal religion and therefore one can be a Muslim without belonging to a community or attending services in a mosque. In fact, some immigrant Muslims have chosen not to display their religion publicly due to fear of discrimination and harassment. The result is increased visibility and focus on large prominent Muslim communities in the United States. They are often inaccurately used to represent all Muslims. This is problematic because these communities are usually limited to one ethnicity or national origin and one specific Islamic school. For example, there is a large Arab Muslim community in Illinois that is composed of mostly immigrants from Palestine, Jordan and Iraq, while there is a large South Asian Muslim community in the New York and New Jersey area (Cainkar, 2009; Leonard, 2003; Reimers, 2005; Sirin & Fine, 2008). Many researchers warn against the grouping of all Muslims together into singular communities, due to the fact that it is difficult to count and categorize immigrant populations (Ewing, 2008). They also caution against these groupings because they reinforce ethnogenesis, which homogenizes all Muslims as one monolithic group. The ethnogenesis of Muslims in the United States has created one face for Islam despite
differences between and among visible Muslim communities and private Muslims (Sirin & Fine, 2008).

Although there are largely visible Muslim American communities, the citizenship of their members has been called into question throughout the 20th century and they have been denied basic civil rights entitled to all American citizens. As described above, Muslim Americans were morally excluded as part of their immigrant experience and have continued to be morally excluded from full American citizenship. Resistance to mosque construction is a striking example of Muslim moral exclusion. Historically, there are numerous examples of non-Muslim opposition to the creation of Mosques in communities across the US. The fundamental right of an American to practice religion is limited for Muslims when restrictions are placed on where mosques can be built and how they must look. Additionally, a great deal of mosque construction has been completely denied unless Muslims contested these decisions through court cases (Leonard, 2003).

As the morally excluded “others,” Muslims have been targeted for popular violence throughout the 20th century, especially following national crises. For example, during the Iranian hostage crisis and the first Gulf War, Muslim communities suffered harassment and suspicion, fueled by the racist ideology that it is morally acceptable to target entire morally excluded groups for the actions of individuals. Following the Oklahoma City bombing, Arab Americans were harassed as the suspect race while no white men faced racial profiling. As “others,” Muslim Americans have seen their entire communities fall under suspicion and suffer
violence due to global conflicts and domestic crises (Abu El-Haj, 2006; Cainkar, 

There is also a history of Muslim moral exclusion in public education in the US. Although required to attend schools, Muslim children have often faced 
discrimination, harassment, and ignorance both among peers at school and in the 
classroom by educators and administrators (Abu El-Haj, 2006; Afshar, 1994; Ahmed 
& Ezzedine, 2009; Fine, 1992; Haque, 2004; Naber, 2005; Opotow, 2004; Sirin & 
Fine, 2008; Zine, 2001). At a public school level, moral exclusion is especially 
dangerous because children are taught at a young age that excluding Muslims is 
natural and even justifiable for the common good. Americans see public education as 
a source of public good and therefore both explicit and implicit forms of public 
education are consumed unquestioned (Fine, 1992). Social studies curricula in middle 
and high school are an example of explicit exclusion of Muslims in public education. 
Not only have Muslim students had to take classes that place their or their families’ 
countries of origin at the periphery, but they are also exposed to textbooks that glaze 
over the complex nature of Western European and American imperialism and the 
more recent US involvement in Arab countries and South Asia (Abu El-Haj, 2005; 
2006; Afshar, 1994; Ahmad & Szpara, 2003). In a study on public school 
environments for Arab students, Abu El-Haj (2006) found that a US history textbook 
used in senior year ignored US involvement in Afghanistan prior to 2001 and the 
impact of the Cold War on the US-Afghanistan relationship. The resulting narrative 
highlighted the emergence of an Islamist resistance to the Soviet Union and the
formation of Al-Qaeda, both with no connections to the US. Furthermore, the textbook did not talk about civilian casualties in Afghanistan and instead only focused on the deaths of US soldiers. Historically, these textbooks have been juxtaposed with conformist educational environments which implicitly exclude and discriminate against Muslim students. Dissenting opinions about US foreign and domestic policy in the last several decades that do not conform with the views provided in textbooks or the views of teachers and other students have been interpreted as unpatriotic and resulted in banishment from the learning communities in the classroom (Abu El-Haj, 2006; Afshar, 1994; Naber, 2005; Zine, 2001). Muslim students have also learned that stating a nonconformist belief in the classroom can result in school-sanctioned disciplinary measures and increased harassment and bullying from peers on the playground and in school hallways (Abu El Haj, 2005; Afshar, 1994). Instead of using dissenting opinions about global issues as a vehicle for teaching, schools often adopt a framework of pluralist multiculturalism, which conveys the message that while cultures are different, all should be treated the same. However, this model does not allow for debate or discussion on these topics in schools, thus silencing the minority opinions and perpetuating stereotypes (Abu El-Haj, 2005).

A critical backdrop for national policy and public sentiment towards Muslim Americans is their portrayal in the US media. Research on Muslims in the media throughout the 20th century is plentiful and briefly outlined here (Abu El-Haj, 2006; Blank, 1998; Cainkar, 2009; El-Amine, 2005; Kozlovic, 2007; Malek, 2009; Michalek, 1989; Pomerance, 2009; Said, 1997; Shaheen, 2003; Sirin & Fine, 2008).
Films, fictional television serials, newspapers, and televised news have portrayed Muslim culture as mystical, exotic, sexualized, and barbaric. Muslim men are simultaneously visiting harems and oppressing women by keeping them locked up and covered from head-to-toe. All Muslims hate the United States and use their religious fervor to fuel violence against Americans. These are the pervasive ideas in the American media about Muslims in the last 100 years. These inaccurate and dangerous notions about Muslims are perpetuated by selective coverage of major world events like the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, the Gulf Wars, and the continued conflicts in Israel, Palestine, Iraq, and Afghanistan, all of which is favorable to the US (Cainkar, 2009; Malek, 2009). The favorable coverage garners popular support for US foreign policies and involvement in Arab and Muslim countries. Perhaps the most dangerous stereotypes exist about Palestinians who are invariably portrayed as terrorists and militants and never as civilians who cope with losing their loved ones, family members, and their homes (Said, 1997, 2001; Shaheen, 2003). Furthermore, popular movies like The Sheik (1921), The Mummy (1932), The Siege (1998), Rules of Engagement (2000), and United 93 (2006) have promoted Muslims and Arabs as villains, terrorists, and in general, culturally inferior (Pomerance, 2009; Shaheen, 2003). Muslim characters are portrayed as violent caricatures and often appear in movies as large faceless, angry throngs, making them that much easier to kill off by the heroic Western protagonists. There are filmmakers in the last few decades creating films that present more positive images of Arabs and Muslims, but the most pervasive negative notions of Muslims come from major Hollywood movies with
nationwide releases. Without any vocal opposition to these movies from government or Hollywood leaderships, the Muslim “other” is replicated and spread through the US media, along with inaccurate and dangerous stereotypes about an entire population of people (Malek, 2009; Said, 1997; Shaheen, 2003).

Closely related to moral exclusion is the concept of Manifest Destiny. The dangerous processes occurring in public schools, media, and government are also a demonstration of the enduring manifest destiny of the US (Said, 2002). Manifest destiny gives the US religious, political, and military approval to take global control when desired or deemed necessary. Historically, manifest destiny came in the form of American imperialism and now comes in the form of foreign wars and military involvement. In either case, debate on these topics is considered unpatriotic and therefore censored in public schools and diminished in the media (Abu El-Haj, 2005; Said, 2002; Shaheen, 2003).

9/11 and Muslim backlash. The moral exclusion of Muslim Americans through US immigration policy, ethnogenesis, public education, popular violence, media, and the denial of basic civil rights throughout the 20th century has laid the groundwork for the backlash against Muslims post-9/11. Polling data has shown that many Americans believed that Muslim Americans should be interned and put under surveillance for the sake of national security (Cainkar, 2009). Public figures have distanced themselves from the Muslim community, perhaps most notably during the 2008 presidential campaign. Americans feared that presidential candidate Barack Obama was a Muslim and both his supporters and his opponents strongly stated that
he was not a Muslim and instead a good, decent American citizen (Cainkar, 2009). The discourse throughout the election and the last 10 years has demonstrated that Muslims are not and therefore need not be treated as American citizens (Cainkar, 2009; Sirin & Fine, 2008; Volpp, 2002; Zaal, Salah, & Fine, 2007). The striking moral exclusion of Muslim Americans has reached new heights in the post-9/11 climate. As stated above, in times of crisis and conflict, moral exclusion is used to justify human rights violations of an entire people. In 2002, the Council of American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) logged over 500 discriminatory acts against Muslims. Many of the acts were violent and threatening in nature (CAIR, 2002; see also Ali, Liu, & Humedian, 2004). In the years since 2002, the number of anti-Muslim hate crimes has gone down, but workplace discrimination has gone up by 18 percent with 452 cases reported in 2007 (CAIR, 2008). The majority of discrimination has targeted individuals that look ethnically Muslim and/or are practicing their religion through prayer. As such, Arab Americans, whether Muslim or not, have been targeted extensively in the last five to ten years. There have been 800 cases of employment discrimination, 80 cases of illegal or discriminatory removal from aircrafts, thousands of cases of Arab men required to submit to “voluntary government interviews” and abundant instances of denial of services and housing (Sue & Sue, 2008).

It is important to highlight the role of the US government in the moral exclusion of Muslim Americans. The domestic policies targeting Muslims in the US post-9/11 have been the most dangerous because they have reversed civil rights for American citizens based on their race, country of origin, and religious affiliation and
they signal to Americans that it is acceptable to act out against their Muslim neighbors and community members through violence, harassment, and discrimination (Cainkar, 2009; El-Amine, 2005; Sirin & Fine, 2008; Volpp, 2002). In summary, new domestic security policies after 9/11 include: mass arrests of Arab and Muslim men, the USA PATRIOT Act, visa holds, FBI interviews, restrictive immigration reforms for specific countries, and a special registration program for non-immigrant aliens from specific countries. All of these new policies target Arabs and Muslims in the United States, both non-citizens and citizens. They include ethnic profiling of Muslims and indiscriminate arrests of individuals for whom the only grounds for suspicion is either their country of origin, race, or religious affiliation. Although these policies have lead to almost no additional protection for the United States, government leadership promote their use as a means for national security and control. The popular rhetoric over the last 10 years has aligned all Arab and Muslim men with terrorists and therefore arrests, deportations, and detainment of Arabs and Muslims have been justified, regardless of their civil rights (Cainkar, 2009; El-Amine, 2005; Sirin & Fine, 2008; Volpp, 2002). Although these policies are ineffective, they serve to demonstrate the strength and power of the US to its citizens, providing a sense of safety and stability. In turn, the domestic financial stability of the US and popular support for foreign military involvement are maintained (El-Amine, 2005).

There has been a gendered impact of the post-9/11 backlash for Muslim Americans. In the media and in many of the government policies, Muslim men, more than women, have been targeted for surveillance and arrests, indicating that mostly
men are suspected for terrorist activities. This is again based on different stereotypes for Muslim men and women. Muslim men are perceived to be violent and hate Americans and Christians, while Muslim women are perceived as oppressed, uneducated, and submissive (Cainkar, 2009; Peek, 2002; 2003; Sirin & Fine, 2008). The stereotypical understanding of Muslim women, that they are in need of rescue from their men and their religion, is protective against arrests and detainment. However, women who practice veiling, a visible marker of their religion, are subject to harassment, violence, and discrimination in their daily lives and interpersonal interactions. They are also the mothers, daughters, and wives of the Muslim men that are being detained and arrested. Furthermore, despite their perceived passive role in their culture, Muslim women are still “un-American” and inextricably linked to the image of a terrorist (Ahmed-Ghosh, 2004, 2006; Cainkar, 2009; Rehman & Dziegielewski, 2004; Sirin & Fine, 2008; Sue & Sue, 2008; Zaal, Salah, & Fine, 2007).

One positive area in the research on the post-9/11 backlash is college climate. Recent interview studies have shown that generally university administrators and professors have been polite and helpful and in some cases, act as advocates for Muslim college students. In the months following 9/11, many New York universities provided safety planning and assistance to Muslim students, which facilitated their participation in college life for the remaining semester (Peek, 2002; 2003; Seggie & Sanford, 2010).
How does the dominant understanding of Muslims, cultural identity development, and acculturation in psychology fit for young Muslim American women?

The following section explores how Muslim American women are represented in mainstream psychological literature. Again, this is not an exhaustive review of all that has been written about Muslims in psychology, but instead provides a critical analysis of popular and well-respected literature and research that are used to train psychologists and mental health professionals in graduate programs and serve as a reference for general knowledge about this population in clinical settings. Along with literature specific to Muslims, this section also reviews racial and cultural identity and acculturation models, which are often used as the foundation for understanding culturally diverse populations, including Muslim Americans. Finally, I explore how the religion of Islam has been used to understand Muslim Americans in psychological literature.

**Muslim American women in textbooks.** According to promotional materials for the book, *Counseling the Culturally Diverse: Theory and Practice*, currently in its fifth edition, is the most widely used textbook on multicultural counseling (Amazon, 2004). Author Derald Wing Sue has had leadership positions within the American Psychological Association and has served as the president of the Society for the Psychological Study of Ethnic Minority Issues. He also was called to present at the race advisory board under the Clinton Administration at the White House (*Derald Wing Sue*, 2004). With a prestigious author and wide circulation, *Counseling the
Culturally Diverse is a very influential textbook among psychologists and psychology students. Along with information about culturally competent counseling, the book explores issues of racism, discrimination, and social justice in the US. A significant portion reviews a variety of culturally diverse populations with a focus on basic demographic information, cultural background, and implications for therapy. The fifth edition of the book includes a chapter on Arab Americans, a population not covered in the previous edition. Within this chapter, the authors discuss Arab Americans and provide a brief general synopsis about Muslim Americans (Sue & Sue, 2008). While the textbook illuminates many of the issues salient to Arab and Muslim Americans, there are many statements in the short chapter that demonstrate a lack of context for and intra-group diversity within the population and therefore potentially misrepresent the lived experiences of Arab and Muslim Americans.

The chapter highlights that there is widespread fear among the Arab and Muslim American populations, resulting in withdrawal from public religious activities. According to the chapter, the fear is due to interpersonal harassment and government surveillance (Sue & Sue, 2008). While these are real threats, another major threat, neglected by this chapter, is detainment and deportation of Arab and Muslims from the United States due to their race and religion. The denial of one’s civil rights and the removal from one’s family are transformative fears, for which withdrawing from any or all religious and cultural activities is an expected reaction (Cainkar, 2009; Sirin & Fine, 2008). Without explicit information about the continued unmonitored government access to these groups, their behavior can appear to be both
cowardly and an admission that their religion is inherently bad or wrong. This is especially true for Arab and Muslim women who choose to no longer practice veiling. From the chapter, this action can be interpreted as a way for women to distance themselves from their oppressive religion and communities, when in fact, women mostly remove their headscarves as a way to protect themselves and their families from suspicion and harassment (Cainkar, 2009; Rehman & Dziegielewski, 2004; Sirin & Fine, 2008). The Sue & Sue chapter also emphasizes that Arab and Muslim families have complementary or patriarchal roles for men and women; men as providers and women as caregivers and homemakers. Despite the fact that most American families also have complementary roles for men and women, this statement further perpetuates the stereotypical idea that Arab and Muslim women are trapped in traditional and oppressed roles (Carolan, Bagherinia, Juhari, Himelright, & Mouton-Sanders, 2000; Carter & Rashidi, 2003; Rehman & Dziegielewski, 2004; Suárez-Orozco & Qin, 2006).

Another section in the chapter is called “Acculturation Conflicts” (Sue & Sue, 2008, p. 413), which calls the following issues to attention: Arab and Muslim Americans may hide their ethnic backgrounds by taking American sounding names and conversely, they may withdraw into their ethnic communities to separate from other Americans. Again, each of these statements can be misinterpreted without context, especially when cited as acculturation conflicts. While these may be related to issues of acculturation, they are also related to the social and political climate in the US. Changing one’s name can be a way to escape harassment and distance one’s self
from the stereotype of a terrorist, thus enhancing one’s safety and security in a hostile environment. Similarly, “withdrawing” or joining with one’s community can be a way of finding peace and acceptance during a time of crisis and fear. These statements, out of context, can imply that Arab and Muslim men are cowardly, ashamed of their religious heritage, or oppositional to mainstream American society, which serve to perpetuate existing negative stereotypes. Furthermore, when these are labeled as acculturation conflicts, it is automatically assumed that the conflicts are internal for each Arab and Muslim, when in fact, Arab and Muslim Americans are responding to their ever-changing environments (Sirin & Fine, 2008; Sue & Sue, 2008).

A final area of concern in Sue and Sue’s (2008) chapter is the overlapping discussion of Arabs and Muslims in the same chapter. Although the authors explain that most Arabs in the US are Christians and that the majority of Muslim Americans are from South Asia, Islam is still housed in a chapter about Arab Americans. Moreover, there are no details about the religious heritage of Arab Christians. It appears that the Arabs and Muslims are clustered together for convenience and to provide a forum to speak to the racism and prejudice experienced in both groups. However, the resulting chapter contributes to the ethnogenesis of Muslim Americans into one monolithic group, for which differences in ethnicity, cultural background, and countries of origin appear irrelevant (Abu El-Haj, 2006; Sirin & Fine, 2008).

The book, Counseling the Culturally Diverse: Theory and Practice, is taken as one example of many in psychology literature, especially multicultural counseling
textbooks and articles (Abu-Ali & Reisen, 1999; Abudabbeh, 2005; Ahmed, 2009; Amer & Hovey, 2005, 2007; Haboush, 2005; Jalali, 2005; Nath, 2005; Sue & Sue, 2008). In this literature, the focus becomes the cultural background of immigrant populations and specifically, the cultural differences between mainstream US culture and minority cultures. This method can reinforce the notion that Arab and Muslim culture is a static set of traditions, rituals, and beliefs that is the same for all Arabs and Muslims, regardless of race, class, gender, and political climate. Additionally, it reinforces the notion that there is an inherent clash between Arab and Muslim culture and mainstream US culture; driving a greater wedge between the two (Bilgrami, 2003; Huntington, 1993; Maira, 2010; Said, 2001). Arab and Muslim culture becomes so different and oppositional to US culture that Arab and Muslim Americans are maintained as the “others” (Abu El-Haj, 2006). Furthermore, the “othering” is based on often inaccurate information. In a 2004 study of how Islam and Muslims are represented in psychological publications using the PsycINFO database, 19.9 percent of the abstracts reviewed focused on advice and nonscientific descriptions rather than evidence-based research about Muslims and Islam. The study also showed that few publications looked at the impact of discrimination by and against Muslim populations (Sheridan & North, 2004).

Sue and Sue’s (2008) book chapter, as does much of the psychology literature on Arabs and Muslims, includes a number of important insights about the populations and addresses many of their therapeutic needs, but the missing focus on context and intra-group diversity contributes to the propagation of existing pervasive stereotypes
about these populations, resulting in their continued moral exclusion (Abu El-Haj, 2006; Maira, 2010; Nassar-McMillan & Hakim-Larson, 2003; Sirin & Fine, 2008; Sheridan & North, 2004).

**Racial/cultural minority identity development and acculturation.** Over the last several decades, acculturation and racial, ethnic and cultural identity development models have become increasingly influential in the field of counseling psychology (Salazar & Abrams, 2005; Sanchez & Welsh, 1999; Sue & Sue, 2008). There are many proposed benefits of these models. They assist therapists in avoiding a stereotypical understanding of their culturally diverse clients by emphasizing intra-group diversity in a population. They also help therapists understand how their culturally diverse clients are oriented to therapy and the salience of cultural identity to their therapeutic needs (Sue & Sue, 2008). These development models have evolved significantly since the 1970s; one of today’s most widely circulated and widely taught model is the Racial/Cultural Identity Development model (R/CID), which is based on the earlier Minority Development model (Atkinson, Morten, & Sue, 1989; Salazar & Abrams, 2005; Sue & Sue, 2008). Previous models of identity development were specific to racial and ethnic populations like blacks, Asians, and Latinos, but the R/CID model was developed to apply to all culturally different populations in the US. It is a five-stage model that explains how oppressed people experience and understand their own culture, the dominant culture, and the relationship between the two cultures (Sue & Sue, 2008). Unlike earlier models of identity development, the R/CID model falls in a long line of contemporary models that are decontextualized
and depoliticized. The R/CID model ignores the social and political activism in culturally diverse communities, the ever-changing US political climate, and the intersections of class, gender, and power that influence racial and cultural identity (Sanchez & Welsh, 1999). In doing so, this model has the ability to misrepresent the identity and lived experiences of Muslim American women and distorts their therapeutic needs (Britto, 2008).

The R/CID model includes five stages: conformity, dissonance and appreciating, resistance and immersion, introspection and integrative awareness. The stages demonstrate how a minority individual begins her identity development as self- and community-depreciating, all the while preferring the cultural values of the dominant group, white Americans. The individual then encounters information that contradicts her existing conformist beliefs and begins to feel conflicted about her community and the dominant group. After stages of resistance to and rejection of white American values and introspection about both her community and her US American culture, the individual reaches integrative awareness, in which she has an inner sense of security that allows her to appreciate both her own minority culture, her community, and US American society. The culmination of these stages is the goal for all culturally diverse people because it brings the most psychological well-being and the strongest sense of self-worth and confidence (Salazar & Abrams, 2005; Sue & Sue, 2008).

The first implication of the R/CID model is that all minority individuals progress through the stages outlined above, beginning in a stage of conformity.
Research on Muslim American youth shows that they are very aware of racism and discrimination from a young age. They are also adept at negotiating their identities in public spaces, like school. Furthermore, they do not always see a clash between their Muslim and American identities and in fact, can reconcile the two well. Research shows that young Muslim Americans often cite that they are proud of their heritage and are committed to educating others about their communities and religion. They do not value dominant American attitudes and beliefs over their communities’ and instead, find pride in their many diverse identities (Abu El-Haj, 2005; Abu-Ali & Reisen, 1999; Afshar; 1994; Ahmad & Szpara, 2003; Sirin & Fine, 2007, 2008; Zaal, Salah, & Fine, 2007). Muslim American children and adolescents can get angry about the current political climate in the US and harassment and threats they witness in their schools and communities, but there are a myriad of ways that they cope, including activism, religion, and sharing with other community members (Ahmed & Szpara, 2003; Chaudhry, 1998; Sirin & Fine, 2007, 2008; Zaal, Salah, & Fine, 2007). Clearly, young Muslim Americans often do not fit the stages of the R/CID model. Research in this area demonstrates that religious and cultural identity development for Muslim Americans is a complex, nonlinear process that cannot be quantified in a universal model.

The final stage of the R/CID model, integrative awareness, implies all minority individuals should eventually find both an inner sense of security and an appreciation for their own culture and US culture. However, for Muslim Americans, inner security is difficult, if not impossible, to achieve in the current US sociopolitical
climate. They are facing threats of safety, surveillance, and deportation in their daily lives, along with harassment and violence towards their communities. An inner security is both unattainable and ineffective for Muslim Americans right now. Joining with their communities and standing together in opposition to government policy and dominant US culture may be a better psychological place for Muslim Americans. According to the decontextualized R/CID model, these behaviors and attitudes would be inaccurately interpreted as less developed or earlier stages of cultural identity development.

Another implication of the R/CID model is that oppression of nondominant, minority cultures by the dominant white US culture is a natural and permanent part of US society. The consequence of this oppression is that minority people internalize this oppression, which leads to a negative view of the self. Given the immigration history of Muslims to the US and the subsequent treatment they have received in both pre-9/11 and post-9/11 US society, the oppression of Muslims is not eternal or innate, but the consequence of historically situated events, government policies, and media coverage. Muslims do not have to accept that oppression is a permanent part of their lives. Instead, they have reacted with anger, activism, education, and community engagement to make changes in their communities and across the nation. Other Muslim Americans have reacted with fear and silence in order to protect themselves and their families. There are a variety of ways that Muslim Americans have reacted to oppression, but the R/CID model’s focus on internalization and negative views of self

Finally, the R/CID model is limited to racial and cultural identity development. The Muslim American identity, which has emerged in the last few decades and has been spotlighted by 9/11, defies categorization as a racial or cultural identity. Given the diversity among Muslim Americans based on race, class, gender, Islamic school, country of origin and cultural background, identity development among Muslim American individuals is not simply about their race or culture. Furthermore, based on these factors, Muslim Americans see different forms of racism and discrimination. Government policies have targeted Muslim Americans from some countries of origin far more than others and some Muslim Americans appear more “Muslim” or “Arab” than others and therefore are targeted more frequently for harassment and violence. Ecologically, being Muslim American in the US is complicated by both internal and environmental factors; another reason that Muslim American identity development does not fit in the R/CID model (Hopkins, 2004; Sirin & Fine, 2008).

The theories of acculturation, which overlap with the models of cultural identity development, provide a better fit for Muslim Americans (Britto, 2008; Britto & Amer, 2007; Sirin & Fine, 2008). Research with first and second generation Muslim American youth from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds shows that they are able to integrate both the mainstream US culture and the culture from their and their family’s country of origin effectively. They participate in social activities
from both cultures and have friends from both cultures. They also consider their perspectives and ideas to be influenced by both cultures (Ahmad & Szpara, 2003; Britto, 2008; Sirin & Fine, 2007, 2008). Despite successful integrated acculturation, Muslim American youth are still aware of discrimination and moral exclusion in their lives from an early age. According to Berry’s model of acculturation (Phinney, Berry, Vedder, & Liebkind, 2006), perceived discrimination results in a negative view of the mainstream society by immigrant youth. Discrimination-related stress does weaken the bond between Muslim Americans and US society. Berry’s model (Phinney, Berry, Vedder, & Liebkind, 2006) considers all of the following contextual factors to understand acculturation: language proficiency; social contacts; family relationships; cultural, religious, and visibility differences; length of residence; neighborhood composition; and attitudes of the host society.

There are no inherent limitations to using Berry’s model with young Muslim Americans. They result from the general discussion of acculturation in textbooks and in summary articles (Ahmed & Ezzeddine, 2009; Amer & Hovey, 2007; Haboush, 2005; Jalali, 2005; Nath, 2005; Sue & Sue, 2008). Acculturation becomes a dichotomous system in which an individual can only be “acculturated” or “not acculturated.” If the individual is “not acculturated,” it is assumed that there will be conflicts and a negative impact on self-esteem, behavior, and psychological well-being. Acculturation, when presented without the well-researched contextual factors, does not represent the complicated and challenging identity development of Muslim American youth.
The dichotomy of “acculturated” and “not acculturated” also fits with the framework of manifest destiny. If Muslim American youth do not accept the US society’s goal of gaining and maintaining global control and dominance through foreign military involvement, they are not acculturated. They are instead disturbed or uneducated or popularly believed to be terrorists (Said, 2002). Instead of this dichotomy, Muslim American youth have the capacity to both think critically about mainstream society, government, and media, and have positive associations with their US culture and peers. Young Muslim American women and men have different reactions to the discrimination they experience (Sirin & Fine, 2007, 2008). In addition, Muslim American youth can be competent in mainstream US culture for the purposes of school and work, but may still find peace and a sense of belonging in their community and family culture if they are exposed to hostile environments in their schools and society-at-large (Padilla & Perez, 2003; Sirin & Fine, 2008). Finally, Muslim American youth may choose to reject aspects of US society and therefore not acculturate, but this is not related to their self-esteem, psychological well-being, or their negative behaviors. Muslim youth may be making a conscious choice to stand against the aspects of US culture with which they disagree (Ali, 2005; Leonard, 2003; Sirin & Fine, 2007, 2008; Zaal, Salah, & Fine, 2007). In order to understand the lived experiences of young Muslim Americans, it is crucial to go beyond simplified, universal racial and cultural identity development and acculturation models, and consider the following contextual and ecological factors:
gender, political climate, social stigma, cultural competence, and motivation for acculturation (Britto, 2008; Padilla & Perez, 2003; Sirin & Fine, 2008).

**Understanding Islam in psychological literature.** In many textbooks, research articles, and generally in psychological literature, Islam is briefly outlined to provide a basis for understanding the population of Muslim Americans. There is a great deal of correspondence amongst the information presented, including: the five pillars of faith, jihad, practicing hijab, gender roles, and the history of the prophet (Abu-Ali & Reisen, 1999; Abudabbeh, 2005; Ali, Liu, & Humedian, 2004; Carolan, Bagherinia, Juhari, Himelright, & Mouton-Sanders, 2000; Carter & Rashidi, 2003; Nath, 2005; Rehman & Dzgielewski, 2004; Sue & Sue, 2008). While useful information to understand some Muslim Americans, these facts do not apply to all Muslims in the US and around the world. Globally, like Christianity, Islam is practiced in a diversity of ways based on country of origin, Islamic school, cultural background, socioeconomic status, and individual and family beliefs. There is so much diversity among Islamic practices and beliefs that there are significant sociopolitical conflicts over Islam inside countries and between countries. These conflicts have and continue to cause discrimination, violence, and war (Leonard, 2003). The global lines between Islamic interpretations apply to Muslim Americans as well. Muslim Americans are not one group with the same religious beliefs but, instead, a group of people and communities who self-identify as Muslim Americans and have had similar immigration histories (Leonard, 2003; Sirin & Fine, 2008). Among them, young Muslim American women come from a diversity of
backgrounds, but share some similar themes in their lives. Islam is central to the themes, but there are many other contextual factors that influence the lived experiences of young Muslim American women. These themes are explored in the next section.

**How do young Muslim American women construct their lived experiences in the context of a post-9/11 United States?**

The dominant understanding of Muslim American women in psychology is often superficial and decontextualized. The main focus of psychology literature includes gender roles in Islam, the highly contentious practice of hijab, acculturation issues, and often patriarchal family values. According to psychology literature, Muslim women are only acted upon and have little agency of their own (Abu-Ali & Reisen, 1999; Abudabbeh, 2005; Haboush, 2005; Jalali, 2005; Nath, 2005; Sue & Sue, 2008). Their lack of agency appears to be present with their families, their communities, their acculturation, and the practice of their religion. Outside of mainstream psychology literature, there are resources that show a different profile of Muslim American women. Drawn from both qualitative and quantitative research, ethnographies, and personal stories, this next section highlights the variety of themes that emerge from the critical literature about young Muslim American women. These themes, presented as questions, are complicated and include many and often conflicting points of view.
How do Muslim American women self-identify?

Dual identities. The complicated nature of Muslim American identity is discussed repeatedly in the literature. Although theorized with many different names, the research and conceptual literature demonstrate that Muslim American youth have the ability to form different identities that serve them in different contexts. The two significant identities are “Muslim” and “American.” The formation of these identities differs significantly from the process described in R/CID and acculturation literature. Generally, Muslim American youth have agency and cultural competency when negotiating their two identities. They may maintain their identities throughout their lives; choose one identity over the other; or integrate the two identities. Maintaining multiple identities reflects their knowledge of both how others perceive them and how they perceive themselves (Bilgrami, 2006). As a conscious process, Muslim American youth are often aware of the contextual factors that might necessitate their dual identities, including: societal disapproval of Islamic religious expression; discrimination and stereotyping in mainstream society; and family values and obligations. While for some Muslim American youth, the dual identities may reflect low self-esteem and a desire to fit in with a mainstream school environment, overwhelmingly, the research shows that the dual identities help Muslim American youth manage their many conflicting obligations and values (Ahmed & Ezzedine, 2009; Bilgrami, 2006; Chaudhry, 1998; Hasnat, 1998; Sirin & Fine, 2008; Zaal, Salah, & Fine, 2007).
Also conceptualized as “ethnic options” or “racial labels” (Waters, 1990) the dual identities of young Muslim American women can take different forms. In an intensive, mixed-methods research project, which included surveys, interviews, focus groups, identity mapping, and historical information, Sirin and Fine (2008) focused on the identities of Muslim American youth. With 204 respondents of first and second generation youth from mostly high socioeconomic backgrounds, the researchers found robust evidence for three paths to negotiating identities. Most were able to integrate the identities without conflict, while others lived their parallel identities in separate worlds. For a small number of Muslim American women, there were conflicts, hostility, and tension between their identities, which often resulted from the current political climate in the US and inside the Muslim communities (Sirin, Bikmen, Mir, Fine, Zaal, & Katsiaficas, 2008; Sirin & Fine, 2008; Zaal, Salah, & Fine, 2007). The research showed that young women were more likely to display integrated identities than young men, while young men were more likely to construct parallel paths for negotiating their two identities. The results of the research were sharp contrast to existing popular speculation, present in mainstream psychological literature, that there is an inherent incompatibility between Muslim and American identities (Abu-Ali & Reisen, 1999; Sirin & Fine, 2008).

For Muslim women with integrated identities, being Muslim American was an advantage, which allowed them access to more than one ethnic or cultural group. The young women in the study saw the benefits of living in a plural US society that allowed them to practice Islam as they chose to, just like their male counterparts.
They also saw their identities as flexible with a great deal of choice about how much of their identity was dictated by their religion, peers, family, and culture. However, the integrated identities did not prevent Muslim women from critiquing both their own families and cultures and the mainstream US society and culture. They were able to separate their US neighbors and friends from US foreign and domestic policy, which caused fear and panic for their family, especially when related to their country of origin (Leonard, 2003). They were also able to see racism and colorism present among their communities and families, to which they responded with critique and education. These women saw themselves as patriotic and identified that their dissent was a duty of their US citizenship. Additionally, they chose to display their Muslim identities out loud by attending mosques and practicing veiling to call attention to and protest the treatment of Muslim Americans in the US post-9/11. Despite a hostile US society and government, young Muslim American women with integrated identities in Sirin and Fine’s study were empowered to fuse their worlds together (2008; Zaal, Salah, & Fine, 2007).

For the few Muslim American women with parallel or conflicted dual identities, the struggle to find a balance between their identities came from outside of themselves. Despite their loyalty and patriotism to the US, the young women expressed concern about the privacy violations and discrimination targeted at their community. The impact of surveillance and intolerance impacted these women so much that they either could not or chose not to integrate their identities. Additionally, some of these women cited that they did not find belonging in either US culture or
their family’s culture. Despite believing that they were both Muslims and Americans, other members from these communities rejected their membership. They were either too American or too Muslim for both worlds (Ahmed & Ezzedine, 2009; Hasnat, 1998; Sirin & Fine, 2007, 2008; Zaal, Salah, & Fine, 2007). Other research shows that this issue is compounded by limited knowledge about the religious and cultural needs of Muslim students in schools, in which practices like required gym uniforms, restrictive holiday schedules, and limited acceptable food options can alienate young Muslim American women from their peers and their educational environment (Ahmad & Szpara, 2003). Furthermore, there is limited knowledge about the needs of Muslim American youth inside Muslim communities, which often segregate their children from activities with mainstream US children without providing equivalent social activities for their children (Ahmed & Ezzedine, 2009; Sirin & Fine, 2008).

Religious identity versus cultural identity. In the context of a larger sociopolitical debate in the Muslim community over modernizing Islam to better correspond with the Western world, young Muslim American women are choosing between their Muslim religious identities and their Muslim cultural identities (Leonard, 2003). From the literature, it appears that these two identities are grounded in separate, but overlapping phenomena occurring right now in the US. Young Muslim Americans are choosing their religious identity as a demonstration of their resistance towards US domestic and foreign policy and certain aspects of US culture. Known as an “Islam first” or “Muslim first” identity, women within this movement have put on the veil despite their mothers and family members who do not cover their
heads. It is their agency to reinterpret hijab that reflects a reinvention of conservative Islam that is being practiced among young Muslim Americans, as an assertion of their strong Muslim identity. Young woman are insisting on Islamic marriages that emphasize religious identity over ethnic identity, which is often in contrast to the wishes of their parents and communities (Al-Johar, 2005; Leonard, 2003; Naber, 2005). Similarly, these women are also forming and participating in national organizations, prominent on college campuses, which exhibit a transnational Islamic movement focused on activism in the US. These young women assert that their free and autonomous practice of Islam is a demonstration of their unique Muslim American religious identity (Chaudhry, 1998; Leonard, 2003; Sirin & Fine, 2008; Zaal, Salah, & Fine, 2007).

There is another group of young Muslim American women who are also choosing their religious identities with different results. There is a rich tradition of women authors who speak to the inherent feminism in the religion of Islam. These authors detail the cultural restrictions that are put on Muslim women, which actually prevent women from practicing Islam in its “true” or “essential” form (Hasan, 2009; Naber, 2005). Central to these writings are issues like hijab, women’s financial rights, gender roles in marriage, and polygyny. In each of these cases, the authors argue that Islam, as outlined in the Qu’ran and the Sunnah, gives women rights over property, their finances, and in their relationships. The authors also point out that the practice of hijab does not force women to cover their heads and bodies in loose-fitting clothing, but that the general practice of modesty is required for both men and women (Hasan,
2000, 2004, 2009; Leonard, 2003). It is in this context that feminist Muslim authors discuss the practice of Islam in the US. They write about women’s freedom in the US to practice a form of Islam that values women, which is not afforded to women in some Muslim countries. These women write about their Muslim American identity with great pride, but also with some level of conflict. Liberated Islam in the US is overshadowed by the current political state of the US, which promotes discrimination and surveillance of Muslims and Muslim Americans (Ahmed-Ghosh, 2004; 2006; Hasan, 2009; Hasnat, 1998; Naber, 2005; Leonard, 2003). Of course, these writings are hotly debated by other Muslim scholars, who either believe that women are not being restricted by their culture or that the religious and cultural aspects of Islam cannot be separated. It is also important to acknowledge again the diversity of Islamic practices both in the US and across the world (Leonard, 2003; Maira, 2009).

**What does the act of practicing hijab mean to young Muslim American women?** The practice of hijab is widely understood as a veiling of a woman’s head and sometimes her entire body with loose-fitting scarves, robes, and other clothing as dictated by Islamic teaching. Hijab is also characterized as an oppressive practice that is linked to real and perceived injustices against Muslim women in other countries, such as lack of education, mobility, financial independence, and power in relationships. The practice of hijab is repeatedly used as a symbol of Islam in the United States, global Islam, and terrorism groups that affiliate themselves with Islam (Cainkar, 2009; Haque-Khan, 1997; Hasan, 2000; Maira, 2009; Sirin & Fine, 2008). The combination of these popularly held beliefs significantly contributes to negative
views about both hijab and the Muslim American women who practice hijab. However, in the literature and research that ask Muslim American women about their own views, there are a variety of complex reasons why women choose hijab. Their reasons often show resistance, agency, and empowerment, which are neither represented in popular media nor in mainstream psychological literature. Although alluded to throughout this review, I present these reasons comprehensively in this section.

*Religious assertion.* There is debate within and between Muslim American communities about the actual practice of hijab. Some religious scholars have argued that women should keep their heads and bodies covered in loose-fitting apparel when in the company of unrelated men, while others state that the Qur’an dictates only that both men and women should conduct themselves with modesty and cover their heads during prayer. There are scholars that argue for either more strict or loose interpretations of the religious texts and depending on community, Islamic school, and national origin, the concept of hijab is fluid and evolving. Regardless of interpretation, for some young Muslim American women, the practice of hijab is a religious assertion. Muslim women who interpret hijab as a head scarf or veil state that it brings them comfort, freedom, and closeness with their faith and God. Despite harassment and unwanted attention that the veil brings to these women, they cite their religious duty as a priority and find inner peace from their observance of God’s will (Ahmed-Ghosh, 2004; 2006; Ali, 2005; Chaudhry, 2005; Cole & Ahmadi, 2003; Hallak & Quina, 2004; Hasan, 2000; Leonard, 2003; Seggie & Sanford, 2010). For
these women, covering their heads is inextricably linked to their religious identity. Among Muslim communities, the practice of veiling is increasing. As communities of Muslims grow in number and grow stronger, young Muslim women are learning more about their religious heritage and the veil is becoming a viable option for demonstrating their Islamic beliefs and connection to the community. In addition, the increased negative attention towards Muslims has caused Muslim women to think about what role Islam plays in their life. Many have discovered that being Muslim is central to their identity, which they choose to demonstrate with the veil (Chaudhry, 1998; Leonard, 2003).

Other Muslim American women practice hijab without covering their heads. They also assert their religious identity with their choices about modesty and clothing. Although Islam is central to their identity, veiling is not central to their Islamic beliefs. Despite family members and religious leaders that cover their heads, some young Muslim Americans decide that veiling is not the right choice for them. They may also believe that veiling is an aspirational virtue, but one that does not fit into their present lives. These women do not oppose veiling as a practice, but appreciate their freedom to refrain from covering, afforded to them in their Muslim American communities. Occasionally, for these young women, veiling may be a conditional practice that they save for community events, large Muslim gatherings, or going to the mosque. In these cases, veiling also serves as a way to honor family and community (Ahmed-Ghosh, 2004; Hasan, 2000, 2009; Hasnat, 1998; Sirin & Fine, 2008; Zaal, Salah, & Fine, 2007).
There is a very different vocal group of Muslim American women who assert their religious identity by opposing veiling as a practice of hijab. They argue that the sometimes forcible practice of veiling among global Muslim communities is a conflation of Islam and country-specific cultures, often to the detriment of Muslim women. For these women, gendered veiling perpetuates the notion that women are only sexualized objects who serve as temptations for men; only by covering them up can women be protected. In opposition to Muslim American communities that require women to veil in order to convert and attend events, they contend that in the US, women can practice Islam without the cultural constraints that restrict their freedoms. Additionally, for this vocal group, the topic of veiling often saturates debate in Muslim American communities at the expense of other important issues (Hasan, 2000; Hasnat, 1998; Leonard, 2003).

* A woman’s Islam - Challenging some Western practices. Along with religious assertion, some Muslim American women choose to veil as a public statement about their practice of Islam. For these women, veiling is entirely separate from cultural practices that oppress women in other countries. They showcase this distinction through their own lives. All while veiling, they attend college; take leadership roles in their communities and club organizations; enter professional careers; and participate in education and activism. The veil is a symbol of independence, strength, and feminism (Haque-Khan, 1997; Sirin & Fine, 2008; Zaal, Salah, & Fine, 2007). Muslim American women state that veiling gives them more power and agency in their interactions with men and powerful people. The US provides the space for
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Muslim American women to express their Islamic beliefs as they choose to, which is
not always possible in other countries.

Young Muslim American women also wear veils to demonstrate their distance
from some Western practices, which they believe objectify and subjugate women.
The veil is a tool for liberation from subordinate women’s roles. For some of these
women, veiling is not meant as a critique or a challenge towards American women,
who are often their friends and peers. Instead, it is an alternative means to express
womanhood and have gendered interactions (Chaudhry, 1998, 2005; Haque-Khan,
1997; Mahmood, 2005). For other women, stereotypical notions about mostly white
American women fuel their desire to veil and wear modest clothing. Revealing
clothing is seen as a gateway to promiscuity and other shameful behaviors practiced
by American women (Ajrouch, 2004).

Women who practice hijab without veiling are also making a public statement
about their practice of Islam in the US. Similar to women who veil, these women cite
that they are free to practice their own vision of their religion; a right afforded to them
in a plural society (Hasan, 2000, 2004, 2009; Leonard, 2003). However, despite
personal choices about hijab, all Muslim American women are aware that veiling
makes women targets for harassment and violence due to their prominent visible
marker of Islam. This is a serious conflict for young Muslim American women, who
can see both the positive and negative aspects of living in their country.

Resistance/unity. Often against the wishes of their parents and family
members, young Muslim American women will wear veils in all the public spheres of
their lives, including schools and in their neighborhoods (Ali, 2005; Leonard, 2003; Peek, 2002; 2003; Rehman & Dziegielewski; 2004; Sirin & Fine, 2007, 2008; Zaal, Salah, & Fine, 2007). Despite concerns for their safety and fear of discrimination, job loss, harassment, and surveillance, these young women demonstrate their resistance to US government policy and public sentiment about Islam. By wearing a clear marker of their faith, they show their pride and defiance to other US citizens and to members of their community. The veil is a symbol of their dissenting patriotism and a demonstration of their rights as US citizens (Afshar, 1994; Ali, 2005; Sirin & Fine, 2008; Zaal, Salah, & Fine, 2007). It is also a sign that they are part of their Muslim communities and a part of young Muslim American social movements, which participate in activism and education across college campuses and in government (Ali, 2005; Leonard, 2003). These women do not recoil from difficult conversations about their religion. They want people to ask questions and they want to educate others about Islam. For the sake of education, these young women do not mind being singled out to speak about global Islam and the political climate in the US and in Muslim countries. They often seek out multiple sources of news and media coverage about global conflicts and consider themselves more knowledgeable than their peers about the religion of Islam and the political Islam that appears repeatedly on television and in the newspapers. They are looking for opportunities to impart their knowledge (Sirin & Fine, 2008). The veil is usually how others identify these women as Muslims and they use the visible marker to their advantage.
Distance. Only briefly discussed in the literature, there are women who cover their heads to create a physical distance between themselves and others in public spaces. For these women, covering their heads and bodies is connected to separating themselves from Americans, men, and even their peers in school and at work. In some cases, these women and their families interpret hijab as both veiling and very strict guidelines for interactions between men and women (Sarroub, 2001, 2005). Due to often open communication between men and women in mainstream US society, these women find it easiest to simply limit all their interactions with non-community members in public spaces (Ajrouch, 2004; Cole & Ahmadi, 2003; Sarroub, 2001, 2005). They may also either want to or be required to limit their interactions to only other Muslim women and family members. These women appear silent and detached in public spaces, but there is limited research about their lived experiences (Sarroub, 2001, 2005; Sirin & Fine, 2008). Given the incomplete information about these women, it is difficult to know their motivations for their practice of hijab. They may feel obligated by family and community to maintain distance or they may interpret distance as a religious duty. For now, there is only speculation about these women’s reasons and experiences.

How are young Muslim American women different from Muslim American men, both in social context and in level of civic engagement and activism?

Different consequences, different reactions. There is limited research on gendered differences among Muslim American youth. The existing research shows
that there are distinct reactions to family, community, and mainstream US society based on gender. However, the research is inconsistent, largely due to the different populations that have been studied. For example, in Sirin and Fine’s (2008) study of Muslim youth in New York City, the younger participants attended public schools and the older participants mostly attended college. They came from diverse backgrounds and cultures, but most shared similar socioeconomic backgrounds. Most of the participants’ fathers held bachelors or advanced degrees. In their study, Sirin and Fine found that young Muslim American women had strong voices that educated others about Islam and strong dissenting opinions about the US political climate, which they expressed through activism and public demonstration of their Muslim American identity by attending mosques and wearing head scarves. These young women had agency and power because they were able to take advantage of their rights as US citizens and they had support from their communities. Their parents feared for their safety and occasionally disapproved of their activities, but the consequences of their activism and civic engagement were generally positive (Sirin & Fine, 2008; Zaal, Salah, & Fine, 2007). Young Muslim American women were combating public opinion and interpersonal harassment and violence in their neighborhoods and communities. They were reacting to widely held beliefs that their Muslim practices, especially veiling, were un-American and anti-freedom. The choice to veil was seen as a rejection of the American values fought for by US soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan (Cainkar, 2009). Although placing themselves in danger, these young women could take legal action against their offenders and gather support and
strength from their communities and organizations on college campuses (Hasan, 2000).

The young men in Sirin and Fine’s (2008) study had different reactions to their social context and participated very differently in their communities. Their research found that young men were constantly defending themselves and their religion. They felt that contact with non-Muslims and non-community members could be dangerous. Some of the young men retreated from these interactions and instead separated their religious identity from their American identity. They did not feel like they fit in and were aware of perpetual threats against themselves and their family. The fear of detention, deportation, and surveillance weighed heavily on the men, as they were often targeted for these governmental actions. With the government acting against them, they felt little or no safety. Instead these men felt anger, conflict, and a longing for a “home” where it was safe to be Muslim. The young men’s agency and resistance was quashed by the severe consequences for any “acting out” behaviors, including demonstrations, protests, and activism (Cainkar, 2009; Sirin & Fine, 2007, 2008).

The role of culture. There is other literature that demonstrates women have greater negative cultural consequences for resistance and agency (Ahmed & Ezzedine, 2009; Carter & Rashidi, 2003; Leonard, 2003; Sarroub, 2001; 2005; Sirin & Fine, 2008). A popular Muslim American women scholar, Asma Gull Hasan, explains in her memoirs that there are many cultural expectations of Muslim American women that run counter to transnational feminist Muslim movements that
promote women’s agency and voice. She explains that cultural patriarchy can still be tied to Muslim American communities, which limit women’s participation in education, finances, family decisions, and much more. She goes on to cite examples from her own life where she has been criticized by Muslim Americans for public speaking, her non-veiled head, and her “feminist” attitude (Hasan, 2000, 2009). A striking fieldwork study in a Yemeni community in Michigan showed that the young women interviewed faced serious restrictions due to their gender (Sarroub, 2001, 2005). The young women came from families with low socioeconomic backgrounds and limited parental education, both significant differences from Sirin and Fine’s (2008) study. Some of the women had limited or no options for higher education and nearly all had or were expected to have arranged marriages. Some of the women chose these practices, while for others, these practices nullified their personal agency (Sarroub, 2001, 2005). In Ahmed-Ghosh’s work (2004) with Pakistani Ahmadi women in Southern California, her participants’ agency came from proactively accepting their subordinate roles to their husbands and male family members as a means of submission to their religion. They believed that Ahmadiyyat Islam and Pakistani cultural practices provided them with adequate rights and taking a secondary or complementary role to their husbands was not seen as a threat to their well-being. In fact, they were very satisfied with the differences between their own lives and the lives of mainstream American women. For these women, “Religious patriarchy [was] god-ordained and not one of dominance and control; whereas non-
religious patriarchy especially in the USA [was] perceived to be one not only of 
hegemony, but one where "other" communities, cultures and 
women in general are debased and devalued” (p. 73).

This section showcases diverse examples of young Muslim American 
women’s social context and their level of community engagement and activism. The 
diversity of experiences presented here are a striking example that, unlike popular 
stereotypes, Muslim women in the US are not simply oppressed or rebellious. A 
binary view does not serve the richness of their experiences. Instead, it is crucial to 
view and interpret their actions in the context of their communities, schools, and the 
larger political climate (Ballou, Matsumoto, & Wagner, 2002; Mahmood, 2005).

Missing from this exploration of culture is the inherent influence of religion 
on culture. Additionally, does religion have inherent oppressive practices that limited 
women’s freedoms? Specifically, are there practices in Islam that oppress Muslim 
women? Although not explored in depth in this review, this is an important question. 
It is complicated by the simple fact that any religion, by virtue of dictating behavior 
and control of personal freedoms, can be interpreted as oppressive. For the purpose of 
this study, the impact of religion is assessed by how young women make meaning of 
their Muslim identity. For them, Islam is a combination of religion, culture, family, 
and community. If these women find their religion or culture oppressive, it is 
explored in the context of their community and family. The study of intrinsic 
oppression and control in religion is not examined, because it is beyond the scope of 
this study.
How does community impact the lived experiences of young Muslim American women? The feminist ecological model (Ballou, Matsumoto, & Wagner, 2002) is a useful tool for navigating through existing research to understand how different communities have impacted the lived experiences of young Muslim American women. Each of the studies conducted with Muslim Americans provides valuable information to help understand the population in the US. However, each study is located in a different community and presently, there is no review or analysis that explores how factors of race, ethnicity, class, country of origin, immigration history, and Islamic school impact community formation and community influence over youth. In the absence of such an analysis, I have used the feminist ecological model to glean community-specific factors that may impact Muslim American youth from the existing research on this population.

Class. An important factor that appears repeatedly in the literature is class. Class inside a community has a far reaching impact on Muslim American youth (Reimers, 2005). With limited access to financial and educational resources, youth may be expected to complete high school and begin working to support their families. Daughters may be expected to enter into marriage and then support their husbands with homemaking and childrearing. Without college access, these youth are not exposed to the transnational social movements happening among college-going Muslim American women and men. They do not see the resistance, agency and community support that Muslim Americans have outside of their homes and communities. Without this support, there is little space for personal agency to grow
and flourish for Muslim American women, who may be struggling with both gender restrictions and discrimination from the larger society (Leonard, 2003; Maira, 2004, 2010; Sarroub, 2001, 2005; Sirin & Fine, 2007, 2008). Existing immigration literature shows that the impact of class on young women is similar across many poor immigrant communities in the US (Suárez-Orozco & Qin, 2006).

As examples in Muslim American communities, the studies presented in an earlier section showcase how significant a role class can play. Sirin and Fine’s (2008) study, conducted in New York City, included interviews with a diverse group of Muslim youth with high socioeconomic status and many educational opportunities. They lived and worked in a metropolitan city with exposure to many cultures, lifestyles, and learning opportunities. In contrast, Sarroub’s (2001) study took place in a small Yemeni community described as a “ghetto” neighborhood in an otherwise white, middle class town outside Detroit, Michigan. Unlike in Sirin and Fine’s study, many of the Yemeni parents did not have high school or college educations and instead moved to Michigan to work in the automobile industry. The significant differences in these two Muslim American communities had a major impact on the lives of the youth community members, especially women. The more recently immigrated Yemeni community, interested in maintaining traditional Yemeni culture, imposed more restrictions on their daughters, wives, and women community members. They were married as teenagers, often to young men in Yemen, who needed the marriage for sponsorship to live in the US. Fewer resources resulted in limited access to higher education and learning opportunities for the young women.
The Muslim American youth in Sirin and Fine’s study, including young women, not only had access to higher education, but were encouraged to pursue college and make independent choices about their futures. The differences in gender expectations and resources in these two communities had a significant impact on the youth (Sarroub, 2001, 2005; Sirin & Fine, 2007, 2008; Suárez-Orozco & Qin, 2006; Zaal, Salah, & Fine, 2007).

Class dictates the type of neighborhood that a community exists inside. In cases of Muslim American communities that settle into working class and poor neighborhoods, they are surrounded by a great deal of diversity. For some Muslim youth, this is a clear advantage. They feel solidarity with other young people of color who also understand the impact of discrimination. The support from other minority youth is missing in more wealthy or white neighborhoods (Maira, 2004; Sirin & Fine, 2007, 2008). For wealthy Muslim Americans, class does not appear to be a protective factor against racial profiling. The existing limited research demonstrates that Muslim Americans were uniformly targeted post-9/11 for interpersonal violence and harassment despite wealth and financial status (Cainkar, 2009; Sirin & Fine, 2008; Sue & Sue, 2008).

Additionally, class can have a fundamental impact on identity making. In Maira’s (2004) study with South Asian Muslim youth in Boston, the young men and women in the study were not interested in their American identity because they saw themselves as migrant workers who would eventually return to their home countries. They only accessed American culture and mainstream American interactions through
their low-wage jobs, leaving little desire to become US citizens and form American identities. Conversely, limited financial resources can also result in limited funds to travel to one’s home country, thus increasing participation in mainstream American activities and cultural practices to achieve a sense of belonging in the US (Al-Johar, 2005).

Community Size. Another factor that impacts Muslim American youth is the size of the community to which they belong. Larger Muslim American communities often share ethnicity, countries of origin, and Islamic school. Families have more education choices for their children and may choose private Islamic schools over public schools in the area (Leonard, 2003). In general, Muslim youth have access to other Muslim friends, which often contributes to their sense of belonging to the community and their connection with their religion. In larger communities, Muslim youth feel more supported by their peers, especially when the larger US climate is hostile and prejudiced (Ahmed, 2009; Ahmed & Ezzedine, 2009; Sirin & Fine, 2007). In smaller Muslim communities or in the case of singular Muslim families, lack of community can leave Muslim youth feeling isolated and alienated. However, some also find community among non-Muslim peers and participate in either diverse or mostly white peer groups. In these cases, the lack of community limits the visibility of Muslim families. There are fewer cases of harassment and violence for singular families, especially if the family does not have visible Islamic practices like veiling or attending mosque regularly (Cainkar, 2009; Leonard, 2003).
In Cainkar’s (2009) study of Arab Americans in Chicago, Illinois, the significant community themes that emerged from the research centered around the community’s experiences of discrimination, racial profiling, and interpersonal harassment and violence. As a prominent Arab American area, the community members were targeted repeatedly for several years following 9/11. They were subject to vandalism, death threats, and surveillance at their homes and businesses. The resulting impact on the Muslim American women in these communities related mostly to coping with discrimination. These women had to make choices about maintaining or changing their religious practices in order to protect themselves and their families (Cainkar, 2009).

What strategies do Muslim American women use for coping with and reacting to discrimination they encounter in the government, media and their interpersonal interactions? Much of the literature and research presented above highlights the discrimination and moral exclusion towards Muslim Americans, especially during the last ten years. Muslim Americans have reacted against this discrimination in a variety of ways. Although outlined briefly in other sections, this section provides comprehensive information on how young Muslim American women cope with and react to discrimination they witness in their daily lives and in their government and media.

Religiosity. Islam is a significant part of the daily lives of Muslim American women. It is a source of support, comfort and peace for young women as they experience their lives in a hostile and anti-Muslim environment. Young Muslim
Americans rely heavily on their faith in God and their religion and participate in religious practices like fasting and prayer even more than their parents and families (Sirin & Fine, 2008). Religiosity is a protective factor for Muslim American youth. As a part of their social identity, highly religious Muslim youth also have many of the following characteristics: kindness, leadership, self-regulation, prudence, gratitude, hope, and optimism (Ahmed, 2009). Their faith and these characteristics are powerful coping mechanisms. Due to their status as an ostracized religious minority, some Muslim American youth feel an increasing need to engage their religion to separate truth from lies and better understand how to combat stereotypes. This process helps these youth find pride in their unique religious identities (Ahmed, 2009; Hallak & Quina, 2004).

*Turning to friends, family, and community.* Turning to friends, family, and community as a means for coping with discrimination takes many forms for Muslim American women. For some, their friends are a diverse group of white and minority youth who can share experiences of discrimination and support each other when critical incidents occur. In these cases, Muslim women are widening their peer groups to others outside their immediate communities to create a diverse and inclusive coalition of supporters and friends. These young women feel a kinship with blacks, Latinos, and Jews, whose communities have also faced historic discrimination and moral exclusion. These women have a nuanced understanding of how fragile belonging and inclusion can be and choose to grow their group of allies and friends (Sirin & Fine, 2008). For other young women, support and comfort come from inside
the Muslim community. For them, non-Muslims do not understand the rigorous, daily commitments of Islam and therefore do not understand how Muslims build their lives. These young women see too many differences to form close bonds with non-Muslims. They find peace among family and community, but the closest bonds are formed with other young Muslim women, who can travel with them through both their religious commitments and mainstream US society (Ahmed-Ghosh, 2004; Hallak & Quina, 2004; Sirin & Fine, 2008; Zaal, Salah, & Fine, 2007).

*Seeking mental health services.* Existing research shows prolonged exposure to discrimination and moral exclusion has a significant negative impact on mental health (Ali, Liu, & Humedian, 2004; Cainkar, 2009; Ribeiro & Saleem, 2010; Sirin & Fine, 2007, 2008; Zaal, Salah, & Fine, 2007), but few research studies examine how young Muslim American women use mental health services to cope with the discrimination they face in their daily lives. The existing research shows that Muslim Americans are likely to seek out informal services inside their community, such as close friends, family members, and religious leaders, before seeking formal services through mental health agencies. There is a stigma and lack of confidence in mental health services that prevents Muslim Americans from requesting formal, licensed care (Aloud & Rathur, 2009; Hallak & Quina, 2004; Haque-Khan, 1997; Nassar-McMillan & Hakim-Larson, 2003). Furthermore, researchers speculate that mental health professionals may not have the cultural competency or skills to appropriately counsel Muslim Americans around issues of discrimination, harassment, family conflicts, and religious confusion (Ali, Liu, & Humedian, 2004; Amer & Hovey, 2007; Chaudhry &
Li, 2009; Hallak & Quina, 2004; Nassar-McMillan & Hakim-Larson, 2003). Recent research suggests that outreach services and support groups can be helpful for introducing mental health services to Muslim American women in college, if appropriate cultural competency skills are used (Ribeiro & Saleem, 2010).

**Education.** While there is research that shows some Muslim women choose to remain silent and disengage with the larger US society due to fear for their own and their families’ safety, overwhelmingly recent research studies show that young Muslim American women are ready to educate and engage with their peers and in their schools and neighborhoods about Islam (Abu El-Haj, 2006; Ahmad & Szpara, 2003; Ali, 2005; Chaudhry, 2005; Hasan, 2000, 2004, 2009; Sirin & Fine, 2007, 2008; Zaal, Salah, & Fine, 2007). Across age group, socioeconomic status, gender, and community, Muslim American youth cite lack of knowledge about Islam and Muslims as a significant barrier between themselves and their peers, teachers, and the larger US society (Abu El-Haj, 2006; Ahmad & Szpara, 2003; Hallak & Quina, 2004; Sirin & Fine, 2007, 2008; Zaal, Salah, & Fine, 2007). Due to the pervasive negative images of Muslim Americans in the US, young Muslim American women seek out both formal and informal opportunities to educate their peers and teachers about Islamic practices, cultural traditions, and global perspectives on political Islam. They confront the ignorant and monolithic understanding of Islam by being as knowledgeable as they can be and then passing on information to people around them (Abu El-Haj, 2006; Sirin & Fine, 2008). Formal education opportunities include prominent Muslim groups on college campuses that organize rallies, events, and
speakers to bring different and balanced perspectives to the college communities (Leonard, 2003). In addition, for young women, simply the act of speaking up is an education for the people they encounter in public spaces. They use education as a means to challenge the stereotype of the oppressed and submissive Muslim woman, which is carried out in the media and news coverage (Sirin & Fine, 2008; Zaal, Salah, & Fine, 2007).

**Different forms of citizenship.** In the context of the “other,” young Muslim American women also use their US citizenship as a means for coping with discrimination. In Sirin and Fine’s (2008) study of New York City youth, Maira’s (2004) study of South Asian youth in Boston, and Ewing’s (2008) study of South Asian youth in Raleigh-Durham, different forms of citizenship emerged among the study informants. These studies showed that the youth who most endorsed their American identity struggled the most with their moral exclusion from American citizenship, as demonstrated by harassment and civil rights abuses to themselves and family. For other youth, their citizenship was flexible, situational, and fluid. They saw themselves traveling, both physically and symbolically, between the US and their country of origin to see family and friends and remain involved in both cultures. This became more difficult after 9/11 when such travel was restricted due to tighter immigration controls and more fear of civil rights abuses. Formal US citizenship became more desirable to solidify rights within the US. However, for these youth, it was still helpful to see themselves as flexible citizens that could escape discrimination in the US. Other youth enacted multicultural citizenship, which emphasized their
diverse networks of friends and drew support from their kinship with other minority youth, who also faced discrimination in their lives. As part of a coalition of morally excluded youth, the civil rights abuses, threats of surveillance, and harassment were less intimidating for the young Muslim Americans in these studies. Finally, Muslim American youth, especially women, endorsed dissenting citizenship. These young people considered themselves both patriotic to their country and critical of the US government and mainstream US opinions of Muslims. Their dissent, critique, and activism were, in fact, a sign of their citizenship and their patriotism, even if other Americans considered them outsiders. For these youth, to speak up and challenge the government was their civic duty. Contributing to change and having an optimistic outlook on the future of Muslims in the US helped young Muslim American women cope with and react to discrimination in their personal lives (Abraham, 2005; Maira, 2004; 2010; Sirin & Fine, 2008; Zaal, Salah, & Fine, 2007).

**How does living in the context of surveillance and discrimination, both governmental and interpersonal, impact the future-oriented thinking of Muslim American women?** During the significant developmental period of adolescence, discrimination can take its toll on Muslim American youth. The impact of discrimination on Muslim American youth is referred to in the literature as distress, cynicism, acculturative stress, worry, fatalism, and fear. The connection between the developmental tasks of adolescence and discrimination is relatively unknown among Muslim Americans. The limited existing research shows that some Muslim youth approach their futures with pessimism. They do not plan for long-term goals, because
the fear for their safety and citizenship is so strong. They expect racism to be a permanent part of their lives. Some worry that their mistrust of the government is paranoia while others long to return to their countries of origin to escape daily incidents of harassment and surveillance. Other Muslim youth approach their lives with optimism and recognize that there are some positive forces at work in the larger US society. For these young people, combating discrimination in their own lives through education helps them to imagine positive long-term change in the larger society (Abraham, 2005; Abu El-Haj, 2006; Sirin & Fine, 2007, 2008; Zaal, Salah, & Fine, 2007). The connection between these different outlooks and future goals has not been researched. Questions about career choices, higher education, family, desired country of residence, and ongoing religious and cultural participation would help illuminate how young Muslim American women see their futures in a politically-charged, racialized US.

**How does ethnic background impact young Muslim American women’s lived experiences and their experiences of discrimination and racial profiling?**

Ethnic background among Muslim Americans is complicated by the variety of ways that Muslims self-identify their ethnicity in the US. The major distinctions between groups of Muslim Americans are born out of immigration history: African Americans, Arab Americans, and South Asian Americans. However, Arab Americans and South Asian Americans may prefer to refer to themselves by their countries of origin instead of by the region of the world. Furthermore, country of origin has a significant impact on their racial identification, Islamic school, and treatment received
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in the US, which is overlooked by regional classifications (Britto, 2008; Leonard, 2003; Sirin & Fine, 2008). The existing research on Muslim Americans’ ethnic background has little to do with how they self-identify and instead on how others identify them for the purposes of discrimination and racial profiling. Based on names, skin color, physical features, and clothing, Muslim Americans are singled out for an inaccurate affiliation to terrorism. In a 2004 Scottish study, Hopkins found that keeping a beard, darker skin color, and dress resulted in different experiences of discrimination among young Muslim men. Another study conducted in Michigan with Lebanese American high school students found that their white racial identification did not result in joining with other white Americans, due to their Arab ethnicity and associated religious and cultural beliefs (Ajrouch, 2004). US history demonstrates that visible ethnic identification can have a significant impact on the moral exclusion of entire populations of people, including Japanese Americans interned during World War II. Further research can help elucidate how different ethnicities, ranging in visibility, result in different experiences of discrimination and racial profiling for young Muslim American women.

How does violence and war in their or their family’s country of origin impact the lived experiences and mental health of young Muslim American women? Research on the impact of violence in one’s country of origin on Muslim Americans’ mental health and life experience is limited and lacks integration. However, there is valuable information about this important issue in the existing literature. Among Palestinian women, the lack of a safe “home” country causes
uncertainty, fear, and loneliness (Cainkar, 1996). Post-traumatic stress disorder is often present among recent Arab and Muslim refugees (Ali, Liu, & Humedian, 2004; Nassar-McMillan & Hakim-Larson, 2003). Discrimination and violence against Muslims in both the US and their countries of origin leads to a diminished sense of belonging among South Asian youth and Ahmadi youth (Ahmed-Ghosh, 2004, 2006; Leonard, 2003; Maira, 2004). Historical violence and discrimination in a family’s country of origin can also cause intergenerational conflict among Muslim American women and their parents. Parents wish to hide their children’s Muslim identity in the larger US society to protect them from the type of violence and harassment they witnessed in their countries of origin, while their children, who grew up in the US, view their parents’ behavior as paranoia (Sirin & Fine, 2008). For them, being a US citizen means that they have legal protection for all their expressions of religion. More research can build a better understanding of the impact of global violence on Muslim American women.

The literature reviewed in this chapter demonstrates that Muslim American women organize their lives and making meaning of their world and identities in diverse ways. It also shows that Muslim American women live in a country where they are sometimes viewed as foreign and dangerous. They belong to a country in which their citizenship is often questioned. This study adds to the existing research and literature on Muslim American women, specifically how Muslim American women construct their own cultural identities across multiple contexts in a post-9/11 United States. Furthermore, this research explores how discrimination impacts
identity development and lived experience. It is used to evaluate and critique existing
theories of identity development by spotlighting the effects of social and political
context. The goal of this study is to raise the voices and lived experiences of Muslim
American women. In doing so, this study challenges popular notions that Muslim
women are submissive and uneducated and shed light on the diversity among
Muslims and Muslim Americans, based on race, ethnicity, class, gender, country of
origin, religiosity, and many other factors.
Chapter Three – Methodology

In the following chapter, I outline a description of the research design, specific research techniques and tools, individual interview criteria and recruitment, informant information, interview questions and procedures, informed consent, and data analysis. I also include information about the authenticity, consistency, and faithfulness of the research and data analysis, along with ethical considerations that appear at the end of the chapter.

A Qualitative Narrative Research Study

The purpose of this study is to learn more about the lived experiences of young Muslim American women. I contrast the dominant narratives about Muslim American women in psychology and in the public imagination in post-9/11 United States with the personal narratives of the Muslim American women in this study. I used in-depth, open-ended interviews, structured minimally by research questions drawn from the literature review. The research questions pertinent to this study help understand the contextual factors and personal narratives that the women in this study shared. A narrative research methodology was used to capture the complicated and fluid themes in the lives of young Muslim American women, especially how they make meaning of their multiple identities (Daiute & Lightfoot, 2003).

Narrative research is holistic and inductive. The interpretive tools of narrative research are designed to examine the complexity of people’s lives, with an emphasis on descriptions of identity, social relationships, and cultural points of view. The intersecting forces between self and society can emerge in narrative work because
there are no prior assumptions about findings and results when research begins. Additionally, in narrative research, the informants are the experts on their own lives. Therefore, the resulting knowledge claims of the study are based in the actual lived experiences of the informants (Daiute & Lightfoot, 2003). My goal is to put forth the most faithful narrative analysis of the women’s stories in this study. I intentionally put forward complicated narratives, grounded in the overlapping systems that impact young Muslim American women, including school, peers, family, and the larger political and cultural context of their communities and the US. Additionally, I avoid imposing dichotomies on the different stories provided by my informants, especially those found in the dominant literature on Muslim American women. For example, I attempt to avoid simplified binaries like oppressed/liberated or victim/survivor (Mahmood, 2005; Zaal, Salah, & Fine, 2007). Instead, my goal is to describe the contextual and psychological factors that influence the complexity and variation in their narratives (Ballou, Matsumoto, & Wagner, 2002; Bhavnani, 1994; Mahmood, 2005).

In order to be faithful to my informants’ stories, I must also acknowledge my own values and attitudes towards this research. In qualitative research, this process is called reflexivity. As the researcher, I have chosen the topic and created research questions and the research design. I have assumptions about this work and I must be aware of their influence on my interviews with the women in this study. We may not share the same language about culture and identity. Their lived experiences may be very different from my own and furthermore, they may interpret their experiences
differently than I do. My interest in this research originates in historical, political, and cultural contexts, which I may or may not share with my informants. I cannot remove my own narrative and identity from the research, but I must be sensitive to how my presence as the researcher influences my informants. By sharing about my own background and identity later in this chapter and using member checking, I am more aware of how my own subjective experiences inform the data analysis (Fine, Weis, Weseen & Wong, 2000; Lincoln & Guba, 2000).

Gaining awareness of my own subjectivity does not, however, guarantee an objective analysis of my informant’s stories. Our conversations impacted both of us and the resulting stories. The stories are co-constructed between us. It is vital that I acknowledge that all attempts to increase the objectivity and accuracy of the stories do not entirely remove my perspective. Furthermore, my perspective changed as I progressed to later interviews. With each new interview, I gained ideas and opinions and I took these to my later interviews. The resulting stories start and end in different places due to my own evolving perspective. Given how much the research topic means to me and how much pain and emotion is related to the concepts in this research, I have been significantly impacted by the interviews. With these acknowledgements in mind, the legitimacy of the research comes into question.

However, the purpose of this research is to give voice to the personal narratives of young Muslim American women. By laying bare the process of doing each interview and my own emotional reactions and evolving perspective, I can share their stories and tell our co-constructed stories. I kept a journal to record my own opinions,
thoughts, and feelings as I completed each interview. Through the journal, I explored my evolving perspective, my emotions, and how I may have influenced the conversations. Additionally, I gained further insights about our co-construction from my informants’ answers to interview question ten which asks about my influence over their stories and opinions (see below).

The process of sharing stories in this research is also important because of how Muslim American women have been described in existing literature. So often, in mainstream psychology and in the US media, these women do not tell their own stories, but instead are discussed by experts and researchers. They are further “othered” in this process. They are often described as only foreign and different from Americans. Their rituals and customs are highlighted to show the striking contrast between Muslims and Americans. As such, in the tradition of much of the qualitative and critical research literature used throughout the literature review, I try to join with my informants and describe our conversations and their stories. I attempt to raise the issues and concerns that are important to my informants. In order to challenge the dominant narratives about Muslim American women in multicultural psychology, I present a counter analysis grounded in the stories of my informants, my experiences during this research, and the existing critical research presented in the literature review.

**Research Design and Methods**

**The researcher.** In order to practice reflexivity, discussed above, I reflect here on my own background and how my own lived experiences impact this study.
Like the informants in this study, I come from a Muslim American immigrant family. My parents migrated to the US from Pakistan in 1983 and I was born a year later in Ohio. During my first five years, my parents and I split our time between the US and Pakistan before my father’s early retirement. After that, we settled in the US more permanently. I learned quickly about issues of race and religion, given how different I was from my peers in school. We moved several times throughout my early and secondary education, but always settling in predominantly wealthy white suburban towns. I did encounter numerous counts of discrimination and racism, focused mostly on my South Asian physical features. My darker skin and dark hair incited often inaccurate stereotypes about me, including jokes about Hinduism. A combination of my good academic performance and my family’s educational achievement and religious and cultural pride insulated me well from the discrimination at school. I ignored the comments and found support from friends and family. Additionally, summer trips to Pakistan to see family helped me gain perspective and several family moves made me adept at finding allies and supports in my many school environments.

Subtle but significant changes began after 9/11. There were increased incidents of anti-Muslim comments and jokes at my school. These were not directed at me, because my religious background was not readily known among my peers. I did not cover my head or take breaks during school to pray, which would have increased my visibility as a Muslim. Several extended family members were detained and interviewed all around the US. Some of them were US citizens like me, while
others were permanent residents with green cards or on student or travel visas. I was fortunate enough to attend a women’s college, which valued diversity and social responsibility, and helped me understand and integrate my lived experiences with other women on campus and as a global community member.

Although I have experienced life in the US post-9/11 through young adulthood, I realize that my experiences can and will be different from my informants. Coming from a middle class educated family and living in wealthy suburban towns led to specific experiences, both positive and negative. I did not have a large cultural or religious community local to my residence nor did I have extended family in my area. These are just two examples of many, including my country of origin, education level, geography, and Islamic school, which have influenced my perspective as a young Muslim American woman. I use my dissertation committee, my peer reviewer, and member checking to raise my awareness about the impact of my perspective on the interviews and data analysis.

**Informants.** I conducted in-depth interviews with 10 young Muslim American women. For the purpose of this study, these women are college-aged, between the ages of 18 and 25, self-identify as Muslim American, and have lived in the US for at least five years. A length of stay in the US of at least five years was required to assess their experiences as adolescents in post-9/11 US. For this study, which has a significant focus on both Muslim and American identities, five years is sufficient for the informants to make choices about their identities as residents or citizens of the US. My informants are a diverse group of women in terms of their
race, ethnicity, country of origin, and Islamic school. The preceding literature review demonstrates that these factors play a significant role in Muslim women’s experiences in the US, which I explore in this research. Additionally, my goal was to speak with both women who are attending and not attending college in order to meet a diverse group of women with different socioeconomic backgrounds and educational attainments, which the existing research shows have a significant impact on Muslim American women’s lived experiences. Despite recruitment efforts, I was unable to speak with any women who are not attending college, which is discussed further in the next section. All of my informants have English language proficiency, given my own limitations with other languages. The common language of English helped me establish rapport with my informants and ensure understanding and trust between us. Through the interviews and storytelling, additional information about the women was collected, including marital status, family background, and cultural background. In my analysis, I paid special attention to how the range of ages among my participants impacts their stories, given the potential for diverse developmental trajectories. At the time of 9/11, these women were aged 8 to 15 and therefore, their developmental stage influenced how they experienced the events of that day and the aftermath. This includes how much they knew about the event and its causes, as discussed in school and at home. It also includes how much they were able to understand the event themselves and the impact on their lives at the time. I have included adolescent development as part of my data analysis.
Recruitment and selection criteria. Following approval of this study by the Northeastern University Institutional Review Board (IRB), I used email and telephone to connect with Muslim student associations at Massachusetts colleges and universities and Muslim community centers and mosques in the greater Boston area. I contacted student groups at a diverse range of universities, including small private colleges and large public universities. I asked the respective directors and/or representatives to email an IRB approved flyer stating research topic, population of interest, and my contact information, including phone number and email address, to their community members. I also requested that the flyer be posted in their meeting space. My initial contact email and my project information was passed along to the larger Muslim community in Massachusetts and generated interest from many community members and leaders. I met with two Muslim student group leaders and I spoke over the phone with two prominent Muslim women leaders in the Boston community. All of the community members I encountered were eager to help me and passed along my project information to potential informants. My flyer reached many interested women students and I was able to recruit ten informants for my research interviews. I recorded my recruitment experiences and interactions in a journal, which I summarize in chapter four.

Despite efforts to connect with Boston Muslim community organizations and mosques, I was unable to reach non-college women with my recruitment efforts. I shared my recruitment flyer with women at the mosque. It was posted in a common meeting space and sent out on a Massachusetts-wide listserv for the Muslim
community. Beyond these recruiting measures, there were no targeted recruiting strategies available. Community leaders at the mosque suggested that non-college women may be difficult to reach and interview for my study. I do not have the language proficiency to connect with recently immigrated women. Also, non-college women may have less access to computers and the internet and therefore may not have seen my recruiting flyer online. They may also fear sharing personal information because they perceive threats like deportation or detainment as a result of the hostile US environment around them.

My informants and I remained in contact through phone and email. I spoke with each informant over the phone to review the goals and purpose of the study, along with information about participation, timelines, and confidentiality. I also provided time for questions. The informants were screened based on the selection criteria. If the informant met the inclusion criteria and expressed an interest in participating, we scheduled an interview time and day. We used email to remain in contact and reschedule interviews as needed.

**Interview procedure and consent.** Given the open-ended nature of this research design, interviews were not time-limited and usually lasted between one and two hours. The open format of the interviews allowed for detailed storytelling and rapport building between the informants and me. We met in private or semi-private meeting spaces on the campuses where the women attend college. In some cases, we met in a private office space, while other informants preferred the library or campus center for the interview. At the beginning of each interview, I shared the general
purpose of the interview and details about the research project. I also explained the nature of their voluntary participation; audio-taping purposes and permission; and detailed informed consent. Following a clear and comprehensive discussion about informed consent, I asked if there were any questions or concerns about participation. The informants were then asked to sign an informed consent document, approved by the Northeastern University IRB. Informants were not asked about their legal status in the US. All informants gave permission for audio-taping and each interview recording was later transcribed.

**Interview research questions.** The intention of this study is to share the personal narratives of young Muslim American women. Narrative research captures stories from those who have knowledge and experience on a specific topic. The stories not only tell what happened but what meaning people make of what happened. As such, in each interview, I introduced this study as a way to gather stories about lived experiences. I requested each informant to share any stories about their Muslim American identity and experiences that they would like others to know about because they are the experts on their own lives. The interviews were informal and minimally structured, apart from a focus on Muslim American identity.

There are a few interview questions listed below that I used to start conversations and maintain consistency across interviews. They also assured that all the research questions were addressed. In most cases, many of the interview questions were not necessary because the young women shared experiences that highlighted all the research areas on their own.
Interview questions.

1. What does your Muslim American woman identity mean to you?
   a. Can you tell me about your family?
   b. Do you or any of your family members stay in contact with family in your country of origin?
   c. Can you tell me about your friends and your social activities?
   d. Can you tell me about your religious activities (going to mosque, praying at home)?

2. What is it like for you as a Muslim woman?

3. How has 9/11 impacted you, your family, and your community?

4. What does hijab and modesty mean to you?

5. Are you part of a Muslim community? How has that impacted you?

6. Has your behavior changed post-9/11? Have you noticed any feelings like anger or fear?

7. Do you take part in any activities, like education or community engagement, that raise awareness about global Islam or Muslim Americans in the community?

8. How does the instability and violence in the Middle East and South Asia, which we see in the news, affect you, if at all?
   a. Do you worry about your family in (country of origin)?
   b. Do you watch US news? Do you get information on TV, newspapers, internet?
9. What are your future goals and aspirations? Are they shaped by your Muslim American identity?

10. What are your thoughts on the interview process? Did I impact the stories you told?
   a. Did you notice that I moved our conversations in any direction?
   b. Did I influence your stories?
   c. When we disagreed about _____, how did that affect you?

*Addressing the research questions.* The above interview questions help address one of my fundamental research questions about how young Muslim American women construct their identity. These questions also attend to specific factors of identity, as described in the existing literature on Muslim American women, including the practice of hijab; gendered experiences; community impact; religiosity; cultural influence; discrimination experiences; global war and violence; and the role of race, ethnicity and class. The answers to these questions and the resulting stories shared by the informants constitute their personal narratives as young Muslim American women in post-9/11 US. These personal narratives share some of the same themes outlined in the dominant narrative about Muslims in the US, but they also serve as a critique of the dominant understanding about Muslim American women in both psychology and the public imagination. I study both the personal and dominant narratives through a historical and political lens, grounded in the literature reviewed in chapter two.
Data Analysis

I used thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to analyze the narratives collected in the interviews. Thematic analysis is clear, detailed and flexible. It includes specific guidelines for conducting theoretically and methodologically sound qualitative analysis. Not only is thematic analysis an accessible tool for data analysis, but it also aligns well with the guiding theoretical perspectives of this study: feminist ecological model and social constructionism (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

For this study, thematic analysis provided phases for investigating the patterns and themes that emerged from the informants’ narratives. The earlier literature review outlined many themes present in young Muslim American women’s lives and I used thematic analysis to compare and contrast those themes with the ones present in the narratives collected in this study. I used a theoretical, thematic analysis, which focused on detailed and nuanced accounts of particular themes, which both overlapped with and diverged from themes found in existing literature. Additionally, using a social constructionist epistemology as outlined in chapter one, I investigated the sociocultural contexts and structural conditions that enable the personal narratives provided. I used the feminist ecological model to help me explore the many systems that influence the women’s narratives. I focused on latent themes, which are the underlying ideas, assumptions and conceptualizations that shape and inform the semantic content of the data.

There are six phases of thematic analysis. In phase one, familiarizing myself with the data, I immersed myself in the verbal data I collected in the interviews. I
conducted all the interviews, completed all transcriptions and read through the transcripts several times. During the second phase, generating initial codes, I generated a list of ideas present in the data, along with their interesting qualities. These ideas, later in the analysis process, formed latent themes. In phase three, searching for themes, I took the initial ideas I had gathered to create larger themes that helped connect and make sense of the data. These themes were largely based in the literature, but new themes emerged as well. The research questions helped organize the themes, but I also looked for new data-driven themes that were not present in existing research. At the end of this phase, I had a collection of major candidate themes and subthemes, along with the transcript extracts that relate to each theme.

The fourth phase, reviewing themes, focused on the accuracy and consistency of the themes. I examined the patterns in the data to determine if each theme was robust and uniform. In cases of contradictory narrative data, I investigated if the theme itself was problematic or if some data did not fit. However, I did not exclude any contradictory data in my analysis and instead I tried to understand the various factors that led to the inconsistency. I include these contradictions as part of the report in chapter four. I document both “typical” reactions and points of opposition and disagreement, in order to avoid oversimplifying the women’s lived experiences into dichotomies and isolated data points. Instead, the range of narratives, opinions and reactions are presented, organized by theme (Zaal, Salah, & Fine, 2007).
In phase five, *defining and naming themes*, I focused on the essence of each theme, its accompanying narrative, and what makes it important. I conducted and wrote a detailed analysis of the story of each theme and how the story relates back to the research questions and the overall story of the data. In phase six, I *completed the report*, found in chapters four and five.

**Faithfulness to the Data, Consistency, Authenticity, Utility**

With a foundation in the feminist ecological model and social constructionism, this study makes no truth claims. Instead, I hope to bring forward the voices of young Muslim Americans. I retell their stories and experiences within the context of the post-9/11 US climate. As a qualitative study, the concepts of validity and reliability are less useful for my study. Instead, I have assessed my study for faithfulness to the data, consistency, authenticity and utility. In order to be faithful to the women’s narratives and how they make meaning of their lived experience, I asked a peer reviewer with a background in research and counseling to evaluate the transcripts and the themes I generated. Together, we reviewed my data analysis for consistency and bias. There was a high concordance rate for our individual assessments. I also presented my findings to my informants in a feedback session. Using member checking (Creswell, 2009), I asked their reactions to my analysis and their opinions and revisions were incorporated into the results in chapter four. Member checking is a documented method to help ensure that my interpretations are faithful to my informants’ stories (Creswell, 2009; Janesick, 2000).
As outlined by Lincoln and Guba (2000), there are specific criteria for authenticity, which I attempt to include in this study. Fairness is achieved when all the stakeholders’ views, perspectives and voices are apparent in the text. By using a peer reviewer and member checking, I have attempted to create a fair report that avoids the marginalization of any informant’s stories. Educative authenticity is related to the impact of the research on the informants and their communities. Through the research process, I raised awareness for myself, my informants, and in the community. With a dynamic and active research design, we all learn through the process. In conjunction with educative authenticity, I hope that my study has catalytic authenticity, such that my research study moves beyond inquiry. I hope my findings provide feedback to my informants and in their communities and reflect the possibilities for social and political action (Lincoln & Guba, 2000).

The utility of this study does not come from its generalizable results or significant findings. In fact, the purpose of this study is to tell the stories of ten Muslim American women and only those women. Its utility is grounded in hearing their voices and stories. Their lived experiences add richness and depth to existing literature about the population and their perspectives can serve to oppose and contradict the dominant narratives about their lives. By bringing their voices forward, I hope that this study challenges popular notions that Muslim women are submissive and uneducated. I hope it also sheds light on the diversity among Muslims and Muslim Americans.
Ethical Considerations

There was no harm to the informants during this study. This study did not involve deception. The informed consent indicated that participation was voluntary and informants had the right to withdraw from the study or refuse any questions. Additionally, the informants have access to the study’s results if interested.

The women in this study volunteered to share their personal and often difficult stories with me. Using a narrative research methodology, a peer reviewer, and member checking, I attempt to present a faithful retelling and interpretation of their stories. My goal is to use their stories to promote the health and safety of Muslim women, in accordance with their reasons for participation. As the main vehicle for analysis in this study, my opinions, emotions, discipline, and politics influence the research results. This is the case in all forms of research. My informants and I discussed this process in the course of informed consent and again, during member checking.

In order to maintain confidentiality, informants are only identified by first name in the transcripts. The informed consent forms are the only documents that contain the informants’ full names and therefore, all consent forms are stored separately from the tapes and transcripts. Additionally, all names and identifiers have been changed for this report. For the duration of this study, all notes and tapes were stored in a locked filing cabinet, to which only the researcher and committee members of this research had access. All notes and tapes have now been destroyed.
Chapter Four – Results and Discussion

In this chapter, I present the results of the interviews I conducted with 10 college-aged Muslim American women. The goal of this chapter is to put forth a contextual understanding of young Muslim women’s lives in the US by bringing forward their voices and their stories and grounding their complicated narratives in the many overlapping systems that impact their lives, including school, peers, family and the larger political and cultural context of their communities and the US. I used thematic analysis to explore the common themes and differences among my informants’ experiences and perceptions. With an investigative lens informed by social constructionism and the feminist ecological model, I examined how my informants’ narratives are shaped by their sociocultural contexts, with a focus on factors like race, ethnicity, gender and class.

This chapter includes several sections that explore the reciprocal process of doing this research. I share my experiences when connecting with the Muslim community and my informants. I present the findings of this study using the themes that best represent the experiences of my informants. I also summarize the major findings of this study by using the framework of the feminist ecological model to explore the structural conditions that enable and shape the themes. I also address the limitations and contributions of this study and provide future recommendations. All of the names and personal information in this chapter have been de-identified to protect the privacy of those who shared in this project.
Recruitment Process

During the recruiting process, I kept a journal about my interactions and experiences. I connected with many individuals who were eager to help me with my research and share ideas with me about the Muslim community. Their commitment to Muslim student groups and the larger Boston-area Muslim community was overwhelming and they were enthusiastic about my project, which they expressed was much needed. They all agreed that raising awareness about mental health and mental health services was vitally important in the Muslim community.

I met and emailed with several Muslim student group leaders, all very protective of their group members. Despite their own busy schedules pursuing the sciences, medicine and other career paths, these students wanted to know more about me and my project before they connected me with their members. I met with two men student leaders in person. One student invited me to attend his Muslim student group’s first meeting of the year at a medium-sized public university. The meeting took place on a Friday night and consisted of introductions, annual planning, evening prayers and dinner. Approximately 20 men and four women attended the meeting. At the beginning of the meeting, I briefly spoke to the leader and then sat and shared my project with the women on one side of the room. The men introduced themselves and discuss the events for the upcoming year. The women talked quietly among themselves and welcomed me to their group. They were excited about my research topic and expressed an interest in participating. Three of the women, all recently immigrated to the US from South Asia, left the meeting early. One woman, Fatimah,
who grew up in Massachusetts and had a leadership role in the group, stayed throughout the meeting. She did not participate in the prayers, reporting that the imbalance of men and women made her uncomfortable. While the men prayed, Fatimah shared her opinions about my project. She reported that there is a strong need to destigmatize the negative impact of 9/11 on mental health among the Muslim community. She shared that mental health services would be very helpful to many community members. After prayers, we helped clean up the meal and Fatimah and I walked out together. When asked about her experience with the group, she shared that she enjoyed the activities and the community, but she noted that ineffective communication across gender in the group results in delayed event planning and limited community building. I was also struck by the gender segregation in the group and the impact on women’s participation and leadership. In my journal, I noted that it appeared as if two separate meetings were taking place in one room. I also wondered if some of the women left early because they felt excluded from the event or were bored. However, I also noted that all of us worked together to clean up the meal and Fatimah was clearly regarded as a leader by men group members.

I also met with Masoud, the president of a Muslim student group at a large private university. He requested a short meeting with me to discuss my project in depth before he passed along my information to his group members. We met in the library and I shared the details of my research. Like Fatimah, he emphasized the need for more Muslims in psychology and improved mental health services in the community. He also shared that his group has had many discussions about identity
making, especially related to negotiating between Muslim and American identities. Masoud was enthusiastic about supporting research in that area. He was also excited about research that focused on Muslim women and agreed to connect me with many of the women student leaders in the group. He stated that he works closely with the men and women students in the group to plan and implement activities and events. He also connected me with many of his fellow student leaders at other Muslim groups at area universities. This meeting contrasted sharply with my meeting with Fatimah. Masoud reported that his group was focused on education, outreach and community, with leadership from both men and women while Fatimah’s group appeared to be focused on building a community among the Muslim men on campus.

I also connected with a number of Muslim community leaders and Muslim university chaplains through my recruiting efforts. I spoke with two women at length over the phone and they shared their ideas about my project. One woman, Yasmin, a prominent health care provider in Boston and an active participant at a large local mosque, was eager to help me by posting my flyer in her business area and emailing it around to a number of groups. She stated that my research was vital to the community because she had observed a number of local Muslim youth who were struggling in their personal lives. Yasmin took a historical approach to her understanding of Muslim mental health. She talked about the children of the large numbers of wealthy, educated Pakistanis that settled in the larger Boston area in the eighties. According to her, they had gone through the “cultural washing machine” and therefore were neither completely connected with Islam nor Western culture. She said
that this disconnection and conflicts with parents resulted in substance use and a number of mental health problems among the young Muslim community. Yasmin stated that if I was already licensed as a psychologist, she would have a number of referrals for me, all youth struggling with their families and mental health. In my journal, I noted Yasmin’s intimate style. Although we only spoke over the phone, she opened up to me and was eager to share her ideas about my research. Her style was warm and welcoming and she had overwhelming passion for her community.

Mariam, a former Muslim chaplain at a large private university, was very excited about my research because she had observed problematic behaviors on college campuses during her time as a chaplain. She related an incident at her university where the Arab student group was targeted with harassment as recently as five years ago. Mariam said that the harassment was significant enough that the group dissolved. Although the Muslim student group remained, it was a troubling time for those students in both groups. She stated that the harassment caused many students to feel unsafe. She noted that the Arab students were harassed because it is “easier to target a region than a religion.” For Mariam, this incident and others like it cause students to question their Muslim American identities because their American citizenship and their community membership are called into question by the larger student body. This story was very surprising for me and I noted my emotional reaction in my journal. I was shocked that this incident had occurred on a university campus in the greater Boston area, both because I perceived the Northeast as a safe haven for people from diverse backgrounds and research shows that colleges have
made significant efforts to protect their Muslim and Arab students (Peek, 2002, 2003; Seggie & Sanford, 2010).

**Interview Process**

The research methodology discussed in chapter three outlines the fundamental goals for my interview process. The women are the experts on their own lives. The interviews impact both my informants and me and the resulting stories are co-constructed by both of us. Finally, the open-ended interview process allows for complicated and nuanced stories to emerge.

In an attempt to accomplish these research goals, the informants were asked to choose a meeting space that was comfortable and convenient for them. Many chose private spaces on their college campuses like an office space or a study room, while others preferred a semi-private space in the campus center or library. Meeting in my informants’ spaces gave me a precious glimpse at their homes and daily lives. In many cases, I had the privilege of meeting friends and being a part of their college community, which provided me with an invaluable context of their lives. At the beginning of most of the interviews, I was offered food, snacks, or a beverage, again, making me feel at home and welcomed. In most cases, the women asked a number of questions at the beginning of the interview about confidentiality and the purpose of the research. I answered each question comprehensively and provided ample time for feedback and more questions. Some women had participated in or even conducted qualitative research before and therefore were very comfortable with audiotaping, while others wanted more information before agreeing to be audiotaped. In these
cases, I explained that the taped recordings were confidential and that the recording could be stopped at anytime in the interview. I also encouraged the women to ask about confidentiality, privacy or taping at any point during the interview, if they felt uncomfortable sharing a particular piece of information.

I also explained that there were no time limits for our conversation and I requested that the informants share any and all stories that they perceived to be representative of their experiences as Muslim American women. Furthermore, I explained that I was not going to structure our interview with many questions and instead, we could engage in an informal conversation. This information helped the women feel more comfortable. In my journal, I noted that, overwhelmingly, the informants grew excited when I explained that my project’s goal was to put forward their voices and opinions and challenge existing notions about Muslim women. All of the women reported their frustration with stereotypes about Muslim women and expressed a need for this type of research.

Early in the interviews, I used humor and positive feedback to establish rapport with my informants. I also told them to feel free to let me know if my questions were either confusing or irrelevant for their lives. In most interviews, I spoke very little, mostly to ask questions. In some cases, I summarized the informants’ ideas and stories to show that I heard and understood their comments. In a few of the interviews, I added comments based on existing research to show the women that their experiences and opinions were shared by others in the community.
At the end of the interviews, I asked all of my informants if and how I influenced the stories and ideas they shared. In an effort to make it easier for the informants to share any negative feedback, I prefaced my question by stating that I was a researcher, but I was also a person with my own experiences, points of view, and therefore biases. In all cases, the informants reported that I did not sway their comments in any direction and instead, I gave them the space to share what was most important to them. In one case, an informant stated that she was unsure if I understood some of the religious references she made, which she then clarified.

When we wrapped up our time together, I thanked each informant and shared my appreciation for their valuable time and their important, honest and personal stories. The informants also expressed gratitude for providing them with a space to talk about their experiences, and in some cases, hugs were exchanged.

**Peer Reviewer Process**

I recruited a peer reviewer, with a strong background in counseling and multicultural research, from my university doctoral program. After completing the thematic analysis, she was given portions of each interview transcript, along with detailed notes about thematic content, embedded in the transcripts. She reviewed my data for two weeks and we met to discuss the research. Together, we reviewed my data analysis for consistency and bias. There was a high concordance rate for our individual assessments. She did not identify any points of disagreement, but she did highlight several themes which she was especially struck by, due to their repetition in the transcripts. Specifically, she noted my informants’ passion and responsibility for
being ambassadors of Islam. She also talked at length about the role of hijab in identity development and educating others about Islam. Her comments were a useful part of my analysis and I have incorporated some of her comments into my discussion of the themes.

**Member Checking Process**

After I analyzed the themes, I used email to reconnect with my informants. In a brief message, informants were invited to participate in the member checking process through a short telephone conversation. In the email, I made it clear that this part of the project was completely voluntary, but I also shared why member checking is important. Most of my informants contacted me within a week. Of the ten original informants, I spoke with five over the phone for conversations that lasted approximately 45 minutes. In the phone conversations, I explained my progress in the project and allowed time for questions. I used about twenty minutes to review all the themes. I provided overall information about each theme and then delved into the specific subthemes, with breaks between each theme for questions and comments. At the end, I also allowed time for more questions and comments. Our conversations wrapped up with details about my next steps in the project. All of the women asked questions about when the document would be completed and were interested to read the final version. I shared that the document would be publicly available later this year and I would send an email to informants to let them know where they can find it.

Overwhelmingly, my informants reported concurrence with my analysis. They stated that the analysis was a comprehensive review of the important aspects of their
lives. They also shared they enjoyed both the diverse perspectives presented in the themes and the common experiences of all the women. None of the women expressed any disagreement with my analysis. In some cases, informants added more details to existing themes by providing examples from their own experiences. In the discussion about restrictive gendered expectations in the community, one informant reported incidences where she was scolded at her mosque for the placement of her veil. Specifically, she was told that her hair should not show under any circumstances. In another discussion about ethnic segregation in Muslim communities, an informant agreed segregation is a problem but emphasized that some community centers, including hers, are making visible efforts to encourage inclusion by holding events that celebrate the diversity among Muslims.

Informants

One of the easy pitfalls of qualitative analysis is presenting informants and their stories as disembodied themes and isolated data points. In my interviews, I was struck by the confidence and bravery of the young women I had the privilege of meeting. They all lead complicated lives and their experiences and perceptions are not simply statistics. In this section, I attempt to present themes in a way that honors my informants’ agency and complexity. Additionally, I share about my informants here, providing short descriptions of our interviews and those aspects of their lives that they considered most important.

Hafsah, a serious law student at a medium-sized private university, has been on a journey of religious discovery over the last year. After reconnecting with Muslim
friends at a local, large Islamic cultural center and mosque, Hafsah has made many changes in her life. She has put her Muslim identity first by reading the Qur’an on a daily basis, attending prayers at the mosques weekly, and participating in community service activities. She has also started veiling her head and wearing loose-fitting clothes. In her lifelong journey, there were periods of time when Hafsah struggled with her Muslim identity and her identity as a first generation Arab woman. The hostile climate of the United States post-9/11 significantly shifted how Hafsah understood her American identity. However, in the context of her family and her community, Hafsah has become a proud Muslim American woman. She is eager to be a successful Muslim woman who can inspire others and demonstrate that Muslim women can achieve professional careers.

Kamilah is a vibrant, confident and very busy young woman pursuing a rigorous graduate degree in pharmacy at a private university. As a Muslim American woman, Kamilah feels a strong sense of duty to her local Muslim community and the larger Muslim community across the US, specifically bridging the connection between Muslims and all of their neighbors. On top of school and work, she leads significant outreach in the community through the local, prominent Islamic center. She also embodies her outreach duties in her personal life. With irrepressible energy and a friendly personality, Kamilah is always ready to talk to friends and strangers about her Muslim AND American background and the ease with which she belongs to both. She draws a lot of her strength and courage from her close-knit family and her parents, who are both educators and actively involved in the local Muslim
community outreach. Their own strong connections with Islam and the community have served as protective factors for Kamilah and her siblings for the hostility and discrimination they have witnessed in a post-9/11 world.

Taliya and I found a quiet spot in the library of her small women’s college for our interview. Taliya used humor throughout the interview and did not hold back about her opinions. Her laidback style masked an ambitious young woman devoted to her dream of going to medical school. Taliya struggled with a number of the questions I posed because she was very emotionally connected to the material. She described her own challenging identity development in a hostile post-9/11 environment. Her American identity continues to be very conflicted. Prior to college, Taliya drew her support from her very close-knit family, especially her resourceful and brave father. In college, Taliya has connected with many other young women, both Muslim and non-Muslim. In her new community, she is finding comfort, peace and healing. Despite the challenges that she has faced, Taliya is committed to educating others about her religion.

Faridah and I met on a chilly, rainy evening. She arrived smiling and joking about the “beautiful” New England weather, wearing a tight veil around her head, loose-fitting gym clothes, and colorful rainboots. A sophomore at a private university in the city, Faridah is considering many different challenging majors in the sciences. She expressed her excitement and appreciation for my project, stating how necessary it is to disseminate information about Muslim Americans. Faridah identifies as a Muslim American woman. Her Algerian heritage is important to her, but she has no
doubt that she is an American. She sees very few challenges in being both Muslim and American and she is always eager to share about herself with others. Being a vehicle for educating others about Islam in America is a consistent personal goal for Faridah. Her practice of hijab, the veil, often invites attention from others and she welcomes the opportunity to share about her religious background. Faridah has observed negative changes in her country post-9/11 and this only further fuels her desire to educate. Despite her busy schedule, Faridah has a leadership position in her university’s Muslim student group.

Faiza is a junior at a large private university, majoring in a healthcare related field. Faiza and her family belong to a small, tight-knit sect of Shia Islam, which has approximately one million adherents worldwide and about seven thousand in the US. Faiza’s Muslim American identity is superseded by her identity as a member of this sect. She wears a unique form of hijab which includes a colorful full-length loosefeting robe and a veil that covers her head, which is worn only by women in Faiza’s sect. She is very involved in both her local and global community. Her family’s active leadership in the community and their financial means to travel around the world for sect-specific events allows Faiza to connect with other young people like herself in the world. She is eager to educate others about her sect of Islam, which she feels is her duty as a member of the community. Given her unique dress and the relative obscurity of the Shia sect, Faiza is always fielding questions about her background, her culture and her religion. Faiza is also making a commitment to her religion and community through marriage. She is engaged to be married to a man
from the Shia sect community in another state. Faiza will move across the country to
be with her husband after she graduates from college. Faiza also has a strong
American identity. She is well-connected with her high school and her town and she
looks forward to joining the American workforce as a young professional.

Sana is a serious and quiet young woman who has graduated from college. As
a young professional, she sees community service and regular Islamic study as
fundamental parts of her Muslim identity. She has great insights into the Muslim
community, especially related to the changes post-9/11. Like other members of her
family, she struggles with the veil, but continues to practice as a religious fulfillment.
She also has little enthusiasm for answering to the curiosities of others as it relates to
her religion. She feels it is a great responsibility and sometimes a burden. She finds
support in her family, who are active members of a thriving Muslim community. Sana
does have critiques of the Muslim community and the larger US community which
she shared during the interview, but she thoroughly identifies as a Muslim American.

Aisha is a senior at a prestigious women’s college studying philosophy. She is
a serious, intellectual young woman who is passionate about bringing her Islamic
scholarship to her otherwise very secular philosophy classes. She struggles with peers
and professors who believe Eastern or religious philosophy is less valuable than
Western, secular philosophy, but she has big plans to study Arabic and Islam and
connect the two worlds. Before coming to college, Aisha struggled with how her
Muslim identity isolated her from others in a post-9/11 US. She found limited social
supports in school and she had limited access to the Muslim community in her
family’s home state. Positive experiences in her college community have brought Aisha peace and growth. Aisha’s commitment to Islamic scholarship comes with a critique of cultural influences on religion and existing scholarship which sidelines feminist perspectives.

I met Noor in the campus center of an elite women’s college on a Sunday afternoon. She was casual, confident and articulate. With a strong interest in journalism, Noor has already participated in internships in which she has promoted the Muslim American community and dispelled stereotypes. Noor’s aspirations to be a successful and socially responsible Muslim American woman are supported by her well-educated family and her diverse and close-knit communities in her home state and on campus. Noor talked at length about the changes in and development of the Muslim American community after 9/11 and specifically the role women can play in education and outreach. She also discussed her decision to practice a moderate form of hijab, which does not include covering her head. As a South Asian woman, Noor also shared about how she negotiates between her religious values, her family’s cultural values and her own love for both American and South Asian culture.

Zeynab is a fiercely independent young woman with strong opinions, a dark sense of humor, and a friendly personality. She is studying International Relations at a small private college. She asked me many questions about my project and joked around during the interview. Zeynab’s easy ability to connect with me may stem from her upbringing which involved moving around all over the US and the world. Coming from an Iraqi family, Zeynab has faced discrimination and racism throughout her life,
which she handles with humor and courage. She is a critical young woman who uses her practice of veiling as a political statement. Zeynab has set high academic and career goals for herself. She draws support from her immediate family in the states and her extended family in Europe and Iraq. As a Shia Muslim, Zeynab’s family has minimal to no community nearby in the US.

I met with Sofia on a cold, rainy evening. Despite the weather, she was cheerful and friendly. Sofia is a senior at a medium-sized public university with tentative plans to pursue a law degree in the future. Repeatedly, she told me about her excitement for my project and her desire to help and share her opinions. Sofia sees her Muslim, American and South Asian identities blending well. She has a deeply personal connection with her religion and loves picking and choosing aspects of her culture to observe and celebrate. However, Sofia struggles with how others view her, including her family, other Muslims, and non-Muslims. They find Sofia’s choices to be contradictory. She perceives that other people simply do not understand her multiple identities. She finds solace in her very diverse group of friends, who all connect over their immigrant backgrounds and shared family experiences. They celebrate each other’s cultural traditions, which is when Sofia is the happiest. Despite the challenges, Sofia is a fierce advocate for Muslim woman and is eager to educate others about Islam.

Themes

Derived from the nuanced and complicated stories of ten women, many of the themes overlap and share concepts. For the utility of this study, the results are
presented as separate themes that best represent the most significant aspects of all the interviews. The individual narratives yielded seven themes; each theme had one or more subthemes. The major themes are as follows: integrating identities is the goal, but there are conflicts; family significantly influences development of Muslim and American identities; community access is a major factor in identity development; hostile schools and neighborhoods negatively impact Muslim American identity development; media and government have morally excluded Muslim Americans in the US; hijab has a diverse range of practice and meaning; and Muslim American women are ambassadors for their communities. To support themes, direct quotations from the informants are included in the text. The informants’ voices and stories are identified by italics and quotation marks. The themes also include references to existing literature and research that connect my informants’ stories to the stories of Muslim women across the US. The literature adds richness and detail to the themes as well as context for my informants’ comments. I also include those cases where my informants’ stories are not included in or contradict the existing literature.

**Integrating Identities is the Goal, but there are Conflicts**

All of the women I interviewed were either born in the United States or grew up in the US from a young age. Many of them reported that they self-identify as Muslim Americans and that their Muslim and American identities are the most important to them. Despite all the women’s goals to fuse their identities, their stories revealed that there are conflicts and distance between the two identities for some women, due to a number of identified barriers.
Fused identities. In some cases, the informants’ stories showed integrated identities, as defined by Sirin & Fine’s (2008) study. One feature of integrated identities is a healthy fusion of multiple identities. For most of the women in my study, their Muslim identities were constant in their lives, whether they expressed it through their community or practiced their faith privately. The journey to integrate their American identities varied for all the women.

Some described the ease with which they blended their Muslim and American identities together from a young age. Kamilah shared,

“I feel like it’s very easy to be a Muslim American woman. For example, because in the end you find that our religion is very compatible with American culture, give and take a few lifestyle (decisions).... Everything about being a good citizen here, is being a good Muslim. And everything about being a modest woman is also being a good citizen and respecting the people around you and the environment.”

Many of the women described how they came to embrace their American identities. For many of them, there were a number of cultural options to choose from. In some cases, exposure to their families’ countries of origins through travel helped them to see just how American they actually were. The cultural differences in other countries were profound and helped cement their American identities. In the following quotation, Zeynab explained how her personal discovery of her American identity is a uniquely American experience. For Zeynab, having the options and negotiating between different identities helps her to feel even more American.
"I choose to be Muslim. And American, I don’t know, I’ve always had this weird thing where I change nationalities every week or something. But since I actually wasn’t born here, I was born in Iraq and I came here when I was four, so I’ve always felt that I wasn’t American actually. And then I realized that I was, in terms of culture, in terms of just the way I thought. When I went to Iraq again, and I’ve been going for the past seven years, I realized that I was very American in the way that I think. And that’s kind of confusing because I can go either way between nationalities, and then I realized that a lot of Americans have this issue because a lot of Americans actually are part something else. There are hardly any people who can claim to be American, you know straight out American for the past three generations or something. So yeah, so I’m very American because I have a lot of identities, is what I realized."

My informants identified a number of US cultural features that appeal to them, including the right to get the same educational opportunities as men and the freedom to practice Islam that honors women. This finding reflects existing research which shows that women with integrated Muslim American identities identify gendered advantages to life in the US (Sirin & Fine, 2008). Taliya, an ambitious student studying medicine discussed the many conversations she had with her father about her goal to attend a prestigious college across the country. She described her father’s South Asian cultural expectations that, as a woman, she would stay close to home until she was married, severely limiting her career goals. Taliya’s American
identity helped her to distinguish her father’s cultural voice from his religious voice. She convinced her father that her distance from home was not Un-Islamic and therefore she should have access to an excellent education anywhere in the country.

“…She has to be a housewife, but it’s not Islam (that is) teaching that, it’s the culture. And I’ve challenged a lot of gender roles and especially with my father. I remember having very heated conversations with him. I never disrespect him, but I talk to him in a way that’s respectful but also something that’s important. He would say something like a girl shouldn’t be that way or shouldn’t do that and I’d be like what do you mean and he’d say that a girl just doesn’t do that, it’s not Islamic. He also had a problem with sending me to college here, very big problem. You’re a girl and you shouldn’t be going off to college by yourself and this and that and I think what the world really needs right now is to know that a Muslim woman can be educated and she can be bright. It was definitely a challenge to shape my dad into someone who was not the typical desi dad who was like you’re a girl and your goal in life should be to get married. No, my dad is not like that anymore and I like that.”

Many of the young women see another advantage to their Muslim American identities. The women with integrated identities were eager to share that being American actually facilitates their ongoing discovery and study of Islam. Being different and having the choice of many identities encourages these women to seek out their religion in a way that is not required in a Muslim majority country. The proactive decision to be Muslim in America has created a strong devotion to their
religion. In Sana’s interview, she explained that her family and others in her country of origin, Pakistan, were “culturally religious.” As part of the majority, they were never held accountable for their religion or questioned about their beliefs. They did not have to think critically about Islam. Sana is always aware of her difference and from a young age, in a post-9/11 US, she has been explaining Islam to others. Learning her religious tradition is her duty to an American Islam, which she described as follows,

“I’ve been fortunate, actually the last two years of college and afterwards, I’ve had more of a spiritual exposure to Islam. To me, it became more about learning and developing myself spiritually so that’s the phase I’ve been in after college. And I think that it’s really important because I think that that is, being American, I think that as an American Muslim you have to be very informed about your religious tradition, what it means. Sometimes for people, they’re like “I’m an American” and that means integrating and assimilating and sometimes it’s at the expense of their religiosity. In order to develop an American Islam, we need to be very, very firmly grounded in the tradition itself. I have, for the past several years, been attending regular classes about different topics and I’m learning Arabic right now and I’ve also been, I’m interested in education...”

**Commuting across multiple identities.** According to Sirin and Fine (2007; 2008), another aspect of healthy fusion is feeling comfortable in the different communities to which one belongs. All of the young women in my study belong to
many communities, including public schools, Islamic schools, universities, mosques, cultural centers, clubs and families. Most of my informants described how easy it is to find belonging in all their communities without compromising their integrated Muslim American identity.

A striking commonality in many of the interviews was the comfort with which many women traveled through their many, diverse worlds. Their integrated identities allow them to feel just as comfortable at the mosque as they do among non-Muslim friends at school and at college. They do not achieve this comfort by hiding or compartmentalizing any of their identities. These women are always both Muslim and American in each of their worlds. Among the Muslim community, they advocate for outreach and more participation and leadership from women members. With friends, they go to the movies and out to dinner, but excuse themselves from activities that involve significant mixed gender socializing and/or alcohol. Faridah talked about her many activities in college. Her strong Muslim American identity fuels her adventurous spirit and allowed her to explore many diverse communities.

“I am a busy student. My life I guess as a student for the last three years you know I go to class, I usually in between will have lunch dates with some friends and then I’m actually... I’m the secretary of the Muslim student group, so I get pretty involved with that. I currently have a work-study position at the (Religious Life) Center. I try to go to the... like Northeastern is good at having like random events. I am very... I would consider myself a spontaneous person, so for example... I go to the Latino/Latina cultural center, I’m not
Latino or Latina at all, but I just go there all the time…I just showed up there one day and it's a great place over there. And today they had something….where you speak Spanish over coffee for like an hour, so it was really cool. I brushed up on my Spanish a bit.”

Another aspect of comfort in different worlds that many of my informants demonstrate is their desire to display their Muslim American identity out loud. Most of the women in the study wear a veil that covers their head which instantly identifies them as Muslims to other Americans. Additionally, the young women do not shy away from questions about their faith and manage any attention or curiosity from others with ease. Faiza, who wears a unique, colorful veil in accordance with her sect of Shia Islam, made the choice to display her Muslim identity openly throughout high school and in college. It comes with challenges, but she sees the humor in the other people’s questions. She laughed when she related a funny story about a young girl at Epcot Center who mistook her for a Disney employee dressed as a foreign princess. Faiza continues to wear the unique veil because she has incredible confidence in her Muslim American identity.

“I’m just lucky I guess that my parents have never been discouraging of it. They have always made sure that I was confident enough to handle it. I have always kind of been the person where I’m like, just because I’m wearing a (veil), I still like to match and still wear nice clothes and I’ll still wear jewelry. So if I carry myself in a way that I can be confident, even for myself, then it’s not a problem. I mean, I have tons of friends that started off wearing
(veil) and it was too much. They were sick of answering questions all the time so they stopped and they are back to pants and shirts or whatever they were wearing before. So it definitely is like an individual strength kind of thing.”

Not only do the women feel comfortable and confident in their many worlds, they also celebrate the diversity around them. Many of the women actively seek out both Muslim and non-Muslim friends. Along with companionship, these relationships allow the young women to share their own experiences as Muslim Americans and hear about the religion and culture of others. In many cases, these women find non-Muslim friendships that are fulfilling and without compromise and in other cases, they have many Muslim friends to share common experiences. Sofia has struggled to make connections with other Muslims or South Asians, but she loves sharing her culture with her own community of diverse friends.

“Yeah, I love it. They listen to my music, I listen to their music, we eat each other’s food; we try to learn each other’s language. I know a lot of her language. My best friend, I’ve known her since 9th grade, she’s Dominican. I’m a little hesitant to speak in Spanish but I can understand everything somebody is saying. People go into a store and they need help finding something, they’ll speak to me in Spanish and I’ll be like explain to me what you need and I’ll show them where it is. I love it…”

Dissenting as a part of integrated identity. In Sirin and Fine’s study (2007; 2008), there were many Muslim youth who spoke critically about the US government’s injustices towards the Muslim community, including surveillance,
deportation and detainment without cause. They also talked about the media’s role in creating negative, violent stereotypes about Muslims and contributing to the growing fear of the global Muslim community. In my study, the informants minimally discussed the American government and media. They acknowledged their own dissent towards some US governmental policies and talked about media-driven stereotypes, but it was not an area of importance for them. In some cases, they thought the situation had improved in the last five years and others saw problems more locally, without influence from the government. Overall, their expressed dissent was overwhelmed by their positive tone towards the US and their desire to make positive change themselves through education. Additionally, the young women were able to separate any hostility they observed either nationally or locally from their own network of non-Muslim friends and supports. They all cited incidents of harassment and hostility, discussed in a later section, but they saw these events as isolated and they did not hinder their desire to connect to non-Muslim Americans.

My informants were also able to critique their own Muslim communities. According to Sirin and Fine (2008), Muslim youth who were willing to criticize Islam or the Muslim world demonstrated deeply integrated identities. The women in my study with integrated identities offered complicated critical views of the US, Islam and their Muslim communities, both nationally and globally. They discussed the need for separation between religion and culture, which would lead to improved Islamic scholarship and more gender equality. Hafsah talked positively about her American, immigrant vantage point for observing and evaluating the differences between
religion and culture. She expressed strong criticism for the Muslim world’s sometimes culturally-biased practice of Islam.

“When it’s happening in the country where the culture and the religion are both predominant you just do what everyone else is doing, because it surrounds you and you don’t have to think about it. When people are here and they’ve had an immigrant experience, they kind of get to hold to both and say “Wow I get to see what happened there, I get to see what happens here,” and you get a really great place to observe from. At least I think so, I think it’s really you know you get to step back, you can observe both the cultures and the religions in a way that people from there can’t. I think it’s a pretty cool gift I think in some ways. It can be a real hassle too growing up, I know.

Looking back, even for myself, but I’m glad that I’ve had them.”

Conflicts limit integration. Despite all my informants’ desire for integrated Muslim American identity, there are some conflicts that prevent or limit integration. These conflicts are not unique to my informants, but are reflected repeatedly in existing literature on Muslim American youth (Ahmed & Ezzedine, 2009; Hasnat, 1998; Sirin & Fine, 2007, 2008; Zaal, Salah, & Fine, 2007). One conflict that was expressed by a few women related to shame and embarrassment about being Muslim. In all cases, the young women reported that they have resolved these feelings and now are proud of their identity. Taliya described how her feelings of shame and embarrassment caused her to hide her Muslim identity from others.
“And although I wasn’t a Hijabi or anything like that, but my mom was. So whenever I think about this, I feel so bad, I was ashamed of my own mom. Like coming to, oh God, she’s a mom and she was so proud and she would come to my award ceremonies. I remember doing this thing and I hate myself for doing that. I was like, she came and she was taking pictures of me and she wanted to see my award and I wouldn’t give it to her and I didn’t want to stand by her and I didn’t want people to know I was with her and now that I think about, I think how could I do that. That’s just, I’m so ashamed of that part of my character. I can’t believe I did that. I constantly apologize to my mom, like I can’t believe I did that. I’m so sorry. It makes me so sad. I cry about it. I can’t believe I did that to my mom.”

Other women also described a lack of acceptance or understanding from other Muslims, both in their home communities and in college. In these cases, the young women in my study have divergent ideas about the religiosity, hijab, and women’s participation in Islam, which leave them feeling either isolated or uncomfortable joining in group activities. Sofia shared at length about how her personal views of Islam clash with the larger Muslim community. She perceives that she is not welcome in the Muslim community in her local area or her college.

“Like the way that I dress, it’s not conservative. I talk to everybody male, female, you know how the culture is. You’ll see the girls with the girls and the guys with the guys, it’s very segregated. They intermix but not for long periods of time. Probably they think that I think I’m better than them or I
forgotten where I came from or I don’t know. I don’t pray or fast, you know, stuff like that. I can just tell they look at me with disgust. You know what I mean. So it did bother me a lot at first, but then I was like, I am not going to let these people like you know, put me down.”

All of my informants’ stories revealed complex and nuanced stories of identity development. Many women have integrated identities and some experience conflicts about and between their Muslim and American identities. In all of the individual narratives, there are external factors that enable and inhibit identity development. Hostility in the local schools and neighborhoods significantly impacts the young women’s safety and comfort practicing their Muslim identities. The media and government exacerbate existing stereotypes about Muslims and Muslim women, which makes it more difficult for all my informants to develop and assert their American identity. Both family and community serve as protective factors for many of the women in the study. However, other women described conflicts with family and community members, which prevent them for accessing other Muslims for support, guidance and acceptance. The factors are explored in the next four themes.

**Family Significantly Influences Development of Muslim and American Identities**

Family is a fundamental part of identity development for most young adults and existing research shows that family is a major factor in the development of Muslim American identity. Muslim families in the US influence religiosity, practice of hijab, and value of education. They set gendered expectations for their children, which can include limiting their children’s goals and prioritizing the needs of their
sons over the needs of their daughters. Families can be an access point for the local Muslim community or the larger non-Muslim society. They can also emphasize an American identity or the cultural identity of their country of origin (Ahmed & Ezzedine, 2009; Ahmed-Ghosh, 2004; Al-Johar, 2005; Hasan, 2000, 2009; Hasnat, 1998; Leonard, 2003; Naber, 2005; Sarroub, 2001; Sirin & Fine, 2007, 2008; Zaal, Salah, & Fine, 2007). Family is an integral part of the lives of all the Muslim American women in my study, reflecting many of the themes in the existing literature.

**Active parents, active daughters.** Overwhelmingly, the most positive and optimistic young women I interviewed are surrounded by active, involved and supportive families. Kamilah, Faridah, Noor, Sana and Faiza all described parents, siblings and extended family who participate and lead local Muslim communities at the mosque or cultural center. From a young age, all of these women have joined their families at large, vibrant Muslim centers where they feel belonging and security. They participate in events on a weekly basis at minimum. In addition, they see their families providing outreach and education about Islam to the larger US community. In an official capacity, many women described mothers and fathers who work on interfaith events through the mosques. Other women talked about parents who are proactive about making strong relationships with neighbors and at their children’s schools. The modeling and support of their parents have encouraged these young women to take active leadership roles in their Muslim communities, at home and at college. Kamilah, a graduate student in a prominent leadership position with a
Muslim young professional group that provides outreach and education, was proud to share about her parents’ efforts to establish a local Muslim community in the Boston area when they immigrated to the US.

“They were active in the community… like my dad’s generation you know when they came here there weren’t Muslims around. It was a matter of they had to do things otherwise Islam on campus was not going to exist basically.

For example my dad is at (large university in Boston area), he and his friend at the time, they’re the ones who opened up the prayer room that’s there now. And now, 30 years later, that’s the one that’s being used. He teaches there now, so he still uses that space.”

In Kamilah’s story, her parents have been active in her community throughout her life. For other women, their families became active in their religion and the Muslim community after 9/11. In both these cases, active families serve as a protective factor for young Muslim women for discrimination and hostility from the mainstream US society. Faiza described her family’s journey to increased practice of their religion and participation and leadership in their Muslim community. After 9/11, her family has made a conscious effort to travel around the world for sect-specific community events and they have connected more with the local community. She described her father’s increasingly devout practice of his religion by keeping a beard. For Faiza, her family’s increased involvement in their religious community came at the ideal time. Just as the US was becoming aware of Islam and making increasingly negative associations with the religion, she was learning the skills and gaining the
resources to stand up to any discrimination she faced. Her family’s active involvement increased her own involvement in her religion and her community, which serve to insulate her from discrimination and harassment.

“I was just the Indian kid at school… Because I knew my parents were (from Shia sect), but it didn’t really go much further than that… I was just the Indian one… It wasn’t that big of a deal if I was Muslim or Hindu or… like within that sub-category… So, we went to Karbala, in Iraq that has a big shrine for us… All family friends from Boston… so we all went together and that basically changed all of our lives… (We) basically said “Ok, we need to teach our kids what they are supposed to know, we need to be more involved,” so looking back, I was a little young to understand fully the impact that the trip had on my parents. That trip was the start of a line of big trips… we took more trips to the Middle East, we went to Egypt and Jerusalem… My involvement in my own culture became much more after that changed in a good way for me, we became a lot more involved. My dad became a lot more… like he started wearing a full beard. My mom started becoming more involved with… I mean, we were all very involved anyways because the community is small enough where we’re all friends… my mom would host stuff at her house and we were into all of that anyways, but it all became more of, like on a bigger scale I guess.”

In a more official capacity, some of my informants’ families were very aware of the negative impact of 9/11 and made concerted efforts to outreach to the larger
community for dialogue and education. As Faiza went on to explain, these families helped change the perceptions of Muslims in their local neighborhoods and towns. They distinguished themselves as an American Muslim community from both actual terrorism and the negative, violent stereotypes about Muslims appearing in the media.

“My dad and that friend of his, the second they found out about 9/11, called every church they knew in Massachusetts and said they want to come to your community and clear up any questions. Their first instinct they had, we rely on all these people to rent out their space (for community meetings) and the second they start hating Muslims, what’s going to happen to us? They need to know who we are, because up until then, yeah we were Muslims, but they were as naïve as anyone else, they didn’t know what it meant to be Muslim. We were just another Indian community. So I remember then that, I think I went to one of those events with my dad, basically it was a panel discussion where my dad stood up with a mic and answered any questions. I didn’t realize until afterwards that it was a clear effort from my dad to…make sure that everyone knew exactly who were and who weren’t.”

**Families influence American identity.** All of my informants’ families hold onto some cultural aspects of their countries of origin. In some cases, parents are very flexible with their daughters’ adherence to South Asian or Arab cultural norms. Some parents encourage their daughters to find their own balance between their American identities and the cultural identity of their countries of origin. The parents themselves model this balance in their own lives by actively participating in American cultural
activities, as long as they do not interfere with their Islamic beliefs. For these families, their Muslim identity, always most important, does not clash with their American identity. The informants from these families experience the fewest conflicts about their Muslim, American, and South Asian/Arab identities. They balance these identities easily. Some identify more strongly with their American identity while others embrace many of their South Asian/Arab cultural practices. In either case, they are flexible because they do not experience pressure from their parents to conform to a specific identity. Sana described her family’s positive influence over her identity development.

“Definitely my identity as Muslim and American have been very important to me for most of my life. My family was very observant when I was growing up and so that was something I was raised with and my sisters, who are older than me, several years older than me, so they had a big impact on me... And um, my identity as an American has always been really important to me as well and I think I’ve been fortunate to have had a lot of influences that have really taught me that those two things are complementary and they’re not at odds with one another. So my identity as an American has always very, very important to me.

Some of my informants like the different gender expectations that come with their American identity. As women, they find they are less restricted in the US than in their family’s country of origin. In the quotation below, Faridah distinguished between Arab and American cultural practices related to cross-gender
communication. As a strongly identified American from an American family, her parents do not restrict her friendships with men. If her family had maintained Arab cultural practices, they would enforce strict gender segregation for their daughter, which is customary in their country of origin.

“I don’t know if I’d strongly identify myself as Arab. I mean the Arabic language is beautiful. But in terms of culture, I don’t find myself to be a very cultured person. You know I do visit my family in Algeria and I think it’s great and it’s a beautiful place. But I don’t necessarily strongly identify myself as Arab necessarily…I guess my parents weren’t extremely cultural. And things that were cultural, like religion always came first, so things that were cultural that did not coincide with religion we did not take into our lives… I guess throughout middle school and high school, I was not one of those you know oh I can only talk to girls, I was very open to everyone. I had a lot of female friends and I had a lot of male friends as well. And it was something, a lot of times people will say “Oh what will your parents say?” My parents were very ok with that.”

Other informants described a very different process of cultural identity development, in which their parents enforce a strong adherence to the cultural gendered practices of their country of origin. These young women sometimes struggle to find a balance between their American and South Asian/Arab identities. Above, Taliya explained that she was able to change her father’s South Asian cultural beliefs about women’s agency in society and therefore gained access to a strong education
and ambitious career path. For other women I interviewed, they continue to be limited by their family’s cultural expectations for women. Sofia described the challenge of reconciling her “Americanized” identity with her mother’s South Asian gendered expectations.

“So my mother always says to me, “We are not American” but she needs to understand that we grew up here, me and my brothers, from when we were two years old. We went to public schools, we grew up with a coed school, with boys and girls, my teachers were like professors, male and female, the society is very liberal so in that sense, we are Americanized... I am Americanized but I don’t forget who I am. I am Muslim. I don’t forget the five pillars of Islam that we stand on, I don’t forget that. I don’t forget where my mother and father came from, where they grew up. I appreciate that. My mother and I, we don’t really get along, at first, “What is wrong with her, she doesn’t understand.” But then I realized that she is a product of her society, just as I am of mine. I can’t clash with her. I can’t get mad at her for something that she doesn’t know. That’s what I mean by Americanized... She’s still, I’m 21 and in America, you’re grown. “I don’t care that you’re 21, that doesn’t matter to me. You’re still a daughter.” You know for Muslims and in South Asia, daughters (are) your pride, and if your daughter messes up, your family messed up, your father, your mother, that’s why my mom is like, “Don’t go outside. Not don’t go outside, but don’t stay out too late.”...It used to be, I’m the oldest and I wasn’t allowed to do anything, go the movies, to anything, my
brothers, they are 17 and 18, they do whatever the heck they want to do, I’m like “Mom, that’s not fair” (and she says) “They’re boys.” I was like “So what?” and she was like, “It doesn’t matter about boys, it’s all about girls.” Aisha discussed her parents’ cultural gendered expectations for her adult life and marriage. She clearly observes how her American cultural upbringing clashes with her parents’ cultural expectations. She is unsure about how to negotiate between the two.

“...Because I’m an American, right, I’ve been raised in a different context and even if there are certain cultural aspects of Indian culture that aren’t necessarily wrong, I’m not part of that culture, so it doesn’t fit in my ways of doing things so I don’t want to be restricted by that... My family’s a little bit, like they’re not ultra culturally Indian. But then there are some instances when it kind of creeps in, in terms of expectations. Expectations in terms of marriage, or things like that...Like in the case of marriage, the ways in India there’s obviously a wide range of the way people do things, but one of them is arranged marriages or kind of like more family involving, like it’s a different approach. And so in America, that approach that they’re doing in India isn’t necessarily unethical, I don’t necessarily have to follow that. And sometimes I am kind of also clashing in terms of culture because I just don’t want to do that. As opposed to I think it’s wrong.”

Families influence religious identity, but women make their own choices. All of the women in my study discussed their family’s impact on their religious
identity. They were born into Muslim families and the positive associations with Islam in the family grew and maintained their strong Muslim identities. For a number of women, they continue to explore and learn about Islam for themselves. This has resulted in some women who are connected with their religion more than their families. They attend services at the mosque regularly and adhere to the five daily prayers. They also participate and lead community activities. As stated above, Sana described her parents and extended family as “culturally religious.” She cited that they did not pray regularly. Sana and her older sisters took the initiative to learn more about Islam and dedicate more time to devout practice, which in turn encouraged the rest of her family to explore the religion for themselves. Hafsah described her parents as “moderate” Muslims. Her Islamic education at home was very positive, but she continues to explore on her own. She now attends services regularly at the local mosque, where she also interned for one summer. She fasts during Ramadhan and on optional dates. Hafsah has also started veiling to fulfill her religious calling, which was never encouraged or forced by her parents.

**Family support is essential.** Evident in many of my informants’ stories is the necessity of family support for positive identity development in a post-9/11 US. Families provide a safe space for their daughters and act as protectors and advocates in cases of harassment or threatening behavior from the larger US society. Family support is especially essential in the absence of a larger Muslim community in the area, which was the case for Taliya, Zeynab and Aisha. These women described strong family connection and they emphasized their parents’ efforts to provide a
buffer for their children against any discrimination or intolerance. Taliya’s family struggled financially when she was young and both her parents worked long hours to provide for their family. Despite their busy schedules, Taliya shared that she always feels she can rely on her parents. Taliya provided an example of an incident in high school where she was harassed by a teacher because her last name is similar to that of a prominent, negative public figure in the Arab world. Taliya’s father’s condemnation of the incident and his attempts to hold the teacher accountable for his actions sent a strong message to Taliya. She does not tolerate discrimination about her Muslim American identity because her father modeled a strong, positive Muslim identity.

“There was a substitute teacher and he called rolecall, you know, they say your name and you say, “here!” so he called my name Taliya (last name) and then he asked me, “Are you related to (prominent figure).” I was mad and I don’t even know what I was feeling, I was so furious, why would you ask that, you’re mature enough to know that I’m not, that doesn’t even make sense. During lunch, I borrowed one of my friend’s cellphones and called my dad and told him what happened. He was furious, but I told him not to come to the school or anything. I knew he would end up yelling so I was like, no don’t do that. And my dad picked me up that day and we’re thinking about suing the guy but I don’t know what, I don’t know what it would really accomplish and I don’t want to go through all that trouble. So the teacher did end up writing a letter of apology and that was nice.”
Community Access is a Major Factor in Identity Development

The existing research shows that community has a significant influence on the identity development of Muslim American women. A strong local Muslim community contributes to positive identity development and serves as a protective factor in a post-9/11 US. However, community can pose gendered restrictions on women, reinforce racism and segregation based on culture and race and contribute to conflicts with the larger US society (Ahmed & Ezzedine, 2009; Hasnat, 1998; Sarroub, 2001; 2005; Sirin & Fine, 2007, 2008; Zaal, Salah, & Fine, 2007). In the present study, all of the young women I interviewed discussed community’s influence on their identity development. Many of the themes that emerged from our conversations are reflected in existing literature. New themes emerged as well.

Community facilitates positive Muslim identity development. Many of the young women I interviewed discussed incidences of discrimination they encountered after 9/11. During their childhood and adolescence, these incidences led some of the women to hide or separate their Muslim identities. However, if the women and their families belong to a strong Muslim community, they draw support from their community which helps limit the negative impact of the incidences. Not only do the young women have allies close by, but they also have access to education about why these incidences occur. Their increased knowledge and their ability to provide outreach and education through the community serve as a protective factor during their identity development in a hostile post-9/11 environment. Hafsah has discovered a local Muslim community in the past year. Her early journey to embrace her Muslim
identity was marked by struggle, but now she is finding a great deal of peace in her faith. In her younger years, she did not want to connect with Islam and disengaged from religious activities due to discrimination. More recently she has found healing through her local Muslim community, which provides access to many religious and social activities and other young Muslim women with whom she can share her experiences and build friendships. In this process, she is developing a positive Muslim identity. She described the journey for me:

“My parents started going to the Friday prayers and I was really reluctant to go, but then I went and really liked it and ran into a ton of familiar old faces... So I would go to the Friday prayers and then one day my friend randomly asked me if I wanted to host a Qur’an competition. So I was like no problem and I hosted it. Honestly I would hear Koran sometimes, I would hear the Azan like I would hear it playing in the background when my parents were watching TV, but I never like actually listened to it, you know? So I hosted the competition and there were kids in that competition like three years old and they knew like these long surahs and most of the people in the competition they can’t even speak Arabic. So I was like blown... I was like crying in the end of it, it was the most humbling experience of my life. Like these kids and people who don’t even speak Arabic, I’m blessed to know Arabic, the language of the Qur’an, and I don’t even do the simplest thing of praying. This was in June so I’d have to say that experience totally changed
my life, so ever since then I’ve been trying to learn more about the religion and yeah things have really changed.”

Local Muslim community impacts connection with American identity.

Women like Faiza, Kamilah, Faridah and Sana who have access to strong local Muslim communities feel connected to their American identities despite the discrimination they experience. Even though they receive messages that they either are not American or do not belong in the US, their community provides a safe space to understand and combat these messages. Communities that are actively working to improve conditions for Muslims in the US and raise awareness about Muslim Americans give hope to young Muslim women that positive change is possible and they can contribute.

The absence of a strong local community has a different impact on young women. For Taliya, Aisha and Zeynab, a limited or lack of a local Muslim community has resulted in a limited connection with their American identities. Although there are aspects of US culture that they appreciate and incorporate into their lives, they described their ambivalence or confusion about their American identities. They do not have anything positive to connect them with the US and in its absence, all that remains are the negative experiences of discrimination and exclusion. Aisha shared that she felt isolated before entering college. Her isolation and lack of connection resulted in anti-American sentiments, despite the fact that she has lived in the US all of her life. Fortunately, she explained that the inclusive
community of open-minded Muslim and non-Muslim students she discovered in college is helping her develop more positive associations with the US.

“Yeah there was a community in (State). We were involved with it, but not... I mean we went to the potlucks and events, and went to people’s houses. Be we were still kind of aloof a little bit, because we were living in a rural area, there was a lot of distance. And when we went to (State) there was nothing in our city, so we commuted to (Other City) for the mosque just for some of the events that they were having. And our, it was much more restricted, our social life, because we only lived there for two years, and there was a lot of driving... Yeah so I kind of, I mean I did meet people and had friends. But it was kind of like I never fully felt I could really (connect)... and also maybe just the way I see the world in terms of wanting to do something and make something... you know it’s just different. And then when I came to (college), then I met people that I could relate to. It’s like (a women’s college)! If you’re going to come to a women’s college, that means you have a certain mentality...Because also I felt like my ideas might have also been a little dogmatic as well because my isolation in the past, you know when you’re only getting perspectives from yourself, which means you’re going to be restricted in your understanding. So now I was able to explore other viewpoints. I was actually in the multi-faith corridor sophomore year, so you live in a corridor where there’s a bunch of other people from other religious traditions so every
"week you have a meeting and you discuss certain topics and so that really opened my eyes."

Flexible balance between Muslim and non-Muslim communities. Many of the women in the study talked about belonging to multiple communities, both Muslim and non-Muslim. There is a range among the women in terms of the diversity of their communities. For many informants, the two communities remain separate, one in their hometown school or at college and the other at the mosque, but they travel between the two comfortably. In fact, some women make special efforts to remain connected in both communities as a way of maintaining their Muslim American identity. The young women draw support from friendships developed in these communities, each providing them with different benefits. Some women talked about how enjoyable it is to share common experiences with other Muslims. They also rely on their Muslim friends to help them practice Islam faithfully. For many, non-Muslim friends are long-time companions who they met at a young age in their public school. Although they are non-Muslim, informants talked about the incredible value of these friends, with whom they have shared the experiences of growing up in the US. Additionally, many women talked about the fact that their non-Muslim friends are supportive and involved with the daily activities of Islam. They give reminders about prayers and visit the mosque with them. Essentially, my informants have chosen connections in their communities that facilitate their integrated Muslim American identities. Faridah and Hafsah both described how they have chosen friends who best
support their Muslim identities, with different results. In Faridah’s case, she finds that her non-Muslim friends are more helpful than Muslim friends.

“And I guess when you’re younger you just have this mentality almost that I guess maybe I was a little confused growing up, you know this is us and this is them. We’re the Muslims and they’re not Muslims. But in high school that kind of just like faded away. And there were a lot of my friends I realized who were more willing to like stick up for me than maybe Muslim friends would. I had my American friends who were like “oh Faridah it’s time for prayer.” Whereas a lot of my Muslim friends would be like, “Oh no there’s still like three hours left.” That’s when I realized it’s not about... it’s not black and white like that. It’s not like we’re Muslim they’re not, you know. There’s a lot of great people who I’ve met who aren’t Muslim who became great friends and I think that’s what it came down to. Your friends will remind you of things whether they agree with that or not.”

Hafsah’s journey to her Muslim identity has come with some changes in her friendships. She continues to find support from diverse friends, both Muslim and non-Muslim, but increasingly, she is connecting with other Muslims with whom she can share her religion and the common experiences of being Muslim. She has also disconnected with those of her non-Muslim friends with whom she feels she has little in common anymore. However, she is not limiting her new friendships to only other Muslims.
“We kind of just stopped talking because I was really focused on getting into law school and they were focused on other things. Unfortunately we just you know, couldn’t talk. I mean we’re civil, like we congratulated each other when we graduated and stuff. I do miss their friendships, but I just feel like with the changes in my life, we just wouldn’t be compatible anymore. They’re the type, you know they always want to party. Their goal in life is to have fun. I like to have fun and stuff, but I just feel like there’s other ways of having fun. They’re still good people, but unfortunately we couldn’t continue our friendships…The friends (from the mosque)…ever since I started seeing them there we started talking on a personal level, we’ve gotten extremely close… Yeah, just because I’m trying to be a better Muslim. It helps, but it’s not an important quality I look for in a friend. But like I said, it just helps because they are more knowledgeable than me about the religion. I can always get advice from them. I have so many good friends that aren’t Muslim.”

**Insulated communities produce conflicts.** None of the women that I spoke to described themselves as members of insulated Muslim communities, but they did discuss such friends and community members. In many of the cases, the youth that they described attend Islamic schools from a young age and therefore have limited exposure to non-Muslim peers. According to my informants, these youth do not develop a positive American identity for many reasons. My informants hypothesized that the lack of interaction with non-Muslims results in youth who only see significant differences between Muslims and Americans. They may also be exposed
only to the negative portrayal of Islam in the media and never find evidence of non-Muslim Americans who disagree and condemn the anti-Muslim stereotypes. Similar to the findings in Maira’s (2004) study with South Asian Muslim youth in Boston, Kamilah described some of her peers from insulated Muslim communities who diminish their American identities and focus on leaving the US to live in a Muslim majority country.

“Yeah it’s strange and sort of sad. Yeah a lot of these people who went to an Islamic school and had that us versus them mentality. Especially after 9/11 and especially after the invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan, you know kind of seeing Americans as the enemy, which is very unfortunate. Just like we sometimes think that other people sometimes generalize and stereotype Muslims, we do it too. So a lot of them were kind of like, no I’m never gonna live here. I’m going to graduate school and go back home. I’m like, where’s home? And they’ll be like oh I’ll just live in Saudi. Because they feel like they can’t be good true Muslims by living here, or sometimes they see stuff on TV that they think is inappropriate. Which is true, that stuff exists, but that stuff exists everywhere no matter where you go. I think some people are under the false assumption that if they move somewhere like Saudi Arabia and everything is all holy, which is not the case. But I think a lot of people have that thinking.”
Sofia raised another potential conflict for Muslims in insulated communities. She shared concerns about her young cousin’s ability to live and interact effectively in a mainstream US society if she attends Islamic school throughout her education.

“Yeah. My cousin, she goes to (Islamic School). She’s 7 or 8. She’s enjoys it but I can tell it’s going to be hard for her. After all, she is growing up in America. I remember I was with her and I didn’t have a plunging neck line but it wasn’t a crew neck either. She was trying to pull it up for me. I was like, “What are you doing?” …She said because it was what she learnt in school. It’s good she’s learning but she can’t go around doing that to everyone. Some people are going to take that offensive… I know she going to struggle. She comes home and she watches TV. That’s where a lot of your thoughts come from, oh, they’re going to junior prom, they’re going to prom, they’re wearing dresses. Commercials, clothing commercials, Hannah Montana, she loves Hannah Montana, look how she dresses. So I know she’s going to have some problems, some hurdles.”

Kamilah explained what happens to some of these Muslim youth who leave their insulated communities at Islamic schools and enter mainstream universities. She has observed significant challenges and conflicts in identity development for these young men and women when they are confronted with mainstream American environments.

“It’s sad like these kids, it’s like K-12 and then all of a sudden they’re thrown into college. And some of them just end up in colleges only sticking with their
kind. Or some of them go the other end, they’re like I just never want to see a Muslim ever again, and they almost fall into that pool of... we don’t like Muslims.”

Communities impose gendered expectations. Similar to findings in the existing research (Hasan, 2000; 2009; Hasnat, 1998; Naber, 2005; Leonard, 2003; Sarroub, 2001; 2005; Sirin & Fine, 2008; Zaal, Salah & Fine, 2007), many of my informants were very critical of their Muslim communities for imposing gendered expectations which restrict women’s involvement in religious, social, and professional activities. Many of the women expressed frustration about the ongoing existence of sexism in the community, which in turn negatively impacts their community involvement. Hafsah, who has been working at her local mosque more recently, shared two incidents where she was harassed by a man and a woman because she did not fit into their prescribed role for a Muslim woman. Hafsah continues to struggle with distinguishing her community’s mandates for women and her own understanding of gender in Islam.

“For example, I was holding a donation box and there was a problem in the mosque. So unfortunately men and women had to pray in the same area upstairs. Something happened...the space was limited, basically. This guy comes and yells at me, “You’re supposed to tell the men and women not to pray together!” He just yelled at me, and he was like, “This isn’t right!” And I’m like, instead of blabbing, why don’t you try to help me? And how one time this girl was saying, “Oh, you wear too much perfume. You know when you
wear perfume, that makes you an adulteress?”...I was mad at them. Like can you leave me alone? Just a lot of hypocritical things people say and do, Muslims, that I was struggling with. And I was actually considering not wearing a hijab because of the criticism I would get and some of the things they would say.”

Some of the women gave examples of their own efforts to increase equitable practices in their Muslim communities. Kamilah is trying to give women in her Muslim community more access to Muslim leaders.

“Or even for example just in our meeting today I was addressing the fact that we have a huge (Muslim leader) coming, starting in December, and I was kind of talking about how it’s always the guys who get to know (him) and bond with him because they’re playing sports with him and stuff like that... And I was saying how the sisters need time with (him) to get to know him on a personal level, it’s not fair blah, blah, blah. And they’re just like, “Yeah you’re right, we’ll do something.”

For some of the women, the gendered expectations are not part of Islam, but the consequence of convoluted religion and culture, which has been elaborated on in earlier themes. Aisha agrees that there is “Indian cultural baggage” which dictates “how a girl should be” but she also stated that current Islamic scholarship, independent of culture, is lacking the feminist perspective that can make positive and empowering changes for Muslim women. Aisha wants to be a part of that change.
“I also am interested in what I’m going to do for study hopefully insha’Allah (God willing) in the future, to focus on women’s issues and how certain modern women issues need to be relooked at. I know there’s not a lot, I don’t know if I’m making a blanket statement, but first of all the Islamic scholarship has gotten very poor, recently... And so there’s not a lot of critical thought or progress going on... And also there’s a dearth in Islam of female perspectives that’s going to be recognized and appreciated by a large portion of Muslims, or what you would consider quote unquote traditional, I don’t want to use that phrase. But sometimes when you have these Muslim authorities or whatever, academics who are saying certain things about Islam, they might have a slightly feminist perspective or whatever, they’re kind of sidelined a little in just general Islamic thought. So I want to study further, ok what is going on here, can we necessarily sideline them? ...And there’s also the sort of prejudice of Muslims themselves about women going and doing these things. And even amongst women, oh that’s just too masculine or whatever.”

**Segregation in the community.** In the existing literature, there are Muslim American youth who have recognized and criticized racism and segregation in the Muslim communities (Leonard, 2003; Sirin & Fine, 2008; Zaal, Salah & Fine, 2007). Some of the women in my study also discuss these problems in their own local communities, which serve to divide communities, disrupt communication, and actively exclude some groups from participation in the community. However, they point out that there is progress in this area, especially in larger, more prominent
Muslim cultural centers where explicit efforts are made to welcome Muslims from diverse nationalities and cultures. Kamilah discussed three Muslim communities she knows well. Kamilah criticized two of the communities which feature a great deal of segregation based on culture and race. As a young woman who puts her Muslim identity first as part of a transnational Muslim youth movement, she is frustrated by cultural and racial barriers which prevent a true community practice of Islam. In the third, larger community, she has encountered a progressive movement of Muslim young people who are also focused on practicing an inclusive Islam in America.

“So Alhamdulillah (Praise be to God), I think this is less of a problem with my generation just because those of us that grew up here, Muslim Americans, we kind of don’t differentiate as much. With you being Indo-Pak and you being Arab, or African American and whatever …. But with our parents, that’s still a big thing. I see it so much. I grew up in (City) and so the (City) mosque is a predominately Arab mosque. There’s maybe two Pakistani families. But even for them to come to the masjid and feel like they fit in, it’s a bit tough. Because then you’ll find that in the masjid, they’re speaking Arabic only, for example. Or you’ll have that lonely convert in the corner who’s not able to assimilate so well because of the cultural barriers. Same thing with the mosque that I go to now in (City)…There’s a huge Indo-Pak community, but it also now has a huge Arab community. But you’ll see the Desi ladies sit on one side and the Arab ladies sit on the other and they each speak their own language. And then the kids you know we’re all sitting together in our own
section. And sometimes we look and we’re like what a shame! And I understand it’s human nature to kind of be with people you know... I think it’s kind of sad for example my mom will know this lady for years and years and will know her by face, but she won’t ever know her name. So they don’t get to know each other, which is a bit sad.”

University Muslim student groups have many internal challenges. Many of the young women I interviewed participate in the Muslim student groups at their universities and in some cases, they have leadership roles. For many of the women, their Muslim student groups are a positive source of support and community and for some, it is the first time that they have access to other Muslim youth. While a Muslim community in college is important to many of the women, several reported problems with the student groups, which have limited their involvement with the groups. Problems in the groups revolve around sexism and racism. These problems at the university level reflect problems discussed above at the larger community level.

The women at the co-educational institutions described limited space to pray for women and limited opportunities to participate in events. Additionally, they noted that few women participate in the group, which results in increased isolation for the small group of women members. These shortages result in women’s disengagement from the Muslim groups, which otherwise can be both a source of support and shared religious and social activities. Faridah described her experience with the Muslim student group at her university. She did state that there have been small improvements in the last few years, likely due in part to her leadership role in the group.
“In the beginning, it was... because the way it’s traditionally set up is like there’s a circle of guys in the middle and then right behind them a circle of girls. And it’s the same conversation going on, or sometimes it just be like one big circle. But when it was just like men and then me, I felt like I was almost drawing attention to myself and I didn’t know if I like that necessarily. And then there came a time when I was just like sitting almost, so where it’s held it’s in the other space... So there’s the enclosed area almost for women’s prayer and I would sit in the back and listen there just so I wasn’t seen almost. I was like forget this, so I stopped going. But this year it’s been a little better. Like there are more girls...But part of me wishes that there was some kind of like strong support group, but I think (University) lacks that. If I were to think of, you know if I want to go to the masjid down the street and I want somebody to go with, I wouldn’t know who to go with, or if I do it would be a bunch of guys, which I don’t know how thrilled they’d be about that.”

Another deterrent to participating in university Muslim student groups is racism. Sana compared the very different Muslim student groups she encountered at the two universities she attended during her undergraduate education. At the first university, despite her strong interest in working closely with other Muslim students, she stopped participating in the student group due to the racism and exclusion she witnessed. She described that it was a predominately South Asian Muslim group; non-South Asians were sent a clear message that they were not welcome through racist comments and the use of inaccessible South Asian languages. In contrast, the
second university Sana attended was inclusive of diverse Muslim students and focused on Islam, not specific cultures.

“I was at a school, I went there being like okay, I want to be part of the (Muslim student group) and so I went there and it was very cultural and I hate to say it, I just felt like people didn’t have as sophisticated understanding of Islam at all and so for them, it was just cultural. They were to hang out and it was completely South Asian dominated to the point that like there were a couple of Hindus and Sikhs that hung out with the (Muslim group) crowd and the non-South Asian Muslim students didn’t feel comfortable coming to the (Muslim group) and that really upset me...Also what bothered me was that anyone that was not South Asian who was a part of that clique, they had to give something up. Just for example, they, people would use the “n” word and there were a couple of black students who were Muslim who would hang with this group and they would be like “Do you mind that we said that? Ok good.” So the few people who were not South Asian were expected (to tolerate)...saying what you wanted was more important that being ethical and in a...Muslim environment, you never compromise those things.”

A few of the women also discussed the issue of Muslim student groups engaging in un-Islamic practices, including smoking, drinking, and dating. These behaviors are a strong deterrent for those women who are seeking out a safe and comfortable space to learn about and practice their religion. Kamilah, Faridah, and Sana all expressed shock and disappointment when they each discovered that their
Muslim student groups engaged in un-Islamic practices. These practices made them feel uncomfortable and unsafe and they limited their ongoing involvement with the group. Luckily, all of them found other Muslim groups, either in the community or at the university, where they met others who were interested in devout, serious practice of their religion. Kamilah explained that this is an issue at many Muslim student groups.

“Even now for example you’ll have a (Muslim student group) and they’ll have a meeting and then they’ll all go to a shisha bar and smoke hookah or whatever. People do that, but if you are going to be the MSA president then that comes with responsibility. A lot of people don’t understand that. A lot of people think that as long as you can put an event together and you have good organizational skills and leadership skills...but that’s not what it’s about.”

**Hostile Schools and Neighborhoods Negatively Impact Muslim American Identity Development**

The literature review in chapter two highlights the increased harassment and violence towards Muslims in their schools and neighborhoods post-9/11. The range of threatening behavior ranges from subtle racist comments in the classroom to yelling and shouting in public to physical threats to individuals and their families. Muslim women are often subject to specific types of harassment, based on existing gendered stereotypes. Muslim women are perceived as foreign, un-American, oppressed, and submissive (Abu El-Haj, 2006; Afshar, 1994; Ahmed-Ghosh, 2004, 2006; Cainkar, 2009; Naber, 2005; Rehman & Dziegielewski, 2004; Sirin & Fine, 2008; Sue & Sue,
For the women I interviewed, ongoing harassment and violence is a significant concern. The threatening behavior they have witnessed negatively impacts their identity development and psychological wellbeing.

**Harassment in public schools.** In the years following 9/11, many of the young women I interviewed experienced harassment from peers in middle and high school. In some cases, teachers also contributed to the hostile environment, by ignoring the harassers or expressing their own stereotypes about Muslims in the classroom. The resulting negative environment in the school was reflective of the overall US society, especially in the five to ten years after 9/11 when my informants were still in school (Abu El-Haj, 2006; Afshar, 1994; Ahmed & Ezzedine, 2009; Fine, 1992; Haque, 2004; Naber, 2005; Opotow, 2004; Sirin & Fine, 2008; Zine, 2001). However, unlike adults, these young women were required to attend school and therefore did not have the option to avoid those environments that they found threatening. For many of the women I interviewed, this has resulted in the belief that they must tolerate some amount of hostility and harassment in their daily lives.

Taliya, like many others, talked casually about name-calling and inappropriate questions she heard often at school.

“*And besides that and the substitute teacher calling my name out, there have been several incidences of being called a terrorist and stuff like that in (state), but other than that, compared to what people had to go through here on the mainland, compared to that, I feel lucky not to have lived here during that time period. There was some hate thing going on, but I didn’t think it was that*
significant...towards me, towards any Muslim in (state)...In general, there were teachers who I questioned if they really hated me and there were strong Catholics and I understand and there were people who had died and I understand why they would have that kind of hate in their heart.”

For Sofia, hearing these kinds of negative comments has become so commonplace that she tolerates racially- and religiously-driven insults from her friends.

“Even now, people make jokes, she’s the Pakistani, she’s the one with the bombs and the terrorists, they’re my friends, they’re making jokes because they have heard this stuff before, so I just play off of what they say.”

**Feeling “lucky.”** Despite the fact that almost all of the women shared incidents of being threatened and feeling unsafe, many of the women described “feeling lucky” that their own experiences of harassment were minimal compared with the overall Muslim population in the US. This is again a demonstration of how much these women have to tolerate harassment in their lives. Additionally, separating their own experiences in their region, school, or neighborhood from the overall hostile US environment may help them feel safer or maintain their optimism about most Americans. Furthermore, as Faridah explained, by accepting and expecting harassment, my informants cope better with their negative experiences; they do not surprise them.

“I mean it’s terrible. I guess you just have accepted that these terrible things happen. You know there was a woman a few years back who went to pick up
her kids from the bus stop and somebody murdered her on the way. And you just… these terrible things happen and I know that they’re out there. It’s almost more surprising that terrible things haven’t happened to me as much than me almost feeling bad for her. It’s unfortunate, that’s almost become the norm. I feel almost lucky that I haven’t been tormented or made fun of too much. I mean there definitely have been experiences…”

**Hostility threatens safety and limits freedom.** My informants have experienced a range of negative behaviors including verbal threats, physical threats, name-calling, and inappropriate questions and comments, often based on stereotypes. All of these behaviors have the power to make one feel unsafe. For the women I interviewed, given how often they experience these behaviors, they feel most unsafe due to explicit threats. Hafsah shared a story about an overt threat she received from a school peer.

“There was also this boy who would bother me on Instant Messenger, he would send me stuff like “terrorist! terrorist!” He thought it was funny, but it really wasn’t funny in the end. One day, he passes over a dictionary to me. It has the word terrorist highlighted in it. I wasn’t angry, I was just annoyed. But then one day, I was getting on the train to go to school and he shouts in from of everyone, a ton of people n the train, “She’s a terrorist! That girl’s a terrorist!” Everyone just looks at me. It was humiliating…Well my mom called the school and he actually got suspended. I was kind of scared because after he got suspended he was threatening to get people to hurt me. So my mom used to always pick me up after school. From freshman year to
11th grade my mom would pick me up after school just because I didn’t want to take the train and deal with people.”

For Hafsah and many others, threats to their safety also limit their freedom. As she explained, she was restricted from taking the train because she felt unsafe. Her right to the same transportation as her peers was diminished by harassment and violent threats. Faridah shared that her sister’s and mother’s freedoms were limited immediately after 9/11 because they feared physical violence as veiled Muslim women. For weeks, they left their home as little as possible. She also shared that there are still times that she stays in her house because she fears similar attacks.

“Right away. My mom was actually, when 9/11 happened she was at the mall. She had no idea what was going on, but she was saying how she felt like everyone was staring at her from that moment. And this was probably like 9am that morning. And people were like PLO, PLO and like starting at her and pointing at her almost, and she had no idea what was going on... Yeah, she wore hijab at the time. And it was, although nothing terrible had happened, it was a lot of preventative action that was taken. Like my mom and sister would leave the house very minimally, just what was necessary...

Um, actually the most unsafe I felt was at the 10 year anniversary, just a month ago. I was almost afraid that everyone... just like those sentiments of anger come back to people. So that weekend I tried to not leave just because you never know. Although most people don’t have these crazy ideas, but you just never know. I mean my mom, I was talking to my mom, and my dad never
Feeling excluded. Routine harassment and threats of danger and violence serve to morally exclude Muslim Americans from full participation as citizens in the US (Abu El-Haj, 2006; Ahmed-Ghosh, 2004, 2006; Brah, 1994; Cainkar, 2009; Malek, 2009; Opotow, 2004; Opotow, Gerson & Woodside, 2005; Rehman & Dziegielewski, 2004; Said, 1978; 2001; Sirin & Fine, 2008; Zaal, Salah & Fine, 2007). As described in existing research, the women in my study are acutely aware that others perceive them as foreign and un-American. They described the struggle of reconciling their strong American identities with the realization that others feel they neither belong nor deserve the same civil rights. Faridah shared a story of an encounter with an older woman who yelled at Faridah and her father about how women should be treated. Faridah was wearing a scarf and the woman made gross assumptions about her country of origin, culture, lifestyle, and family. It was a very disturbing incident for Faridah because she was confronted with how others see her as foreign and separate.

“And it was really weird because even though it really wasn’t a big deal, like I went home and I just like cried because I was like I can’t believe this just happened. Because I feel like I’ve become so comfortable in this society and I feel very American, I would say. I know some people do feel intimidated by Americans, like my mom for example. There are not that many non-Muslims that she is very close with. But I’ve become so comfortable, so when she was
affiliating me with whoever they are (terrorists, foreigners, groups who oppress women), it was very disappointing and it really upset me. But then again, I think those are some things that make you stronger. And they only prepare you better for if there’s a next time, hopefully there isn’t...Like I almost wish I was able to come up with something to... like I almost want to make her almost hear my voice, look I don’t know who they is, but I am not they. Like I am here, I am now, I am us.”

Veiling increases harassment. Most of my informants practice veiling and therefore are subject to increased harassment due to their visible marker of Islam. Sofia, who wears the veil occasionally, reported that harassment increases when she does cover her head. Not only does veiling make women more noticeable and more identifiable as Muslims, it also elicits specific stereotypes. Muslim women who veil are considered oppressed, uneducated, submissive, and subordinate, along with the pervasive notion that they are linked to terrorism (Brah, 1994; Cainkar, 2009; Leonard, 2003; Peek, 2002; 2003; Sirin & Fine, 2008). Zeynab described an interaction with a school peer, in which he made assumptions about her based on her veil. As the only Muslim student in her high school that wore a veil, Zeynab’s peers held many negative stereotypes about her.

“I was the token Muslim, yeah. There were other Muslims before me, but I was the first hijabi in my school’s history though, so I was definitely their token Muslim. They would even put a lot of pictures of me in the paper to show that they’re welcoming of everyone. ..He (school peer) basically asked
me why I was wearing this even though I was living in the US and I have my own freedom, and no one can control me, and he went on and on about how this was a free country. And I was sitting there thinking, “Oh my God, I never expected to meet anyone who would actually go around and say that, like someone who would believe that and would repeat it.” Not that America isn’t free, but that people are oppressed like that. So I just couldn’t respond to him. And another guy in my class told him to be quiet, that he was being rude to me...And I’m pretty sure he’s the one who tugged my scarf...Yeah, which is very weird because I thought I was one of the... very active in my high school. I was president of a ton of things, I ran a bunch of things, I would go on school trips, I’d be after school... Like if my parents were oppressing me, I wouldn’t be able to do that much. I wasn’t a very quiet person either. I didn’t look meek enough to be told that I was oppressed so I was just surprised.”

**Media and Government Have Morally Excluded Muslim Americans in the US**

Research over the past ten years demonstrates the profound negative impact of governmental policies and media representation on Muslim American youth. The media and government have had a significant role in morally excluding Muslim Americans from citizenship in their own country by denying them their basic civil rights. In earlier literature, many youth have been critical of their media for perpetuating stereotypes and their government for undue surveillance and detainment of Muslim citizens (Cainkar, 2009; Leonard, 2003; Sirin & Fine, 2008; Zaal, Salah & Fine, 2007).
In my study, the informants made few comments about their feelings on government and media. Overwhelmingly, they saw problems for Muslims originating at the community level. In some cases, they remarked that there have been improvements in the media portrayal of Muslims. Similarly, none of the women made any comments about being monitored or watched by local police or government. This was in sharp contrast to existing literature in which surveillance and threats to one’s privacy have been a significant concern for Muslim Americans. Furthermore, my informants did not make connections between the harassment and violence in their schools and neighborhoods and the governmental policies and media coverage which implicitly condone these actions. There are a few possible reasons for my informants’ divergent perspectives. There have been many positive changes after 9/11, including increased education and outreach to the larger US society by the Muslim American community (Leonard, 2003). Many of my informants are involved in these efforts. As such, there may be a more balanced depiction of Muslims in the media and a more accurate understanding of Muslims among non-Muslim Americans. On the other hand, there continue to be governmental policies that limit Muslim Americans’ rights in the US, but they may receive less attention in the media. My informants may have less exposure to information on what is happening in their government (Kaleem, 2012; Lewis, 2012; President Obama, 2012). Despite the minimal focus on media and government in the interviews, significant comments were shared by my informants, discussed here.
**Ethnogenesis of Muslims.** Many of my informants shared their frustration about the ethnogenesis of Muslims in the US after 9/11. Noor, like others, was able to reflect on the process of ethnogenesis with clarity and awareness. Her comments are a clear indicator of her significant study and thought on the issue.

“I don’t know. I guess because after 9/11, people sort of made us into like a group of our own. Whereas before it was just Indian people, Bengali people, it was a bunch of South Asians and they might have felt excluded based on being South Asian, but no one really knew what your religion was, and I feel like there wasn’t that much awareness about Islam in the first place in American. But then after 9/11 all the headlines... you know even the positive ones, it was like Muslims condemn 9/11. But even when you make a headline like that, you’re making it seem as if Muslims are a separate group and it needs to be acknowledged that they’re condemned, like why wouldn’t we condemn 9/11. You’re not going to see a headline that says Jews condemn 9/11. So even stuff like that it forced us to be more self-aware of our identity and not just identify as South Asians but identify as Muslims. Yeah I think that was definitely a big game changer.”

My informants also noted that they are not only clustered with all Muslims in the US, but often clustered with the “Muslim terrorists” portrayed in the media. For my informants, this has resulted in significant inconveniences due to the practice of veiling, their last names, and their countries of origin, as epitomized by their experiences at the airport. They have also struggled with feelings of anger and shame...
from a young age. Developmental stage at the time of 9/11 has influenced the women’s reactions to media and government. As preteens, some described confusion, fear, and internalized shame due to their limited ability to understand how the media manipulates popular opinion about Islam. Others shared that they were angry at the media coverage during 9/11 because they were well aware of the increased challenges it would bring for the Muslim community. Hafsa shared the ongoing impact of 9/11 on her life, which reflects the significant influence of the media and government.

“The only thing really is when we’d go to airports they’d hold us back for a bit, but other than that nothing… I mean, it’s not a big deal to me just because I understand the situation. I mean it sucks, but I’m willing to do whatever it takes to ensure the safety of other Americans. Because honestly there is a situation going on, and unfortunately I’m linked to those people in a way. It’s no one’s fault…and the only thing we can really do is comply with it diplomatically just to let them know that hey we’re just like you, we’re concerned about safety as well…

I was in the 7th grade, so maybe 12 or 13? When I heard about it, I was really confused. I was like, what’s happening?…When people on the news said they did it for Islam, I was like what? My Dad’s Muslim, he barely even raises his voice…People probably assume we’re all a part of organizations like that. And I was just really ashamed of being called a Muslim and the things that people would assume about me and my family. I didn’t tell people I was Muslim until I got to college and I joined the (Muslim student group), so that
was when I was comfortable about my identity being out there. And ever since that incident happened, I tried to keep a distance from the identity. And I tried to fit in more to mainstream society and blend in...

Um, I think it’s changed in the sense that they’re starting to come to terms with the fact that we’re normal people. But if you watch Fox News sometimes, some of the shows on there, some of their speakers do try to make it seem as if we have ulterior motives when we try to appear normal. So I feel like some people might have lingering perceptions that we’re ultimately going to be up to no good in the end.”

**Anger.** My informants expressed anger at the events of 9/11, both the perpetrators of the attacks and the resulting changes in the US landscape. In many cases, the expression of anger was immediate and visceral in the interviews. Kamilah was not hesitant to share her feelings.

“Yeah, oh gosh yeah. Because I just saw it as how dare these people damage the reputation of Islam so bad and how dare they in the name of God and in the name of Islam do something so horrible. It should be self-explanatory that Islam is a religion of peace, and it’s sad that we have to sort of prove otherwise. But, Alhamdulillah, I think as I got older I realized that that’s my mission in life, to convey Islam with utmost clarity, that’s the mission statement. So Alhamdulillah it keeps me busy.”
Aisha’s anger impacted her identity development. Like many others, she struggled with the rejection of Muslims in the US. She handled her feelings of anger and confusion by rejecting the mainstream US society around her at a young age.

“Yeah, it did. So before 9/11, like I didn’t really see... I knew that I was different because I was also living in (State) and it was primarily white and there were some instances of racism, but I didn’t really think that my Muslim identity would ever be viewed so negatively. So when September 11th happened, I remember my mom saying, “oh no this is going to mean like a backlash against Islam and Muslims”...And then later on I realized that, as I started to see, obviously in the media and people’s reactions because of the media portrayal towards Islam and Muslims. Teachers might have, a lot of my teachers actually in high school, like the history teachers when they’re speaking about Islam, or the sociology teachers, very kind of negative. So then I don’t know whether I was just going through a phase or whether I was going to go through this phase even if September 11th hadn’t happened, but I started becoming more critical of America and separating myself more from being American.”

**Complicated stereotypes.** My informants demonstrated a nuanced understanding of specific media stereotypes about Muslim women. Although they do not believe that the stereotypes are reflective of Muslim American women, they are aware of cultural norms and governmental laws in some Arab and South Asian countries that oppress and restrict women. They disapprove of the stereotypical
representation of Muslim women and the religion of Islam in general, but they are critical of national policies in Muslim-majority countries. Noor explained her perspective on this complicated issue.

“And I’ve always been a very logical person so, I know personally I’ve also...had somewhat of an issue with I mean there are in Muslim countries, women aren’t really treated that well. And I know you can argue about, and I know definitely in the West there’s a bit of a stereotype in the media, which I’m totally against. But at the same time, those stereotypes are based on something. You know like in Saudi Arabia, women aren’t allowed to drive and there’s no way you’re going to get around that. So there are certain issues, because I do consider myself to be a feminist, that bother me there. So in the back of my mind that’s also bothering me I guess.”

Hijab has a Diverse Range of Practice and Meaning

In chapter two, I summarize the existing literature on hijab. I review the many ways and the many reasons why women practice hijab. The diversity among my informants’ comments reflects the existing research. However, my informants do not endorse a number of reasons for their practice of hijab which exist in the literature. Research shows that Muslim women may wear a veil as a critique of Western practices, specifically revealing clothing and promiscuity (Ajrouch, 2004). When discussing the differences between their practices, none of my informants were critical of non-Muslim Americans and American culture. Additionally, there are Muslim scholars who actively oppose the practice of the veil (Hasan, 2000; Hasnat,
My informants, including those who do not practice veiling, talked about an inclusive, diverse practice of hijab, free of judgments. Finally, there are a small number of research studies that discuss veiling as a means for distancing women from the mainstream US society (Ajrouch, 2004; Cole & Ahmadi, 2003; Sarroub, 2001, 2005; Sirin & Fine, 2008). None of the women I interviewed desired distance from non-Muslims or American culture. Furthermore, none of them expressed a pressure from family or community to establish any distance.

**Religious assertion.** In the existing literature, Muslim scholars argue for diverse interpretations of hijab based on religious texts, community, Islamic school, and national origin. Regardless of interpretation, all of my informants practice hijab as a religious assertion. Like most Muslim American women, this is the first and foremost reason for their practice (Ahmed-Ghosh, 2004; 2006; Ali, 2005; Chaudhry, 2005; Cole & Ahmadi, 2003; Hallak & Quina, 2004; Hasan, 2000; Leonard, 2003; Seggie & Sanford, 2010).

Those of my informants who interpret hijab as a head scarf or veil stated that it brings them comfort, freedom, and closeness with their religion. Many of my informants began veiling at puberty, either in middle school or high school, which is in accordance with Islamic tradition. Veiling has influenced their religious practice and their identity formation as it relates to their daily interactions and responsibilities. Kamilah explained that veiling helps her maintain her religious duties related to modesty and cross-gender interactions.
“I’m glad you said modesty because a lot of people reduce hijab to a cloth on your head you know? I wore it in the 6th grade and at the time when you’re in 6th grade it’s like oh I’m covering my head, you know my body. That’s all it meant because that’s all you understand. But then you grow up and you realize that it translates to being modest in your actions. It’s sort of like the way you interact with the other gender. I told you I grew up a tomboy so I always had guy friends but it was sort of a limit or reminder for me that I’m only going to get so close to them.”

Despite harassment and unwanted attention that the veil brings for my informants, they cite their religious duty as a priority and find inner peace from their observance of God’s will. Aisha expressly stated that veiling is simply a religious assertion and resents the questions, attention, assumptions, and harassment she encounters in her daily activities.

“So the decision, I actually wore it maybe three years after 9/11 and it was just spiritually motivated. Like I just felt like I wanted to just wear it to please God. It wasn’t like political. It wasn’t identity formation. In fact I was nervous about it because I thought oh how am I going to be perceived by people? …It’s just you see the difference in how people’s initial perceptions of you are. Like oh you’re dressed very differently than the normal average American…foreign, and I work at a gas station because my parents own a business and I work behind the counter, so I get a lot of customers talking to me. Some of them obviously were very rude, but some of them are nice. And
people ask me why I wore it, like respectfully sometimes. So I just explained why I wore it, and they would ask me where are you from? Like blah, blah, blah...so many times."

Similar to Aisha, Taliya delayed wearing a veil for many years because she feared the unwanted attention and the stereotypes. She explained that, despite these fears, she began veiling as a religious duty. Over time, she has found peace in veiling because it completes her Muslim identity.

“In a way, it made me come to terms with my Muslim identity, I am a Muslim within me, in HS, I was a Muslim on the inside, but it felt wrong because I wasn’t wearing the hijab. I guess I felt like a hypocrite. I would pray and tell other people about it and a lot of people would ask me why I don’t wear hijab. It wasn’t Muslims who asked me, it was Western people, it was my friends who asked me. I felt ashamed when I would tell them that I just didn’t feel like it. Once I put it on, I felt like there wasn’t a dissonance anymore between my identity and who I am, it was connected. And it was really empowering to know, I mean the stereotypes are bad, but in a way, it’s a challenge and I like challenges. It’s empowering in that way.”

Like many Muslim American women, Noor and Sofia shared that veiling is not the right choice for them (Ahmed-Ghosh, 2004; Hasan, 2000, 2009; Hasnat, 1998; Sirin & Fine, 2008; Zaal, Salah, & Fine, 2007). They believe that hijab has a religious basis but they practice by wearing modest, Western-style clothing. For Noor, her parents’ opinions on hijab influence how she practices, but its fundamental value is
dictated by Islam. As a religious practice, Noor is critical of the politicizing of hijab by Muslim groups and countries.

“I really don’t think it’s a big deal if someone walks around in a knee length skirt or something, but that was always frowned on in my family. So I’ve been sort of figuring out where I stand on that….Because (my father) just doesn’t believe that (veiling is) obligatory and he feels that people just wear it for the sake of wearing it and that it really has no Islamic basis, which I personally think it does. I think it has a documented basis, and whether or not you choose to accept that is up to you…People have similar opinions as my father, so I’m very comfortable with women wearing hijab, but my dad would also flip out if he saw me in a skirt that was like five inches above my ankle, even three inches. So I’m not like that either. I think I fall into a middle area where I think modesty is important but I do feel that the importance can be overblown sometimes, especially because we were discussing in my (political science) class how political Islamist groups spend so much energy on “Wear the hijab! Wear the hijab!” and they don’t focus on other issues that are also important to women.”

Sofia explained that her practice of hijab is flexible and conditional. She believes that modest clothing fulfills her religious duty, but she veils for community events, large Muslim gatherings, or going to the mosque, as a way to honor and respect her family.
“Ok, to me, basically, like, I don’t do it (veil) because it was not how I was brought up, but in certain times, in namaze (prayer) or someone older is in the house, I do it out of respect. But modesty is a big deal for me as well because I don’t like advocate walking around half naked. If you’re comfortable doing that, I’m not going to say anything, it’s you, not me, nobody going to stop you. But for me, I show how much I want to show, it’s up to me. If I am in front of my uncles, my father, it matters, you have to be a little modest, but with my mother and even my brothers, it doesn’t matter, it’s situational. It’s respect, it’s cultural, but when I am going to school or work, I’m not half naked, just because I am not covering my head, it’s crazy for you to think I’m not Muslim, that’s basically what it is for me.”

Community and family practice of hijab. As stated above, how women practice hijab is influenced by their communities and their families. As Noor explained above, her parents’ opinions about the practice of veiling strongly deters her from wearing a headscarf. For other informants, their own practice of veiling is reflective of their mothers and older sisters. Similarly, pervasive practices in a strong, close-knit Muslim community influence women’s decision to veil. For my veiled informants, their headscarves bring a sense of belonging and connection with other Muslims. Hafsah explained the benefits of her recent decision to begin veiling. For her, belonging to the Muslim community is more important than connecting with peers at her university.
“They all wear it. So it kind of rubbed off on me. I like it and it’s cool when I see other Muslims. They’re always like “As Salamu Alaykum.” I do feel kind of isolated from the other people in the law school in a way, but I don’t let it get to me because at the end of the day it was my decision and I know why I’m doing it.”

Distance from the Western practices. Like many young Muslim American women, some of my informants veil to demonstrate their distance from Western practices (Chaudhry, 1998, 2005; Haque-Khan, 1997; Mahmood, 2005). The veil is an expression of their womanhood, which gives them confidence and freedom. It is easier to have appropriate interactions with men. The interactions remain professional and respectful because of the veil. For these women, veiling is not meant as a critique of American women, who are often their friends and peers. Faridah shared how veiling has increased her confidence and has helped maintain appropriate friendships with men.

“I guess initially I put it on because it was a religious fulfillment. I didn’t know anything else of it at the time; I mean I was only 12. But I think with it came a lot of other things that I guess I didn’t necessarily expect it to. Confidence has definitely been one of those things I didn’t necessarily do it for, but it just kind of came with the package. I feel confident when I’m talking to males that they’re not talking to me because of how I look. They’re talking to me because they, you know whether it’s compatibility in personalities or something like that. So it’s definitely... that has definitely been a plus.”
Resistance and education. The existing research shows that some Muslim American women choose to veil as a public statement about their practice of Islam. The veil is a symbol of independence, strength, and feminism. All while veiling, they attend college; take leadership roles in their communities and club organizations; enter professional careers; and participate in education and activism (Haque-Khan, 1997; Sirin & Fine, 2008; Zaal, Salah, & Fine, 2007). These women make conscious decisions to defy stereotypes about Muslims. They want people to ask questions and they want to educate others about Islam. For the sake of education, these young women do not mind being singled out to speak about global Islam and the political climate in the US and in Muslim countries. Overwhelmingly, my informants reveal the tension between their own understanding of hijab and the pervasive stereotypes about veiled Muslim women in the US. Kamilah talked about her responsibility as a veiled Muslim woman to defy stereotypes that she is oppressed, submissive, and foreign.

“But wearing hijab also meant that I had a responsibility especially post-9/11. That happened in my 9th grade, so that meant that all of a sudden here I am waving a flag, I’m Muslim, like we’re in the spotlight. And I’m expected to sort of know how to handle it, know how to talk, know how to represent Islam when people ask questions like oh why do Muslims do that? So a lot of us had to grow up early. That’s actually why a lot of us became so active in our community...I decided to be like eco-friendly and rode my bike to work all the time and it was amazing how many looks I got. Just like wearing a hijab,
being on a bike, having a helmet...It’s probably like comical. And then I’d always have my cell phone and scarf, which people find hilarious. I think it’s really funny. So just like being on a bike and doing all those things people are just like oh my gosh. But I just think it shows that hey I’m not confined to my home, confined to like a kitchen. I’m going to work and I care about the environment.”

For many Muslim women, the veil is also a demonstration of their resistance to public sentiment about Islam. By wearing a clear marker of Islam, they show their pride and defiance to other US citizens and to members of their community (Afshar, 1994; Ali, 2005; Sirin & Fine, 2008; Zaal, Salah, & Fine, 2007). For Zeynab, veiling is a political statement. She wants to show others how proud she is of her religion. In doing so, she can confront stereotypes and educate others.

“To me, half of it is a political statement, sometimes... Yeah I wear a scarf sometimes... I don’t think every woman has to wear a scarf in Islam. I’ve studied that a lot and thought about it a lot and I think modesty can be different in each culture and in each community. And I think that’s what Islam wants, us to be modest within your community.... But I wear it here for modesty and because I want to tell people that I’m Muslim, not oppressed and proud of it. Yeah, so it is half a political statement for me.... No I love explaining it. I love explaining it. I’m a big fan of repelling stereotypes and going around making people understand things, so I’m definitely more than willing to explain it over and over again to anyone who asks me.”
Muslim American Woman are Ambassadors for their Communities

Recent research shows that young Muslim American women participate and lead education and outreach efforts to share Islam with the larger US community (Abu El-Haj, 2006; Ahmad & Szpara, 2003; Ali, 2005; Chaudhry, 2005; Hasan, 2000, 2004, 2009; Sirin & Fine, 2007, 2008; Zaal, Salah, & Fine, 2007). Due to the pervasive negative image of Islam in the US, young Muslim American women, including my informants, have sought out both formal and informal opportunities to educate their peers and teachers about Islamic practices, cultural traditions, and global perspectives on political Islam. As Kamilah shared, 9/11 was a catalyst for her participation in formal Muslim youth groups that focus on creating dialogues between Muslim Americans and non-Muslim Americans. Her comments show her passion for her duty to educate others and therefore create a safer society for Muslims.

“Alhamdulillah, I think as I got older I realized that that’s my mission in life. To convey Islam with utmost clarity, that’s the mission statement. So Alhamdulillah it keeps me busy...Yeah I mean, post- 9/11, I’m definitely doing a lot more, answering a lot more questions, doing a lot more talking, which before my friends would, they knew me as Muslim and knew that I pray and fast, but that’s about it. But all of a sudden, post-9/11 it’s like even if it’s just at work, everyone around me calling, sort as asking, they’re kind of curious...I feel like once 9/11 happened is when I went from being more... I used to be a lot quieter actually. I talked to my friends but I wasn’t outspoken or anything. And that’s why all of a sudden in 9th grade I was finding myself...
**doing a lot more public speaking, talking to groups and stuff. And it’s been that way since, so that’s a big change.**”

While some women engage in formal education opportunities like organizing rallies and events and inviting speakers to speak to their schools and communities, other women share Islam with their friends in informal conversations. These women are appreciative that others want to learn about Islam and they are enthusiastic to share and exchange traditions. Sofia loves to share Islam with her friends because she can explain that Islam is a peaceful religion focused on living a good, fulfilled life. This is in sharp contrast to the stereotypes about Islam that Sofia is confronted with in her life.

“I love it. I really love it. Honestly, I enjoying sharing it with them. It’s who I am and it’s something that’s very personal so if you see that in me and you ask about it, I’ll appreciate it so much more because you’re taking the time out to respect what we do...My friends will come over to my house, we have Mecca and Medina on the walls, and they’ll be like, “What’s that?” “Oh, you know, all Muslims try to strive to go there once in their lives...”

**Demonstrating empowerment.** Like many young Muslim American women, my informants use their own behaviors and actions as a means to challenge the stereotype of the oppressed and submissive Muslim woman, which is carried out in the media and news coverage (Sirin & Fine, 2008; Zaal, Salah, & Fine, 2007). Simply the act of speaking up is an education for the people they encounter in public spaces. In addition, these women confront the monolithic understanding of Islam as “foreign”
by visibly showcasing their American identities through their daily activities. These duties are clear in Faridah’s discussion of her hobbies.

“And I think that’s something that they almost don’t expect or the average American wouldn’t expect from a girl in a scarf. In high school I did track; I was pretty active in that. Which also when you think of a Muslim woman, you don’t think of someone in a jersey running on the track. That was something I was into…There wasn’t as many Muslims or people that were different, so sometimes you’d get looks. But usually it always ended up, you know you would kill them with kindness. You smile at them and they’ll smile back. But that was something I enjoyed just because I felt like I was breaking down those stereotypes. And that was part of the reason why I kept doing it, because I wasn’t the greatest runner or anything, but I felt like I was almost serving my religion and as well as serving America because that’s what America is all about, or what it should be all about… being able to be different.”

**Maintaining optimism.** Discussed both in the existing literature and in the earlier themes, there is a significant amount of harassment and hostility in the lives of young Muslim American women, including my informants. Despite the moral exclusion they see in their daily lives, many Muslim women approach their lives with optimism and recognize that there are some positive forces at work in the larger US society. For these young people, combating discrimination in their own lives through education helps them to imagine positive long-term change in the larger society (Abraham, 2005; Abu El-Haj, 2006; Sirin & Fine, 2007, 2008; Zaal, Salah, & Fine,
2007). Serving as ambassadors of Islam is a form of coping with the moral exclusion that these women face. By educating others, these women contribute to a more positive and inclusive US for everyone, especially Muslims. For Faridah, it is very rewarding to show others that Muslim Americans are just like non-Muslim Americans.

“You know at the end of the day if I have interacted with someone and it’s ended up positive, that’s almost like the greatest sense of reward to me. You know whether it’s just a conversation with someone in an elevator or something, it doesn’t have anything to do with talking about religion or being like actually Muslims aren’t like this, just talking about things that normal people talk about, almost brings us down to the same level. Like at the end of the day we’re both human. It’s not you’re this and I’m that; we’re both human and we can talk about human things. Because we probably share a lot more similarities than we do differences.”

Future goals. There is little existing research about how Muslim American women think about their futures in the context of a post-9/11 US. My informants’ career choices and future goals indicate that their duty as ambassadors has a significant influence on their future plans. Hafsah wants her future career to showcase that Muslim women can be educated and successful. In doing so, she hopes to be a role model to other Muslim women.
“I do want to be a figure someday just to inspire other Muslim women to take the initiative to get an education and to always strive to learn more about whatever it is they’re interested in.”

Noor sees her journalism career as a vehicle for educating the US about Islam on a national scale. She has already participated in making documentaries about Muslim Americans and the challenges they face in the US. Although she has had some pressure from family to pursue medicine, she has chosen journalism because she wants to make a positive change.

“So that was really a watershed moment for me, because a lot of the negative press that ends up happening is because people don’t understand Islam or they haven’t been raised with the same viewpoints. And I feel like that’s something I can contribute. So definitely Islam I feel is a big factor there because I feel I could have a big impact, and not to say that doctors don’t have a big impact. But I just know personally that I would be happier doing this. And we have so many Muslim doctors and we don’t have that many Muslim journalists...You know there isn’t that much research on Muslims in academic fields. And I think it’s up to us to provide that service. I probably would have been doing journalism either way because I love it, but it plays a big role that way.”

**Educating others is a burden.** In the ten years after 9/11, Muslim American women along with their communities have played a major role in changing common American sentiments about Islam and its followers. The responsibility of education
and outreach can be a burden for some women (Zaal, Salah, & Fine, 2007). A number of my informants shared that, while they love to provide a positive understanding of Islam to others, it is sometimes overwhelming to carry around the duty of ambassador. Kamilah reflected on her younger self, shortly after 9/11, who participated in many very public outreach efforts. The teenaged Kamilah was usually happy and proud to talk about Islam, but she occasionally had periods of sadness and anger.

“I remember at one point, maybe a year later or something, there was one day actually it was right in the middle of it, and I was just crying over it. I was like, I want to be a kid, I don’t want to give talks about it. But my mom just kind of like you know you do what you can, but this is unfortunately the situation that we’re in, you know? And I was just all of sudden angry because I don’t even know these people who claim they’re Muslims and do something and we pay the price.”

For Faridah, presenting her best self in order to project a positive image of Muslims is a duty she takes seriously. However, she hesitantly stated that the constant responsibility of behaving perfectly can sometimes be a burden.

“It is a lot of weight on your shoulders, sometimes. Sometimes you definitely have to question yourself and question your actions. And ask yourself is what I’m doing reflecting myself or do I want people to think this way of me or me as an American Muslim... It can be a burden, sometimes. Because sometimes you want to act I guess a certain way, or you want to do something. But you
feel like that would almost hurt the reputation of Muslims. I mean usually they weren’t crazy things. My parents, I give them credit, they raised me well. You know definitely sometimes it’s like oh I want to do this but I’m afraid that people will think of Muslims in a certain way, and therefore I probably shouldn’t do that.”

Sana shared that when she was younger, in the immediate aftermath of 9/11, she was eager to be a positive voice for Islam. As she has entered adulthood, she has realized that Islam and the associated politics and violence are complicated. She finds it difficult to distinguish herself and her community from terrorism activities, especially as they get closer to home. Educating others about Islam is just a reminder that terrorism in the name of Islam continues, along with negative consequences for both Muslim and non-Muslim Americans.

“At the time, I was happy to do it. I don’t remember being frustrated at the time and I think a lot of that is that I was so young. I think I would be much more stressed out about that now...And also, I think now, 9/11 was the first big thing that happened, but now there have been just so many incidents, like all this homegrown terrorism stuff. I think that if one event happens, you can be like, “Oh that’s not us, that’s the exception,“ but when it happens again and again and again and it happens closer to home, because we had two incidents very close to home in our community. It just becomes more and more exhausting and harder to separate yourself and I can be like, ok these people were Saudi, they were overseas, I don’t know anything about them, but this
person lived in the town next to me and he was American, how do I explain that? It becomes much more difficult to separate yourself.”

**Critique of Muslim communities.** Although all of my informants consider themselves ambassadors for American Islam, some of them were critical of their communities for maintaining a separation from the mainstream American society. For my informants, as Noor described, insular communities that keep a distance are not actively working to make a more positive image of Islam and in fact, reinforcing the stereotype that Muslims are not interested in being Americans.

“I would say a lot of the Muslims I have been with though, I feel like a lot of Muslims just end up being in clans together. They’re almost I guess like proving that stereotype. This is us and you’re them. So a lot of them will only stick with each other. And I find that a big flaw within the Muslim community. Like people are almost only willing to be with each other. Which I mean it’s good to have that strong bond, I guess. But I definitely think that if the Muslim community expects other people to, other people who aren’t familiar with Muslims, to come out of their shell and be open to the Muslim community, I think the Muslim community needs to start first and be willing to talk to other people. It doesn’t even have to be an interfaith like let’s only talk about religion. Just, you know, serve the American community as well, like volunteer at a local soup kitchen. It doesn’t have to be at the masjid. It’s great that there’s something, but it doesn’t have to be a close-knit community and I think a lot of people believe that unfortunately.”
Feminist Ecological Model

In the next section, I use the feminist ecological model to structure and support a contextual analysis of the themes. The feminist ecological model is multidimensional and includes four progressively distal spheres of influence on people’s lives: individual, micro, exo, and macro (Ballou, Matsumoto, & Wagner, 2002). It also includes additional levels that look at planetary/climatic conditions and time/history. I explore the following intersecting coordinates at various levels of the model: sex-gender, race-ethnicity, age, and class. This analysis uses the literature from the review in chapter two to provide context for each system of the model. The critical literature grounded in the lived experiences of Muslim women shapes all the levels of the model, while the mainstream psychological literature is discussed at the individual level.

**Planetary/Climate Conditions and Time/History.** The present study does not focus on how planetary/climate conditions impact Muslim American women and their communities. Interactions with the planet are not part of the narratives shared by my informants. Additionally, psychology literature, research, and theory largely ignore how the planet, climate, and environment interact with people and their psychological wellbeing. However, the conditions of the planet have a significant impact on the lives of individuals, including my informants. My informants and I are fortunate to live in a country relatively free of pollutants in the air and we have access to clean water, housing and nutritious food. Generally, we have abundant amounts of fuel and energy to power our lives, including our buildings and our cars. At the
planetary level, it is important to explore how and why Americans have access to the natural, precious commodities of Earth. Rich deposits of oil are found in the Arab world; specifically almost one fifth of the world’s proven oil reserves are in Saudi Arabia (CIA, 2011). How does our dependence on oil in the US impact our relationship with Saudi Arabia and its neighbors? How does drilling for oil and seeking alternative sources of energy like nuclear power and ethanol impact the health of our planet and our global community? Due to the fact that my informants and I are privileged enough that we are not impacted by these environmental factors in our lives, these topics were not raised in this study. However, these are significant questions and should be the focus of future interdisciplinary studies in psychology, sociology, environmental science, and political science.

The time/history level of the feminist ecological model is a significant part of this study. In terms of biographical time, this study explores how individuals experience significant life events and how they react to changes in their membership to dominant and non-dominant groups. For the Muslim American women in this study, one of the significant aspects of their identity development relates to the event of 9/11 and the resulting increased discrimination they have experienced. I also touch on historical time, which investigates how social and political forces influence normative standards for groups and institutions. One of the historical forces that has influenced the experience of Muslims in the US is their immigration history. The process, riddled with racially-driven discriminatory policies, established Muslims as part of a non-dominant, marginalized group as they settled in the US. Additional
historical factors are not explored in this study. For example, this study does not examine the origins of conflict between Muslims and Christians throughout the modern world. Historical events like the Crusades, colonization of South Asia and Africa, World War II, the establishment of Israel, and contemporary wars in the Arab world are not discussed in this study. Although they contribute to the moral exclusion of Muslims in the US today, they are beyond the scope of the present study. Again, these historical trends should be the focus of future interdisciplinary research.

**Macrosystem.** The macrosystem level focuses on worldviews, ideologies, values, and political, economic, and environmental forces. These forces develop based on institutions like government, educational systems, and religious organizations and shape the experiences of groups, communities, and individuals. Macrosystem forces lay the groundwork for the moral exclusion of Muslims discussed in the next section. Unfortunately, this study and psychology research, in general, do not explore the impact of macrosystem forces on the individual. Questions about power, money, resources, Empire, and Manifest Destiny are largely ignored in psychology. I also did not raise these questions with my informants, nor did they make statements that connected their own experiences with this level. Although beyond the scope of this study, the lack of macrosystem analysis is a detriment to this research. A very important unexamined research question focuses on who is benefitting from the moral exclusion of Muslim Americans. Does national discrimination of Muslims help bolster popular support for current US foreign policy in the Arab world and South Asia? Similarly, what are US interests in those parts of
the world? How does US dependence on oil influence decisions about Muslims in the US? Another unexamined area in the present study relates to the event of 9/11 itself. Although the defining event of this research, I do not discuss the actual event, its causes, and its global and domestic repercussions. As a student of psychology, I am not an expert in global political affairs. However, with some research in the area, questions arise about the impact US foreign policy throughout the 20th century on the events of 9/11. Without an open discussion about 9/11, it is impossible to completely understand the experiences of Muslim American women in the US today. However, critical discussions about 9/11 continue to be muted due to the increased conservative and nationalist attitudes in American society. Moreover, without these discussions, the moral exclusion of Muslims is exacerbated. Their dissent or any dissent is condemned and sidelined and their countries of origins are the subject of continued aggressive US foreign policy (Ahmad & Barsamian, 2001; Chomsky, 2001; Hiro, 2002; Said, 1997; Zinn & Arnove, 2002).

Although these questions arise at the macrosystem level, they influence the daily experiences of Muslim American women, including vital aspects of identity development. These young women struggle with the tensions between being American and accepting US hegemony around the world, especially in their families’ countries of origin. Regardless of how these young women resolve their struggle, they receive messages, as we all do, that there are serious and severe consequences for dissenting against US hegemony, at the personal, professional, and legal level. There is popular violence targeting those who dissent and government action preventing
dissent. Presently, in the US, there is a significant societal value placed on nationalism and patriotism, which directly benefits the US. Being American implies that the US provides protections and rights to its citizens, often at the expense of citizens of other countries. It creates distance and division between global people and results in exclusion of non-Americans and non-dominant American groups. In fact, the process of gaining US citizenship reflects disengagement with one’s country of origin. There is an emotional toll for immigrant families where there is US involvement and violence in their countries of origin or if they come from postcolonial countries. They struggle to manage their feelings about US foreign policy, as well as being targets for harassment and violence in the US. The present study used language reflecting being American without directly addressing this tension. Future studies can explore identity using a framework of Universal or World Citizens, as outlined by the United Nations, in which rights and protections are guaranteed to and deserved by all global people. Again, I recommend interdisciplinary research in this area to better understand the impact of macrosystem forces on Muslim Americans.

**Exosystem.** At the exosystem level, the impact of regional and national institutions, such as federal, state, and local government, school systems, professional groups, and religious institutions, is evaluated. It is often federal, state, and public policies and pervasive influence of the media that trickle down into the day-to-day interactions where Muslim American women experience discrimination.
Moral exclusion throughout history and post-9/11. The moral exclusion of Muslim Americans in the US is grounded in a history of racially-driven discriminatory government policies and practices during immigration and the establishment of communities and citizenship in the US and pervasive media stereotypes that Muslims are anti-American and violent. The media and government have reinforced the notion that there is an inherent clash between Arab and Muslim culture and mainstream US culture; driving a greater wedge between the two. This discourse has laid the groundwork for the 9/11 backlash against the Muslim American community (Abu El-Haj, 2006; Bilgrami, 2003; Blank, 1998; Cainkar, 2009; El-Amine, 2005; Huntington, 1993; Kozlovic, 2007; Leonard, 2003; Maira, 2010; Malek, 2009; Michalek, 1989; Opotow, 2004; Opotow, Gerson, & Woodside, 2005; Pomerance, 2009; Said, 1978; 1997; 2001; Shaheen, 2003; Sirin & Fine, 2008; Volpp, 2002; Zaal, Salah, & Fine, 2007).

The stories of the women I interviewed demonstrate that they experience moral exclusion in their daily lives. As described in existing research, the women in my study are acutely aware that others perceive them as foreign and un-American (Cainkar, 2009; Leonard, 2003; Sirin & Fine, 2008; Zaal, Salah, & Fine, 2007). In their answers to my questions, they described the struggle of reconciling their strong American identities with the realization that others neither feel they belong in the US nor deserve the same civil rights. Many of my informants shared their frustration about the ethnogenesis of Muslims in the US, which prevails after 9/11. My
informants also noted that they are not only clustered with all Muslims in the US, but often clustered with the “Muslim terrorists” portrayed in the media.

My informants’ comments reinforced that there is no inherent clash between Muslims and Americans and they embody the integration between the two in their daily lives. Many of them reported that they self-identify as Muslim Americans and that their Muslim and American identities are the most important to them. Some of the women described the ease with which they have blended their Muslim and American identities together from a young age, while others described a challenging journey to integration.

In those cases where women identified conflicts between their American and Muslim identities, the challenges are in their external environment. Some women experienced shame, embarrassment, and anger at a young age about being Muslim in a country where their American citizenship was questioned and they were subject to harassment and hostility. This conflict is not unique to my informants, but is reflected repeatedly in existing literature on Muslim American youth (Ahmed & Ezzedine, 2009; Hasnat, 1998; Sirin & Fine, 2007, 2008; Zaal, Salah, & Fine, 2007).

*Gendered impact of moral exclusion.* The pattern of Muslim immigration to the US has had a negative impact on popular attitudes towards Muslim women. Their dependent status, different dress, veiling, and the idea of the “other” perpetuate an exaggerated image of Muslim women as subordinate and oppressed. Post-9/11, misunderstood ideas about arranged marriage and polygyny and media coverage of the treatment of women in Islamic countries further enables the idea of Muslim
American women as foreign and threatening to American culture (Ahmed-Ghosh, 2004, 2006; Brah, 1994; Cainkar, 2009; Leonard, 2003; Rehman & Dziegielewski, 2004; Sirin & Fine, 2008; Sue & Sue, 2008; Zaal, Salah, & Fine, 2007). My informants, just like all Muslim American women, can easily list all stereotypes about themselves prevalent in the US: shy, oppressed, uneducated, and submissive. The women that I interviewed have been confronted with these stereotypes repeatedly in their lives, especially those who veil. In contrast to stereotypes about Muslim women, my informants identified a number of US cultural features that appeal to them, including the right to get the same educational opportunities as men and the freedom to practice a version of Islam that honors women. These gendered advantages enable Muslim American women to achieve successful careers, which may not be available to them in some Muslim-majority countries. My informants and Muslim American women across the country seek out opportunities to demonstrate that they are educated, successful, outgoing, and empowered (Sirin & Fine, 2008). Additionally, my informants were eager to relate that they feel just as comfortable at the mosque as they do among non-Muslim friends at school and at college without hiding or compartmentalizing any of their identities. These women are always both Muslim and American in each of their worlds and they display their Muslim American identity out loud.

My informants demonstrated a nuanced understanding of specific media stereotypes about Muslim women. Although they do not believe that the stereotypes are reflective of Muslim American women, they are aware of cultural norms and
governmental laws in some Arab and South Asian countries that oppress and restrict women. They disapprove of the stereotypical representation of Muslim women and the religion of Islam in general, but they are critical of national policies that discriminate against women in Muslim-majority countries.

Attitudes towards government. In a post-9/11 era, the US government has expanded its role in morally excluding Muslim Americans through domestic policies that have reversed civil rights for Muslim American citizens based on their race, country of origin, and religious affiliation. They signal to Americans that it is acceptable to act out against their Muslim neighbors and community members through violence, harassment, and discrimination (Cainkar, 2009; El-Amine, 2005; Sirin & Fine, 2008; Volpp, 2002).

Unlike Muslim youth in existing research, my informants made few comments about their feelings on government and media. In earlier literature, many youth have been critical of their media for perpetuating stereotypes and their government for undue surveillance and detention of Muslim citizens (Cainkar, 2009; Leonard, 2003; Sirin & Fine, 2008; Zaal, Salah & Fine, 2007). My informants remarked that there have been improvements in the media portrayal of Muslims. Similarly, none of the women made any comments about being monitored or watched by local police or government. This is in sharp contrast to existing literature in which surveillance and threats to one’s privacy were identified as a significant concern for Muslim Americans. Furthermore, my informants did not make connections between the harassment and violence in their schools and neighborhoods and the governmental
policies and media coverage which implicitly condone these actions. There are many possible reasons for my informants’ divergent perspectives. There have been many positive changes after 9/11. The Muslim American community has mobilized to provide education and outreach to the larger US society by the Muslim American community (Leonard, 2003). Many of my informants are involved in these efforts. As such, there may be a more balanced depiction of Muslims in the media and a more accurate understanding of Muslims among non-Muslim Americans. On the other hand, there continue to be governmental policies that limit Muslim Americans’ rights in the US, but they may receive less attention in the media. My informants may have less exposure to information on what is happening in their government at present (Kaleem, 2012; Lewis, 2012; President Obama, 2012). Additionally, the women I interviewed, all busy, young college students, may not connect their own negative experiences of discrimination and stereotyping with government policy. Despite minimal direct discussion of government policies, my informants did cite examples of institutional discrimination. Most commonly, they talked about hassles at the airport, including delays and undue “random” bag checks.

Overwhelmingly, due to their own efforts to reach out to non-Muslim Americans, my informants’ stories reflected an optimism for a changing US, whose citizens were more educated about and more inclusive of Muslim Americans.

**Microsystem.** The microsystem level includes the daily interpersonal influences of family, school, work, church, neighborhood, and friends. Often embedded in interpersonal interactions with other people and with social systems may
be norms and values that perpetuate oppression and discrimination in Muslim American women’s lives.

*Interpersonal discrimination.* Muslim American youth often face discrimination, harassment, and ignorance among peers at school, in the classroom by educators and administrators and in their neighborhoods by strangers (Abu El-Haj, 2006; Afshar, 1994; Ahmed & Ezzedine, 2009; Cainkar, 2009; Fine, 1992; Haque, 2004; Malek, 2009; Naber, 2005; Opotow, 2004; Said, 1978; 2001 Sirin & Fine, 2008; Zine, 2001). My informants’ comments about interpersonal discrimination reflect existing research in the area. Their experiences of threatening behavior range from subtle racist comments in the classroom to yelling and shouting in public to physical threats to individuals and their families. For the women I interviewed, ongoing harassment and violence is a significant concern. The threatening behavior they have witnessed negatively impacts their identity development and psychological wellbeing.

In the years following 9/11, many of the young women I interviewed experienced harassment from peers in middle and high school. In some cases, teachers also contributed to the hostile environment, by ignoring the harassers or expressing their own stereotypes about Muslims in the classroom. The resulting negative environment in the school was reflective of the overall US society, especially in the five to ten years after 9/11 when my informants were still in school (Abu El-Haj, 2006; Afshar, 1994; Ahmed & Ezzedine, 2009; Fine, 1992; Haque, 2004; Naber, 2005; Opotow, 2004; Sirin & Fine, 2008; Zine, 2001). For many of the women I interviewed, this has resulted in the belief that they must tolerate some
amount of hostility and harassment in their daily lives. Accepting and expecting
harassment helps my informants cope with the negative experiences. However, my
informants have also received explicit threats of violence. In these cases, they
described feeling unsafe and therefore changing their behaviors to avoid the
threatening individuals. For my informants, threats have the power to diminish their
rights and limit their freedom.

Muslim women, especially those who veil, are often subject to specific types
of harassment, based on existing gendered stereotypes (Abu El-Haj, 2006; Afshar,
1994; Ahmed-Ghosh, 2004, 2006; Cainkar, 2009; Naber, 2005; Rehman &
Dziegielewski, 2004; Sirin & Fine, 2008; Sue & Sue, 2008; Zaal, Salah, & Fine,
2007; Zine, 2001). Most of my informants practice veiling and therefore are subject
to increased harassment due to their visible marker of Islam. The negative comments
received by my veiled informants’ echo widespread beliefs that Muslim women who
veil are considered oppressed, uneducated, submissive, and subordinate, along with
the pervasive notion that they are linked to terrorism (Brah, 1994; Cainkar, 2009;

*Turning to family.* As described in the existing literature, family serves as a
significant protective factor for Muslim American women (Sirin & Fine, 2008). Many
of my informants described active, involved, and supportive families. Their parents,
siblings, and extended family participate and lead local Muslim communities at the
mosque or cultural center. From a young age, all of these women have joined their
families at large, vibrant Muslim centers where they feel belonging and security.
They participate in events on a weekly basis at minimum. In addition, they see their families providing outreach and education about Islam to the larger US community. The modeling and support of their parents have encouraged these young women to take active leadership roles in their Muslim communities, at home and at college. Some women’s families have been active in their community throughout their daughters’ lives, while other families became active in their religion and the Muslim community after 9/11. In both these cases, active families serve as a protective factor for young Muslim women for discrimination and hostility from the mainstream US society. The class status of my informants’ families plays a major role in their ability to connect with community and take an active role in their religion. Most of my informants come from wealthy, educated families who not only have the financial means to take on leadership roles in their communities, but also have the education and knowledge to understand its importance. For example, some of my informants’ families were very aware of the negative impact of 9/11 and made concerted efforts to outreach to the larger community for dialogue and education. These families helped change the perceptions of Muslims in their local neighborhoods and towns. They distinguished themselves as an American Muslim community from both actual terrorism and the negative, violent stereotypes about Muslims appearing in the media.

Family support is especially essential in the absence of a large Muslim community in the area. My informants with limited or no local Muslim community described strong family connections. They emphasized their parents’ efforts to provide a buffer for them against any discrimination or intolerance.
For many of my informants, families also help facilitate positive identity development. Although all of my informants’ families hold onto some cultural aspects of their countries of origin, many parents are very flexible with their daughters’ adherence to South Asian or Arab cultural norms. They encourage their daughters to find their own balance between their American identities and the cultural identity of their countries of origin. The parents themselves model this balance in their own lives by actively participating in American cultural activities, as long as they do not interfere with their Islamic beliefs. In these families, there are no restrictive cultural expectations for daughters relating to marriage, education, or cross-gender communication.

Other informants described a very different process of cultural identity development, in which their parents enforce a strong adherence to the cultural gendered practices of their country of origin. These women’s experience reflect existing literature which shows that some Muslim women are limited by their family’s restrictive gendered expectations, which clash with their American identities. For these women, their families’ support is very important but their families’ beliefs have exacerbated their challenging identity development. They have minimal access to the resistance, agency, and community support that Muslim Americans have outside of their homes and communities. Without this support, there is little space for personal agency to grow and flourish for Muslim American women, who may be struggling with both gender restrictions and discrimination from the larger society.

*Turning to community.* Like many Muslim American women, many of my informants belong to strong local Muslim communities, which provides access to many religious and social activities and other young Muslim women with whom they can share her experiences and build friendships. They also have access to education about why these incidences of harassment and hostility occur. Their increased knowledge and their ability to provide outreach and education through the community serve as a protective factor during their identity development in a hostile post-9/11 environment (Ahmed-Ghosh, 2004; Aloud & Rathur, 2009; Haque-Khan, 1997; Hallak & Quina, 2004; Nassar-McMillan & Hakim-Larson, 2003; Sirin & Fine, 2008; Zaal, Salah, & Fine, 2007).

Strong local Muslim communities also bridge connections with my informants’ American identities despite the discrimination they experience. Even though these women receive messages that they either are not American or do not belong in the US, their community provides a safe space to understand and combat these messages. Communities that are actively working to improve conditions for Muslims in the US and raise awareness about Muslim Americans give hope to young Muslim women that positive change is possible and they can contribute. Many of the young women I interviewed participate in the Muslim student groups at their universities and in some cases, they have leadership roles. For many of the women,
their Muslim student groups are a positive source of support and community and for some, it is the first time that they have access to other Muslim youth.

For other informants, the absence of a strong local community has a negative impact. Lack of community can result in a limited connection with their American identities. Although there are aspects of US culture that these women appreciate and incorporate into their lives, they described their ambivalence or confusion about their American identities. When there is nothing positive to connect them with the US and in its absence, all that remains are the negative experiences of discrimination and exclusion (Ahmed & Ezzedine, 2009; Hasnat, 1998; Sirin & Fine, 2007, 2008; Zaal, Salah, & Fine, 2007).

Reflective of existing literature, all of my informants belong to multiple communities, both Muslim and non-Muslim. There is a range among the women in terms of the diversity of their communities. The young women draw support from friendships developed in these communities, each providing them with different benefits (Ahmed-Ghosh, 2004; Hallak & Quina, 2004; Sirin & Fine, 2008; Zaal, Salah, & Fine, 2007). Some women talked about how enjoyable it is to share common experiences with other Muslims. They also rely on their Muslim friends to help them practice Islam faithfully. For many, non-Muslim friends are long-time companions who they met at a young age in their public school. Although they are non-Muslim, informants talked about the incredible value of these friends, with whom they have shared the experiences of growing up in the US. Additionally, many women talked about the fact that their non-Muslim friends are supportive and involved with the
daily activities of Islam. They give reminders about prayers and visit the mosque with them.

As discussed in the existing research, some of my informants described conflicts in their communities that have a negative impact on Muslim American women. My informants discussed other youth who belong to insulated Muslim communities. It is more challenging for these youth to develop a positive American identity. Similar to the existing research findings (Maira, 2004; 2010), youth from insulated Muslim communities diminish their American identities and focus on leaving the US to live in a Muslim majority country. Additionally, these youth face challenges interacting effectively in a mainstream US society due to their limited interactions with non-Muslims.

Muslim American communities, including university student groups, can also impose restrictive gendered expectations. Similar to findings in the existing research (Hasan, 2000; 2009; Hasnat, 1998; Naber, 2005; Leonard, 2003; Sarroub, 2001; 2005; Sirin & Fine, 2008; Zaal, Salah & Fine, 2007), many of my informants were very critical of their Muslim communities for limiting women’s involvement in religious, social, and professional activities. Many of the women expressed frustration about the ongoing existence of sexism in the community, which in turn negatively impacts their community involvement.

In the existing literature, there are Muslim American youth who have recognized and criticized racism and segregation in the Muslim communities (Leonard, 2003; Sirin & Fine, 2008; Zaal, Salah & Fine, 2007). Some of the women
in my study also discuss these problems in their own local communities and their university Muslim student groups, which serve to divide people along ethnic and cultural lines, disrupt communication, and actively exclude some groups from participation in the community. However, they point out that there is progress in this area, especially in larger, more prominent Muslim cultural centers where explicit efforts are made to welcome Muslims from diverse nationalities and cultures.

**Individual**

The individual level is the focus of most traditional psychology and includes one’s biology, emotions, cognitions, spirituality, growth, and development. In this section, I use critical and qualitative literature to help understand how my informants and other Muslim American women have experienced their identity development during a time of crisis, hostility, and fear in the United States. I focus on how context and history influence identity development; specifically how factors of the self intersect with race, ethnicity, economic status, gender, and age cause each individual to experience life differently. In this section, I also examine the utility of mainstream psychology’s models of identity development for Muslim American women.

*Contextual understanding of identity development.* The present study showcases Muslim American women who are dynamic, active, and empowered to make positive changes in the US. These women have the ability to form different identities that serve them in different contexts. The two significant identities are “Muslim” and “American.” They demonstrate agency and cultural competency when negotiating their two identities. As indicated in existing research with Muslim
American youth, commuting across multiple identities reflects their knowledge of both how others perceive them and how they perceive themselves (Bilgrami, 2006). As a conscious process, the Muslim American women in this study are aware of the contextual factors that might necessitate their multiple identities, including: societal disapproval of Islamic religious expression; discrimination and stereotyping in mainstream society; and family and community values and obligations (Ahmed & Ezzedine, 2009; Bilgrami, 2006; Chaudhry, 1998; Hasnat, 1998; Sirin & Fine, 2008; Zaal, Salah, & Fine, 2007).

My informants have the capacity to both think critically about mainstream society, government, and media, and have positive associations with their US culture and peers. Some of the women are competent in mainstream US culture for the purposes of school and work, but may still find peace and a sense of belonging in their community and family culture. Others choose to reject aspects of US society and therefore limit the integration of their American identity, if they are exposed to hostile environments in their schools and society-at-large (Padilla & Perez, 2003; Sirin & Fine, 2008). Like other Muslim youth, many of my informants make a conscious choice to stand against the aspects of US culture with which they disagree (Ali, 2005; Leonard, 2003; Sirin & Fine, 2007, 2008; Zaal, Salah, & Fine, 2007).

For those of my informants who have successfully integrated their multiple identities, being Muslim American is an advantage, which allows them access to more than one ethnic or cultural group. Many of my informants described the gendered benefits of living in a plural US society where they can practice Islam as
they chose to, just like their male counterparts. Many of the young women were eager to share that being American actually facilitates their ongoing discovery and study of Islam. Being different and having the choice of many identities encourages these women to seek out their religion in a way that is not required in a Muslim majority country. They also see their identities as flexible with a great deal of choice about how much of their identity is dictated by their religion, peers, family, and culture. However, the integrated identities do not prevent Muslim women from critiquing both their own families and cultures and the mainstream US society and culture. My informants discussed racism and colorism present among their communities and families, to which they respond with critique and education. They shared the need for separation between religion and culture, which would lead to improved Islamic scholarship and more gender equality. These women also see themselves as patriotic. Being ambassadors of Islam is a duty of their US citizenship. They display their Muslim identities out loud by attending mosques and practicing veiling to call attention to and protest the treatment of Muslim Americans in the US post-9/11 (Leonard, 2003; Sirin & Fine, 2008; Zaal, Salah, & Fine, 2007). The results of recent research, including the present study, are in sharp contrast to existing popular speculation that there is an inherent incompatibility between Muslim and American identities (Abu-Ali & Reisen, 1999; Sirin & Fine, 2008).

Furthermore, Muslim American women demonstrate agency and independence when constructing their identities. Some women put on the veil despite their mothers and family members who do not cover their heads. Many of my
informants described their practice of veiling as both a religious fulfillment as well as an assertion of their strong Muslim identity. Similarly, almost all of my informants participate in prominent national college organizations across the US, which focus on education, activism, and outreach. These young women assert that their free and autonomous practice of Islam is a demonstration of their unique Muslim American religious identity (Chaudhry, 1998; Leonard, 2003; Sirin & Fine, 2008; Zaal, Salah, & Fine, 2007). These women advocate for the practice of Islam free of restrictions for women, which includes forced veiling, limited educational opportunities, and limited financial rights. These women talk about their Muslim American identity with great pride because it affords them the right to practice a form of Islam that values and honors women (Hasan, 2000, 2004, 2009; Leonard, 2003; Naber 2005). Although there is a diverse range of Muslim American identity reflected in recent research and this study, all of the women are making their own choices about how they construct their identity.

Discussed at the exosystem and microsystem levels, external factors sometimes pose conflicts between Muslim and American identities for some of my informants. Like many Muslim women across the US, tension between identities often results from the current political climate in the US and inside the Muslim communities. Despite their loyalty and patriotism to the US, my informants are concerned about the negative portrayal of Islam in the US media. The impact of harassment and intolerance in their schools and neighborhoods impacts these women so much that they struggle with their identities (Sirin & Fine, 2007, 2008; Zaal, Salah,
& Fine, 2007). Additionally, some Muslim American women cite that they do not find belonging in either US culture or their family’s culture. Despite believing that they are both Muslim and American, other members from their communities reject their membership. For the young women in my study, their divergent ideas about the religiosity, hijab, and women’s participation in Islam leave them feeling either isolated or uncomfortable joining in group activities. They are either too American or too Muslim for both worlds (Ahmed & Ezzedine, 2009; Hasnat, 1998; Sirin, Bikmen, Mir, Fine, Zaal, & Katsiaficas, 2008; Sirin & Fine, 2007, 2008; Zaal, Salah, & Fine, 2007).

Mainstream psychological literature is limited. Over the last several decades, acculturation and racial, ethnic and cultural identity development models have become increasingly influential in the field of counseling psychology (Salazar & Abrams, 2005; Sanchez & Welsh, 1999; Sue & Sue, 2008). One of today’s most widely circulated and widely taught model is the five-stage Racial/Cultural Identity Development model (R/CID) (Atkinson, Morten, & Sue, 1989; Salazar & Abrams, 2005; Sue & Sue, 2008), which explains how oppressed people experience and understand their own culture, the dominant culture, and the relationship between the two cultures (Sue & Sue, 2008). The present study supports existing critical and qualitative literature and research, which demonstrate that the R/CID does not reflect the identity development experiences of Muslim American youth.

Unlike the R/CID’s conformity stage, Muslim American women are very aware of racism and discrimination from a young age. They are also adept at
negotiating their identities in public spaces, like school. Furthermore, they do not see a clash between their Muslim and American identities and in fact, can reconcile the two well (Abu El-Haj, 2005; Abu-Ali & Reisen, 1999; Afshar, 1994; Ahmad & Szpara, 2003; Chaudhry, 1998; Sirin & Fine, 2007, 2008; Zaal, Salah, & Fine, 2007).

In contrast to the final stage of the R/CID model, integrative awareness, which implies all minority individuals should eventually find both an inner sense of security and an appreciation for their own culture and US culture, finding inner security for Muslim Americans, including my informants, is nearly impossible in the current US sociopolitical climate. They are facing threats to their safety and harassment and violence directed at themselves and their communities. Attaining inner security for Muslim Americans involves denying their moral exclusion in the US. Joining with their communities and standing together in opposition to dominant US discrimination may be a better psychological place for Muslim Americans. Another implication of the R/CID model is that minority people internalize oppression by the dominant white US culture as a natural and permanent part of US society. Oppression of Muslims is not eternal or innate, but the consequence of historically situated events, government policies, and media coverage. My informants and other Muslim women do not accept that their oppression is a permanent part of their lives. Instead, they react with anger, activism, education, and community engagement to make changes in their communities and across the nation (Abu El-Haj, 2005; Ahmad & Szpara, 2003; Britto, 2008; Chaudhry, 1998; Sirin & Fine, 2007, 2008; Zaal, Salah, & Fine, 2007).

Finally, the R/CID model is limited to racial and cultural identity development. The
Muslim American identity of my informants defies categorization as a racial or cultural identity. Given the diversity among Muslim Americans, as highlighted by the diversity among my informants, identity development among Muslim American youth is not simply about their race or culture (Hopkins, 2004; Sirin & Fine, 2008). Clearly, Muslim Americans often do not fit the stages of the R/CID model. Research in this area demonstrates that religious and cultural identity development for Muslim Americans is a complex, nonlinear process that cannot be quantified in a universal model.

Theories of acculturation, which consider contextual factors like language proficiency; social contacts; family relationships; cultural, religious, and visibility differences; length of residence; neighborhood composition; and attitudes of the host society provide a better fit for Muslim Americans (Britto, 2008; Britto & Amer, 2007; Sirin & Fine, 2008). These are the salient environmental factors that impact the identity development of my informants. The utility of acculturation is limited by its general discussion in textbooks and in summary articles (Ahmed & Ezzeddine, 2009; Amer & Hovey, 2007; Haboush, 2005; Jalali, 2005; Nath, 2005; Sue & Sue, 2008), which reduces acculturation to a dichotomous system in which an individual can only be “acculturated” or “not acculturated.”

**Contributions of Study**

Exploring the identity development and lived experiences of Muslim American women through the many levels of the feminist ecological model reveals a complicated and nuanced process. This study shows that Muslim American women
are active, empowered, and independent women with future aspirations and a sense of responsibility to their communities. By investigating the context of their lives, this study demonstrates that identity development is a dynamic and reciprocal process. Muslim American women influence and are influenced by their communities, families, peers, schools, colleges, and the larger US society. These factors have both positive and negative effects on Muslim American women. Furthermore, this research helps clarify how discrimination impacts identity development and lived experience. It also sheds light on the diversity among Muslims and Muslim Americans, based on race, ethnicity, class, gender, country of origin, religiosity, and many other factors.

This study, in concurrence with existing qualitative and critical literature, provides a strong critique of existing theories of identity development in mainstream psychological literature by spotlighting the effects of social and political context. Mainstream psychology has not examined the context and ecology of the Muslim American community and therefore draws inaccurate conclusions about identity development and psychological wellbeing. Furthermore, it contributes to the moral exclusion of Muslims in the US. In mainstream literature, the focus becomes the cultural background of immigrant populations and specifically, the cultural differences between mainstream US culture and minority cultures (Abu-Ali & Reisen, 1999; Abudabbeh, 2005; Ahmed, 2009; Amer & Hovey, 2005, 2007; Haboush, 2005; Jalali, 2005; Nath, 2005; Sue & Sue, 2008). This method reinforces the notion that Arab and Muslim culture is a static set of traditions, rituals, and beliefs that is the same for all Arabs and Muslims, regardless of race, class, gender, and political
climate. Additionally, my informants highlighted the fact that overlapping discussions about Arabs and Muslims contribute to the ethnogenesis of Muslim Americans into one monolithic group, for which differences in ethnicity, cultural background, and countries of origin appear irrelevant (Abu El-Haj, 2006; Sirin & Fine, 2008).

Furthermore, statements about acculturation conflicts, limited public religious activities, and removal of veils out of context cause Muslims to appear cowardly and shameful about their religion, when in fact, these behaviors are in reaction to real threats of violence and denial of civil rights. In order to understand the lived experiences of young Muslim Americans, it is crucial to go beyond simplified, universal racial and cultural identity development and acculturation models, and consider the context and ecology of their lives.

The major contribution of this study is bringing forth women’s voices, experiences, and stories using the feminist ecological model. It focuses on how women make meaning of their lived experiences. These narratives are invaluable in further understanding the complexities and intricacies of these informants’ lives. In practice, mental health professionals can be alerted to the ways that the sociopolitical climate can affect the individuals’ identity, behaviors, and feelings. This study raises awareness of the need for advocacy and social justice. Instead of expecting Muslim American women to adjust and integrate into the dominant US culture, there needs to be a bidirectional approach to this process. The dominant culture needs to adjust and integrate itself as well, striving to be more flexible, welcoming, and sensitive to the varying needs and experiences of Muslim American women. Engaging in this process
requires a fundamental shift in the training of psychologists. We must value activism among our mental health professionals and train them to engage in conversations about oppression with their clients. They need the tools and flexibility to make positive environmental changes in the many systems interacting in their clients’ lives. Currently, this is not supported in psychology education or in the current insurance-driven model of providing care.

This study also shows mental health professionals that Muslim American women are already shaping their lives and making the changes that they want to see for their communities in the US. This is in sharp contrast to existing mainstream psychological literature which reinforces stereotypes about submissive, oppressed, and uneducated Muslim women.

This study also provides a roadmap to young Muslim women who are interested in impacting the systems of the feminist ecological model with which they interact. My informants engage in community service; participate in multifaith dialogues; provide education; seek out friends from diverse cultural traditions and religions; participate in political activism; and advocate for changes in their communities and public policy for the benefit of the Muslim community. In addition, young Muslim women can also seek out mental health services and consider careers in psychology and mental health.

This study provides psychologists and mental health professionals with recommendations for serving Muslim youth. Fundamentally, psychologists can operate from the feminist ecological model and examine the psychological distress of
their clients as a function of the many systems operating in their lives, not simply as intrapsychic material. This process reframes the origin of distress as the social structures to which the individual is subjugated. Psychologists can engage their Muslim women clients in discussion about oppression. They can encourage them to connect with Muslim student groups and serve as advisors for such groups. Particularly, they can assist in creating Muslim women student groups, where women take on leadership roles. Psychologists can also connect with larger-area Muslim organizations to coordinate care for Muslim students.

While this is a study about Muslim American women, the information gathered here can be useful for other minority groups who are also negotiating their identities in environments where they face discrimination. Many racial and ethnic minorities in the United States travel between two or more countries and therefore must decide how they will construct their identities across multiple contexts.

Finally, this study can help mental health professionals examine their own points of view about Muslim Americans in the United States. This research challenges all of us to consider our feelings about global Islam and the events of 9/11 as they relate to our feelings about Muslim Americans.

Limitations of Study

Given the small number and diversity of my informants, there were two coordinates of the feminist ecological model which were difficult to analyze: age and class. My informants’ ages range from 19 to 24, but there are a number of factors that influenced their development beyond age. Although I paid special attention in my
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analysis to how the range of ages among my participants impacts their stories, I was unable to draw any specific conclusions across informants. My informants’ reactions to 9/11 and its aftermath were dictated by a myriad of factors, including school, community, family and geography. The impact of specific developmental stage on the experience of discrimination and the subsequent impact on Muslim American identity development were impossible to isolate. This study focuses on young adult women in general, without exploring the range of developmental stages during late adolescence and young adulthood. There is limited research on the connection between the developmental tasks of adolescence and discrimination for Muslim American youth in the existing literature as well.

Additionally, I did not collect enough information from my informants to comprehensively understand their class status. Therefore, I am unable to make any conclusive statements about how class status impacts Muslim American women’s identity development and lived experiences. Existing literature indicates that class status can influence gendered expectations for Muslim daughters and determine their access to education and career attainment. All of my informants are attending or have graduated from college and therefore come from a privileged class background. For many of my informants, their family’s privileged background has enabled them to connect more with their community and attend expensive educational institutions, which serve as protective factors for the women. However, two women in my study did discuss their family’s financial struggles. For these women, their access to a local Muslim community was limited and they struggled with their Muslim American
identities. They both described parents with cultural gendered expectations. These statements do not suffice to make comments about class in my study, but do help shape future areas of research.

Similarly, the informants recruited to this study mostly identified strong connections with their Muslim and college communities, both which are strong protective factors for the women. All of the women identified positive attitudes towards their religion, colleges, and in general, towards their families and communities. Although their stories were important to capture here, this study does not address the narratives or needs of Muslim women who are distant from their communities, struggling with their families, or alienated from their religion. My recruiting technique of connecting to Muslim women through their communities is a limitation of this study and future research should examine the lives of other Muslim women, especially those who are seeking mental health services. Given the negative and violent experiences of Muslim youth across the United States, vital research is needed to investigate the origins and occurrences of mental illness, like anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder amongst the Muslim community.

Language was also a limitation in this study. Given my own language limitations, I was only able to interview Muslim women with English language fluency. Muslim women with other language proficiencies may belong to different communities and have different immigrant experiences. The breadth of experiences I heard was also limited by my recruitment of college-only women. I was unable to reach non-college women despite efforts to connect with Boston Muslim community
organizations and mosques. Again, the breadth of experiences I was exposed to, especially related to immigrant experiences and class, were limited.

Another limitation of this study relates to where informants were interviewed. A majority of my informants were interviewed in private spaces on their college campus; while a few informants were interviewed in semi-private or public spaces like libraries and campus centers. The private interview spaces provided me with a very in-depth look at my informants’ lives and they allowed my informants to open up about difficult experiences without concern that others could hear them. Those informants I interviewed in public spaces may have limited their sharing due to the fact that others could listen to their private stories.

There were regional limitations of this study. All of my informants currently live in Massachusetts, and therefore, it is important to note that individual stories and experiences may be specific to the northeast region of the US. Although many of my informants have lived outside of Massachusetts during portions of their lives, most of their stories related to New England.

I attempt to present a faithful retelling and interpretation of my informants’ narratives. However, like all researchers, I have my opinions, feelings, politics, and life experiences that influence my analysis in this study. I use my dissertation committee, my peer reviewer, and member checking to raise my awareness about the impact of my perspective on the interviews and data analysis. Instead of sidelining myself in this process, I attempt to share the conversations I had with the young women I interviewed, laying bare the process and the analysis. The reader can draw
their own conclusions about my influence over the research. Our conversations impacted both of us and the resulting stories. The stories are co-constructed between us. It is vital that I acknowledge that all attempts to increase the objectivity and accuracy of the stories do not entirely remove my perspective. In the end, the purpose of this research is to give voice to the personal narratives of young Muslim American women. By exposing the process of doing each interview and my own emotional reactions and evolving perspective, I can share their stories and tell our co-constructed stories.

**Future Recommendations**

This study aims to gain a comprehensive understanding of the lived experiences and identity development of Muslim American women. Using a qualitative approach and the feminist ecological model, I had the opportunity to study a phenomenon that is embedded within a social, political, economic, and cultural context. More research is needed in this area so that the voices and stories of Muslims and other minority communities can be heard.

Additionally, interdisciplinary research is needed that explores levels of the feminist ecological model that were not part of this study and are largely ignored in mainstream literature. In collaboration with researchers and scholars from political science, sociology, environmental science, and history, we can investigate the impact of planetary/climate conditions, time/history, and macrosystem levels on the individual. Specifically, a critical analysis can help understand how these forces cause
and influence the experiences of marginalized and oppressed groups in the US and globally.
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