

Identity Performance Among Muslim International Women: A Narrative Inquiry  
Ayesha Latif Yousafzai

Dissertation submitted to the faculty of Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State  
University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

In

Higher Education

Claire K. Robbins, Chair

Jennifer M. Bondy

Gabriel R. Serna

Karen Eley Sanders

February 11, 2019

Blacksburg, Virginia

Keywords: Ecological systems theory, gendered Islamophobia, identity performance,  
international students, Muslim students, narrative inquiry, women students

# Identity Performance Among Muslim International Women: A Narrative Inquiry

Ayesha Latif Yousafzai

## Abstract

The purpose of this research was to study identity performance among undergraduate Muslim international women on college campuses in the U.S. Identity performance was defined as the way in which these women acted, engaged, interacted, behaved, and situated themselves in their various environments (Goffman, 1959). The conceptual framework for the study was Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979) that identifies five environmental systems in which an individual interacts (microsystems, mesosystems, ecosystems, macrosystems, and chronosystems). This study focused on identity performance in microsystems.

Narrative inquiry, a qualitative methodological approach, was utilized to pursue two research questions: (1) how do undergraduate Muslim international women describe their experiences of identity performance inside college environments; and (2) how do undergraduate Muslim international women describe their experiences of identity performance outside college environments? Two in-person interviews were conducted with eight participants representing six countries (Kuwait, Malaysia, Morocco, Oman, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia). Interviews were transcribed verbatim, and data were analyzed with four iterations of coding (narrative coding, refining narrative coding, pattern coding, theming the data) (Saldaña, 2015). Five themes emerged: Muslim identity performance in home country, Muslim identity performance and family, Muslim international identity consciousness, religious engagement on campus, and understandings of new Muslim international identity.

The stories shared revealed that identity performance was a complex process; it was ever changing and evolving as Muslim international women navigated their way from a religiously homogeneous environment in the home country to a heterogeneous environment within the U.S. Their microsystems and interactions with various environments influenced their performances of their various identities. These influences were also related to contextual conformity, psychological awareness, agency, resilience, persistence, positivity and appreciation of their experiences in the ever-changing environments. The study has implications for faculty and university administrators who are seeking to create inclusive and encouraging academic and social environments. Findings also have implications for future research on identity performance, contextual conformity, and experiences of Muslim international students.

# Identity Performance Among Muslim International Women: A Narrative Inquiry

Ayesha Latif Yousafzai

## General Audience Abstract

The population in the United States of America is rapidly becoming more diverse in terms of ethnicities, religions, and resident demographics. As a result of this shifting pattern towards heterogeneity, colleges and universities are also becoming more diverse (Seidman, 2005). International students and Muslim students are two such populations that have contributed to the increased diversity of the student body. Among these populations, international Muslim women reside at a unique intersection of gender, religion, culture, ethnicity, and national identities. Literature reveals that Muslim international women are often stereotyped and they experience Islamophobia in gendered ways (Cole & Ahmadi, 2003).

The purpose of my research was to study identity performance of Muslim international women on two college campuses in the U.S. Identity performance was the ways in which these women acted, engaged, interacted, behaved and situated themselves in their various environments (Goffman, 1959). I used Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979) as the conceptual framework for this study. This theory identifies five environmental systems in which individuals interact (microsystems, mesosystems, ecosystems, macrosystems, and chronosystems). This study focused on identity performance in microsystems, which were their immediate environments.

I used narrative inquiry, a qualitative methodological approach, to pursue two research questions: (1) how do undergraduate Muslim international women describe their experiences of identity performance inside college environments; and (2) how do undergraduate Muslim international women describe their experiences of identity performance outside college environments? I conducted two interviews each with eight participants to collect their stories of identity performance. The stories shared revealed that identity performance was a complex process. Contextual conformity, psychological awareness, agency, resilience, persistence, positivity and appreciation of their experiences influenced their identity performances. This study has implications for faculty and university administrators who are seeking to create inclusive, convenient and encouraging academic and social environments for all students. Findings also have implications for future research on identity performance, contextual conformity, and experiences of Muslim international students.

## Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my father, *Abdul Latif Yousafzai* and my mother, *Shahnaz Latif Yousafzai*. I am who I am because of your love, support, prayers, and inspiration.

## Acknowledgements

I am extremely thankful for the love, prayers and support of my family members. My parents, Abdul Latif Yousafzai and Shahnaz Latif Yousafzai, who have always pushed me to be the best, have taught me to be resilient, hardworking and encouraged me to continue my educational endeavors away from Pakistan. I am blessed to have you both as my parents. To my siblings (Khurram, Ehsan and Nida), my sister in law (Yamna), my nieces and nephew (Aleena, Amarah, Essa, Ayra and Hanna) for your positive words, countless laughs and long distance calls of support. To my sisters Dr. Nida Latif, Lindsay Strawbridge and Heather Duhart, you have always been there for me, calmed me when I was stressed and without your support and care I would not have made it through this program.

My tremendous gratitude goes to my academic village for providing guidance, feedback, inspiration and words of encouragement. To my committee chair, Dr. Claire Robbins, you continue to inspire me and I am thoroughly grateful to have you as my Chair. You have invested countless hours listening to me talk about my life, family and research, provoked my curiosity, and been a mentor and a role model. Thank you to my committee members, Dr. Jennifer Bondy, Dr. Gabriel R. Serna, and Dr. Karen Eley Sanders for finding value in my research, offering invaluable advice and encouraging me to keep going.

To my Durham family, thank you for giving me a home away from home, for your friendship, support and love, Heather Duhart, Philip Duhart, Deb LoBiondo, and Meg Wilson. You have opened your hearts and homes for me. We have laughed, we have cried and have made great memories together. I am fortunate to have you as my extended family.

To my writing partners who have spent countless hours with me at the library, coffee shops and at the GLC, Arun Das, Dr. Delight Yokley, Dr. Dez-Ann Sutherland, Dr. Elsa Camargo-Medina, future Drs. Javier González-Rocha and Noha Elsherbiny. Each of you have inspired me, encouraged me, pushed me and supported me on this journey. Thank you for being there for me and with me.

Thank you to my other VT friends, Dr. Amy Nelson, Dr. Andrea Ogilvie, Dr. Dave Brod, Jessica Grimes, Karen Howe, Dr. Marwa Abdel Latif, Dr. Mike Kutnak, and Dr. Sheila Carter-Todd. Each of you have played a part in my success and have been a vital part of my time at VT. You have been generous with your love, time, and encouragement.

Thank you to various VT professionals at Cranwell International Center, Student Success Center and College Access Collaborate for giving me incredible professional experiences at VT. And lastly, to my eight incredible, brave, inspiring, resilient and courageous participants (Hayden, Amber, Rose, Julia, Arianna, Zainab, Razan and Sarah) who have taught me so much about myself during this research. Without you eight I would not have been a Dr. So THANK YOU!

## Table of Contents

Abstract.....	ii
Dedication.....	iv
Acknowledgements .....	v
List of Tables .....	xi
Chapter One: Introduction .....	1
International Students, Muslim Students, and Gendered Islamophobia.....	2
Muslim, International, and Women College Students.....	4
Campus Climate .....	5
Conceptualizing Muslim International Women’s College Experiences: Microsystems ..	8
Identity Performance .....	9
Purpose of the Study and Research Questions .....	11
Definition of Terms .....	12
Significance of the Study.....	14
Delimitations .....	16
Organization of the Study.....	17
Chapter Two: Literature Review .....	18
Islam and Muslims .....	18
Islamophobia and Gendered Islamophobia .....	21
Muslim Undergraduate College Students.....	24
Campus Climate .....	28
Identity.....	32
Developmental Psychology .....	32
Sociology .....	33
Social Psychology .....	37
Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity.....	37
Human and Developmental Ecology.....	39
Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979).....	41
Conclusion .....	44
Chapter Three: Methodology .....	46

Positionality .....	47
Worldview .....	50
Methodology.....	51
Sample Selection .....	52
Institutional Sampling .....	52
Participant Sampling .....	54
Interview Protocols.....	57
Data Collection .....	59
Data Analysis.....	60
Trustworthiness .....	63
Chapter Four: Findings.....	66
Participant Introductions .....	68
Haden.....	68
Amber .....	69
Rose .....	70
Julia.....	70
Arianna .....	71
Zainab .....	72
Razan .....	72
Sarah .....	73
Grand Narrative of Muslim International Identity Performance .....	74
Muslim Identity Performance in Home Country .....	74
“Most Of The People Around You Are Muslim”: Religious Homogeneity .....	74
“I Had To Be Very, Very Contained”: Societal and Gendered Boundaries.....	77
Muslim Identity Performance and Family.....	83
Family Dynamics.....	83
Parental Fears and Masking the Muslim Identity.....	85
Muslim International Identity Consciousness .....	88
“I Am Wearing A Hijab, I Must Be A Muslim” .....	89
“Muslim Women are Much More Diverse Than a Headscarf” .....	94
Representing Others .....	98

Religious Engagement On Campus.....	103
Religiously Affiliated Experiences.....	103
Prayer Spaces.....	107
Campus Religious Climate.....	108
Understandings of New Muslim International Identity.....	111
Reconciling Environments.....	112
Embracing the New Muslim Identity.....	116
Summary.....	119
Chapter Five: Discussion and Implications.....	122
Discussion and Implications.....	122
Limitations or Study Boundaries.....	122
Discussion of Study Findings.....	123
Relationship of the Findings to Prior Research.....	125
Islam, Muslims, Islamophobia and Gendered Islamophobia.....	125
Muslim Undergraduate College Students.....	127
Campus Climate.....	131
Identity.....	133
Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979).....	135
Unique Findings.....	136
Culture vs. Religion.....	137
Parental Influences.....	138
Locations of Religiously Affiliated Experiences.....	138
Implications for Future Practice, Policy and Research.....	139
Conclusion.....	143
References.....	146
APPENDIX A Introductory Email to Gatekeepers (Directors).....	159
APPENDIX B Participant Recruitment Email via the Gatekeeper (Directors).....	160
APPENDIX C Newsletter Recruitment Write-up via the Gatekeeper (Directors).....	161
APPENDIX D Email to Gatekeepers (MSA Leadership).....	162
APPENDIX E Participant Recruitment Email via to Gatekeepers (MSA Leadership).....	163
APPENDIX F Facebook Write-Up via to Gatekeepers (MSA Leadership).....	164

APPENDIX G Individual Emails to Participants (Snowballing).....	165
APPENDIX H Pre-Screening Phone Interview.....	166
APPENDIX I Interview Protocol for Interviews.....	167
APPENDIX J Informed Consent Form for Interviews.....	173
APPENDIX K IRB Approval.....	176
APPENDIX L Reminder Email Two Days Before The First Interview .....	177
APPENDIX M Reminder Email Two Days Before The Second Interview.....	178

List of Tables

Table 1: Self-Reported Demographic Characteristics of Participants.....	67
Table 2: Institutional Demographics .....	68

## Chapter One

### Introduction

The population in the United States of America is rapidly becoming more diverse in terms of ethnicities, religions, and resident demographics. As a result of this shifting pattern towards heterogeneity, colleges and universities are also becoming more diverse (Seidman, 2005). The college landscape and the make-up of the student body have significantly changed in the last decade with increased multicultural, racial, religious, and ethnic diversity (Curtin, Stewart, & Ostrove, 2013). International students and Muslim students are two such populations that have contributed to the increased diversity of the student body. Muslim women, particularly international Muslim women, reside at a unique intersection of gender, religion, culture, ethnicity, and national identities. Muslim international women are stereotyped, face discrimination and experience Islamophobia in gendered ways (Cole & Ahmadi, 2003).

On college campuses, students constantly interact with various contexts and environments. Literature on campus climate reveals that college environments (both positive and negative) can impact academic achievement, sense of belonging, retention, persistence and student engagement for minoritized students (Ostrove & Long, 2007; Seidman, 2005). Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979) stresses that interactions between individuals and their environments transform the person as well as the environment. One type of individual transformation that occurs in college environments is identity performance. Individuals consciously and unconsciously engage in identity performance, and college environments provide numerous settings in which students perform their identities. Goffman (1959) and Butler (2004) emphasized the role of social environments in shaping individuals' identity performance. Yet, very limited research has been conducted to examine how college environments in the U.S. influence identity performance among Muslim international women.

Accordingly, the purpose of this study was to explore Muslim identity performance among Muslim international women on U.S. college campuses. This study was designed to address the following research questions:

1. How do undergraduate Muslim international women describe their experiences of identity performance inside college environments?
2. How do undergraduate Muslim international women describe their experiences of identity performance outside college environments?

I start this chapter with a discussion of key areas informing the argument for this study. Namely, I present literature on international students, Muslim students, gendered Islamophobia in the U.S., and campus climate. Then, I connect these areas of literature by demonstrating how I use microsystems and identity performance to conceptualize Muslim international women's college experiences. Next, I describe the purpose of the study and research question, pertinent definitions, significance of the study, and delimitations. I conclude the chapter by summarizing the organization of the dissertation.

### **International Students, Muslim Students, and Gendered Islamophobia**

In recent years, there has been a 10% percent increase in the number of international students attending U.S. colleges and universities. International students are classified as any persons who are on F (student) or J (exchange student) visa status, and who are granted permission to temporarily study at an institution of higher education in the U.S, (The Power of International Education, n.d.). In 2015-2016, there were 1,043,839 international students, with 88,874 more students, an increase of 7%, than the previous year enrolled in colleges and universities across the U.S. Moreover, international students make up almost 7%, out of over 20 million, of all students enrolled in colleges and universities in the U.S. The rate of increase has risen steadily in the past five years with 2.4% more international students studying at U.S. colleges and universities in 2016 year than in 2015 (The Power of International Education, n.d.).

In 2013-2014, approximately 105,000 international students in the U.S. came from seven Muslim countries that are among the top 25 nations of origin of international students. Furthermore, there has been an increase of 4.8% in the numbers of international undergraduate students coming from Middle East (4.5%, 100,926), Northern Africa (9.1%, 7,301), Asia (9.9%, 689,525) and Sub-Saharan Africa (5.3%, 35,364). Each of these regions includes countries whose majority populations are Muslims (i.e. those who follow the religion Islam). Based on the most conservative estimates, there are no fewer than 100,000 Muslim students enrolled in colleges and universities in the U.S. (The Power of International Education, n.d.).

Muslims in general and Muslim students in specific in the U.S. and all around the world are a highly diverse group. Muslims represent various nationalities and a wide range of world languages, cultural customs and traditions, ethnic backgrounds, and ways in which they practice Islam (Witherell, 2016). The traumatic events of September 11, 2001 have profoundly impacted and changed the lived experiences of non-resident Muslims and Muslim American populations in

the U.S. (Tindongan, 2011). Regardless of their legal status, Muslims in the U.S. are positioned as national outsiders and considered as potential terrorists due to media misrepresentations and stereotyping (El-Haj, 2010). The increased attention and scrutiny due to the 9/11 attacks and the precipitated “war on terror” has increased Islamophobia and widespread despair with Islam and Muslims within and outside of the U.S. (Jamal, 2011; Kabir, 2013; Marranci, 2004).

Islamophobia has been described as a special, sophisticated form of racism and is rooted in an unfounded fear of Islam and associative actions, principles, and beliefs (Shryock, 2010).

Moreover, 9/11’s tragic events have abruptly evicted Muslims from the moral community of psychological citizenship in the U.S. and put them in the category of “Others” or “outsiders” (Ali & Bagheri, 2009).

Due to Islamophobia and stereotyping, Muslims living in the U.S. are facing increased levels of discrimination and prejudice and have become targets of racial profiling and hate crimes (Ali & Bagheri, 2009; Mirza, 2013; Shryock, 2010). Since 9/11, extremists Muslims have constantly dominated the national and international news. Political speeches and news coverage during the last U.S. presidential election, November 2016, once again cast Muslims as aliens and their status in a democratic society continues to be challenged. There is a lack of understanding in the U.S. and around the work of the religion Islam and the practices of Muslims. This lack of understanding and perceptions of Muslims have directly impacted the ways in which Muslims assimilate and identify themselves within the dominant U.S. culture (Tindongan, 2011). The current refugee crisis in Syria and efforts to impose a travel ban to the U.S. for citizens of six Muslim countries, spearheaded by the current President Donald Trump, has exacerbated the negative sentiments towards Muslims nationally and internationally. Consequently, Muslims and Muslim Americans, including Muslim youth, are defining themselves during a time of crisis, where their beliefs are questioned and they are facing negative sentiments in a diverse array of contexts (Rangoonwala, Sy, & Epinozar, 2011).

Muslim women reside at a unique intersection of gender, religion, culture, ethnicity, and nationality. Increasingly, they face stereotyping, discrimination and microaggressions in addition to the typecasting associated with their religion, stemming from what scholars have described as gendered Islamophobia (Zine, 2006). Muslim women are viewed from a lens of inferiority; they are regarded as women who are oppressed and need saving from Muslim patriarchal men (Soloom, 2005). Furthermore, Muslim women are thought of as more foreign

and exotic than other minorities, and they face racism, discrimination and biases based on their appearance (Perry, 2014). Moreover, Muslim women who wear a hijab (head covering) experience visual profiling and are considered voiceless, oppressed and uneducated (Cole & Ahmadi, 2003; Perry, 2014; Stubbs & Sallie, 2013).

### **Muslim, International, and Women College Students**

Outside of higher education, Islamophobia and gendered Islamophobia towards Muslim women are receiving much attention. According to the Council on American Islamic Relations (CAIR), in 2005 there was a 29.2 percent increase in civil right complaints filed by Muslims (Witherell, 2016). These complaints were filed from all over the U.S. and included various atrocities committed against Muslims including hate crimes, discrimination, and verbal and physical assault. Unfortunately, Islamophobia has also entered U.S. colleges and universities, where harassment and discrimination towards Muslims and Muslim American students are on the rise (Ali & Bagheri, 2009). However, very little recent research has focused on Islamophobia or gendered Islamophobia towards Muslim women students in higher education. In fact, there is limited research examining the experiences of Muslims in U.S. higher education.

Most U.S. colleges and universities provide services for international students to help with their immigration needs, governmental policy compliance, as well as some programming efforts (for example, orientation programs to ease the academic and social transition to college). Many institutions have created multicultural centers to cater to the specialized needs of minority students. Some have gone a step further by establishing Muslim student centers; however, the exact number of such institutions is not known. Specialized services for Muslim international students are inadequate (Ali & Bagheri, 2009). As Muslim students continue to enroll at higher rates in colleges and universities in the U.S., institutional leaders will have to recognize and deliver higher-level services to accommodate the needs of Muslim international students.

Nationally and internationally, the gender gap among undergraduate student populations is increasing (Allan, 2011). Currently, there are more women enrolled in colleges and universities in the U.S. In recent decades there has been a steady increase in the gender gap and in the last several decades, women have outpaced men in colleges and universities across the U.S. (Sax, 2008). In 2013, women comprised 57% of the U.S. student population, and researchers have predicted an increase to 60% by 2020 (DiPrete & Buchmann, 2013). African

American women and Latinx women have also steadily increased their rate of attendance at U.S. colleges and universities in the last decade (Lopez & Gonzalez-Barrera, 2014).

Even though women make up a majority of the student population, women (both majority and minority) continue to feel unsafe, feel unwelcomed, and face discrimination, racism and sexism on college campuses in the U.S. (Caplan & Ford, 2014). Muslim women in general and Muslim international women specifically face oppression due to their intersecting class, gender, ethnic, racial and religious positions. Intersecting forms of oppression linked to these positions may simultaneously affect Muslim international women on college campuses, rendering them as easy targets for discrimination, hate crimes, and other forms of violence (Perry, 2014).

With increased diversity of the student body in colleges and universities in the U.S. and increased visibility and attention imposed on Muslim and international students, institutional leaders will face pressures to educate administrators, staff, faculty and students about Muslims and Islam. Otherwise, Muslim students will likely continue to be marginalized and isolated, inevitably influencing their well-being and success. Institutional leaders will also face pressures to provide specialized services for the development, persistence, growth and retention of both international and Muslim international students, particularly Muslim international women. To meet these demands, institutional leaders need information about how Muslims and international students experience campus climates.

### **Campus Climate**

In the last decade, campus climate and its influences on college students, faculty members, and institutions has become a hot topic in higher education (Mayhew, Bowman, & Rockenbach, 2014). Campus climate broadly has been defined as interactions among universities people, processes, and institutional culture, including the current perceptions, attitudes, observations within the academic community (Hart & Fellabaum, 2008). A number of studies have been conducted to evaluate the impacts of positive and negative campus environments on college students. Most research has focused on the experiences of minoritized groups at predominantly White institutions, namely, African Americans, Latinx students, LGBTQ students, and women. Negative campus climates have been associated with lower self-esteem (Tetreault, Fette, Meidlinger & Hope, 2013) and poor academic performance for minoritized students (Rankin & Reason, 2005). Alternatively, positive campus environments have been linked to minoritized students' retention, persistence, and increased sense of belonging

(Hurtado, Clayton-Pedersen, Allen & Milem, 1998; Morrow & Ackermann, 2012; Strayhorn, 2012).

*Retention* is a campus-based phenomenon and defined as an institution's rate of degree-completing students relative to non-completing students. Stated differently, it is the capacity or ability of a particular institution to help its students attain their academic and personal goals and to successfully graduate the students that initially enroll at that institution (Seidman, 2006). Institutions initiate retention efforts and these efforts allow students to persist and complete college. Most minoritized students who graduate and complete college have a higher satisfaction with their collegiate experience, experience a better quality of life, have fewer health problems, and earn more money over a lifetime (Strayhorn, 2012). A number of stakeholders are impacted when universities fail to retain minoritized students, including students, parents, faculty members, university administrators and governing bodies, and policy makers (Seidman, 2006). Multiple positive and negative environmental factors are linked to issues of retention with minority students. For African American, Hispanic, and Native American students, peer and faculty mentorship serve as positive contributors to their overall success and greater occurrences of retention (Seidman, 2005). Similarly, absence of parental support, unwelcoming classrooms, lack of positive role models, deficient academic preparation on the part of prior institutions attended, first-generation student status, and insufficient economic resources serve as negative predictors of retention among minoritized students (Seidman, 2005).

Similarly, positive or negative campus climate for minority students on college and university campuses is increasingly linked to students' *sense of belonging* at that institution (Ostrove & Long, 2007). Sense of belonging is a complex term and has many meanings and a vast array of labels: relatedness; membership; community; acceptance; support; and belongingness (Strayhorn, 2012). Strayhorn (2012) defined sense of belonging as:

A basic human need and motivation, sufficient to influence behavior. In terms of college, sense of belonging refers to students' perceived social support on campus, a feeling or sensation of connectedness, the experience of mattering or feeling cared about, accepted, respected, valued by, and important to the group or to the campus (p. 3).

Research on sense of belonging suggests that satisfying the need to belong leads to achievement, wellbeing, happiness and engagement for all students, especially for minority students. Further,

there is a strong relationship between belonging and student persistence and ultimately student retention and graduation (Strayhorn, 2012).

Consequently, when institutions fail to provide positive campus experiences and improve students' sense of belonging, it can have negative consequences for both institutions and students, particularly minoritized students (Hausmann, Schofield, & Woods, 2007). Students who fail to have their need to belong satisfied may feel isolated and alienated, and that has the potential increase their loneliness (Mellor, Stokes, Firth, Hayashi, & Cummins, 2008). Furthermore, students who endure an absence of belonging experience loneliness, depression and may withdraw from their environment (Costen, Waller, & Wozencroft, 2013; Hagerty, Williams, Coyne, & Early, 1996). Additionally, the absence of sense of belonging within higher education is a key cause of student attrition (O'Keeffe, 2013).

A review of extant literature indicates that there are many factors that can enhance a student's sense of belonging on college campuses; a positive welcoming campus environment, including participation in residential living communities (Schussler & Fierros, 2008); cross-racial friendships (Mendoza-Denton & Page-Gould, 2008); and interracial roommate relationships among those who live on campus (Shook & Clay, 2012). Furthermore, a positive and welcoming classroom environment can enhance interactions with other students, peers and faculty members, contributing to sense of belonging (Stebbleton, Soria, Ronald, Huesman & Torres, 2014). Johnston et al. (2007) added that these interactions can make complex environments more academically and socially supportive. Additionally, for minoritized students, interactions with faculty and friendships with peers influence their institutional attitudes (Mendoza-Denton & Page-Gould, 2008).

In the same way as some aspects of the college environment can facilitate a sense of belonging, other aspects inhibit students' sense of belonging. Hurtado and Carter (1997) found that among Latino (term used by the researchers) students, a hostile campus climate has a negative impact. Johnson (2012) added that campus racial climate, primarily at predominantly white institutions, can directly impact minoritized students' sense of belonging and development. The negative effects of campus racial climates can also influence the academic performance of students of color (Hurtado & Carter, 1997). Lastly, student engagement is also impacted if students experience negative campus climate (Stebbleton et al., 2014).

Given the increase in the numbers of international students and Muslim students, including Muslim international women, in U.S. colleges and universities, higher education stakeholders need to understand their college experiences and outcomes. To do so, examining how Muslim international women experience campus climate is essential, yet research documenting this phenomenon is scarce. One way to begin to conceptualize Muslim international women's college experiences and outcomes is through the lens of their identity performance in on-campus and off-campus microsystems.

### **Conceptualizing Muslim International Women's College Experiences: Microsystems**

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979) focuses on the ways in which humans develop with an emphasis on environments and contexts. The theory stresses that simultaneous interactions between the individuals and their environments transform the person as well as the environment with which they interact. Although the theory primarily focuses on present interactions, Bronfenbrenner recognized that previous interactions could have an impact on one's present (Cabrera, Watson, & Franklin, 2016; Cross, 2017; Rosa & Tudge, 2013).

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979) presents a series of five nested environments that influence a person's development and places the individual at the center. These five environments are called microsystems, mesosystems, exosystems, macrosystems and chronosystems. Within each of these contexts are key factors that uniquely impact development for each individual (Cross, 2017). *Microsystems* are the immediate environments that individuals closely interact with in their daily lives (classrooms, romantic partners, roommates, family, mentors, friends, faculty, neighborhood, and religious institutions). *Mesosystems* refers to relationships between one or more microsystems (interactions between peer experiences and family experiences, classroom experiences and peer experiences). *Exosystems* are one or multiple social environmental settings that indirectly impact a person. *Macrosystems* are larger cultural contexts that are made up of social, cultural and historical belief systems that influence the individual indirectly (for example, negative portrayals of Muslim women in the media can impact how Muslim women are treated; Onwuegbuzie, Collins, & Frels, 2013). Finally, *chronosystems* add the dimension of time as it relates both to the sequence of events that take place in a person's life and socio-historical time (Rosa & Tudge, 2013).

College students constantly interact with various contexts and environments both within and outside of higher education that directly and indirectly influence their growth and

development (Renn, 2003). With the rising numbers of international students and Muslim students, including Muslim international women, institutional leaders can benefit from learning about the ways in which these students interact within microsystems, including interactions in classrooms and other spaces on and off campus; within social networks (both in-person and virtual); and with a diverse array of individuals, including roommates, mentors, family members, faculty, and staff. Limited research explores how microsystems influence Muslim international women students, but one way to conceptualize these influences is to explore students' identity performance.

### **Identity Performance**

The concept of identity performance may be new to higher education, but it is not as new to other academic fields. Outside of higher education, the concept of identity performance has been examined in sociology as well from a feminist perspective. One of the first sociologists to explore identity as performance was Erving Goffman (1959). He examined individual identity, group relations, and the impact of environments by applying a symbolic interactionist perspective (i.e., the ways in which one interprets the world impacts the ways in which one acts). Goffman used theatre as a metaphor to describe the performance of identity and explained that people serve as actors who perform various roles in various settings based on their interactions in multiple social contexts (Pearson, 2009).

To elaborate on this theatre metaphor, Goffman (1959) presented the dramaturgical framework, incorporating the elements of *performance*, *setting*, *appearance*, *manner*, *front*, *front stage*, *back stage* and *off stage*. He defined *performance* as interactions or activities individuals engage in with others. Through performances, individuals share impressions of themselves with others. Environments and audiences thus shape performances, and social identities develop as a function of interaction or exchange with others. *Settings* according to Goffman (1959) are locations and environments where performances take place, and individuals alter their performances based on the settings. *Appearance* refers to different props individuals use to communicate their identities, which includes one's dress, language, gender, age and occupation. *Manner* refers to the ways in which individuals communicate or play their roles (for example, aggressive, receptive, assertive).

*Front* in the dramaturgical framework is described as a process of impression management in which individuals adjust their image or impression (intentionally or unintentionally) for others

in their settings. Goffman (1959) described three regions or types of interactions individuals engage in that influence their identity performance; *front stage*, *back stage*, and *off stage*. *Front stage* (similar to *front*) is where the individuals perform their identity in a way that adheres to the expectations of their audience as they recognize that they are being watched. On the front stage, individuals display different behaviors (conscious and unconscious) depending on others' impressions of them, and sometimes impressions are influenced by stereotypes. Therefore, individuals present idealized versions of themselves to conform to the norms and expectations of others. *Back stage* is the opposite of front stage. Individuals behave differently when no one is watching, as they are not in front of others and get to be themselves. *Off stage* is when individuals meet with other individuals outside of daily settings and give specific performances based on individual interactions.

Goffman (1959) asserted that social norms shape the ways in which individuals perform their identities. Gender is one type of identity that is influenced by social and cultural norms. Judith Butler (2004), philosopher and gender theorist, has written extensively about gender performance and performativity. She rationalized that gender identities (e.g., man, woman) are socially constructed and are not stable identities. Gender identities may appear to be stabilized due to repeated gestures, movements, and enactments (e.g., dress, manners) and are thus misleadingly seen as stable. Butler argued that there is no physical sex and sex is determined by society. She added that society places an emphasis on sex and one's gender identity is difficult to break away from due to societal pressures. Butler (2011) further asserted that the performing of gender occurs from the conception of a baby when they are "boyed" or "girlled" and as they grow up, society continues to recognize them as such. In turn, this social recognition influences the construction of the individual's own gendered identity. Further, this process of social construction imposes the ideas of masculinity and femininity onto individuals (Butler, 2011).

Thus, according to Butler (2004, 2011), gender is performative, as it is something that is repeatedly "done" and not something that humans possess. Since gender is socially constructed, when individuals do not perform gender according to prevailing social and cultural norms, there are various repercussions since gender constitutes the ways in which people read and treat others. Therefore, gendering becomes a way to mark or (de)humanize people, so people are treated accordingly. However, Butler stressed that some people disrupt prevailing norms by not conforming to pre-existing social categories (Butler, 2004).

Both Goffman (1959) and Butler (2004) emphasize the role of society in the construction of one's identity, and they both propose that consciously and unconsciously, individuals engage in identity performance. Goffman (1959) used theatre as a metaphor to explain the various roles individuals play based on their settings, and Butler (2004) added that gender is socially constructed and individuals exhibit norms imposed by others on the ways in which they perform their gendered identities. Despite increasing numbers of Muslim international women in U.S. college environments and the prominence of gendered Islamophobia, few if any studies exist in higher education that examine how campus environments influence identity performance among Muslim international women. Understanding these students' narratives and amplifying their voices is imperative so that higher education stakeholders, both within and outside campus environments, can intentionally design and sustain programs and services to enhance Muslim international women's college experiences and outcomes.

### **Purpose of the Study and Research Question**

The purpose of this research was to study Muslim identity performance on college campuses. Identity performance is the ways in which individuals act, engage, interact, behave and situate themselves in their various environments (Goffman, 1959). The conceptual framework for the study was Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979). This theory identifies five environmental systems in which an individual interacts: microsystems (immediate environment), mesosystems (connections), ecosystems (indirect environment), macrosystems (social and cultural values), and chronosystems (changes over time). Further, the theory underlines environmental influences on an individual's development. Using Bronfenbrenner's theory as a framework, this study focused on Muslim identity performance in microsystems within and outside college environments.

In particular, I was interested in understanding how microsystems shape the ways in which undergraduate Muslim international women perform their Muslim identities on college campuses. Accordingly, this study was designed to address the following research questions:

1. How do undergraduate Muslim international women describe their experiences of identity performance inside college environments?
2. How do undergraduate Muslim international women describe their experiences of identity performance outside college environments?

To pursue these research questions, I used narrative inquiry, a qualitative methodological approach, to explore and understand stories of Muslim identity performance among eight undergraduate international women. All participants in this study were sophomore, junior or senior undergraduate students at two institutions (one public and one private) on the east coast of the U.S. All students self-identified as women, were international students on F-1 or J-1 visa status (immigration classification for an international student), and self-identified as Muslim. I conducted interviews until I achieved data saturation; however, my target sample size was eight participants. I collected data by conducting two interviews with each participant. Interviews were transcribed verbatim, analyzed for salient constructs, and organized in themes that emerged during data analysis. Data consisted of stories related to Muslim identity performance in various environments inside and outside the college campuses.

### **Definition of Terms**

*Adhan/Azan* – the Muslim call to prayer. The adhan/azan consists of specific phrases, recited aloud in Arabic prior to each of the five daily prayers times. Upon hearing the call, Muslims discontinue all activity and assemble at a local mosque for formal communal worship. There are different spellings based on language and country (Ali, Liu, & Humedian, 2004).

*Abaya* – a loose-fitting full-length robe worn by some Muslim women (Ali et al., 2004).

*Burqa* – an enveloping outer garment worn by women in some Islamic traditions to cover themselves in public.

*Chador* – a large piece of cloth that is wrapped around the head and upper body, leaving only the face exposed.

*Dupatta* – cloth material worn as a scarf or head covering in South Asia.

*Hajj* – an annual Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca (the most holy city of the Muslims), mandatory for all Muslim adults who are physically and financially capable and it is to be performed at least once in their lifetime (Ali et al., 2004).

*Halal*– permissible or lawful foods, a way of preparing food that is in accordance with Islamic principles.

*Haram* – something that is forbidden by Islamic principles.

*Hijab* – Commonly, the term hijab is used to denote the scarf or other type of head covering worn by Muslim women throughout the world. However, the broader definition of the

term refers to a state of modesty and covering that encompasses a woman's entire body, excluding hands and face (Ali et al., 2004).

*Hijabi* – common term for a Muslim woman who wears the hijab/headscarf.

*Identity Performance* – Identity performance is the ways in which individuals act, engage, interact, behave and situate themselves in their various environments (Goffman, 1959).

*Islam* – “The word Islam comes from the Arabic root word salaam (‘peace’) and literally translates from Arabic to English as ‘surrender’” (Ali et al., 2004, p. 636).

*Jummah Prayers* – the congregational worship performed on Fridays in place of the midday worship. On this special day, Muslims make an extra effort to go to their local mosque to listen to the *khutbah* (community address) by the *imam* (worship leader) and to perform the formal worship with their other Muslims (Ali et al., 2004).

*Mahram* – a person with whom marriage is forbidden.

*Microsystems* – the immediate environments/settings in which an individual closely interacts in their daily life (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). For college students, these environments include classrooms, neighborhoods, public and virtual spaces, and religious institutions, as well as relationships with romantic partners, roommates, family, mentors, friends, and faculty members.

*Mosque* – a place or house of prayer, a place of prostration.

*Muhammad* – founder of Islam and regarded as the last Prophet of God within that faith.

*Muslim* – a believer in Islam.

*Muslim Student Association (MSA)* – a campus student organization to bring together Muslims of diverse backgrounds and cultures to facilitate networking, educating and empowering of the students under one unified, organized, proactive community (Mubarak, 2007).

*Niqab* – a veil worn by some Muslim women in public, covering all of the face apart from the eyes (Ali et al., 2004).

*Qur'an* – “is the holy book for Muslims” (Ali et al., 2004, p. 636) and foundation of Islamic law, religion, culture and politics.

*Ramadan* – Ramadan is the month in which Muslims fast daily from dawn to sunset to develop piety and self-restraint (Ali, Liu, & Humedian, 2004).

*Salat* – is a ritual of prayers of Muslims that are performed five times daily in a set form (Ali et al., 2004).

*Shahada* – Considered the basis of the religion Islam; “there is only one God and Muhammad is his messenger” (Ali et al., 2004, p. 637).

*Shalwar-Kameez* – traditional clothing worn in the Indian sub-continent.

*Shi'a* – one of the branches of Islam (second largest).

*Siyam* – Arabic word for fasting, performed during Ramadan. Sawm means total abstinence from food, liquids, and sexual relationships from dawn to sunset, for one lunar month.

*Sunni* – one of the branches of Islam (the largest).

*Zakat* – almsgiving/charity to be made annually by Muslims.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study explored the identity performance of undergraduate Muslim international women in collegiate microsystems (both on- and off-campus). The study was significant for several constituents, including Muslim international women students, faculty members and student affairs educators, and university leaders who serve minoritized students at U.S. colleges and universities, as well as for researchers, policymakers and higher education associations. First, Muslim international women want to attend colleges and universities that allow them to grow and learn. Findings from this study gave voice to the participants, but may resonate with the experiences of other Muslim international women students. Beyond resonance, the information they learn can help them in making informed decisions about which colleges to attend and which collegiate experiences to pursue.

Faculty members play an important part in retention and academic achievement for all students. Findings from this study provided information about faculty relationships and classroom experiences among Muslim international women students. Faculty members at U.S. colleges and universities can use this information to create educational environments within and outside the classroom that foster support and growth for Muslim international women. Faculty members may also realize the importance of mentorship and one-on-one interaction with Muslim international students and, as a result, form close relationships with them. Additionally, findings may enhance faculty members' knowledge about this student population and may clear up some misunderstandings about how to interact with Muslim women students in ways that facilitate, rather than detract from, their sense of belonging.

University administrators and leaders who serve minoritized students, including student affairs educators, will also benefit from this study. Findings addressed how various microsystems, both on- and off-campus, influenced Muslim international women students' identity performance. University administrators and leaders in cultural centers and other offices serving minoritized students can use the information to form personal relationships and create intentional, meaningful experiences and programs for Muslim international women to increase their sense of belonging and retention on campus. Findings may also inform the efforts of institutional leaders tasked with increasing the representation and retention of minoritized students. Institutional assessment and evaluation professionals may use the findings as part of their efforts to assess whether campus communities are inclusive and foster growth and learning for Muslim international students. In turn, university presidents/chancellors, provosts, deans, vice-presidents/vice-chancellors, and governing boards can use institutional assessment findings to make appropriate recommendations for institutional change.

The present study also had significance for future research and scholarship. This study explored the identity performance of Muslim international women two institutions of higher education in the U.S. Future studies could utilize the same conceptual framework to explore identity performance in different types of U.S. colleges and universities. Researchers might examine identity performance of Muslim international women at community colleges, women's colleges, or minority-serving institutions. Other future studies might compare and contrast identity performance among Muslim international women at predominantly white public and private institutions in the U.S. Such a study would expand on what we know about the lived experiences of Muslim international students attending colleges and universities in the U.S. Together, such studies would expand findings from this study by considering the experiences of Muslim international women in different institutional settings.

This study addressed an important gap in the literature by focusing on Muslim international college women, yet there is also limited research on the experiences of Muslim international college men. Future studies might use narrative inquiry methodology to explore identity performance among Muslim international men, trans and gender non-conforming Muslims at institutions of higher education in the U.S. Such studies would expand the literature on identity performance among Muslim international college students.

Policymakers and higher education associations may use findings from this study to make decisions about individual and institutional resources for Muslim and international students. Policymakers may also use these findings to make recommendations related to cultural centers, religious centers, and other spaces that may enhance college experiences for Muslim and international students, including Muslim international women. Lastly, policymakers may use findings from this study to inform recommendations for institutional change efforts to improve the campus climate. For example, they may recommend inclusivity trainings for faculty members and administrators so that they can serve Muslim students more effectively.

### **Delimitations**

As with any research project, this study had several initial delimitations. The first related to the sample. This study took place at two institutions, one private and one public, four-year, predominantly white institution in the Southeast. It is possible that Muslim international women students at other institutions in other parts of the country might have different experiences of identity performance. If the study had taken place at any such more than two institutions across the U.S., the findings might have been different.

The second delimitation was related to the design of this study. Muslim international women were interviewed twice as planned in the study design. If other data collection methods were utilized, such as collecting stories via journals or asking the participants to draw their experiences of Muslim international identity performance, it is possible that these methods might have given different findings.

A third delimitation was the timing of the interviews. Students were interviewed during the second semester of their sophomore, junior and senior years and were asked to recall and reflect on their experiences over several years. Interviewing students during different times, such as the first semester of their sophomore, junior or senior year or during a less busy time, may have provided different information.

Despite these initial delimitations, this study was worthwhile because of the need for multiple constituent groups to learn more about identity performance among undergraduate Muslim international women. This study examined the ways in which undergraduate Muslim international women describe their experiences of identity performance in microsystems inside and outside their college campuses.

### **Organization of the Study**

This dissertation is organized into five chapters. Chapter One introduced the topic and the broader issues around the topic, the purpose statement, and the significance of the study. Chapter Two reviews the literature relevant to the study. The third chapter describes the methodology, including sampling, data collection, and data analysis procedures. Chapter Four introduces and describes the findings of the study, and Chapter Five discusses the findings and offers implications for practice, research and policy.

## Chapter Two

### Literature Review

In this chapter, I review multiple bodies of literature most relevant to my study on identity performance of undergraduate Muslim international women (UMIW) on college campuses. There were five bodies of literature that were relevant to this study. The first section includes research on Islamophobia and gendered Islamophobia. The second set of literature examined experiences of Muslim undergraduate college students (both international and domestic) in the U.S. The third body of research relevant to this study included literature on campus climate. The fourth group of studies relevant to this study focused on identity. Lastly, I conclude this chapter with research on the conceptual framework for the study: Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979).

The majority of this chapter is organized around these five major bodies of literature and their respective subcategories. However, readers first should understand key issues relating to Islam and Muslims. Thus, the chapter begins with a brief overview of these topics.

#### **Islam and Muslims**

Islam is the second largest religion of the world and according to Pew Research Center (2017) it is the fastest growing religion in the world. By the middle of this century, it will surpass Christianity and become the world's largest religion (Lipka, 2017). *Islam* is an Arabic word that means submission, and individuals who follow the religion of Islam are known as Muslims (one who submits) (Ali & Bagheri, 2009; Lippman, 1995). All Muslims follow the holy book, the Qur'an (also spelled Koran), as the primary source of faith and practice (Armstrong, 2007). Similar to Christianity and Judaism, Islam is a monotheistic, Abrahamic religion (Ali et al., 2004; Armstrong, 2007; Lippman, 1995).

There are five fundamental practices, beliefs and duties that are required for all Muslims. These include profession of faith (*Shahada*); prayer (*salat*), obligatory prayers performed five times a day; charity (*zakat*), a mandatory donation to be given to those less fortunate; fasting during the month of Ramadan, from sunrise to sunset for a month each year; and pilgrimage (*hajj*) to visit the holy city of Mecca in Saudi Arabia during one's lifetime (Armstrong, 2007; Haddad & Esposito, 2000). There are two major religious festivals that Muslims celebrate each year: Eid Al-Adha and Eid al-Fitr. The Eid Al-Adha is celebrated at the end of *hajj* (pilgrimage) and the Eid al-Fitr is celebrated at the end of Ramadan (month of fasting).

In addition to the mandatory beliefs and practices, Muslims are expected to abstain from gambling, adultery, fornication, and consumption of alcohol and carnivorous animals (Ali et al., 2004). All of these acts are deemed harmful (*Haram*) or impure for all Muslims. Additionally, Muslims have a few dietary restrictions, and they follow the Islamic principle of only eating *halal* (beneficial) foods, much in the same way that observant Jews eat only kosher foods. Muslims in the West often face challenges when finding *halal* foods that satisfy the religious restrictions, especially on college campuses (Ali & Bagheri, 2009).

Within the Muslim community, gender roles and dress are among the most disputed and controversial issues related to women's rights, responsibilities and treatment (Haddad & Esposito, 1997). Since Islam is practiced in different parts of the world, the treatment of women is influenced by ethnic, cultural, and national differences. The religion prescribes modest dress for both men and women (Cole & Ahmadi, 2010). Depending on one's cultural context dress for women could mean wearing a *burqa* (cover completely), a hijab (head covering), a *niqab* (face covering), a *chador* (long cloak or drape), or other forms of modesty personally defined by individuals within their cultures and society (Ali et al., 2004). Therefore, Muslim women's choices to dress are influenced more by national, and ethnic cultures as opposed to the religion.

The Muslim population, nationally and internationally, is extremely diverse. Muslims represent a wide array of countries, cultures and ethnicities (Peek, 2005). Although Islam originated in the Middle East-North Africa region in the seventh century, this region now houses only about 20% of the world's Muslims (Arabs) (Cole & Ahmadi, 2010; Lipka, 2017; Mohamed, 2016). Globally, 62% (a majority) of the Muslims live in the Asia-Pacific region, including large populations in Indonesia, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Iran and Turkey (Lipka, 2017). This diverse embodiment is also reflected in Muslim populations in colleges and universities across the U.S.

The Muslim population in the U.S. is increasing and is estimated to double in size by 2050. In 2015, there were approximately 3.3 million Muslims of all ages in the U.S., which is only one percent of the total U.S. population (Mohamed, 2016). This percentage is just an estimate and does not include Muslim international students. The Muslim population in the U.S. is divided between immigrants and nonimmigrants (Ali & Bagheri, 2009).

It is pertinent to understand the demography and history of Muslims in the U.S. The U.S. is more diverse now than it was 50 years ago with more people from Asia, Latin America,

Middle East and Africa (Citrin, Wong, & Duff, 2001). These diverse populations, in the U.S., all fall under one nationality, American. National identity often overlaps or co-exists with other identities namely social identities, racial identities, gender identities and religious identities (Citrin et al., 2001). Therefore, it is not uncommon to know that people within the U.S., consciously and sub-consciously, identify themselves by various identities, and not just by their national identity, namely African-Americans, Asian Americans, Native American, Arab-Americans and Muslim Americans and many more not included here. “Muslims in the United States (and else where) are ethnically diverse and heterogeneous in language, skin color and culture. The only element they have in common is their religion and even that has some variations” (Kabir, 2013, p.11). Although Muslims practice the same aspects of the Islamic religion, they are distinct from the mainstream American population.

Historically, the U.S. has had a long-established Judeo-Christian tradition, and Muslims within the country were African American Muslim populations, who followed slightly different understandings and practices of Islam (Leonard, 2005). Currently, this landscape looks different with diverse Muslims (those belonging to the religion Islam), migrating to the U.S. and representing countries from almost all continents (Sirin & Katsiaficas, 2011). Among the major groups that make up the Muslim-American populations are African Americans, South Asians and Arab Americans (Leonard, 2005). The 1965 Immigration and Naturalization Act, Arab-speaking Muslims have become increasingly numerous, which has further increased the diversity within the Arab American populations. Additionally, the Act of 1965 has also increased the immigration of South Asians, mainly from Pakistan, India and Bangladesh to the U.S. (Ajrouch, & Jamal, 2007).

Muslim populations, although representing various nations, have been organized along religious and political lines in the last decades of the twentieth century (Leonard, 2005). Arab-speaking immigrants, because of their fluency in Arabic language, have played a significant role in establishing Islamic educational settings and mosques around the U.S (Ajrouch, & Jamal, 2007). Similarly, South Asian Muslims have played a substantial role in building political and national Muslim coalitions within the U.S. (Leonard, 2005; Ajrouch, & Jamal, 2007).

Information concerning Islam and Muslims (nationally and internationally) has been influenced by assumptions and stereotypes (news, politics, and media) that perpetuate a lack of understanding and biases towards this population. Therefore, it was imperative to provide

fundamental information and common language about Islam and Muslims. Subsequent sections of this chapter address the five bodies of literature that informed this study of identity performance among undergraduate Muslim international women (UMIW). The first such section addresses Islamophobia and gendered Islamophobia.

### **Islamophobia and Gendered Islamophobia**

Despite the growing number of Muslims in the world and in the U.S., there are many individuals, including Americans, who are largely suspicious, have adverse opinions, and are ignorant of Islam and of Muslims (Ali et al., 2004). A number of terms have been used to explain the negative attitudes and feelings towards Islam and Muslims. Among these terms, the most common word is Islamophobia, which means fear of Islam (Esposito & Kalin, 2011). Islamophobia is defined as an unfound fear, hostility and dislike for Muslims and Islam (Shryock, 2010). However, many scholars use the term Islamophobia without defining it and in many cases it has become a “catch all” term, ranging from xenophobia to antiterrorism, used both in academics and politics (Helbling, 2010). One of the most problematic aspects of using this term is that its universalizing quality casts Islam and Muslims as the potential enemies (Shryock, 2010). Additionally, Islamophobia has become a form of racism as it incites hatred and targets religious beliefs, cultural traditions and ethnic backgrounds (Esposito & Kalin, 2011).

Contrary to popular belief that Islamophobia suddenly started after the 9/11 attacks, unfortunately, it has deep historical roots. The term was first introduced in 1997 in the UK, in the Runnymede Trust report, as part of a more common xenophobia (fear of foreigners) framework. In the U.S., however, the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon exacerbated the Islamophobia in the West (Esposito & Kalin, 2011).

Since 9/11, hate crimes against Muslims all over the U.S. have increased (Esposito & Kalin, 2011; Ali & Bagheri, 2009; Shryock, 2010). In 2005, the Council on American Islamic Relations (CAIR) processed 1972 civil rights complaints, representing a 29.2 percent increase from the previous year. These complaints included hate crimes, discrimination, verbal and physical assault against Muslims in the U.S. Unfortunately, Islamophobia has also entered U.S. colleges and universities, where harassment and discrimination towards Muslims and Muslim American students are on the rise (Ali & Bagheri, 2009).

In 2010, according to the Gallup Center for Muslim Studies report, 43% of Americans reported that they felt more than a little prejudice towards Muslims (Esposito & Kalin, 2011) and

in the year 2017, quantitative data from a Pew Research center survey revealed that overall Americans gave a 48 rating (on the scale of 0-100, zero being the coldest and 100 the warmest) to Muslims, similar to that of Atheists (50). Although it reflects an improvement from 2014 when Muslims were awarded a 40, the overall positive sentiment towards Muslims is still low (Lipka, 2017). After the November 2016 Presidential election, anecdotal reports suggested that there had been an increase in anti-Muslim hate crimes. Although the FBI has not released the exact figures, a civil rights advocacy group that tracks hate crimes estimated that in the five days following the election, 30 such cases were reported (Mohamed, 2016).

In 2017, the national and international spotlight again focused on Muslims due to one of the executive orders signed by U.S. President Donald Trump, which would impose a ban on U.S. travel among citizens of six Muslim countries. Although in an unsigned opinion, the courts put a hold as of June 2017, the proposed travel ban brought increased attention to the Muslim population within the U.S. and all over the world. The executive order stimulated national and international debate about Muslims and their place in the U.S. society, feeding into existent anti-Muslim rhetoric and playing into Muslims' outsider status (Ali, 2014; Mir, 2007; Sirin & Fine, 2007).

Islamophobia affects Muslim men and Muslim women in different ways (Kwan, 2008; Zine, 2006). Perpetrators of Islamophobic crimes are more likely to target Muslim women than Muslim men, especially Muslim women who cover (hijab or veil) or have other religious identifiers (Cole & Ahmadi, 2003; Perry, 2014; Stubbs & Sallie, 2013). In the West, the public perception is that the head covering by Muslim women constitutes a form of gender discrimination within Islam (Ali, 2014). Due to stereotypes, negative media portrayals, and language differences, Muslim women are labeled as oppressed, backward, and uneducated (Zine, 2006).

Generally, hate crimes tend to target men disproportionately, but not in the case of Muslim women (Perry, 2014). The gendered violence and hate crimes that Muslim women experience, regardless of cultural background, is different than the ones perpetrated against Muslim men and non-Muslim women. Muslim women are often constructed as radicalized, exotic "others," who are different than the western ideal (Ali et al., 2004; Mir, 2007). Often, Muslim women in the U.S. are women of color. Crenshaw (1994) explained that women of color are simultaneously oppressed by their class, gender, ethnic, racial and religious positions.

For Muslim women (who are often women of color), their status as women, cultural identities, immigrant status, language use, religious identities, and dress may all distinguish them from non-Muslim women, rendering them as easy targets for discrimination, hate crimes, and other forms of violence (Perry, 2014).

The term *gendered Islamophobia* is an ideological construct that refers to ethno-religious and extreme political and social discrimination leveled at Muslim women (Zine, 2006).

Gendered Islamophobia stems from historically contextualized negative stereotypes that inform individual and systemic forms of oppression towards Muslim women in the West. Additionally, Western narratives represent Muslim women as victims of their culture, religion and Muslim men. Gendered Islamophobia bears material consequences and affects Muslim women's experiences, influences their sense of belonging, and forces them to think of their visibility (Perry, 2014). Many Muslim women are forced to alter their gender performance, practice their religion in accordance with western ideals instead of their own values, and change their activities, habits, and ways of being in the world in order to manage their physical and psychological safety (Kwan, 2008; Perry, 2014).

One example of the consequences of gendered Islamophobia relates to Muslim women's head covering practices. Generally, the head covering is greatly misunderstood and serves as visual profiling. In the West, women who veil are perceived as markers of gender oppression, patriarchal domination, and matriarchal submission. Non-Muslims read Muslim women's dress code as a sign of the backwardness of their religion (Zempi & Chakraborti, 2014). This perspective implies a failure of autonomy for veiled women. On the contrary, for the women who wear it, the head covering serves as a symbol of female Muslim identity, and a form of resistance to Islamophobia (Zine, 2006). Muslim women choose to define modesty in diverse ways. No matter which way they choose, many Muslim women connect to their religion as one of their primary identities, and their faith provides them a sense of community, meaning, guidance, and consolation (Esposito & Mogahed, 2007).

Literature on Islamophobia and gendered Islamophobia has been used to explain the negative attitudes and behaviors towards Muslims. The aim of this section has been to provide awareness of these terms. Literature on this topic verifies that Islamophobia has affected many environments, including college campuses. Muslims of all genders suffer great consequences in the forms of violence, verbal and physical abuse, discrimination and hate crimes due to a general

lack of understanding and stereotyping of Islam and of Muslims. Additionally, literature on gendered Islamophobia confirms that Muslim women are at a higher risk of facing prejudice and gender discrimination and experiencing differential treatment. To fully understand the sample of this study, it is important to be familiar with these concepts. In the next section, I discuss scholarly literature on Muslim undergraduate college students.

### **Muslim Undergraduate College Students**

Muslim college students constitute an important part of the increasingly diverse student body at most colleges and universities in the U.S. In the last decade, there has been an increase in numbers of Muslim students attending colleges and universities across all the states (Ali, 2014). The diversity among Muslim college students is consistent with the national demographics of Muslims in America (Ali, 2014). There are no clear statistics indicating the exact number of Muslim college students attending colleges and universities in the U.S. However, the most conservative estimate is that there are about 100,000 Muslim students enrolled in colleges and universities across all the states, including both Muslim American and Muslim international students (Lipka, 2017). Although a growing number of Muslims live in the U.S. and attend U.S. colleges and universities, they are still a minority in both these environments (Nasir & Al-Amin, 2006).

One of the first scholars to examine the religious experiences of Muslim undergraduate and graduate students in a college setting was Speck (1997). In a mixed methods study, Speck found that Muslim international students identified four major problems that impacted their learning and development in the classrooms. First, professors' lack of knowledge about and misunderstanding of Islam led them to misrepresent Muslim students in the classroom. Second, professors' use of media and textbooks that misrepresented Islam or their ethnic cultures negatively affected the learning of Muslim students. Third, professors who failed to maintain attitudes of respect, and who failed to intervene when other students stereotyped or misrepresented Islam, negatively influenced Muslim students' learning. Additionally, Muslim international students put the burden of responsibility on the professors to create an inclusive classroom learning environment. Muslim international students in this study recognized that classroom cultural norms in the U.S. were different than those in their home countries. Lastly, Muslim international students expected some reasonable accommodations from professors as it pertained to their need to take a prayer break. Overall, professors' failure to accommodate

cultural differences and maintain classroom environments free of religious intolerance negatively affected Muslim international students' classroom experiences. Speck's (1997) study was one of very few conducted prior to the events of September 11, 2001. Since 9/11, scholars have continued to investigate Muslim students' experiences with campus support (Ahmadi & Cole, 2015), mental health (Peek, 2005), and experiences in the residence halls (Calkins et al., 2012).

Among Muslim college students (both American and international), there is no universal American experience as Muslim students have to forge or force new Muslim identities (Ali, 2014). The new Muslim student identities are born out of a quest to belong, to assimilate, or out of the experiences of constantly being depicted as the "other" or "outsider" (Mir, 2007). Muslims as "other" representations, as well as general hostility toward Muslims, have regularly been constructed in the popular media and political speeches (Ali, 2014; Mir, 2007). This perspective constantly puts Muslim students on the defensive regardless of the specific environments in which they are situated.

Western media outlets (Hollywood movies, popular fiction, and television shows) continue to demonize Muslims by portraying both Muslim men and women in stereotypical roles (Nacos & Torres-Reyna, 2007). Accordingly, Muslim students in the U.S. continue to believe that news about them is negatively biased. A study by Shammass (2009) confirmed that Muslim community college students reported statistically higher incidences of perceived discrimination in the media than their non-Muslim peers. Additionally, months after the events of September 11, Muslim students living in New York City faced outward anger and harassment based on the way media sources defined them (Peek, 2005).

Thus, media representations continue to feed into the depiction of Muslims as "others" who are different from western norms. Scholars have explored the concept of Muslim college students as "others" among Muslim college women in Canada (Bullock & Jafri, 2000; Eid & Khan, 2011) and Muslim students in Europe (Morey & Yaqin, 2010; Talani, 2011). In a study on Muslim students in U.S. colleges and universities, Ali (2014) explored the raced representations of the "Muslim other." Ali conducted qualitative life history interviews with 24 Muslim undergraduate students (13 females and 11 males, ten of whom were South Asian, seven were Middle Eastern and three were African Americans) to reveal three major themes that marked the Muslim body as outside of the normative American identity. The first theme, the pre-modern Muslim, referred to heightened awareness of Muslims in America due to others'

descriptions of them as having “alien” ways. Dominant narratives that contributed to the pre-modern Muslim theme included the notion that Muslims were anti-rational, culturally and politically backwards, and unable to participate in a liberal democratic society. Together these narratives informed the assumption that all Muslims needed to be saved from themselves (Ali, 2014).

The second theme, the Muslim as a physical threat, focused on not only saving the Muslims from themselves, but also saving the western/American society at large from all Muslims. Muslim students revealed that they were treated as a suspect class. Further, Muslim students emphasized that media messages (i.e., entertainment and news outlets) portrayed them as inherently violent, and this description played into the dichotomous narrative of “Us” versus “Them” (Ali, 2014).

The third and final theme that marked the Muslim body as an “outsider” was the gendered treatment of Muslim identities. According to the students, Muslim masculinities and femininities received different treatments. Muslim men were interpreted as socially violent and aggressive, whereas Muslim women were constructed as backward, oppressed, and lacking agency and voice. Study participants disclosed that their peers believed that all Muslims were dangerous and ran the risk of “becoming radicalized.” In summary, the focus of Ali’s (2014) study was to understand Muslims students’ experiences of otherness and the ways in which these experiences impacted their Muslim identities.

While Ali (2014) found that both Muslim men and Muslim women faced questions about and scrutiny of their Muslim identities (both negative but different), other research suggests that increasingly Muslim women are more frequently targeted. Consistent with gendered Islamophobia, Muslim college women who wear a hijab or veil or have other religious representations are particularly likely to experience scrutiny (Cole & Ahmadi, 2003; Perry, 2014; Stubbs & Sallie, 2013). Further, Muslim college women increasingly feel vulnerable and highly visible (Nasir & Al-Amin, 2006).

Another dimension of scholarship on Muslim undergraduate students has focused on visual aspects of Muslim identity. More specifically, the experiences of Muslim women who veil on college campuses have received increased attention. Muslim women who veil are visible and their dress easily recognizes them with their religion. In two separate studies, Cole and Ahmadi (2003, 2015) found religious identity for Muslim women had negatively impacted their

satisfaction with their overall university experience. In their 2003 study, Muslim women in the study reported that over all people in the campus environment knew very little or were misinformed about the veil and Muslims. This misinformation led to feelings of isolation and these Muslim women felt coerced by the alienating experiences to reexamine their choices to veil.

Muslim women on college campuses have described the burdens of representing all Muslims due to their dress (Mubarak, 2007). Other Muslim students stated that being Muslim on American college campuses required them to serve as ambassadors of Islam (Ali & Bagheri, 2009). Serving as representatives or ambassadors of their religion required Muslim students to reconcile their Islamic values with the social culture of the institution (Mir, 2009). As a result of marginalization, exclusion, judgment, and pressure to meet the expectations of societal and university cultures, some Muslim students (Americans and international) report actually changing their religious practices or appearance to avoid conflict, hostility, and lack of understanding from others (Ali et al., 2004; Ali & Bagheri, 2009; Mir, 2009; Stubbs & Sallee, 2013). For example, Muslim women students have modified their dress (Mubarak, 2007) and removed their traditional hijab or veil (Cole & Ahmadi, 2003), and Muslim students have chosen to remain silent when angered or upset due to negative comments (Peek, 2005).

This section has identified several themes from the literature on the experiences of Muslim students (domestic and international) in U.S. colleges and universities. First, these studies revealed that Muslim students' classroom learning is negatively affected by attitudes and (mis)understandings of Islam Muslims by professors and students. Further, research shows that Muslim students are often depicted as "others" or "outsiders," and their experiences and identities are impacted by media outlets, political speeches, and gendered stereotypes. Similarly, findings of these studies suggested that Muslim women, especially those who veil, are highly visible and experience negative scrutiny on college campuses. Lastly, Muslim students (men and women) experience the burden of serving as ambassadors or representatives of their religion.

The body of knowledge regarding the experiences of Muslim students continues to grow. Although some research has examined the experiences of identity as it relates to dress or religious practices for Muslim women, a review of the literature revealed a paucity of studies regarding undergraduate Muslim international women's experiences of identity performance. In particular, the literature has not distinguished between the voices of Muslim international and

Muslim domestic women students. Current research on Muslim students has not focused on the intersections of religion, culture and nationality. Additionally, a vast majority of research has utilized qualitative approaches to examine Muslim women students' experiences, but there are no studies that use narrative inquiry as a methodology to collect stories of undergraduate Muslim International women's identity performance. This study hopes to fill this gap by exploring and extending the literature on Muslim international women's identity performance in campus environments. To advance understanding of how campus environments influence college students' identities, the next two sections of this chapter review the literature on campus climate and identity development among college students, respectively.

### **Campus Climate**

Campus climate and its influences on students, faculty members, and institutions has become a hot topic in higher education in the last few decades (Mayhew et al., 2014). Although a very broad term, campus climate is often used to describe the interaction among various constituents at the university, namely its people, processes, and institutional culture (Harper & Hurtado, 2007). More broadly it includes current perceptions, attitudes, observations and expectations of the people in the academic community about the environment (Hart & Fellabaum, 2008).

In recent years the majority of campus climate studies have focused on ethnicity, race and gender. As a result, the use of the term *campus racial climate* has become common. Campus racial climate comprises attitudes, observations and perceptions of minoritized students' experiences on campus, including experiences of racism, discrimination, as well as support for diversity (Hart & Fellabaum, 2008). Literature in this area reveals that White and ethnically and racially minoritized students who attend the same institution often view the campus climate in different ways. For example, Rankin and Reason (2005) conducted a multiple campus study to evaluate the differences between the campus climate perceptions for students of color and White students. Through this quantitative study, they showed that students of color found the campus climate to be less accepting and racist compared to their White counterparts. Findings from the study reinforced the need to consider intersections of identities, namely both gender and race, when studying students' experiences of campus climate. Similarly, Cabrera and Nora (1994) found that racial prejudice and discrimination negatively impacts learning for Black students. However, in this study feelings of alienation and unfriendliness were reported by both White and

Black students, but they experienced these feelings in different ways. Additionally, a number of studies have shown that racially minoritized students (i.e., Black and African American, Latinx, Native American, and Asian American) at predominantly White institutions have reported differential treatment and lower levels of satisfaction with racial campus climate than their White peers and are more likely to perceive pressures to conform to stereotypes (Ancis, Sedlacek, & Mohr, 2000; Cabrera & Nora, 1994).

In 1998, Hurtado et al. created a campus climate framework to enhance the educational policies and practices and to illustrate issues related to campus racial climate. This framework introduced four different dimensions of campus climate: an institution's historical legacy of inclusion or exclusion (general policies, institutional mission and desegregation policies for some institutions), structural diversity in terms of numerical representation (increase in diverse student enrollments, increase in diverse staff, and faculty), the psychological climate in relation to perceptions and attitudes between and among groups (levels of alienation, perceptions of discrimination, perceptions of a hostile environment and perceptions of race/ethnicity), and the behavioral climate dimension (interactions across race/ethnicity, campus and classroom diversity).

In addition to these four dimensions, Hurtado et al. (1998) explained that a central concept of campus climate for diversity is that students are educated in distinct racial contexts that are both influenced by external and internal institutional forces. The authors suggested that there were two main issues to consider when evaluating a campus climate for an institution, “(a) How diverse does the campus look in its representation of different cultural groups? and (b) To what extent do campus operations demonstrate that racial and ethnic diversity is an essential value?” (Hurtado et al., 1998, p. 297). Lastly, the authors explained that psychological perceptions, attitudes and observations (both negative or positive) of the racial climate of an institution could impact the identities of minoritized groups.

Milem, Chang, and Antonio (2005) extended the campus climate framework by adding a fifth dimension to the model called organizational diversity. This aspect focused on creating supportive structures for institutionalizing diversity on a college campus. Additionally Hurtado's et al., (1998) campus climate model was utilized to create a Multicontextual Model for Diverse Learning Environments (DLE) (Hurtado, Alvarez, Guillermo-Wann, Cuellar, & Arellano, 2012).

The model is applicable to the experiences of students from a wide range of diverse backgrounds and suggests that identity mediates the way in which students experience college.

Another set of studies relating to experiences of marginalized groups has focused on campus climate for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender students. LGBT students often face a chilly campus climate and harassment/discrimination (Dolan, 1998; Rankin, 2003; Yost & Gilmore, 2011). Based on their sexual identity, most LGBT students emphasize that they feel like the least accepted group when compared with other under-served populations (Tetreault et al., 2013). As a result, LGBT students indicate that their sense of safety and wellbeing is disrupted due to the negative campus climate (Rankin, Weber, Blumenfeld, & Frazer, 2010). Similarly, a study by Rankin (2003) indicated that LGBT students of color were more likely to hide their gender identity than their White counterparts based on harassment, homophobic remarks and physical assaults.

Campus climate frameworks have also been used to examine women's experiences at U.S. colleges and universities. Review of the literature in this area reveals that most studies of college women's experiences focus on "chilly climate" (i.e., classroom environments where one sex is valued differently than the other) (Hall & Sandler, 1982), gender bias, and gender discrimination in classroom environments that disadvantage women (Allan, 2002). Some studies have examined the experiences of women faculty and staff (Maranto & Griffin, 2010); however, most studies focus on female college students (Banks, 1988; Brady & Eisler, 1999; Morris, 2003). For example, a study by Morris (2003) revealed that unwelcoming classroom environments, lack of scholarly attention, faculty members' lack of interest in and awareness of women, and feelings of being an outsider negatively impacted college women's learning. Although the majority of the studies focused on experiences inside the classroom, Woodard and Sims (2000) focused on climate issues outside the classroom, which is similar to the early work on chilly climate by Hall and Sandler (1982).

Overall, literature on campus climate across various studies uncovers that creating a welcoming campus environment positively affects the perspectives, experiences, and attitudes of minoritized groups (Hurtado et.al, 1998). Furthermore, a positive campus climate can increase minority student retention (Harper & Hurtado, 2007). Additionally, campus climate literature reveals that students, who interact with racially and ethnically diverse peers in a college setting, enjoy higher psychosocial, interpersonal and cognitive gains (Gurin, Dey, Hurtado & Gurin,

2002; Rankin & Reason, 2005). Also students who attend racially diverse institutions show higher level of academic engagement (Gurin et al., 2002; Pike and Kuh, 2006). Lastly, positive experiences of campus climate and positive perceptions of campus safety increase the likelihood of confronting other students or faculty for negative comments (Tetreault et al., 2013).

Alternatively, negative campus climates have been associated with undesirable outcomes for students, such as lower self-esteem (Tetreault et al., 2013) and poor academic performance (Rankin & Reason, 2005). In addition, negative perceptions of the university environment have adverse results on student involvement and other social outcomes (Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Rankin & Reason, 2005) for minoritized students (Ancis et al., 2000; Cabrera & Nora, 1994; Hurtado, 1992; Suarez-Balcazar, Orellana-Damacela, Portillo, Rowan, & Andrews-Guillen, 2003) and LGBT students (Dolan, 1998; Rankin 2003, Rankin et al., 2010; Tetreault et al., 2013; Yost & Gilmore, 2011). Lastly, linking the negative experiences with campus climate and one's identity, various studies postulate that extracurricular contexts and classroom contexts shape students' levels of engagement and exploration of self (Guillermo-Wann & Johnston, 2012).

The literature provided here is a fraction of the campus climate literature. The vast majority of campus climate studies have examined the experiences of minoritized students (particularly students who identify as Black and African American, Latinx, LGBT, and women) with a focus on ethnicity, race, and gender. Studies highlighting the experiences of these minoritized groups have utilized both qualitative and quantitative methods. These studies suggest the psychological dimension of the campus climate influences minoritized students' experiences. Overall, positive campus climates promote minoritized students' retention and sense of safety and increase their interpersonal, cognitive and psychosocial abilities. On the contrary, negative campus climates can lower minoritized students' self-esteem, decrease their academic and co-curricular involvement, and create an undesirable impact on students' identities.

The topic of campus climate has been studied from many different dimensions. Despite the prolific nature of campus climate research, few studies have explored the influence of campus climate on the identities of undergraduate Muslim women and international women. Since literature in this section uncovers that campus climate can have both negative and positive influences on minoritized students' experiences and identities, the next section delves deeper into literature on identity.

## **Identity**

Identity is the condition of being oneself (Kabir, 2013). “Arguably it is a process that is fluid and is shaped according to circumstances and opportunities. Identity may depend on the family one is born into, the culture and religion one belongs to, one’s community and one’s life experiences” (Kabir, 2013, p. 23). Identity can be defined as the qualities, beliefs, traits and characteristics, and social group membership that make a particular person or group different from others (Leary & Tangney, 2011). This meaning changes slightly depending on the academic field. Identity has been studied across academic disciplines, but most prominently it is situated in developmental psychology, sociology, social psychology, and human and developmental ecology (Patton, Renn, Guido, & Quaye, 2016; Torres, Jones, & Renn, 2009). Identity theories in higher education have been influenced by each of these fields in different ways. One commonality these academic fields share is the focus on understanding the individual (Jones, 2013), and in higher education, the student. In the next few sections, I explain the origins of identity framework within each of these academic fields and provide literature on influences of each of these disciplines on studies of identity among college students in higher education.

### **Developmental Psychology**

One of the earliest student identity theories in higher education emerged out of the discipline of developmental psychology. In developmental psychology, the definition of identity includes a focus on self, rooted in a person’s experiences, and personal identity (Leary & Tangney, 2011). Some identity studies focus on perceptions of self based on membership within groups, whereas others discuss traits, characteristics, and personality. Erik Erikson (1959/1980) was one of the first people to examine identity development. He theorized that identity development occurs throughout one’s lifetime and thus he presented an eight-stage identity development model, depicting a series of developmental tasks, or crises that each individual address or resolves to move towards a higher level development (Patton et al., 2016). Crisis for Erikson meant a time for decision-making that requires choices and actions (Jones, 2013). Additionally, crisis signifies internal tension, mental stress and presents an opportunity for growth (Spencer et al., 2006). Further, Erikson suggested that development occurs with a combination of genetic and environmental influences and actions and choices cause progression, regression, or stasis among the various stages (Torres, Jones, & Renn, 2009).

The eight stages of the Erikson's identity development model (1959/1980) are *trust versus mistrust* (infancy), *autonomy versus shame and doubt* (early childhood), *initiative versus guilt* (play age), *industry versus inferiority* (school age), *identity versus role confusion* (adolescence), *intimacy versus isolation* (young adult), *generativity versus stagnation* (adulthood) and *integrity versus despair* (mature age). The fifth stage, *identity versus role confusion*, was considered as the dominant developmental stage for traditional college age students, therefore Arthur Chickering (1979) developed this stage further.

Arthur Chickering, a psychosocial theorist, has had immense influence on research relating to college student development (Jones & Abes, 2013; Patton et al. 2016). Based on his research, he recognized that there was an absence of identity frameworks for traditional college age students; thus, he developed the Seven Vectors of Student Development Model in 1969. He named the seven developmental tasks vectors, not stages, and placed identity development at its core (Jones & Abes, 2013). Although the vectors are built on one another, and require resolution of specific developmental tasks, they are not mutually exclusive (Torres, Jones, & Renn, 2009). Therefore, the vectors are not linear, rigidly sequential and/or age related (Jones, 2013). Development occurs across the vectors when students encounter complex ideas, values, and struggles, and the reconciliation process of differentiation and integration allows for new positions, ideas and beliefs (Jones & Abes, 2013).

Chickering and Linda Reisser later revised this model in 1993. The revised model applies to college students of all ages, and elaborates on identity dimensions of gender and race (Torres et al., 2009). Additionally, students can move back and forth between vectors and movement along any of the vectors may be simultaneous. The movement along the vectors requires refinement, and discovery of individualization. Despite the revision of the model, it does not transfer easily to diverse populations. Chickering and Reisser's (1993) seven vectors created an impetus to explore other social identities as new student populations entered colleges and universities (Torres et al., 2009).

### **Sociology**

Typically student development theories in higher education have stemmed from psychology, as psychological identity studies have focused on self, singular identity, and perceptions of one's experiences. With an emerging need to understanding an individual's multiple identities, the focus has evolved and scholars and theorists have drawn on other

academic disciplines such as sociology (Torres et al., 2009). Sociological approaches to identity are much broader and center on individuals and their roles within social structures. Further, sociologists emphasize one's interactions with society, examine one's identification with a given social group, and acknowledge that there are multiple perspectives of self (Torres et al., 2009).

Several important sociologists who have studied identity include George Herbert Mead, Sheldon Stryker and Henry Tajfel. George Herbert Mead (1934) introduced the perspective of symbolic interactionism, which stemmed from Max Weber's assertion that an individual's interpretations of the world, impacts the ways in which he or she acts (Carter & Fuller, 2015). Within this perspective, reality is a social product of one's mind, thinking, culture, and society is socially constructed. Thus, symbolic interactionism relies on subjective meanings and symbols that are culturally derived by individuals who use or impose these subjective meanings on events, behaviors and interactions (Serpe & Stryker, 2011).

Sheldon Stryker (1980/2000) used Mead's (1934) description of symbolic interactionism and created the Symbolic Interactionist Identity theory. He made "self" as the central concept of this identity theory and asserted, "that 'society' impacts 'self,' which in turn impacts 'social behavior' (Serpe & Stryker, 2011, p. 234). Additionally, Stryker elaborated on the definition of "self" and described it as comprising multiple internalized roles and identities (Serpe & Stryker, 2011). Stryker (1980/2000) explained that one's identities determines social behaviors. He further added that an existence of a positive or negative link between identities and behavior could impact the individual in different ways depending on where the individual is located in the social structures of a society.

During the same era that Stryker was honing the details of the Symbolic Interactionist theory, Tajfel and his student, John Turner, were developing the Social Identity Theory (1979). This sociological theory elaborated on the definition of "self" and recognized two dimensions of identity which were not previously explored. According to this model, the two dimensions of 'self' used by individuals when defining their identities are social and personal. The social dimension of self is based on the knowledge of one's membership in social groups, and the personal dimension of self is based on distinctive attributes and values that separate individuals from one another (Howard, 2000). Social Identity Theory (1979) places social and personal identities on opposite ends of a continuum, and their saliency depends on context.

Tajfel and Turner (1979) proposed that when individuals feel like they belong to a group, this belonging creates an important source of pride and self-esteem, and creates their sense of social identity and social categorization. Social categorizations explain that social identities are changeable depending on time, context and the environment (Kabir, 2013; Stets & Burke, 2000). Social Identity theory is often described in relation to perceptions of one's membership and intergroup dynamics (in-groups and out-groups). Tajfel and Turner (1979) proposed that there are three mental processes that individuals use to evaluate the intergroup dynamics. The first mental process is categorization. It is used to understand and identify others and self, and serves as a precondition for all other dimensions of Social Identity (McLeod, 2008). Assigning categories tells us things about other people and ourselves. For instance, within American society, putting people in racial categorizations (i.e., Black, Whites, Latinx, Asian and Native Americans) identifies who belongs in these groups and who does not (Huddy, 2001).

The second mental process of social identification is when individuals identify themselves as belonging to a group; they adopt the group identity and categorize themselves as that group's identity (Stets & Burke, 2000). For example, as explained by Tajfel and Turner (1979), all Muslims, regardless of the ethnicity, would categorize themselves as Muslims and thus conform to the norms of other Muslims in the group. This identification increases individuals' emotional significance and self-esteem, which becomes part of the group membership (McLeod, 2008). Goals and motives of the categories can dictate the types of choices individuals make for categorizations (Huddy, 2001). Some individuals may have a disagreement about the title of the group even if they see themselves as part of that category, and an example of such disagreement may be African Americans vs. Blacks (Ashmore, Deaux & McLaughlin-Volpe, 2004).

Lastly, the third mental process is social comparison (McLeod, 2008). Individuals develop a sense of protection for their group once they conform to the norms of that group (Stets & Burke, 2000). Some individuals may engage in comparisons between groups to compare who is more advantageous (Ashmore et al., 2004). The comparison strategies between groups help to maintain self-esteem (Huddy, 2001). Additionally, two rival groups may be forced to compete for their members to maintain self-esteem, and between-groups rivalry may cause an increase in prejudice when individuals are competing for resources and for competing identities (McLeod (2001).

Another social psychologist who contributed to the literature on social identities was Kay Deaux (1994). She extended the literature on the relationship between social identity and personal identity (Jones & Abes, 2013). Deaux (1994) explained that personal identity could not be separated from group identity and that they were fundamentally interrelated. Her conceptualization links the individual, the social world they function in and the meanings they assign to their experiences. Moreover, Deaux conceptualized that there are five distinct types of categories for social identities: ethnicity and religion (West Indian, Asian American, Muslim, Jewish), political affiliation (feminist, democrat, environmentalist), vocation and avocations (artist, athlete, doctor), relationships (parent, sister/brother, widow), and stigmatized identities (alcoholic, homeless person, fat person) (Deaux, 1994). From this perspective, social identities are complex and multifaceted.

Within higher education, studies of social identities are relatively new. The interest in social identities emerged because many of the foundational student development theories were based on privileged identities, white men, white women or both and did not focus on underrepresented and oppressed identities (Jones & Abes, 2013). Additionally, major social movements (namely, women's movements, civil rights movements, gay rights movements, and movements to increase the diversity of the college student population) created a need to scrutinize and address the racial, ethnic, and cultural identities of minoritized populations college and on university campuses (Torres et al., 2009). From this need emerged Jackson and Hardiman's Social Identity Development Model (1994), which was adapted from Black identity development (Jackson, 1976, 2001) and White identity development (Hardiman, 1982). Jackson and Hardiman (1994) created this stage-based model, and it describes attributes of identity development for all students. Although a stage-based model, individuals could simultaneously be in any of the five stages: 1) naive or no social consciousness, 2) acceptance, 3) resistance, 4) redefinition and 5) internalization.

Sociological perspectives of identity continue to influence the ways in which student populations are analyzed and studied. Sociologists recognize that institutions of higher education are spaces where individuals experience, develop and understand their various identities. Lastly, sociological perspectives acknowledge the complexities of individuals and their multiple perspectives of self and the approaches influenced by sociology, in higher education, help to explain the individual and their identities from broader perspectives.

## **Social Psychology**

The earlier two sections emphasize that most higher education theories on identity have been borrowed from developmental psychology and sociology. However, there have been some influences from the field of social psychology, which stems from sociology (Torres et al., 2009). James Côté and Charles Levine (2002), two social psychologists, contributed to the study of identity formation and presented three viewpoints related to identity: personality, social structure and interaction. Personality centers on the self as described in developmental psychology and in psychoanalysis. Social structures are centered on the economic and political environments as studied in sociology (Renn, 2003) and interaction focuses on the day-to-day behaviors while individuals interact (Torres et al., 2009). Côté and Levine (2002) utilized Erikson's ego identity formation from psychology, and personality and social structure (as described earlier), to present their theory of identity formation, agency, and culture.

Within higher education, identity literature on college students' lacks two important concepts that social psychologists bring: emerging adulthood and possible selves (Torres et al., 2009). Emerging adulthood is referred to the period of life between late teens to mid 20's, which is typically associated with traditional college students (Arnett, 2014). During this time students or young adults have the most opportunity to explore their identity in various areas of their life (Jones & Abes, 2013). This time period is typically associated with identity development and formation among college students. In higher education, Chickering's Seven Vectors of Student Development Model (1969) serves as a good example of the influence of social psychology.

The concept of possible selves represents individuals' hopes, fears and goals for the current or future self, and it provides a link between motivation and cognition (Markus & Nurius, 1986). All individuals are complex, and have a variety of possible selves (Markus & Nurius, 1986). In higher education, the concept of self-authorship as explained by Marcia Baxter Magolda (2001) is closely related to individuals' hopes and fears of the future self. Self-authorship requires students to have internal coordination of beliefs, values, and interpersonal loyalties as they mature and develop all three cognitive, intrapersonal, and interpersonal capacities towards self-authorship.

## **Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity**

Within higher education, most identity theories have been influenced by developmental psychology, sociology, or social psychology. However, one identity model draws from all of

these fields: the Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity (MMDI) (Jones & McEwen, 2000). The MMDI represents ongoing construction of one's multiple identities whose salience is influenced by changing contexts. It is a complex model that provides a holistic picture of one's various and intersecting identities. The model captures and distinguishes between an individual's core sense of self (personal attributes, personal characteristics, personal identity), their social identities (race, gender, class, culture, religion), and social contexts (family background, sociocultural conditions, current experiences, career decisions and life planning) that influence one's identities. According to Jones and McEwen (2000), individual experiences shape and reconstruct a student's identities and their salience at different points in time. This is a fluid process, and therefore, individual dimensions of identity cannot be fully understood in isolation.

In 2007, Abes, Jones and McEwen reconceptualized the original MMDI model by incorporating meaning making capacity into the model. The new model is known as Reconceptualized Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity (RMMDI). The RMMDI depicts the relationships between context and identity salience as well as the relationship between core identity and social identities. Additionally, the meaning making capacity filter in the RMMDI provides richer explanations of relationships among one's personal and social identities as well as how individuals perceive these relationships (Abes et al., 2007).

Recently, the Reconceptualized Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity was revised through critical and poststructural perspectives, including intersectionality, critical race theory and queer theory (Jones, 2013). Intersectionality refers to the ways in which intersecting social identities interact with systems of domination or oppression (Crenshaw, 1991). The intersectional model is grounded in theoretical nets of intersectionality as explained by Dill and Zambrana (2009): centering the experiences of people of color, complicating identity, unveiling power, and promoting social justice. The Intersectional Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity (I-MMDI) emerged when elements of RMMDI were analyzed using the tenets of intersectionality. The next critical perspective that revised the RMMDI was critical race theory (CRT) (Quaye, 2013). CRT considers the relationship among one's social identities but the emphasis is on race, racism and power (Delgado & Stefanic, 2001). The revised model, CRT-MMDI, uses the five tenets of CRT (ordinariness of racism, interest convergence, social

construction and differential racism, intersectionality and anti-essentialism and counter story telling) to reinterpret the elements of RMMDI.

The third perspective used to revise the RMMDI was queer theory. This poststructural theory offers a more fluid perspective on identity and challenges the construction and reality of power structures (Jones, Abes, & Kasch, 2013). Queer theory has four central concepts: heteronormativity, performativity, desire, and becoming. When these four tenets were used to analyze the elements of the RMMDI, the Q-MMDI emerged. Similar to the CRT, in the Q-MMDI explains a more fluid relationship among one's social identities. In this model heteronormativity serves as the context, while the focus is on an ever-changing core positioned within the filter of desire and each of these have intersecting identity performances (Jones, Abes, & Kasch, 2013).

### **Human and Developmental Ecology**

The human and developmental ecological perspective focuses on the environmental influences of human development and studies the interaction between the developing person and their environment (Renn, 2003). Some ecological theories are developmental and stage-based, focusing on an individual's development over time. Other ecological theories do not focus on developmental processes or particular outcomes; instead, they focus on personal characteristics and the ways in which these characteristics interact and influence the environment (Torres et al. 2009).

Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979) was the original theorist who developed the ecological systems model of human development. He explained that interactions between the environment and the developing person played a significant role in human development and as a result it impacted individual characteristics of one's identity. He viewed development as an emerging process and stressed that the interactive process between the individual and the context explained the complexity of one's identity development (Rosa & Tudge, 2013).

Although the theory was developed to understand the complex relationship among infants, child development, families and society, in recent years Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory has been applied to various settings including college campuses (Renn, 2003; Torres et al., 2009). Theorists and researchers in higher education have begun to study and examine various college environments and the ways in which these settings influence, effect and change individual student identities. Faculty, family, roommates, classrooms, clubs and

organizations might be some immediate settings that impact college students' identities (Torres et al., 2009).

Renn (2003) in a study of multiracial identity development explored the influence of interaction within and between college environments on mixed race students. She demonstrated that immediate settings within a college campus influenced mixed race students' ability to identify with one or more aspects of their racial heritage. Additionally, she explained that the college environment influenced the identity development of the students in her study, which in turn influenced the environment.

This section has reviewed current literature on and theoretical approaches to identity in developmental psychology, sociology, social psychology, human and developmental ecology, and higher education. This literature informed the current study, which explored identity performance among undergraduate Muslim international women (UMIW). The literature in this section highlights that individual identity and group/collective identity are multifaceted and complex, can be context-dependent, and the meaning of identity may change depending on one's academic lens or focus. In psychology, the definition focuses on self or personal identity, while sociological approaches center on individuals and their social structures (group membership). In social psychology, identity is viewed from three viewpoints: personality, social structure, and interaction. Lastly, human and developmental ecology studies of identity have focused on environmental influences on identity development and interactions between individuals and their environments.

Further, this section demonstrates that understanding identity can play an important role in understanding students and their development, interactions, experiences, perceptions, and observations on college campuses. To gain a holistic understanding of identity performance among undergraduate international Muslim women on a college campus, it is important to understand the evolution of various identity theories and their influences in higher education. Despite the vast literature and investment into understanding students' identities, very few scholars have explored identity experiences of Muslim students (any genders) or international students. Similarly there is a dearth of literature on intersections of international identities, religious identities and cultural identities among college students. Finally, few studies explicitly examine identity performance among college students; most center primarily on development. This study aims to fill this gap. To gain a thorough understanding of the conceptual framework

for this study, in the next section I provide information to understand Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979).

### **Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979)**

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory was originally termed as the ecological model that explained the ways in which human development occurs (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Bronfenbrenner placed considerable emphasis on context, adding that individuals simultaneously interact with multiple environments/contexts. He stressed that continuity and change were both essential for human development and he underscored the ways in which individuals influenced the environments and concurrently how the environments influence the individuals (Cross, 2017). The aim of the theory has been to examine the forces that shape human development today and the impact of these forces on one's future. The ecological theory does not emphasize past interactions but acknowledges that one's previous interactions can impact the present (Cabrera et al., 2016; Cross, 2017; Rosa & Tudge, 2013).

This theory has undergone various transitions since it was first conceived in the late seventies. Between 1993 and 2006, the theory went through the final revisions and the Process-Person-Context-Time (PPCT) model emerged as the theory's appropriate research design (Rosa & Tudge, 2013). Process, as known as proximal processes, which lies at the center of this theory and are considered the driving forces of human development. Proximal processes involve relations between people, objects, symbols as well as relationships among people (Cross, 2017). Bronfenbrenner added that a person's disposition and resourcefulness, as well as the characteristics of the settings, play a strong role in influencing the power of the proximal processes.

Person, the second aspect of the model, is the characteristics of the individual that are likely to encourage the person's developmental outcomes (Rosa & Tudge, 2013).

Bronfenbrenner described three types of characteristics that make up the person: generative, resources and demand. Generative forces are positive or negative individual characteristics within an individual that incite change; some examples of these characteristics are curiosity, engagement, readiness or impulsiveness, distractibility or other extreme forms of aggression (Rosa & Tudge, 2013). Resource characteristics are attributes that allow the individual to actively engage in proximal processes. Some examples of these attributes are one's knowledge/lack of knowledge, skill/limitations, experience/inexperience, or ability/disability

(Cross, 2017; Rosa & Tudge, 2013). Lastly, demand characteristics are individual qualities that encourage or discourage the interaction of an individual with the social environment; some examples of demand characteristics are friendliness, attitude, passivity, and hyperactivity.

Context in Bronfenbrenner's ecology model places the individual at the center of a series of five nested environments that influences a person's identity development. These five environments are called microsystems, mesosystems, exosystems, macrosystems and chronosystems. Within each of these contexts are key factors that uniquely impact development for each individual (Cross, 2017).

Bronfenbrenner (1979) defines microsystems as the immediate environments or settings in which an individual closely interacts or have normal interactions in their daily lives. For college students these environments would include classrooms, romantic partners, roommates, family, mentors, friends, faculty, neighborhood, and religious institutions. Furthermore, these interactions between the students and their immediate environments often have the greatest impact on the students as well as the interacting proximate environment (Rosa & Tudge, 2013).

Mesosystems serves as the second level of Bronfenbrenner's model and refers to relationships between one or more microsystems in which a person actively participates (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The relations among the various microsystems can be positive or negative and as a result can impact the individual positively or negatively (Rosa & Tudge, 2013). Some of the examples for college students may include interactions between peer experiences and family experiences, classroom experiences and peer experiences (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2013).

Exosystems, according to Bronfenbrenner (1979), involve one or multiple social environmental settings in which the person does not have an active role and or a clear link between that environment and the person's immediate context. Additionally, one or more settings do not necessarily have to directly involve the individual as an active participant. However, events that occur in these settings either impact the individual or are affected by what happens in the setting containing the individual. For instance, availability of certain majors or degrees may influence the type of colleges the student applies to.

Bronfenbrenner (1979) explains macrosystems as larger cultural contexts that surround any individual. Macrosystems influence all other environmental contexts (micro-, meso-, exo-) and evolve over time (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2013; Rosa & Tudge, 2013). They are made up of social, cultural and historical forces and may include cultural norms, ideologies, institutional

policies, and societal belief systems that influence the individual indirectly (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2013). For example, negative portrayals of Muslim men in the media can impact how Muslim male students are treated or perceived within their microsystems on the college campus, or these portrayals may influence the ways in which faculty interact with Muslim men within classrooms.

Lastly, chronosystems serve as the highest level of the environmental contexts that influence the development of an individual. They add the dimension of time (as explained in the PPCT model) and relate to events that take place in a person's life (Rosa & Tudge, 2013). One aspect of time is the ways in which individuals' interactions evolve over time in all the systems (micro-, meso-, exo-, macro-) (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2013). Within chronosystems, dimensions of time are also influenced by historical events and major life events that influence the development of an individual. Some examples for college students may include the death of a close friend or family member, change in family structure, or immense societal changes.

The five ecological systems or environmental contexts are explained as the most immediate environments to the most distant environments from an individual (figure 1). Bronfenbrenner (1979) emphasized that any disturbance, fluctuation or changes in one layer can create ripple effects throughout the ecological system. Consequently, both the individual and the environment will be impacted (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2013; Rosa & Tudge, 2013).

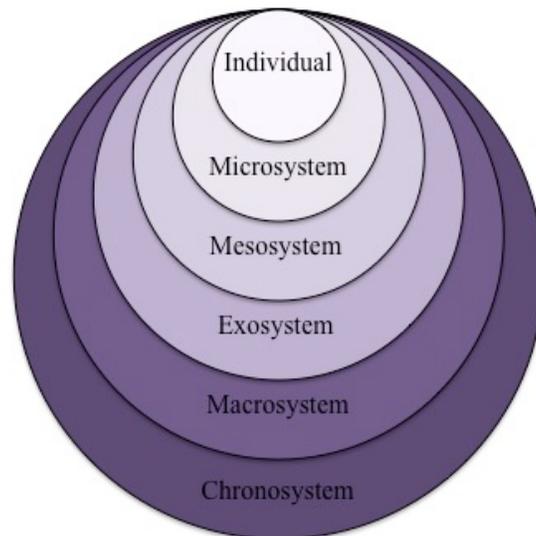


Figure 1: Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979)

The purpose of this section was to provide a detailed description of the conceptual framework for this study. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979) is useful in understanding the complex relationships among individuals, their development and the influences of social environments (contexts) on individuals. Although in recent years, research in higher education has begun to examine college environments to understand the influences of college settings on students' identities, limited research has focused on environmental influences on Muslim women or international women. This study will make unique contributions to literature in higher education by using Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979) as a conceptual framework to examine identity performance among undergraduate Muslim international women in college environments.

### **Conclusion**

Institutions of higher education are becoming increasingly diverse. Muslim students and international students both add to the diversity of the student body on any college campus. Muslims and their religion Islam are greatly misunderstood in the U.S. This lack of understanding, perpetuated by news and entertainment media, has exacerbated assumptions, biases, and stereotypes towards Muslims and Islam. Some consequences of these misinterpretations have resulted in Islamophobia and gendered Islamophobia in the forms of violence. Muslims have experienced verbal and physical abuse, discrimination, and hate crimes, and Muslim women have faced gender discrimination and additional prejudices. Literature on the experiences of Muslims students reveals that Muslims of all genders are often depicted as "outsiders." They experience negative attitudes in the classroom when faculty members lack knowledge of Muslims and Islam. Muslim students also face the burdens of serving as representatives of their religion. Although the body of knowledge regarding the experiences of Muslim students continues to grow, this literature has not distinguished between the voices of Muslim international and Muslim domestic women students, and the intersections of religion, culture and nationality have received virtually no attention. Another topic that has neglected to highlight the voices of Muslim international women students is campus climate.

Campus climate broadly includes perceptions, attitudes, and observations of the people in the academic community about the environment and is often used to describe the interaction among various constituents at the university. Within higher education, the vast majority of campus climate studies have examined the experiences of minoritized students (i.e., students

who identify as Black and African American, Latinx, Native American, Asian American, LGBT, women, and intersections of these identities) in relation to race, ethnicity, and gender. Literature on campus climate uncovers that positive and negative campus climates influence minoritized students' experiences, identities, and outcomes. Despite this information, few studies have explored the influence of campus climate on the identities of undergraduate Muslim women and international women.

Learning about identity development among college students helps educators understand the interactions, experiences, perceptions, and observations of college students when on a college campus. Student identities and experiences play an important role in the ways in which students develop and learn. Multiple models and theories have been developed within higher education to understand students' identities. Despite the vast literature and investment in understanding student experiences with identity, very few scholars have explored identity experiences of Muslim students (of all genders) and international students. Campus climate literature as well as identity literature generally fits well under the conceptual framework for my study, Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979).

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979) explains the complex relationships among individuals, their development and the influences of social environments (contexts) on individuals. Bronfenbrenner's ecological model provides five nested ecological environments that influence a person's identity development. These five environments are called microsystems (immediate environments), mesosystems (relation between one or more microsystems), exosystems (multiple social environments with no clear link), macrosystems (larger cultural contexts) and chronosystems (evolving of time over all the previous systems). Within each of these contexts are key factors that uniquely impact development for each individual. In recent years, higher education scholars have begun to examine college environments to understand the influences of college settings on student identities. One such study was conducted by Renn (2003) to explore the influence of interaction within and between college environments on mixed race students. However, limited research has focused on environmental influences on Muslim women or international women despite their growing presence on college campuses, often in climates that are persistently hostile to them. Thus, this study made unique contributions to literature in higher education. In the next chapter, I describe the methodology guiding this study.

## Chapter Three

### Methodology

The purpose of this research was to study Muslim identity performance on college campuses. I defined identity performance as the ways in which individuals acted, engaged, interacted, behaved and situated themselves in their various environments (Goffman, 1959). The conceptual framework for the study was Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979). This theory identifies five environmental systems in which an individual interacts: microsystems (immediate environment), mesosystems (connections), ecosystems (indirect environment), macrosystems (social and cultural values), and chronosystems (changes over time). Further, the theory underlines environmental influences on an individual's development. Using Bronfenbrenner's theory as a framework, this study focused on Muslim identity performance in microsystems within and outside college environments.

In particular, I was interested in understanding how microsystems shape the ways in which undergraduate Muslim international women (UMIW) perform their Muslim identities on college campuses. Accordingly, this study was designed to address the following research questions:

1. How do undergraduate Muslim international women describe their experiences of identity performance inside college environments?
2. How do undergraduate Muslim international women describe their experiences of identity performance outside the college environments?

To pursue these research questions, I used narrative inquiry, a qualitative methodological approach, to explore and understand stories of Muslim identity performance among eight undergraduate international women. All participants in this study were sophomore, junior or senior undergraduate students at two institutions, one private institution and one large, public institution of higher education on the east coast of the U.S. All students self-identified as women, were international students on F-1 or J-1 visa status (immigration classification for an international), had completed their high school education outside of the U.S., and self-identified as Muslim. I conducted interviews until I achieved data saturation; however, my target sample size was eight participants. I collected data by conducting interviews with each participant. Interviews were transcribed verbatim, analyzed for salient constructs, and organized in several

themes. Data consisted of stories related to Muslim identity performance in various environments inside and outside of the college campus environments.

This chapter presents the methodology guiding the study. The chapter begins with my positionality and worldview within the study. Next, I present the methodology, sample selection, interview protocols, data collection and data analysis procedures for the study. The chapter concludes with the steps taken to advance the trustworthiness of the study.

### **Positionality**

In narrative inquiry, the inquirer must build a trusting and open relationship with each participant, as this contributes to the quality and quantity of the stories gathered (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). Therefore, it was necessary for me to be open and honest, and to reflect on my own stories, values, views, and beliefs related to Muslim identity performance as an international woman.

I am a 36-year-old woman who was born and raised in Pakistan until the age of 17. I was born into a Muslim family and a country whose population is 98% Muslim. Both my parents were lawyers; my mom later changed her profession to teaching. I am the youngest of four siblings. I attended a private, non-religious, co-educational British school (K-12) and all my friends were Muslims (girls and boys). I learned about Islam at home and at school. Islamic studies were a required course until twelfth grade. I was eight years old when I formally started to learn how to read the Qur'an (Islamic holy book). I still remember struggling through the lessons with a private tutor my parents hired for my siblings and me, as the Qur'an is written in Arabic (my native language is Urdu or English).

I learned what it meant to be a Muslim girl in Pakistan primarily from my mother. Friday afternoons were a special time as my sister and I would pray with her (*Jumma* prayers). Any opportunity my mother got, she would teach my sister and me informal lessons on being good Muslim girls. For example, she would tell us to cover our heads when we heard the Azan (call for prayers), to always seek knowledge, to never sit with our legs wide open, to be respectful to those who are older than us, to wash our hands before every meal, to never use obscene language, to be humble and appreciative for everything, and to dress modestly, among other lessons. Growing up, I didn't know any women who wore the hijab (head covering). Overall, I led a sheltered and privileged life, as I was emotionally and financially dependent on my parents. I had an extreme sense of security as I grew up in a loving and caring family. At that young age

it was difficult for me to decipher between religious and cultural influences (they all seemed religious).

Despite the sense of security, I never felt like I belonged in the Pakistani environment. This sense of un-belonging led me to leave Pakistan for my undergraduate studies in the United States of America. I was almost eighteen years old when I started my undergraduate studies at Clarion University of Pennsylvania. I was the first woman in my immediate family to leave home for education and it came with great pressure to be successful. My mother was my biggest champion and she influenced my father's decision to send me to the U.S. Within my family, not going to college was never an option. Fortunately, I had the privilege of choosing whatever career I wanted as my older siblings had already started pursuing their education in engineering, law and medicine.

I came to the U.S. in January 2000 and I believe the transition was a lot smoother than I expected. My mother stayed in the U.S. for my entire first semester in college. And my parents called me every day, sometimes twice a day, to check on my progress, despite the time difference. At college, for the first time I started to realize that the environment I grew up in had more cultural influences on my upbringing than religious ones. Every time I met a new person, one of the first questions they asked me was why I didn't cover my head (or wear the hijab), or how come I spoke English well. I always felt like I served as an ambassador for all Pakistani women. All my actions and behaviors were no longer my own but somehow they were representative of all women from my country. I became more conscious of my surroundings and started to question what it really meant to be a Muslim international woman from Pakistan. This added to the pressures I was already carrying from my family to be successful.

During my first year in college, I took pride in wearing Pakistani clothes; I loved it when people asked me questions about my culture and country. I appreciated standing out without even trying hard. I was a social person and had a diverse group of friends. I found a religious community, and finally started to feel like I belonged, through the Muslim Student Association at my university. Although I liked the small town I was in, I planned to transfer to a bigger university during my sophomore year. The transfer never happened due to the tragic events of 9/11. My parents heard stories of mistreatment of Muslims in bigger cities and advised that I stay where I had already formed a caring community. The next three years at my university were significantly different than the first year. The Muslim Student Association started to lose its

members and we no longer congregated in public spaces, as we previously did. Personally, I started to focus more on blending in than standing out. I didn't want to call extra attention to myself so I stopped wearing Pakistani clothes. I became more aware of my accent, my clothes, the people around me, the community outside of the university, and the places I traveled to within and outside the U.S.

Since 9/11, my experiences when traveling have significantly changed. There has been additional scrutiny at the airports since 9/11, and every time I went back home for the breaks, there was always a fear that I may not be able to get back to the U.S. given the political situation. Racial profiling at the airports impacted me in several ways. During my last two years in college, every time I was at the airport, I was "randomly selected" for additional security checks because I was carrying a Pakistani passport or because of my name. All the people in the "randomly selected" area looked like me; they had Islamic names and were Arabs or South Asians. One occasion I will never forget is when I was going through additional security checks and the security person going through my luggage said, "you are the only person I have met who is in a good mood and smiling through this process, people are always in a bad mood, and I don't understand why." I replied, "Whether I am in a good mood or have a terrible attitude, it does not matter as I am excited to go see my family and nothing is going to change that." This must have been over a decade ago, but every time I am at the airport I have additional travel anxiety and a fear of being stopped for added security checks. However, I think this is the new normal for me now. Additionally, when traveling within the U.S. I have stopped carrying my passport; instead I use my driver's license as a form of identification and I never get stopped.

Upon completion of my undergraduate education, I enrolled at Indiana University of Pennsylvania and two years later completed a Masters in Student Affairs in Higher Education. During that time I had embraced my new western wardrobe and my more American accent, and my primary friends circle consisted of Americans. Right after my Masters, I took my first and only full time job at Duke University as a Residence Coordinator and Academic Advisor. Over my time there, I once again, after a very long time, found a community where I felt like I belonged. Throughout those years I forgot that I was a Muslim woman from Pakistan as I worked in a diverse community. When I introduced myself, my most prominent identity was my job title and not the country I came from; it was easy to blend in. I formed some of the closest relationships with friends, colleagues and the students I worked with. I worked at Duke

University for seven years and I believe one of the reasons for staying there for so long was because I felt like I was always myself.

In 2013, I started my Ph.D. in Higher Education at Virginia Tech, but even before starting my program I was once again reminded that I was different and did not look like others around me. I still remember the stares I got from strangers when I stopped to put gas in my car when I was visiting the institution before admission. This experience shaped the way I started thinking about what life would be like at Tech, before I started at Tech. In the last few years I have had to renegotiate my various identities. Being an international woman from Pakistan is the first identity I present to others. Yet, I still question every day what it means to be a Muslim international woman, as I have been away from Pakistan for an equal number of years as I have lived there.

As I reflected on my own Muslim identity performance, I realized that international, national and campus specific events, as well the people I interacted with, influenced the ways in which I performed and continue to perform my own Muslim international identity. Moreover, I have had informal conversations with my graduate student friends from the Middle East (Egypt and Lebanon) about our graduate Muslim identities at Tech. These reflections and conversations sparked my interest in studying how undergraduate Muslim international women describe their experiences of identity performance.

My positionality has influenced my study in a number of ways. First, the questions I ask each participant may be influenced by my own stories of Muslim identity performance. Second, my personal experiences may have influenced my interpretations of the data. Therefore, based on the nature of my study, it was important for me to continue to reflect on my positionality throughout the study. These reflections allowed me to be aware of the various lenses I used during the study. I recorded my feelings, reactions and thought process while designing the study, in memos after the interviews, and during the data analysis process.

### **Worldview**

I approached this study from a constructivist standpoint. The constructivist paradigm focuses on the meanings each participant assigns to their experiences based on their values, beliefs, feelings and assumptions (Creswell, 2013). This approach is centered on the idea that individuals create their own realities grounded in their belief systems and the ways in which they interpret and see the world. The constructivist approach is directly aligned with my

methodology. In narrative inquiry, the researcher allows individuals to construct stories based on the meanings each participant assigns to them. The epistemological assumption is that humans make meaning of their experiences through storytelling and the inquirer collects, retells, and writes these stories (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). Therefore, my purpose in the study was to understand and focus on each participant's stories and her interpretations, values, feelings, assumptions, and belief systems when describing her experiences of Muslim identity performance.

### **Methodology**

Qualitative research is an inquiry approach used to explore and understand a central phenomenon by asking participants broad questions about the phenomenon. Data is collected in the form of words or images, and the researcher analyzes the data to generate descriptions and themes (Creswell, 2013). Narrative inquiry is one form of qualitative research and is based on the ways in which individuals experience the world, make meaning of their experiences, and construct their identities through their stories (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). Therefore, experiences are explained through storytelling. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) explain that they call the “phenomenon ‘story’ and the inquiry ‘narrative.’ Thus, we say that people by nature lead storied lives and tell stories of those lives, whereas narrative researchers describe such lives, collect and tell stories of them, and write narratives of experience” (p. 2). Accordingly, narrative inquiry is the study of stories that individuals construct about a particular phenomenon based on their belief systems, assumptions, and values. Researchers in narrative inquiry systematically gather, analyze, and represent these stories as told by the participants (Clandinin & Huber, 2010).

There are three dimensions to narrative inquiry: temporality, sociality, and place (Clandinin & Huber, 2010). Temporality refers to studying people, events, things and places in terms of the past, present and future. Sociality means focusing on both the personal as well as social and cultural conditions where the experiences occur, and place in narrative inquiry is the concrete, physical location where the events or inquiry takes place (Clandinin, Murphy, Huber, & Orr, 2009). The researcher in narrative inquiry simultaneously explores all three of these dimensions as it adds to the complexity of understanding participants' lived experiences (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). This simultaneous study of the three dimensions is unique to narrative inquiry and distinguishes it from other qualitative methodologies.

In summary, narrative inquiry focuses on storytelling, grounded in one's beliefs, values and assumptions, and the ways in which individuals experience the world around them. Thus, this approach was ideal for exploring my research questions, "how do undergraduate Muslim international women describe their experiences of identity performance inside college environments?" and "How do undergraduate Muslim international women describe their experiences of identity performance outside college environments?" Narrative inquiry enabled me to study the complex ways in which each of my participants shared their stories regarding their experiences of Muslim identity performance. Further, this approach allowed me to collect individual stories and create a collective story of Muslim identity performance among all of my participants.

### **Sample Selection**

To understand the central phenomenon of the study and to provide data that answers the research questions, qualitative researchers must purposefully select the site and the sample (Creswell, 2013). In this study, sample selection involved two levels. The first part of the sampling process involved selecting institutions as the site for data collection.

#### **Institutional Sampling**

Selecting purposeful sites was important for answering the research questions. I established several criteria for the institutions I selected. First, the site institutions needed to have a high number of international students. Second, the institutions needed to be geographically close in proximity to my home institution. Third, the sites needed to include at least one private and at least one public institution, and lastly, I wanted to select institutions that offered specialized services for international and/or Muslim students.

The first criterion was that institutions needed to have a high number of international students. To meet this criterion, I visited the IIE (The Power of International Education) website and explored the Open Doors tab under "Research and Insights." Open Doors is an information resource on international students and scholars studying in the U.S. and those that choose to study abroad. Open Doors is supported by a grant from the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs at the U.S. Department of State (The Power of International Education, n.d.). In Open Doors, I visited the "Fact Sheets and Infographics" and narrowed the search by "U.S. State Fact Sheet" for the year 2016 (the latest report that was published; World Region Fact Sheets, 2016).

I created a list in Microsoft Excel of all the institutions with high number of international students in the U.S. by state.

The second criterion was that institutions needed to be close in proximity. To meet this criterion, I narrowed my list of institutions in the Excel sheet with a high number of international students in three states: Virginia (VA), North Carolina (NC) and West Virginia (WV). I needed to select institutions that were regionally accessible since my methodology focused on face-to-face conversations with each participant. I had to be able to travel and see them as needed.

The third criterion was to include one private institution and one public institution. To meet this criterion I further scrutinized the “Open Doors Fact Sheets” for the three states as well as the excel list of institutions. I narrowed the list of institutions with higher number of international students at private universities and public universities in the three states (VA, NC, WV). I wanted to choose a private institution and a public institution as the sites for research because student experiences can differ in the type of institutions they attend. Typically, private institutions are smaller, and have a lower student to faculty ratio compared to public institutions. Six institutions met the first three criteria.

The last criterion was that the institutions needed to offer specialized services for international and/or Muslim students. To meet this criterion, I visited the websites of the six institutions that were high in the number of international student populations, geographically close in proximity, and were private and public institutions of higher education. I searched the websites to determine the level of specialized services the institutions offered for international and/or Muslim students. All six institutions offered specialized services for international students, and had a student-run organization titled as Muslim Student Association (MSA).

**Selected institutions.** The private institution I selected was an elite institution that has an undergraduate population between 5,000 and 10,000 students and was referred as “the Private University” in this document. Additionally, this institution was among those with the top number of international students in its state at the time I selected institutions (The Power of International Education, n.d.). This institution also has a nearly even proportion of women to men compared to other institutions in the state (The Power of International Education, n.d.). Moreover, this institution provides public prayer spaces, has an active Muslim Student Association (MSA), and has a Muslim Student Center (MSC) (pseudonym for the center to mask the institution) that provides specialized services to Muslim students and focuses on uniting all

Muslim students at this institution. Other institutions only provided one of these services/experiences.

The public institution I selected was a large state institution that has an undergraduate student population between 25,000 and 30,000 students and was referred as the “Public University” in this document. Moreover, this institution attracts a high number of international students and was among those with the top number of international students in its state at the time I selected institutions (The Power of International Education, n.d.). This institution enrolled fewer women than men (The Power of International Education, n.d.). Lastly, this institution provides public prayer spaces on campus, has community-based mosques in the local area, and has an active Muslim Student Association (MSA).

### **Participant Sampling**

During the second part of the sampling process, I selected participants who met a series of criteria for participation. To be a part of this study, participants needed to meet four main criteria. First, students needed to identify as Muslim women. Because the focus of this study was to explore experiences of Muslim identity performance among international women, it was pertinent that they self-identified both as Muslim and as women.

The second criterion was that participants in the study had to be international students who were in the U.S. on an F-1 or J-1 visa (immigration classification for an international). Because my study focused on full time international students, it was important to confirm that they had F-1 or J-1 visa status. This status is an immigration classification used by colleges and universities in the U.S. to confirm that a student is enrolled full time, and the visa is valid for as long as the student remains enrolled (Ruiz, 2013).

The third criterion was that students had to have completed their K-12 education in their home country. This criterion ensured that all participants had spent a substantial amount of time in their home countries prior to starting their undergraduate careers. This criterion also limited the sample to participants who experienced the U.S. educational system for the first time upon enrollment in college.

Lastly, participants for my study needed to be in their sophomore, junior or senior year of undergraduate education at the selected institutions. I decided to focus on participants who were in their sophomore, junior or senior year because I believed that students who had spent several years away from their home country would offer stories of both experiences in the U.S. and their

home countries. Additionally, my focus on college sophomores, juniors and seniors enabled me to select participants who would be able to reflect back and provide stories about several years of college experiences.

I recruited participants through two sets of gatekeepers and through snowball sampling. In qualitative research, gatekeepers are individuals who provide access to the site and helps researchers in identifying participants for a study (Creswell, 2013). I sent an email to the director of the international student services office at each institution (see Appendix A). These directors, one at each institution, served as the first pair of gatekeepers. In my email to each director, I provided introductory information about my study, explained my methodology, provided information on how to reach me if they had any questions, and requested to meet in person. Next, I met the directors in their office and during the meeting, I once again introduced myself, shared detailed information about my study, gave them background information, answered any questions, and requested that they send out an email to international women students on my behalf at their institution (see Appendix B). The message outlined the purpose of the study and what the participants would be expected to do (provide written consent and participate in two audio-recorded interviews, each lasting 45-60 minutes). The email included my contact information so that potential respondents could email me directly so that they could remain anonymous. In addition to sending out an email to international women students, I asked the directors to include recruitment information about my study in their weekly newsletter (Appendix C). The newsletter write-up contained an outline of my study and what the participants would be expected to do (provide written consent and participate in two audio-recorded interviews, each lasting 45-60 minutes) and my email address so that they could contact me directly. This approach allowed for potential participants to remain anonymous to me unless they decided they were interested in participating in the study.

Second, I send an email to the leadership of the Muslim Student Association (MSA) at each institution (see Appendix D). The presidents of the MSA at each of the institutions served as a second pairs of gatekeepers. In my email to the leadership, I provided introductory information about my study, explained my methodology, provided information on how to reach me if they had any questions and requested to meet in person (see Appendix D). I met the presidents of MSA at a coffee shop on each campus. During our coffee meeting, I once again introduced myself, shared detailed information about my study, gave them background

information, answered any questions, and requested that they send out an email to Muslim students on my behalf that were members of the MSA (see Appendix E). The message outlined the purpose of the study and what the participants would be expected to do (provide written consent, participate in two interviews; each lasting 45-60 minutes, and audio-recorded interviews). The email included my contact information so that potential respondents could email me directly so that they could remain anonymous. In addition to sending out an email to Muslim students who were members of MSA, I asked the presidents to share my information with anyone else they thought could help identify potential participants. Additionally, I asked the presidents at each institution if I could speak about my study at the *Jummah* prayers (Friday afternoon). Once they agreed, I attended the *Jummah* prayers organized by the MSA the following week and spoke about my study with the audience. I also answered any questions and shared my contact information so that potential participants could contact me directly. Lastly, I asked the MSA presidents at each institution to include recruitment information about my study on their Facebook page (Appendix F). The Facebook write-up contained an outline of my study, what the participants would be expected to do (provide written consent and participate in two audio-recorded interviews, each lasting 45-60 minutes) and my email address so that they could contact me directly. Again, this approach allowed potential participants to remain anonymous unless they decided to participate.

Third, I used snowball sampling (Rossman & Rallis, 2012) to identify potential participants for the study. Potential participants were asked to refer peers who may meet the selection criteria and who may be interested in participating. Additionally, at the end of each interview with the selected participants, I asked if they wanted to provide names and contact information of potential participants. A few of the participants offered to send out emails on my behalf to their peers. At this point I shared the recruitment email with them (Appendix B) that they could share with their peers. If the selected participants shared names and contact information of the interested peers, then I emailed them directly (Appendix G).

When potential respondents emailed me, I set up a time to call them. During the phone call (10 to 15 minutes long), I conducted a pre-screening interview to verify that potential participants met the selection criteria and would be an effective informant given my research question (Appendix H). The pre-screening protocol also asked for demographic information about participants, including age, gender, and major, among other items. The pre-screening

process allowed me to not only verify that potential respondents met the study's selection criteria, but also that they were comfortable talking with me about their identity performance experiences.

At the end of the pre-screening phone call, I thanked them for their time and informed them if they met the selection criteria or not. For the participants that met the selection criteria and were willing to participate, I scheduled the interviews. For those who did not meet the selection criteria, or who did not seem willing to talk about their identity performance experiences, I thanked them for their interest but explained that I would not be able to include them in the study. At the conclusion of the sample selection, I had identified eight participants who met the criteria for participating in my study.

### **Interview Protocols**

To collect data, I conducted semi-structured qualitative interviews using an interactive dialogic approach. In qualitative research, semi-structured interviews allow for flexibility and are organized around topics or themes rather than a sequenced script (Creswell, 2013). Additionally, they are conversational and adaptable based on the participants (Hesse-Biber, 2013). I conducted two interviews with each participant; therefore, I developed two interview protocols (Appendix I) for data collection.

The first interview was 45-60 minutes long. The protocol for the first interview was organized in two sections and included eight main questions, along with some prompt questions that I could use if appropriate. Narrative inquiry requires a caring and equal relationship between the participants and the researcher (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). Thus, the first section of this interview, Introduction and Rapport, included three questions designed for me to get to know the participants and to begin building relationships with them. I started the interviews by sharing some introductory information about myself. I asked participants to tell me about themselves, their decisions to leave their home country to pursue their undergraduate education in the U.S., and some of their perceptions about college life in the U.S prior to their arrival. These questions were designed to build rapport and to learn more information about each participant. At the end of the first interview I set up a second interview with each participant.

The second section of the first interview was aimed at learning about each participant's family life and peers. Family life and peer interaction covered some aspects of their microsystems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Therefore, the participants were asked five main

questions to elicit stories about their Muslim identity performance with family and peers. For example, I asked each participant to tell me about their family and peers and the roles they play in their lives. Further, I asked them to share stories of being a Muslim woman in their family and with peers, some expectations family had of them as Muslim women, and the ways in which they learned to be a Muslim woman in their families. I also asked them if they could share stories of how they behave/act/engage as Muslim women with different groups of people. See Appendix I for a thorough list of questions that were asked in this section. At the end of the first interview, I thanked each participant and confirmed the date and time for our next conversation.

The second interview was 45-60 minutes long and was scheduled no less than a week after the first one. The protocol for the second interview was organized in three sections and included seven main questions, along with some prompt questions that I could use if appropriate. The second interview protocol was designed to learn about the ways in which each participant performed her identity as a Muslim international woman inside and outside her college campus. Thus, these questions addressed aspects of their microsystems beyond their family and peers.

The first section of the second interview contained four questions. These questions were aimed at helping the participants in drawing out concrete examples or memories about Muslim identity performance on their college campus. For example, I asked them to describe how they behave/act/engage as a Muslim international woman on their college campus and to share a story or stories about a time they thought about their Muslim identity on their college campus. Other questions I asked were about places on campus where they spend most of their time and to share their perceptions of how people treat them as Muslim international women on their college campus (e.g., professors, people at the library, classroom, on the bus, and dining facilities). Lastly, I asked them about the ways in which these perceptions influence their Muslim international identity performance on their college campus.

The second section of the second interview contained two questions, along with some prompt questions if needed. These questions were aimed at evoking stories of Muslim international identity performance outside the college campus. For example, I asked them to describe and share stories of places where they felt the most and least comfortable outside of their college's physical campus. This included both physical (e.g., Mosque off campus, international food stores, traveling in U.S., restaurants, coffee shops, friends' homes over breaks) and virtual spaces (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat).

The third section of the second interview consisted of two questions. Both of these questions were aimed to conclude the interview. The first questions I asked was to explain the ways in which being a Muslim woman in the U.S. was different than being Muslim in their home country. Lastly, I asked the participants if they had any parting comments or if they wanted to share any additional stories or information beyond what we had talked about related to their Muslim international identity experiences. See Appendix I for a thorough list of questions that were asked in the second interview protocol.

I started both interviews by sharing some introductory information about myself. I asked participants to tell me about themselves, their decisions to leave their home country to pursue their undergraduate education in the U.S., and some of their perceptions about college life in the U.S prior to their arrival. These questions were designed to build rapport and to learn more information about each participant. At the end of the second interview I informed the participants about the timeline of my data collection.

During the entire process (both interviews), I allowed each participant to take their time to think, to ask me questions about my own experiences, and to tell me their stories in the ways they found appropriate. At the end of each of our conversations, I thanked each participant.

Upon drafting the interview protocols, I asked a member of my dissertation committee who is an expert in qualitative methods to review the protocols. I revised the protocols based on their feedback. After obtaining IRB approval, I then piloted the study with a small number of participants who met all the selection criteria for the study but were at another institution. I made changes to the interview protocol based on the feedback I received from pilot participants.

### **Data Collection**

Prior to collecting data, I obtained approval from the Institutional Research Board (IRB) at my home institution. IRB administrators at both institutions asked to review the approved IRB from my home institution and granted permission to interview participants without going through the official IRB approval process at the institutions. Copies of IRB approvals are included in Appendix K. Participants were selected once IRB approval was received.

Two weeks before each interview, I reserved a room in the undergraduate student union for the days I would be interviewing. One week before the interview, I emailed the participant to confirm the date, time, and location of the interview. The informed consent form (Appendix J) was attached to that email so that the participant could review the form prior to the first

interview. The email explained that she would be asked to sign a consent form on the day of the first interview, and that I would bring two copies of the form (one for me to keep on file and one for her records). Additionally, I asked the participants to contact me through email if they had any questions about the consent form. A reminder email was sent to participants two days before the scheduled interviews (Appendix L). Again, I asked the participants to contact me with any questions or concerns about the consent form or their participation in the study.

On the day of the interview, I arrived early to set up the room and to test the recording device. The first interview lasted for approximately 45-60 minutes and the second interview lasted approximately 45-60 minutes. I engaged in an informal conversation to build rapport with the participant, at the start of the first interview. I reviewed the informed consent form with the participant, and asked that she sign the form to indicate her consent to participate in the study. Before asking for permission to record the interview, I asked the participant to choose a pseudonym. I conducted the interviews using the interview protocols (Appendix I). The interviews were recorded using an audio recorder and were also saved as .mp3 files. At the end of the interviews, I thanked the participant for her time, participation and for sharing her stories. I also asked her for permission to contact her later if I had other questions. I transcribed four .mp3 interview files while the rest of the twelve .mp3 files were transcribed using an online transcription service (rev.com). Once all the files were transcribed, I sent each participant a copy of her transcript and asked her to review it and offer any comments, corrections, or questions within one week.

### **Data Analysis**

In narrative inquiry, the researcher makes meaning (analysis) of the data gathered throughout the research process instead of it being a separate activity (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). Therefore, the processes of “data collection” and “analysis” become seamless and organic. In my study, as I gathered stories of Muslim identity performance, I began analyzing data as soon as an interview was concluded. Throughout the analysis process, it was important that I analyzed participants’ stories in meaningful ways by making connections between participants and between the stories and experiences they shared. Thus, the units of analysis were stories told by the participants that were related to the emerging themes.

In narrative inquiry, researchers think narratively by attending to three commonplaces: temporality (past, present, future), sociality (the dialectic between inner and outer, the personal

and social), and place (the concrete physicality of the place or places in which experiences are lived out and told) (Clandinin & Huber, 2010; Clandinin et al., 2009). In this study, *temporality* included Muslim international women's stories about identity performance in the past, present, and future. *Sociality* consisted of the social conditions, or cultural and social influences on these stories of identity performance. I defined *place* as the physical contexts where Muslim international women lived out their stories. I was particularly interested in place in relation to students' microsystems within and outside the university: classrooms, public spaces, and their living spaces.

I began the data analysis process by reading each transcript in its entirety at least twice and heard the audio recordings at least twice to get a holistic understanding of the participant's stories and experiences before analyzing them more closely. Next, I recorded my initial thoughts and impressions about the transcripts in a research journal. Then, I conducted four iterations of coding; first cycle was narrative coding, second cycle refining the narrative codes, third was pattern coding and the fourth cycle was theming the data (Saldaña, 2015). In qualitative research coding is the process of breaking down or dividing the text or images by examining the data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Additionally, coding involves assigning codes or labels to the assigned segments of texts or images (Creswell, 2013).

The first step, narrative coding (Saldaña, 2015), involved breaking each transcript down into excerpts (i.e., stories in which participants narrated an experience in terms of temporality, sociality, and place; Clandinin & Huber, 2010; Clandinin et al., 2009). In each transcript, the beginning and end of one story constituted an excerpt. I used an inductive approach to develop emergent codes for each excerpt. The goal of applying codes was to recognize the underlying meanings behind the stories that each participant shared. For example, one participant shared,

It made me realize that my university is a very supportive campus. I mean there are going to be problems everywhere. You can't make any place perfect. But ever since I have been here, I've always noticed that my university tries its best to be as inclusive as possible. All the people here, the people you normally interact with, I wouldn't say they're free of stereotypes, or they're free of biases, but they at least try to act as free of the biases as they can, and try to include you in everything that they can. And the general environment at my university is just, no matter where you're from, no matter what your identity is, you're safe.

After reading this story, in the first cycle, I assigned “Sense of support on campus/ inclusive campus” as the first cycle narrative code. I used this method to complete first cycle coding for each transcript. After I coded both transcripts for each participant, I recorded the first cycle codes in an excel worksheet under the heading “Level 1 code (Narrative).” I did the same process for each participant (using pseudonyms) and created a separate worksheet that included all the codes for that participant. For example, my first worksheet was labeled “Haden001,” the second was “Amber002,” and so on.

After completing the first cycle of coding for each of the transcripts, I wrote analytical memos. In these memos, I recorded my thought process, analyzed the relationship between all the codes, and noted any patterns in the coding that I observed. At this time, I revised and refined some codes by making them clear and concise, and I recoded them into a second column. I labeled this column “Level 2 code (Narrative).” Additionally, my goal was to condense large data into smaller number of analytic units. Thus, I pulled together all the material from first level coding into more meaningful units of analysis and input them into my worksheets for the second cycle of coding. From the example presented above, “Sense of support on campus/ inclusive campus” got refined into “inclusive campus” in the second cycle of coding. I conducted the second cycle of coding on each participant’s codes. As I was analyzing and refining the second level of codes, I started to note similarities, differences, frequency, sequence, and correspondence (Hatch, 2002) across the second-cycle codes for all participants in an analytical memo.

I then arranged and organized similar codes into groups that consisted of patterns for each participant. Grouping similar codes together in qualitative research is called creating categories (Hesse-Biber, 2013). For example, I grouped four codes together as they shared a similar pattern in that they were all describing the campus environment: “inclusive campus,” “supportive environment,” “accessible religious spaces,” and “appreciation of religious diversity.” Similarly, I sorted all the second level codes by patterns and if they required further refining, I labeled them under the heading “Level 3 code (Pattern)” for each of the participants. From the previous example (from level 2 code), “inclusive campus” became “perceptions of campus” as part of the pattern code. Other codes in that pattern across participants were “experiences through religious organizations” and “campus religious culture.” While doing this third iteration of coding (pattern

coding), I wrote additional analytical memos in order to examine the relationships between similar patterns and analyzed the patterns.

The next stage of analysis involved examining all the sorted patterns to create themes that told the story of Muslim international identity performance inside and outside the college campuses. In qualitative research, similar ideas or categories grouped together to make a major idea are called themes (Creswell, 2013). I continued to write analytical memos at this stage of analysis. In these memos, I considered the relationships between patterns to uncover emergent themes from the stories of identity performance. I examined all the pattern codes across all the participants as well. At this time, I created a fourth column labeled “Level 4 (Theming the Data).” I analyzed each participant’s pattern codes to move some of the codes from pattern to a theme in this column. As I analyzed for themes, I was cognizant and conscious of the ways in which temporality, sociality and place (Clandinin & Huber, 2010) played a part in the theming the codes. For example, all of the codes related to Muslim identity performance in the home country were under similar themes, and all the codes related to Muslim identity performance in the classroom were under another theme.

Before finalizing each of the themes relating to the stories, I reviewed the stories and themes with my methodologist. Once the themes were finalized and organized, I gathered these viewpoints and interpretations and revised my themes if needed. Finally, I organized the themes to tell a collective story or grand narrative about the influence of microsystems on participants’ experiences of Muslim identity performance inside and outside college campuses. I used the narrative inquiry commonplaces of temporality, sociality, and place to organize the collective story (Clandinin & Huber, 2010).

### **Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness in qualitative research refers to steps taken by the researcher to advance the quality and maintain the integrity and accuracy of a study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). For a study to be trustworthy the researcher must employ competent research practices, use ethical measures, conduct the study that honors the participants, and be sensitive to the setting and the topic of the study (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). Qualitative researchers must address ethical, political and attention to methodological matters from all perspectives: researcher, participant, and reader (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). To heighten the trustworthiness of the data in this study, I used four methods: piloting the study, memoing, member checking, and triangulation.

The first method to enhance the trustworthiness of the study was conducting a pilot study. In qualitative research a pilot study is when a researcher tests the interview protocol and other data collection methods with a small number of individuals (Creswell, 2013). Pre-testing allows the researcher to test and gauge if the design of the study is consistent and is measuring or answering the research questions of the study (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). For my study, I piloted both the interview protocols with three undergraduate Muslim international women with the institution that met all sampling criteria. These protocols were piloted after obtaining IRB approval. The pilot study allowed me an opportunity to review and refine various aspects of the study including interview questions, methodology, design and analysis. The changes I made included refining my interview questions, making edits to the recruitment emails to participants, interview time listed on the IRB (which was 60-90 minutes, when it never took more than 60 minutes with the piloted participants). Thus, the pilot study helped to refine the interview protocols, enhanced the quality of data, helped me in building rapport with my participants, and helped in enhancing the accuracy of my data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

The second method to enhance trustworthiness in the study was memoing. In qualitative research, memoing offers the researcher an opportunity to record hunches, insights, questions, speculations, and tentative interpretations (Creswell, 2013). Memos should be written throughout the research process and can be in the form of letters and notes to oneself. Memoing encourages the researcher's analytical thinking; helps with recognizing emergent insights, themes, and methodological questions; and allows the researcher not to rely on recall memory, all of which enhances the trustworthiness of the study (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). Memoing triggered my thinking process, allowed me to reflect throughout the research process, and helped me to reconstruct the meaning of the stories and experiences under study. I wrote memos after each interview and during the data analysis process.

The third method I employed to ensure the trustworthiness of the study was member checking. Member checking in qualitative research is used to improve the accuracy and credibility of the data by sharing findings with the participants and asking for feedback (Anfara, Brown, & Mangione, 2002). Feedback from the participants can include asking for clarifications, elaborations, and/or corrections to elicit further information (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). In my study, during the interviews, I asked each participant clarifying question and encouraged them to elaborate when needed. Additionally, I sent participants a copy of their

transcripts and asked them to offer clarification, comments or questions. This allowed the participants an opportunity to provide additional interpretations and analyses. These two forms of member checking enhanced the accuracy of the study's findings from the perspectives of participants.

Lastly, I used triangulation to enhance the accuracy of the data. Triangulation in qualitative research refers to the process of using multiple perspectives to reduce misrepresentations and to find consistencies in findings (Creswell, 2013; Rossman & Rallis, 2012). I achieved data triangulation by examining data that were collected by using the same method from different participants.

In summary, this study was designed to gain an understanding of Muslim identity performance among undergraduate international women at a private and a public institution in the U.S. The narrative inquiry approach to this study provided data relevant to the research question. Higher education scholars and practitioners have very little information about how undergraduate Muslim international women perform their Muslim identities on college campuses. My study aims to fill this gap. The findings from this study appear in Chapter Four. Chapter Five includes a discussion of the findings in relation to prior literature, a discussion of unique findings from this study, and implications for practice, research, and policy.

## Chapter Four

### Findings

The purpose of this qualitative narrative study was to understand and unveil stories of identity performance of Muslim international women during their undergraduate college careers in the United States of America (U.S.). In this chapter, I present the findings from interviews with eight Muslim international undergraduate women who self-identified as Muslim, women, were on F-1/J-1 visa status, and completed their high schooling outside of the U.S. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979) served as the conceptual framework and it was useful in understanding the complex relationships between my participants and their microsystems inside and outside college campuses as these systems pertained to their Muslim identity performance. Microsystems were the immediate environments, people or settings with whom Muslim international women closely interacted. Examples included parents, friends, school, and other environments in the home country; and classrooms, professors, peers, friends, public spaces on campus, and prayer spaces in the U.S. All these environments or settings provided context for their narratives of Muslim international identity performance.

In narrative inquiry, context is essential, makes a difference, and is necessary for making sense of people, places, and events (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). The nature of my study required that I attend to context and the three dimensions (temporality, sociality and place) of narrative inquiry (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006) as they related to the identity performance of Muslim international women in my study. Temporality (past, present future), sociality (social and cultural conditions) and place (physical location) were evident in the individual descriptions as well as the grand narrative. All narratives were created using participants' stories. The resulting narratives presented the students' personal stories of their Muslim international identity performance outside and inside college campuses through their respective voices. Relevant data that addresses both the research questions are shared.

The analysis of my findings starts by providing relevant demographic information and pseudonyms for each participant (Table 1). I also include institutional information and demographics (Table 2). Subsequently, I present a brief introduction to each participant. Next, I present a grand narrative of the emergent themes that arose during data analysis across all the participants as it related to their Muslim international identity performance inside and outside the college campuses. I conclude this chapter by providing a brief summary of all the themes.

Table 1

*Self-Reported Demographic Characteristics of Participants (N = 8)*

Participant Name	Home Country	University Type	Class Standing	Years in U.S.	Visa Status	Major
Haden	Saudi Arabia	Private	Junior	2.5	F-1	Political Science
Amber	Pakistan	Private	Junior	2.5	F-1	Biology
Rose	Pakistan	Private	Sophomore	1.5	F-1	Political Science/Pre-Med
Julia	Morocco	Private	Senior	2.5	F-1	Mechanical Engineering
Arianna	Malaysia	Public	Junior	1.5	J-1	Chemical Engineering
Zainab	Kuwait	Public	Senior	3.5	F-1	Chemical Engineering
Razan	Oman	Public	Sophomore	1.5	F-1	International Relations
Sarah	Malaysia	Public	Junior	1.5	J-1	Chemical Engineering

~ All names listed above are pseudonyms selected by participants

Table 2

*Institutional Demographics 2018 (N = 2)*

	The Private University	The Public University
Carnegie Classification	Research 1	Research 1
Undergraduate Population	5,000-10,000	25,000-30,000
No. International Students (includes undergraduate and graduate)	4,000-5,000	4,000-5,000
Muslim Student Association (MSA)	√	√
Muslim Student Center (MSC)	√	
Public Prayer Spaces	√	√

### Participant Introductions

#### Haden

Haden was born and raised in Saudi Arabia to Egyptian parents. She attended a British school growing up. She has two younger siblings and often felt like a “role model for them.” She was the first woman in her family to go to the U.S. for higher education. Typically women in her family “would get married and stay at home.” Her parents encouraged her to pursue higher education in the U.S., although “it was really scary for them,” because her parents valued education.

Haden came to the U.S. in 2016 for her undergraduate degree in political science at the Private University. She had been exposed to American students in her school and neighborhood so she “knew that things were much more complicated in the U.S., especially the topic of race.” Prior to coming to the U.S. she had “some fears that had to do with having more freedom and more autonomy.” She realized that most of her fears were related to the way she “was raised in Saudi Arabia” and that was her “comfort zone.” At first she was “scared of Greek life, alcohol, and men.” She wondered how she would “navigate all of this” when she had “been raised very conservatively.” She shared:

I did not have any male friends because for me men were scary. Like all of them were off-limits. That's just the way I was raised. You just don't talk to a man! So coming here I started to have male friends and it was such a new experience. It was honestly like really weird for me because I was like it isn't as bad as they tell you. But it took a lot of anxiety to get over.

Additionally, she thought about her Muslim identity often and how she would "assimilate into the university culture, coming from somewhere that you could say is a polar opposite of here." She shared that she identified "as a Muslim woman" but being a Muslim was "a very cultural thing." Religion was always a "source of conflict" between her and her family because they wanted her "to be religious" but for her being Muslim was "an identity" and "not necessarily something that she had to follow."

### **Amber**

Amber was born and raised in Pakistan. She has two younger sisters who aspire to join her some day in the U.S. Her parents "put all their life and energy and resources into getting" [her the] "best education possible." She grew up in an environment where "there is this idea that only sons can support their parents. You have to have a son who can take care of you when you get old." Being the oldest daughter, this provided her "an intense incentive to excel and do better." At the same time, she put immense "pressure and responsibility" on herself to succeed academically. In high school she was one of the best students in all her classes.

She came to the U.S. in 2015 to attend the Private University on full scholarship and majored in biology. She was the first woman in her family to leave home for higher education. She always wanted to do biological research and left because there was "no scope for that in Pakistan." She traveled to the U.S. twice before enrolling and visiting extended family on the east coast helped her in her transition to life in the U.S.

Her first year in college was tough and she "felt so homesick and displaced." There were times when she was "ready to give up on everything and just go back." She realized it was because she was "actively resisting assimilation." During her sophomore year she started to "get to know people in classes, her scholarship program, Muslim students and people in the Pakistani community." Once she started "developing friendships" and "started assimilating, everything got a lot better." She "loved" being at her university and it "had become so much of a home."

## **Rose**

Rose was born in the U.S. but moved to Pakistan with her family when she was six years old. She completed all her middle and high schooling in Pakistan. She has very strong relationships with her family and has an older brother and a younger brother back in Pakistan. Her parents served as religious role models for her and her siblings and she believed they did a “good job...raising them,” “ingrained what their priorities should be” and to always focus on “kindness, intelligence, these kind of things that are Islamic, rather than looks, et cetera.”

When Rose was in ninth grade she knew that she “wanted to come to America.” She came back to the U.S. this time as a teenager in 2016, to pursue her higher education in political science with a focus on pre-medical track. She did not want to attend medical school in Pakistan and always wanted to do her “residency within the United States for medicine.” Her “dream is to become a surgeon and that's one of the reasons” why she came to the Private University in the U.S.

When she came to college, she was “very, very, excited.” However, she realized that she came to a campus where she “knew nobody,” and after everything she “had seen in movies about college life and Greek life and all the culture” she could not understand why she was “so excited.” She was “not terrified of not fitting in, she knew it would “take time” to get used to the new environment. She was more enthusiastic about “the chance to be independent, and new adventures, instead of having preconceived notions.” She was optimistic that she would find her “own niche in a place that's as big as the Private University” and she “did find that.”

## **Julia**

Morocco was where Julia was born and raised. She completed her high school there but attended a pre-university program in South Africa prior to coming to the U.S. She decided to come to the U.S. because it would provide “more opportunities and more resources” and she did not want to limit her options to “engineering, math and physics.” She knew some people at the Private University prior to coming to the U.S. and they shared positive experiences.

Her family played a “big role” in her life and “they encouraged” her and placed “values on education and hard work.” She was 17 when she came to the U.S. and it “was not easy for her and her parents” to go so far away from home. As a senior at the Private University, she majored in mechanical engineering and hopes to go back to Morocco upon completion of her degree.

When she started college, she tried to come “with a beginner mindset with as little assumptions as possible about the U.S and the U.S culture in general.” While she was back home she had heard about “diversity in the U.S and how there were people from different parts of the world.” She knew that it “would be good” with her “Muslim identity.” When she got to the U.S. she “realized that there are actually a lot of tensions about Muslims, and Islamophobia was a big thing.” But she was hopeful that her university would be “diverse and inclusive.”

### **Arianna**

Arianna was born in Malaysia and completed her first year of college in her home country. She was 18 when she left home in 2016 to continue her higher education in chemical engineering. She received a government scholarship for her education and planned to return to Malaysia once she had completed her undergraduate degree from the Public University. She was the second person in her family to receive the same scholarship and move to the U.S. for her education.

Her “parents came from a rural place” and when she was young they “moved to a big city.” She shared that in Malaysia “people in the city are not that religious and if they are in the rural areas then they're more religious.” That transition was tough for her and her three siblings, who are in Malaysia. Her parents encouraged their education, which was “really expensive back home,” and she described her parents as “conservative” but “not very religious.”

Arianna did not come “from a rich family” and that “motivated her to study real hard.” Among her family, she was the “only one who wore hijab.” She shared that wearing a hijab “was a cultural thing and not religious” for her family. She went to a “boarding school in a really rural place and everyone there wore a hijab.” She started wearing it because she was “surrounded by people who wore it.”

Before coming to the U.S. she was scared of the “racism” and “ill treatment” toward her because of her hijab. She explained that particularly after the recent presidential elections of 2017, she was worried because “people in American became more brave to be racist” and that her family thought the “U.S. was dangerous.” Lastly, she explained that some of these fears were exacerbated because she and her family had “never travelled outside of Indonesia.” She was thrilled when she formed close friendships with other international Muslims at the Public University as that changed her negative perceptions.

## **Zainab**

Zainab was born in the U.S. and moved to Kuwait with her family when she was six months old. She completed all her education in Kuwait prior to coming to the U.S. She was the oldest of four siblings and the only one in her family that came to the U.S. for higher education. Before she graduated from high school, her fiancé, who was attending the Public University in the U.S., asked her to “marry him.” After marriage, she joined him at the Public University in 2014. They had a daughter after her sophomore year. She worked towards a degree in chemical engineering and minoring in chemistry. Upon graduating, she and her family planned to return to Kuwait. In college, most of her friends were other Muslim international students.

Zainab grew up in an environment where most women wore a hijab. She, similar to other women in her family, was given a choice at puberty and she chose to wear it. She shared that her cousins and siblings considered her “more strict and conservative” when it came to her religion (based on her actions). Being the oldest sibling, she always had higher “expectation” for herself.

Prior to coming to the U.S., her perception of college life was what she had seen in western movies. She assumed that everyone partied, were not serious about their academics and that college was all fun. She also perceived that people would look at her as a “weird person” because she wore a hijab and she was “afraid of racism” towards her because she was “Muslim.” She added, “they accepted me more than I thought” and they were “not as racist, most of the time, as I thought.” Overall she thoroughly enjoyed her college experience as her perceptions were challenged and she found more of an academic community.

## **Razan**

Razan was born in Oman, where she completed all of her education, before coming to the U.S. Her grandparents raised her and her two siblings after her parents passed away when she was six years old. At first her grandparents were against her going to the U.S. for her education, as no other woman in her family had done so, but she was able to convince them. Now they brag to everyone “their daughter was studying in America.”

In 2016, Razan received a government scholarship and decided to come to the U.S. to major in international relations. During her first year in college she attended a local community college and transferred to the Public University after the first year. She did not experience “culture shock” because of her exposure to American movies and these movies gave her “an idea” of what to expect. Although she loved her independence in the U.S. she explained that at

times she missed being back in Oman as “back in my home country, I didn’t do anything for myself; I didn’t cook, I didn’t clean, I didn’t buy groceries, I didn’t pay bills and now I have to think about all of this.”

Growing up in Oman, she did not consider herself a religious person and “it did not matter” to her if she “was Muslim” or if she “identified with a faith” because she “didn’t consider” herself “a religious person.” Although she wore a hijab, she realized that it was more related to her “culture” than her religion. When she came to the U.S. she realized that she was more “spiritual in an Islamic way.” She believed that taking classes about “various religions in the U.S.,” being a member of a “Christian” organization on her college campus and exposure to people from around the world made her a more involved Muslim.

### **Sarah**

Sarah was born in Malaysia and she completed all her education and first year of college in her home country before coming to the U.S. She received a full government scholarship for her undergraduate education. She completed her freshman year at a local university back home before coming to the U.S. to attend the Public University. She came to the Public University in 2016 as a sophomore and was working towards a degree in chemical engineering. She knew several people who came to the U.S. on similar scholarships from her country; thus, the transition to college was smoother than she expected.

She grew up in an Islamic household, and her grandfather was a Chinese man who converted to Islam. She had three sisters and two brothers. She along with the rest of the women in her family wore the hijab. When she hit puberty she was given a choice about the hijab and as her sisters did, she chose it as well. She attended two different schools simultaneously while growing up, an “Islamic school and the regular school.” The Islamic school met for several hours each day after her regular school and required all women to wear a hijab. Additionally, she went to her local mosque regularly with her mom in her home country.

Prior to coming to the U.S. she assumed that all of the U.S. was like “New York or Time Square or Beverly Hills” as she had seen in the movies. She was surprised when she found her town “small” compared to her previous perceptions. She also assumed that she would “face racism” and would be “treated differently” because of her “hijab.” Additionally, she and her family had heard “about Islamophobia in the U.S., on the news and on social media.” That

caused some “anxiety” and inspired her to research more about crimes related to Islamophobia in her state and town, before coming to the U.S.

### **Grand Narrative of Muslim International Identity Performance**

In this section I delve deeper in to the five emergent themes along with sub themes. These themes were derived during data analysis from the narratives shared by eight Muslim international women at two different university campuses in the U.S. The emergent themes are: *Muslim identity performance in home country, Muslim identity performance and family, Muslim international identity consciousness, religious engagement on campus, and understandings of new Muslim international identity.*

#### **Muslim Identity Performance in Home Country**

*Growing up in a Muslim-majority country surrounded by other Muslims ... my parents are Muslim, my siblings are Muslim, everyone around you is Muslim, so you don't actually notice the difference. You don't actually notice what you're doing because everyone is doing it. Like wearing the hijab or covering, and doing the prayers, the Islamic rituals or whatever. I didn't think about it first, but when I came here, it's like I just realized ... It's the change of the people who surround you. So I'm the only one who does this now. I don't think I thought about being a Muslim woman because everyone does the same thing. (Razan)*

As the participants reflected on their Muslim identity performances they journeyed their way back to who they were in their home countries. Each participant shared experiences related to school, religious and cultural environments, and expectations of them in the home country. These reflections revealed several commonalities amongst the participants namely, “*most of the people around you are Muslim*”: *religious homogeneity*, and “*I had to be very, very contained*”: *societal and gendered boundaries*. All these experiences and stories help one to understand the participants’ backgrounds as well as provided context for identity performance in the environments outside of the college campus.

#### **“Most Of The People Around You Are Muslim”: Religious Homogeneity**

In the opening quote, Razan (a sophomore from Oman at the Public University) explained the concept of religious homogeneity. She talked about growing up in an environment where the majority of the people belonged to the same religion. For all participants that religion was Islam. The six countries represented by my participants (Kuwait, Malaysia, Morocco,

Oman, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia) all had Muslims in the majority. Although the religion Islam has various sects, *Sunni* and *Shi'a* being the two most common ones, none of the participants shared any stories about the sects they belonged to or if being a part of a particular sect within the home country was relevant to their Muslim identity performance. However, all women shared that gender added a different layer to being a Muslim back in the home country; more information about gender and religion in the home country will be presented later.

Each of the participants highlighted positive aspects related to Muslim identity performance that related to coming from a Muslim majority country and belonging to the majority religion in that country. One aspect was that the environment was conducive to learning about their religion and to engaging in practices related to their religion. All women discussed their levels of religious involvement and ways in which they learned to be a Muslim. Although they learned in many different ways, one commonality among all was that they all had Islamic studies as a subject throughout their schooling in home country. They emphasized that being in a community, surrounded by other Muslims, certainly made it easier for them to learn and perform religious practices. Julia (a senior from Morocco at the Private University) described her experiences as:

We learn about Islam in school, and again, you see role models at home, what your parents are doing, what everyone is doing. It came naturally. You hear the *adhan* all the time, you see people going to prayers. It just felt like the norm and just feels normal to pray — like something you've always done.

Similarly, Sarah (a junior from Malaysia at the Public University) explained that it was convenient for her to indulge in religious practices at home because of her proximity to a mosque, going to the mosque, praying together with her mom, and by hearing the *Azaan* (call to prayer):

Back in my place also, there's a lot of talks and preaching people give about Islam. You can listen online or you can go to the mosque. At the mosque, they did every Friday night, they will give talks about certain topics that they choose. My mom was always like, "Come, just go. Let's just hear about a topic." My mom always took me to the mosque since I was six years old. Because it's like two minutes walk from my house. It's easier for me. And then when *Azaan*, I heard from my house, it's time to pray. Because of the *Azaan* it was easy. But here, you never know when it is time to pray.

Arianna (a junior from Malaysia at the Public University) disclosed that she learned about her religion from her family and various practices associated with being a Muslim more at school than at home:

Actually, I went to a boarding school. It's a religious school, so they make me read *Qur'an* every day. I have to pray extra all the time. And my family send my siblings to *Qur'an* classes but at home, we didn't really pray together.

Lastly, Zainab (a senior from Kuwait at the Public University) shared that she grew up in a “healthy Muslim family” and her parents taught her and her siblings everything she knew about being a Muslim and various Islamic practices. She added, “Before even like I'm seven they taught me about like *salat*, *siyam*, all of that. The schools in Kuwait were all Muslims. Yeah, they teach you about *salat* and Islam in school too.”

Other positive aspects related to growing up in a religiously homogeneous environment included “people around you don't treat you differently because of your religion” (Sarah), “it is much easier to be a Muslim back home” (Zainab), and “growing up in Morocco, that is just something natural. It never felt like, oh, I'm doing something specific to be the Muslim woman thing. It has been something that's been natural” (Julia). Similarly, Amber found it easy to be a Muslim back in Pakistan, because “...there you're going with the flow”:

Most of the people around you are Muslim. Because so many things that you do are just things that everyone does, and you're not doing them because you think you're a Muslim. You're doing them because everyone around you is doing them. And that's one of the things I've realized once I came to the States. Here you're going against the flow. There you're going with the flow, and going with the flow is not hard.

Likewise, Rose (a sophomore from Pakistan at the Private University) added that being part of the majority meant being included:

Growing up as a Muslim, a woman in a country that was Muslim majority, it didn't make you feel like you were not a part of the community. You felt just like everybody else, and you never felt excluded, you felt like you were part of that community.

Lastly, Haden (a junior from Saudi Arabia at the Private University) and Amber shared that being in the majority in the home country awarded them many privileges, compared to the experience of being a minority in the U.S. As Haden observed:

Being a Muslim in my home country means being part of the majority, and being part of the majority group there is privilege that comes with it. Being a Muslim woman here I have more freedoms, so I have more freedom as a woman, but less as a Muslim. Back home, as a Muslim I'm much more privileged, but as a woman this means there's all these added pressures. And things I have to abide by.

It was evident from our conversations that parents and school environments helped them in learning about their religion, and practices associated with the religion. From the time they were born to coming to the U.S., consciously or subconsciously their religion was present in their lives regardless of the environment or spaces they occupied.

All participants shared that Islamic studies was a part of their curriculum growing up, and the various components in the environment reminded them of their Muslim identities through the call from prayers (*azaan*), going to the mosque and the acts of prayers together. All of these factors evoked feelings of inclusivity and community around their religion. Therefore, growing up in a religiously homogenous environment aided the participants' Muslim identity performance in the home country.

### **“I Had To Be Very, Very Contained”: Societal and Gendered Boundaries**

The women realized that they had many privileges and advantages as a Muslim growing up in a religiously homogeneous environment. However, they also recognized that they had a number of added expectations, pressures as Muslims and as women in that environment. For some women these expectations created boundaries within which they were expected to perform their gender and religious identities. For others, many of the expectations were cultural and/or religious, and stemmed from societal norms depending on the environment they were in within the country. One such expectation had to do with their choices or lack of choices related to certain clothing and perceptions associated with women's clothing. Amber described her experiences:

There is a problem that's spread across Pakistan. There is a stereotype of what is a good Muslim. There's not much for you to be considered a good person, which is pretty much synonymous with a good Muslim back home. I mean, yeah. So, there are pretty much a set of rules that you have to follow, or a set of implicit principles that you have to follow, that you have to ostensibly show, because a lot of those principles, or rules, are things that have appeared on the surface. For example, if you are female back home, and you're

doing the headscarf, or if you have a full-on *burqa*, people just immediately associate piety with it. I mean, anyone could wear the headscarf. Anyone can change the way they look. Anyone can change the stuff they wear. That does not reflect their internal state. And I think people back home just, even when they do know this, they just refuse to acknowledge it. Because it's just the idea of how you dress, or how you behave on a surface level correlating with what you are on the inside has just permeated our society so much that that at least initially, they're unable to look past that.

Amber explained the societal rules or principles Muslim women had to follow in her home country. She emphasized the symbolic values placed on clothing and some stereotypes in that environment that created certain perceptions of women based on their choices of clothing. She recognized that to her, one's level of religiosity had less to do with the dress but more about their inner beliefs.

Similarly, Arianna described that women who wore a headscarf in Malaysia had many additional societal expectations compared to the women who did not wear a hijab:

In our society, when someone wears hijab, I think this happens everywhere – they are expected to be perfect and nice. They don't make mistakes, and all. I guess hijabi women have higher expectations, you are expected to look decent and you are expected to be soft-spoken. So that's what people expect me to be, but I'm not.

Razan believed that culturally women in Oman were expected to be modest in their dress especially when they were out in public. She, similar to other women in the study (Zainab, Arianna, Julia, Haden, Sarah), was given a choice at puberty to wear or not wear the hijab (she chose to wear it). However, Razan added that there was a lack of choice when it came to the *abaya*, at least in the environment that she grew up in. Additionally, she shared that although women had some choices, there were stigmas attached to the choices if one went against the societal norms:

It's also a cultural thing as well. It's just like you're expected to wear the hijab. You're expected to cover. You are expected to wear *abaya* when you go out. It has been like that from the side that I grew up in because I know things are different in different families. It depends what your parents think. I do have friends who don't wear the hijab, and they're still back home and don't wear *abaya* when they go out. But generally you are expected to in terms of covering and like being modest.

Finally, Rose disclosed that there were hypocritical standards around women's clothing in her country and the society's definition of modesty in clothing for women did not align with hers. She was not afraid to challenge her family on their expectations and perception of modesty in women's clothing:

I'm wearing things that are not making my body prominent for example, it's fine. Because I could wear the tightest *shalwar kameez* as long as I was wearing the *dupatta* on top of it, my parents were like, oh that's fine. And I thought that's pretty hypocritical. So that was something I had to explain to my family that they need to understand that... it's different just because I'm wearing the national clothing doesn't mean that that's modest. I can look modest in other clothes as well.

Expectations around clothing were also influenced by the school one attended. Zainab, Arianna, Haden, Julia, and Sarah all attended schools where women were required to wear certain clothing. Zainab mentioned that she attended an all-women's school and "you have to wear a hijab in school." Similarly, Sarah's school also required women to wear a hijab. However, she recognized that expectations regarding the hijab differed depending on the school one attended:

In my country, I don't know, but in certain schools, like in my school, for a Muslim woman, you have to wear a hijab. Even though you don't wear a hijab outside, you have to wear hijab in these schools. My school was 50/50, 50 percent Muslims and 50 percent non-Muslim. So everybody had to practice these rules in the school.

Haden, who wore an *abaya* when she was in her home country, described that wearing an *abaya* for girls was an expectation, at school, after sixth grade. Outside of the school she was expected to wear it as soon as she hit puberty and not wearing the *abaya* in public gave others the "moral authority" to confront her:

It was only after I hit puberty when I started to wear the *abaya* because you are supposed to wear it according to, like in school you're supposed to wear it around 11 and that's when it started to register like there are certain expectations that I am supposed to abide by. But before that I was just a child like everyone else around me. In school everybody above sixth grade has to wear an *abaya*. So you have to wear the *abaya* to school but because it's a woman's school, you could take it off once you are inside. That is just the dress code.

Arianna highlighted that her family was not very religious. She was the only woman in her family who chose to wear the hijab. She elaborated by saying that her school environment influenced her decision to continue to wear the hijab:

I'm used to that surrounding because I went to a boarding school in a really rural place that like everyone is wearing hijab. And then at some point, they did criticize me for not wearing it. The students were like, why are you not wearing it? So everybody there wore it in the boarding school. In school we have to wear it, it's part of the uniform. But we have social media, and they saw my pictures of me not wearing it, the complete opposite of me in school. And they were like, why are you not wearing hijab? And then I started wearing it because I'm surrounded by people who wear it.

Another set of societal expectations that almost all the women expressed was the lack of freedoms, lack of independence, and challenges associated with navigating certain societal boundaries within which they were expected to perform their gender and religious identities in their home countries. Razan reflected on her experiences as a Muslim woman in her home country and revealed that culturally “women did not work or go to college,” but she was optimistic that a “cultural shift” was happening with her generation and added, “so people are becoming more aware that the woman's role is not just to sit at home and whatever. But I was definitely the first one to decide that I wanted to study abroad, and that was shocking to everyone. That was too much.”

Rose discussed differential treatment in her home country that was not based solely on her Muslim identity, but the intersection of being a Muslim and a woman. She did not realize that the society imposed different expectations on her due to this intersection until she came to the U.S. She disclosed that, in her home country, she had to learn to be “contained” and women in general had to learn to maintain certain boundaries especially when interacting with boys and men:

Based on being a Muslim woman, I am treated differently in terms of there are certain bounds, boundaries that you have to comply with, and sometimes you don't even understand why. Most of these are from the society, obviously I had to be very, very contained I guess. I'm naturally a very, very high energy, hyper person, and I love to interact with people, and be really loud, but I guess in Pakistan the expectation is that women are not going to be that loud, and women are going to maintain a certain

boundary. Between themselves and boys for example. And I understand that, growing up I did have, in high school, I did have guys who were best friends, but it was very, very different. Until I was in Pakistan, I followed the non-mahram rule, where I didn't even shake hands with boys, and that was something that, number one, I saw what society promoted but it was never, but my parents didn't force it upon me, but because society was so, okay you know if you interact with a boy in a slightly friendly way, you're going to be considered, for example, pardon my language, but like a slut.

Amber too revealed that within her society men and women did not carry the same weight in expectations. She believed that although, women were awarded small privileges like, “people tend to be kinder towards girls,” “people are like, ‘this is a girl, let's help her and stuff,’” and that girls were “more pampered back home, for example, just a simple example. If I had a huge bag that I was dragging behind me in an airport in Pakistan, people would voluntarily come to help me out....As a girl, back home, you have more restrictions on you, and expectations of you as a girl are just very different and not always positive.” Amber’s story revealed that small privileges awarded to women in her home country stemmed from general gender stereotypes and perceptions in that environment, which were not always favorable for women.

Julia also reflected on her experiences and lamented about the differences in expectations for boys and girls in Morocco and explained that lack of freedoms and additional expectations were encouraged by her religion, which was more protective of women in her country:

So like these general expectations related to being a Muslim woman are in my environment and also part of it is because of religion, so it's really protective for women. You can't just go out whenever you want, you can't go out with anyone. There were these expectations, you know that I can't go out without telling my parent, or I can't go out with people that my parents do not know. They will be more lenient with boys. Obviously it was like girls with their friends kind of thing, but I think the society and the part of it in religion is protective when it comes to women.

All Muslim women in this study recognized that culture, societal expectations as Muslims and as women, and gendered boundaries in the home country. These women learned to navigate stereotypes of good Muslim women back home. Additionally, they learned that their identity performance was influenced by their choices or lack in choices related to their clothing back home that were encouraged by the culture of the country, and societal perceptions of their

clothing (that involved intersections of religious, cultural and gendered perceptions). Additionally, they experienced lack of freedoms expressions and independence in their home country based on their gender and religion.

Together, these two sub themes highlighted various ways in which participants performed their Muslim identities in their home countries. The first sub theme, “*most of the people around you are Muslim*”: *religious homogeneity*, was about the religious environment they grew up in, whereas the second subtheme, “*I had to be very, very contained*”: *societal and gendered boundaries*, delved deeper into the complex relationship between religion, culture, and gender. At times it was obvious to the participants what the religious expectations were, and at other times the relationships between religion and culture were blurred.

As the Muslim women in this study grew up in their home countries, they not only learned about their religion and expectations related to their religious performances, but also learned to negotiate and navigate the societal/cultural expectations of them as women. These women were unique as they were raised in religiously homogeneous environments that shaped their religious identities, and where religious practices, experiences, and expectations were intermixed with the culture within that country. For example, participants’ stories suggested that one’s clothing and choices related to the way they dressed at times were more cultural impositions than religious ones. Their dress was influenced by various factors, including what others were wearing around them. For some it was the hijab, for others it was the *abaya*, and for yet others it was the country’s national clothing (for example, *shalwar kameez* in Pakistan). Additionally, certain freedoms or lack of freedoms these women discussed intersected with religious and cultural expectations of them. Lastly, these women learned that intersections of religious, cultural and gendered expectations influenced the ways in which they performed their Muslim identity in the home country.

In summary, the narratives of coming from a homogenous environment, engagement in religious rituals/practices and navigating gender, cultural and societal expectations shaped the ways in which the Muslim women in this study performed and continue to perform their Muslim identities, both in the U.S. and in their home countries. In every new environment they inhabit, they take these personal and social experiences from the home country with them. Another theme that continues to play a part in their identity performance as Muslim woman is related to family.

## **Muslim Identity Performance and Family**

*My family has been my biggest support system. I feel that my family did a good job to raise me in a way that they told me, and they explained to me, and they kind of ingrained this within me, what my priorities should be, and how these shouldn't focus on materialistic things, for example, how they should focus on kindness, intelligence, these kind of things that are Islamic, rather than looks, et cetera. (Rose)*

The family values and family support that Rose alluded to were not unique to her. All other participants shared similar sentiments. As we engaged in conversations, all of them remembered the personal roles they played as well as the intersections of their personal roles with family dynamics. These roles and dynamics influenced how they performed and thought about their Muslim and other identities in their home countries as well as in the U.S. Each participant conversed about the importance of family in their lives and the various roles they played. These conversations divulged a few other commonalities among them: family dynamics, and parental fears and masking the Muslim identity. This section is organized around these two sub themes.

### **Family Dynamics**

Most of the women revealed that one of the main reasons they chose to come to the U.S. was because their families emphasized the importance of getting an education. For some they were the first women in their family to go to college (Haden, Amber, Julia, Razan, Sarah), and for others (Rose, Zainab, Arianna) it was a family expectation, as others before them had gone to college in the home country, to another country, or the U.S. All except for one participant (Razan) grew up in a traditional home with both parents. Razan and her siblings grew up with her grand parents as her biological parents had passed away. In this section when I refer to parents I am referring to the most immediate family members the participants grew up with.

All participants indicated that they had close relationships with their parents. They also shared that their parents and families played a big role in their lives. Further, family members served as support mechanisms as well as people they turned to in times of crisis or encouragement. For Haden closeness brought different complexities, and she described the role of her family in her life as “complicated.” She recognized that her parents supported her academics, and certain choices, like not wearing the hijab, but they also expected her to invest more into religious practices. She revealed that these expectations at times created conflict:

Family plays a very complicated role in my life. It's very hard to summarize it because they have supported my education, they support me being independent, and not having to get married and rely on a man the way it has worked in our family but at the same time they don't want to challenge the status quo if that makes sense. And religion is a source of conflict sort of because my parents want me to be religious. I don't want to be religious because for me it is an identity; it is not necessarily something that I have to follow. I don't think I am ready to address what my religious status is yet, just yet. So I have been taking it slow in terms of revealing my true beliefs and religious identity to them.

Similarly, Julia, Sarah, Arianna, and Amber all emphasized that their families were their support systems. These women conversed (on the phone and text) with their families frequently. Amber attributed "open mindedness" and "mutual respect" as the strength of their relationships. She added that her parents served as religious role models, and instilled religious, cultural, and family values in her:

My parents taught me the messages of peace and acceptance and tolerance that are part of my religion and that is what I value more than certain practices that are associated with it. Most of the worship things that I've learned to do, I've learned from my dad because he does them regularly. I guess the simplest way to put it is that I am what I am because of my family.

Likewise, Rose explained a "closeness" to her family and that her parents served as religious "role models," yet they gave her the freedom to make her own decisions:

A lot of the things that I identified primarily with Islam, the five prayers, fasting, all those things, those are things that my parents were like, ok do. They never forced it on me after I was a certain age, after I was 12, my parents were like, do whatever you want to do. So I was able to make that decision on my own. But I think their support helped me.

Lastly, Julia shared that it was hard for her and her family when she left for the U.S. because of the strong familial bond she shared with them. She added that her family encouraged her education, career, and future aspirations and throughout college they provided continuous support for her academics and personal decisions:

Family definitely plays a big role in my life. They encourage me throughout the day. My family values education a lot. So, they really push me, always study hard, work hard.

They always have been looking for the best for me. That's why I know leaving home at 17 was not easy for me, was not easy for my parents and coming all the way here. My parents have always been there. I still talk to them every single day. Whenever there is something going on, they would know about it and I would need to talk to them.

Parents of all the women I spoke with played multiple roles in their lives before they came to the U.S. Some of these roles included teachers of cultural and religious values, religious role models, and motivators and supporters of their academic ambitions. Since they had been in the U.S., some of these roles had changed and others had developed into different roles. All of the family members and parents continued to be the pillars of support for these women.

### **Parental Fears and Masking the Muslim Identity**

One aspect that had changed for the parents since their daughters decided to come to the U.S. was increased feelings of fears, apprehensions, protectiveness, and anxiety. Various events in the U.S. and globally, depicted in the news and media in the home countries had perpetuated most of these feelings. A number of women explained that their parents were knowledgeable, aware and cognizant of negative treatments of Muslims in the U.S (Amber, Haden, Razan). These women and their parents stayed abreast of news and stories about issues of harassment, discrimination and hate crimes against Muslims in various states and universities. Because of these stories, some of the parents were hesitant in sending their daughters to an environment that was seemingly unwelcoming.

Razan shared that it took her a week to convince her parents to let her go to the U.S. She added, "One of the reasons my parents did not want me to come to study here was that they expected that I would be harassed, for being a Muslim woman, especially since I wear hijab." Her parents were aware of the gendered Islamophobia in the U.S. Similarly, Sarah disclosed that her parents continued to keep up with the news in the U.S and if some targeted hate crimes occurred towards Muslims, they would worry and feel helpless:

Before coming here, we would hear about Islamophobia in the news all the time. My parents' read the world news and my siblings are on lots of social media. They always hear about things and get worried. Because of my parents I even researched this place to know what is the Islamophobia here? Is it high risk or what? I did my research back in my country. And even now my family always ask, and if there's news about Islamophobia in the U.S., they will call me, "Are you okay? Is there anything happening

or what?" We're aware of it. We are just aware and worried, but we cannot do anything. So we just learn to live with it.

Moreover, this level of awareness towards Islamophobia, and harassment of Muslims in the U.S. brought extra protectiveness towards their daughters and their engagement in activities on and off campus. Parents monitored their involvements on and off campus. In some cases, parents encouraged their daughters to mask certain aspects of their religious identity, to not engage with certain groups of people or not engage in certain conversations (Rose) because of their religious identity. Arianna shared:

... my friend, she didn't wear hijab, so she was visiting me at home. And my mom knew her and she was talking to me like, "Look at her, she doesn't wear hijab." She encouraged me not to wear it because she was worried. I told her, it's fine. There are a lot of people who wears hijab in the U.S and they're fine. Just my mom was worried especially because of the guns and stuff too. My parents think Americans and the U.S. is dangerous, so they really worry about me.

Arianna explained that her parents became increasingly worried when she decided to come to the U.S. and her mother tried to convince her to give up the hijab. One aspect for that fear was availability of weapons that added another layer to their concerns. She added that when she visited home last summer her parents asked her a number of questions, "How were you treated there? Do your friends treat you ok?" And of course, they asked about my hijab, do people treat you differently because of it." Additionally, she recalled that once she came to the U.S., she was aware and nervous about racism because of her hijab, "because I'm a Muslim and I wear a hijab, initially I was scared of how big racism is here, and I was worried about how people would treat me." These feeling were exacerbated after the new presidential elections and her parents became protective of her safety:

After the election actually, my family called me and they were like, be safe because they read in the news and saw that people in America already became more brave to be racist and then they called me and told me to be very safe.

Julia described that her parents had always been protective of her and it increased since she decided to come to the U.S. and she added, "My parents don't want anything bad to happen to me." She understood her parents' concerns and explained that one of the reasons for being protective was that, "if something bad happens to me, since they're not around, they're very far

away. So, even if something happens to me, they can't help it much.” Julia’s parents, similar to Sarah’s parents, felt a level of helplessness and powerlessness in case something unfavorable happened to their daughter because of their religious identity. Further, Julia added that:

Unfortunately, there are a lot of bad things that could happen to you because of your Muslim identity here in America, like the shootings that's been happening many times, for example some mosques that were on fire and stuff. That's why I feel that when I came here, my parents were very worried if I was going to something that is Muslim-specific.

Julia mentioned, “Just coming here, I did not even have to think about how my Muslim identity could interfere with me being in this environment.” She was highly involved in high school and was bothered when her parents reacted negatively to her being a part of the religious organization on campus. She recalled the first time she told her parents about her involvement with the Muslim Student Association (MSA) on campus:

I remember, the first time, I was like, “You know, I am going to the events by MSA.” I started getting calls and calls, and they were very worried. I get their perspective, they're like be careful and “Okay, just pray in your room, just be a good Muslim on your own” but like sort of masking some behaviors just for protection. That was one of the things that really bothered me at the beginning.

Lastly, Rose remembered that her parents cautioned her against discussions about certain topics with others, based on her religious affiliation:

In America, these days they're bad times for Muslims. It's like everyone thinks Muslims are terrorists, and it's a very common perception that, my parents especially, they taught me not to talk about anything political or religious with people. Because these are two things, which really, really get people angry, and people won't change their perspective on those things. And they'll start judging you, or looking at you differently if you have certain views that are against theirs. So I guess I was kind of, for my own security, they kind of pushed me into a place where they were like, okay don't talk much about politics, or religion. And so, that's why I was a little scared doing that.

The two sub themes – family dynamics, and parental fears and masking the Muslim identity highlighted two important aspects in understanding Muslim identity performance for these women. The first theme, *family dynamics*, collectively revealed that relationships with family were not only important to their religious learning, development, and identity performance but

also personal and emotional wellbeing. Family members played important roles in the lives of all the participants. The main roles had been encouraging the value of education, instilling religious and cultural values, serving as pillars of support, and being protective towards their daughters.

The second theme, *parental fears and masking the Muslim identity*, revealed that due to the closeness these women shared with their family members, at times parents imposed their fears onto their daughters. Some parents felt helpless, and had apprehensions for the safety of their daughters in the U.S. The increase in their fears stemmed from their knowledge and awareness of Islamophobia and gendered Islamophobia in the U.S. Consequently, some parents encouraged their daughters to mask certain aspects of their Muslim identity, while others monitored their religious involvement in activities on campus in the U.S. Parental involvement and fears made the participants cognizant of their Muslim identity before they came to the U.S. and influenced their involvement, actions and behaviors after they came to the U.S. Therefore, these participants not only accepted their own fears, apprehensions, and worries but also those encouraged by their parents. As a result parental involvement in their lives directly or indirectly played a part in the way they performed their Muslim Identity in the U.S. and on their college campuses in the U.S.

### **Muslim International Identity Consciousness**

All participants shared that as they navigated various environments in the U.S., there were a number of ways in which they became cognizant of, sensitive to, and aware of their Muslim, international, and woman identities. These realizations played a part in the ways in which they performed their Muslim international identities. For some participants it was because of their clothing/hijab that outwardly transformed these women into religious bodies and for others, certain events on and off campus reminded them of these identities. Most importantly it was about interactions with various categories of individuals (peers, faculty, visitors, strangers) on and off campus that brought their Muslim international identity to the forefront. Thus, Muslim identity performance (act, behave, engage, and situate) was at times encouraged by experiences that were externally imposed and at other times they were a result of intentional decisions on the part of the participants. In this section, I present three subthemes pertaining to performance of their Muslim international identity: “I am wearing a hijab, I must be a

Muslim...”, “Muslim women are much more diverse than a headscarf...”, and representing others.

### **“I Am Wearing A Hijab, I Must Be A Muslim”**

*You know I'm a Muslim by just looking at my appearance. I'm not shouting that I'm a Muslim, but they just know because I'm wearing a hijab, I must be a Muslim. (Sarah)*

Fifty percent of the women that I conversed with wore a hijab. These four women (Arianna, Sarah, Razan, and Zainab) revealed that they did not have a choice in disclosing their Muslim identity to others in the U.S. Wearing the hijab made them hyper-visible, and this piece of clothing imposed or marked their bodies as visible Muslims. Visibility was referred to as being seen without them intending to or trying to be noticed. In the U.S. the hijab is associated with belonging to the religion Islam, thus making them Muslim woman in the eyes of observers.

As described in the opening quote, Sarah stated that her appearance made it apparent to others that she was Muslim. She knew her hijab was the reason for her visibility. Zainab also said that she did not have to disclose to people that she was Muslim, “I think it is obvious from my hijab that I’m Muslim. I think now all people know that hijab is related to Islam.” Similarly, Razan specified, “My hijab kind of tells others about me being a Muslim. I don’t even have to tell because I feel like nowadays people know that.”

All hijabi women that I conversed with acknowledged that regardless of where they were, or whom they were with, their hijab was something people recognized. Sarah and Razan agreed that visibility inflicted by the hijab made them “uncomfortable,” and aware of their Muslim international identity and their surroundings. One way they became aware of their Muslim bodies was when they spotted people gazing at them. Three of the four women used the word “staring” to describe the gaze of others, on and off campus in the U.S. Some stories related to the gaze of others occurred in spaces off campus, including experiences on the bus, at bus stops, and at the grocery stores. Sarah disclosed that she frequently used public transportation and described that often she caught people looking at her:

When I go home from campus on the bus, sometimes I feel like, oh my god, these people are staring at me on the bus! I sometimes think, Oh, so maybe they think my hijab is nice? I don't know what people are thinking right? or I think, Oh, maybe they're judging me! or Maybe because I wore a nice hijab that day so they are staring at me, I don't know. I just do my stuff, talk to my friends, or play on my phone. I don’t let it bother me.

In another story Sarah shared that at times she experienced “visitors” looking at her:

I think they were parents. Sometimes when I walk around campus you can feel it, people looking at you. So I always say...it's okay. I cannot do anything as long as they don't do any harm to me. Maybe they are just curious about me or my styles of hijab, we don't know.

Sarah’s stories revealed, that she noticed people recognizing her by her hijab. The stares she described were a form of harassment she experienced often and in various environments. One way that she handled these uncomfortable situations was by rationalizing and by remaining positive about these incidents. She also recognized that the only thing she could control was the way she thought and reacted to these acts. Similarly, Arianna shared a story about an uncomfortable experience she encountered, with a random person, at a local grocery store (original name omitted) when she was out shopping with one of her friends:

Of course, you have some people who stare down at you. I get a lot of staring from people but I'm used to it now, sometimes on campus and sometimes at the grocery store. One time I went with my Filipino friend to the local grocery store and I saw this man staring at me... I went outside and she stayed behind. I was wondering why she stayed and then some guy stopped her, this American guy just stopped her, and I was wondering, why? And then when she came out, she told me, “oh, that guy asked, why does your friend wear that?” I just thought, why is this random person stopping her to ask that? Why don't you ask me?

Her story revealed that being “stared” at was not something new to her. She had experienced it before and in various environments. Experiences of “staring,” that my participants described, were not limited to environments outside the campus. A number of participants shared similar experiences within various environments on the college campus. Zainab shared that she felt that people acknowledged her presence and she believed her international student status might also play a part in why people noticed her:

I sometimes notice people staring at my hijab, or me, in class or out on campus. I think on campus it is more about me being international. They kind of think... I don't really know much, and they need more effort to explain stuff to me. Sometimes they avoid talking to me.

Staring as harassment was an act that made these women aware of their presence and difference and instigated uncomfortable feelings. Although these women remained positive, and often simplified their noticeability to the hijab, they realized that they were treated as outsiders that did not belong in these environments. Further, they learned to ignore and to not be “bothered” by these acts.

Another aspect that made these women think of their Muslim international identity was lack of diversity (religious and otherwise) in their academic departments. Sarah disclosed that there were very few women in her academic department and explained that there were even fewer hijabi women in her classes. She acknowledged that because of a lack of gender and religious diversity, and her wearing a hijab to her classes, made her recognizable:

I don't know but I feel like, in class people are judging me or staring at me or they would look at me when I come into class. One time I texted a person in my class, saying, “Hey I'm in your class...” and they replied back, “Oh, you the girl with hijab?” So that made me think that they know who I am ... I was like...people notice me. Even when I went to see my professor at his office he was like “Oh, I notice you in my class, you take notes like that and you listen to me.” I was like, oh, thank you. I didn't know that people notice me before I talked to them.

Arianna also shared that she had similar experiences and divulged that she noticed people intently staring at her inside and outside her classroom building:

Around class, outside my building, in front of it is where I get a lot of stare downs. This has happened a lot of times, I'm used to it now. Sometimes outside, sometimes inside, it depends. I don't know why but when I'm with my friends, I don't get stare downs, but when I'm alone I do. I used to be annoyed. If you have something to say, just say it. But now that I'm used to it, I'm not bothered because they're not doing anything. They spent their energy to hate and I don't want to use hate, it's just wrong, if I'm annoyed or if I react to it, that action says a lot about me. So I just don't bother.

Similar to Sarah, Arianna too learned to cope with these stares over time. She too decided to take the positive approach and leaned “to not be bothered.” Additionally, Arianna realized that reacting negatively would not only impact her but others who share her faith, “if I do react a certain way, then that also makes other Muslim women look bad.” Arianna was not just self-conscious and aware of her impressions as a Muslim woman, but she recognized that the

prominence imposed on her by the hijab carried a burden of “representing” other Muslim women.

Other experiences of hyper-visibility, as a Muslim woman and as an international student, were experienced inside the classroom, with professors and peers. Muslim women in this study who wore the hijab were not just noticed by other students, they were also visible to their professors because of their clothing. Razan spoke enthusiastically about the religions class she was taking and stated that it was her “favorite class.” She particularly enjoyed the class because the professor acknowledged her in the classroom:

My religions professor, he knows that I'm a Muslim, because of course he's a religions professor and I wear a hijab. He was more interested in knowing my opinions about other religions, simply because of my own religion. He said that Christian people in the U.S., or the students in his class at least, do not know how to express what they believe in, because they haven't been taught their constitutional religion. Unlike the Muslim students in my class, and he was referring to me and my friend.

Although Razan alluded to positive visibility by her professor in one of her classes, she recognized that her opinions in the classroom were encouraged by her religious identity. She served as a representative of her religion. Additionally, her professor imposed his perceptions of Muslims not only on her but also the other students in the classroom.

Sarah also shared stories of being visible to her professors within her classrooms. One of the experiences she elaborated on was with a professor who noticed her in class because of her hijab. Because of this visibility she was conscious that she could not “hide” or “miss class”:

I go to most of the classes, I went to office hours for one professor and I asked questions about the class. Because I am the only one who is wearing hijab, so my professor said, “I saw you! You sit behind...” “And I see you jot down my notes and stuff. I realized that he notices me. I guess it is a plus point for me because they notice me in class and maybe will give me marks for participation and they know I attend the class. I cannot hide in class or if I skip class they will notice, ‘oh the hijabi girl is not here.’”

Besides being noticeable to the professors in the classroom, a few of the women shared stories of the ways in which their visibility interacted with the relationships they formed with their classmates. In the classroom, visible Muslim international women described experiences of being under the microscope at one time or another. Similar to Sarah, Zainab shared that most of

the time, she was the only hijabi woman in her classes. She believed that there were “maybe one and two more” Muslim women in her classes, besides her. She recognized that in “STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) areas” there was often a lack of Muslim and gender diversity. Due to “standing out” in her classes, she particularly had a hard time finding group members:

In class whenever I ask people, “Are you interested to team up with me?” Even when I text them, they don't answer back. I was kind of shocked. Like you can say no. I will not be like offended. They answer all the messages but this message there is no reply. So I felt it's kind of weird. So this is a struggle whenever we have to do group work. I end up with other international people. Maybe because my English is not perfect English so sometimes I cannot really deliver my idea clearly to them.

Arianna shared parallel struggles when working on group projects with her peers and attributed her language skills as playing a role with these challenges:

I don't know why but every time there's a group project and you have to choose your partner, I end up working alone. Eventually you get stuck with the same person and they get to know you better and we are friends now. Making friends was a difficult time at first. But I think the ones that actually approached are mostly international people. I think because they actually feel and understand me. At first I was insecure about my English but with international students, their English is similar to mine.

Both Zainab and Arianna shared stories of having difficulty in successfully working with peers on group projects. They recognized that their international identity coupled with Muslim identity created certain barriers. Consequently, they often worked with other international students and assumed that their lack of English language fluency served as an obstacle to collaborating with non-international counterparts.

For other women the hijab made it difficult to socially engage with peers. These women rationalized that the hijab made them seem “unapproachable” and “unfriendly.” Arianna shared that initially she had difficulty engaging with others and felt excluded until people got to know her individually:

At first it was hard for me to make friends because I think everyone was afraid to approach. People did not want to be seen with me. My classmates and coworkers used to

not include me in outings or stuff to go out. I guess I don't really blame them because they don't know what I prefer to do. I don't know if it is because of the hijab.

For Arianna social connection experiences with peers, with the hijab and without the hijab, were distinct. She explained that she got differential treatment when, occasionally, she chose not to wear the hijab. She recognized that lack of hijab made her “approachable, friendly, and welcoming.” She added, “This one time I didn't wear my hijab, and people were commenting and asking me, “Can I buy you a drink or something?” I guess I knew it was because I didn't wear hijab.”

Similarly, Razan recognized that because of her hijab, people around her were more cautious and careful. On several occasions she decided not to wear the hijab and noticed a difference in the way she was treated. As a result, Razan shared that she “struggled with the hijab” mainly because she did not like to be noticed and preferred to “blend in”:

I'm a person who doesn't like to stand out. When I came here, I feel like I'm standing out in an uncomfortable way for me, because of the hijab. It doesn't necessarily mean like someone is harassing me or anything, it is just that people are being more careful around me. So in a way they speak at first, after they get to know me of course, it changes. When people approach me they're more careful. I got a sense that it was my hijab, it might be a reason but not in all cases. That's why I am having the struggle to wear it or not wear it. These four women disclosed experiences and shared stories of hyper-visibility imposed by their hijab in the U.S. They shared that others saw the hijab as a religious symbol and they did not have a choice in disclosing their religious identity to others. At times, these women felt uncomfortable due to harassment, in the form of staring, by strangers, visitors, and peers on campus as well as off campus. Over time they learned to cope with these acts by ignoring them and by not being “bothered” by them. Additionally, lack of diversity, their international, and wearing a hijab in their academic fields, and classrooms made them noticeable to professors and peers. Lastly, these women shared challenges when working on group projects, and social connections, with peers, due their visible Muslim international identity.

**“Muslim Women are Much More Diverse Than a Headscarf”**

*Just by looking at me, most people never really find out. People see me and think I'm visibly woman, but what is the identity of that woman? It's hard. People always act so shocked, they're always like, how? Because they're very confused when I say something*

*about Islam, because I show up in a crop top or something, most people can't even tell what am I? So they just assume I'm a woman of color. But then I say I'm Muslim, and they're like, oh really? Tell me more. So they all just assume, you're Muslim, there's a headscarf! But Muslim women are much more diverse than a headscarf. (Haden)*

The other fifty percent of the women that I conversed with did not wear any religious or cultural artifacts that signified an immediate affiliation to their religion. These non-hijabi women (Amber, Haden, Julia, and Rose) expressed that they had a slight advantage and a choice to decide when and to whom they disclosed their Muslim and international identities. These women acknowledged that lack of hijab or any other cultural/religious artifacts on their bodies allowed them to be invisible and shielded from others' perceptions of their religious identity, at first. Julia believed that not wearing a hijab disguised her Muslim identity and people only presumed her Muslim identity once she disclosed her national identity to them:

Because I'm not wearing the hijab, people usually don't know that I am Muslim. My religion doesn't come up unless someone asks. People usually ask when they know I'm from Morocco and if they know something about Morocco they might ask whether I am a Muslim or not. Definitely when people know where I am from, I think that brings up the Muslim identity.

Additionally, Julia recognized that some people around her had certain perceptions of Muslim women, and they assumed certain levels of religiosity based on Muslim women's clothing:

It's interesting because many people here tend to associate the Muslim women with the hijab, so I don't fit that. I feel like there is this underlying assumption that if you're not wearing the hijab than you're not as good of a Muslim. People around me usually would not know and when they know, they say, "Oh, I didn't know that you are Muslim." Or "You don't seem like a Muslim woman."

Further, Julia often wondered what people meant when they said, "You don't seem like a Muslim woman!" It makes me think, "what do Muslim women seem like?" Haden too shared that she did not "fit the Muslim woman stereotype" and that because she was "not visibly Muslim," no one saw her and speculated, "oh, she's Muslim!" and that she had a choice in disclosing her Muslim identity to others. She only shared her religious identity with "people who were close" to her and at other times she acknowledged that she did not have the ability to disclose because, "as soon as I say where I'm from, people immediately assume that I'm Muslim."

Lack of hijab may have shielded these women to be religiously ambiguous, but that did not mean that these women were not visible to others because of their ethnicity or national identity. Amber, Haden, and Julia all disclosed that people noticed that they were “not American.” Rose shared:

They usually never figure out my religion. Most of the time they ask me where I'm from because that's why they're interested. I do not look like other Americans, so people get curious, and that's when I tell them my national identity.

Likewise Amber shared that people would not know that she was Muslim “just by looking” at her. She recognized that as soon as she shared her national identity with others they would make the connection that she was Muslim. At other time, she recognized that, “I don't look American, but at the same time, I don't look immediately Muslim as well, because I don't wear the headscarf. So people usually get confused when they see me.”

The non-hijabi women that I conversed with shared experiences of “not standing out” as Muslim women within the classroom setting as well. Julia could not think of any times where her peers or professors within the classroom knew or recognized her Muslim identity unless she decided to share it:

It is interesting that I can't think of any particular instance or class where the professor or the other students in class knew I was Muslim. I'm not sure they could know. I don't know. Even when talking to any of my professors, I never had a conversation of being a Muslim or my religion. I think part of that is because I'm not wearing the hijab.

Haden agreed that she did not stand out in her classes based on her appearance either, because her appearance did not match others' perceptions of what Muslim women wear. She did, however, understand that once she disclosed her religious identity, she got reactions of confusion from her faculty and peers. She shared a story related to this experience within the classroom:

For example, I had a class called “Radical Islam” that I took. The name itself is so problematic but I was like, I'm gonna take the class, because it was studying all these terrorist groups and their history, and the politics of them. So me and another woman were the only Muslims in that class. The other woman was head scarfed and one day she missed class. So the professor was talking, and he was trying to explain how these groups don't represent Islam as a political ideology, and he was like, “I really wish the Muslim student was here to listen,” so I raised my hand, and I was like, “actually, that's not the

only Muslim student here.” Yeah well, I'm Muslim too, and turns out there was another girl who also was Muslim. But it just went straight to their head that we are not Muslim, just because our names don't show it and neither do our appearances. It was an interesting experience, because the students and the professors were confused. And once again, if you don't wear a head scarf people are not gonna know if you're a Muslim woman or not. Amber disclosed that classroom settings were not the places where conversations around ones religion organically came up. However, she revealed that it was common to disclose one's national identity in classrooms. She grasped that there could be many reasons why people were always “surprised” when they discovered that she was from Pakistan:

Speaking about your religion in class would be just odd. But, because it's common for you to tell people where you're from, and I'm never hesitant about that, so I always tell people, “Oh, I'm from Pakistan.” And I guess most people know that Pakistan is a Muslim majority country. I've noticed that every time I say that I'm from Pakistan, people turn heads. So they do notice that, “Oh, this is something unusual.” I don't know if it's because I'm an international student, or if it's because of the specific place that I'm coming from. It could also be that they have a preconceived notion of what a female from Pakistan looks like, and when they see me, it just shatters their notion. And I don't fit that image. Many people don't expect me to come from Pakistan or maybe they don't even expect someone from Pakistan to be there.

These four women who did not wear a hijab shared that they had a choice in disclosing their Muslim identity at their own will to others. They recognized that people (professors and peers) around them had certain perceptions or stereotypes of Muslim women and when they disclosed their religious identity, people acknowledged that they did not fit the stereotypes. Additionally, their stories revealed that although they were religiously ambiguous that did not mean that they were invisible. Most of these women knew that their national identity and race brought attention to them.

All eight women I conversed with shared experiences of being religiously visible or religiously invisible on their college campuses at one time or another. Some women had choices while others were not given the options of disclosing and sharing their religious or other identities with others. Hijabi women often felt uncomfortable due to harassment in the form of “staring,” whereas non-hijabi women often faced “unusual looks” once they disclosed their

national identities to others. National identities lead to conversations around their religious identities, which, came as a surprise to many people as these Muslim international women did not “fit the stereotypical” Muslim woman image. Therefore, experiences of Muslim Identity performance often differed for Muslim international students that wore the hijab or had other cultural/religious identifiers, and Muslim international students that did not wear the hijab or had other cultural/religious identifiers. Experiences of being stereotyped and serving as representative of their religion, culture, ethnicity, and/or gender, was one of many aspects shared by all eight women.

### **Representing Others**

Collectively, all Muslim international women respondents shared stories of facing stereotypes from their peers on their college campuses. These stereotypes ranged from religion, ethnicity, gender and various behaviors. Consequently, these women understood that their actions, behaviors, and ways of performing their Muslim international identities were never individualistic. Each of them recognized that one way or another, their actions, and behaviors were scrutinized: sometimes by others who stereotyped them, and at other times, it was an inward lens that stemmed from fears of misrepresentations. Most of these women sensed that they were always representing either their country or their religion and in some cases both (whether they liked it or not), and they acted accordingly depending on the environment. Additionally, these women found themselves representing other Muslims as well, thus it is presented in the sub-theme; *representing other Muslims* in this section.

Amber disclosed that when people found out about her country of origin, they often asked about her religion, but more importantly, she realized that they treated her as “someone exotic.” She added, “Americans have this fascination with exoticness. But over time, they realize that you're very much like they are. That there are not a lot of differences, and the exotic veneer, it just fades away.” She also added that once people got to know “you” that “clearly” changed these stereotypes as well.

Arianna shared some experiences where she realized that at times she was categorized on multiple fronts: religious, ethnic and national. Particularly, she shared one story where she become conscious and aware of her Muslim and Asian identity when conversing with some peers on campus:

Because I wear a hijab, some people actually ask me, “what are you?” I’m like, oh, what do you mean?” And then they ask me, “where are you from?” And when I tell them, “I’m from Malaysia” ... Because some people assume that Muslim people are from Middle East only, and they’re like, “where’s that? Is it somewhere in Middle East?” I’m like, “no, Southeast Asia.” Sometimes when I tell them I’m from Asia, people often respond: “but you don’t look Asian, because they think Asians are like Chinese, Korean, and Japanese.”

Arianna brought attention to a larger stereotype that is wide spread in the U.S. and other western countries that the majority of Muslims are Arabs or from the Middle East. Additionally she highlighted a general lack of geographical knowledge from her peers and shared that not only was she stereotyped based on her religion, but also her nationality. Similarly, Rose disclosed that she was aware of her presence in various spaces due to her various identities and recognized that sometime she was treated differently by some of her white peers, based on her race and as well as their perceptions of Muslims in general:

I don't think it's about me being a Muslim. I do see there's a difference in the way they treat me, but that's based on my color, or where I'm from. My Indian friends and I talk often that some white people treat us very differently because it's a brown thing. Some of my closest friends are whites, and they treat me really, really well, but the majority of them, for example, they tell me themselves, because we're comfortable enough to tell each other, they're like, “oh yeah my parents often think that Muslims are really weird, or things like that,” and I told them recently, “that's not true” and I explained everything, that's how they were telling me, and they framed it in that context.

Julia also shared experiences in which she faced stereotypes from her peers based on their assumptions about Islam and Muslim women. She disclosed that she had Islamic art on her walls “that's written in Arabic,” in her residence hall room. She said that at times, when people visited her room, conversations about Arabic, Islamic art, or her culture would stem from their observations of the room and that “could bring up the topic of religion.” During these conversations, many people disclosed that they assumed she was “not as involved as Muslim” because she does “not wear a hijab” or talk about her religion often, and that she was “not a practicing Muslim or as good of a Muslim.” She believed that:

Specially non-Muslims, I feel that they tend to also see more Muslim women with the hijab, which is interesting. If you're not wearing the hijab, you're just more open, or less

good of a Muslim, or you're trying to mask your Muslim identity. That's how I felt, actually, in many of my conversations.

Lastly, Sarah shared her experiences of being stereotyped by her peers and revealed that when people asked her questions about her hijab, she would be very intentional in explaining about her religion and practices in relatable ways. She shared that the most common questions she received were related to her hair or her hijab, “Do you have hair under that?” and she would reply, “Yeah! I do! But I cover it.” She recalled one conversation she had with a coworker her on campus job, who asked her why she covered her hair? She replied:

In every religion there's a good ... like Christian, there's a good Christian, there's a bad, like the middle Christian. It's according to whether they're practicing it all stuff and in Islam, I say it's also a good Islam, a good Muslim, a bad Muslim, a medium Muslim, and I am trying to be better Muslim,” so I said “Oh, I'm trying to be better by practicing what I'm practicing now and it's my choice.” Like you, a Christian, you go to the church every Sunday so it's your choice to be better.

Sarah recognized that some of the questions that people asked were based on their assumptions of the hijab and of hijabi women. At times she appreciated when people would “respectfully” ask such questions. At other times she believed it was best to take her time in explaining so that she does not falsely “represent” other Muslim women.

**Representing other Muslims.** Similar to Sarah, all other Muslim international women at one time or another recognized that they served as representatives or ambassadors of their countries, cultures, ethnicities and religion. Many of the women often used disclaimers like, “this is just me” to emphasize that their individual actions do not signify what all others do who share similar religion, gender, and ethnicity with them. Rose shared that she was “open” and “comfortable” talking about her religion with others and she wanted people to know that she was Muslim. Additionally, she divulged that if certain aspects of her religion came up in conversations with peers that she would often say, “This is what my religion says... Just to portray or put forward that good image of the religion.” At another time, Rose shared that she was highly cognizant of her performances of her Muslim identity and wanted to show case the positive aspects:

I realize that every action that I do, or every word that I say is weighted. And so I think before I do those things, things that will impact other people or that will create an image

of me, as a Muslim woman. So it's more like, not common things, like oh she sings bad, or something. But more like, the way I treat people, the way I talk to people. The way I talk about people, all those things are influenced by my Muslim identity, and the fact that I represent that and my country makes me conscious.

Arianna shared that she was always aware of all her actions and she feared that others may associate her actions with other Muslims and she was cautious of “misrepresenting” other Muslims. She emphasized, “I have to be careful of what I say, because what if they think, oh, all Muslims are like this.” Similarly, Zainab recognized that at times she was more cautious about her Muslim identity while she was in the U.S. because she realized that she was never just representing herself but also the “whole religion”:

Whenever I do something in my home country people understand that this is not related to Islam. This is just my own decision, my own beliefs. Here people relate everything you do to Islam. They think all Muslims do it but it's not quite true. So, you have to think about what you're doing, so you don't give a bad idea about the whole religion for something bad you do.

All three of these women realized that whether they wanted it or not, people associated their personal actions and behaviors with other Muslim women. Haden understood that she was different from other Muslim women. She wanted people to know that she was different and that others should not be evaluated based on her decisions. She accepted a sense of responsibility towards teaching others about the diversity among Muslim women:

Many people are knowledgeable about other religions and cultures but I don't think people will learn unless you - not saying you have to teach them, but at least them being aware I'm a Muslim woman doing my own thing is important. Because then they get to see it's not a monolith. Muslim women are always seen as unapproachable, and scary. And everyone needs their own space, and she is seen as this creature people should stay away from. And because of that, I feel the need to show that I'm as normal as you are, despite the fact there's all this stuff going on in the news, Muslim women and Muslim people, terrorists, all that.

Razan, similar to other women, realized that she was representing her religion and nation, however was confident and felt positive about being a good example of other Muslim women

and of Middle Eastern women. And she appreciated when others took genuine interest in learning more about her religion:

I feel like I'm a good representation of what Islam is about. It's just a personal feeling; I'm not saying that I'm a perfect Muslim. But I love it when other people come and ask me about my culture or my religion, these things make me really happy, because I feel like a lot of the western world has a bad idea about the Middle Eastern countries and Islam. I feel like I'm kind of contributing in a way, to make it look better.

The three subthemes (*"I am wearing a hijab, I must be a Muslim," "Muslim women are much more diverse than a headscarf,"* and *representing others*) under the larger theme of Muslim identity consciousness unveiled the ways in which these participants performed their Muslim international identity inside and outside their college campuses. Visible Muslim international women shared stories of hyper-visibility imposed by their hijab. They described feelings of discomfort due to harassment, in the form of staring, by strangers, visitors, and peers in the U.S. They shared the ways in which they learned to cope with the added noticeability either due to the hijab and/or the intersections between their religious visibilities, lack of diversity in their academic fields, and classrooms. Additionally, they highlighted challenges in socially connecting with peers and collaborating on group projects in the classrooms due to their Muslim international identity.

Muslim international women who were not religiously visible accepted that they had a choice in disclosing their Muslim international identity to others in various environments that they occupied. Although at first they were religiously invisible, that did not mean that they were not visible due to their ethnic, national, and other identities. These women faced stereotypes from professors, and peers and "did not fit" others' perceptions of Muslim women.

All participants collectively acknowledged that their actions, behaviors, and performances were "weighted" and not individualistic as they were stereotyped on multiple fronts: religion, nationality, ethnicity, and gender. These women shared burdens of representing others from their religion, culture, and nationality, which often led to their use of disclaimers about their individual identity performance and not a collective one. Additionally, they became "intentional" and "careful" not to portray a negative image of their religion to others and of not misrepresenting other Muslim women. Further, they recognized that they were fighting battles on two fronts simultaneously. One, they were constantly evaluated or "judged" or noticed based

on the individuals' preconceived notions of what women from their religion, culture, country and ethnicity were like. On the other hand, all their actions, behaviors, opinions, and spaces they occupied were further assessed, evaluated, measured, and used to possibly impose new stereotypes onto other Muslim international women at their colleges in the U.S.

### **Religious Engagement On Campus**

In addition to being visible or invisible as Muslim international women, facing stereotypes, and serving as religious/national representatives to others on campus, all Muslim women that I conversed with shared experiences of identity performance through religious engagement in various spaces on and off campus. These experiences of religious engagement are illustrated using three subthemes that emerged during data analysis. This section is organized around these three sub themes: religiously affiliated experiences, prayer spaces, and campus religious climate as it pertains to Muslim international identity performance.

#### **Religiously Affiliated Experiences**

Participants from both campuses shared that their university provided prayer/meditation spaces for all students, had a student-run organization Muslim Student Association (MSA), and one of the campuses had a university affiliated specialized center, Muslim Student Center (MSC) (pseudonym) that focused on delivering religious events, supports and services for Muslim students (both domestic and international) as well as the campus at large. The participants I spoke with shared experiences that related to their religious involvement with the local mosque, MSA, MSC, attending various religious events and services, and the ways in which they performed their Muslim international identities.

Six of the Muslim women shared that they were either partially engaged (Amber, Julia, Sarah) or were highly engaged (Haden, Rose) with the Muslim Student Association. The most prevalent event that all participants attended was the Friday afternoon prayers either at the local mosque or in spaces through the MSA. Arianna was most interested in attending the prayer spaces where she could meet “diverse people.” She spent most of her time at the local mosque, as “most people are international Muslims there.” She was surprised to know that her city “had a lot of Muslims here and Muslim families” and found other Muslim friends through the local mosque:

You know how Muslims are different in every country, like how they practice and how they have different cultures. So now that I'm here, I try to find people like me, that's how

I found my Palestinian friend. I did not join the MSA group, but I try to find other Muslims to explore and understand more about how other Muslims are, and not just from Malaysia. Because back home you just follow what others are doing. When I meet my Muslim-American friends I am able to ask questions about the religion and why we do certain things and it helps me with my Islamic practices.

Amber shared that she wanted to be more involved with the MSA on her campus but disclosed that the physical location of where the student organization was located was unfavorable. She shared that had the location been in a different place which was in a more “central location,” then she would be “more involved”:

I haven't been very active and going to the MSA and participating in their activities just because they're on north campus, and it's such a pain to go to north part of campus. I hate to say it, but this part of the university is the slums. You don't want to go there, seriously. It's so out of the way. So, I haven't engaged in a lot of MSA activities.

For Sarah it was her desire to seek connections with other Muslim women, since there were very few women from her home country on her campus, that got her interested in MSA on her campus. She started attending MSA meetings based on recommendations from some people, but she did not participate for too long. She attended a few events organized by members of MSA, but was unable to connect with the people who attended these events and shared that she, “stopped going because international people don't always join MSA. All the people there are Americans or from this state.” Lack of international Muslim women at the MSA influenced her level of participation.

Similarly, Julia had hoped to be more involved with the MSA but she discovered that most of the members of MSA on her campus were “Muslim Americans, and they grew up in the U.S.” She explained that although she shared the same religion with them, she had a hard time making connections on a personal level:

It just felt that sometimes, maybe some of the things do not apply to me. In general, I was hoping to be more involved with the MSA but it felt a little bit different than what I would have placed, or hoped. I felt that definitely there was this common thing between us, but at the same time, I felt that I was a little bit distant. It's not like I clicked with them right away and we're all friends. I was there, went to their meetings, it was fun but things just did not click as I would have hoped.

Additionally, Julia shared that she attended Friday prayers, but stopped going to MSA altogether during her sophomore year due to the change in the prayer format that did not align with her beliefs and practices. She started going back once the decision was reversed:

During my sophomore year, they changed it to having women praying next to men. That is just like something that was just not acceptable at home in Morocco. Growing up in Morocco in a Muslim community, I always just knew and saw that women prayed differently. I mean there are some reasons for it. They changed it because some women felt that they wanted to feel more engaged. I read a little bit more about it, it's not acceptable at all, so I stopped going for a bit. Now they changed it back again, because fewer women started going. When they changed that I stopped going and just prayed in my room. Now that they changed it back I started going. I think there will always be a group of people who did not get what they wanted.

The same incident that discouraged Julia from going to MSA events and Friday prayers, served a different purpose for Haden. Haden revealed that during her first year in college she, “actively avoided the Muslim Student Association.” She “had so many negative experiences as a Muslim” in her home country and that she was “tired of religion” and “want to take a break from everyone and everything.” During her second year of college she “wanted to get involved” with other Muslims and because of her involvement with MSA she had found a great community of friends:

So sophomore and junior year I started to get more involved and it's been such a great community for me. Because I've realized that first of all, everyone there is so different from each other. Not this idea I had in my head that all the Muslims are the people who I encountered in Saudi Arabia. I'm just fascinated by all the debates that are happening in the Muslim community here. Even when it comes to praying, women are like, are we gender adjacent! It's very progressive and I like that a lot, and it has made me consider being more active as a Muslim.

The “gender adjacent” concept that Haden was referring to was related to Muslim women praying next to men at the MSA Friday prayers at her Private University. Typically Muslim women do not pray standing next to men instead they pray behind men. The “progressive” nature of her campus’s MSA made her appreciate her own Muslim uniqueness as well as the diverse Muslims she interacted with.

Similarly, Rose revealed that before coming to the U.S. she had negative perceptions of organizations such as MSA and she was not expecting to find deep friendships and a sense of community with them. She shared that being a part of her campus MSA, “really revolutionized” her way of “thinking about Islam” and that she met the:

...most wonderful people, the most kind, the most caring, the most tolerant, like a true representation of what a Muslim should be....I think growing up in Pakistan, your parents always warn you, you're very cautious about Muslim organizations, because usually in other cultures, and in Pakistan they tend towards extremist views, so I did not have any intention of coming to America and becoming a part of the MSA. I had no intention of talking to them. My perception of them was a bunch of weird people grouped together, and I didn't want to associate with them. But honestly, I found some of my best friends in the MSA on campus. And I really enjoy going to MSA events, I really enjoy the fact that I know every Muslim on campus and that we have such a community. That was something I wasn't expecting at all.

Other than engaging religiously and socially with the MSA, both Julia and Haden shared their experiences with the Muslim Student Center (MSC) on their college campus. Haden thoroughly appreciated having a “very comfortable” space where she “could be myself” and a place where she did not feel “exclusions or judgments, or anything from anyone.” She used the center as her “primary place for studying and connecting with friends.” She did however add that the center was “put in such a marginal location. It's so far away, it's underfunded, under-resourced. It's not just enough to have a space; it has to be central to the university mission of diversity and inclusion.” Similarly, Julia echoed some of Haden's sentiments by expressing concerns about the location of the center:

Just like the MSA and the Muslim Student Center sometimes just doesn't feel like I fit there. Even if I want to go to one of their meetings, they usually would have them late in the evening. The location is not very convenient and many crimes happen in that area. It is about safety for me. I always think “Do I really want to go that far? I have to go through a dark alley!” It definitely has been a concern for me and it is actually one of the reasons why I haven't been going to Friday meetings. I feel like if they were on the main campus, I would be like more encouraged to go. I hate having to be cautious about it just because it might compromise my safety.

Most of these women found a religious outlet, away from their homogeneous Muslim environment in the home country, on their college campuses and outside the college campus. For some women, membership in the Muslim Student Association and having a Muslim Student Center (MSC) at their campus served the purpose of providing spaces to study and connect with diverse Muslims. For other Muslim women, it was a way to continue their religious practices and religious knowledge, and develop meaningful relationships with others. For yet others, they chose not to engage in these experiences due to physical locations that compromised their safety, and due to the lack of international student engagement in these spaces.

### **Prayer Spaces**

When talking about one's religious involvement on or off college campus, the topic of "prayers" and the act of "praying" was shared by most of the participants. This section is not focused on one's level of religiosity symbolized by the ritual of praying but more about the locations where these Muslim international women engaged in the praying rituals as it pertained to their Muslim identity performance. Amber, Zainab, and Julia all shared that they did not use the public praying spaces provided on campus by the university. Although the act was the same, the reasons for all three women differed. Amber shared that she preferred praying in her room. For her praying was a "private" activity and she felt "uncomfortable" praying in front of strangers even if they were Muslims:

I don't know what preconceptions people have. I don't know how it's going to affect them, or what people are going to think when I pray. And it's a hassle once you're done to tell them everything, and to clarify, so I don't want to do it over and over again. And I just personally think that, because a woman, and I don't normally go to mosque to pray, I pray in my room, or in my house. So praying is more of a private activity for me than it would be for a Muslim man, I assume. So I'm just not very used to people watching when I pray. To me, it's a personal thing that I like to do in my own space. So, even if it was another Muslim, I'm just not very comfortable with other people being there.

Zainab did not use the designated public spaces provided by the university because of the location of these spaces. She divulged that she was comfortable "praying publicly," and "asking people for some place to pray on campus" whenever she needed it. She said people were "absolutely fine with it" and often found a "small place" or allowed her "to pray anywhere in the

room.” She recognized that although people got “curious” when she asked, she appreciated that “they were totally fine with that and didn't feel offended.”

For Julia, it was about drawing attention to herself as a Muslim and being cautious of her surroundings that influenced where she prayed. She shared that although she spent “a lot of time at the library, where one of the prayer spaces were,” she did not feel comfortable using these spaces:

Coming back to Muslim identity and just being more cautious whenever you're trying to do something that is more Muslim related in a public space, I feel like whenever I am outside and I need to pray, I can't just stop and go to a room and be like, "Okay, I'm gonna pray now." I always wait until I get to my room to actually pray, which is not very convenient.

When talking about praying, Rose shared that she felt “more comfortable” praying at her university than she did at her “high school, which was in an Islamic country”:

Initially I was really scared to show any part of my Muslim identity, but I realized very quickly after coming to college that if anything, college encourages you to bring out who you actually are. And so I've never had a problem showing my Muslim identity. I pray in public spaces, in my room (my roommate is not Muslim), and I pray five times a day and my roommate completely understands.

She indicated that besides her room, she often prayed at the prayer rooms at the student center and at the library. She shared that both these spaces were “conveniently” located on campus and having multiple rooms allowed “flexibility between classes.” Lastly, both Sarah and Razan appreciated having a prayer/meditation space at the student center on their campus. Both shared that it was “convenient” and “quiet” and because it was hard to go back and forth between campus and home, just for prayers.

### **Campus Religious Climate**

All Muslim women that I interviewed shared that over all their university campus was “welcoming” and “supportive” of them as Muslim international women. Haden, Julia, Arianna and Rose recognized that their university provided “systems of support” and were safe spaces for their Muslim international identity performance. Julia shared that when she came to the U.S., she assumed that people on her campus would not be “accommodating” to her religious needs,

“especially during Ramadan” but she “got the opposite response and people tend to be very accommodating.” This experience helped her to “appreciate” her university.

Rose felt welcomed at her university because of the “huge international student population, there's such diversity, even American students, within American students there was so much diversity, so many brown students, so many Asian students, and that made me feel more comfortable.” Additionally, she revealed that, “this is a very, very liberal minded school, where we're trying to promote tolerance and love.” She added that the university environment is “very friendly, and I feel like I have the right, and the liberty to express my Muslim identity.”

Similar to Rose, Razan stated that, “what I like about the university is the diversity, a lot of international students and professors respect me. It's been a great experience being here.” For Amber, Zainab and Arianna, the ways in which individuals at their universities responded after the 2016 U.S. presidential election influenced the way they felt about their university and their experiences as Muslim women. Amber disclosed that she “had an intense cognition of being a Muslim woman on campus.” She was increasingly worried about the “rhetoric that the current president spouted.” Additionally, she was worried if, “he did instate the Muslim ban,” how that was going to impact her? Amber appreciated the way her university responded:

After he got elected, there was an inter-religious prayer thing held at the campus church. And that was when I was most cognizant about this. Because you could see people from all religions gathered around you, and we prayed. So we said prayers of peace from different religions. So there was a prayer of peace from the *Qur'an*, and from the Bible, from the Torah, and there was Hindu prayer of peace as well. So that was a really nice...I think at that moment in time, it gave me a lot of comfort and support, that at least within college environment, people were on our side.

Additionally, Amber stated that, the way the university reacted changed her college experience positively and made her “realize that my university is a very supportive campus” and said:

I've always noticed that my university tries its best to be as inclusive as possible. All the people here, the people you normally interact with, I wouldn't say they're free of stereotypes, or they're free of biases, but they at least try to act as free of them as they can, and try to include you in everything that they can. And the general environment at my university is just, no matter where you're from, no matter what your identity is, you're safe. That in the end, people are going to be on your side, as opposed to someone from

outside. That event just increased my appreciation of my university, and my trust in university's student body.

Both Arianna and Zainab shared stories of positive acknowledgements from strangers on their college campus after the recent presidential elections. Arianna shared:

I was walking to class normally, like I do every day, and then two or three people came up to me like, "I'm sorry." This was right after the elections. They were like, "I'm sorry, I'm sorry that you have to be here" or something. A lot of people, random people, I don't even know them, on the streets. They were apologizing because of who was elected. So I thought, oh they were apologizing to me because I'm a Muslim and I wear a hijab. It actually changed my perception towards people here; because initially I was scared of how big racism is here. But then I encountered people like that and I'm like, it's fine, I'm still safe here, my town is still safe. So that changed it in a positive way.

Similarly, Zainab shared that after the presidential election in the U.S. she was increasingly "worried" about her safety, after what she had heard in "news and media" about treatment of other Muslims. She shared a story in which people on her campus made her feel "safe":

Recently people on campus, when they see my hijab, smile at me. A lot of people smile and say welcoming and nice words. After Trump got elected, people are trying to show the opposite. They are showing that we accept you as you are. You don't need to change anything. I appreciate this. It makes me feel better because before you feel like this is not your country and now you feel like accepted to be here. Yeah, so kind of feel good and safer here.

Both these stories were also examples of visibility imposed by the hijab on these Muslim international women. Although there were times when noticeability due to the hijab made these women uncomfortable, when they were harassed by stares from strangers, positive acknowledgement from strangers after the 2016 U.S. presidential election incited positive feelings. Therefore, Muslim identity performance was complex and was constantly changing for these women.

Stories shared by these participants under the three subthemes (*religiously affiliated experiences, prayer spaces, and campus religious environment*) helped to convey the ways in which these women performed their Muslim international identities. *Religiously affiliated experiences* were about Muslim international identity engagement with Muslim Student

Association (MSA), Muslim Student Center (MSC), and events on their college campuses. Collectively, all Muslim women attended the Friday afternoon prayers. Although some women found close friendships and a feeling of community through participation with the MSA, involvement for other women was negatively impacted due to the location and a lack of international Muslims. The physical location of the MLC was also criticized by some participants as the undesirable location played into their insecurities with safety on and around campus.

The second subtheme, *prayer spaces*, focused on the locations where these Muslim international women performed their religious prayers. Both campuses provided public prayer/meditations spaces but the experiences of being in these spaces were varied. For some women these spaces were not “private” and were “uncomfortable” as they brought attention to their Muslim identity. For other, these spaces seemed “convenient” and comfortable for the purpose of praying. All Muslim women shared that besides these spaces, their bedroom (on campus or apartment off campus) was another location where they practiced their prayers.

Lastly, Muslim international women shared several positive experiences as it related to their *campus religious climate*. Some Muslim international women stated that their institution allowed them the liberty to express their Muslim identity. Other shared that their feelings of safety and support increased due to institutional response after the presidential elections. Collectively they found their institutions to be welcoming, accommodating, supporting, friendly, tolerant, and had increased diversity and higher numbers of international students. These were some reasons Muslim international women used to describe the ways in which their university aided in their Muslim identity performance on their college campuses.

### **Understandings of New Muslim International Identity**

*And it's not just regarding Islam, it's also regarding how I am as a person myself because I feel like there's me in Pakistan and then there's me here and then there's a chasm in between. It feels like my personality is divided like this, and then I have to reconcile those two things and then ensure that they are still the same person. They're very different. Even if they feel the same on the outside, on the inside, they're really different because expectations of you as a girl are just very different in Pakistan. For example, I can express myself far more freely here than I can do there. I can engage in discussion far*

*more easily. I can go out. I can do my own things. I'm just so much more independent than back home. (Amber)*

As shared in the first theme, each of the participants collectively disclosed that they came to the U.S. from a religiously homogeneous environment. In that environment, the majority of the people shared their religion as well as their culture. Most of the participants described being a Muslim in that environment as “easy,” “going with the flow,” having certain “boundaries” and their Muslim identity performance was influenced by those around them, namely family members, others within the society, and peers at school.

As participants reflected on the past, they also shared the present and how they were as Muslims now in the U.S. Coming from a religiously homogeneous environment (home country) to a heterogeneous environment (the U.S.) allowed them to think about their think about their various identities in both these settings. There were two subthemes that emerged as they shared their Muslim identity performance experiences now compared to when they were back home: *reconciling environments*, and *new understanding of the Muslim international identity*.

### **Reconciling Environments**

There were a number of ways in which these women had to reflect on who they were back home as Muslim women and who they are in the U.S. as Muslim international women. For all participants, being international was a new identity that was added when they came to the U.S. Most women shared they had to come to terms with who they were in both environments; therefore, reconciling meant different things to different women. For some Muslim women, they had to learn to navigate a new sense of safety while they were in the U.S. Matters of safety and security were not a concern for them when they were back home. Consequently, these Muslim women felt a sense of vulnerability in certain environments on and off their college campuses because of their religious identity.

Arianna disclosed that after the recent presidential elections in the U.S. she became increasingly aware of her environment. She shared that generally she felt safe on her campus but an incident that occurred off campus prompted feelings of lack of safety:

After buying groceries, my friend and I were waiting at the bus stop, to take the next bus home, when someone drove by us. He rolled the window down and then they shouted something and then he showed the finger to us. I was shocked and wondered, why? I realized that it's not just because me, but also because I'm with my Palestinian friend, and

she looks really Arab. We were both wearing hijabs. She taught me to not bother about people like that, because when you react, people will get mad and then God knows what they will do here, so she's like, just don't look at him. Pretend like he's not doing it to us, but we know he was doing it to us, because it's just us at the bus stop.

Arianna recognized that the way a stranger acted was not usual behavior, “this would never happen in my home country.” Additionally, she learned to cope with this incident based on her friend’s recommendations, “pretend like he's not doing it to us.” Although they both recognized that it was happening to them. Using another incident as an example, Arianna disclosed that there were “toxic people everywhere” and when comparing her levels of safety in the U.S. and her home country, she was more afraid in the U.S.:

What I'm more afraid of here is that people can have guns. They can have guns here, so I know I'm being so paranoid, but I'm sure they wouldn't randomly shoot people, but you know how you watch the news and recently I heard about something that happened with a hijabi Muslim, I think she got killed. She got murdered. Something like that but I am sure my city is safe, but you never know.

Similarly Julia expressed that her sense of safety decreased when she came to the U.S. This was triggered by the shootings that took place at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where three Muslims students were shot. She explained that this incident made her increasingly aware of her own Muslim identity and “how it could interfere” with her safety. She recognized that although her campus was safer, she was cognizant that there were people “who carry a lot of hatred towards Muslims” which she read in “newspaper articles” after the events at Chapel Hill. Consequently, she became conscious of her own safety due to her religion:

Just being more cautious in general whenever you are going to do something that has to do with Muslim identity, it's just like you now double think, is it safe. Yeah, I mean there is definitely this conscious thinking if I am going somewhere, is it super safe or not? There are some things that I would not double think, like going out to Friday prayers, I know it's on campus, I know it's safe. Just I guess I'm talking more in general being in the U.S. rather than at my university or in my country. At my university it's definitely less because I feel like there is still like some support system going on, so it's safer than off campus. I am just being more aware of my Muslim identity.

Cautiousness and fears of one's safety were not limited to experiences off campus. However, for some women it meant spending less time away from campus. Amber shared that she "seldom" went off campus because she felt safer on campus than off campus. Therefore, she spent the majority of her time on campus (she lived on campus):

There's not much variability in how comfortable or safe I feel once I am outside the university's campus. Because, first of all, once you go outside of the campus bubble, not the comfort level, I would say, but just the feeling of safety drops perceptively. I mean, this university is its own, whole space and it's much safer.

Rose referenced her increase in worries of personal safety after the 2016 presidential election as well. Consequently, she became aware of her race and religion:

I am afraid to walk alone at night. I wouldn't feel comfortable. Especially, I know after Trump was elected, I was really afraid of hate crimes happening. So much, I was so afraid of hate crimes happening, I wouldn't walk alone, I always used to have a guy friend walk me who was not brown, because I felt like the brown person would also be considered Muslim and be hate crimed with me. So it was a real fear that I had for a while. Until it kind of died down, and subsided a little but walking alone is still something I don't do much, or to far places.

For these four women, reconciling between the environment in home country and being in the U.S., on campus and off campus, meant being aware and conscious of their surroundings as well as feelings of safety in the U.S. For a few other women reconciling between life in home country and in the U.S. meant making a few adjustments. For Sarah, Julia, Haden, Amber, Arianna, and Razan, changes to their diet while in the U.S. reminded them of their Muslim identities. Sarah shared that back home, "we have a lot of access to halal food" but in the U.S., "it is very difficult to find halal food to eat and so most of the time I try to not eat meat." Julia disclosed that in her home country "I never thought if my food was halal or not because everywhere you go that's what you find." She felt "constrained" due to limited food options:

But here isn't halal food anywhere. You have to change your whole diet. I am always aware and now I'm never very compelled to try different restaurants here because there is always, "Oh, do they have halal food? Do they have something in the menu that I would like?" I eat halal, but I know that during halal, I would need to be vegetarian, but I'm not good with eating salads or any sort of green, so it's really hard for me to be vegetarian. I

can't be like, "Oh, I want to try this place." That doesn't work. I usually just like try to go to places that have some halal food or some good food options.

Likewise, Haden struggled with her diet and shared that "it is really hard to find halal food anywhere which is such a great contrast from our cuisine back home." She shared that it had been a huge adjustment for her, "and the only thing that had changed drastically, in my daily lifestyle, was my food. So it was easy to associate my feelings of miserableness and depression, and homesickness with food." Amber too had to learn to adapt to her new diet in the U.S. She shared that due to a lack of halal options she would sometimes eat non-halal food:

But at the same time, every time I do it, it just makes me – it makes me feel guilty, it makes me feel gross, and the thing is, when I was back home, because we have such a meat heavy cuisine, I really liked meat, but because of these two years that I spend not eating a lot of meat, I've kind of lost my taste for it.

For Arianna, diet was not the only adjustment she had to make while she had been in the U.S. She shared that there were a few ways in which she adapted certain behaviors "to fit in" to the U.S. culture:

I try to fit in with the culture here, and then, you know, in Malaysia, most of the people are like me so they understand. Our culture is the same, but here, it's different, so I have to fit in, try to fit in with my friends and with everything. That's when I take off my hijab sometimes to fit in. Well, when I go to my friend's house, and then of course, I can't make them to serve halal, so I just eat anything as long as it's not pork, and I just eat it because it's rude not to.

Lastly, Razan disclosed that there were several adjustments she had made since she came to the U.S. Some of these included communicating and "thinking" in English as opposed to Arabic and modifying her diet based on the food options available in the U.S. More importantly, she was learning to live with the hijab, which she continued to struggle with:

Ever since I got here I've been having this struggle of "do I wanna wear the hijab? Or is it okay if I take it off?" I don't wear it sometimes, but most of the time I wear it. So, that was kind of a struggle for me because, I know my identity as a Muslim, but I did not know... like if I needed the hijab to tell people I was Muslim. So that was a struggle to me, I still wear the hijab, I like it, but sometimes I feel like I don't have to. I feel like because back home hijab is more of a culture thing than it is a religious thing. Back home

where everyone is wearing it, you feel like you have to wear it because I'm a person who doesn't like to stand out. I like to blend in. Back home if you don't wear your hijab you're the one standing out, so I prefer to wear my hijab, I would never take it off back home.

But here, when I came here I feel like I'm standing out in a uncomfortable way for me.

The environment that these women grew up in was significantly different than the environment in the U.S. (on the college campus and outside the college campus). Almost all the women that I spoke with shared various experiences where they had to learn new ways of coming to terms with certain actions, habits or behaviors as Muslim international women. For some women it was being aware of their safety and security, for others it was adjusting their diet accordingly and for a few it was altering their clothing to reconcile between the two environments (home country and the U.S.) to “fit in.” One aspect that was shared by all these women was that since being in the U.S. they had gained a deeper understanding of their religion and as a result learned to embrace the new Muslim identity.

### **Embracing the New Muslim Identity**

Muslim international women that I conversed with faced adversity in the U.S. and on their college campuses. Some of these women learned to “ignore” and or “not be bothered” by the harassment they encountered in various environments. Other Muslim international women, learned to reconcile with heightened sense of safety, perpetuated by acts of Islamophobia against other Muslims, and learned to fight stereotypes imposed on them by others. Yet other women adapted to their new environment by becoming approachable and open when interacting with peers inside and outside the classrooms. Regardless of the adversities they faced, these Muslim international women chose to remain positive and embraced their complex Muslim international identity in their own unique ways.

Amber, in the opening quote of this theme, shared that the different environments and expectations of her in these different environments, from home country to being in the U.S., awarded her new realizations of her Muslim self. She added that being on her college campus in the U.S. allowed her to be more independent and to have greater freedoms of expression in discussions, as well as an increased feeling of being herself:

I really like being a Muslim here as opposed to back home. Because there's just so much more range in which people accept you, in which you can be a good Muslim. In which people don't judge you for following your religion, or not following it. So I think there's

just a lot more independence in terms of free religion, a lot more control over your own spirituality that you gain here as opposed to back home.

Environmental differences challenged the way these women thought about themselves, their religion and understanding of why they act, behave or engage the way they do. For all of these women's exposure to diverse people within the U.S. environment helped with gaining a deeper understanding of themselves and their Muslim international identity. Rose shared that "being surrounded by so many Muslims back home, you start to take for granted the fact that, that's your identity. And coming here, I've started to attach to that identity more." Further, she disclosed that exposure to diversity on her college campus made her aware and encouraged her to view her religion in a new light:

Coming to America, and seeing all the diversity, interacting with people of different religions, which is something I hadn't done before, all of those things helped me to see Islam, and myself as a Muslim woman in a very new light, and a very revolutionized, in a more liberating view.

Equally, Zainab revealed that her Muslim beliefs and "Muslim identity got stronger" by being in the U.S. "After I came to the U.S. I stick to Islam more than before. Now I try to know the reason of anything I'm doing and when you know the reasons you just get stronger in it."

Additionally, She shared that prior to coming to the U.S. she assumed that "all people believed in God," and she "thought that all people from Kuwait were Muslims and all people from the U.S. were Christian," but after meeting "diverse people" she "learned that it's not true and each person has his own beliefs." She appreciated being in the U.S. and the ways her "perceptions changed over time." She shared that she had:

learned more about other cultures and now I know it's very different culture from where I'm from...It's a great opportunity to be in a different community than like being around all Muslims so you can understand. Sometimes you don't realize you're Muslim until you are around another religion and you think more about it. So, I think this, this is a good opportunity to understand Islam more and get my beliefs stronger.

Razan believed that exposure to people from different religions helped her in understanding her own religion. Prior to coming to the U.S. she perceived that the "majority religion was Christianity in America" and she did not know "much about it," but she met a lot of people "from all over the world and Americans" and having discussions with them made her realize that

Christianity was “exactly the same as Islam. It's just a monotheistic religion, and they have one God. It's just a different interpretation of how they worship God.” She added that exposure to diverse people “just strengthened my identity. Everyone here is very respectful, and if they're curious they're curious in a good way. I feel like I'm a good representation of what Islam is about.” Lastly she shared that she felt “liberated” in the U.S. because “coming from a society where women are not given as much freedom. To a place where no one really cares, that's what I like about it. Here no one really cares what you do, where you go, and how you dress. I feel like it's a bit liberating here.”

Sarah shared that her friends in the U.S. were “from everywhere.” Most of the people she interacted with were other Muslims and international students. Being around these people had “increased her understanding” of her religion and having conversations about her “food, culture and religion” had made her appreciate her “Muslim identity more.” Julia shared that both in her home country and in the U.S. “my Muslim identity has definitely been a big part of my identity in general.” Prior to coming to the U.S. she expected to be exposed to diversity, “U.S is very diverse, that is something I was excited about.” She shared that meeting other Muslims from America and other countries helped to “think and share my beliefs with them.” Since being in the U.S. she often thought about her “Muslim identity and how does this fit with this environment.”

Arianna disclosed that since being in the U.S., her understanding of herself and her religion changed due to her friends who were Muslims from different countries. Having diverse Muslims as friends made her realize how “different Muslims practice and how different their cultures are.” She added that having conversations around the religion and “why they practice the way they do” and “understanding my own practices has made me a better Muslim.” She stated that she was “more liberated” about “where I am right now with my Islamic practice.” Haden shared that she had profound experiences as a Muslim since she had been in the U.S. When she came to the U.S., she actively “denied her Muslim identity” due to her experiences in her home country. Exposure to other diverse Muslims changed the ways in which she viewed herself and other Muslims:

We have a lot in common, we are raised in the same religion. And many of us also have conflicts about religion, like some of my Muslim female friends, they have debates with themselves about should they wear the veil or not, and one of them took off the veil. So

that's how I started to get more involved. Here I have space to think about my religion and make it my own things. Because Muslims are very different, there are practicing Muslims and non-practicing Muslims, and people practice their religion differently, there are people who don't practice it. And I wasn't allowed to see those differences and diversity back home. But I was able to see them here. Because also the Muslims here are from different cultures as well, it's not just Arab Muslims. Here, there are brown Muslims, and Arabs. We also have white Muslims, we also have the converts, the internationals, and people from all over the world are here. It just exposes you to many different diverse perspectives.

Lastly, she shared that being surrounded by diverse Muslims, “made me more comfortable with my identity,” and she “no longer feel this anxiety about having to conform to an ideal, nor do I feel like I have to distance myself from it.” She added, “Now I just feel like I can be myself, because this is my identity that I get to make my own experience with.”

Muslim international women that I spoke to shared two very distinct experiences of being Muslim women in the home country and being Muslim women in the U.S. Some of these women had to learn to navigate their increased fears of sense of security, and make amendments to either their clothing, diet, or thinking as Muslim women in the U.S. Collectively, they disclosed that exposure to diversity and diverse Muslims in the U.S. impacted their Muslim identity positively. For some women it was a liberating experience, for others their beliefs and practices got stronger, and for yet others they learned to shape their own newfound Muslim international identity.

### **Summary**

The themes that emerged during data analysis were arranged in a chronological order to convey the experiences of Muslim identity performance among the eight women that I interviewed. Half of the women I conversed with were at the Private University and the other half were at the Public University in the U.S. The first theme, *Muslim identity performance in home country*, started with sharing narratives of their Muslim identity performance in a religiously homogeneous environment that they grew up in prior to coming to the U.S. In their home countries, these women learned to negotiate and navigate the religious, societal, cultural and gendered expectations of them as Muslims and as women. Often their Muslim identity

practices, experiences, and expectations were intermixed with the culture and religion within that country.

The second theme, *identity performance and family*, revealed that relationships with family were not only important to their religious learning, development, and performance but also personal and emotional wellbeing. Additionally, some parents imposed their fears, stemmed from incidences of Islamophobia and gendered Islamophobia in the U.S., and encouraged their daughters to mask certain aspects of their Muslim identity in the U.S. due to the closeness these women shared with their family members. Some of these stories helped in transitioning from experiences of Muslim identity performance at home to Muslim identity experiences in the U.S.

The third theme, *Muslim identity consciousness*, unveiled the ways in which these participants performed their Muslim international identity inside and outside their college campuses. Visible Muslim international women shared stories of hyper-visibility imposed by their hijab and the ways in which they learned to cope with this visibility. Muslim international women that were not religiously visible shared that although they were religiously invisible, that did not mean that they were not visible due to their ethnic, national, and other identities. These women faced stereotypes from professors and peers and “did not fit” others’ perceptions of Muslim women. Collectively these women shared burdens of representing others from their religion, culture and nationality. Additionally, they became “intentional” and “careful” not to portray a negative image of their religion to others and of not misrepresenting other Muslim women.

The fourth theme, *religious engagement on campus*, revealed that some Muslim international women found close friendships and a feeling of community through participation with the Muslim Student Association and Muslim Student Center (MSC), while other women were negatively impacted due to the physical locations and an overall lack of international Muslims representation in these spaces. Both campuses provided public prayer/meditations spaces, but the experiences of Muslim identity performance in these spaces were varied. For some women these spaces were not “private” and were “uncomfortable” and for other, these spaces seemed “convenient” and comfortable. Lastly, Muslim international women shared several positive experiences as it related to their campus religious climate. Collectively they found their institutions to be welcoming, accommodating, supporting, friendly, tolerant, and had increased diversity and higher numbers of international students.

Lastly, the fifth theme, *understandings of new Muslim international identity*, divulged stories that related to the connections these women made as they reconciled between coming from a religiously homogeneous environment (home country) to a heterogeneous environment (the U.S.). The environment that these women grew up in was significantly different than the environment in the U.S. All Muslim international women shared various experiences where on and off campus that made them cognizant of their Muslim international identity. For some women it was being aware of their safety and security, for others it was adjusting their diet accordingly and for a few it was altering their clothing to reconcile between the two environments. These women faced various adversities and learned to “ignore” and or “not be bothered” by the harassment they encountered in various environments, reconcile with heightened sense of safety, and learned to fight stereotypes imposed on them by others. Regardless of the adversities they faced, these Muslim international women chose to remain positive and embraced their complex Muslim international identity in their own unique ways.

## Chapter Five

### Discussion and Implications

#### **Discussion and Implications**

This final chapter contextualizes and discusses the findings and their implications. First, I acknowledge some limitations or boundaries of the study. Discussion of study findings, relationship of findings to prior research, and unique findings are presented afterwards. Next, implications for future practice, policy, and research are discussed in connection to the study. Last, I end the chapter with concluding remarks.

#### **Limitations or Study Boundaries**

This study had several limitations or boundaries that could have influenced the findings. Narrative inquiry, a qualitative approach was used to collect stories from the participants. Qualitative studies are not generalizable to larger populations; thus, the experiences and shared stories should not be generalized to the countries represented in the study, the religion, experiences of international students and context. Findings are specific to the participants and their experiences, in various environments, before and during their enrollment at their respective institutions. Therefore, caution should be taken when applying these findings to other Muslim international students or the institutions at which they are enrolled.

Second, my various identities as a Muslim international woman from Pakistan may have influenced the way I interpreted, analyzed, organized and presented the data. I wrote about my positionality and reflected on my experiences of Muslim international identity performance in the U.S. in a prior chapter. Additionally, I wrote memos during the data collection and analysis processes. This allowed me to become aware of my own biases throughout the study. Another researcher with different identities might examine the same data and extract additional or different themes based on their own positionality, biases or experiences.

The third boundary was that the sample group was ethnically, culturally, and nationally diverse. Women who identify as Muslims and international represent various countries and geographic regions. These countries and regions influence and generate varied cultural, ethnic, gendered, and religious experiences for various students, leading to different college experiences. If different Muslim international women at these institutions had participated, the findings might have been different given the influence of ethnicity, culture and national diversity.

The fourth limitation was the use of language in the interview protocol. All the women that I interviewed shared that English was their second language. Nuances of learning English as a second language may have played a role in their comprehension of the question. Thus, findings may be limited since participants' interpretations of the questions may have been different than the intent of the questions asked. Personal interpretations may have also influenced the responses shared as a result. In this manner, findings about identity performance may be limited.

### **Discussion of Study Findings**

In the first section I briefly review the findings from Chapter Four. Next I discuss the relationship of this study's findings with previous research. Lastly, I present the unique findings from this study.

The purpose of this research was to study Muslim identity performance on college campuses. Identity performance was the ways in which individuals acted, engaged, interacted, behaved and situated themselves in their various environments (Goffman 1959). The conceptual framework for the study was Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979). This theory underlines environmental influences on an individual's development. Using Bronfenbrenner's theory as a framework, this study focused on Muslim identity performance in microsystems inside and outside college environments. This study was designed to address two research questions: (1) how do undergraduate Muslim international women describe their experiences of identity performance inside college environments; and (2) how do undergraduate Muslim international women describe their experiences of identity performance outside college environments?

Five themes emerged from the data. These five themes were: *Muslim identity performance in home country*, *Muslim identity performance and family*, *Muslim international identity consciousness*, *religious engagement on campus*, and *understandings of new Muslim international identity*. In chapter 4, these themes were chronologically arranged around narratives of Muslim international identity performance to make temporality (past, present, and future) more explicit. Half of the women I conversed with were at the Private University and the other half were at the Public University in the U.S. The first theme *Muslim identity performance in home country* started with sharing narratives of growing up in a religiously homogeneous environment. In their home county, these Muslim international women learned to negotiate and navigate the religious, societal, cultural and gendered expectations of them as Muslims and as

women. Often their Muslim identity practices, experiences, and expectations were intermixed with the culture and religion within that country. Thus, the microsystems in the home country influenced their identity performance.

The second theme, *identity performance and family*, revealed that relationships with family were important. Muslim international women shared a strong bond with family members and family members provided religious learning, development, and support on a personal and emotional level. Because of the close relationships, sometimes intentionally and at other times unintentionally, some parents imposed their fears and apprehensions on their daughters. These fears stemmed from incidences of Islamophobia and gendered Islamophobia in the U.S., and as a result, parents at times encouraged their daughters to mask certain aspects of their Muslim identity in the U.S. Some of these stories helped in transitioning from experiences of Muslim Identity performance in the home country to Muslim identity experiences in the U.S.

The third theme, *Muslim identity consciousness*, unveiled experiences of identity performance inside and outside their college campuses in the U.S. Stories in this theme were organized around experiences of religiously visible international women and experiences of religiously invisible international women. Visible Muslim international women shared stories of hyper-visibility imposed by their *hijab*, thus marking their bodies as religious bodies, and the ways in which they learned to cope with this visibility. Muslim international women that were not religiously visible shared that although they were religiously invisible, their other identities (including ethnic, national, gender and racial identities) made them visible to others on and off their college campuses. These women faced stereotypes from professors and peers and shared the burdens of representing others from their religion, culture, nationality, and gender. Additionally, they became “intentional” and “careful” not to portray a negative image of their religion to others and cautious of not misrepresenting other Muslim women in the U.S.

The fourth theme, *religious engagement on campus*, revealed that some Muslim international women found close friendships and a sense of community through participation with the Muslim Student Association (MSA) and Muslim Student Center (MSC) on their college campuses. While other women shared their negative experiences and lack of participation in religiously affiliated spaces due to the physical locations. Both campuses provided public prayer/meditations spaces, but the experiences of Muslim identity performance in these spaces were varied. For some women these spaces were not “private” and were “uncomfortable” and

for others, these spaces seemed “convenient” and comfortable. Lastly, Muslim international women shared several positive experiences as it related to their campus religious climate. Collectively they found their institutions to be welcoming, accommodating, supporting, friendly, tolerant, had increased diversity, and higher numbers of international students.

Lastly, the fifth theme, *understandings of new Muslim international identity*, divulged stories that were related to the connections these women made as they reconciled between their environments in the home country and the U.S. These environments were completely different and influenced their Muslim identity performances in varied ways. All Muslim international women shared various experiences on and off campus in the U.S. that made them aware of their Muslim international identity. For some women it was being aware of their safety and security, for others it was adjusting their diet in the new U.S. environments and for a few others it was altering their clothing to reconcile between the two environments. All these decisions required personal agency and choices rooted in one’s values and belief systems. These women faced various adversities and learned to reconcile with heightened sense of safety, and to fight stereotypes imposed on them by others. Regardless of the adversities they faced, these Muslim international women chose to remain positive and embraced their complex Muslim international identity in their own unique ways.

### **Relationship of the Findings to Prior Research**

In this section of the chapter, I discuss the relationship of the findings (Chapter 4) to prior research that was discussed in Chapter 2. I use the headings from Chapter 2 to organize and demonstrate the connections in this section: *Islam, Muslims, Islamophobia and gendered Islamophobia; Muslim undergraduate college students; campus climate; identity; and Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979)*.

### **Islam, Muslims, Islamophobia and Gendered Islamophobia**

The findings from the study confirmed that Muslims, although belonging to the same religion (Islam), are a highly diverse group who represent various nationalities, languages, ethnic backgrounds, and cultural customs and traditions, and who practice their religion in different ways (Witherell, 2016). The eight women in this study were ethnically diverse and represented six different countries (Kuwait, Malaysia, Morocco, Oman, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia). Further, among this list of countries, there were two women from Pakistan and two from Malaysia. Although these women belonged to the same country and shared the same religion,

there was diversity among these women as well in terms of languages spoken, cultural practices and religious practices. Additionally, all of the six countries where these women came from not only influenced their religious practices, customs, and traditions but also created gendered expectations of them. In the first theme, *Muslim identity performance in home country*, these women disclosed that they had added expectations, pressures or gendered boundaries as Muslim and as women growing up in their home countries. Many of these expectations stemmed from cultures, traditions, societal norms, and interpretations of their religion in their home country. One aspect that involved heightened expectations was related to their choices or lack of choices in the way they dressed. Ultimately they were expected to dress modestly, which aligns with prior research by Ali et al. (2004), and one's cultural context defined what modest dress was, as explained in a prior study by Cole and Ahmadi (2010).

Other findings affirmed that Muslim international women faced gendered Islamophobia on and off their college campuses. Historically, gendered Islamophobia stemmed from contextualized negative stereotypes that informed individual and systemic forms of oppression towards Muslims in the West and focused on political and social discrimination leveled particularly at Muslim women (Zine, 2006). Perry (2014) claimed that gendered Islamophobia bore material consequences and affected Muslim women's experiences, influenced their sense of belonging, and forced them to think about their visibility. Muslim international women in this study shared stories and experiences of hyper-visibility, especially those that wore a *hijab*. These women explained that the *hijab* was greatly misunderstood, served as visual profiling (Zempi & Chakraborti, 2014) and brought additional attention on them in the U.S. This visibility made them aware, conscious, and cognizant of their lack of control in perception management and in the ways that other treated them. All of the hijabi women shared stories of feeling discomfort due to harassment in the form of "staring" from strangers, visitors, and peers. These feelings of discomfort and harassment, particularly aimed towards women who cover (*hijab* or veil), are considered crimes of gendered Islamophobia (Cole & Ahmadi, 2003; Perry, 2014; Stubbs & Sallie, 2013).

Other ways these Muslim international women became hyper-visible was due to the intersections of their various identities. Findings from this study confirmed Crenshaw's (1994) explanation that class, gender, ethnicity, and race, simultaneously oppresses women of color and their religious positions. For Muslim international women (also women of color), their status as

women, their cultural identities, language use, religious identities, and dress all distinguish them from non-Muslim women, rendering them as easy targets for discrimination, and hate crimes (Perry, 2014).

Kwan (2008) explained that many Muslim women were forced to alter their gender performances, and the ways in which they practiced their religion. This was influenced by western ideals instead of their own values, thus Muslim women in that study changed their activities, habits, and ways of being in the world in order to manage their physical and psychological safety. Stories of Muslim identity performances shared in this study both affirmed and challenged certain claims as explained by Kwan (2008). Muslim international women in this study shared various experiences of changes to Muslim identity performances that stemmed from learning new ways of reconciling or coming to terms with certain actions, habits, behaviors and environments in the U.S., both on and off college campuses. For these participants, this was directly related to contextual conformity and was based on reactions to incidences or circumstances as opposed to western idealistic influences. Changes in actions, behaviors or habits were personal choices that involved agency. For example, some Muslim international women shared increased awareness of their safety and security particularly after the recent elections and/or local or national Islamophobic events. For majority of these women, it was more of a psychological awareness as opposed to material changes to their Muslim international identity performance. Although none of the questions directly asked the participants to disclose behavioral changes, Rose was the only woman who revealed that her responsiveness after the presidential elections resulted in behavioral changes to manage her physical and psychological safety (“not walking alone at night...have a guy friend walk me who was not brown....”). Overall, the environment/context played a role in the ways in which they became aware of themselves, their various identities and performances of these identities. Alterations, or changes in actions, habits or behaviors were choices rooted in their values and belief systems.

### **Muslim Undergraduate College Students**

In the last decade there has been an increase in the numbers of Muslim students attending colleges and universities the U.S. (Ali, 2014). As a result, in higher education research, some attention has focused on experiences of Muslim students on college campus in the U.S. However, very limited studies have focused explicitly on experiences of Muslim international women in the U.S. Speck (1997) was one of the first scholars to examine the religious

experiences of Muslim undergraduate and graduate students in a college setting. Conducted prior to the tragic events of September 11, 2001, Speck's study revealed that Muslim international students identified several problems that impacted their learning and development in the classrooms. Professors' lack of knowledge about and misunderstanding of Islam led them to misrepresent Muslim students in the classroom, professors' use of media and textbooks that misrepresented Islam, and professors who failed to intervene when other students stereotyped or misrepresented Islam, negatively influenced Muslim students' learning. Additionally, Muslim international students expected professors to create an inclusive classroom learning environment, recognized that classroom cultural norms in the U.S. were different and expected some reasonable accommodations from professors as it pertained to their religious needs.

My study confirmed Speck's (1997) findings that classroom experiences and interactions with faculty members played a part in the ways in which these Muslim international women performed their Muslim identity. In my study, women shared stories of visibility and noticeability (hijabi and non-hijabi) to their professors. Some women described experiences of being under the microscope at one time or another due to their religious or ethnic affiliations. In some cases they faced stereotypes from professors, and peers and "did not fit" others' perceptions of Muslim women. They shared stories of challenges in socially connecting with peers and collaborating on group projects in the classrooms due to their Muslim international identity. Women who wore the *hijab* additionally stated that the noticeability imposed by the *hijab* made them conscious and they could not "hide" or "miss class." Thus, a number of these findings confirmed that professors' lack of knowledge, misunderstanding of Islam and Muslims, misrepresenting Muslim students in the classroom, and expectations of an inclusive classroom as problems in learning as explained in Speck's study (1997). Other aspects neither challenged nor affirmed the problems, as the focus of the studies was different. Speck's study primarily focused on classroom/ professor experiences, whereas this study included classrooms and professors as a few aspects of the microsystems as it pertained to their Muslim international identity performance.

Other research regarding experiences of Muslim students on college campuses focused on experiences of American Muslim students. Mir (2007) conducted extensive research on experiences of American Muslim college women and she asserted that Muslims as "other" representations, as well as general hostility toward Muslims, have regularly been constructed in

the popular media and political speeches (Ali, 2014; Mir, 2007). This perspective constantly put Muslim students on the defensive regardless of the specific environments in which they were situated. Additionally, Mir (2007) claimed that new Muslim student identities were born out of a quest to belong, to assimilate, or out of the experiences of constantly being depicted as the “other” or “outsider.”

Findings from this study challenged the idea that new Muslim identity for the Muslim international women in this study were born out of a quest to belong or assimilate. For Muslim international women in this study, new Muslim identities were born out of different environmental expectations, sometimes outward and sometimes inward. Environmental differences, from a religiously homogeneous environment in the home country to a heterogeneous environment in the U.S., and their college campuses, challenged the ways these women thought about themselves, their religion, and their understanding of why they act, behave or engage the way they do. Additionally, exposure to diverse people within the U.S. environment helped them in gaining a deeper understanding of themselves and their Muslim international identity. Most importantly, interactions with diverse Muslims helped them to critically think about their religious values, beliefs and practices and to embrace the new Muslim identity with new consciousness, awareness and intent.

Another dimension of scholarship on Muslim undergraduate students and their experiences on college campuses has focused on visual aspects of Muslim identity. More specifically, the experiences of Muslim women who veil on college campuses have received increased attention. Muslim women who veil are visible and their dress easily recognizes them with their religion. Research has not distinguished between Muslim international women who veil and American Muslim women who veil. In two separate studies, Cole and Ahmadi (2003, 2015) found religious identity for Muslim women had negatively impacted their satisfaction with their overall university experience. In their 2003 study, participants reported that overall people in the campus environment knew very little or were misinformed about the veil and Muslims. This misinformation led to feelings of isolation, and these Muslim women felt coerced by their alienating experiences to reexamine their choices to veil.

Findings from this study confirmed that Muslim international women who wore a *hijab* were hyper-visible to strangers, peers, visitors on campus and professors in the U.S. However, other findings contested Cole and Ahmadi (2003). Majority of the research on experiences of

Muslim women have addressed the experiences of those who wore religious artifacts in the form of a *hijab*. Not much research has focused on Muslim women experiences who do not wear the *hijab*. Muslim international women in this study who did not wear the *hijab* also shared experiences of hyper-visibility; for them it was their ethnicity and/or gender. Thus, all Muslim international women in this study felt visible in one way or another.

Despite the visibility imposed by the *hijab* or lack of the *hijab*, these Muslim international women chose to remain positive and persist. They recognized that people “stared” at them on and off campus and they were noticeable to peers inside and outside the classrooms; nonetheless, that did not impact their satisfaction with their overall university experience. All of these women found their campuses to be welcoming, friendly and accommodating. Additionally, none of the women shared stories of isolation or alienating experiences that coerced them or motivated them to re-examine their choices to wear or not to wear the *hijab*. Two women in the study, who sometimes wore the *hijab* and other times did not, explained that their reasoning had more to do with “not standing out” and “blending in.” They wore the *hijab* in the home countries for the same reasons: to blend in and to not stand out. Again, this was an example of the environmental influences as opposed to alienating experiences that coerced them into changing.

Lastly, literature on experiences of Muslim women on college campuses revealed that Muslim women at one time or another have felt the burdens of representing all Muslims due to their dress (Mubarak, 2007). Other Muslim students have stated that being Muslim on American college campuses required them to serve as ambassadors of their religion (Ali & Bagheri, 2009). Serving as representatives or ambassadors of their religion required Muslim students to reconcile their Islamic values with the social culture of the institution (Mir, 2009) and Muslim students have chosen to remain silent when angered or upset due to negative comments (Peek, 2005).

Findings from this study confirmed that Muslim international women sensed that their actions, behaviors and performances were “weighted” and not individualistic. Not only were these women stereotyped on multiple fronts (religion, nationality, ethnicity, and gender); they also bore the burdens of representing either their country or their religion, and in some cases both. For some Muslim international women, it was the dress that imposed this burden, but for others it was their ethnicity or gender. Additionally, findings in this study exposed that these women became “intentional” and “careful” not to portray a negative image of their religion,

country, and of not misrepresenting other Muslim women. Ultimately, these Muslim international women performed their identities in unique ways as individuals, yet they recognized that their personal actions and behaviors were understood as a collective Muslim identity and they were cognizant not to misunderstand or misrepresent their religion. They also acknowledged that they were fighting battles on two fronts simultaneously. One, they were constantly evaluated, “judged,” or noticed based on individuals’ preconceived notions of what women from their religion, culture, country and ethnicity were like. On the other hand, all their actions, behaviors, opinions, and spaces they occupied were further assessed, evaluated, measured, and used to possibly impose new stereotypes onto other Muslim international women at their colleges in the U.S.

### **Campus Climate**

Campus climate and campus racial climate are terms that have become common in higher education research in the last two decades (Mayhew et al., 2014). Campus climate often refers to interaction among various constituents at the university (people, processes, and institutional culture) (Harper & Hurtado, 2007), whereas campus racial climate includes attitudes, observations and perceptions of minoritized students’ experiences on campus, including experiences of racism, discrimination, as well as support for diversity (Hart & Fellabaum, 2008). A number of researchers have utilized campus climate frameworks to examine undergraduate women’s experiences at U.S. colleges and universities. Some studies have examined women’s experiences on a U.S. college campus. Morris (2003) revealed that college women’s learning was negatively impacted due to unwelcoming classroom environments, lack of scholarly attention, faculty members’ lack of interest in and awareness of women, and feelings of being an outsider.

Data from this study challenged some of the negative impacts Morris (2003) identified. Muslim international women in the study were highly adaptable individuals. These women faced various forms of adversity, namely hyper-visibility (due to religion, international status and/or ethnicity); difficulty socially connecting with peers within the classroom, especially when working on group projects; and learning new ways of becoming open and approachable. Despite these adversities, they used personal agency to overcome these negative situations and not let that impact their overall college experiences.

Another aspect of research has focused on college women's experiences with "chilly climate" (i.e., classroom environments where one sex is valued differently than the other) (Hall & Sandler, 1982), while others have determined that "gender bias" and "gender discrimination" in classroom environments serves as a detriment to learning for college women (Allan, 2002). Data from this study revealed that some of the Muslim international women, especially those in the STEM fields, shared experiences of being one of the few women in their academic departments and there were even fewer religiously visible diversity. Thus, these women recognized that their gender and wearing a *hijab* made them stand out. These experiences were not limited to the classrooms. Although they were hyper-visible, they did not explicitly share experiences they associated with gender bias or gender discrimination.

Other literature on campus climate revealed that students who interacted with racially and ethnically diverse peers enjoyed higher psychosocial, interpersonal and cognitive gains within the college settings (Gurin et al., 2002; Rankin & Reason, 2005). Additionally, students who attended racially diverse institutions showed higher levels of academic and social engagement (Gurin et al., 2002; Pike & Kuh, 2006). Findings from this study aligned with prior research as Muslim international women shared that exposure to diverse people within the U.S. environment, specifically on their college campuses, helped them in several ways. Some women shared that exposure to diverse people within the U.S. environment helped with gaining a deeper understanding of themselves and their Muslim international identity. Others added that experience with diversity on their college campuses made them view their religion in a new light and that made their Muslim identities stronger. Exposure to diversity not only challenged their prior beliefs but also allowed them to appreciate the differences among people. These Muslim international women valued diversity and made conscious decisions to interact with racially, ethnically and religiously diverse peers. As a result of these interactions, they felt liberated.

Lastly, a vast majority of campus climate studies uncovered that creating a welcoming campus environment positively affects the perspectives, experiences, and attitudes of minoritized groups (Hurtado et al., 1998) and a positive campus climate can increase minority student retention (Harper & Hurtado, 2007). Additionally, positive experiences of campus climate and positive perceptions of campus safety increase the likelihood of confronting other students or faculty for negative comments (Tetreault et al., 2013). Similarly, negative campus climate has been associated with undesirable outcomes for students such as lower self-esteem (Tetreault et

al., 2013), poor academic performance (Rankin & Reason, 2005), and adverse results on student involvement and other social outcomes (Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Rankin & Reason, 2005) for minoritized students (Ancis et al., 2000; Cabrera & Nora, 1994; Hurtado, 1992; Suarez-Balcazar, Orellana-Damacela, Portillo, Rowan, & Andrews-Guillen, 2003) and LGBT students (Dolan, 1998; Rankin, 2003, Rankin et al., 2010; Tetreault et al., 2013; Yost & Gilmore, 2011). Lastly, linking the negative experiences with campus climate and one's identity, various studies postulate that extracurricular contexts and classroom contexts shape students' levels of engagement and exploration of self (Guillermo-Wann & Johnston, 2012).

Findings from this study aligned with Hurtado et al. (1998)'s conceptualization of campus climate and its influence on students' experiences and outcomes. Muslim international women shared positive experiences, attitudes and perspectives regarding the campus environment and, more specifically, the campus religious climate. These women found their campuses to be welcoming, accommodating, tolerant, and supportive. Their universities' positive responses to local and national events influenced the way they felt about their experiences as Muslim women, especially after the recent presidential election. Ultimately these positive experiences allowed them the liberty to express their Muslim identity on their college campuses. Other findings affirmed that similar to the study by Tetreault et al. (2013), feelings of safety and support were important to Muslim international women in creating a positive campus climate. Similarly, my findings also affirmed Guillermo-Wann and Johnston's (2012) research indicating that Muslim international women's extracurricular engagement were at times negatively impacted by the physical locations of their university-provided prayers spaces, Muslim Student Association (MSA) and Muslim Student Center (MSC). Some of the Muslim women chose not to engage in extracurricular activities with the MSA and/or MSC as the unfavorable physical location compromised their safety. Thus, the Muslim international women in this study did not have equitable access to opportunities for exploration and engagement.

### **Identity**

Identity refers to being oneself; it is fluid and shaped according to circumstances and opportunities and depends on the family, culture, religion and community one belongs to and one's life experiences (Kabir, 2013). Identity has also been defined as the qualities, beliefs, traits, characteristics, and social group membership (Leary & Tangney, 2011). These meanings change slightly depending on the academic field. In developmental psychology, the definition of

identity focuses on self, rooted in a person's experiences, and personal identity (Leary & Tangney, 2011). In sociological approaches, identity is much broader and centers on individuals and their roles within social structures including one's interactions with society, one's identification with a given social group, and acknowledgement of multiple perspectives of self (Torres et al., 2009).

Within higher education, most identity theories have been influenced by developmental psychology, sociology, or social psychology. The Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity (MMDI) (Jones & McEwen, 2000) is one identity model that draws from all of these fields. The MMDI represents an ongoing construction of one's multiple identities whose salience is influenced by changing contexts. It is a complex model that provides a holistic picture of one's various and intersecting identities. The model captures and distinguishes between an individual's core sense of self (personal attributes, personal characteristics, personal identity), their social identities (race, gender, class, culture, religion), and social contexts (family background, sociocultural conditions, current experiences, career decisions and life planning) that influence one's identities. According to Jones and McEwen (2000), individual experiences shape and reconstruct a student's identities and their salience at different points in time. This is a fluid process, and therefore, individual dimensions of identity cannot be fully understood in isolation.

Muslim international identity development for the Muslim international women in the study happened from the time they were born to who they were in U.S. at various stages of their academic careers, which aligned with Erikson's (1959/1980) argument that identity development occurs throughout one's lifetime (from the time they are born). This study was not about identity development, but it was about identity performance. In this study, identity performance referred the ways in which Muslim international women acted, engaged, interacted, behaved and situated themselves in their various environments (Goffman, 1959) inside and outside their college campuses.

Although this study was about identity performance and not identity development, there were still certain aspects of the findings that affirmed the MMDI (Jones & McEwen, 2000) and other recent reconceptualized models such as the I-MMDI (Quaye, 2013), RMMDI (Abes et al., 2007) and Q-MMDI ((Jones, Abes, & Kasch, 2013). Muslim identity performance was an ongoing process, and it was based on the changing contexts in which the Muslim international

women in this study found themselves. The various identities often intersected (religion, race, gender, ethnicity and international status) with one another to demonstrate that performance of these identities could not be understood singularly and were complex. For Muslim international women in this study, family backgrounds, religion, sociocultural conditions (in home country and the U.S.) and current life experiences also interacted with their various contexts. At times, family, religion and culture were the most salient identities and often these identities were performed simultaneously. There were other times when their international and or gender identities became salient depending on the environmental contexts. Findings also affirmed that individual experiences and contexts reshaped and reconstructed the various identities and their salience at different points in time. Thus, identity performance was an ongoing process based on the changing contexts.

### **Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979)**

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979) focuses on the ways in which humans develop. It places an emphasis on environments and contexts. The theory stresses simultaneous interaction between the individuals and their environments. These interactions transform the person as well as the environment with which they interact. The theory presents a series of five nested environments that influence a person's development and places the individual at the center. These five environments are called microsystems, mesosystems, exosystems, macrosystems and chronosystems. Within each of these contexts are key factors that uniquely impact development for each individual (Cross, 2017).

Bronfenbrenner (1979) defined microsystems as the immediate environments or settings in which an individual closely interacts or have normal interactions in their daily lives. For college students these environments include classrooms, neighborhoods, and religious institutions, along with relationships with romantic partners, roommates, family, mentors, friends, university educators and faculty. Furthermore, these interactions between the students and their immediate environments often have the greatest impact on the students as well as the interacting proximate environment (Rosa & Tudge, 2013).

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979) served as the conceptual framework for this study. The focus of this study was on the microsystems as it pertained to the participant's Muslim international identity performance. Findings from this study affirmed that context and environment were critical to the ways in which Muslim international women

performed their identities. Muslim identity performance differed in the home country from Muslim international identity performance in the U.S. The difference was due to the interactions between the different microsystems and different environments.

In the home country identity performance was shaped and influenced by the interactions these women had with family members, peers, religious schools, other individuals that shared the same religion as them, religious role models (at home, school or community) and a religiously homogeneous environment. Additionally, Muslim identity practices, experiences, and expectations were intermixed with the culture within that country. Their performances were thus conformed based on the context of those environments.

Similarly, participants' Muslim international identity performance changed in the U.S. This was due to the environments and contexts inside and outside of the college campuses. The heterogeneous environment in the U.S., interactions with diverse peers (religious and non-religious), faculty within and outside the classroom; experiences of hyper-visibility inside and outside the campus due to peers, visitors, and strangers; affiliations with MSA, MLC, and prayer spaces; and local events all affirmed that the environment one lives in influenced one's Muslim identity performance over time.

### **Unique Findings**

Some of the unique contributions were already discussed in the *relationship of findings to prior research* section. I will begin this section by summarizing those. Next, I will delve deeper into other unique findings that were not explicitly mentioned in the prior sections.

Muslim international women in this study shared various experiences of changes to Muslim identity performances inside and outside the college campuses in the U.S. The changes that they disclosed stemmed from learning new ways of reconciling and understanding the expectations of them (from others and self) in these environments. Thus, Muslim international identity performance was directly related to contextual conformity and was based on personal choices, agency, and reactions to incidences or circumstances. Overall, the environment/ context played a role in the ways in which they became aware of themselves, their various identities, and performances of these identities. Alterations, or changes in actions, habits or behaviors, were choices rooted in their values and belief systems.

Stories gathered from Muslim international women in this study revealed that over time, they gained a deeper understanding of their Muslim identities. Thus, new Muslim international

identities were born that were unique to each individual. These new Muslim identities were born out of different environmental expectations, sometimes outward and sometimes inward. Environmental differences, from a religiously homogeneous environment in the home country to a heterogeneous environment in the U.S., challenged the ways these women thought about themselves and their religion. Additionally, exposure to diverse people within the U.S. environment helped them in gaining a deeper understanding of themselves and their Muslim international identity as well. Most importantly, interactions with diverse Muslims helped them to critically think about their religious values, beliefs and practices and to embrace the new Muslim identity with new consciousness, awareness and intent.

This study also offers unique contributions to research on the experiences of international, Muslim, undergraduate women in U.S. colleges and universities. These contributions relate to culture vs. religion, parental influences, and locations of religiously affiliated experiences.

### **Culture vs. Religion**

Findings from this study revealed stories of how growing up in a religiously homogeneous environment shaped the ways in which Muslim international women came to understand the Muslim self in that environment. These women shared the diverse ways in which they learned about their religion, religious practices, and expectations of them in these environments as Muslim women. Although they all came from Muslim majority countries, culture and cultural expectations for them often intersected with their religious expectations. Sometimes they were aware of these differences and at other times it only became evident once they left the home environments.

One example of the intermixing between religious and cultural expectations was evident in the clothing women wore in different environments in the home country. For each of them, their religion imposed modest dress, but modesty was defined differently based on the culture of that country. There is a lack of understanding of Islam and of the practices of Muslims in the U.S. and around the world (Tindongan, 2011), and increased visual profiling of Muslim women based on their dress (Cole & Ahmadi, 2003; Perry, 2014; Stubbs & Sallie, 2013). Muslim international women shared stories of peers, faculty and others often misunderstanding cultural practices for religious practices. Their stories clarify some of these misperceptions in the west.

## **Parental Influences**

Findings from this study revealed that family dynamics were not only important to Muslim international women in religious learning, development, and performance, but also for personal and emotional wellbeing. Family members played important roles in the lives of all the participants. Family members instilled value for education, imparted religious and cultural values, and served as pillars of support and protectors.

Family members often imposed their fears of Islamophobia and gendered Islamophobia in the U.S. onto their daughters. Some parents felt helpless and were apprehensive of the lack of safety of their daughters in the U.S. Their fears stemmed from their awareness of discrimination, microaggressions, and hate crimes against Muslims in the U.S. Therefore, some parents encouraged their daughters to mask certain aspects of their Muslim identity, while other parents monitored their daughter's religious involvement in activities on campus in the U.S. Parental involvement and fears made the participants cognizant of their Muslim identity before they came to the U.S. and influenced their involvement, actions and behaviors after they came to the U.S. Therefore, these participants not only accepted their own fears, apprehensions, and worries but also those encouraged by their parents. As a result, parental involvement directly or indirectly played a part in the way participants performed their Muslim identities in the U.S. and on their college campuses in the U.S.

## **Locations of Religiously Affiliated Experiences**

Other findings from the study exposed that both college campuses in the U.S. provided prayer/meditation spaces for all students. Additionally, both campuses had a student-run organization, the Muslim Student Association (MSA), and one of the campuses had a university affiliated specialized center, the Muslim Life Center (MLC) (pseudonym). These organizations and this center focused on providing religious events, supports and services for Muslim students (both domestic and international) as well as the campus at large.

For some women, engagement in these organizations or services showed a desire to connect with other international Muslims. Religious student organizations such as MSA aim to provide spaces for Muslim students (international and domestic) to gather, participate, or affiliate with to find religious community while away from their home environments. For some of the participants in this study, the small number of international Muslim students impacted their engagement with the MSA. Most MSA members were American Muslims, and this was seen as

a deterrent since American and international Muslims have different needs. The stories and experiences shared by Muslim international women in the study emphasized this phenomenon that is not often reflected in research on Muslim college students.

For other Muslim international women, it was not the population of students but the physical locations of the prayer spaces, MSA, and MLC that impacted their religious engagement on their college campuses. Findings from this study revealed that for some Muslim international women, learning to navigate a new sense of safety while they were in the U.S. was a concern. Consequently, these Muslim women felt a sense of vulnerability in certain environments on and off their college campuses because of their religious identity. At times this lack of sense of safety was exacerbated after local, national or international events that portrayed Muslims in a negative light.

### **Implications for Future Practice, Policy and Research**

This study has several implications for future practice, policy and research. In terms of future practice, there are several constituents at the university level that may benefit from this study, including faculty members and higher education administrators who work with Muslim and international students.

In regards to classroom experiences, Muslim international women in the study revealed that they were under the microscope at one time or another. These women not only were religiously and ethnically visible to their peers and faculty, but they also faced challenges when working with peers on group projects. Additionally, the findings confirmed that professors' lack of knowledge, misunderstanding of Islam and Muslims, and misrepresentations of Muslim students in the classroom were some aspects that made these women reconsider how to perform their Muslim international identities.

As an increasingly diverse array of students continue to enroll in institutions of higher education, the classrooms where these students obtain their education will observe this trend as well. Faculty members will need to be aware of their own biases and must work towards correcting and increasing their awareness of various religious, ethnic, gender, sexual, and racial identities of the students in their classrooms so that these students do not feel marginalized. Faculty members will also need to work towards creating inclusive and encouraging learning environments that promote student development as well as enhance the students' learning and not hinder it. Additionally, faculty will need to be cognizant of ever-changing classroom

dynamics. They must pay attention to these dynamics when assigning group projects to students as part of their learning experiences. Faculty members should think about pre-assigning students to groups, at least for early parts of the courses until students are able to develop their own relationships. Additionally, faculty members must confront and work with students to resolve classroom situations that could potentially create a negative learning environment for individuals or all students based on any of their identities. Finally, faculty members should avoid putting students in the spotlight based on any of their identities (gender, religious, sexual, racial and or ethnic) so that these students do not feel that they are serving as representatives for that entire group.

Findings from the study also offer implications for practice for higher education administrators who work with Muslim and international students. Muslim international women in the study disclosed that they had close relationships with their parents and that parents served as support systems for these women in times of crises and encouragement. Additionally, parents of Muslim international women often felt helpless and feared for the safety of their daughters. Higher education administrators who provide supports and services for these students should develop ways to involve the parents and to keep them abreast of the institutional efforts and initiatives in response to local, national and international Islamophobic events. Some ways to ensure that parents are informed about the safety and security of their daughters would be through use of social media, creating online forums as well as periodic emails to parents.

Lastly, findings from the study also had implication for practice for higher education administrators who work in functional areas related to student housing or residence. Muslim international women in this study revealed that interactions with diverse individuals and other Muslims was important to their identity performance on their college campuses. Their interactions with diverse students and diverse Muslims not only provided close friendships but also avenues for growth in religious knowledge. One way to ensure that Muslim international students continue to be exposed to diverse students, especially other Muslims (American and international), would be through creating living-learning residential communities, particularly for Muslim women. Such communities will create avenues for meaningful social and intellectual engagement that can enhance their sense of belonging, and feelings of positive campus climate.

Muslim international women in this study also explained that physical locations for religious services were important to them. Their participation was not equitable due to fears of

safety and security. Keeping this sense of safety in mind, it is pertinent to be intentional about the physical locations of services offered to Muslim international women so they are able to take full advantage of their college experiences without fears or apprehensions. Administrators working with campus housing should consider creating meditation and prayer spaces for all students (not just Muslim students) within the residence halls. For Muslim students, this will provide convenient spaces to practice their religion as well as spaces where they may not have to think about their safety and security in a negative way. Furthermore, creating such spaces within the residence halls will enhance diverse peer interactions, which was important to Muslim international women in this study.

In addition to what these findings mean for practice, this study also suggests future implications for policy. This study provides data regarding the importance of a positive religious campus climate. Muslim international women found their campus to be welcoming, accommodating, tolerant, and supportive. One of the reasons for the positive feelings was due to their university's positive response to local and national events, especially after the 2016 presidential election when tensions were high and many Muslim students did not feel safe. Both college campuses provided services and events such as interfaith dialogues to increase religious awareness on their campuses. These positive experiences allowed Muslim women the liberty to express their Muslim identity on their college campuses. Campus policy makers should continue to evaluate their campus environments to ensure that all students, not just Muslim and international students, feel a sense of belonging that enhances their well-being and learning. They should ensure that the environment discourages biased behavior by creating bias trainings for faculty, administrators and student leaders. They should also ensure the institution has systems in place that allow students to report negative incidences. One way to evaluate the campus climate would be through continued risk assessments and creating actions plans that are inclusive and that provide avenues where students could voice their concerns and feel supported.

Another implication this study has for policy is related to the prayer spaces and/or centers that serve minoritized students. Senior leaders should examine their institutional policies, practices, and mission when creating prayer, meditation spaces and/or centers that serve Muslim, international students and other community centers that serve the needs of minoritized students.

Findings from the study revealed that for some Muslim international women prayer spaces and Muslim Life Center were situated in marginalized, unsafe and isolated locations. As

a result, some Muslim international women did not use these spaces, as they did not feel safe. Creating prayer, meditations spaces and centers that serve Muslim, and international students is not sufficient. Policy makers must be cognizant of the unique needs of students and realize that it is important to do an environmental assessment to gauge that these spaces are centrally located and easily accessible to these populations. More importantly, they must evaluate if these spaces are actually meeting the intended needs of the students.

Finally, the study's findings provided implications for future research. The focus of this study was on identity performance of Muslim international students at private and public higher education institutions in the U.S. Future studies might also focus on Muslim identity performance of Muslim international students at other types of institutions, for example: community colleges, religious institutions, and/or minority-serving institutions. Overall, findings from this study revealed that environments and contexts were important in learning about Muslim international women's identity performance experiences. Understanding these different environments will provide more depth regarding identity performance experiences at different institutions.

Muslim international women in this study revealed that contextual conformity played a role in the ways in which they performed their Muslim identities in their various environments inside and outside their college campuses. Behaviors, actions, and ways of being were related to the environments and at time expectations (inward or outward) in those environments. Identity performance in these contexts involved personal agency and awareness. Decisions to conform or not to conform were psychological decisions that each individual faced at one time or another. Therefore, another implication this study has for research is related to further exploring the concept of contextual conformity for not only Muslim international students from countries not represented in this study, but also other minoritized students from across the U.S. Further, this study utilized environmental contexts inside and outside the college campuses. Future research could focus on various environments, whether inside or outside the college campus, to explore this concept.

Muslim international women in this study disclosed that at one time or another, where they were in the U.S., they thought about their safety and security. Aspects of safety and security became increasing concerning for some Muslim international women especially after the 2016 presidential election, or these feelings were prompted after local, national, and/or

international events that feed into Islamophobic rhetoric. Thus, another implication this study has for future research is related to exploring issues of safety and security for other Muslims (multiple genders, ethnicities, races, and nationalities). An exploration of this topic could utilize diverse research methods (qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods) to gain a deeper understanding and learning about experiences of safety and security and the way it impacts students' academic, social, and intercultural engagement in U.S. colleges and universities.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this research was to study Muslim identity performance on college campuses. Identity performance was the ways in which Muslim international women acted, engaged, interacted, behaved and situated themselves in their various environments inside and outside their college campuses (Goffman, 1959). The stories shared by these eight women from six different countries revealed that identity performance was a complex process; it was ever changing and evolving as they navigated their way from a religiously homogeneous environment in the home country to a heterogeneous environment within the U.S. Their microsystems and interactions with various environments influenced their performances of their various identities. These influences were also related to contextual conformity, psychological awareness, agency, resilience, persistence, positivity and appreciation of their experiences in the ever-changing environments.

Muslim students and international students both add to the diversity of the student body on any college campus. Since Muslims and their religion Islam are greatly misunderstood in the U.S., this research was important to share the voices, experiences and stories of these eight women, who shared various intersecting identities including religion, culture, gender, ethnicity, race, nationality, and others. The study not only offered their perspectives but also clarified general misconceptions about religious and cultural impositions on Muslim women in the U.S. as well as in their home countries. Furthermore, the findings revealed that Muslim international women, similar to other minoritized students, faced challenges within classroom environments. Besides being religiously and ethnically visible, they shared stories of difficulty in socially connecting with peers and working on group projects. Although these women developed their own systems and ways of socializing, this study exposed important experiences as it pertained to their learning within the classroom.

The findings further informed university faculty, administrators and policy makers about heightened issues of safety and security for Muslim international women, especially now when the current political climate is tense in the U.S. and these populations often face harassment, discrimination, microaggressions, gendered Islamophobia, and burdens of representations. Their experiences and stories exposed that providing communal spaces where students can practice their religion is not enough to meet their needs. It is imperative to be intentional and cognizant when creating these spaces and that they are centrally located and serving the purpose for which they were created. Lastly, it is my hope that the study will assist both administrators and other institutional leaders to think about their biases and increase their awareness of the needs of these students to create inclusive and safe environments that support the identity performance of Muslim international students.

Most importantly, this study connected deeply with my own experiences of Muslim international identity performance. As I reflected on my journey throughout this research, I realized that the person I was at the beginning of the research is significantly different than the person today. I am not referring to the natural growth or development that one goes through over time; I am alluding to the psychological journey that I embarked on with these eight remarkable women. Every conversation that we engaged in, actively through interviews and passively through the recordings and transcripts, regarding Muslim international identity performance opened my eyes to different and new perspectives. These perspectives were not just about their stories but also about my own life, stories, and ways of being in various environments inside and outside my college campus. I realized my own contextual conformity experiences with various identities in the U.S. and in Pakistan.

These women taught me the real meaning of optimism. This positivity was not just related to one's actions and thinking in connection to one's religious identity or other identities but also in all aspects of one's life. They gave me courage to be vulnerable and open, the way they divulged and shared their experiences with me, in my thinking and in sharing my own stories with people who are close to me. These women confirmed that holding on to one's values and beliefs is important, no matter the environment and circumstance, and it requires resilience when faced with adversity (outward or inward).

Lastly, conversations with these women reminded me that identity performance and conversations around identity is a complex process. One's identity performance is always in a

flux depending on the context and the expectations (personal and others) in that environment. My own identities have been in a flux throughout this research process. I want to conclude this chapter with one of the stories that resonated the most with me when thinking about identity performance in a flux or contextual conformity:

*... I feel like there is me in Pakistan and then there's me here and then there's a chasm in between. It feels like my personality is divided like this, and then I have to reconcile those two things and then ensure that they are still the same person. They're very different. Even if they feel the same on the outside, on the inside, they're really different because expectations of you are very different in Pakistan... (Amber)*

## References

- Abes, E. S., Jones, S. R., & McEwen, M. K. (2007). Reconceptualizing the model of multiple dimensions of identity: The role of meaning-making capacity in the construction of multiple identities. *Journal of College Student Development, 48*(1), 1-22.
- Ahmadi, S., & Cole, D. (2015). Engaging religious minority students. In Quaye, S. J., & Harper, S. R. (Eds.), *Student engagement in higher education: Theoretical perspectives and practical approaches for diverse populations* (3rd ed). pp.171-186. New York: Routledge.
- Ajrouch, K. J., & Jamal, A. (2007). Assimilating to a White identity: The case of Arab Americans. *International Migration Review, 41*(4), 860-879.
- Ali, A. I. (2014). A threat enfolded: Muslim college students situate their identities amidst portrayals of Muslim violence and terror. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 27*(10), 1243-1261. doi: 10.1080/09518398.2013.820860
- Ali, S. R., & Bagheri, E. (2009). Practical suggestions to accommodate the needs of Muslim students on campus. *New Directions for Student Services, 2009*(125), 47-54. doi:10.1002/ss.307
- Ali, S. R., Liu, W. M., & Humedian, M. (2004). Islam 101: Understanding the religion and therapy implications. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice, 35*(6), 635.
- Allan, E. J. (2002). Classroom climates in postsecondary education. In A.M. Aleman & K.A. Renn (Eds). *Women in Higher Education: An Encyclopedia, 282-287*. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO Press.
- Allan, E. J. (2011). *Women's Status in Higher Education: Equity Matters: AEHE, Volume 37, Number 1*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Ancis, J. R., Sedlacek, W. E., & Mohr, J. J. (2000). Student perceptions of campus cultural climate by race. *Journal of Counseling and Development, 78*(2), 180.
- Anfara Jr, V. A., Brown, K. M., & Mangione, T. L. (2002). Qualitative analysis on stage: Making the research process more public. *Educational Researcher, 31*(7), 28-38.
- Armstrong, K. (2007). *Islam: A short history*. Modern Library.
- Arnett, J. J. (2014). *Emerging adulthood: The winding road from the late teens through the twenties*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press

- Ashmore, R. D., Deaux, K., & McLaughlin-Volpe, T. (2004). An organizing framework for collective identity: Articulation and significance of multidimensionality. *Psychological Bulletin*, 130(1), 80.
- Banks, T. L. (1988). Gender bias in the classroom. *Journal of Legal Education*, 38(1/2), 137-146.
- Baxter Magolda, M. B. (2001). *Making their own way: Narratives for transforming higher education to promote self-development*. Sterling, VA: Stylus.
- Brady, K. L., & Eisler, R. M. (1999). Sex and gender in the college classroom: A quantitative analysis of faculty–student interactions and perceptions. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 91(1), 127-145. doi.org/10.1037/0022-0663.91.1.127
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1976). The Experimental ecology of education. *Educational Researcher*, 5(9), 5-15.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The ecology of human development: Experiments by nature and design*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Bullock, K. H., & Jafri, G. J. (2000). Media (mis) representations: Muslim women in the Canadian nation. *Canadian Woman Studies*, 20(2), 35.
- Butler, J. (2004). *Undoing gender*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota
- Butler, J. (2011). *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Cabrera, A. F., & Nora, A. (1994). College student perceptions of prejudice and discrimination and their feelings of alienation: A construct validation approach. *Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies*, 16, 387–409.
- Cabrera, N. L., Watson, J. S., & Franklin, J. D. (2016). Racial arrested development: A critical Whiteness analysis of the campus ecology. *Journal of College Student Development*, 57(2), 119-134.
- Calkins, A., Callahan, A., Houlemarde, M. E., Ikpa, J., Jones, C., & King, C. (2012). Muslim student experiences in the residence halls: A qualitative analysis. *Journal of the Student Personnel Association at Indiana University*, 22-37.
- Caplan, P. J., & Ford, J. (2014). The voices of diversity: What students of diverse races/ethnicities and both sexes tell us about their college experiences and their perceptions about their institutions' progress toward diversity. *Aporia*, 6(4), 30-69.

- Carter, M. J., & Fuller, C. (2015). Symbolic interactionism. *Sociopedia. isa*, 1-17.
- Chickering, A. W. (1979). Adult Development: Implications for Teaching and Learning. *Community Services Catalyst*, 9(2), 4-10.
- Chickering, A. W., & Reisser, L. (1993). *Education and identity*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Citrin, J., Wong, C., & Duff, B. (2001). The meaning of American national identity. *Social Identity, Intergroup Conflict, and Conflict Reduction*, 71-100.
- Clandinin, D. J., & Huber, J. (2010). Narrative inquiry. In B. McGaw, E. Baker, & P. P. Peterson (Eds.), *International encyclopedia of education* (3rd ed.). New York, NY: Elsevier.
- Clandinin, D. J., Murphy, M. S., Huber, J., & Orr, A. M. (2009). Negotiating narrative inquiries: Living in a tension-filled midst. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 103(2), 81-90.
- Cole, D., & Ahmadi, S. (2003). Perspectives and experiences of Muslim women who veil on college campuses. *Journal of College Student Development*, 44(1), 47-66.
- Cole, D., & Ahmadi, S. (2010). Reconsidering campus diversity: An examination of Muslim students' experiences. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 81(2), 121-139.
- Connelly, F. M., & Clandinin, D. J. (1990). Stories of experience and narrative inquiry. *Educational Researcher*, 19(5), 2-14.
- Connelly, F. M., & Clandinin, D. J. (2006). Narrative inquiry. In J. Green, G. Camilli, & P. Elmore (Eds.), *Handbook of complementary methods in education research* (pp. 477–487). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. (2008). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Costen, W. M., Waller, S. N., & Wozencroft, A. J. (2013). Mitigating race: Understanding the role of social connectedness and sense of belonging in African–American student retention in hospitality programs. *Journal of Hospitality, Leisure, Sport & Tourism Education*, 12(1), 15-24.
- Côté, J. E., & Levine, C. (2002). Identity formation, agency, and culture: *A social psychological synthesis*. Mahwah, N.J: L. Erlbaum Associates.
- Crenshaw, K. (1991). Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. *Stanford Law Review*, 1241-1299.

- Crenshaw, K. W. (1994). Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity, politics, and violence against women of color. *The Public Nature of Private Violence*, 93-118.
- Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Cross, W. E. (2017). Ecological factors in human development. *Child Development*, 88(3), 767-769.
- Curtin, N., Stewart, A. J., & Ostrove, J. M. (2013). Fostering academic self-concept advisor support and sense of belonging among international and domestic graduate students. *American Educational Research Journal*, 50(1), 108-137.
- Deaux, K. (1994). Social identity. *PSYCHOLOGIST-LEICESTER-*, 7, 259-259.
- Delgado, R., & Stefancic, J. (2001). *Critical race theory: An introduction*. New York, NY; New York University Press.
- Dill, B. T., & Zambrana, R. E. (2009). Critical thinking about inequality: An emerging lens. *Emerging Intersections: Race, Class, and Gender in Theory, Policy, and Practice*, 1-21.
- DiPrete, T. A., & Buchmann, C. (2013). *The rise of women: The growing gender gap in education and what it means for American schools*. New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Dolan, J. (1998). Gay and lesbian professors: Out on campus. *Academe*, 84, 40-45.
- Eid, M., & Khan, S. (2011). A new-look for Muslim women in the Canadian media: CBC's little mosque on the prairie. *Middle East Journal of Culture and Communication*, 4(2), 184-202.
- El-Haj, T. R. A. (2010). "The beauty of America": Nationalism, education, and the war on terror. *Harvard Educational Review*, 80(2), 242-275.
- Erikson, E. H. (1959). Identity and the life cycle: Selected papers. *Psychological issues*, 1, 1-171.
- Erikson, E. H. (1980). Identity and the life cycle (Vol. 1). *Psychological Issues. Monograph*, 1.
- Esposito, J. L., & Kalin, I. (Eds.). (2011). *Islamophobia: The challenge of pluralism in the 21st century*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Esposito, J. L., & Mogahed, D. (2007). Battle for Muslims' hearts and minds: The road not (yet) taken. *Middle East Policy*, 14(1), 27-41.

- Goffman, E. (1959). *The Presentation of self in everyday life*. (Anchor books ed., Doubleday anchor books; a174). Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday.
- Guillermo-Wann, C., & Johnston, M. P. (2012). Rethinking research on multiracial college students: Toward an integrative model of multiraciality for campus climate. *Online Submission*.
- Gurin, P., Dey, E., Hurtado, S., & Gurin, G. (2002). Diversity and higher education: Theory and impact on educational outcomes. *Harvard Educational Review*, 72(3), 330-367.
- Haddad, Y. Y., & Esposito, J. L. (Eds.). (1997). *Islam, gender, and social change*. New York, Ny: Oxford University Press.
- Haddad, Y. Y., & Esposito, J. L. (Eds.). (2000). *Muslims on the Americanization path*. New York, Ny: Oxford University Press.
- Hagerty, B. M., Williams, R. A., Coyne, J. C., & Early, M. R. (1996). Sense of belonging and indicators of social and psychological functioning. *Archives of Psychiatric Nursing*, 10(4), 235-244.
- Hall, R. M., & Sandler, B. R. (1982). *The classroom climate: A chilly one for women?*. Washington, DC: Project on the Status and Education of Women, Association of American Colleges
- Hardiman, R. (1982). White identity development: A process oriented model for describing the racial consciousness of White Americans. *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 43(1-A), 104.
- Harper, S. R., & Hurtado, S. (2007). Nine themes in campus racial climates and implications for institutional transformation. *New Directions for Student Services*, 2007(120), 7-24.
- Hart, J., & Fellabaum, J. (2008). Analyzing campus climate studies: Seeking to define and understand. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, 1(4), 222.
- Hatch, J. A. (2002). *Doing qualitative research in education settings*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Hausmann, L. R., Schofield, J. W., & Woods, R. L. (2007). Sense of belonging as a predictor of intentions to persist among African American and White first-year college students. *Research in Higher Education*, 48(7), 803-839.
- Helbling, M. (2010). Islamophobia in Switzerland: A new phenomenon or a new name for xenophobia. *Value Change in Switzerland*, 65-80.

- Hesse-Biber, S. N. (Ed.). (2013). *Feminist research practice: A primer* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Howard, J. A. (2000). Social psychology of identities. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 26(1), 367-393.
- Huddy, L. (2001). From social to political identity: A critical examination of social identity theory. *Political Psychology*, 22(1), 127-156.
- Hurtado, S. (1992). The campus racial climate: Contexts of conflict. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 63(5), 539-569. doi:10.2307/1982093
- Hurtado, S., & Carter, D. F. (1997). Effects of college transition and perceptions of the campus racial climate on Latino college students' sense of belonging. *Sociology of Education*, 324-345.
- Hurtado, S., Alvarez, C. L., Guillermo-Wann, C., Cuellar, M., & Arellano, L. (2012). A model for diverse learning environments. In J. C. Smart & M. B. Paulsen (Eds.), *Higher education: Handbook of theory and research* (pp. 41-122). Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Springer
- Hurtado, S., Clayton-Pedersen, A. R., Allen, W. R., & Milem, J. F. (1998). Enhancing campus climate for racial/ethnic diversity: Educational policy and practice. *The Review of Higher Education*, 21(3), 279-302.
- Jackson, B. W. (1976). "Black identity development". In L. H. Golubchick & B. Persky (Eds.), *Urban, social, and educational issues*, (158-164). Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall-Hung.
- Jackson, B. W., & Hardiman, R. (1994). Multicultural organization development. In E. Y. Cross, J. H. Katz, F. A. Miller, & E. W. Seashore (Eds.), *The promise of diversity: Over 40 voices discuss strategies for eliminating discrimination in organizations* (pp. 231-239). Arlington, VA: NTL Institute.
- Jamal, A. (2011). Just between us: identity and representation among Muslim women. *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, 12(2), 202-212.
- Johnson, D. R. (2012). Campus racial climate perceptions and overall sense of belonging among racially diverse women in STEM majors. *Journal of College Student Development*, 53(2), 336-346.
- Johnson, D. R., Soldner, M., Leonard, J. B., Alvarez, P., Inkelas, K. K., Rowan-Kenyon, H. T., & Longerbeam, S. D. (2007). Examining sense of belonging among first-year

- undergraduates from different racial/ethnic groups. *Journal of College Student Development*, 48(5), 525-542.
- Jones, S. R., & Abes, E. S. (2013). *Identity development of college students: Advancing frameworks for multiple dimensions of identity*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Jones, S. R., & McEwen, M. K. (2000). A conceptual model of multiple dimensions of identity. *Journal of College Student Development*, 41(4), 405.
- Jones, S. R., Abes, E. S. & Kasch, D (2013). Queer Theory. In *Identity development of college students: Advancing frameworks for multiple dimensions of identity*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Kabir, N. A. (2013). *Young American Muslims: Dynamics of identity*. Edinburg: Edinburgh University Press.
- Kwan, M. P. (2008). From oral histories to visual narratives: Re-presenting the post-september 11 experiences of the Muslim women in the USA. *Social & Cultural Geography*, 9(6), 653-669.
- Leary, M. R., & Tangney, J. P. (Eds.). (2011). *Handbook of self and identity*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.
- Leonard, K. I. (2005). Introduction: Young American Muslim identities. *The Muslim World* (95), 473-477.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic Inquiry*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications
- Lipka, M. (2017, February 27). Muslims and Islam: Key findings in the U.S. and around the world. Retrieved May 08, 2017, from <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/02/27/muslims-and-islam-key-findings-in-the-u-s-and-around-the-world/>
- Lippman, T. W. (1995). *Understanding Islam: An introduction to the Muslim world*. New York, NY: Penguin
- Lopez, M. H., & Gonzalez-Barrera, A. (2014, March 06). Women's college enrollment gains leave men behind. Retrieved June 29, 2017, from <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/03/06/womens-college-enrollment-gains-leave-men-behind/>
- Maranto, C. L., & Griffin, A. E. (2011). The antecedents of a 'chilly climate' for women faculty in higher education. *Human Relations*, 64(2), 139-159.
- Marranci, G. (2004). Multiculturalism, Islam and the clash of civilisations theory: rethinking Islamophobia. *Culture and Religion*, 5(1), 105-117.

- Mayhew, M. J., Bowman, N. A., & Rockenbach, A. B. (2014). Silencing whom? Linking campus climates for religious, spiritual, and worldview diversity to student worldviews. *The Journal of Higher Education, 85*(2), 219-245.
- Markus, H., & Nurius, P. (1986). Possible selves. *American Psychologist, 41*(9), 954.
- McLeod, S. A. (2008). Social identity theory. Retrieved from <http://www.simplypsychology.org/social-identity-theory.html>
- Mead, G. H. (1934). *Mind, self and society* (Vol. 111). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Mellor, D., Stokes, M., Firth, L., Hayashi, Y., & Cummins, R. (2008). Need for belonging, relationship satisfaction, loneliness, and life satisfaction. *Personality and Individual Differences, 45*(3), 213-218.
- Mendoza-Denton, R., & Page-Gould, E. (2008). Can cross-group friendships influence minority students' well-being at historically white universities? *Psychological Science, 19*(9), 933-939. doi:10.1111/j.1467-9280.2008.02179.x
- Milem, J. F., Chang, M. J., & Antonio, A. L. (2005). *Making diversity work on campus: A research-based perspective*. Washington, DC: Association American Colleges and Universities.
- Mir, S. (2007). American Muslim women and cross-gender interaction on campus. *The American journal of Islamic Social Sciences, 24*:3 (pp. 70-91).
- Mir, S. (2009). Not too “college-like,” not too normal: American Muslim undergraduate women’s gendered discourses. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly, 40*(3), 237–256.
- Mirza, H. S. (2013). 'A second skin': Embodied intersectionality, transnationalism and narratives of identity and belonging among Muslim women in Britain. *Women's Studies International Forum, 5*, 5-15. doi: 10.1016/j.wsif.2012.10.012
- Mohamed, B. (2016, January 06). A new estimate of the U.S. Muslim population. Retrieved April 08, 2017, from <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/01/06/a-new-estimate-of-the-u-s-muslim-population/>
- Morey, P., & Yaqin, A. (2010). Muslims in the Frame. *interventions, 12*(2), 145-156.
- Morris, L. K. (2003). The Chilly Climate for Women: A Literature Review.
- Morrow, J. A., & Ackermann, M. E. (2012). Intention to persist and retention of first-year students: The importance of motivation and sense of belonging. *College Student Journal, 46*(3), 483-491.

- Mubarak, H. (2007). How Muslim students negotiate their religious identity and practices in an undergraduate setting. In C. Calhoun, M. A. Aronczyk, D. Mayrl, & J. VanAntwerpen (Eds.), *The religious engagements of American undergraduates*. Brooklyn, NY: Social Science Research Council.
- Nacos, B. L., & Torres-Reyna, O. (2007). *Fueling our fears: Stereotyping, media coverage, and public opinion of Muslim Americans*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Nasir, N. I. S., & Al-Amin, J. (2006). Creating identity-safe spaces on college campuses for Muslim students. *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning*, 38(2), 22-27.
- O'Keeffe, P. (2013). A sense of belonging: Improving student retention. *College Student Journal*, 47(4), 605-613.
- Onwuegbuzie, A. J., Collins, K. M., & Frels, R. K. (2013). Foreword: Using Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory to frame quantitative, qualitative, and mixed research. *International Journal of Multiple Research Approaches*, 7(1), 2-8.
- Ostrove, J. M., & Long, S. M. (2007). Social class and belonging: Implications for college adjustment. *The Review of Higher Education*, 30(4), 363-389.
- Patton, L. D., Renn, K. A., Guido, F. M., & Quaye, S. J. (2016). *Student development in college: Theory, research, and practice*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Pearson, E. (2009). All the World Wide Web's a stage: The performance of identity in online social networks. *First Monday*, 14(3). doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.5210/fm.v14i3.2162>
- Peek, L. (2005). Becoming Muslim: The development of a religious identity. *Sociology of Religion*, 66(3), 215-242.
- Perry, B. (2014). Gendered Islamophobia: hate crime against Muslim women. *Social Identities*, 20(1), 74-89.
- Pike, G. R., & Kuh, G. D. (2006). Relationships among structural diversity, informal peer Informal Peer Interactions and Perceptions of the Campus Environment. *Review of Higher Education: Journal of the Association for the Study of Higher Education*, 29(4), 425-450. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1353/rhe.2006.0037>
- Quaye, S. J. (2013). Critical Race Theory. In *Identity development of college students: Advancing frameworks for multiple dimensions of identity* (pp. 166-190). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

- Rangoonwala, F. I., Sy, S. R., & Epinoza, R. K. (2011). Muslim Identity, Dress Code Adherence and College Adjustment among American Muslim Women. *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs, 31*(2), 231-241.
- Rankin, S. R. (2003). *Campus climate for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people: A national perspective*. New York, NY: National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Policy Institute.
- Rankin, S. R., & Reason, R. D. (2005). Differing perceptions: How students of color and white students perceive campus climate for underrepresented groups. *Journal of College Student Development, 46*, 43–61
- Rankin, S., Weber, G., Blumenfeld, W., & Frazer, S. (2010). *2010 State of higher education for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people*. Charlotte, NC: Campus Pride
- Renn, K. A. (2003). Understanding the identities of mixed-race college students through a developmental ecology lens. *Journal of College Student Development, 44*(3), 383-403.
- Rosa, E. M., & Tudge, J. (2013). Urie Bronfenbrenner's theory of human development: Its evolution from ecology to bioecology. *Journal of Family Theory & Review, 5*(4), 243-258.
- Rossmann, G. B., & Rallis, S. F. (2012). *Learning in the field: An introduction to qualitative research*. (3rd ed.) Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Ruiz, N. G. (2013). *Immigration facts on foreign students*. Washington, DC: Brookings.
- Saldaña, J. (2015). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Sax, L. J. (2008). *The gender gap in college: Maximizing the developmental potential of women and men*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Schussler, D. L., & Fierros, E. G. (2008). Students' perceptions of their academics, relationships, and sense of belonging: Comparisons across residential learning communities. *Journal of the First-Year Experience & Students in Transition, 20*(1), 71-96.
- Seidman, A. (2005). Minority student retention: Resources for practitioners. *New Directions for Institutional Research, 2005*(125), 7-24.
- Seidman, A. (2006). *College student retention: Formula for student success*. Westport CT: American Council on Education.

- Serpe, R. T., & Stryker, S. (2011). The symbolic interactionist perspective and identity theory. In S. J. Schwartz, K. Luyckx, & V. L. Vignoles (Eds.), *Handbook of Identity Theory and Research* (pp. 225-248). New York, NY: Springer Science + Business Media.  
[http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4419-7988-9\\_10](http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4419-7988-9_10)
- Shammas, D. (2009). *The effects of campus friendships and perceptions of racial climates on the sense of belonging among Arab and Muslim community college students*. University of Southern California.
- Shook, N. J., & Clay, R. (2012). Interracial roommate relationships: A mechanism for promoting sense of belonging at university and academic performance. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 48(5), 1168-1172.
- Shryock, A. (Ed.). (2010). *Islamophobia/Islamophilia: Beyond the politics of enemy and friend*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Sirin, S. R., & Fine, M. (2007). Hyphenated selves: Muslim American youth negotiating identities on the fault lines of global conflict. *Applied Development Science*, 11, 151-163.
- Sirin, S. R., & Katsiaficas, D. (2011). Religiosity, Discrimination, and Community Engagement Gendered Pathways of Muslim American Emerging Adults. *Youth & Society*, 43(4), 1528-1546.
- Soloom, R. (2005). I know you are, but what am I-Arab-American experiences through the critical race theory lens. *Hamline J. Pub. L. & Pol'y*, 27, 55.
- Speck, B. W. (1997). Respect for religious differences: The case of Muslim students. *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*, 1997(70), 39-46.
- Spencer, M., Harpalani, V., Cassidy, E., Jacobs, C. Y., Donde, S., Goss, T. N., et al. (2006). Understanding vulnerability and resilience from a normative developmental perspective: Implications for racially and ethnically diverse youth. In D. Cicchetti & d.J. Cohen (Eds.), *Developmental Psychopathology* (pp. 627-672). Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.
- Stebbleton, M. J., Huesman Jr, R. L., & Kuzhabekova, A. (2010). Do I belong here? Exploring immigrant college student responses on the SERU survey Sense of Belonging/Satisfaction factor. *Center for Studies in Higher Education*. Berkeley, CA: University of California-Berkeley

- Stebbleton, M. J., Soria, K. M., Ronald, L., Huesman Jr., & Torres, V.(2014). Recent immigrant students at research universities: The relationship between campus climate and sense of belonging. *Journal of College Student Development* 55(2), 196-202.
- Stets, J. E., & Burke, P. J. (2000). Identity theory and social identity theory. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 224-237.
- Strayhorn, T. L. (2012). *College students' sense of belonging: A key to educational success for all students*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Stryker, S. (1980/2000). *Symbolic interactionism: A social structural version*. Menlo Park, CA: Benjamin- Cummings/Blackburn.
- Stubbs, B. B., & Sallee, M. W. (2013). Muslim, too: Navigating multiple identities at an American university. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 46(4), 451-467.
- Suarez-Balcazar, Y., Orellana-Damacela, L., Portillo, N., Rowan, J. M., & Andrews-Guillen, C. (2003). Experiences of differential treatment among college students of color. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 74(4), 428-444.
- Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1979). An integrative theory of intergroup conflict. *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations*, 33(47), 74.
- Talani, L. S. (Ed.). (2011). *Globalisation, migration, and the future of europe: Insiders and outsiders*. Oxford: Routledge.
- Tetreault, P. A., Fette, R., Meidlinger, P. C., & Hope, D. (2013). Perceptions of campus climate by sexual minorities. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 60(7), 947-964.
- The Power of International Education. (n.d.). Retrieved July 21, 2017, from <https://www.iie.org/>
- Tindongan, C. W. (2011). Negotiating Muslim Youth Identity in a Post-9/11 World. *The High School Journal*, 95(1), 72-87.
- Torres, V., Jones, S. R., & Renn, K. A. (2009). Identity development theories in student affairs: Origins, current status, and new approaches. *Journal of College Student Development*, 50(6), 577-596.
- Witherell, S. (2016). Open Doors 2016 Executive Summary. Retrieved June 11, 2017, from <https://www.iie.org/Why-IIE/Announcements/2016-11-14-Open-Doors-Executive-Summary>
- Woodard, V. S., & Sims, J. M. (2000). Programmatic approach to improving campus climate. *NASPA Journal*, 37(4), 539-552.

- World Region Fact Sheets. (2016). Retrieved June 11, 2017, from <https://www.iie.org/Research-and-Insights/Open-Doors/Fact-Sheets-and-Infographics/World-Region-Fact-Sheets/2016>
- Yost, M. R., & Gilmore, S. (2011). Assessing LGBTQ campus climate and creating change. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 58(9), 1330-1354.
- Zempi, I., & Chakraborti, N. (2014). *Islamophobia, victimisation and the veil*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Zine, J. (2006). Unveiled sentiments: Gendered islamophobia and experiences of veiling among Muslim girls in a Canadian islamic school. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 39(3), 239-252. doi:10.1080/10665680600788503

## APPENDIX A

### Introductory Email to Gatekeepers (Directors)

Dear Director [insert name]:

My name is Ayesha Yousafzai and I am a doctoral candidate in the Higher Education program at Virginia Tech. I am emailing you because I need your help in recruiting participants for my dissertation. The purpose of my research is to study Muslim identity performance on college campuses. Particularly, I am interested in understanding how various environments shape the ways in which undergraduate Muslim international women (UMIW) perform their Muslim identities on and off college campuses. I will be collecting stories of identity performance using narrative methodology. I have identified [institution name] as a potential institutional site due to its size, gender demographics, and large number of international students. I will be conducting two interviews with each participant (45-60 minutes each).

I would really appreciate it if you would forward my message to international women enrolled at your institution [name of institution]. I am seeking to interview Muslim international women who are either in their sophomore, junior or senior year of college. As demonstrated in the attached IRB approval letter, this study has received IRB approval at Virginia Tech (Protocol: IRB #17-745). If you have any questions, please contact me. I would be glad to answer any questions. Additionally, I would like to request an in person meeting with you. During this meeting I will share more information about myself, answer any questions that you have about the study and discuss other possible ways of recruiting for my study. Please let me know when is a good time to meet. My schedule is flexible.

Thank you in advance for sharing this email with the international undergraduate women at your institution. I look forward to hearing from you and meeting you in person.

Thank you for your consideration,  
Ayesha Yousafzai  
(ay17@vt.edu)  
Doctoral Candidate in Higher Education  
Virginia Tech

## APPENDIX B

### Participant Recruitment Email via the Gatekeeper (Directors)

Hello, my name is Ayesha Yousafzai and I am a doctoral candidate in the Higher Education Program at Virginia Tech. I am recruiting participants for my dissertation research. The purpose of my research is to study Muslim identity performance on college campuses. Particularly, I am interested in understanding how various environments shape the ways in which undergraduate Muslim international women (UMIW) perform their Muslim identities on college campuses. I will be collecting stories of identity performance using a narrative methodology. This study has received IRB approval (Protocol: IRB #17-745) at Virginia Tech.

If you are a sophomore, junior or a senior Muslim international women who is enrolled full time on your campus, are on F-1 or J-1 visa status, have completed your high school education outside of the U.S., and self-identify as Muslim and woman and are interested in participating in this study, please email me at [ay17@vt.edu](mailto:ay17@vt.edu) or if you feel comfortable text me at my cell phone number # \$\$\$-\$\$\$-\$\$\$\$.

If you are selected, you will be asked to participate in two face-to-face interviews. Each interview will be approximately 45- 60 minutes long and will occur during [insert range of dates here]. The information you provide for this study will be kept confidential. You will be asked to provide a pseudonym for the study.

Your participation will be valuable for this study, which will contribute to practice and research in higher education to benefit other students, faculty members, and staff. Please contact me should you have any questions at [ay17@vt.edu](mailto:ay17@vt.edu) or at \$\$\$-\$\$\$-\$\$\$\$.

Best Regards,  
Ayesha Yousafzai  
Doctoral Candidate, Higher Education at Virginia Tech  
[ay17@vt.edu](mailto:ay17@vt.edu)  
\$\$\$-\$\$\$-\$\$\$\$

## APPENDIX C

### Newsletter Recruitment Write-up via the Gatekeeper (Directors)

My name is Ayesha Yousafzai and I am a doctoral candidate in the Higher Education program at Virginia Tech. The purpose of my research is to study Muslim identity performance on college campuses. Particularly, I am interested in understanding how various environments shape the ways in which undergraduate Muslim international women (UMIW) perform their Muslim identities on college campuses. I will be collecting stories of identity performance using a narrative methodology.

If you are a sophomore, junior or a senior Muslim international women who is enrolled full time on your campus, are on F-1 or J-1 visa status, have completed your high school education outside of the U.S., and self-identify as Muslim and woman and are interested in participating in this study, please email me at [ay17@vt.edu](mailto:ay17@vt.edu). If you are selected, you will be asked to participate in two face-to-face interviews. Each interview will be approximately 45-60 minutes long. I hope to conduct these interviews soon and will work around your schedule. The information you provide for this study will be kept confidential. You will be asked to provide a pseudonym for the study.

Your participation will be valuable for this study, which will contribute to practice and research in higher education to benefit other students, faculty members, and staff. Please contact me should you have any questions at [ay17@vt.edu](mailto:ay17@vt.edu). Please feel free to forward my email to any other Muslim international women at your institution who you think will be great participants for my study.

Thank you. Ayesha

## APPENDIX D

### Email to Gatekeepers (MSA Leadership)

Dear MSA President [insert name]:

My name is Ayesha Yousafzai and I am a doctoral candidate in the Higher Education program at Virginia Tech. I am emailing you because I need your help in recruiting participants for my dissertation. The purpose of my research is to study Muslim identity performance on college campuses. Particularly, I am interested in understanding how various environments shape the ways in which undergraduate Muslim international women (UMIW) perform their Muslim identities on and off college campuses. I will be collecting stories of identity performance using narrative methodology. I have identified [institution name] as a potential institutional site due to its size, gender demographics, and large number of international students. I will be conducting two interviews with each participant (45-60 minutes each).

I would really appreciate it if you would forward my message to Muslim students who are members of your organization at your institution [name of institution]. I am seeking to interview Muslim international women who are either in their sophomore, junior or senior year of college. As demonstrated in the attached IRB approval letter, this study has received IRB approval at Virginia Tech (Protocol: IRB #17-745). If you have any questions, please contact me. I would be glad to answer any questions. Additionally, I would like to request an in person meeting with you. During this meeting I will share more information about myself, answer any questions that you have about the study and discuss other possible ways of recruiting for my study. Please let me know when is a good time to meet. My schedule is flexible.

Thank you in advance for sharing this email with the Muslim undergraduate students who are members of MSA at your institution. I look forward to hearing from you and meeting you in person.

Thank you for your consideration,  
Ayesha Yousafzai  
(ay17@vt.edu)  
Doctoral Candidate in Higher Education  
Virginia Tech

## APPENDIX E

### Participant Recruitment Email via to Gatekeepers (MSA Leadership)

Hello, my name is Ayesha Yousafzai and I am a doctoral candidate in the Higher Education Program at Virginia Tech. I am recruiting participants for my dissertation research. The purpose of my research is to study Muslim identity performance on college campuses. Particularly, I am interested in understanding how various environments shape the ways in which undergraduate Muslim international women (UMIW) perform their Muslim identities on college campuses. I will be collecting stories of identity performance using a narrative methodology. This study has received IRB approval (Protocol: IRB #17-745) at Virginia Tech.

If you are a sophomore, junior or a senior Muslim international women who is enrolled full time on your campus, are on F-1 or J-1 visa status, have completed your high school education outside of the U.S., and self-identify as Muslim and woman and are interested in participating in this study, please email me at [ay17@vt.edu](mailto:ay17@vt.edu) or if you feel comfortable text me at my cell phone number # \$\$\$-\$\$\$-\$\$\$\$.

If you are selected, you will be asked to participate in two face-to-face interviews. Each interview will be approximately 45- 60 minutes long and will occur during [insert range of dates here]. The information you provide for this study will be kept confidential. You will be asked to provide a pseudonym for the study. Your participation will be valuable for this study, which will contribute to practice and research in higher education to benefit other students, faculty members, and staff. Please contact me should you have any questions at [ay17@vt.edu](mailto:ay17@vt.edu) or at \$\$\$-\$\$\$-\$\$\$\$.

Best Regards,  
Ayesha Yousafzai  
Doctoral Candidate, Higher Education at Virginia Tech  
[ay17@vt.edu](mailto:ay17@vt.edu)  
\$\$\$-\$\$\$-\$\$\$\$

## APPENDIX F

### Facebook Write-Up via to Gatekeepers (MSA Leadership)

Salam,

I need your help with my dissertation study. I am conducting my research on Muslim international identity performance on college campuses. If you are a sophomore, junior or a senior Muslim international Muslim woman who is enrolled full time at [insert institution], please email me at [ay17@vt.edu](mailto:ay17@vt.edu).

Your participation will be valuable for this study, which will contribute to practice and research in higher education to benefit other students, faculty members, and staff.

Please feel free to forward my email to any other Muslim international women at your institution who you think will be great participants for my study. Thank you so much, I really appreciate your help.

Ayesha

([ay17@vt.edu](mailto:ay17@vt.edu))

## APPENDIX G

### Individual Emails to Participants (Snowballing)

Hello, [insert name]

I hope you are doing well. My name is Ayesha Yousafzai and I am a doctoral candidate in the Higher Education Program at Virginia Tech. I am contacting you because I believe that you will be a great person to talk to about my research study. Here is some information about my study:

I am recruiting participants for my dissertation research. The purpose of my research is to study Muslim identity performance on college campuses. Particularly, I am interested in understanding how various environments shape the ways in which undergraduate Muslim international women (UMIW) perform their Muslim identities on college campuses. I will be collecting stories of identity performance using a narrative methodology. This study has received IRB approval (Protocol: IRB #17-745) at Virginia Tech.

If you are a sophomore, junior or a senior Muslim international women who is enrolled full time on your campus, are on F-1 or J-1 visa status, have completed your high school education outside of the U.S., and self-identify as Muslim and woman and are interested in participating in this study, please email me at [ay17@vt.edu](mailto:ay17@vt.edu) or if you feel comfortable text me at my cell phone number # \$\$\$-\$\$\$-\$\$\$\$.

If you are selected, you will be asked to participate in two face-to-face interviews. Each interview will be approximately 45- 60 minutes long and will occur during [insert range of dates here]. The information you provide for this study will be kept confidential. You will be asked to provide a pseudonym for the study.

Your participation will be valuable for this study, which will contribute to practice and research in higher education to benefit other students, faculty members, and staff. Please contact me should you have any questions at [ay17@vt.edu](mailto:ay17@vt.edu) or at \$\$\$-\$\$\$-\$\$\$\$.

Best Regards,  
Ayesha Yousafzai  
Doctoral Candidate, Higher Education at Virginia Tech  
[ay17@vt.edu](mailto:ay17@vt.edu)  
\$\$\$-\$\$\$-\$\$\$\$

APENDIX H

Pre-Screening Phone Interview

Script for pre-screening phone call:

Thank you for contacting me about my study. The purpose of my research is to study Muslim identity performance on college campuses. The term “identity performance” basically means the ways in which individuals act, engage, interact, behave and situate themselves in their various environments. Before we can begin the pre-screening process I would like to obtain your verbal consent. I will be asking you a few questions to determine that you qualify as a participant in this study. This process will only take a couple of minutes. Please feel free to stop at any time. After the pre-screening if you agree to continue your participation I will email you a confirmation and formal consent form that you will sign when we meet for the interview. Do you give me permission to conduct the pre-screening?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ (initial& date)      No \_\_\_\_\_ (initial & date)

Name of participant \_\_\_\_\_

Country of Birth: \_\_\_\_\_

Country or countries where you completed your education prior to starting undergraduate studies in the U.S. \_\_\_\_\_

Major or majors: \_\_\_\_\_

Year in college \_\_\_\_\_

Age \_\_\_\_\_ Gender: \_\_\_\_\_

International Student on F-1 or J-1 status:      Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

Self Identify as Muslim:      Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

Self Identify as woman:      Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

Are you comfortable talking to me about your Muslim Identity: Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

Does the Participant Meet the criteria for the study: Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

If Yes: Inform the participant about meeting the criteria and set up time for the first interview.

Best way to contact you: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_

Date of interview \_\_\_\_\_ Location of interview \_\_\_\_\_

If no to meeting criteria: I thank you for your time and interest in my study. Unfortunately, you did not meet the criteria for participant selection for my study. Therefore, I will not be able to include you in my study but a appreciate your willingness to talk to me.

## APPENDIX I

### Interview Protocol for Interviews

First Interview (45-60 minutes)

Good Morning/Afternoon/Evening,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my study. I hope you got a chance to look at the consent form that I send you after scheduling the interview. Do you have any additional questions before I collect the signed form from you?

- Answer any questions from participant.

As you know the purpose of my dissertation is to study Muslim identity performance on college campuses. I chose [institution name] because it has a pretty even gender breakdown in the undergraduate student population. [Institution name] also has a high number of international students, and it allows me geographic proximity to my participant. As I mentioned before, this first interview will be approximately 45 to 60 minutes long. Please feel free to stop at any time. Before we begin the first interview do you have any questions?

- Answer any questions from participant.

In a moment, with your permission, I would like to begin audio recording. Before we start the recording can you please provide a pseudonym for you?

[After thanking the participant for providing me with the pseudonym, I turn on the recorder, say my name and the date, say that I am conducting the first interview and the pseudonym of the participant. Then I say “pseudonym, may I have your permission to record this interview?” wait until they say yes and then start.]

Questions:

- Rapport Building
  - a. Tell me a little bit about yourself and when you decided to come to the U.S.?
  - b. Please describe some reasons for deciding to pursue your education in the U.S.
  - c. What kind of perceptions did you have about college life in the U.S.?
    - i. Where did these perceptions come from?
    - ii. How, if at all, did these perceptions differ from what your day-to-day life was actually like once you got here?
    - iii. How have these perceptions changed since arriving here?
    - iv. What are some reasons for the change in these perceptions?

- First Section-Family Life and Peers
  - a. Tell me more about your family and what role they play in your life?
  - b. What are some stories you can share about being a Muslim woman in your family?  
What was/is that like?
  - c. How did you learn what it means to be a Muslim woman?
    - i. What were some expectations of you as a Muslim woman growing up in your home country (from family and society)?
    - ii. What stories can you recall about how you are as a Muslim woman in your home country?
  - d. Next, I'm wondering how people treat you as a Muslim woman in your home country. What are some stories that relate to this experience?
  - e. Here at [institution name], where are some areas where you spend most of you time?  
Who are the people or groups of people you interact with when you are in these spaces?
    - i. What about these areas and people or groups of people makes you want to spend more time with them?
    - ii. What stories can you share about how you behave with your various groups?
    - iii. How, if at all, do you behave differently with different groups? Why or why not?
    - iv. What stories can you share about how you behave when you are not with your various groups?
  - f. Please know that I will be asking you additional questions in our second interview. Some of the topics we will cover are regarding Muslim identity performance in your college campus, perceptions of family and peers of you and identity experiences out side of your college campus. We will talk more about those topics next time, but for today, is there anything else you want to tell me about your decision to come to [institution name], your family life, or the people and places where you spend your time here at [institution name]?

Thank you for your time and your insights. I greatly appreciate you sharing your stories with me. I'm going to stop the recording now.

[Once recording has ended, say: Let's set up a time for our second interview.]

[Schedule time for second interview.]

[Once time is scheduled, say: Please feel free to contact me if you want to reschedule the second interview or if you have any clarifying questions or comments thus far. You can also review the consent form for additional information about my research. Thank you again for your time today, have a great rest of the day.]

---

### Second Interview (45-60 minutes)

Good Morning/Afternoon/Evening!

Thank you again for agreeing to participate in my study. I hope you are having a great day.

Would you like to ask me any additional questions or provide any comments since we last met before we begin the second interview?

- Answer any questions from participant.

As you know the purpose of my dissertation is to study Muslim identity performance on college campuses. I chose [institution name] because it has a pretty even gender breakdown in the undergraduate student population. [Institution name] also has a high number of international students, it allows me geographic proximity to my participants, and it is a private/public institution. As I mentioned before, this second interview will be approximately 45 to 60 minutes long. Please feel free to stop at any time. Before we begin the second interview do you have any questions?

- Answer any questions from participant.

In a moment, with your permission, I would like to begin audio recording our second interview. I turn on the recorder and say my name and the date, and state that I am conducting the second interview and the pseudonym of that participant. Then say I say "pseudonym, may I have your permission to record this interview?" wait until they say yes and then start.

- First Section: Experiences as a Muslim International Woman on Your College Campus
  - a. Please tell me what it is like to be a Muslim international woman on your campus.

- i. Can you recall a time or a story about how you behave/act/engage as a Muslim woman in the U.S. on your college campus?
    - Are there other times when you behaved/ acted/ engaged as Muslim women on your college campus.
  - ii. Please tell me a story about a time you thought about your Muslim identity on your college campus? What made you think about this identity? Where were you? What happened?
    - In what ways has that experience altered your behavior as a Muslim international woman or changed how you behave now as a Muslim international woman?
    - Are there other times when you thought about your Muslim identity as a Muslim woman on your college campus?
- b. The next few questions have to do with your perceptions of how peers treat you as a Muslim international woman on your college campus.
- i. When and how do you disclose to people that you are a Muslim woman?
  - ii. Please tell me stories of the ways you are treated by your peers when they find out that you are a Muslim international woman.
  - iii. Please share stories of the ways you are treated by your professors when they find out that you are a Muslim international woman.
  - iv. Please share stories of the ways you are treated by others (university staff, university professionals or visitors) when they find out that you are a Muslim international woman.
  - v. Please tell me stories of the ways in which others treat you when you are at the library or classroom, on the bus, in the dining facilities or other spaces on campus as a Muslim international woman.
  - vi. Please tell me stories of the ways in which people in your living community treat you.
- c. In what ways have your perceptions of the ways in which people treat you impacted your identity as a Muslim international woman?

- d. What are some places on campus where you spend the majority of your time besides classes?
  - iii. Why do you spend time in these places?
  - iv. Can you tell me a story about how these places make you feel?
  - v. What are some places you feel uncomfortable in on your college campus? What about these places makes you uncomfortable?
  - vi. What are some places you feel comfortable in on your college campus? What about these places makes you comfortable?
  - vii. Are there spaces you avoid based on your perceptions or experiences of these spaces? If so, what are some of those perceptions and experiences?
  
- Second Section: Experiences as a Muslim International Woman outside of your college campus
  - a. What are some environments that you feel the most comfortable in as a Muslim international woman? These spaces can be virtual spaces (Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, and Instagram) or places away from the college campus (Mosque off campus, international food stores, traveling in U.S., restaurants, coffee shops, friends' homes over breaks).
    - i. What virtual spaces make you feel the most comfortable? Why do they make you feel comfortable?
    - ii. What virtual spaces make you feel the most uncomfortable? Why do they make you feel uncomfortable?
    - iii. What are some places away from campus that make you feel the most comfortable? Why do they make you feel comfortable?
    - iv. What are some places away from campus that make you feel the most uncomfortable? Why do they make you feel uncomfortable?
    - v. Tell me a story of places that make you feel comfortable? Why do they make you feel comfortable?
    - vi. Tell me a story of places that make you feel uncomfortable? Why do they make you feel uncomfortable?

### Third Section - Conclusion

- a) In what ways is being Muslim in the U.S. different than being Muslim in your home country?
- b) Would you like to share any other stories or information beyond what we have talked about as it pertains to your identity as a Muslim international woman?

Thank you for your time and your insights. I greatly appreciate you sharing your stories with me. Please feel free to contact me if you have any clarifying questions or comments thus far. You can also review the consent form for additional information about my research. Thank you again for your time today, have a great rest of the day.

## APPENDIX J

### Informed Consent Form for Interviews

Informed Consent Form for Interviews

**VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY**

**Informed Consent for Participants in Research Projects**

**Involving Human Subjects**

**Title of Research Project:** Identity Performance Among Muslim International Students: A Narrative Inquiry

**Principal Investigator:** Dr. Claire Robbins

**Co-Investigator-Graduate Student:** Ayesha Yousafzai

#### **I. Purpose of this Research/Project**

The purpose of my research is to examine narratives of how undergraduate Muslim international women (UMIW) perform their identities on college campuses. By conducting this study I want to understand the ways in which UMIW act, engage, interact, behave, and situate themselves in their various environments. This research will contribute to my dissertation.

#### **II. Procedures**

If you choose to participate in this research study, you will partake in two face-to-face interviews (both approximately 60-90 minutes long) and an opportunity to be a part of a focus group (approximately 60-90 minutes long). The investigator will email you the informed consent form a week before the first interview and at the start of the first interview, you will further discuss all the sections of the the informed consent form and address any questions you may have. Once you have signed the consent form and all your questions are answered, the first interview will begin. At the end of the first interview, the investigator will work with you to set up the second interview. After all the interviews are concluded, the investigator will contact you and send you the transcripts of both your interviews. You will have an opportunity to read and make comments on the transcripts to ensure that the transcripts reflect the meanings you intended. If no response is received from you, the transcripts will be considered accurate. Once the investigator has analyzed all the transcripts and developed preliminary themes and a group narrative, you will be contacted to take part in a focus group where this information will be shared and your feedback will be sought. This focus group will be audio recorded as well and will be approximately 60-90 minutes long.

#### **III. Risks**

The risks associated with participating in this study are considered to be minimal. There might be some risk of emotional distress as you reflect on your stories and experiences of identity performance.

#### **IV. Benefits**

The investigator has not made any promises or guarantee of benefits to encourage you to participate in this study. However, the hope is that results from this dissertation will help in designing future policy and research to benefit leaders, faculty, administrators, staff and students at universities in the U.S. You will have an opportunity to hear preliminary themes and group

narrative in the focus group. Additionally, you may contact the investigator at a later time for a summary of the research results. Finally, you may find it beneficial to reflect on your Muslim identity and your college experiences.

#### **V. Extent of Anonymity and Confidentiality**

The information you provide about you and any of your identity performance experiences will be kept confidential at all times and will be known only to the principal investigator. Recordings of the interviews will be kept safe and locked away. The investigator will transcribe the audio recordings. When the audio recording is transcribed, pseudonyms (i.e., false names) will be used for your name and for the names of any other individuals who you mention. When transcription is complete and verified, the recordings will be destroyed. This audio recording, all paper and electronic copies of the interview transcripts, and this consent form will be erased or shredded no more than seven years after the research has been completed. If a Title IX violation is reported during the study, I have an obligation to report it to the Title IX Coordinator at your institution. Title IX of the Education Amendments (1972) prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex in any educational program or activity that receives federal financial assistance. Title IX prohibits sexual harassment, including sexual violence.

It is possible that the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Virginia Tech will view this study's collected data for auditing purposes. The IRB is responsible for overseeing the protection of human subjects who are involved in research.

#### **VI. Compensation**

You will not receive any form of compensation for participating in this study. Any expenses you incur during this research will be your responsibility and not that of Virginia Tech, nor of the investigator for this research.

#### **VII. Freedom to Withdraw**

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary, and your refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Similarly, you are free to withdraw from this study at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you choose to withdraw from the study, any information about you and any data that you have provided will be destroyed. You are also free to choose to not answer any question, or to not complete any activity, and this choice will result in no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

#### **VIII. Participant's Responsibilities**

You voluntarily agree to participate in this study. You have the following responsibilities: to participate in two one-on-one interviews, each will last approximately 60-90 minutes long, as described in Section II above. Additionally, you will be invited to a focus group (60-90 minutes long) once the preliminary themes and group narrative have been developed by the investigator.



APPENDIX K  
IRB Approval



Office of Research Compliance  
Institutional Review Board  
North End Center, Suite 4120, Virginia Tech  
300 Turner Street NW  
Blacksburg, Virginia 24061  
540/231-4606 Fax 540/231-0959  
email [irb@vt.edu](mailto:irb@vt.edu)  
website <http://www.irb.vt.edu>

**MEMORANDUM**

**DATE:** October 18, 2017   
**TO:** Claire Kathleen Robbins, Ayesha Latif Yousafzai  
**FROM:** Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (FWA00000572, expires January 29, 2021)  
**PROTOCOL TITLE:** Identity Performance Among Muslim International Students: A Narrative Inquiry  
**IRB NUMBER:** 17-745

Effective October 18, 2017, the Virginia Tech Institution Review Board (IRB) Chair, David M Moore, approved the New Application request for the above-mentioned research protocol.

This approval provides permission to begin the human subject activities outlined in the IRB-approved protocol and supporting documents.

Plans to deviate from the approved protocol and/or supporting documents must be submitted to the IRB as an amendment request and approved by the IRB prior to the implementation of any changes, regardless of how minor, except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects. Report within 5 business days to the IRB any injuries or other unanticipated or adverse events involving risks or harms to human research subjects or others.

All investigators (listed above) are required to comply with the researcher requirements outlined at: <http://www.irb.vt.edu/pages/responsibilities.htm>

(Please review responsibilities before the commencement of your research.)

**PROTOCOL INFORMATION:**

Approved As: **Expedited, under 45 CFR 46.110 category(ies) 6,7**  
Protocol Approval Date: **October 18, 2017**  
Protocol Expiration Date: **October 17, 2018**  
Continuing Review Due Date\*: **October 3, 2018**

\*Date a Continuing Review application is due to the IRB office if human subject activities covered under this protocol, including data analysis, are to continue beyond the Protocol Expiration Date.

**FEDERALLY FUNDED RESEARCH REQUIREMENTS:**

Per federal regulations, 45 CFR 46.103(f), the IRB is required to compare all federally funded grant proposals/work statements to the IRB protocol(s) which cover the human research activities included in the proposal / work statement before funds are released. Note that this requirement does not apply to Exempt and Interim IRB protocols, or grants for which VT is not the primary awardee.

The table on the following page indicates whether grant proposals are related to this IRB protocol, and which of the listed proposals, if any, have been compared to this IRB protocol, if required.

*Invent the Future*

VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY  
*An equal opportunity, affirmative action institution*

## APPENDIX L

### Reminder Email Two Days Before The First Interview

Hello [insert participant name]

I hope your day is going well. Thank you again for agreeing to participate in my study. The purpose of this email is to remind you that we will be meeting for our first face-to-face interview on:

Date: [insert date]

Time: [insert time]

Location: [insert location]

Additionally, I am emailing you the informed consent form, as an attachment, with this email. Please feel free to look over the informed consent form. At the start of the first interview, you will have a chance to further discuss the informed consent form and address any questions you may have. Once you have signed the informed consent form and all your questions are answered, the first interview will begin.

The purpose of my dissertation is to study Muslim identity performance on college campuses. If you have any questions about my research, the first interview or the informed consent form, please feel free to email me at [ay17@vt.edu](mailto:ay17@vt.edu) or call/text me at my mobile number: (\$\$\$)-\$\$\$-\$\$\$\$.

Best Regards,

Ayesha Yousafzai

Doctoral Candidate, Higher Education at Virginia Tech

## APPENDIX M

### Reminder Email Two Days Before The Second Interview

Hello [insert participant name]

I hope your day is going well. Thank you again for agreeing to participate in my study. The purpose of this email is to remind you that we will be meeting for our second face-to-face interview on:

Date: [insert date]

Time: [insert time]

Location: [insert location]

As you already know, the purpose of my dissertation is to study Muslim identity performance on college campuses. If you have any questions about my research, the second interview or any other questions, please feel free to email me at [ay17@vt.edu](mailto:ay17@vt.edu) or call/text me at my mobile number: (\$\$\$)-\$\$\$-\$\$\$\$.

Best Regards,

Ayesha Yousafzai

Doctoral Candidate, Higher Education at Virginia Tech