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"Reclaiming Our Muslimness": Intersectional Identities of Muslim American Women College Students

by

Hala Alnagar

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Committee:

Professor Laura Hamilton
Professor Irenee Beattie
Professor Zulema Valdez

The Dissertation of Hala Alnagar is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication electronically:

Irenee Beattie

Zulema Valdez

Laura Hamilton
Chair

University of California, Merced

2021

This dissertation is dedicated to women of color of all backgrounds who have had to navigate spaces that their people have never known and – whether intentionally or not – paved the way for other women with footprints that were familiar enough to follow.

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CURRICULUM VITAE

Hala Alnagar

halnagar@ucmerced.edu
(661) 369-1218

EDUCATION:

University of California, Merced (UCM) Merced, California
Doctor of Philosophy in Sociology May 2021

- *Working Dissertation*: "Reclaiming our Muslimness": Intersectional Identities of Muslim American Women in Higher Education
- Committee: Dr. Laura Hamilton (Chair), Dr. Irenee Beattie, Dr. Zulema Valdez

Master of Arts in Sociology May 2018

- *Thesis*: "We've Never Talked About It": Muslim American Attitudes Towards Same-Sex Relationships
- Committee: Dr. Nella Van Dyke (Chair), Dr. Irenee Beattie, Dr. Sholeh Quinn

California State University, Bakersfield (CSUB) Bakersfield, California
Bachelor of Arts in Sociology June 2016
Bachelor of Arts in Religious Studies June 2016

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

Researcher, Office of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion, UC Merced, January 2020 – present

- Developed the strategic framework for the office in its inaugural year using qualitative data from a campus-wide listening tour
- Analyzed campus-wide data to inform campus recommendations, which are then presented to campus community and leadership
- Assessed local, national and global equity trends to inform office responses via statements, programming, and resources
- Populated and managed workgroups and task forces to ensure representation across all stakeholders and the consistent progression of work

Graduate Student Researcher, "Gender Expression, Academic Social Ties, and LGBTQ+ College Student Outcomes," Department of Sociology, UC Merced, January 2019 – December 2019

- Coded quantitative data and conducted qualitative focus groups across two UC campuses to assess trends of experiences among LGBTQ college students

Research Intern, California School Employees Association, UC Berkeley Labor Center, Summer 2019

- Conducted preliminary research on charter schools' processes and the impacts they have on unionized school workers in the public schooling system

Teaching Assistant, Department of Sociology, UC Merced, August 2016 – May 2019

- Courses: Introduction to Sociology, Gender and Society, Hate Crimes, Sociology of Sexuality, and Sociology of Culture

Graduate Mentor, Undergraduate Research Opportunities Center, UC Merced, Summer 2018

- Led workshops for undergraduate students in an intensive 9-week summer research program on a variety of topics, including writing literature reviews, conducting qualitative interviews, project management, and applying to graduate school

Lead Tutor, School of Arts and Humanities, CSU Bakersfield, 2015-2016

- Managed Arts and Humanities tutoring center by collective tutor timesheets, establishing tutor schedules each quarter, and maintaining general upkeep of tutoring center office

Student Center Student Assistant, School of Arts and Humanities, CSU Bakersfield, 2014-2016

- Organized and filed confidential student data, scheduled appointments with advisors, and promoted Arts and Humanities events to increase student attendance

Religious Studies Tutor, School of Arts and Humanities, CSU Bakersfield, 2013-2016

- Tutored students enrolled in Religious Studies classes, with a focus on writing and critical thinking

General Tutor, Kegley Center for Student Success, CSU Bakersfield, 2013-2014

- Tutored student athletes 1-on-1 in general subject areas, particularly in the areas of writing and critical thinking, and held group study halls

PUBLISHED REPORTS:

"October 2020 COVID-19 Experience Survey Narrative Summary," Cinnamon Danube, **Hala Alnagar**, and Maria Ramirez Loyola, UC Merced, December 2020

"Valuing Black Lives – Petition Responses Executive Summary," **Hala Alnagar**, UC Merced, November 2020

"COVID-19 Experience Survey Narrative Summary," **Hala Alnagar**, Maria Ramirez Loyola, and Cinnamon Danube, UC Merced, July 2020

"Listening Tour Executive Summary: Where We Are and Where We Are Going," **Hala Alnagar** and Dania Matos, UC Merced, May 2020

TALKS:

"Valuing Black Lives Task Force Recommendations," UC Merced, January 29, 2021

- Panelists: Associate Dania Matos, Jonathan Grady, Robin DeLugan, and **Hala Alnagar**

Townhall: "Open Ongoing Dialogue with UC Merced Employees," UC Merced, December 18, 2020

- Panelists: **Hala Alnagar**, Maria Ramirez Loyola, and Cinnamon Danube

People First Town Hall: "COVID-19 Experience Survey Presentation," UC Merced, August 18, 2020

- Panelists: **Hala Alnagar** and Cinnamon Danube

"Coming Out (or not) on College Applications: Institutional and Interpersonal Dimensions of Disoclosing LGBTQ+ Identities," American Sociological Association Annual Meeting, August 11, 2020

- Presenters: Nella Van Dyke, Natasha Hagaman-Cummins, **Hala Alnagar**, Irenee R. Beattie

"'We've Never Talked About It': Muslim American Attitudes Towards Homosexuality," CSU Bakersfield, May 6, 2019

- Presenter: Hala Alnagar

"'We've Never Talked About It': Muslim American Attitudes Towards Homosexuality," Sociology of Gender, April 10, 2019

- Guest lecturer: Hala Alnagar

GRANTS AND AWARDS:

"Dialogues That Matter," Onar Primitivo and **Hala Alnagar**, VOICE Grant, UC National Center for Free Speech and Civic Engagement, March 2021

Chancellor's BigCat Hero Award, UC Merced, November 2020

COMMUNITY AND EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES:

Office of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Representative, Police Advisory Board, UC Merced, July 2020 – present

Graduate Student Representative, Sociology Graduate Student Committee, UC Merced, Spring 2018

DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores the identity development of Muslim American women (N=25) in higher education, utilizing intersectionality as both a methodological and theoretical framework. First and foremost, it centers the lived experiences, agency, and autonomy of Muslim women throughout the findings. Second, it takes into account the intersecting identities of participants and how they relate to their place in larger systems of oppression. I explore their religious identity, alongside their race, ethnicity and gender. I offer the hijab as an added facet of Muslim women's identity, as—when it is worn—it serves as a physical marker of being Muslim. The study finds that Muslim women carry the burden of maintaining their family's reputation and thus must strategize ways to attain their goals despite the gendered constraints they encounter. These familial expectations then place Muslim women in double binds when they enter higher education, as their families simultaneously expect high academic achievement as well as a strict maintenance of one's religious identity. While navigating these conflicting expectations, the women in this study redefine and reclaim their Muslim identities independent of familial and societal influences.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

In a *Washington Post* article titled, "Muslim American girls need to see their role models reflected in the spotlight, too," author Saadia Faruqi (2019) opens with a story about gifting her young daughter an illustrated biography of 27 famous women. Her daughter flips quickly to the two she knows, B for Benazir Bhutto, and M for Malala Yousafzai, and then sadly says, "Those are the only Muslim ones." The author discusses the importance of introducing her daughter to successful Muslim American women in a variety of positions in their local community, in order to expose her to the large realm of possibilities that exist for Muslim American women, even if they are not famous in mainstream media. This article demonstrates a struggle that many Muslim American women face in most settings, which is a lack of representation, and thus a lack of mentors and role models with whom they share lived experiences and perspectives. While the Muslim American community as a whole must face and come to terms with Islamophobic rhetoric, Muslim American women in particular deal with an intersection of various identities that bring forth a unique set of challenges.

The lived experiences of Muslim women are also neglected in academic research. Research on Muslims generally tends to focus on terrorism in the Middle East, its relationship to Islam, and how Muslims grapple with this; research that actually focuses on Muslims and their lived experiences is primarily conducted in other Western countries. What we know from the limited research on Muslim women in the US that does exist is that they experience a heightened awareness of discrimination. I focus on the experiences of Muslim American women in higher education because these women are likely to face competing sets of expectations—those that govern predominately white, non-Muslim academic spaces along with the simultaneously gendered, religious, cultural, and familial expectations that accompany their complex identities as Muslim women. As Faruuqi's *Washington Post* article suggests, there is not enough representation of Muslim American women to provide a blueprint for how to navigate these complexities.

This study sits at the juncture of studies on the role of higher education amongst marginalized groups as well as identity development, and brings forth the unique perspective of Muslim American women and their lived experiences. Existing literature on education and identity development has not included the perspective of Muslim American women students. In addition, the existing work that does explore Muslim American women and their experiences fails to do so from an intersectional lens, which is crucial if we seek to understand Muslim American women as autonomous individuals who are not solely defined by their religious identities.

This study thus seeks to first and foremost center the Muslim American women's voices, allowing them to tell their stories as they experience them, rather than attempting to fit them into existing molds or narratives. Secondly, this study seeks to highlight the strategic ways that Muslim American women knowingly navigate their multiple identities and social contexts all while they are structured by the patriarchal and Islamophobic systems around them. The overarching question this study addresses is: How do Muslim American women college students navigate the multiple identities and roles they hold across various social contexts?

Experiences of Muslims in the U.S.

The perspective of the general U.S. public towards Muslims has been shaped primarily by existing stereotypes present in media and political rhetoric. Pew Research Center (2010) found that 38% of Americans view Islam in a negative light, 35% believe Islam has a higher chance of encouraging violence than other religions, while at the same time, 55% of Americans admitted that they did not know much about Islam. This negative imaging undoubtedly contributes to the Pew Research Center's (2017) findings that anti-Muslim discrimination has increased in 2016, surpassing the numbers immediately following 9/11. While recognizing the amount of discrimination they must deal with, many Muslim Americans still put some faith into meritocratic ideas of success in the U.S.

While 75% of Muslim Americans say that there is a lot of discrimination against Muslims in the U.S. (48% saying they have experienced discrimination, and 18% saying they have seen anti-Muslim graffiti in the last year), 89% say they are proud to be both American and Muslim, and 70% still adhere to the American dream, stating that people can work hard and find success in the U.S. Within these numbers, there is a difference among Muslim American women and men, with women being more aware of anti-Muslim discrimination. Compared to 58% of Muslim American men, 70% of Muslim American women say they are dissatisfied with the way things are going in the U.S.; 83% of Muslim American women compared to only 68% of Muslim American men say there is discrimination against Muslims in the United States—with 55% of women compared to 42% of men saying they had experienced anti-Muslim discrimination in the last year. Clearly there is a difference in the experiences of Muslim men and women that has led to a difference in perceptions, and so it is necessary to study Muslim women specifically to understand the role that gender plays in how they navigate their place in a country they may feel is hostile towards them.

While dealing with the existence of Islamophobia, Muslim Americans are still very much a part of the U.S.'s education system. Muslim American students make up about 5% of the students in the public schooling system; while there are no estimates of the number of Muslim American students in higher education institutions, roughly 40% of Muslim Americans have a college degree (Alsayegh 2016; Tirmazi et al. 2012). Data trends suggest that Islamophobia is pervasive through all levels of schooling. The Southern Poverty Law Center (2019) reports 200 anti-Muslim hate or bias incidents that took place in primary and secondary schools in 2018, most of these incidences being educator-reported and not reported in the news. These anti-Muslim hate incidents reported by teachers were less likely to result in disciplinary action, as compared to hate and bias incidents on the basis of race and ethnicity, sexual orientation and gender identity, immigration status, and Jewish identities.

Despite the high numbers of Muslim American students and the persistence of Muslim hate in schools, there is very limited knowledge on Muslim American students' trajectory into and within higher education. Considering the large number of college graduates among Muslim Americans, the rise of Islamophobia in a post-9/11 society and its pervasiveness at the primary and secondary school level, there is a demand for understanding the experiences of Muslim American students that the literature has not already explored.

In the U.S., there are three major groups of Muslims: Arab, South Asian, and Black (Pew Research Center 2017). Each of these groups are affected by their unique cultural and historical backgrounds. Black Muslims are more likely to be concerned with racial rather than religious discrimination, since they are first and foremost identified as African American by the general society (Rayside 2011). Arabs have a long history of migrating to the U.S. for different reasons and at different times, so their levels of religiosity and cultural conservatism vary depending on what Arab country they come from and at what time they immigrated (Rayside 2011). South Asian Muslims deal with the same type of religious discrimination that Arab Muslims do; however, they have higher rates of education than other Muslim American groups (Rayside 2011). These are only the three major groups of Muslim Americans, since Muslims include people from other parts of the world, and Muslims of other racial and ethnic backgrounds who have converted to the faith. Although the experiences of Muslim Americans may be very similar, the diversity of this group exemplifies the inaccuracy that comes from treating them in a monolithic manner, as well as the demand for an intersectional approach when studying Muslim Americans.

A post-9/11 climate also complicates these matters. A number of studies on Muslims are conducted in other Western countries[1], and although 9/11 has global implications, the effects of 9/11 are heightened in the U.S. Post-9/11, many Muslim Americans felt even more committed to their faith as it came under attack, and simultaneously felt like they did not belong in the U.S. (Tirmazi et al. 2012). Anti-Muslim assaults increased after 9/11 and although those numbers dropped after 2001, these numbers increased in 2016 and surpassed the number of assaults in 2001 (Pew Research Center 2017). This, of course, only takes into account those assaults which were not only reported, but were denoted specifically as being anti-Muslim, and so it is likely that the numbers are even higher.

The negative rhetoric that is present in Western society when it comes to Muslims is a gendered one: Muslim men are violent terrorists, while Muslim women are these men's oppressed, vulnerable and submissive wives and daughters (Abu-Ali and Reisen 1999; Mir 2014), which is why this study will focus specifically on Muslim women. Ali (2014) outlines three characterizations of the Muslim Other: 1) the pre-modern Muslim who is illogical and cannot integrate into a liberal democratic society, 2) Muslims as a physical threat to western life, and 3) the hyper-masculine and violent men paired with the voiceless women with no agency. Muslim women are depicted as victims with no autonomy, stuck in a backwards community, who need western thought to save them (Abu-Lughood 2002; Mirza 2013; Zahedi 2007). However, studies have found that women are active agents advocating for change, not only for themselves, but for their entire community (Tariq and Syed 2017).

Studies on education are lacking in this area as well. A majority of studies on education have focused on white students, and as the field has progressed, more and more research has been conducted on marginalized groups and their experiences within higher education institutions. However, these studies do not engage with Muslim experiences.

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[1] See Afshar (1989); Ahmad (2001); Ahmed (2012); Coene and Longman (2008); Hopkins (2009); Meldrum (2014); Mirza (2013); Tariq and Syed (2017); Tirmazi et al. (2012); & Zainal (2018)

Even outside of the field of education, there are a limited number of studies on Muslim women specifically. Studies on Islam are often political in nature, exploring terrorism and Islam in the U.S., and focusing on post-9/11 Muslims in a general manner. By studying Muslim American women in higher education, this study would not only refute existing gendered stereotypes about Muslim women's supposedly submissive roles but would also explore the unique obstacles that Muslim women face in higher education when their marginalized religious identity intersects with other facets of their identity in the U.S.'s anti-Muslim climate.

The Identities of Muslim Women

In studying the intersectional identities of Muslim American women college students, part of what comes forth is the complexity of identity formation. These women have identities as women, as Muslims, as college students, as daughters—along with all the other facets of their identity, including race/ethnicity, nationality, and hijab-wearing or non-hijab wearing. I am centrally concerned with how Muslim women juggle, merge, compartmentalize, and otherwise agentically navigate their multiple identities.

Individual identity is composed of characteristics and traits, which are determined by the individual, their social roles, and their group affiliations (Thoits 2013). The term "identity" encompasses the parts of a self that are made up of "the meanings that persons attach to the multiple roles they typically play in highly differentiated contemporary societies" (Stryker and Burke 2000: 284). There are multiple identities that exist in one person, and the saliency of each identity at any given moment is determined by individual perception, social relationships, and societal structures (Stryker and Burke 2000). In certain instances, there exists a master status, which is often the most socially determinant identity that overpowers other identities (Hughes 1945). There can be more than one master status in a given context, and one's master status differs by situation and context since it is often determined by the perception of others in that setting (Hughes 1945).

Individuals often hold multiple identities, and these identities involve multiple role expectations that vary among groups and contexts (Stryker and Burke 2000). These multiple identities and roles can reinforce one another in some contexts, and in others they can conflict (Reitzes and Mutran 1995; Thoits 2013; Wiley 1991). Individuals can encounter settings where multiple contradicting identities come forth, which can induce stress as a result of attempting to navigate these contradictions (Stryker and Burke 2000).

As Hughes (1945) suggested, part of an individual's master status is determined by other actors. Ethnic identities, in particular, are determined by one's own definition as well as the perception of the society they exist in (Nagel 1994; Portes and MacLeod 1996). Portes and MacLeod (1996) emphasize that this process of ethnic identity development is not additive; a society's definition of one's ethnic identity influences one's own definition, but ethnic groups also have some autonomy in shaping their identity from one society to the next.

I will later discuss the racialization of Muslim Americans (Garner and Selod 2015; Selod 2015; Selod and Embrick 2013) and in particular the gendered racialization of Muslim American women (Selod 2018), but it is first necessary to acknowledge the anti-Blackness that exists within this racialization, both among non-Muslims and Muslims. South Asian and Arab identities are immediately associated with being Muslim,

while Black Muslim identities are not assumed (Husain 2019). This racialization of Muslim Americans has taken place in a post-9/11 era (Islam 2020), but this divide serves to legitimize the Muslim identity of Arabs and South Asians, while it delegitimizes the Muslim identity of Black individuals (Khabeer 2016). In the U.S.'s history, Islam has been racialized as Black, particularly at the height of the Nation of Islam's movement, and simultaneously seen as a national threat (Khabeer 2016). The racialization has now shifted from Black to Brown, with the notion of Islam as a national threat remaining consistent throughout this shift (Khabeer 2016). Guhin (2018) challenges existing ideas of the racialization of Islam by bringing attention to the conflicting relationship of non-Black Muslims and Black Muslims and the colorblindness present amongst Muslim communities. There exists this notion of unity by religion that then ignores the racialized experiences of Black Muslims and how racialization varies for different Muslim individuals depending on their racial identity (Guhin 2018). Thus, it is necessary to take into consideration the racialization of the Muslim identity while intentionally recognizing the further racialization and marginalization of the Black Muslim identity.

In this project, I will study Muslim American women's intersectional identity development within the context of higher education. Muslim American women are joined by their gender and religious identity—outside of this, Muslim American women are diverse in their race, ethnicity, and whether or not they wear the hijab. These variances, as well as the environmental contexts they occupy, create a unique journey of identity formation. For many Muslim women, it is unclear what their most salient identity is and that is partly due to the fact that it may vary drastically from one social context to the next. Thus, Muslim women are required to do a large amount of reflective work on their identity in order to be able to move fluidly across contexts.

Role of Education

Identity development always occurs in environmental contexts that indelibly shape the process (Coll et al. 1996). This study of Muslim American women is situated within the context of higher education. Muslim American women students encounter multiple salient identities, in multiple contexts that may conflict or reinforce one another.

We can see how this might work through the research on other racial/ethnic groups and identity formation in higher education. For instance, Tovar and Feliciano (2009) find that when Latinx individuals attend colleges where they are the numerical minority, their sense of their ethnic identity is heightened. Part of this results from the group solidarity that forms among students of a shared racial or ethnic background when they are the minority on their campus. In Gap Min and Kim's (2000) study on Asian American identity development, many of their participants tried to push away from their ethnic identity when they were younger to avoid social isolation. They anticipated that higher education would be an opportunity to further escape their identity, since they would be away from their parents' expectations; however, attending college caused them to come closer to their ethnic identities. For students of color, identity development processes within higher education take place dialectically with both ascribed meanings of one's identity as well as self-identification, leading to what is known as ethnoracialization (Brown and Jones 2015; Reyes 2018). Because of the racialization of the Muslim identity (Garner and Selod 2015; Selod 2015; Selod and Embrick 2013), and particularly the gendered racialization of the Muslim woman identity (Selod 2018), we

must seek to understand how this dialectal process of identity formation occurs for Muslim women on campuses. As aforementioned, Muslim women must take on added considerations of family and perceptions of reputation, which adds a layer to their ethnoracialization process.

While higher education has served as an important setting for identity development among other groups of color, part of what I seek to understand in speaking specifically to Muslim American women is how they conceptualize the role of education in their lives. Educational ethnographers have found that women of marginalized backgrounds utilize academic success to resist social systems that otherwise attempt to maintain and reinforce their subordination within hierarchal systems of power (Fordham 1996; Holland and Eisenhart 1990; Hubbard 1999; McGinty 1999).

Du Bois (1935) was one of the first to present higher education as a path for liberalization among marginalized communities. He wrote about education within the context of southern white oligarchy, pointing out how white supremacists specifically barred Black slaves from education in order to maintain the existing racial hierarchy, and continued doing so after the emancipation of slaves. A Du Boisian view of education as liberatory has been pervasive overtime, with Black communities still regarding higher education as key to upward mobility (Cottom 2017), and has extended itself to other communities of color. Some Latinx women, for example, discuss their pursuit of higher education as a way to gain independence, specifically to have the independence that older women in their family did not have (Ovink 2014). While some do this of their own volition, other women specifically cite their mothers, who encourage them to pursue education so that their daughters do not depend on men in the same way that they did. While in Du Bois's (1935) and Cottom's (2017) demonstrations, higher education serves as a path out of racial oppression for Black individuals, higher education is Latinx women's way out of the patriarchal structures of their family. Patriarchy is so salient in their lives that it holds generational implications (Baca Zinn 1980; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1992; Peña 1991).

There is currently no empirical exploration of Muslim American women's conceptualization of education, and whether they regard it as a tool of liberalization. Because higher education has been historically and contemporarily conceptualized as the key to liberation among marginalized and oppressed groups, it is necessary to explore whether or not this is the case for Muslim American women as well. This is especially important considering the existing evidence of Muslim women students going to great lengths to present themselves in a positive manner among their Muslim community so that other Muslim women can have the same educational opportunities. There is a clear importance that Muslim women place not only on their own pursuit of education, but also of future generations of Muslim women. The potential contradictions that may arise between Muslim American women's personal aspirations and the aspirations that their families hold for them can have implications on how these women navigate and grapple with the multiple identities and roles they have within and across the variety of environmental contexts that they occupy.

The Hijab

Before discussing the hijab, it is first and foremost important to note that not all Muslim women wear the hijab. In addition, there are those who wear it but are not given

a choice, and that there are Muslim women who choose to wear the hijab as a testament of their own faith. For Muslim women who do wear the hijab, it plays a critical role in shaping their experiences in the U.S., as it is an immediate and visible identifier of their religious identity. According to Pew Research Center (2017), 64% of Muslims who say their religious identity is clearly identifiable have experienced some form of anti-Muslim discrimination, compared to only 39% of those who do not have any immediate Muslim identifiers.

Whenever a self-proclaimed Muslim group commits a terrorist attack, a number of Muslims feel a looming pressure to defy stereotypes so that they can separate themselves from these violent actors (Alsayegh 2016). Following the events of 9/11, Muslim students in the U.S. "found themselves targeted on campuses, and often felt alone and unsafe at their institutions" (Oplatka and Lapidot 2012: 329). Muslim American women on college campuses may feel the need to constantly defy existing stereotypes and represent Muslims in the best way possible (Ahmad 2001; McGuire, Casanova, and Davis III 2016; Meldrum, Liamputtong, and Wollersheim 2014; Mir 2014; Ryan 2011). Muslim youth have high levels of anxiety due to the emotional work it requires them to navigate the perceived hyphenation of their Muslim and American identities (Sirin and Fine 2007). Muslim girls, in particular, feel the emotional burden of having to educate non-Muslims to disprove existing stereotypes about Muslims (Sirin and Fine 2007).

While many of these previously cited studies do not emphasize the role of the hijab, it is necessary to point out a hijabi's[2] heightened visibility as Muslim, relative to Muslim women who do not wear the hijab and Muslim men. Women who wear the hijab are more likely to be approached with non-Muslims' inquisitive questions and more likely to be in positions where they are expected to represent their entire religious community; in this same way, Muslim women who wear the hijab are more likely to be victims of discrimination (Tariq and Syed 2017; Vickers, Kumra, and Manfredi 2012). On the other hand, Muslim women who do not wear the hijab are often overlooked—by Muslims and non-Muslims alike—because they are not considered to be "representative Muslims" (Jeldtoft 2011).

The hijab plays a role here, not only because it serves as an immediate religious identifier for Muslim women and leads Muslim women who wear it to deal with more discrimination (Paz and Kook 2020; Tariq and Syed 2017; Vickers et al. 2012), but because it has been used as a public tool to continue attacking Islam, despite it being a private religious matter to Muslim women (Coene and Longman 2008; Killian 2003; Mirza 2013; Wallach 2007). The Muslim female body has become the focal point in an Islamophobic state (Jiwani 2006; Mirza 2013; Razack 2008). The hijab is a part of one's identity; it provides some Muslim women with a sense of belonging in the larger Muslim community and is heavily involved in these women's identity formation (Mirza 2013).

Depictions of the hijab as a tool of oppression challenge and undermine the agency of Muslim women and ignore the active choices that Muslim women make regarding their religious identity (Paz and Kook 2020). Publicizing the hijab via Islamophobic rhetoric perpetuates patriarchal practices of regulating women's bodies. Consequently, Muslim women must face the attempted regulation of their dress by both

[2] Hijabi is a colloquial term used to refer to a Muslim woman who wears the hijab.

the Muslim community around them as well as wider society's gendered form of Islamophobia (Paz and Kook 2020).

The hijab has played a key role in what Selod (2018) calls the gendered racialization of Muslim women. There is a homogenization of the Muslim identity that occurs through the process of racialization (Garner and Selod 2015; Karaman and Christian 2020; Selod 2015). Karaman and Christian (2020) discuss the notion of corporeal bodies, which include gender, skin tone, hair, dress, and facial and body features. The hijab is a key component of these corporeal bodies that is used to specifically racialize Muslim women who choose to wear it. There is the potential for Muslim women who do not wear it to avoid this racialization, given their ability to avoid other components of the corporeal body that would be used to racialize them (Paz and Kook 2020; Zine 2006).

What the aforementioned studies do not explore further is how experiences differ for women who do wear the hijab compared to those who do not, despite it being apparent that the hijab or lack thereof must play a role in shaping Muslim women's experiences and identities. This oversight has a number of implications. It can: 1) perpetuate this idea that all Muslim women wear the hijab, deeming those who do not wear the hijab as not Muslim or not Muslim enough, and 2) belittle the role that the hijab—or lack thereof—plays in how Muslim women are perceived by both Muslims and non-Muslims. Thus, I argue that the hijab as a characteristic is key to understanding Muslim women and their experiences in higher education and that it should be handled as another facet of one's identity—specifically using intersectionality—as another dimension of both social structure and individual identity.

Winker and Degele's (2011) conceptualization of intersectionality includes the category of body, alongside gender, race, and class. People attribute "Muslimness" onto individuals based on ideas of culture and appearance. For example, the hijab, the jilbaab, a Muslim name, or a certain nation of origin can be markers of a Muslim identity, and so individuals who do not "look" like a Muslim can pass as non-Muslim (Garner and Selod 2015). Including the physical markers used to identify a Muslim thus demonstrates how the Muslim experience is shaped by the body, gender, and race/ethnicity. This aligns with the concept of gendered racialization of Muslim women (Selod 2018) as well as the notion that the hijab is a component of the corporeal body (Karaman and Christian 2020). Since the hijab or lack thereof impacts the ways in which Muslim women are racialized, and thus shapes their interaction with various axes of oppression, we must take it into consideration as part of an intersectional analysis of identities.

Familism

There is a limited amount of research on Muslim American identity development; however, much can be taken from other marginalized groups, particularly Latinx communities as there are many parallels in cultural values, particularly regarding gender. The concept of familism is one that is prevalent among Latinx communities. Familism is when an individual's values and behavior are determined by relatives, and when a family's needs are prioritized over the needs of an individual (Desmond and López Turley 2009). There is an attitudinal aspect of familism, which includes values and ideologies towards notions of family, particularly considering concepts of family loyalty (Desmond and López Turley 2009; Sabogal et al. 1987). The second component is

behavior, which is the actions taken based on these values (Sabogal et al. 1987) and can often include making major life decisions with family ties being taken into consideration (Desmond and López Turley 2009).

While familism as a concept has not been applied to Muslim Americans, it can be seen in existing research. There is evidence that familial ties are high in Muslim communities (Tirmazi et al. 2012). In one study, some Muslim women stated that their families valued higher education and viewed careers as a necessity, regardless of gender; however, gender played a role in determining the extent and reach of these values (Ahmad 2001). Sons were encouraged to pursue careers in law, medicine, or engineering; while daughters were not always expected to pursue full-time employment after they graduated, they still had some level of encouragement from their families (Ahmad 2001).

In many Muslim families, women are expected to prioritize their marriage and children over their career (Ahmad 2001; Ahmad and Sardar 2012; Gale and Hopkins 2009). Many women did not find support from their families for pursuing a career, and instead were pressured into marriage; many of these women were then self-motivated despite this pressure (Ahmad 2001). Muslim women who came from families that had other working women were more likely to find support (Ahmad 2001).

For some Muslim women, their families also regarded education and the possibility of a stable career as a safety net in case they were not able to find a suitable husband, especially if they were in an area where they did not have a lot of extended family or a strong Muslim social network (Ahmad 2001). Even if some Muslim women married immediately after graduating and did not pursue a career, their degree still served as a safety net if their marriage did not succeed (Ahmad 2001). This type of support, however, is not common among all Muslim families. Although family support was essential for most Muslim women, the best scenario in some cases was finding a supportive husband who would not expect them to stay home and take care of the children (Tariq and Syed 2017).

The heterogeneity apparent in these Muslim women's experiences and their families' values demonstrates a need to explore the way Muslim women navigate their familial values before and after entering higher education. Research has shown that immigrant women generally face more pressure from their family than men because of the idea that society is threatening important family values (Das Gupta 1997). Family ties and values thus have a heavy influence not only on Muslim American women's values, but also their decision-making processes surrounding their educational pursuits.

Research has demonstrated that the presence of familism can have both positive and negative psychological effects (Fuligni, Tseng, and Lam 1999; Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco 1995). For Muslim American women, in particular, familism may have more of an impact on their decisions because of their role as reputation holders. Within Muslim communities, Muslim women are the public face of their family and they carry the task of guarding the honor of the family with their behavior (Afshar 1989). If they do not deal with pressure directly from their parents, some Muslim women noted pressure from extended family members, particularly uncles (Ahmad 2001). Some Muslim women in Afshar's (1989) study stated that girls "running away" from home were dishonoring their family in the worst way possible.

In Ahmad's (2001) study, Muslim women mentioned experiencing either a duality—in which they were Western at school and Eastern at home—or separatism—in which they separate themselves from either one of these identities entirely. A large majority of these women stated that their white friends were exclusively school friends, and that they did not interact with them outside of that setting (Afshar 1989). Some Muslim women said that they felt like they could relate to Asian friends more because of shared family values, but that even in those instances, they maintained those friendships only within school settings (Afshar 1989). Even though certain families regarded education as a means of upward social mobility, they still feared the "liberalizing impact" it would have on their daughters (Afshar 1989: 267).

This fear of corruption, paired with the burden of being the reputation-holders in their family, puts Muslim women in the position of being advocates for young girls in their families. Muslim women in higher education feel they must "pave the way" for other Muslim girls in their families, and even in the wider Muslim community, by demonstrating that education is not a source of "corruption" or "westernization" (Ahmad 2001; Oplatka and Lapidot 2012). This is manifested in a strict and strategic maintenance of one's religious and cultural ties (Ahmad 2001; Oplatka and Lapidot 2011). Thus, Muslim women must navigate their familial values, expectations of success or lack thereof, the expectations of maintaining their family's reputation, and the pressure to ensure that other Muslim girls in their family have the same opportunities they do. These various roles and expectations that Muslim women manage undoubtedly have an effect on the ways in which they begin to conceptualize and develop their identities. These types of processes of negotiation are present for Muslim women in a way that is less pervasive for Muslim men, due to the gendered expectations of Muslim women and the role they play in determining their family's "reputation" among the rest of the Muslim community.

Du Bois's concept of double consciousness explores the bifurcated nature of a Black identity in the U.S. as one must carry their personal identity juxtaposed with the meaning of the self as it has been defined by the oppressor (Du Bois 1994). In the case of Muslim women, they must carry their personal identity juxtaposed with the identity that has been defined for them by their family and by the larger Muslim community. Being removed from a tightly-knit community can bring about a sense of liberation for Muslim women, as they do not have to face the pressure of being a "good" Muslim (Bibi 2020). Bibi (2020) explains how Muslim women operate within the framework of double consciousness by having to negotiate their own identities amongst notions of respectability within their family. Families are concerned with notions of status within the community, which affects the cultural expectations they place on their daughters under the guise of religious behavior.

Our understanding of culture and how it contributes to status is typically class-based, and as such includes class-based social practices that can elevate one's status, including the association with and knowledge of what is considered high-status art (Bourdieu 1984, 1986; Bourdieu and Passeron 1977). In more recent work amongst marginalized groups in particular, this theory of cultural capital has been expanded beyond these presumed high-status arts, as they are limited by conceptualizations of race and do not consider what is status-elevating among non-white groups. For example,

Carter (2003) expanded our understanding of cultural capital theory to explore how status operates within groups of African American youth, whose cultural values differ from those of the dominant group. We see the emergence of second-generation youth cultures, in which second-generation youth ascribe value and definitions to cultural practices that may overlap or differ from the values and meaning-ascription within adult culture (Warikoo 2011). As such, Muslim American women—often second or third generation—must simultaneously develop their own youth culture based on their own values while ascribing to the cultural values set forth by their families. These familial cultural values hinge around the elevation of Muslim families' cultural status within the Muslim community, and Muslim women often carry the burden of being responsible for that status elevation.

Patriarchy

All of the identity development that Muslim women undergo occurs within the contexts of a patriarchal system. The institution of patriarchy involves social relations where men benefit from a system in which they have power over women, and where women find various methods to exercise resistance (Baca Zinn et al. 1986; Collins 2000; hooks 1984). Patriarchy persists in shaping the lives of women of color, specifically Latinx women (Baca Zinn 1980; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1992; Peña 1991). In speaking to Mexican-American participants, Gowan and Treviño (1998) found that while both men and women disagreed with traditional values regarding women's roles, men were still more likely than women to hold more traditional views regarding work and family. Since patriarchy as a system intrinsically benefits men, they are less likely to criticize it as deeply as women (Collins 2000); therefore, it is necessary to focus specifically on Muslim American women, rather than men, because women of color across multiple groups face a heightened sense of discrimination due to patriarchal structures that deeply impact the development of their gender identity as well as other facets of their identity.

There is a generational awareness of patriarchy that is found among Latinx women. While immigrant parents generally encourage their children to pursue an education so that they can have better lives in comparison (Ceja 2004), young Latinx women specifically state that their mothers encourage them to pursue an education in order to gain financial independence so that their daughters are not subjected to the same financial dependence that they have on men (Cammarota 2004; Ovink 2014). Their mothers simultaneously send messages about the importance of being a wife and having children (Villenas and Moreno 2001), and this same messaging is present within their peer culture (Gándara 1995).

Women of color's identity formation and how it is affected by ties to their family and their family's cultural values is inherently laced with and complicated by experiences of navigating patriarchal systems and the expectations that lie within them. Research on immigrant families demonstrates that parents are more likely to be more restrictive on their daughters than their sons (Ghosh 1984; Parvez, Siddique, and Wakil 1981; Pettys and Balgopal 1998). These restrictions can be a result of preserving values under cases of perceived threat, as mentioned above with Muslim women being responsible for the reputation of their families; it can also be in direct relation to the lower expectations of men.

In studying gender disparities among Caribbean youth, Lopez (2002) finds that women are expected to be responsible, but men are not. This same finding is echoed among Latinx communities, where Latinx women students take on both the caretaker and breadwinner roles while simultaneously attending college fulltime, and in some cases, are expected to do this specifically because their brothers were deemed unsuccessful. Men in these scenarios benefit from what Ovink (2014) calls "automatic autonomy," which grants them the freedom to be less thoughtful about their decisions and actions, whereas women dealt with the pressure of heightened expectations and thus higher familial responsibility. While there are implications for the negative impact that this has on men's aspirations and levels of achievement (Lopez 2002; Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Smith 2002), it is necessary to understand that this stems from a patriarchal system that intrinsically works to men's overall benefit, and as stated, leaves women with conflicting roles within their identity that they must navigate in various contexts and settings.

While this notion of gendered expectations has been explored among Muslim women regarding family values and women's roles in maintaining their family's reputation, there is no research that explores whether these gendered expectations also manifest in heightened pressure for Muslim women's success. It is important to explore this, as it would add another layer of complexity to the roles that Muslim women must navigate. A higher education setting, which would be considered conducive to this proposed expectation of success, can also present contradictions to what their family expects from them as Muslim women.

Dissertation Roadmap

The following chapter outlines the research design of this study. I outline the role of intersectionality as the driving theoretical and methodological framework of the dissertation as well as my positionality as it relates to the participants. I describe the site and sample of participants, situating the sample within the nationwide demographics of Muslims in the U.S. I then outline my recruitment processes, describe the structure of the interviews, and the process of data analysis.

Chapter 3 explores the role that the hijab—or lack thereof—plays in Muslim American women's lives. Specifically, it asks: 1) How do Muslim women's experiences as hijabis and/or non-hijabis contribute to their meaning-making of the hijab and their religious identity?; and 2) How do Muslim American women navigate the fluctuating and transitionary space that exists between being a hijabi and a non-hijabi? I discuss the tokenization and hyper-visibility that Muslim women experience when they wear the hijab, compared to the invisibility and identity-erasure that Muslim women encounter when they do not wear the hijab. In addition, I shift from the narrative of the hijab being a binary experience—i.e. Muslim women either wear the hijab or they do not—and discuss the in-between space that exists as women come to conclusions around the role of the hijab at various stages in their lives.

Chapter 4 explores the role of familism in Muslim American women's lives and the specific familial values they must navigate. In this chapter, I ask: 1) How do Muslim American women perceive their families' values towards them as Muslim women and as college students?; and 2) How do Muslim American women students negotiate between these perceived family values and their own values? I situate this chapter within the context of patriarchy, underscoring that many of the familial values Muslim women

encounter are laced with gendered expectations; however, some families simultaneously expect and place high value on academic success. Thus, the women in this study found ways to either work within the boundaries set by their family, push against them, creatively leverage areas where they have some leniency, or fulfill their expectations in one area to give them more leeway in another. This chapter demonstrates the level of agency amongst the Muslim women in this study and how they were able to strategize within their familial contexts to achieve their goals.

Chapter 5 details the experiences that Muslim American women have within higher education institutions and how these experiences contribute to their overall identity development. Specifically, it asks: 1) How do Muslim American women conceptualize the role of higher education in their lives and utilize it to define and develop their identities?; and 2) How do Muslim American women's identities develop as they navigate numerous conflicting expectations from their families—i.e. high academic and career achievement as well as gendered expectations of marriage and family—within higher education settings characterized by low representation and administrative support? Muslim women in this study used their time in higher education to define and conceptualize what their religious identity meant to them. In doing so, they were grappling with the expectations their family had of them as students and as Muslim women, compared to what they expected of themselves. More often than not, they navigated these complex negotiations without the support and guidance of mentors, instead finding support amongst their peers and other Muslim women in their family.

Chapter 6 gives an overview of the findings in each chapter, situating the results and patterns within existing literature, and provides suggestions for future research on Muslim women. Lastly, I outline the implications that this study has for higher education institutions and how they best serve their Muslim women students, focusing particularly on the often implicit ways that Islamophobia has shaped perceptions towards Muslim women.

CHAPTER 2

RESEARCH DESIGN

RESEARCH DESIGN

Intersectionality: A Theoretical and Methodological Framework

Intersectionality's roots, before it was coined as an academic term, stem from the thinking of feminists of color. Some cite Sojourner Truth's poem, "Aren't I A Woman?" as being one of the first demonstrations of intersectionality (Collins 2000; Yuval-Davis 2011). At the very least, what this poem did was demonstrate why intersectionality came to be and what it attempts to do. When white women took part in feminist movements, they spoke of women's struggles as though they were homogenous among all women. "Many of the conditions that middle-class, white feminists have found oppressive are perceived as privileges by black women, especially those with low incomes" (King 1988, 71). Women of color and women from lower-class backgrounds were left out of the conversation, as Truth's poem suggests, despite having the shared identity of being women. This idea is at the core of what intersectionality seeks to bring to the table.

Intersectionality would look beyond this, by taking into account local knowledge, which entails "theorizing from locations other than the controlling 'texts' of dominant discourse" (Collins 1992, 78). Just because academics have ignored these traditions and sources of knowledge does not mean that they have not existed (Collins 1992). Collins (1992) states that we must acknowledge how race, gender, social class, age, sexual orientation, and religion affect how and where individuals and their knowledge are created and manifested. Thus, intersectionality, unlike feminist epistemology, does not argue that women and other marginalized groups *can* speak, but reveals what these groups have already said that has been ignored, while taking into account the intersecting facets of their social location. Because Muslim Americans are not often the subjects of empirical studies (Garner and Selod 2015), intersectionality served as the perfect tool to provide Muslim American women with a platform to have their voices and experiences heard. Using an intersectionality framework also limited the risk of reducing these Muslim women down to only their religious identity, by bringing forward how other facets of their identity intersect with one another to shape their unique and diverse experiences.

As both a theory and a method, intersectionality takes into account the diverse ways groups experience oppression and privilege, depending on the various social identities they hold and how they intersect with one another (Zinn and Dill 1996). By looking at how social location and identities interact, we are able to analyze larger systems of oppression and how they are manifested and replicated (Collins 1986, 2000; Crenshaw 1989; Lorde 1984). In this dissertation, I utilize Winker and Degele's (2011) conceptualization of intersectionality, which includes the category of the body. I argue that the hijab, as a physical marker of some Muslim women's religious identity, is a category that must be accounted for, in the same way that other identities are.

Collins's (2000) concept of the matrix of domination will be particularly useful in understanding the experiences of Muslim American women. Matrices of domination differ on the basis of time, social setting, and the way identities intersect within a given matrix. Collins (2000) states that, "regardless of how any given matrix is actually organized either across time or from society to society, the concept of a matrix of domination encapsulates the universality of intersecting oppressions as organized through

diverse local realities" (246). This concept posits that when attempting to understand how domination and oppression occurs, one cannot account for one axis of oppression independently. The way the matrix operates and maintains existing forms of oppression is based entirely on how these multiple axes of domination intersect with one another. Using this framework is not only helpful to understand the way Muslim women who wear the hijab and Muslim women who do not wear the hijab experience privilege and oppression differently, but can also be applied to the complex ways race/ethnicity, gender and religious identity intersect with one another to create different forms of domination and privilege that vary across contexts and groups.

One of the main challenges and critiques of conducting an intersectional analysis lies within its complexity and goal of inclusivity. There is a certain level of difficulty "that arises when the subject of analysis expands to include multiple dimensions of social life and categories of analysis" (McCall 2005, 1772). Questions arise methodologically around how many categories should be or can be included within the breadth of one study, as well as theoretically and analytically regarding the broad scope of framing these issues on a micro-, meso-, and macro-level scale simultaneously. However, this broadness and ambiguity is exactly what contributes to intersectionality's success and versatility, particularly when using it to contribute to our limited knowledge on Muslim American women in higher education. Using intersectionality to study Muslim Americans allows us to identify and analyze the other identities that Muslims hold and understand how those identities not only shape their experiences but may determine which identities are most salient in certain contexts.

I argue that without intersectionality, I would risk the continued portrayal of Muslim American women in a monolithic and homogenous manner. Studies that address Muslim women as one group do an injustice to the nuanced experiences of Muslim women. While a religious identity can play a major role in one's life, assuming that it is the most salient identity among Muslim women adheres to existing rhetoric that paints Muslims as the Other. Much of this othering occurs by centralizing Muslims' religious identity, when this same logic is not placed on individuals of other major monotheistic faiths, such as Christianity. To assume that all Muslim American women share the same experiences is to assume that they all think and operate the same way, and that their other identities are minute. I use an intersectional approach to continuously take these identities into account during my analysis as well as to centralize local knowledge by placing precedence on the way Muslim women conceptualize and theorize their own experiences.

Positionality

In interacting with intersectionality as both a method and theoretical framework, it is important to acknowledge one's own positionality juxtaposed with the social location of the participants of a study. I identify as a Yemeni Muslim American woman. While I was raised in a Muslim family that adhered to the primary teachings of Islam, I no longer practice the religion, as seemingly apparent by my having tattoos and the fact that I do not wear the hijab. I wore the hijab from the ages of 10 to 22. I experienced my entire undergraduate career with the hijab on, while living with my family who had more expectations for my identity as a Muslim woman than for my academic success. I have a dual understanding of navigating higher education settings both with the hijab on and without, and with family involvement and without. As a graduate student, I do not wear

the hijab and do not live near my family or Muslim community, and so I do not have to operate within strict expectations regarding my religious identity. Without the hijab, I occupy spaces as a light-skinned "ethnically ambiguous" woman until I choose to share my religious and/or ethnic identity. These lived experiences and perspectives provided me with the local knowledge necessary to understanding some of my participants' experiences; however, I come with my own complex relationships with privilege and oppression.

While I am of Yemeni descent—a culture that tends to be traditional and conservative in its view of gender—my family was considered "progressive" because they allowed me to pursue an undergraduate career without any opposition, to work at my undergraduate institution, and to drive my own car. Compared to other Muslim women in my community, I occupied a very privileged space. However, as I continued my pursuit of education for a graduate degree and lessened my engagement in Muslim practices, I have dealt with heavy family disapproval, to the point of disownment by a majority of relatives. Understanding the complexity of my own experiences—how my own oppression can be regarded as privilege, and vice versa, in the eyes of other Muslim women in different social locations—aided me throughout this project. I understand the inaccuracy that stems from applying broad generalizations to Muslim American women based on my own ever-changing experience from undergraduate to graduate student. This benefitted me during data analysis, but even before that, in creating a level of relatability with the participants at varying levels of religious practice. Overall, the local knowledge I have from being raised Muslim helped me to establish a comfortable interview environment with participants, so that they may have been less likely to feel the need to defy negative stereotypes with an interviewer they know is Muslim. Further, it aided me with a personal sense of responsibility to accurately present the experiences of participants, with whom I have shared identities and experiences.

Site

The entirety of this qualitative study took place in a virtual setting due to the COVID-19 pandemic. All of the interviews were conducted via Zoom, with a majority of participants having attended universities and colleges in Northern and Central California. Due to the broader reach of these virtual interviews, I also interviewed participants who resided or attended school in Maryland, Chicago and Barbados.

Sample

The sample for this study consists of 25 Muslim American women, ages ranging from 19 to 55, who are currently or have been students at any college or university. The women in this study were at various stages of their higher education journey (see Table 1). A majority of participants were currently enrolled in an undergraduate program (n=7), while the second largest majority had completed a Bachelor's degree (n=6). The highest degrees attained were a J.D. (n=1) and a Ph.D. (n=1), and 2 participants who had attained a master's degree. Others were in progress to complete a post-graduate program (n=3), or currently enrolled in medical school (n=4). There was one participant who had completed some part of undergraduate and was no longer enrolled.

Table 1. Level of Education of Muslim American Women Sample (N=25)

Current Level of Education	n	%
Currently enrolled in medical school	4	16%
Currently enrolled in post-graduate program	3	12%
Currently enrolled in undergraduate	7	28%
Bachelor's	6	24%
Master's Degree	2	8%
Ph.D.	1	4%
J.D.	1	4%
Some college/not currently enrolled	1	4%

A large number of the Muslim population is attending or has attended college, with 40% of Muslims having college degrees (Alsayegh 2016; Tirmazi et al. 2012), including 11% with a post-graduate degree (Pew Research Center 2017). While I did not interview Muslim women who had never enrolled in college to create a comparison, this sample demonstrates that Muslim women are present at various stages of the higher education system and that there are shared as well as disparate experiences that shape their time in and through the various institutions they attend.

A majority of the participants were born in the U.S., with 7 women who had immigrated from another country at a very young age. The youngest age of immigration was 2-3 months old and the oldest age of immigration was 8 years old, with participants having immigrated from Canada, Pakistan, Nigeria and Yemen.

It was important to explore Muslim American women who came from varied racial and ethnic backgrounds in order to understand how these identities may or may not intersect with their religious identity to create a unique experience (see Table 2). A majority of the women in this study identified as Pakistani (24%) as well as Indian and Pakistani (8%) and Punjabi (4%). There also those who identified as Indian (4%) or Guyanese Indian specifically (4%). Others of South Asian backgrounds included Afghan (20%) and Bangladeshi (4%) women. The Arab participants (20%) were all of Yemeni descent, and so their experiences represented a very specific subgroup. African American/Black Muslim women constituted 12% of the sample.

Table 2. Self-Identified Race/Ethnicity of Muslim American Women Sample (N=25)

Racial/Ethnic Category	n	%
Afghan	5	20%
African American/Black	3	12%
Arab (Yemeni)	5	20%
Bangladeshi	1	4%
Guyanese Indian	1	4%
Indian	1	4%
Indian & Pakistani	2	8%
Pakistani	6	24%
Punjabi	1	4%

According to Pew Research Center's 2017 survey of U.S. Muslims, 41% of Muslim Americans are white (this is according to the way the Census categorizes individuals of Arab, Middle Eastern, Persian/Iranian, etc. descent), 28% Asian (including South Asia), 20% Black, 8% Hispanic, and 3% other or multi-racial. While this sample is not nationally representative, it does represent the three major groups that are represented in the Muslim community in the U.S.—Arab, South Asian, and African American/Black. This sample cannot paint broad strokes across any one group; however, it can give some perspective into the role that race and ethnicity play in shaping Muslim women's experiences.

Of the women in this study, 40% stated that they currently wore the hijab a majority of the time, 60% did not currently wear the hijab most of the time. The Pew Research Center found that 53% of Muslim American women say they wear the hijab in public at all times or most of the time and 42% say they never wear it. Including a sample of women who wear the hijab and those who do not is not only necessary to be representative of the wider community of Muslim American women, but serves to provide insight into how wearing the hijab or not wearing the hijab affects Muslim American women's identity formation and their experiences in higher education. It is also important to note that some Muslim women's relationship with the hijab is beyond the binary of either wearing or not wearing it. For example, some women who did not wear the hijab most of the time would clarify that they may wear it in a particular social setting, such as attending the mosque or other religious events. Each Muslim woman had a unique experience with the hijab, many of them going through fluctuating journeys of wearing or not wearing the hijab.

Recruitment

I initiated contact with a number of Muslim Student Associations (MSAs) at universities across California. Upon receiving permission from these clubs, I posted my flyer to their social media pages. Unfortunately, due to the COVID-19 pandemic limiting the activity of some of these groups, the attempts at racially and ethnically diversifying my sample through target sampling of racial/ethnic Muslim clubs were not as successful. In addition to contacting MSAs, I used my own network to connect with individuals who would refer me to Muslim women they knew.

Following initial contact with clubs and individuals, I used snowball sampling by asking each individual I spoke with to provide me with the contact information of other Muslim American women they felt would be willing to participate in the study. Through this recruitment method, I was able to speak to Muslim American women in various regions of California, of various racial/ethnic/national backgrounds, and from colleges and universities that I did not specifically recruit at.

Semi-Structured Interviews

I interviewed 25 Muslim American women who are currently or have been enrolled at a college or university. The interviews were one-on-one to allow participants to comfortably disclose information about their experiences. All interviews were conducted over Zoom. I had my camera on so that participants could put a face to the interviewer, but let each participant know that the use of their camera was optional.

Prior to the interview, I emailed the participants a brief intake form with a few demographic questions and asked them to send it back to me before our interview took

place. I was able to read each participant's demographic information before the beginning of the interview so that I was already aware of some of the intersections I may come across during the course of the interview. I began the interview with a broad and general question about their journey through higher education to create a conversational environment in which they felt at ease.

The interview guide explored the following: 1) their religiosity, the decision process of wearing/not wearing the hijab, their experiences as a Muslim woman with/without the hijab, and their family's reaction to the decision; 2) their experiences entering higher education and their family's role or lack thereof in this process; and 3) their experiences within higher education in accordance with the expectations of their families. All interviews ended with an opportunity for participants to add anything they feel we did not cover during the interview. In order to make sure these interviews were catered to the experiences of the Muslim American women I interviewed, I allowed the flow of our conversation to shape the questions that emerged, often focusing on one area of the interview guide more than another based on where the participant provided more responses. I also consistently reevaluated how I asked certain questions, depending on the reactions they elicited. For example, asking participants how religious they were with no other context seemed to bring up confusion and so I began asking the question with a disclaimer—I explained to participants that I wanted them to measure and define "religious" as they pleased and I also probed them to explain what they meant when they used phrases such as "not that religious." This allowed all of the participants to create their own scale of religiosity based on their own lived experiences.

Data Analysis

All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. I coded the transcriptions according to common themes around the following: 1) experiences either wearing or not wearing the hijab, 2) the obstacles they encountered when entering and within higher education, 3) what their familial expectations of them as Muslim women, 4) familial expectations for their educational career and thereafter, and 5) what, if any, support systems they have in place. I took special care around the intersections of various parts of their identity in order to create a full view of Muslim American women students' experiences that is not monolithic in nature.

While I did search for patterns with high levels of saturation, I did not disregard experiences that were seemingly outliers. During recruitment and in conversations before or after our interviews, many of the Muslim women who did not practice the religion strictly felt that they would not qualify or that their experiences would be irrelevant to the topic at hand. Some thanked me for including them. Because a latent goal of this work is to avoid the typically monolithic depictions of Muslim women, I believe it is important to highlight the experiences that were not as common as they are still a part of the collective experience of Muslim women.

To best adhere to the goals of an intersectionality framework, I did not approach this study seeking to prove or disprove existing theories. Instead, I used a grounded theory approach. This approach begins with the data, using themes shared among interviews, which then develop into theories (Glaser and Strauss 1967). To analyze the data in this way, data gathering and data analysis took place simultaneously. After each interview, I wrote at least a paragraph of notes, reflecting on the new interview and how

it compared or contrasted to what I had observed in previous interviews. In addition to this, I wrote memos after I finished coding each transcript on emergent themes.

I began the coding process by reading each transcript without any coding, simply refamiliarizing myself with the data and noting high-level themes. The first round of coding was broad in nature, identifying general themes and patterns. I followed this with focused coding, which required me to reread the transcripts and existing codes to find more concise themes and categories that appear across multiple interviews (Marvasti 2004). I was sure to take note of when similarities and differences occurred both across and within the categories that participants fell into.

In the next chapter, I will explore the theme of hijab and identity. I describe the experiences of Muslim women when they wore the hijab and when they did not and how this relates to their overall religious identity. I also explore the meanings that Muslim women have ascribed to the hijab—including religious, personal and socio-political. I argue to remove our existing understanding of the hijab as binary—either wearing or not wearing the hijab—to one that recognizes it as a spectrum of experiences, with Muslim women often occupying a transitionary space in which they may or may not wear it given the social setting.

CHAPTER 3

HIJAB AND IDENTITY

HIJAB AND IDENTITY

The racialization of Muslim identities is shaped by the interactions between other individuals and the various intersections of one's own identity (Husain 2019; Karaman and Christian 2020; Selod 2018). The hijab has become a tool for the gendered racialization of Muslim women and as such, a public tool for the perpetuation of Islamophobia (Coene and Longman 2008; Killian 2003; Mirza 2013; Paz and Kook 2020; Selod 2018; Wallach 2007). This relies on the usage of the Muslim female body as the focal point of an Islamophobic state (Jiwani 2006; Mirza 2013; Razack 2008), one that depicts Muslim women as submissive victims to a supposedly oppressive religion and ignores their agency and active decision-making (Abu-Lughood 2002; Ali 2014; Mirza 2013; Paz and Kook 2020; Zahedi 2007). The findings in this chapter support these notions of gendered racialization, demonstrating the tokenization of Muslim women who wear the hijab as representatives and spokespeople for their entire community, as well as the complete erasure of the Muslim identity for Muslim women who do not wear the hijab.

Karaman and Christian (2020) find a number of racialized outcomes for Muslim women in relation to the hijab, which include taking the hijab off, educating others, and being silent. It is important to point out that while these actions are in response to racialization, they are active choices made by Muslim women themselves. In this chapter, participants undergo meaning-making of the hijab as it relates to their religious identity while simultaneously navigating familial, societal, and religious expectations.

Because the hijab plays a large role in shaping how Muslim women are perceived by others—whether they do or do not wear it—I will explore the experiences of Muslim women when they wear the hijab and when they do not, as well as how they conceptualize their relationship to their religious identity as it relates to the hijab or lack thereof. I will also explore the space that exists between being a hijabi and non-hijabi, as many women transition from one to another, or fluctuate between being a hijabi or non-hijabi based on specific social contexts.

In moving away from the hijab as a binary space, it is important to outline that the categories of hijabi and non-hijabi presented throughout are not fixed and were determined by how participants identified themselves at any given point in their lives. Thus, when I discuss a woman encountering a certain experience as a hijabi, it is in reference to the moment in which she wore the hijab. She may have worn a hijab in that specific instance, but does not wear it most of the time. As such, her identity as a hijabi was a key determinant in shaping that particular experience. The numbers of hijabis and non-hijabis presented in the previous chapter are arbitrary and relied on how participants identified themselves at the time of the interview. The numbers represented throughout this chapter are out of the total sample due to the fact that a majority of participants fluctuated between wearing and not wearing the hijab.

Experiences as a Hijabi

The Muslim American women in this sample who experienced wearing the hijab shared encounters with tokenization, micro-aggressions and/or heightened hostility. Despite the monolithic and politicized treatment that the hijab receives, it is ultimately a personal facet of a Muslim woman's religious identity if she chooses to wear it and so

each woman had her own personal reasoning and conceptualization of what the hijab meant in relation to her own identity. I will discuss the micro-aggressions and heightened hostility they faced in a later chapter, but in the following sections I will discuss experiences of tokenization, concerns around safety, and the various personal meanings ascribed to it by women who wear it.

Tokenization and speaking for all Muslims.

Women who wear the hijab, because it serves as an immediate signifier of their religious identity, experience tokenization and being delegated as a spokesperson for the entire Muslim community. A total of 9 participants cited specific instances of being tokenized, all of these participants stating that this occurred when they were wearing the hijab. Among these participants, there were some who acknowledged these experiences as negative.

For example, as Aisha states:

> Someone will reach out to me and kind of be like, “Hey I noticed that you are different. You’re Muslim. What do all Muslims think about all of this?” So I get put in that speaker role. During my undergrad, I was okay with it, but I wish I hadn’t had that so much sometimes, because I had to do a lot of work internally to kind of mature and realize that.

Aisha recognizes that because of her hijab, she would be placed in a representative position, in which she had to explain how Muslims felt about a certain topic. While she accepted this role during her undergraduate career, she began questioning it and struggling with it as she got older. She goes on to explain:

> I don’t speak for everyone even if I want to . . . I have no right to be like, “Oh, all Muslims think this and all Muslims think that.” That’s why I started explicitly saying clearly, “This is what the general consensus is of these scholars, and this is what I think. Those sometimes are different, sometimes those are the same.” I don’t think I would have had to spend so much energy doing that if I hadn’t started wearing a scarf.

Aisha knew that when she answered certain questions, she had to clarify that this was only her informed opinion so that the person asking this question did not assume that this was a universal opinion of all Muslims. Even further, she recognized that she may not have had so many of these experiences had she not started wearing the hijab.

While there were participants who recognized the negative impact of these experiences, there were others who not only saw it as a positive experience but also enjoyed the opportunity to answer questions that came from non-Muslims. Amira states:

> Honestly, actually, I really like talking to them about Islam. I'm not saying I'm an expert on Islam. But I think that when it comes to the hijab, yeah, I do have expertise in that area . . . I remember one time, I was at a grocery store with my mom . . . and a woman came by. She was actually talking on her cell phone, but she pulled her cell phone away from her ear and she was like, "You know, you're really pretty. Why are you wearing that around your head?" . . . I was like, "I'm wearing this because I'm trying to be closer to God and modesty is a requirement for Muslims and this is my way of practicing that." And she was very shocked. She was like, "Wow." She's like, "I never thought of it that way. I didn't know that's how it was." So I felt happy to clear that misconception she may have had.

While Amira recounted an experience in which she was questioned about her hijab by a stranger in a public setting, she recalled this moment in a positive way. She appreciated that she was given the opportunity to shed some light on the topic of the hijab and have an impact on at least one individual who could walk away having learned something about Muslims and Islam as a whole. Amira was particularly passionate about what the hijab meant to her, and so she was happy to have conversations about this topic with any non-Muslims who were interested.

In addition to being placed in situations in which they have to speak for the wider Muslim community, the Muslim women in this study expressed instances of being the only visibly Muslim woman to occupy certain spaces. They were very aware that their hijab made their religious identity visible, leading to experiences of being categorized as the token Muslim in the room. Hibah explains:

> I had to learn how to navigate that, this obsession with my identity. It was really icky. I felt when I would get into a conference, for example, and talking to other scholars that are not from my university, I questioned are they wanting to talk to me because they're interested in my work, or are they wanting to talk to me because, "Oh, wow. Look at that Muslim girl. She's the only hijabi here at this conference." It was really, again, icky is the only word that I can think of. You're just a token. You really just feel like a token.

Hibah describes being the only Muslim woman and hijabi in certain academic settings and how that colored all of her interactions. Even in instances where no one made a specific comment about her identity, she constantly felt the tokenization taking place, especially when she knew that there was no one else in the room who looked like her. Similarly to Aisha, Hibah noticed this shift take place when she started wearing the hijab. She recognized that she did not feel this same level of tokenization prior to wearing the hijab.

It is important to recognize that these moments of tokenization—while they can be perceived as positive or negative depending on the individual—do carry a certain amount of weight. Saba explains how these instances weigh on her:

> I mean, it was the same—this feeling of heartbreaking, this feeling of why me? Why do I have to deal with this? Why do all these other kids get to just sit here and not really feel anything? Whereas with the rest of us, with me, I have all this . . . And I have this feeling of responsibility that I need to speak up and say something. It's just like, why is that responsibility on me? It shouldn't be on me but at the same time, it's like what do I do? Because I should say something. It would just take over and then I couldn't focus on the lecture and then I would have to get my notes from someone else.

Saba speaks of being the only visibly Muslim woman in her class and when there was information being taught about Islam that was not entirely accurate, she experienced an internal debate of whether or not to speak on the subject. She recognizes that her peers have the privilege of simply sitting in class while she has to debate whether or not she should take the weight of the entire Muslim community on her shoulders in a given class, so much so that she was unable to focus on the content of the professor's lecture.

Safety concerns.

Because the hijab serves as an immediate identifier of one's religious identity, there is a concern that hijabi Muslim women would be the easiest targets for anti-Muslim discrimination. There were 5 participants who cited that their parents expressed concerns about them wearing the hijab and how that might negatively impact their safety. For some, it even influenced their decision to not wear it. Basma states:

> The reason why I ended up taking [the hijab] off, sadly, this was February 2015 . . . There was a [Muslim] couple and her sister, and it was in North Carolina, and they were shot and killed by their neighbor. Something about the story just really resonated with my parents and our family. It's like, they're just students and they had a really bright future ahead of them. So young and they were newly-weds. It was after that point that my dad was just like, he was constantly texting and calling in and telling my sister to take it off . . . I had taken it off after that point. But there was a sense of relief. And at that point, around 2014 was also when ISIS had started. Every time ISIS did something, my dad would call me and be like, "Take it off, stop wearing it or don't go out today."

Basma recalls specific events that heightened her parents' concerns for her safety. Rhetoric around a terrorist group brought about fear from her father, and the murder of three young Muslims only served to confirm that fear—especially being that two of those victims were Muslim women and both wore the hijab. Basma explains that she had started wearing the hijab at a later point in life, and that she had already been considering taking it off. These events and her father's fear for her safety served to finalize her decision.

Saba recounts similar fears from her parents when she began having conversations about wanting to start wearing the hijab.

> I think my sister and my dad were okay with it. It was more my mom. She was a little bit... She wasn't against it but there was a lot of hesitancy. The political climate was not good when I was a sophomore. She just was not... She was just really scared for my safety. This was around the time when there were a lot of news reports about hijabis getting beaten and harassed in public. She really just feared for my safety even though we lived in San Francisco.

While Saba did ultimately decide to wear the hijab and continues to wear it, there were many conversations that took place that centered around safety. Despite living in San Francisco, which she perceived as liberal and progressive, her mother still had fears based on reports of other hijabi Muslim women being attacked in public. There are many considerations that Muslim women have to make when it comes to the hijab and the visibility that it brings, which highlights the fact that the journey to wearing the hijab or not wearing it is a personal one with many factors that come into play.

The personal meaning of the hijab.

The hijab has become a public political tool to fuel attacks on Islam, when in actuality it is a private religious matter for Muslim women (Coene and Longman 2008; Killian 2003; Mirza 2013). For Muslim women who decide to wear the hijab, their reasonings and meanings they assign to the hijab are very individual. Of the participants in this study, 8 of them emphasized that there needs to be separation of religion and culture in that the hijab's religious meaning has often been complicated by the cultural expectations of wearing it. There were 3 women who cited wearing it for socio-political

purposes, making a conscious decision to make their Muslim identity public and known. There were 4 who specifically cited doing it for God and to enhance their relationship with God. There were 5 participants who emphasized that the hijab was a personal choice to make in regards to how they practiced and interpreted their faith.

Hibah made the choice to start wearing the hijab after completing her undergraduate degree and just before starting graduate school. She explains her reasoning:

> [Wearing the hijab] wasn't something I always wanted to do. In undergrad, I found my own Muslim identity that felt like my own. It didn't come from my parents. It came from really, I think, a post-9/11—something that only us as post-9/11 youth could understand. How do we reclaim our Muslimness in a way that empowers us? For me, that's what undergrad did for me. The hijab symbolized, for me, yeah my faith, but also I want to own this identity that I was trying to hide in a way. It was almost when you're not a hijabi, it's like you come out as Muslim. You're like at what point will I reveal to my peers and my friends that I'm this hidden Muslim? Maybe my Muslimness as a non-hijabi was obvious, but I think in many ways it's not. We're racially ambiguous.

Hibah's decision, while it did stem from her feelings about her faith, ultimately came from making a very politically informed choice to make her Muslim identity known and highly visible. She recognizes how the events of 9/11 came with negative stereotypes of being Muslim, and that she wanted to claim her identity in the face of these negative stereotypes. She wanted to ensure that she did not have to decide to "come out" as Muslim, but that her Muslim identity would immediately be known upon meeting her. This was, to her, an act of resistance to the rampant Islamophobia in the U.S. by showcasing her identity as both Muslim and American.

Aisha highlights that her relationship with the hijab is not always a positive one, but that it ultimately has a meaning that lies within her relationship to God:

> My relationship with hijab has kind of been… Yeah, sometimes it's annoying, and sometimes there's a lot of cultural things that come with it. I go back and forth. It's just a piece of cloth on my head, but I do it for God, I don't do it for a person, I don't do it for any human being, it's purely God.

Aisha explains that the influences of culture—this being both her family's culture as well as the Western culture of living in the U.S.—can make her relationship with the hijab difficult, in that it requires her to occupy spaces differently because of this identity marker. It also requires her to do additional mental work to disentangle these cultural definitions of the hijab from her own. In these moments, she reduces the hijab in a physical way by remembering that it is only a piece of cloth, and centers its symbolic relationship to her connection with God and not individual people or their cultural perceptions.

In a similar way to Aisha, Mina explains that her view of the hijab is not always positive, but that it maintains a central role in her identity:

> I ultimately chose that I would like to [wear the hijab] because it makes me feel good when I wear it. But hey, I'm not going to lie, there's days when I don't want to. They just exist. I would say there's a lot of days when I don't want to, but then I also feel good when I am wearing it. It makes me feel… I don't think the word

> modesty would go with it, because honestly I think whether you wear it or not, you can show that modesty in yourself. I don't think it would be religious, because whether you wear it or not, you can be religious. It's just… I guess it's become a part of me. It makes me feel good. It makes me feel accomplished for some reason. It makes me feel stronger and more brave when I wear it.

Mina separates the hijab from the meanings that are usually attributed to it—such as being religious and being more modest—and regards it in a much more personal and individualized way. Even though there are days in which she does not enjoy wearing it, the hijab is a part of her identity and brings with it feelings of accomplishment, strength, and courage. Mina's statement highlights how personal the hijab can be. While it has been regarded as a public symbol, with a number of meanings attributed to it by others, each Muslim woman that wears it has ascribed her own deeply personal meanings to it as well.

Experiences as a Non-Hijabi

The Muslim American women in this sample who experiences not wearing the hijab shared encounters with various ways in which their Muslim identity was erased and their level of faith diminished. In these experiences, they also recognized the privilege that came with the erasure of their religious identity, as being invisible meant not having as many safety concerns when it came to anti-Muslim discrimination.

Invisible identity.

While hijabis experienced varying degrees of tokenization, non-hijabis shared a sense of having an invisible identity. A total of 15 participants who experienced not wearing the hijab expressed this sense of having an invisible identity because they did not wear the hijab. There were some who experienced this "invisibility" in a negative way, and others who regarded it as positive.

Sonia recounts that people place her in racial/ethnic categories since the lack of hijab does not signify her religious identity:

> With non-Muslims, it's funny because a lot of the times people don't off the bat think I'm Muslim . . . People think I'm Mexican or Hispanic or just something else entirely . . . It does bother me because I feel like I am really proud of my identity. I'm very proud to be Afghan, I'm very proud to be Muslim and it does bother me a little bit . . . I wish more people off the bat would know [my Muslim identity].

Sonia explains that she is proud of both her religious and ethnic identity, but because of the lack of a hijab, people often place her into different racial and ethnic categories without considering her religious identity. She later references the color of her skin, explaining that her lighter complexion influences how people categorize her. She recognizes that this is a privilege, since she is less likely to experience religious discrimination or colorism, but that she would prefer to be more immediately associated with her religious and ethnic identities.

As Sonia describes, the lack of hijab leads individuals to try and place non-hijabis into other categories that are informed by racial features. Faiza describes experiencing this with other Muslims as well:

> I remember when I got [to my university], [name redacted] was like, "Oh, you're Muslim?" I was like, "Yeah." She's like, "Oh you don't look Muslim." I

> remember thinking it was similar to people saying, "Oh you don't talk Black." And me having to say, "What do you mean I don't talk Black?" So when she told me I don't look Muslim, I was like, "Yeah. I mean, visibly, I'm not. Visibly I'm not Muslim, but you don't go around telling people you don't look Muslim." I think before she even said that most of [the other Muslim women students] probably thought I was a convert and I feel like a lot of Muslims, especially Arab Muslims, don't really… They forget I think that other people can be Muslims. And so I've felt like they probably don't even take Black Muslims seriously, like [Arab] Muslims are the best Muslims. And so when I don't wear the hijab, it's like they just assume it's because I'm a Black Muslim anyway.

Faiza acknowledges that not only does her lack of a hijab influence how other Muslims perceive her and make assumptions about her religious identity, but that race plays a role as well. Faiza attended an institution where the Muslim population were largely of Arab backgrounds, and so she had experiences in which she felt like her Muslim identity was discredited not only by the fact that she was Black but because she did not wear the hijab as well. Not wearing the hijab rendered her religious identity invisible, while her racial identity was at the forefront and used to explain her religious practices.

Other participants enjoyed the feeling of not being seen as Muslim right away, enjoying the sense of "invisibility" with regards to their religious identity. Basma states:

> It was liberating once I stopped wearing it, in the sense that I just felt invisible again. It was really nice, as far as that sounds like, just to know how people would stare at me and I just really don't like that kind of attention. I just felt like not wearing it came with a sense of relief and it was easier. Because, I didn't have those religious convictions to keep it on. I was also struggling to being reduced to just that part of my identity. In some circumstances, it was really nice to feel like I was representing who I am and representing my community. Then it elicited more questions about being Arab American and growing up Muslim American in this country and stuff. It was nice to be able to have those conversations and to be representative. But at the same time, it was exhausting. It felt like it was not that big a part of who I am, and yet it was always just like a giant red flag all the time.

Basma recognized the shift that took place from not wearing the hijab, to wearing it, to not wearing it again. She saw the heightened attention that came with wearing the hijab, and the questions that it elicited since individuals could easily identify her as Muslim, and with that came conversations about her ethnic identity as well. She felt liberated to no longer be stared at and felt free of the exhaustion that came with constantly representing the entire Muslim community. Basma also points out that she was reduced down to her religious identity, despite not having strong religious convictions about wearing the hijab. She explains that religion and the hijab were such a small piece of who she was, and yet it was the only thing that people could see when looking at her.

Aliya also recognized the benefit that came with not having the hijab as an immediate identifier, especially when it came to her racial identity as well:

> There's times, if I'm going to prayers or if I'm going to an event or whatever, I'll leave the house in full-blown African garb with a hijab on my head. And whoever sees me sees me, and I don't care. But there is also that part of me that always has the back-of-my-mind thought is, like I mentioned, it makes me sad that I even

> have that thought—part of me is like, "It's nice that [my Muslim identity] is not easily seen," just because, for the most part, I've been lucky throughout my life, even with the stuff that is easily seen like my race and whatnot to not have too many bad experiences . . . I already have so many targets on my back—being Black, being a woman—so it's nice not to have another one.

Aliya describes the awareness she has, even when she does wear the hijab on special occasions, and articulates that it would add another layer to the way people identify her. She notes that her identity as a Black woman is already visible as a "target," and that despite this, she has not had too many negative experiences; however, adding the hijab as a visible identity could increase the risk for these negative encounters. She describes a sense of relief about not having another clearly visible marginalized identity.

Being perceived as less religious.

Alongside having a religious identity that is rendered invisible, non-hijabis also experience perceptions of not being "religious enough" once their religious identity is known. There were 9 participants who referenced moments in which they were made to feel as though they were not religious enough in instances where they did not wear the hijab.

Khadija describes feeling this perception of being "not religious enough" from both her Muslim and her non-Muslim peers:

> I feel like people would consider me less religious because I'm not wearing the "hijab." Because my college friends are still my friends, and because I had friends who did wear the hijab and there was me who didn't, my friends would be like saying things and say, "Oh, I forget you're even Muslim." It's like, because what? I still try to embody the values, but just because I don't look like it or I don't show it they would think I'm less devoted to the religion, Muslims and non-Muslims would.

Similar to the ways in which many non-hijabis expressed their Muslim identity being invisible, Khadija receives comments from friends who "forgot" she was Muslim, despite her dedication to the core values of Islam. She highlights that she had Muslim friends who did wear the hijab, and so she drew the comparison that others might perceive her hijabi friends as more religious and her less so because she does not choose to embody her faith through the hijab.

Yara also discusses this fear of judgement, due to her lack of hijab as well as the way she chooses to dress:

> It's very interesting because there's times I pass by hijabis and I want to say, "Salam," but then I'm like okay I don't want to be judged because I'm wearing shorts or something, or showing my arms and I'm just like I really don't want to be judged. I have friends who are hijabis who have introduced me to other Muslims, so I've made my connections through those friends but… there's events or things happening that I didn't know about, that no one's told me until I asked around, because I guess no one thought to approach me because I wasn't obviously Muslim, and I don't know, because I also dress in a way that isn't modest they didn't think I would want to know? I don't know.

Yara experiences the sense of invisibility that was discussed earlier, but this invisibility is heightened by the fact that she does not choose to dress modestly. She fears being judged

already because she does not wear the hijab, and this judgement may be heightened because of how she chooses to dress. When she has connected with other Muslims on campus through hijabi friends, she feels that they do not always inform her of events taking place that are catered towards Muslim students. She does not know if this is because her Muslim identity is not visible, or if it is because they assume she is not interested due to the way she dresses and thus her perceived lack of religiosity. It is also important to note that Yara identifies as Black, and so it may be possible that she experienced similar perceptions to those denoted by Faiza, in which she felt that non-Black Muslims did not take her religious identity as seriously because she was Black.

Ritha, who wore the hijab most of her life but stopped wearing it late into adulthood, feels a clear shift in how people perceive not only her religious devotion, but her religious knowledge:

> I definitely don't think I hold as much credit to what I say, as much as I did [when I wore the hijab]. Before, I used to do a lot of lectures and talks on Muslim women's experiences, and what they have the rights to do. I said the same things that I say now, except I had a headscarf. And that makes me more credible to the Muslim community. And now, I almost feel like that it's kind of like, "Well you don't know what you're talking about." Because I've kind of lost that symbol of being part of the group. And so I think you're kind of caught in the middle where you take off the scarf, oh you've finally assimilated here. And then in your own community, you're not as accepted. Because of that, everything you say or practice or lecture on is thrown out.

Ritha describes her loss of credibility both in the eyes of Muslims and non-Muslims. She explains that non-Muslims view her as having "assimilated," and thus not being as tied to her religious practices. She later critiques this, emphasizing that her decision to stop wearing the hijab has nothing to do with assimilation or the influence of American culture, but that it was a personal decision based on the growth of her religious knowledge. In the same sense, other Muslims discredit her religious knowledge since she does not wear the scarf, and some Muslims that she knew before taking off the scarf no longer accept her as part of the community. Even though she still lectures on the same topics, she feels the hijab gave her a sense of credibility in the eyes of both Muslims and non-Muslims.

Recognition of safety.

As mentioned earlier, a number of Muslim women experienced concerns from their family regarding safety when it came to wearing the hijab. In addition, they dealt with heightened visibility and the micro-aggressions that came with that visibility. Many of the non-hijabis, while describing their experiences of having an invisible religious identity, recognized the issues that hijabis must face and took the time to express their respect for that decision. Neya states:

> I mean, I do feel bad that I can just go out in the world and nobody really makes any assumptions about my religiosity, whereas hijabis have to go through a lot more I feel… like with safety, because you don't know how people will react and with people just making so many assumptions about them and who they are, without them getting a chance to explore themselves.

Neya explains that she enjoys having the freedom to occupy spaces and behave in any way she chooses since people around her are not making assumptions about her religious identity. She also recognizes that Muslim women who wear the hijab do not have that same option, as people make assumptions about how they should operate since they are perceived as "religious." Neya also notes that there are safety concerns that come with wearing the hijab that she does not have to consider.

Abir also recognizes the political climate that exists and what hijabi Muslim women have to face: "Whoever does wear [the hijab], I give them a lot of respect especially in this day and age. People who do wear it, they get a lot of shit for it so I give them props." While Abir has never worn the hijab, she respects Muslim women who do, aware of the weight that comes with having one's religious identity highly visible in a political climate that is often contentious towards Muslims.

Basma, who grew up not wearing the hijab, wore it for a brief time, and then decided not to wear it, felt a sense of guilt for not wearing it. She states, "Sometimes I feel like I'm doing a disservice to my Muslim sisters by not wearing the hijab because people now don't know I'm Muslim until I tell them." Basma has a clear picture of what comes with wearing the hijab, since she used to wear it. She discusses the responsibility that comes with it, recognizing its importance but also how exhausting it was. She sometimes feels that by choosing to relieve herself of that responsibility by taking off the hijab, she is doing a disservice to all Muslim women by not continuing to represent the community and ward off any disinformation.

The Non-Binary Hijab Space

The hijab can be treated as both a monolith, in painting all Muslim women's experiences as one, as well as a binary, that Muslim women either wear it or do not wear it. What was apparent in conversations with the Muslim women in this sample is that there is a space that exists between wearing it and not wearing it. Muslim women can go back and forth between not wearing it and experience either end of the spectrum, and they can also wear and/or not wear it depending on any given social setting. It is important to acknowledge the space in-between the binary to further our understanding of the hijab.

Transition of hijabis and non-hijabis.

A common theme that arose when the participants discussed how they felt non-Muslims perceived them was that non-Muslim peers spoke in a more "respectful" manner. Participants who wore the hijab for most of their lives often wondered if their peers were more careful about the type of jokes they made around them, but since they had nothing to compare it to, they could not be sure if it was just a general politeness that was present when meeting people or if it was specifically attributed to their hijab.

Women who had experienced being both a hijabi and a non-hijabi, however, absolutely took note of the difference and recognized that this reservedness came from non-Muslims perceiving them as being more religious because they were hijabis and not one who could engage in inappropriate jokes. Hibah commented:

> [My peers] wouldn't curse. I would see how they would interact with my other friends in the program, other women of color. They would talk in a certain way to them, and then to me just be more respectful kind of. That was weird, too. Again, assuming that I'm a certain way. It wasn't until when we would have seminars

> together and I sometimes curse. I'm a person. I'm a not a nun or something. Yeah, you get treated like a nun in a very weird way . . . I think with people being careful what they say around you, in a way I feel like I have to fight that, because I feel like I didn't have the freedom to say what I wanted. If they're walking on eggshells around me, maybe I should question what I'm going to say.

Hibah, who had started wearing the hijab after undergraduate, saw a shift in the way people interacted with her and how they were surprised if they heard her curse in a classroom setting. Hibah had donned the hijab in part to reclaim her Muslim identity and was quickly confronted with non-Muslims who had put her in a religiously conservative box based solely on her hijab. In addition to addressing the questions that people may pose about Islam as a whole, she felt she had to subvert peoples' assumptions even in the way she joked or the way she spoke so that she could make her way out of the religious mold they had created for her.

Asia, who had worn the hijab throughout most of her undergraduate career, but stopped wearing it in her last year, also saw this shift specifically in her immediate friend group:

> When I took it off, I did notice my non-Muslim friends start to get comfortable around me, talk more comfortably about sex or things that you don't talk about in front of a religious girl. People just saw the hijab . . . again, that was the thing, it's like when you wear the hijab, people automatically assume you're religious . . . So they would be more careful about what they say in front of me and all of that. After [I stopped wearing the hijab], I started to see people be more comfortable to joke and talk about things they would have thought were inappropriate before.

Asia saw her non-Muslim friends get more comfortable around her once she stopped wearing the hijab. She also noted later that many of her non-Muslim friends knew her enough to know that she was not someone who considered herself extremely religious, and yet there still seemed to be a hesitation that went away once she stopped wearing the hijab. She recognizes that even for non-Muslims who were her close friends and knew her level of religiosity, they still saw the hijab and immediately related it to someone who was religious and thus were careful of the kind of jokes they made around her.

These types of perception shifts are difficult to identify for women who wore the hijab or did not wear the hijab for most of their lives, but for women who go through this transition, they are able to more visibly acknowledge and identify the way individuals' interactions with them are shaped by the presence or lack thereof of a hijab.

Social hijabis.

For the participants who did not currently wear the hijab, all of them still had occasions—some more than others—where they did wear the hijab. For the most part, it was not something that they took off once and never put on again. The instances in which they did put the hijab back on varied but usually hinged on the context of a social situation. For example, some Muslim women would still attend the mosque, sometimes on their own or sometimes accompanying their mother. Out of respect for the expectations set forth at the mosque, they would wear it. Some would keep a scarf with them so that they could put it on if they went into the prayer room that their campus may have provided.

Others would wear the hijab if they attended events where they knew the majority of the women present would be wearing it. Iman, who specifically called herself a "social hijabi," noted that she did not want to be the only Muslim woman at a gathering without the hijab so she would wear it in these settings. Even though Iman had deep criticisms for the hijab, stating that she had concerns of it being a patriarchal tool for control, she still decided to don it at these gatherings due to the social expectations that were set forth.

There were also women on the other end of that scenario who wore the hijab most of the time when they were out in public but would take it off on occasion—such as going to a beach or a lake with friends, going hiking, or attending a party where family members would expect them not to wear it. While the analyses above are presented and separated by themes of being a hijabi and a non-hijabi, it is important to look beyond this binary and understand that the hijab component of a Muslim woman's identity fluctuates throughout her life and across social settings.

Conclusion

This chapter demonstrates the complexity and personal nature of the hijab. The homogenization of Muslims occurs through racialization (Garner and Selod 2015; Karaman and Christian 2020; Selod 2015), and particularly the gendered racialization of Muslim women (Karaman and Christian 2020; Selod 2018). Attributing a Muslim woman's identity solely to her hijab perpetuates the stereotype of the submissive Muslim woman and ignores her ability to decide how to express and practice her faith (Paz and Kook 2020). Ignoring the heterogeneity of Muslim women's identities and bodies limits our understanding of Muslim women's experiences and ignores the agency they demonstrate in their day-to-day lives. The findings in this chapter highlight the ways in which wearing a hijab or not wearing a hijab heavily influences Muslim women's experiences, and thus plays a role in how they conceptualize their identities in relation to the hijab and their choice to either wear it or not wear it. For participants who chose to wear the hijab most of the time, they attributed a number of meanings to it, including a stronger relationship to God, a strong socio-political stance, and an act of courage and empowerment. They did not qualify it as a sole determinant of one's faith or a simple act of modesty, because they recognized that faith and modesty can be expressed in a number of ways.

Participants who chose not to wear the hijab most of the time held these same sentiments, recognizing that they could express their faith and notions of modesty in other ways. Despite the religious identity erasure they encountered, they held onto and demonstrated their faith in a way that worked best for them. They also recognized the struggles that came with wearing the hijab and held a sense of compassion and respect for women who did choose to wear it.

Both women who wore the hijab and did not wear the hijab at various points in their lives shared the perspective of the hijab as a private religious matter. They recognized that it often carried with it complicated familial and cultural values and that its religious definition had to come from the individual woman who either chose to wear it or not. While previous work acknowledges the varied experiences of women who wear the hijab and women who do not, a central contribution of this dissertation is the recognition that the hijab is not a binary experience for Muslim women: that is, either they wear it or they do not. Rather, I contribute to existing theories and understandings of

the hijab as a component of gendered racialization by establishing the hijab as a continuum of experiences, and not the inflexible binary of either hijabi or non-hijabi.

In the following chapter, I will explore the familial expectations that Muslim women experience and how these shape their experiences and religious identity development. In the same way that was outlined with the hijab, this next chapter will elaborate on how familial expectations are laced with cultural values that are convoluted with religious beliefs and how participants had to do the work to extrapolate these concepts from one another.

CHAPTER 4

THE ROLE OF FAMILIAL EXPERIENCES

THE ROLE OF FAMILIAL EXPERIENCES

Familial values and practices play a role in shaping the experiences of Muslim American women; however, in the same way that the experiential relationship with the hijab is complex, familial dynamics and their impact vary. The concept of familism is one that has been observed as prevalent among Latinx communities and is defined as having an individual's values and behavior determined by relatives, and prioritizing the needs of the family over an individual (Desmond and López Turley 2009). Familism can manifest in values and ideologies such as the concept of family loyalty (Desmond and López Turley 2009; Sabogal et al. 1987). It can also impact decision-making, in which individuals take actions based on these familial values and ideologies and may make major life decisions that are informed by their family ties (Desmond and López Turley 2009; Sabogal et al. 1987).

This dissertation demonstrates how familism occurs differently for Muslim American women, as it is shaped by the gendered expectations placed on Muslim women to be the reputation holders for their families within the Muslim community (Afshar 1989; Ahmad and Sardar 2012; Bibi 2020). This reputation maintenance not only impacts the experiences of Muslim women individually, but can impact younger Muslim women in their families. In this chapter, Muslim women demonstrate the importance of ascribing to familial values—even if doing so performatively—in order to ensure that they can pave the way for other Muslim women in their families to pursue higher education (Ahmad 2001; Oplatka and Lapidot 2012). Thus, Muslim women's individual identity exists alongside what their family expects of them as it relates to reputation, as well as the larger society around them and its Islamophobic sentiment. This results in what I call a triple consciousness for Muslim women.

Du Bois's concept of double consciousness describes the nature of a Black identity in the U.S. as each individual identity must exist alongside the meanings that have been ascribed to the Black identity by the oppressor (Du Bois 1994). It has been found that Muslim women must also operate within this double consciousness, as they must negotiate their own identity alongside notions of respectability that have been created by their family (Bibi 2020). The findings in this chapter demonstrate that there are two dominant majorities that Muslim women must consider alongside their own identity—their family and the larger U.S. society. In this chapter, participants enacted a careful and strategic maintenance of their cultural and religious ties in order attain what they desired while simultaneously appeasing their families and creating opportunities for other Muslim women around them. At the same time, they were careful to explain that the familial expectations around them are due to cultural and familial dynamics that are independent of religion, demonstrating an acute awareness of the stereotypical notions that exist regarding Islam as an oppressive religion towards women. Thus, I contribute to our understanding of identity by demonstrating that Muslim American women must operate with a triple consciousness, which encompasses their individual identity alongside familial expectations and notions of reputation, as well as Islamophobic rhetoric within the U.S.

As a result of operating within this triple consciousness, this chapter demonstrates how Muslim American work towards developing their own cultural values. The findings

in this chapter demonstrate how Muslim women's families were concerned with their status within the Muslim community. This expands our existing understandings of cultural capital theory as one that goes beyond class-based behaviors (Bourdieu 1984, 1986; Bourdieu and Passeron 1977) and contributes to what we know about cultural values within marginalized groups (Carter 2003), as well as emergent youth cultures (Warikoo 2011). This chapter exemplifies how Muslim American women have to strategically navigate the cultural expectations of their family as it relates to status within the Muslim community, while simultaneously seeking to understand their own identity and ascribe their own values and meanings to culture.

The Muslim American women in this study had clear understandings of how their family perceived their identity as Muslim women and their educational pursuits. Women also had their own values and goals but varied in the degree to which those values aligned with those of their family, sometimes by situation. This chapter will explore the patriarchal expectations that some Muslim women faced and the role these expectations played in their own identity development; the concept of reputation and how that lead to specific behavioral expectations from the family; the familial values placed on marriage compared to education; the concept of paving the way for other Muslim women; and the distinction between family, religion and culture and how Muslim women actively navigate all three.

This chapter will also explore the ways in which Muslim women strategize within the expectations of their family to attain their goals. The Muslim American women in this study demonstrated agency in how they navigate these familial expectations. Where their familial expectations contradicted with one another—i.e. traditional gendered and reputation management juxtaposed with expectations of high academic achievement—Muslim women found creative ways to strategize and continuously re-strategize to make these expectations work to their benefit.

Patriarchal Expectations

A total of 20 out of 25 Muslim American women participants noted specific instances in which they experienced gendered expectations, which were made apparent in how the actions of their brothers or other relatives who were men were treated by their family. There was a consistent theme of having less leeway to make certain decisions as compared to the men in their family.

Asia states:

> [My parents] were very supportive of my brother going to school, and he even moved to another state for pharmacy school and they were absolutely supportive of the idea. I mean, obviously my mom, again, she's always going to be anxious, saying "You're in a place by yourself. Don't think you could go start dating American girls now," all that stuff, but they still let him do it, because at the end of the day, he's going to be the one that's going to support his family, so they believe, "Okay, we want him to go to school, be successful, make money and support his family." But with me, it's like, "Well, she doesn't need to do that anyway. Somebody's going to marry her and take care of her." And so, very different. With me, I had to literally argue, fight with them, beg whatever worked at the moment. With my brother, it was more of like, "Well, why don't you look

> for schools here?" He was like, "Well, I already got accepted there." It's like, "Sure, but..." He didn't need to argue with them or beg.

Asia discusses how her brother was able to easily move to another state for his education, without too much pushback from their parents. In comparison, she had to constantly argue with them even though she lived at home while attending college. While she had to convince her parents to actually allow her to go to college and then had to negotiate with them about coming home at a certain time, her brother was able to leave to another state entirely because there was more value placed on his educational and financial attainment.

Mina discusses a similar experience:

> One big limitation is that my brother was able to go to school. He was able to leave home to go to school to get his degree. He went to Los Angeles to do that. It is going back to the very first topic we were talking about, not being able to [live outside the home]. That's why I had to go for plan B. That's where that limitation comes. I think that's seen a lot in our culture, where the guy is open to do whatever they want because if they do go out and do whatever they want, they're going to, I guess, come home the same person. But if the girl unfortunately goes out and does the same exact thing, but if she comes home, it's probably not going to be seen the same way.

Mina notes that she had to alter her career goals and educational trajectory because she was unable to attend a school in a different city, whereas her brother was able to. Mina discusses pursuing a "plan B" because the university in the city where her parents lived did not offer the post-graduate program that would lead her towards her career goals in neuroscience, and so she had to defer to what was available at her local university. The program that she ultimately chose was not related to the field of neuroscience, and so she recognizes that she had to pursue this "plan B" because she could not attend a university in a different city like her brother did. She also recognizes that the ways in which men are perceived when they leave home and come back are different to the ways in which women are perceived if they do the same. I will discuss this in a further section, but much of this centers around gendered notions of reputation and behavioral expectations.

Sonia does not have any brothers, but she is also aware of how these behavioral expectations differ with the relatives in her family who are men:

> There's a big, there's a stark difference for sure. I think, there's only one guy cousin that I'm particularly close to. And so it's funny because he would tell me certain things that my aunts or my uncles would say to him, so he would say like, "Oh yeah, they're always joking about women with me and how I could be a little player," and I'm like, "What? What are you talking about?" For us it's like, "Oh my God, no mention of guys. No mention of this knowledge, or any of that." And then also he had told me one of my uncles had actually taken him out for a drink and it's like, "A drink? What? That's not even brought up to us." It's definitely different. I feel like it's more of, I feel like it's more of a lax tone with the guys in the family, for sure. Just because for some reason, there's this stigma with us of just like, "Oh, you need to be pure inside and out if you're a woman and you need to be never straying from that certain type of path."

Sonia acknowledges that men's behavior is not as tightly monitored and the expectations are much more relaxed, while women must be perceived as "pure" and so these casual

conversations about dating and drinking could not occur in the same way; instead, these behaviors have to be hidden. Sonia notes later on that this ideal image of a woman is impossible to fit into and that it leads to many internal debates of what may be perceived as "shortcomings" that men in her family do not have to consider.

Noor explains a similar experience with her brother, who had a much easier time attaining this acceptable image that she was not only unable to attain, but did not want to:

> Inherently, [my parents] trusted [my brother] more. They treated him better. And because he was a man in Islam, they criticized him less for what he wore, how he was perceived, whether or not he could cook or clean. He was just going to be the man. I was criticized all the time for being sloppy, for not knowing how to cook, just being overall clumsy. I was overweight as a kid too, so my appearance was heavily criticized, whereas my brother was just lanky, skinny, tall, dark, eventually handsome. I'm sure he had his own rough patch that I wasn't cognizant of, or aware of, but he morphed more naturally into this role of prodigal son. He had a more emotionally free relationship with my parents in that sense. Whereas, me and my sisters were always on our guard. We always knew that we'd have to hold our own ground, and so, I think me and my sisters were tougher sooner.

Noor notes that it was easier for her brother to become the child his parents wanted him to be, in part, because the expectations that were placed on him were not nearly as constricting as the expectations placed on her and her sisters. She recognizes that this also affected the type of relationships they had with their parents, in which they had to prepare to be defensive of their behaviors, while her brother was able to maintain a much more emotional connection with his parents, free of the behavioral expectations. In addition, because his behavior was less heavily criticized, he was more easily able to attain the ideal image of a son in their eyes, whereas she does not feel that she could have become the ideal daughter—even if she had tried to do so.

These gendered expectations continue to play a role in Muslim women's lives as they begin considering building their own families. Zahra states:

> Nobody says it really, nobody openly says it, but it's already a given in everybody's mind is I'm going to have to find a job wherever the guy [I'm going to marry] lives, right? And to me, I already hate that aspect of it, because to me, I'm like, "Well, I already worked so hard to build my connections here." . . . But the guy lives in another city, I'm going to have to move there, try to apply to jobs there. I'm not entirely giving up my career, but I am having to adjust. And I'm going to have to work harder to find something closer to where the man is. And to me, I'm just like, "That sucks. That's frustrating." Why isn't it that the guy finds a job where the girl is? There's very rare cases of that.

Zahra was currently pursuing a master's degree, while engaged to a man who lived in another city. She discusses that she had made valuable networking connections where she lives and that her pathway to a career was very clear due to these connections. While she will not have to give up her career entirely, it will be much more challenging since she will not have the same network that she currently has.

Zahra goes on to discuss the longer-term future:

> I think a lot long-term in the future. But children, right? It's not like the guy is going to give up his job and take time off to raise a kid, right? It's typically the

> woman. And for me, it's not a bad thing. But I want to work. If I worked so hard to get my degree, I don't want to just sit at home and be a mom. It's not a bad thing to be a mom, and it's a blessing. But I don't want to be a stay-at-home mom. But I also don't want somebody else to take care of my child. You know what I mean? . . . I do feel like it's going to affect my career a lot. But also, I know that I've worked really hard, and I will stand up for myself in that sense. No, I've put way too much hard work to just sit at home.

Zahra recognizes that beyond simply having to move to another city when she gets married, there is an expectation in her family that the woman is responsible for child-rearing. She herself respects the role of mothers but would prefer having the option to work while her husband contributes to the childcare responsibilities. Zahra paused many times while discussing this, recognizing that she would have to face a number of obstacles as she built both a career and a family. However, she ultimately concludes that she has put work into building her career and will not stop even if she does not have a clear path lined up yet. It is often difficult to envision how to go about addressing these childcare concerns, if no one else in the family has demonstrated an alternative path.

Hibah discusses having to be the first in her family to change the mindset around shared childcare responsibilities:

> Expectations of who's going to watch the baby. Again, child rearing, it's expected. It's assumed that I'm going to take care of the baby . . . Me and my husband are going to change what that looks like for a lot of our relatives who believe it was always the husband is working and the mom is home taking care of the baby. That's not going to be our lifestyle. It's going to be both of us. That's going to be interesting of how our families perceive that. Obviously, they're so excited [about my career] and everything, but I definitely feel those questions of, “But how? He's at work. Who's going to watch the baby?” It's like, oh, well, we'll work our schedules. They can't even fathom that option.

Hibah and her husband had recently had a child, but because they were both working from home due to the COVID-19 pandemic, they have not had to have discussions about schedules and who can be home with the child. She recognizes that there are underlying questions that her family already has about how they will navigate childcare once they do go back to working in person. Although her family is extremely supportive of her career, they simply do not have an example in their family of a home in which child-rearing does not fall entirely on the woman.

As detailed above, these gendered expectations were limiting, but some women also noted how they not only found benefits in these unbalanced roles, but that gender also placed specific limitations on the men in their families.

For example, Basma states:

> I have a brother who just finished law school, but in [another city]. I've always thought that my parents aren't the double standard type of parents. But when it came to him wanting to go away for law school, and he wasn't married, that's not even relevant. But he was able to [move out] and go to law school. Yeah, it's just so different for girls, you just have to... My personal ideology is like, I just work within the boundary. I say my brother ended up in [another city], but he advocated for himself, he really had to push back and it's not easy for boys either. My dad

> has a store, he has his own business, my brother was basically raised there and always spent all his time there. For him, as much as I wanted for him to go to the same law school as I did, he was always going to be connected to the store and my dad's business. I knew and he knew, he needed that physical separation for him, in order to set his own career and his own path.

Basma notes that while she typically perceived her parents to be progressive when it came to gendered expectations, they were still more open to the idea of her brother attending a school far from home, whereas she would have had to have been married and live in that city with her husband. At the same time, she makes two important distinctions. First, she stated that her brother did have to advocate for himself, while her own personality was to work with what was provided to her rather than push against the boundaries. Second, she emphasizes that her brother had his own gendered expectations to navigate, which included working in the store their father owned. She recognized that if her brother attended a law school close to home, he would have had to navigate his school workload with the workload of his father's business. She states that her success did not hinge on a physical separation from her family in the same way that her brother's did.

Aisha makes a similar comparison:

> For my brother, my parents are like, "Well, you have to stand up on your own two feet before you get married. You absolutely have to get a job with a certain threshold and earning potential." For me, they're kind of like, "You're spending all this money and time, but if you don't get into medical school, it's fine, because you'll have somebody to take care of you." And I'm like, "No." So, there has to be a conviction that I have. For my brother, that's something that's put onto him and he struggles with it, I think, in the sense of, "I have to take care of everyone. I have to take care of my parents and my own family and all that stuff." Whereas I'm like, "I want to." So, that dynamic of... It's different, for sure, between us.

While Aisha later speaks more on the struggle of having to work towards her career goals despite her parents not placing as much value onto it, she recognizes that added pressure that has been placed on her brother. Not only is he expected to take care of his parents, but he is also expected to be the main financial provider when he gets married and has his own children. Aisha acknowledges that she is able to ascribe her own meaning and dedication to her career goals, while her brother must operate within these tight financial expectations and does not have the leeway to set his own goals or path. Aisha and Basma are both aware of the limitations that have been placed on them by these gendered expectations but are just as aware of the type of pressure that this can place on the men in their family as well.

In the same way that Aisha discusses the personal conviction that she had to develop, Yara explains:

> I just think that growing up, me and my sister would have to make sacrifices for the family and maybe take care of our younger siblings, and that my brothers didn't have to do any of that, or let's say I wanted to leave the house. Although my parents were cool with it, I would probably have to give them a notice. My brother would just walk out the door and it'd just be like, "Okay." He could probably come in really late multiple nights in a row and no one would question

> it. My brothers just aren't…and I just see how that has affected us now that we're all older and that my brothers really cannot provide for themselves or really take care of themselves because they've always been taken care of, whereas I feel like girls in general are always made to uphold the family and really work for the family, so then when we finally are alone, it's like you can finally breathe and like just take care of yourself and it just feels nice, but [the boys] are like struggling taking care of themselves because they've always been taken care of.

Yara recognizes that she and her sister were expected to take on the caretaking responsibilities, whereas her brothers were not. However, now that she and some of her siblings live away from home, she sees the ways in which these expectations have benefitted the women. She feels that she was able to institute those caretaking skills in to being able to take care of herself in a way that her brothers are unable to, since their needs were catered to by the women in their family. Yara feels a sense of relief, since these caretaking skills are not new to her, while her brothers have to face a large learning curve as they adjust to living on their own. Participants who noted these small benefits of the gendered expectations their families held had a thorough understanding of the ways in which gender roles are not only intrinsically limiting for women, but that men can be limited by the tight expectations—or lack thereof—placed on them as well.

Many of the gendered expectations present in women's families were laced with notions of how women are perceived by the wider Muslim community and how this translated into specific behavioral expectations.

Reputation and Behavioral Maintenance

There were 15 of 25 participants who discussed instances of their families expressing concern around reputation, which resulted in specific behavioral expectations. As discussed earlier, these notions of reputation and perception were not placed on the men in the family.

Noor explains:

> We grew up in this bubble, out here in the East Bay, with all the same people, our whole lives. Our reputations were definitely on the line. My parents, having been very successful and very active and in the community at large, they were looked up to. Revered . . . When I started to have drawbacks, that definitely came into play, and more so in the way... Not necessarily even about how I practice [Islam], it was more just how I would be perceived. They didn't actually care what I was doing, they just didn't want other people to know it. It was like, "Okay, you can't dress this way, or you're a slut. You can't wear shorts in front of these people, even though you wear shorts at soccer practice. We don't want these people knowing that." Or, "You're not allowed to date or go to dances because we don't want anybody to see you out there with these random boys that are not like us." When it came down to what was actually required of someone who was religious, I don't really think anybody cared, so long as it held up this façade of someone who is obedient and pious and covered up, sort of thing.

Noor's family had lived in the same area for most of their lives and so they were deeply connected to and respected by the surrounding Muslim community. This resulted in her parents doing what they could to maintain that respect by monitoring her behavior. Noor acknowledges that her parents were seemingly less concerned with whether or not she

practiced the religion, but how certain actions would be regarded by the wider Muslim community and their perception of her family's religious piety.

Asia notes similar experiences, especially having moved from an area with a less connected Muslim community to an area with a much more tightly-knit Muslim community:

> Well, from looking at everything that I've done that they perceived as negative like, the way you're dressing, it's going to attract boys. You don't want to smell like this, because you're going to attract boys. You don't want to stay late, because they would always think if I'm staying late that I have a boyfriend or I'm with a guy or. It was always like they're trying to protect me from having a boyfriend, or being in a relationship, or leaving the religion, or just becoming very Americanized. And also they were worried about what people were going to say. It was always that. It's like, what are people going to say if we let you do this? Because when we lived in [another state], my parents were still very conservative but they weren't as strict, and they wouldn't get as angry as they did when I was here, because there's more people here that know them and our family.

Asia notes that much of the behavioral maintenance was centered around not attracting the attention of other men, keeping a close relationship to the religion, and not becoming too Americanized. Asia also witnessed this behavioral maintenance shift when they moved from a city where Muslims were more dispersed and her family was not heavily tied to the community, to a city where her family had roots in the Muslim community and so they were much more closely tied to it. Upon this move, Asia noticed the increase in concerns around how other Muslims might perceive her since that would affect her family's reputation in the community at large. Asia does make sure to emphasize that her mother's concerns were largely around safety, while her father's concerns were centered around her behavior.

While most of the examples that participants provided were around notions of being a "religious" or "pious" women, there were some who discussed the idea of reputation being tied with notions of educational achievement.

Aliya explains:

> This is a stereotype [my mom] falls into, just in terms of caring way too much about what people say. Even to this day, there's a lot of times, even a lot of people don't know the full truth of my college experience in terms of why I took a break, the fact that I'm still on a break. Outer family, a lot of them think I'm still in school. It's annoying having to play along and remember who to tell what story to because she's just so concerned about what people are going to think if they know that I didn't finish college, this, that, and the third, whatever. There are some people that think I finished and graduated. There are some people that think I'm still taking classes right now. And then the very, very close people know the truth. It is very tiring the once in a blue moon I do interact with that extended family, that I have to remember who knows which story to keep the story straight. It's very annoying just because she does care so much.

Aliya discusses that her mother, in comparison to other parents, is not overtly strict when it comes to religious expectations; however, she does put weight onto how people might perceive the fact that Aliya did not complete her college degree. Aliya has to play a

performative role when interacting with relatives to ensure that she is in line with whatever story her mother has chosen to tell them about Aliya's college career. Even with some relatives who might know that Aliya is no longer in school, she notes that they may not know the extent of the truth. Aliya dealt with both mental and financial struggles which contributed to her decision to leave school, but of her relatives who do know she is no longer enrolled, there is still a stigma around mental health which keeps her from being able to tell the full truth.

Faiza explains a similar experience with her mother:

> I remember always having a conversation with my mom. "I don't care what people do." And she would say, "No, you have to care." No, you shouldn't even care either . . . the expectation is even higher if you came from Nigeria to the States. It's like, "Well, you got this privilege to go to the United States. So I expect something great of you. I don't expect anything less from you. You have to be the best of the best. You're not wasting this golden ticket to go to the States." But not feeling like… okay, yes, we know this privilege, we know we got the golden ticket, but it's still hard. And it's different. It's hard adjusting from a different school system coming here to the United States and it's completely different. And so things that in Nigeria, you're like, "Oh, that should be easy." No, it's hard. It's hard now.

Similar to Aliya, Faiza states earlier that her mother is not extremely strict when it comes to religious expectations, but that she is concerned with how people perceive her ability to succeed. Faiza acknowledges that this weight is even heavier because she and her family immigrated from Nigeria, and so her family would regard this immigration as a "waste" if Faiza was not educationally successful. These perceptions then lead to her mother placing these expectations on Faiza as well. It is important to note that while this was not a common pattern amongst other participants, Faiza and Aliya both identified as African American and had immigrant African parents and so their experiences of reputation being related to success may be tied to the cultural ideologies of their families.

As Muslim women experience these notions of community perceptions and being assigned the responsibility of the reputation holder, they find ways to strategically navigate through these familial expectations to attain what they desire. Even when these expectations may be contradicting—i.e. adhere to gender expectations and be a pious Muslim woman, but still be a high-achieving student—they find ways to maintain their autonomy while working within the values that their families hold.

As Asia had to adjust to the familial shift that took place when her family moved to a city with a more tightly-knit community, she found ways to make it work to her benefit:

> In the beginning when I would ask to do certain things, I would bring in my brother, but then it came to a point where they were just like, even when I bring in my brother, they weren't taking it anymore. And so, I started doing the whole like, "Well, so and so's daughter is going to stay and she's taking this class." Because for some reason, when you tell them that their friend's kid is also going to be staying late, then it's okay, because another parent is allowing their kids to do that. And so, I would start using that, or sometimes I'd be like, "Well, if I want to graduate early and be done with this sooner, I need to do this." And they just

> wanted me to graduate and be done with school so that I could get married. So, there were different things that I used. And after pushing curfew, I started wanting to be out on weekends. So, even when I wasn't actually at school, I would say, "I'm just studying and I'm studying with so and so." A person who they've met or that they know. And so, that always helped. Even though they would call me all the time like, "Where are you?" Even though I've told them 100 times where I am and when I'm coming home, they would still call and double check and just to make sure I'm not lying, I'm not in a nightclub or something. But that's the only thing that would calm them down for a short while.

Asia discussed having to continuously re-strategize as new situations arose that she had to navigate with her parents. She would first have her brother speak to her parents on her behalf and advocate for her, especially since he himself was attending a school elsewhere and could explain what was required in a higher education setting. However, that eventually stopped working, and so Asia used the close ties of the Muslim community to her benefit by explaining that another Muslim woman, whose parents were friends with her own parents, was also taking a late class. Since another respected Muslim family was okay with their daughter staying late, this would relieve her parents' concern around reputation. She would also explain that if they kept her from taking a late class, it would prolong her time to graduation, and thus prolong her time to get married. Asia thoroughly understood what her parents' concerns were and found creative ways to address and appease these concerns by utilizing the same Muslim ties that were seemingly limiting her freedom.

Neya also explains having to strategize with her family's concerns, but having a bit more freedom in how she did so because she did not live at home:

> I don't think [my parents are] very happy about my relationships, my friendships with non-Muslim friends . . . So I used to mention to them last year, "Oh, I'm going to get food with these people." And they were like, "Why aren't you going with Muslim girls who live near you?" . . . So at this point, I don't even bring it up anymore. I'll just mention if I'm going to do something that it's with my Muslim friends, because I know that they don't necessarily know what I'm doing here. If I don't bring it up, then I don't think it'll really be an issue. But I think they felt they're very scared of me being influenced by non-Muslims, even though it's just friendships and they're good people and they respect my religion. Yeah. It's interesting because, I see a lot of people in MSA, they have very close, non-Muslim friends. And I feel like parents are usually okay with that, but I think my parents just got freaked out about it.

Neya references concerns that her parents have about her friendships with non-Muslim friends and some pressure they put on her to develop friendships with other Muslim students. She assumes that some of these concerns may be around how non-Muslims may influence her in ways that other Muslims would not, even though her non-Muslim friends respect her and her religious beliefs. Being met with her parents' oppositions, she began to withhold information from them or tell them she was hanging out with Muslim friends, recognizing that she had the advantage of being away from home to be able to keep certain details from them. In comparison with Asia, who had to constantly re-strategize because she lived with her parents, Neya could withhold certain pieces of information

from her parents to keep them from expressing concerns about her behavior since she attended school in another city.

Familial values around piety and reputation can be closely tied to how parents regard success. Women recognized that they could strategically utilize and convey these values to their advantage. Khadija explains:

> I don't think [my family] would be as proud, they wouldn't even be near close to proud as the way they are right now with me, nowhere close to that. I don't think they would have respect, I had to earn the respect of all the adults in my family. And I think in our, or at least for me, what I've seen in our culture, even in sometimes our religion, which gets mixed up into our culture, you have to respect the elders but they don't respect you. But this was one thing where I saw that I was earning their respect, which was a big thing, but I don't think I would have their respect if I . . . I don't think that and especially if I didn't have my mom's support, I would easily get married off by now. Easily arranged marriage, taken back to Pakistan, set up with somebody and I wouldn't even have the willpower probably to fight against it. And so that's why there is always this little fear of if I went against that, either being successful or being a good Muslim woman.

Khadija was one of the first women in her family to pursue higher education, and in large part did so because of her mother's support. However, she consistently faced opposition from the rest of her family and had to find ways to navigate that. Khadija explains that she earned her family's respect and approval by doing two things simultaneously: attaining the height of success and being a good Muslim woman. She acknowledges the extreme pressure she felt to have the best grades and attain the best career after graduating in order to earn her family's respect, all while also performatively maintaining her ties to her faith and religious practices in a way that would appease them. Khadija acknowledges that if she was either not as successful or not perceived as a pious Muslim, she would not have the respect that she has worked to gain from her family over the years.

Abir discusses similar feelings of pressure, which are further complicated for Abir by her sexuality. Her experiences reveal how difficult and tiring the work of maneuvering familial reputation concerns could be. As she notes:

> For me, aside from the pressure of education and maintaining good grades and all that, I also have this extra added pressure where I have to hold this image. My sexuality is something that I have to constantly hide because I also have this image of me becoming a doctor. If I'm seen as a doctor who likes other girls and my family, they're going to be like, "What the hell? What happened? We were looking up to you." My family's all excited like, "Oh, she's going to become a doctor. She's such a good person." Whatever, but then when they see this other or if they ever do see this other aspect, it's going to be a slap on their faces. I don't know. It's hard, so I have different kinds of pressures on me.

Being in medical school, Abir has become an example to the rest of her family of a Muslim woman who attains success while also maintaining her religious devotion. She fears that if her family finds out about her sexuality, it will discredit whatever success she earns when she becomes a doctor and she will no longer be the relative that they all look up to. Abir consciously hides her sexuality, having only disclosed it to a small number of

relatives, and still does not know if she will ever be able to disclose her sexuality to the rest of her family without losing the reverence they have for her career as a doctor. She does not know how to balance this notion of being a good and successful Muslim woman with her family's view of homosexuality.

Navigating these notions of success and reputation can be difficult and place an immense amount of pressure on Muslim women as they navigate their higher education careers and beyond. However, in the same way that some participants noted the ways in which patriarchal expectations have benefitted them, some find empowerment in having to navigate these complex familial relations and values. Khadija states:

> If I didn't have that [Muslim] identity, sure I could say my life would have been so much easier, but I wouldn't change anything about what might... No matter how much of a fight I basically had to put up to get an education, it is what made me so much more resilient and so much stronger today . . . I had to prove myself, even when I got to the school, so much more to my family that they made the right decision, that they should be proud that they sent me off. Not that it was a bad thing. So I had to watch every single grade, I had to make sure that the outcome of this experience was not honestly, just some average job. It had to be something just miraculous where they're just jumping off the moon. And luckily I was able to, I worked twice as hard because I had to prove myself to my own family rather than even to me.

Khadija, as mentioned earlier, was the first woman in her family to attend college and had to navigate disapproval from her family in doing so. While this absolutely presented some difficulties, she is grateful that this provided her with a drive towards success that she may not have had otherwise. The fight that she had to put in to not only gain an education, but to then prove that an education was worth it, provided her with a level of resilience and strength. Khadija recognized the difficulty of her experiences, but she consistently stated that she would not change any of it and that she found both empowerment and success in the need to prove herself to her family.

Marriage vs. Education

In discussing what the familial expectations were for their futures, many Muslim women brought up marriage in some way or another. The relationship between their family's expectations of their success and expectations for marriage were not always clear. While some families prioritized educational success, others prioritized marriage, and some encouraged both but with an emphasis on and expectation of marriage eventually.

It is important to note that a total of 5 women did find complete support from their families regarding their education and careers, with no pressures around marriage. Amira states:

> I think honestly, which, I guess, is common with a lot of... with Pakistanis is that, I guess, they do expect me to get married at some point after graduation. So I have had proposals come in in the past too, and my parents would be like, "No. She's studying. She's still really young, so we're just going to let her study" . . . I would want to get married after I complete my undergrad. I don't want marriage to be like the only thing I have on my mind because I am planning on applying to medical school and hopefully, pursuing a career path for a doctor. That's my main

> goal, and my parents understand that and they're like, "We respect you too." They're not pushing me to do anything else or saying like, "Oh, you have to get married now."

Amira acknowledges that culturally, other Pakistani women experience a pressure to get married, but that her family prioritizes her educational career and acknowledges that she is too young to get married. It is normal for women in her culture to get married after completing their undergraduate degree, and she is okay with going on that path as well but emphasizes that she will still pursue a career as a doctor and that marriage will not overshadow her desire to build a career. Her parents continue to advocate for her and her educational career.

Aziza, who is now engaged, also explains being able to do so at her own pace without pressure from her parents:

> Thankfully there was no marriage pressure. It was more like, get your education. That's the most important pressure, which I'm kind of relieved about. Because for my other Muslim peers, I hear they're like, "Oh my mom's like, why aren't you married right after college?" It's like, "Why aren't you married? Why aren't you married?" For me, it was more like I found... It was like I found the guy that I'm now engaged to through like a dating app and we dated. Then I introduced him to my parents. So it was very much like my process and they are in love with him. He's like the new favorite child.

Aziza acknowledges that while her parents may have had some cultural concerns amongst themselves about she and her sister getting married, they did not express these concerns knowing that she and her sister would not react well to any pressure. Aziza also notes that her mother consistently instilled values in them about not prioritizing men in their lives and not being dependent on men, so she could not simultaneously pressure them to get married while instilling these values. Overall, she felt more pressure to be successful in her educational career, which she was grateful for especially since her Muslim women peers often complained of their parents constantly talking about marriage. In the end, she was able to find her current fiancé at her own pace and gain her parents' approval.

Nadia is currently in the process of completing her undergraduate career, and has received no pressure from her parents about getting married:

> Recently I talked to my mom about [my future]. She kind of wants me to go more towards grad school or just finding a job and working, which is really nice to hear. Because she's like, "If you want to keep pursuing your education, go for it." And then, it is kind of that like, "Oh, I am going to have a job in tech or some related field and probably work in somewhere close to Bay Area in San Francisco." But yeah, that's the assumption I would say.

Nadia discussed that her mother envisions her daughter's future to be in either graduate school or a career. Nadia notes that it was nice to hear that there was no expectation of marriage, but she also explains that their expectations for her future are not completely aligned, even if marriage is not in the equation. Nadia's mother envisions either graduate school or a job in the Bay Area, while Nadia would like to use the time after her undergraduate career to travel and explore jobs and careers in other parts of the world.

She is unsure how this misalignment in future expectations will pan out, but she is hopeful knowing that the assumption is a career instead of marriage.

In contrast, a total of 11 participants cited a perception that their family placed more value on marriage than education. The degrees to which families valued marriage over education varied. For some, education was only regarded as a temporary placeholder, while marriage was an obvious eventuality. Khadija states:

> And [my family] still kind of had it in their head that, "Oh yeah, well, she's going to come back in two years, and we're just going to get her married off." And then I had to fight back, even after an education, they were like, "Well yeah, she is going to come back when she graduates, she'll get married. What do you mean a job?" And I was like, "No, I just graduated. I'm going to move to another city and maybe I'll go to New York and chase a career." And they're like, "What? Oh, this isn't going to end, is it?"

Even while Khadija pursued her educational career, her family assumed that it would be temporary and that she would get married soon after starting her undergraduate experience. As graduation approached, they then expected marriage to follow, not a job. It was only upon seeing her career grow, and even hearing that she was exploring options in other states, that they began to realize that she was not planning to cut her trajectory short in place of marriage.

> Ritha's family held similar views, which were stated to her much more explicitly: I think their expectation was basically what they told me, like, this is just something to pass time by and then get married. And that was the expectation. That was something I was reminded of. Like "Oh, she's doing homework? You can do homework after you make dinner. You can do homework after you clean." That always like became a primary. Because that's kind of what you were made for. There was this whole expectation. And it wasn't something hidden. It was something very vocalized. Like, she's going to get married, this is just her going to school just to learn, it's not for anything. I think that was the expectation.

Ritha emphasized that her family was always explicit in what they expected of her future. She had to do a lot of work to convince them to consider college, but even as she did, they made it very clear that they regarded this as temporary and that they prioritized her caretaking skills since they did not have any expectations for a continued education or a career. Ritha had to ultimately push back against her family's expectations and live on her own, which caused a severe rift in their relationship.

Often times, families do not place an emphasis on their daughters' educational success, because of the traditional view that they would marry a man who would be the primary financial provider. Aisha explains:

> Even now, I'm going to go to med school, and it's been a really long... It's been, what, five, six years post-grad now. My parents are like, "Time's ticking. You have eggs that need to be frozen if you don't do this now." Because I've always said, I don't want to get married until I'm in medical school or past that. My parents are always kind of like, "I don't know why you have that caveat, because your money will... It doesn't matter." To me, it matters. I'm spending all this money and time to go to medical school. Being able to have that earning potential, I don't want to depend on my husband for that kind of stuff. Because if I ever

> need to be independent or anything like the way that my mom kind of sometimes wishes that she was. She doesn't have that economic freedom. She's tied to my dad because of that. That's why she stayed in such a horrible—not horrible—but a hard situation because of that. I don't want to have to make that sacrifice.

Aisha explains that while her parents have not objected to her plans to pursue medical school, they do not understand why she will not get married until she is firmly established in her medical program or after. Their perception is that her financial success is not necessary, since she will marry a man who will financially provide for her. Aisha explains that her financial independence is important to her, in part, because of the fact that her mother is financially dependent upon her father. She notes that there were moments where her parents' marriage was extremely difficult and recognizes that her mother had to stay with her father due to that financial dependence. Aisha's prioritization of her own career is to secure her own financial independence so that, when she does get married, she can maintain the ability to take care of herself.

Sonia explains that while her parents may not pressure her consistently about marriage, she knows that they place more value on marriage than her own success:

> I think my parents think, and unfortunately I feel like it's this way for a lot of Muslim women, I could be as successful as I can be, make all the money in the world. I could probably even be president of the United States, but if I'm not married, there's something wrong.

Sonia recognizes that culturally, there is more weight placed on a woman's ability to find a spouse than her ability to attain her own success. No matter how successful she is, her parents will always feel that something is missing if she does not get married.

Asia also recognizes this expectation of marriage with her parents, even if she has already gone against many of the other expectations her family had for her:

> It's funny because I've already taken off the hijab, I've already moved out of the house, which is something that's extremely unaccepted in our community. I have a boyfriend—they don't know that. But I've already done all this stuff, and every time we talk on the phone, they still ask me when am I going to get married . . . So, they still always ask me that even after all of this. They're still waiting for the day where I'm going to realize that everything I did was wrong and I'm going to go home and say, "All right, arrange [my marriage.]" So, they still expect me to get married and come back and be a good Muslim girl who wears the hijab and listens to her husband.

Asia has already gone against the expectations of not only her parents, but of the larger Muslim community that they are a part of. She no longer wears the hijab, she does not live at home, and she does not strictly practice the faith. While her parents do not know about her boyfriend, they do know about everything else and yet they still have this expectation that she will change her mind and ultimately decide to get married. No matter how much time has gone by, she knows their expectations of her may not ever change.

In comparison with Asia, Zahra did pursue the more traditional route her parents expected, but has encountered some caveats that have still made it difficult:

> I haven't been very open about [being engaged] either, because it's just... It stresses me out, and there's times where I'm like, "I don't want this anymore." And it's not in a bad way, it's just so much pressure, especially from the guy's side of

> the family to get married soon. And I'm like, "Well, I don't want to. I'm doing my schooling." And they're like, "So what? You can do both." And I'm like, "Yeah, I'm not one of those people." I don't want to be in school and get married at the same time. And especially my master's right now, it's just two really big things. And I feel like the two of them together, they're just going to clash . . . I just don't want any hiccups. Anything that's going to happen that's going to affect my education. Because honestly, for me, my education is more important than marriage.

After completing her undergraduate degree, Zahra decided to go through with an engagement that her parents had proposed to her. However, she did not want to stop her educational pursuits for this marriage, and so while she agreed to the engagement, she also enrolled in a master's program. Knowing that it will be difficult to manage both an engagement and the two-year program, she is now facing pressure from both her family and her fiancé's family around expediting the process. More than anything, Zahra does not want anything to potentially impede upon her educational career, which she personally views as a priority, even though her family does not share that same sentiment.

Paving the Way

Many of the difficulties Muslim women encounter in situations in which their values do not align with their familial values are heightened by the fact that they are likely to be the first in their family to go against traditional expectations. A total of 12 participants experienced either paving the way for a younger sibling or relative or having the way paved for them by an older sibling or relative.

Some participants with younger sisters recognized that the leniency their younger siblings might experience is due to parents naturally getting older and less strict in their parenting. Participants also recognized areas in which they cleared any misconceptions their parents may have had, which lessened the amount of convincing and negotiating their younger sibling had to do. Basma offers an example of this:

> I mean, [my little sister] is definitely able to do a lot more. I would like to think it's because we also paved the way for that. When I was in high school, I was editor in chief of the high school newspaper and we would have late night[s]... It would be the night before we publish . . . It would be such a struggle to explain why I have to go back to school at like 6:00 p.m. or 7:00 p.m. and stay in for a couple hours. I was editor in chief, it was like, I have to be there. Those are conversations that I shouldn't have to have. Because, [my little sister] ended up being in the school paper too and she would just go to late night sessions. [For my parents] it's like, yeah, we get it. We know that's work that you have to do. Then they understood that you need to do those things, extracurricular things to then get scholarships or to get other opportunities and make connections. Those are conversations, and in that sense, we did push back and we paved the way. Those are things that I'm sure she takes for granted and wants to just stay out until nine, which would be like, so scandalous back in the day.

Basma outlines a specific instance in which she had to go back to school on some nights and stay there late in order to publish the high school newspaper. She recalls having difficulty explaining this to her parents, who had never had this experience themselves. When her younger sister eventually had the same opportunity, she did not have to do the

same level of explaining that Basma did because her parents now understood the concept of the school paper and the time that it took to publish it.

Neya also recognizes that she has been able to pave the way for other Muslim women in her family, beyond just her younger siblings:

> [My cousin] got a job, after I had already moved to the Bay, I think this past year, so when I was choosing to come here, I was the first in my family to move out of the SoCal area. So that was a big deal because my mom was like, "No girl, on either sides of our family, has done that." So that was a lot to cope with. But then now my second cousin, she got into Stanford and she's going there, she's at home now because of COVID. But because I was already in the Bay Area, it made it easier for her to convince her parents.

Neya had somewhat of a challenge convincing her parents to allow her to attend a school in the Bay Area, rather than going to school in Southern California where the rest of her family lived. She notes that this challenge was due to her being the first woman in their family to attend a college in another city, and so there was more work she had to do around convincing them. Once she was the first one to do it, however, she found that her cousins had an easier time convincing their families to allow them to take jobs and attend schools in areas outside of Southern California.

Participants who were not the first in their family were also aware of the path being made easier thanks to older siblings or relatives who did it before them. Nadia states:

> I think because my sister, she went to Irvine and she did her school there. My other sister was moving out to LA at the same time, so I kind of became like, I didn't have to convince my parents. When my sister was going to college, she did have to convince our parents a little bit . . . It wasn't extremely hard because she had done two years here at a community college first, so she was going to transfer where she needed to go. And yeah, I think it was just like my parents needed to say everything that they needed to so they can feel okay about it because their first child is moving out . . . So, it definitely helped me.

Nadia recognizes that while her parents did not push back against her sister moving out as much, there was still some work that her older sister had to do before moving out which alleviated some of the convincing that Nadia had to do when she eventually moved out as well. She explains later that she was able to hear what some of their concerns were with her older sister and anticipate ways to alleviate those concerns once she moved out, such as finding other Muslim women to rent a house with.

Asia discusses the mental struggle that specifically came with the decision to stop wearing the hijab, knowing that her parents would disapprove of that. She explains:

> It was an internal struggle. There was just a lot of... I was very unhappy, I was very depressed . . . I was unsure of my identity or who I was, because here I am telling the world I'm this, when internally I don't believe in anything that I'm showing, I guess. And so, it was just a struggle and I got to a point where it was just hard and I just couldn't take it anymore. And I also have family who have thought the same, and they've had questions and there was just a... There was just a feeling of like, "Okay, I'm not the only one. Other people have felt this." And

> you just talk to more people about it and you realize that this is actually becoming more common. There are more girls in the community that are feeling this way.

Asia notes that other Muslim women in her family had not only taken the hijab off but also questioned some of the familial and community values. While she was grappling with her own identity, she had struggles with her mental health. Having other women in her family who had similar thoughts and struggles made it easier to process these concerns and gave her comfort in knowing she was not a complete outlier. While having other relatives who did it first did not necessarily make the path any easier or soften her family's reaction, it did ease some of the mental turmoil that came with questioning facets of her identity.

Paving the way for younger siblings or relatives did not come without a certain amount of pressure. Neya, who noted that her cousins were able to get jobs and attend schools in other areas because she had moved out, expressed this concern:

> I think my fear is that, if I graduate and my parents realize that I'm not as religious as I was brought up—because I was brought up very religiously, very practicing—then my family will be like, you should not have sent her to the Bay Area because she just got influenced. So I'm a little bit scared about that having a negative impact on my siblings and then other family members. So I guess we'll have to see how that plays out. But at the same time, I don't really want to limit myself or stop myself because of what other people expect of me. Just being able to choose what I want to do and where I want to go, is important to me, so… but I definitely feel that pressure.

Neya's own connection with her religion has changed since moving out of her parents' home and exploring her own identity. She no longer practices the faith in the traditional way that her family does, and being that she is not near home, her family does not see these changes. She does have concerns about the implications that this may have on her younger siblings and relatives, as her family will eventually take note of these changes, but she ultimately wants to prioritize being herself and practicing the faith the way she sees fit.

Aisha also feels this pressure:

> I had to be on my best behavior, because I knew [these opportunities] could be taken away at any time. Any time like I was noncompliant, or I stepped out of line . . . That was a fundamental part of, I think, my maturity too as a person. There's a trust contract of like, "We're letting you do this against our better judgment. If you mess it up now, you're going to mess it up for all your siblings too. They're going to punish your siblings for what you did." It was never explicitly said like that, but it was known.

Aisha explains that she sensed her family held a mindset that they had entrusted her with the opportunity to pursue an education and a career, and if she stepped out of this pious Muslim woman identity, she would be breaching this contract. Breaching this contract would not only have implications for her, but for her siblings as well.

Similar to the ways in which some participants had to strategize with their families around this notion of maintaining their reputation, Khadija notes doing the same to ensure that she can still create a clear path for success for her younger relatives:

> So I have three younger cousins who are females . . . I knew that whatever I do, they're watching and either I'm going to set the path for them or my actions may mean that they never get that opportunity at all. And so it was always like I had to paint sometimes, especially when I would come back on the weekends, a picture that wouldn't even be me . . . I wasn't part of the Muslim Student Association, but I would tell them I am. I'm like, "Yeah, they do prayer on campus. And you can break your fast on campus during Ramadan." And they'd be like, "Oh, okay. You could still practice your religion when you go off to college." I had to make it so that everything I left this house with I still have, even though I don't really, to show that [my cousins] can still be who they are and hold what you taught them while going off to school, whether if it was true or not. I had to paint that picture because anything different than that, nobody would have gotten the chance that I got, especially the women.

Khadija knew that her actions would determine whether or not her younger cousins were granted the same opportunities that she was. In recognizing this, she strategically highlighted the religious practices on campus, even though she did not take part in them herself. In doing so, Khadija was able to disprove their fear that one would lose their religious identity upon pursuing higher education. Khadija was able to demonstrate, whether true or not, that her younger cousins could hold onto the religious teachings of their parents even while pursuing their degrees.

The Distinction of Family, Religion and Culture

Similar to the hijab, it is important to distinguish familial, religious and cultural practices from one another as well as to understand that each Muslim woman's perception of and experience with these three facets of her identity is unique to her. While families themselves may entrench religion with culture, each participant found her own meaning-making strategy in identifying her own approach to religion and culture, whether it be separate or in line with her family's views.

There were a total of 5 participants who made references to their family using religion as a tool of guilt to keep them from doing something. Aisha states, "I was always really aware of how... My parents were like, 'We will do and say almost anything to get you to comply with us. We will use religion even to get you to do what we want. We'll say it's religious, even if it's not.'" Aisha recognized that religion was a tool her parents used, and so as she grew older, she did her own personal work of disentangling the two to find her own personal connection with the religion.

Jannah explains a similar experience with her family, "I grew up in a very strict household, very both culturally conservative and also religiously conservative where you didn't know if it was culture or religion, honestly. But religion was used a lot to manipulate a lot of things." Jannah notes having a hard time distinguishing culture from religion growing up, as both were often used as a tool to manipulate her. In addition, each individual family dynamic can vary, independent of where religion and culture may play a role. Jannah, specifically, had a unique experience which she attributes to her father having a very controlling role in her life. She notes that other relatives in her family did not have similar experiences because her father, individually, used religion to manipulate her and her siblings in a way that no one else in the family did. She grew up in an environment that was unique from cousins and other distant relatives. While her father

used religion as a tool do so, she attributes her experiences to his individual nature as a person rather than the religion itself.

Jannah goes on to explain:

> I think my experience, I do want to clarify, is that my experience through higher education is heavily influenced by culture, religion and also a lot by mental health. Because of what I went through growing up, I experienced a lot of the barriers and struggles that maybe people may have not . . . I'm still working through those because of what happened. It still affects me to this day . . . My mental state around it is always ever-changing, and I think that shaped my education journey in general. But what it did also do was help me be more determined in getting to where I want to be. Then I realize that Islam is my greatest tool for it. Not the way my dad taught it, but the real Islam.

Jannah notes that culture, religion and her father's and her own mental health played a role in shaping her experiences. The difficulties she had at home, with her father specifically, shaped her identity in a way that she continues to have to grapple with. However, within all that, she finds empowerment to push herself towards success.

In a similar way, Ritha recalls using Islam as a tool against her family for her own empowerment:

> The fear I think my family had was me becoming westernized. And it all came back to this whole idea of upholding honor. I remember when I went to my family after [learning more about Islam], I think the first thing I said to them was, you can't force me to get married. Because I can tell the Sheikh that I don't consent and I don't agree. And right then and there, the marriage is not valid. And I started quoting the Qur'an and it was really empowering. Because I felt like the more I quoted the Qur'an, the more that they were not able to fight it. They couldn't really say, "This is wrong," because I was using the same thing that they used to oppress me, to kind of liberate me.

In attempting to convince her family to allow her to attend college, Ritha began educating herself on Islam separate from what she had been taught by her family. In this self-taught process, she learned much more about her rights as a woman that then gave her the tools to tell her family that they were not allowed to push her into marriage to keep her from attending college. In a similar way to Jannah, Ritha reclaimed her religion in a way that empowered her and that was separate from the cultural views her family had infused into it.

Conclusion

Familism clearly plays a role in shaping the experiences of Muslim American women; however, similar to the role of the hijab in their lives, these experiences are not a monolith and are themselves shaped by individual familial attitudes and culture, which then come together to shape very specific versions of religious values. The families of the participants demonstrated various levels of traditional gendered expectations, which led to pressures around behavioral maintenance that were based on notions of "reputation." Families engaged in a unique version of cultural capital theory, one in which they sought to elevate their status within the Muslim community through the perceived religious piety of their daughters. This contributes to and expands upon our understanding of cultural capital theory as it relates to class-based behaviors and values (Bourdieu 1984, 1986;

Bourdieu and Passeron 1977), as well as the use of culture to elevate status within marginalized groups (Carter 2003) and the emergence of youth cultures (Warikoo 2011). Much of the negotiations that participants had to do with their families when it came to their gendered values centered around how this would impact the family's reputation within the wider Muslim community. Some families supported educational attainment and prioritized it over marriage, but a majority either prioritized marriage entirely or expected it alongside educational attainment.

At the same time, the women in this study demonstrated agency in how they navigated and made sense of familial expectations. In some instances, they find ways to work within the boundaries that are provided to them, and in others, they push against them completely. The space in between these two ends of the spectrum is where participants found ways to negotiate and strategize within the expectations that were placed upon them. The Muslim women in this study found ways to creatively leverage areas where they had more leeway with their families, or fulfill obligations in one area so they can find that leeway in other area. Where families may have used religion as a tool to reenforce these familial expectations, participants either used the same tool of religion to prove their family wrong or redefined it entirely for their own purposes and identity development. Similarly to the sexually nonconforming Latinas in Acosta's (2013) work, the Muslim women in this study demonstrated the "acute ability to wrestle with the contradictions in their lives and to find ways to balance life's contradictory demands without compromising too much of themselves or those they love" (134). The women in this study not only strategized in creative ways to attain their own goals and values, but often did so in a way that would provide younger women and girls in their family with the same opportunities.

As discussed in the final section of this chapter, familial dynamics must be separated from religion and culture, even in instances where families themselves use religion and culture as a tool to justify their values. Muslim women's experiences varied heavily dependent upon individual family dynamics, such as having a father present or not present, having a mother who would advocate for them, the level of connection to the wider Muslim community, or having older siblings to pave the way. These specific dynamics are separate from whatever religious values families align themselves with, which is why there was no distinct relationship between religiosity of the family, the experiences Muslim women had with their families, and the resulting religiosity of the individual Muslim women. As Muslim women described this key distinction between religion, family, and culture, they engaged with what I posit is a triple consciousness.

Du Bois (1994) describes double consciousness as it relates to the Black identity, and describes having to balance one's own identity alongside the identity that has been ascribed by the oppressor. Muslim American women must consider two dominant majorities alongside their own identity: their family and an Islamophobic U.S. society. They must develop their own identity, while carefully navigating gendered notions of reputation and status within the Muslim community, and Islamophobic sentiment in the U.S. that paints Islam as an oppressive religion.

The following chapter will further explore some of these familial expectations, particularly the ways in which family expectations shaped Muslim women's pathway into higher education. It will then explore how higher education institutions shape the

identities of Muslim women, and the conflicts that arise between what Muslim women seek out for themselves in higher education and what their families expect of them. I will discuss the lack of mentorship present for Muslim women on campuses as they navigate these difficult binds and how some faculty perpetuate negative stereotypes of Muslim women when attempting to guide them. Lastly, I will explore the various types of discrimination that Muslim women experience on their campuses, separate from the tokenization and microaggressions that hijabis experienced in the previous chapter.

CHAPTER 5

HOW COLLEGE SHAPES MUSLIM WOMEN'S IDENTITIES

HOW COLLEGE SHAPES MUSLIM WOMEN'S IDENTITIES

Educational ethnographers have found that women from marginalized backgrounds utilize academic success to resist social systems that otherwise attempt to maintain and reinforce their subordination within hierarchal systems of power (Fordham 1996; Holland and Eisenhart 1990; Hubbard 1999; McGinty 1999). Research has found that higher education leads to the strengthening of ethnic identities for other groups, including Latinx students (Tovar and Feliciano 2009) and Asian American students (Gap Min and Kim 2000). We see in this chapter that Muslim women experience ethnoracialization, which is a dialectical process of identity formation that is based on both self-identification and ascribed meanings of identity that individuals encounter (Brown and Jones 2015; Reyes 2017).

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Muslim women experience triple consciousness, in which they must operate from the lens of familial values around reputation, Islamophobic rhetoric in the larger U.S. society, and their own perception of self. Thus, these same layers come into play as Muslim women undergo identity development within the context of higher education. These findings demonstrate that Muslim American women students operate as cultural straddlers, in which they "understand the functions of both dominant and nondominant cultural capital (Carter 2003) and value and embrace skills to participate in multiple cultural environments" (Carter 2006:306). These multiple cultural environments include mainstream society, educational institutions, and individual ethnoracial communities (Carter 2006).

Due to the often conflicting values that arise during this identity formation, Muslim women undergo processes of identity development similar to what Pitt (2010) describes amongst Black gay Christian men who must grapple with their religious, racial and sexual identity despite areas in which these identities may present conflict. This process can begin with a rejection of the identity (Pitt 2010), which we see as some Muslim women begin disconnecting with their religious identity as they enter higher education and see an exacerbation of the clash between their own values and the values of their family. Muslim women in this chapter also encounter having to lead double lives (Pitt 2010), in which they must compartmentalize parts of their identity given the settings they occupy. In most cases, this process ends with an integration of identities (Pitt 2010), which we see as Muslim women ultimately reclaim and redefine what their religious identity means to them, even where it may conflict with what their family and larger society expects of them.

In this chapter, I explore types of identity development among Muslim women in higher education, focusing specifically on the ways they navigate and negotiate their families' meaning making and expectations of education and their experiences within higher education settings. This chapter will also demonstrate the ways in which Muslim women actively utilize tools and resources within college campuses to develop facets of their identity. It will outline the double binds that participants had to navigate—those of expectations of academic achievement and the need to be a pious Muslim woman—and how their strategic efforts around and through these binds impact their religious identity development.

Types of Identity Development

A total of 13 participants cited some type of experience in which they found their Muslim identity developing within the context of higher education. Time spent in college had various impacts on Muslim American women and their religious identity development. For 8 participants, college was a time in which their religious identity not only grew, but specifically grew into one that they were able to cultivate themselves.

Aisha explains:

> When I questioned religion, and I was like, "Do I believe in Islam? And do I believe Allah is the one true God and Prophet Muhammad is Allah's messenger? Do I believe that? Or do I believe it because everybody tells me to believe it?" I've only been around people who believe that. Because people, non-Muslims would ask me questions about my faith when I went to college. I was kind of like, "Huh, wait a second, do I need to figure this out?" And because I have the freedom to figure it out in college, and because I had both the MSA facilitating those conversations, and I had room to do that with my non-Muslim friends too and be the inbetweener or kind of middle person, at that time, I think I valued that freedom, because it made my faith stronger. I truly believe that.

Aisha found college as an opportunity to address questions that had never come up for her in the past. Growing up in a Muslim family and being around primarily Muslim relatives and peers, there were not many opportunities for her faith to come into question. In the previous chapter on the hijab, Aisha discussed experiences of tokenization as a result of wearing the hijab. This same tokenization, however, led to questions and conversations with non-Muslims about her faith, which resulted in her deepening her faith by researching it on her own, without the influence or pressure from her family.

Similarly, Hibah found her Muslim identity growing as she was able to explore it outside of her family:

> For me in undergrad, I was finding again what my Muslimness meant to me. Not what my upbringing, not what my family taught me. As a student, I took Islam classes, I took Intro to Middle Eastern Studies. We talked about Islamic history. Learning about that in a university context in a scholarly way . . . as opposed to going to Friday school or your parents just teaching you in the house, it became more empowering. It was, wow, I'm learning this on my own. The mosque was across the street from my college. I started going to Friday prayers in between class. It felt more like my own as opposed to, oh, we're all going to go as a family. My new Muslim identity in undergrad, I think, enhanced my identity as a student and vice versa. My student skills, in terms of reading and taking classes and that kind of stuff, enhanced my Muslimness, because I would take Islamic classes. I took Arabic classes. I was reading the Quran in Arabic really for the first time. Attempting to.

Hibah saw this identity development as reciprocal—her Muslim identity enhanced her student identity and vice versa. She was able to explore what her Muslim identity looked like outside of her family, as well as explore facets of her Muslim identity in a scholarly way. Hibah utilized the resources provided by her college—the mosque in near proximity, as well as specific courses—to learn about and grow her Muslim identity by engaging with her student identity and responsibilities.

Faiza, similarly, utilized the resources provided on her campus to spark both her religious and her cultural ties:

> In Nigeria, everything was so much better. So much better... In a way like culture wise and religion wise. And so moving here, religion slowly went down, praying and all that stuff that we do together as a family, with religion completely went down. I felt like I didn't really know much about my own culture anymore, especially with school and you have kids that are bullying you because you're African and you're trying to be Americanized and so you slowly lose your culture and everything that you were taught and brought up with. And so in high school, I was like, "Okay, when I get to college, I hope there's clubs that I can join to get back into religion and culture." And thank God, there was MSA [Muslim Student Association] and there was ASA [African Students Association] and I'm very, very fortunate for those two clubs on campus. Because I was able to bounce back and get more in tune with both religion and culture.

Faiza recognized that there was a shift not only in herself, but her family as well, after immigrating to the U.S. from Nigeria. She saw their religious and cultural ties dwindling. Having clubs where she could reconnect with both her Muslim identity and her African identity allowed her to find reprieve after years of trying to subdue her identities to avoid bullying.

Basma attributes part of her identity development to the curriculum she was exposed to through Women's Studies courses:

> Women's studies was really where [my identity] came to light, because it was an amazing major . . . It was really like, it was about yourself and it was about empowerment and activism . . . In that sense, it really gave me a lot of opportunities to really be engaged in activism and the community. Then that's also what led me to wanting to go to law school too. Me and my sister were student organizers and we would organize rallies. Working with these groups that would help us know city ordinances . . . To know those things, I felt like was very powerful. I felt like, okay, so you need to know the rules in order to play the game or to want to change the rules. That's part of why I wanted to go to law school, is to really just know all of that stuff, because it's really powerful.

Basma saw her ties to the Muslim community grow through building relationships with other Muslim women, something she had not had the opportunity to do prior to college due to the low Muslim population in the city she grew up in. In addition, she highlights how college—and Women's Studies specifically—helped grow the activist side of her identity, which ultimately led her to her career in law.

In comparison, 5 of the participants used similar opportunities to explore facets of their Muslim identity and found that their ties to their faith began shifting. Reema states:

> I think going to college and having my own independence and not having the same Muslim community that I have at home, just not being surrounded by as many religious people definitely made me chill out a bit so that I started dating someone two years ago, and then I feel like it mellowed me out religiously in a sense . . . They are not Muslim, but we do both have an interest in Islam. That's kind of how our friendship and relationship started. Because he was looking for religion . . . and it was just like he is interested in Islam. And sometimes we'll

> learn stuff together and we're very comfortable that we can talk about Islam. And sometimes in the past he has fasted with me or we've gone to Eid prayer together and stuff, which is pretty fun.

Being removed from the Muslim community that she grew up with caused Reema to loosen her own strict way of practicing the faith. Doing so opened her up to dating someone who was not Muslim, and through this relationship with an individual who was interested in learning more about Islam, she has been able to continue exploring it in a way that she considers fun but still educational. Reema explains that the relationship has not pushed her way from her faith, but it has allowed her to connect with the core values of the faith rather than focusing heavily on what is permitted and what is not.

While some found that the Muslim community on their campus helped strengthen their religious identity, Noor experienced the opposite:

> Now, I do culturally identify as Muslim. I was raised Muslim, I practiced the Muslim faith. I participate in those things with my family, I understand the cultural significance of those things. For a while, I didn't [identify as Muslim], because my experience in college, I felt like who I was becoming, was not part of the Muslim faith. The people I was associating with were like, "You're not Muslim enough for me." . . . I kind of abided by that like, "Okay, well then I guess I'm not Muslim at all, and I'll stop saying that because I don't want to ascribe to something if it doesn't mean the truth."

Noor explained that while she does not strictly practice Islam anymore, she still identifies as Muslim culturally because of the important role it played in her upbringing. However, during college, as she began to explore alternate ways of being Muslim, she felt judgement from her Muslim peers. This judgement resulted in her pushing away from her Muslim identity as a whole, feeling as though there was no space for her to be Muslim if she was not practicing the faith in a strict manner.

Nadia also saw a shift in her identity through the people she interacted with in her college career:

> I guess my first year I was a little bit more conservative. For example, I wouldn't really hug guys because I was Muslim. I just was more conservative . . . I don't want to blame other people but at the same time I blame other people because they always chipped away at me. They always thought I was weird or they always were like, "Why not do this? It's not so bad. You're not doing anything wrong." So I didn't even go to my first college party until my junior year . . . So I think people chipping away at like, "Why not?" really just got me to push myself and question things and I'm like, "Okay. Let me just try these experiences."

Nadia explains that she began her time in college adhering to a much more conservative practice of the Muslim faith, one in which she rarely interacted with men and did not attend college parties. She recounts moments of peer pressure in which she was coerced into doing things she was not comfortable with; however, she ultimately used the questions that came from her peers to ask her own questions. When she began choosing to push the boundaries of her experiences on her own, she began to consider the cultural impact on her religious practices, which lead her to loosen the strictness of the way she practiced her faith.

College as Liberation

As outlined above, this opportunity for identity development demonstrates the role that college plays in providing women with an opportunity to liberate themselves from the difficult expectations of their families and wider Muslim community. A total of 5 participants specifically stated that college was an opportunity for them to get away from the way their family and community perceived religion and develop their own perceptions and ideas of Islam and their Muslim identity.

Ritha explains:

> It's funny, because when I started college, I didn't really have expectations outside what my family had put on me . . . I think my expectation for myself changed after my uncle passed away. And I started taking in college, more than just kind of hanging out with my cousins and getting out of the house. It became something so much more. And that turned into really challenging myself and putting myself out there and start speaking out in public and enjoying it. Hosting events and making sure that I'm advocating. And ever since then, that's become the standard that I hold myself to.

Ritha first approached college as an opportunity to be out of the house and spend time with her cousins. She adopted her family's expectations that college was just a way to pass the time until marriage. Ritha explains that her uncle was always a proponent for education, and so his death pushed her to question her purpose in pursuing a college degree. She then began utilizing it for a purpose beyond what her parents had set out, and used it to grow her religious identity, as well as knowledge and advocacy for the Muslim community. In an earlier chapter, Ritha explains how she used religion—which her family had previously used to oppress her—as a way to liberate herself. By growing her knowledge on Islam while she was in college, she enhanced this newly defined tool of liberation.

Abir knew, prior to choosing the college she attended, that she needed to be away from her family to utilize this time in college for her own growth:

> For me to really explore myself . . . I had to make sure that I applied somewhere that I was away from home so that I can explore myself and be more comfortable because I knew that if I stayed... There's literally a university a few minutes from my parents' home. I realized I wouldn't be able to really explore myself and really just figure things out. I went to a school that's two hours away, it's not too far, but it's also far because I can do my own thing or whatever.

Abir was strategic when applying to schools, knowing that if she attended a school near home and continued living at home, she would not have had the opportunity to explore facets of her identity independent of her family's influence. She chose a school that was close enough to earn her family's approval, but far enough that she could grow and develop without her family's influence.

Khadija, being the first woman in her family to attend college, had her mother's foresight to utilize college as a time of independence and growth:

> And my mom really found [college] as an opportunity also to separate me from my family's culture and kind of let me explore other parts of our culture and even our religion on my own. And that was really big for her, she always says, "Yeah, I sent you off to hide you from the family so that you can figure out your life away from everyone else's expectations." Because otherwise the traditional trajectory

> was maybe I go get a degree, maybe not. Even if I do, it doesn't make a... It's just piece of paper so that I can get married. And then I get married . . . And I was lucky in that my mom was the same way, she's very big on have a career, have a life, enjoy your life, have boyfriends, date. But no one else in my family is like that. And they also helped to raise us, every day they picked us up from school, they cooked for us, they taught us everything because we only had them.

Having her mother as an advocate for her personal growth, Khadija was able to change the typical trajectory that most of the women in her family followed. Khadija's extended family had helped raised her, and so her mother knew that if Khadija did not go away to college, they would continue to have a heavy influence on her path in life. If Khadija's mother did not have this foresight and value mindset outside of traditional marriage, Khadija may not have been able to develop her Muslim identity separate from her family's identity or attain the success that she did.

NAVIGATING AND NEGOTIATING HIGHER EDUCATION WITH FAMILY

While the previous chapter on familism highlighted ways in which family expectations and values affected the experiences of Muslim American women, there were specific ways in which family shaped Muslim women's pathway into higher education.

Family's Meaning Making of Education: Expectations and Prestige

A total of 14 participants spoke on college attendance as a preconceived expectation of their family, as well as notions of prestige that came with attending specific schools. Being the children of immigrants, many participants explained that attending college was a way to show gratitude for the work their parents put into their success.

Saba explains:

> I always knew growing up that I would be going to college. My parents were like, [not going to college is] totally not an option. They migrated from India and Pakistan. My mom came here when she was seven and my dad moved here when he was around 20. They spent their whole life working for me and my family to have a better life. So I always knew that, okay, college is the way to go to support that and to make sure... To continue their work and make sure that it's counting for something. So I always knew.

Saba's parents always made it clear that their children would attend college, specifically because of the time they had spent working to ensure their children had all the opportunities available to them that they did not have themselves.

In comparison, Aziza found that having a large number of family members who had sought out higher education resulted in the same expectation:

> So whether it was my decision [to go to college], I honestly don't know. It was kind of like more of an expectation of us growing up. One thing that my parents did, they really emphasized the importance of education above anything else, which I appreciated . . . I graduated high school and I graduated college, even my master's, it wasn't ever like a, "Oh yay." They were happy, but it was more like a, "Okay, yeah, that's expected. You're supposed to do all that stuff." . . . And I was surrounded by all my family members, my mom and my dad, they also pursued higher education, so that really helped as well because I was surrounded by family members who also did the same. So it was kind of like an expectation.

Most of Aziza's family had also pursed higher education and placed high value on it, so she always had that expectation of herself, unable to disentangle her own expectations from her family's. Attaining educational success, and even an advanced degree, was a norm in her family.

Yara states that she is a first-generation student of Somali descent, and so her parents have the mentality that their children must attend college as a result of the work they put into growing their family and attaining opportunities for their children that they did not have themselves. In addition, Yara points out that not only was she expected to attend college, but there was value placed on which school she attended. Yara explains: "[School redacted] was my dad's dream school . . . It's a popular school worldwide, but I've heard a lot of it like in my mosque, and I think it's a cultural thing to be very prideful in where your kids go, like the community talks in that sense." While the school Yara chose to attend made sense financially, she also recognizes the prestige that it adds to her family, especially when interacting with other Muslims in the mosque. She states that it's a cultural norm for parents in her community to discuss and take pride in schools their children attended based on the perceived prestige of that school.

Anissa also explains that this notion of prestige applies to the type of school one attends:

> When I was in high school, I don't think I really had a choice of going to community college. My parents really wanted to see me go to a four year. I felt like their dreams were like my dreams back then. They really wanted me to go a UC [University of California] and it seems like really shallow looking back at it back then, like I should've been at my dream school, but I didn't really think about that back then. I just ended up going to a UC because that was the only UC that I got into. I did get into other four years, but my parents really wanted me to go to like a UC.

Anissa knew early on that attending a community college was not an option and that her parents would prefer a four-year institution. Even beyond that, they specifically preferred for her to attend a school in the prestigious UC system, rather than a California State University (CSU). Anissa had other dream schools, but because her parents saw value in the only UC she got accepted to, she was pushed into choosing that school. She recognizes that she may have taken a different path if she had the awareness she does now.

Similarly, Zahra had her options limited due to the notions of prestige that her parents placed on the school she would attend:

> I moved here from Pakistan when I was a couple months old. And the reason my parents say they moved here is for their children, which is so we can get a better education. So with that being said, after high school, I knew I was going to go to college . . . But when I applied to colleges, I applied to four UCs, four community colleges, and I got into all of the CSUs. But I only got into one UC. And so to my parents, and my family, everybody, we were just shocked. So when it came down to that, then I was like, "Well, I don't want to go to the UC because they don't have my major." But my parents were also not okay with me going to a state college. UC has more prestige, and respect, it gives you a name.

Zahra got accepted into all of the CSUs she applied to, but only one UC. The UC she got accepted into did not have her major, but her parents and her extended family did not approve of her attending a CSU, and so they pushed her into attending the UC, despite not offering the field of study she wanted to pursue. Zahra later explains that these notions of prestige, respect and a name are less about career prospects, and more about community perceptions. The family attains more prestige in the community by having a child that attends a UC, and even further, it improves marriage prospects.

Expectations of Field of Study

A total of 10 participants noted that their family expected them to pursue specific fields of study in college that would result in a particular type of job, some of those being a medical doctor, a lawyer, or an engineer.

Sonia states:

> Speaking to a lot of Muslim women, in general, I feel like we're pushed into certain fields. It's like, "Okay, you're either doing your MD, your PhD or becoming a lawyer or engineer or something like that." So I don't know . . . I mean, not so much for me just because I already wanted to [pursue medical school], but even my dad till this day, my sister has her master's in developmental psych. And even till this day, he's like, "She should have just became a psychiatrist." It's like, "She doesn't want to do that." I feel like, definitely, like I said, it's that whole thing of the name and the respect and prestige.

While she herself was pursuing a medical degree because she had an interest in it, Sonia recognizes that there is often a pressure placed on other Muslim women to go down these career paths, even if that is not their own desire. She uses her sister as an example, with their father making comments about how she should have become a psychiatrist instead of attaining a master's degree in developmental psychology. Similar to discussions around attending a UC or other prestigious schools, Sonia is aware that the push towards these career fields is in pursuit of perceived respect and prestige.

Similarly, Nadia explains:

> So, ever since I was younger, I was always told that, "You have to go to college," and it wasn't even just college. It was like, "You have to become a doctor." . . . Till this day I probably still can't even decipher if I've always wanted on my own or if I was always told that that's what you're supposed to do because my parents are from Afghanistan. And my mom only went up to the third grade. My dad's education… kind of not sure what it was. So education is and was really important to them. And it's kind of, in our culture, your children's education is kind of how your status is built upon. It's one thing that builds on your status. So from then, I always knew I was going to be in the health field and I always thought I was going to do an MD program kind of primary care. And that was influenced by our mom because she's like, "Oh, as a woman, it's just easier to do primary care so you can have a family on the side as well and you can make time for your family."

Nadia notes that it is difficult for her to know if her desire to pursue medical school is her own or if it was always influenced by the messaging she received from her parents around attaining the success that they could not. She is aware that, while she is on this path of pursuing medical school, she cannot decipher her own wants from those of her

parents. In addition, however, her mother still wanted her to pursue a medical degree while adhering to particular gendered expectations. While it would bring great respect to her family to have a daughter who was a medical doctor, her mother encouraged her to pursue primary care so that she could have flexibility in her time commitment to get married and build her own family. These types of contradicting expectations—i.e. become a successful doctor but also marry and have children—present Muslim women with a clash of values that they have to navigate. As discussed in previous chapters, they must be religiously pious to maintain their family's reputation, attain academic and career success, and work towards getting married and having children. The pursuit of education introduces possible and complex binds for women to navigate.

Abir, on the other hand, emphasizes that her pursuit of a medical degree is not due to familial pressures:

> I know this is a big stereotype, Brown families always say, "Oh, you got to become a lawyer, a doctor, or engineer." They put you in those three categories, but for me, it was never that. I actually wanted to go into this field. There were times where actually my parents were discouraging me. Actually, my mom had good intentions really because she didn't want me to be so stressed out going into a science field, especially the medical field. She just wanted me to do something that would give me peace of mind.

Abir's own experience pushes back against the notion that families of color and immigrant parents encourage these specific career pathways. Upon her decision to pursue a medical degree, she even found that her mother was concerned about the level of stress that this would bring upon Abir. Abir's experience was, however, unusual in my data.

Expectations of School Distance from Home

An important negotiation factor for participants to consider with their families was how far college was from home. A total of 9 participants stated that distance from home was a consideration they had to make, not only for colleges but for additional opportunities as well. The degree to which families were concerned with distance from home varied, with some willing to negotiate schools that were a short distance away, and others who did not approve of their daughters living outside the home to attend college.

Aziza explains that distance played a role in deciding the school she ended up attending:

> I actually wanted to go to UCLA at first, just get a little far from my family and also study down there. It was kind of my plan, but my parents were like, "We want somewhere close to us. We don't want you too far." So I decided to go to [UC in northern California]. At first, I was upset with the decision because it kind of wasn't my decision. It was kind of more pressured onto me like, "Oh, you have to go there because your sister goes there and it's close to home and we don't want you going too far." . . . Those kinds of discussions were looking like, "Okay, what's close to us? What can we do there?" That was kind of more of the discussions around that, going to college. But then for my master's, it was very much like, "Okay, well I'm going to make my own decision on where I go."

Aziza's family ultimately pressured her into attending the same school her sister attended because it was much closer to home than southern California. Aziza does emphasize that she grew to love the school she attended and does not regret that decision; however, when

it came time to explore master's programs, she did not engage in these same negotiations or conversations so that she could make the decision on her own.

Neya was able to convince her family to allow her to attend a school that was farther from home:

> I think in my family, education is probably a pretty high priority, so it was always a given that I'd go to school. It was just the location of where I was going to go to school was what was more up for debate. Because I'm from Southern California, my family very much so wanted me to stay home. They really wanted me to go to UC Irvine. And I definitely felt a lot of pressure in that way, but at the end of the day, they respected my decision and they were like, "You can choose as long as you don't go outside of California. We don't want you to resent us if we stop you." So I think overall, I feel like I had more difficulty compared to my peers because, in an ideal world, I would have just wanted to be able to choose to go wherever I wanted to go. But they ended up being supportive of my decision after a lot of negotiations and whatnot.

Neya ended up attending a UC in northern California, which was much farther from home than the school they wanted her to attend in southern California. She recognizes that she was required to do a lot of negotiating and convincing that many of her peers did not have to experience. Even with her family's ultimate approval, they still wanted her to confine her options to California.

Similarly, Nadia knew that her family had very specific distance constraints when it came to which colleges she could attend:

> I wasn't allowed to apply to any college more than two hours away . . . And my sister as well, she actually got pre-accepted to like UCLA and everything. My parents were like, "No way, you have to stay close to us. God forbid something happens to you. We want to have access to you." . . . And actually this is probably something different from other Muslims that I've heard. My parents always said, "You will move out when you go to college. We don't want you to stay home because when you're home, we know we're going to force you to wash dishes and take care of the house and stuff." So for them, they knew how they were as parents. So it was important for them to have us move out.

Despite being limited to schools that were only two hours from home, and even having a sister who was kept from attending a school as prestigious as UCLA, Nadia explains that her parents were unique compared to other Muslim parents. Nadia's parents wanted her to move out when she went to college, aware that they themselves would still be tasking her with gendered roles if she continued to live at home. They wanted to ensure that she moved out so that she could focus entirely on her studies without familial responsibilities as a distraction. While they did want their daughters to live outside their home, the stipulation was that they had to be no farther than two hours away for perceived safety reasons.

While some Muslim women's parents were okay with them moving out, but had specific expectations around distance, others required their daughters to attend schools in their local area so that their daughters could continue living at home.

Mina explains:

> There was no conversation. I didn't talk to anybody about if I want to leave or not. I automatically just assumed and thought that we are that type of a family that stays together and sticks together and takes every decision together. I already knew four steps ahead what the answer might be. I kind of gave myself the answer and accomplished what I have accomplished now staying at my parents' house. I know I talk to other people about this and a lot of my friends give me the idea of, "Why don't you just talk to your parents about it? I'm sure they'll blah, blah, blah, blah." But I don't because I know.

Mina emphasizes that when it came to making decisions around schooling, she did not have a conversation with her family about it. She had grown up in a family in which she could assume what the response would be to those types of conversations. Mina had older siblings and no sister before her had moved out of the home for school, so she knew that the case would be the same for her. In addition, she had a deep understanding of the cultural values that her family held. Instead of having these discussions, she focused on the opportunities she could attain while still living at home.

Basma acknowledge similar assumptions, even when it came to other opportunities:

> I remember in college, I had applied for an internship and I got it and it was in Washington, D.C. It was just like, okay, "How are you going to go to Washington, D.C.?" That was the vibe I got from my parents and I was like, "Well, it's not going to happen." I'm the type that, before I even brought it up, I just knew it wasn't going to happen. I just don't even want to talk about it . . . I feel like I was able to work within the boundaries and was still able to accomplish a lot and get to the goal that I wanted.

Basma received an opportunity that would have required her to live out of state, and without even having an in-depth conversation with her family, she knew that she would not be able to take this opportunity. She notes that she was aware of what the outcome would be before even bringing it up. Similarly to Mina, however, Basma emphasizes that she was still able to accomplish a lot and attain success while working within the boundaries that she perceived her family had established.

Similarly, Hibah knew that distance for school and for additional opportunities would be an issue:

> Me and my sister went [to undergrad] together and would commute together. It wasn't even a thought in my mind to go to undergrad to live away somewhere. You're raised to just have certain expectations, whether that's right or wrong. That's just your world view when you're that age. When you're 18 you can't even fathom another option. Ridiculous in some ways . . . When I got into grad programs, it was like, "What are we going to do with Hibah? What are we going to do?" It worked out that I was getting married. We rushed the wedding a little bit to be honest. In some ways my marriage made it okay for my family to feel okay with me then going to grad school and moving here.

Hibah acknowledges that there were many assumptions that were not only made, but also accepted, when it came to expectations around distance and living away from home. She and her sister never even considered that they could live away from home for school. Even when it came to graduate school, her parents expressed concern. While they always

encouraged education for their daughters, they still did not know how to navigate these issues of distance. Hibah states that her marriage ultimately made the pathway to graduate school much easier, since she was able to move with her husband to the city that her school was located.

Hibah goes on to emphasize, however, that these concerns around distance are not attributed to her religious identity:

> The thing I want to go back to is this topic and question of freedom in terms of our mobility. I hesitated [to bring that up], because I'm like, that's not my Muslim identity. That's my family. That's our culture. We are constantly conflating those things. I have to stop myself to think that's not my Muslim identity. That's just my family and culture.

While discussions around distance and mobility are highly relevant to her experiences through higher education, Hibah was careful around bringing it up because she recognizes that this is not a concern that stems from religion, but instead is an issue that stems from specific family dynamics and cultural values.

EXPERIENCES WITHIN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

Muslim American women go through specific negotiations with their family's notions and meaning making upon pursuing higher education. Their multitude of identities then shape the experiences they have once they arrive at their institution.

Experiences with Mentorship

As highlighted earlier, a majority of Muslim women in this study are navigating many complexities related to their identities while simultaneously pursuing a college degree. They are navigating the shifting of their own identity, how others perceive their identity and that of the larger Muslim community, and notions of reputation or prestige among their family. A majority of the participants (n=15) did not have positive experiences—if any at all—when seeking mentorship. They had to find and create their own systems of support while navigating these complex issues.

It is important, however, to highlight some of the positive experiences that Muslim women had when they did find mentorship on their campus. There were 6 participants who found helpful guidance and support from mentors on their campus.

Ritha states:

> I don't think there was somebody to guide me through it. Because I don't... I mean, it's something so close to my own experience, because I was dealing with my family, I was dealing with my community. And those are all kind of individual experiences. But I did have a couple professors, and my old bosses who kind of supported me, as I went. Supported me as I dealt with it, but not guiding me through. More like emotional support.

Ritha explains that while the mentors she sought out could not necessarily guide her, she was able to find much needed emotional support with them. She recognizes that their ability to guide her through these experiences was limited by how specific these were to her identity, community and culture. She emphasizes how helpful it was to have the emotional support from these individuals through her educational career.

Asia was able to find support from mentors who had interacted with other Muslim women on her campus:

> I actually had mentors that I would go to, and like I mentioned earlier, there were more girls in the community that were [questioning their identity]. A couple of them had the same major as me, so we had the same counselor, same mentor, same professors. And so, it made it easier for me when I was having these issues to go and talk to some of my professors, because they had already known from previous students how the culture works. And the counselor that I would see at [at my school] would counsel a lot of [Middle Eastern] girls. And so, he learned a lot about our culture from hearing their stories. So, it really helped, again, that I went to a school that had a lot of [Middle Eastern] girls to where a lot of people have had encounters, they've either taught, been a classmate, counseled, so it helped with my experience.

Asia was going through a complicated process of questioning her identity and her cultural ties. She attributes having such positive experiences with mentors to the large population of Middle Eastern and Muslim women on her campus, who had gone through similar questions and struggles. Because many professors and counselors had interacted with other Muslim and Middle Eastern women, they had some understanding of the cultural issues that she was encountering and were better equipped to guide her through them.

There were 4 Muslim women in this study who were able to interact with Muslim women faculty on their campus; however, this did not equate to finding helpful mentorship in these faculty members. Faiza explains, “I think there was one Muslim professor, but I didn't really know her like that . . . We had a discussion once, during the MSA fundraiser and her way of thinking was... This is probably going to sound terrible, it was too extreme for me.” Faiza’s interaction with the one Muslim woman faculty member that she was aware of on campus was not a positive one, because their ideological views of their faith differed so vastly. Faiza states that this professor’s view of Islam was much more conservative than her own, and so she would not have naturally sought her out for guidance, especially when it came to matters related to her Muslim identity.

Similarly, Hibah interacted with a Muslim woman faculty member whose views differed ideologically from her own:

> I actually had two professors who were identified as Muslim women of color . . . I realized that I had a romanticized version of that, because even when I found these two amazing people, they weren't perfect . . . I remember the one professor that I'm thinking of talking when she knew that I was interested in grad school, she had this whole lecture with me about how, "Listen. You need to know this culture, it's a secular culture. I want you to know, if you go to a restaurant and you're sitting with your advisors, you need to know that when you’re ordering… with red meat, you get red wine. With fish, you get white wine. You need to know these things." I was like, "I don't drink." She was like, "I'm sorry, Hibah, but if you want to succeed in this career, you're going to have to assimilate a little bit, because that's where the conversations happen. That's where the job interviews happen." . . . She was not at all receptive of me saying, "But that's not how I want to get jobs." That was disillusioning. The other professor was a lot more understanding, but again didn't fully understand my apprehensions about moving or going away to grad school . . . She was like, "You're a grown adult. You should

> be independent." You don't understand. You're not understanding. You're belittling this anxiety that I have. I'm still so grateful that I had at least them to come to with those problems, because if I had gone to a white professor, I don't even think I could begin to explain those things.

The dynamics that Hibah experienced with these two faculty members were complex. She concludes by saying she was grateful they could at least understand her experiences in a way that non-Muslim and white faculty could not, but there was still a misalignment in their experiences. While both these faculty members understood her experiences, they wanted her to push against the boundaries in the same ways that they had, as non-practicing Muslims, rather than recognizing that she wanted to continue practicing her faith and maintain her family ties as she built up her academic career.

Basma faced a similar experience and sums it up succinctly: "[This professor] always pushed us. A lot of her research that she did was the good Muslim girl. Sometimes I felt like I was in that box, I've listened to my parents, I did fit definitely more in that mold of what she was trying to push us out of." Similar to what Hibah experienced, the Muslim woman faculty member that Basma interacted with seemed to be trying to push Basma to go against the boundaries of her faith and family. In both of these instances, these Muslim women faculty members ascribed the trope of the obedient Muslim girl that needed to be saved to potential mentees, rather than recognizing that they were autonomous actors in their own lives.

The majority of women in this study (n=15) had no mentors at their college and so they sought support from their friends and peers who understood and shared their experiences. The lack of understanding they experienced from some professors hindered them from seeking support from other faculty.

Mina explains:

> No one helps. You think they're helping, but in a way they're just saying things that are like a script, I feel like . . . They're just saying things to say them because they think they'll make you feel better. But in reality, they're really not helping . . . I had a mentor that... He was actually my advisor. I would go into his office hours all the time because we would really talk on family issues and what the future holds and philosophizing about things . . . But every time I would mention something about school and he knew how bad I want to be in the neurosciences or cognitive psychology, and he would give me this really nice dad type push. Where it's like, "Forget about everything and just go out and do what you want . . . Who cares about what your parents are going through. They're not that old. They can get up and get their own medicine." . . . I don't need your push. Let's talk about what more I can do if I can't do plan A. But I didn't get that help. I had to help myself . . . I never really got that help from anybody. I had to come home and talk to my sister about it and cry to her, or I just sit down and help myself sometimes or ask God for help. That's my main mentor.

In developing a relationship with her advisor in which he could have mentored her on how to move her career path forward, she ended up being met with resistance. Mina felt that her advisor was pushing her to go against her family's wishes and pursue what she wanted despite them. Her advisor placed her in this victim-like state, in which he pushed her to find the autonomy to do what she wanted. He did not acknowledge, however, that

she was making an autonomous decision to work with her family. She wanted someone who could provide her with guidance on what other options she had, but ultimately had to figure that out on her own. She sought guidance and comfort from her sister and God when making these difficult life decisions.

Sonia specifically cites the impact of her familial dynamics on her hesitance to seek out a mentor:

> I think in terms of mentorship it's funny because I think, I always grew up with a sense of mistrust for confiding in others, especially about your deep personal life and things like that. So somebody older than me, no, never. It was always more with my friends my age or something like that. Of course I could confide in and naturally, having Afghan or Muslim friends that were going through the same things, that was helpful. But no, I never really had somebody I could turn to in that sense. And I think that also stems from just always hiding certain things from your parents and things like that. So it's like shielding all of that. I think I've just gotten used to keeping it to myself.

Because Sonia had to strategize which information she could share with her parents, it made it difficult for her to confide in those who were in positions of power. Sonia was accustomed to keeping personal information to herself and hiding certain details of her life, and so it was easier to confide in her peers when she needed to talk things through. Having a shared understanding of life experiences with her peers was helpful since she did not feel comfortable speaking to a professor or other individuals in positions of power.

In a similar way, Khadija never thought to look for mentorship and guidance as she faced certain obstacles:

> What's so interesting is I didn't even understand why there was always this cutout, for first-generation college students, they would always be like in financial aid, in scholarships, in academics . . . I was so used to this being my norm for my entire life that I had no idea until probably after college that, no, you had a very special set of circumstances that made it very challenging compared to a white person . . . It didn't click because I was always in this kind of maybe it was psychologically speaking, fight or flight mode, keep going, keep going, keep going. You don't have time to sit here and reminisce about adversities and what you've overcome and outcomes. I was doing a survey or questionnaire about tell us about an adversity you've overcome . . . I'm clicking all these boxes that apparently mean I did face adversities. I was like, oh wow. But no, I never realized that that was something I could get help for. Or it was almost like I never gave myself that credit because I didn't know that that was credit to be given that you're overcoming so much at such an age.

Khadija was so used to the norm of her familial and cultural dynamics, as well as her family's overall financial situation, that she did not realize these were adversities that she had to overcome. She did not realize that being the first woman in her family to attend college meant that there were both structural obstacles and familial challenges she had to navigate in a way that many of her peers did not have to. Citing this notion of being in fight or flight mode, Khadija was focused on moving her way forward in her higher education career that she did not have a moment to think that she could or would need to

seek guidance or help. She had taken these disadvantages to be the norm and was not aware that there could be resources specifically allocated for someone like her. Like many other participants, she navigated through this unfamiliar terrain largely unguided.

Not having mentors at college, the Muslim women in this study found guidance and support in their own networks. Like other participants with older sisters, Noor sought solace and comfort in her older sister:

> For a long time, I went pretty unguided. That was really hard and scary. I talk to my older sister every single day, sometimes twice a day, so... While she may not have been giving me pertinent advice or guidance so to speak, I have that mother figure guiding me through it. Being able to see her on the other side of her labor. She'd gone through these woes, and she'd come out the other side with her husband, with her family. They have a house. She was like, "Things come around. If you're making the right decisions for yourself, these things will all work themselves out." That was really amazing, and my sister... My sister is still the person that I'm closest to today, but I was struggling really badly, with the mental repercussions of it.

It is important to note that Noor struggled with mental health issues that steadily rose through her childhood and came to a head during her undergraduate career. The culmination of difficult family dynamics and the complexities of grappling with her own identity had negative impacts on Noor's mental health that she is still working through. Having an older sister who had gone through a similar struggle but had come out on the other side of it gave Noor a sense of hope.

For participants who did not have older sisters, having Muslim women on campus with similar cultural backgrounds was the closest thing to mentorship that they could find. Ritha states:

> I think we all kind of desire that sense of belonging. So it was kind of nice to have a group of girls, who come from the same community and deal with the same things that we do. Someone who knew like, oh, I've got to go home before sunset, and understood that. Something as simple as that, without me having to sit down and explain, well, it's because my family is this, we don't really go by the clock, we go by the sun. So that was a little bit more important, because it showed that you're not an alien. You're not just doing this alone. So that was kind of important to me.

Ritha felt the burden of having to explain the familial expectations she has to navigate with non-Muslim peers and even professors, who did not have that shared cultural understanding. She found comfort and validation in having other Muslim women on campus who understood her experiences without explanation.

Many of the Muslim women in this study noted that they encountered a number of difficulties during their undergraduate career specifically. Going through a new experience, navigating complex family dynamics, and coming to often difficult realizations around one's identity were all taking place as they also did their best to succeed as students. While doing this without proper mentorship proved to be difficult and had mental health implications for many of them, the Muslim women in this study still found ways to mentor and guide one another.

Types of Discrimination

In this section, I will explore the types of discrimination that the Muslim women in this study encountered in their higher education institutions. It is important to note that this is separate from the tokenization and micro-aggressions that were outlined in chapter 3, with those instances being associated primarily with women who wore the hijab. Those instances of tokenization and micro-aggressions took place both on and off campus, but this section will focus on what discrimination looked like on campus.

Ritha's experiences of anti-Muslim discrimination were often associated with moments in which she advocated for the Muslim community:

> There was once when I had hosted an event called Redefining Jihad. And that was kind of to take the stigma from the word jihad. I remember going around campus, and I would pass out flyers . . . And I went up to someone, I was like, "Hey, we're doing this event." And she looked at it, and she threw it back in my face. And she was like, "There's nothing for me to learn about this religion." I was shocked, because nothing ever happens on campus. Campus has been the sacred place where everyone's friendly and supportive.

Ritha recognized that when she took on events such as the one described above, she was opening herself up to the increased possibility of encountering anti-Muslim discrimination. Even when moments like this occurred, however, she was usually surprised because she most often found support from the campus community when it came to her Muslim identity. The MSA events that she helped host were typically met with much support from the campus community and attendees with a healthy and productive curiosity.

Similarly, Hibah also expected campus to be a place that was much safer when it came to anti-Muslim discrimination:

> In undergrad, there was a man. We would just call him the Christian man, because he would stand at the free speech area and yell at students . . . A lot of my friends were hijabis. Hanging out with them, we're all racialized as a group, as Muslim girls. I remember him harassing us when walking by and just saying things like, "Your prophet's a pedophile. Free yourselves." I don't know if that's considered harassment. To me I feel like the campus is in some ways, I hate the word safe space... but compared to the outside world... Because I feel, again, even when you're dealing with just academics, they might say ignorant things, but it's not the same type of fear as when you're in the airport. You're literally scared someone might pull your scarf or physically harm you.

Hibah, like other Muslim women, often felt heightened attention from individuals who were on campus to preach about their own faith. While she did not wear the hijab at the time, she was easily perceived as Muslim by association because many of her friends did wear the hijab. Hibah emphasizes, however, that campus still felt much safer compared to other places, such as the airport. She may experience ignorant comments, but she was never in fear for her physical safety on campus.

A common concern that came up for participants was anti-Palestinian sentiment which they perceived as discrimination (n=4). Although none of the participants identified as Palestinian, they felt a sense of unity with Palestinians by way of their shared Muslim identity.

Jannah states:

> There was this one chemistry teacher. She was Israeli and I remember... But the thing is I was her favorite student, so personally I was like, "She loves me." She even asked me to be her TA [teaching assistant] and everything like that, but some of the things that she would say was... I don't know. For example, one of the things that she said was she would talk about back home . . . She would say, "Oh, back in Israel we have a moment of peace for all of the soldiers or the people that died, and stuff like that. But the Muslims there don't respect that moment of silence." I'm like, "Okay. I'm sorry?" The thing is, at that moment I wanted to be like, "Yeah, well, a lot of other Muslims were killed by the Israeli soldiers. A lot more." But I'm not going to say that to a professor, especially who's literally grading our stuff. I think at that point, I just had to take it in. It would be subtle things like that. I think she was trying to look for a reaction from me or maybe an apology on behalf of the Muslims. I'm not even Palestinian, but at the same time, I'm not going to give you that.

Jannah pointedly describes an experience that many of the participants shared, in which a professor made comments that signaled anti-Palestinian sentiment. Because of the uneven power differentials, students were not in a space in which they could comfortably challenge these professors. In this one interaction, Jannah experienced a simultaneous erasure and tokenization of her Muslim identity. While this professor favored Jannah despite these views, she also seemed to expect Jannah to speak on behalf of Muslims. Jannah recognized that she could not challenge a professor who had both provided her with important professional development opportunities and who was still in charge of her grades.

Yara describes the type of discrimination she experienced from her campus's administration, particularly in regards to her Black identity:

> I feel as though I kind of sought out groups and spaces in which I belong, but I think all of us who are a part of these groups acknowledge that like we're kind of fighting against the university and that the university just doesn't want us here. It's just like I found my space so I found my sense of belonging, but in general, it's just like it's a vicious cycle of [campus] versus said minority. It's just like thinking back, it's like you don't realize how much you or your friend group goes through and I'm just like I had a crazy first year of college, it's only been like a year. I don't think the university provides any sense of belonging. Students kind of make it what it is . . . It's just like everything that Black students have is fought for and then the university likes to claim that they're diverse and they provide these resources to us. You didn't give it to us because you wanted to. We made you give it to us.

For Yara, the discrimination she encountered was at an institutional level, rather than via individual interactions. Yara explains that she and other Black students had to cultivate their own sense of belonging on campus and that the university then takes credit for the things marginalized students fought to attain for themselves. Because the university did not already cultivate a campus in which students like Yara could feel like they belong, they had to rely on one another and often protest until the university provided them with a resource they needed. Yara also cited ways in which the university did not support her

Muslim identity, referencing instances of anti-Palestine sentiment, but her racial identity plays a major role in her sense of belonging on campus.

Conclusion

The ways in which higher education shapes Muslim women's religious identities are varied by familial, cultural, and campus dynamics. Some Muslim women's relationship with their faith deepened during their college career, while others redefined it or declined it entirely. They ultimately found a way to integrate their identities (Pitt 2010), as they found ways to reclaim and redefine their Muslim identity independent of societal and familial expectations and ascriptions. In the same way that familism impacted Muslim women's expected behaviors, their families' views around education also affected their pathway into higher education. Many of the Muslim women in this study then find themselves in a higher education institution without much guidance on how to navigate these issues. They had to operate as skillful cultural straddlers, in which they navigated both dominant and nondominant cultural capital around them across various cultural environments, including mainstream society, higher education, and their individual Muslim community and family (Carter 2006).

In the same way that Muslim women strategized and found ways to creatively work within the expectations of their family to attain what they desired, they do the same when it comes to navigating higher education. The networks that Muslim women built with one another assist them in navigating the fluctuation of their Muslim identity, their familial and cultural dynamics, and the complex world of higher education. While participants did not explicitly discuss their sense of belonging on campus at length, they demonstrated how they cultivated their own sense of belonging through the crucial networks of Muslim women around them. Our understanding of belonging refers to how students perceive the support, connectedness and acceptance they feel on campus (Strayhorn 2019). One key component of this is social belonging, which includes having a friend group that one feels deeply and genuinely attached to (Nunn 2021). When Muslim women did not find belonging amongst faculty or others in mentor-like positions, they sought out and built their own sense of social belonging by connecting with the Muslim women around them. A majority of participants immediately pointed to friends and peers when asked about mentorship and support, and so this clearly played a role in determining their success both within school and in navigating the complicated process of identity formation.

The section on mentorship highlights how some individuals in positions of power regard Muslim women as individuals lacking autonomy, pushing them to go against their religious or familial values as though they did not choose those values for themselves. Chapters 3, 4 and 5 present evidence that clearly opposes this trope and stereotype. Many of the Muslim women in this study or their older sisters were the first in their family to accomplish a number of things. While some did so within the boundaries of their familial values, others pushed against them entirely. Both sides of this spectrum demonstrate different versions of what autonomy can look like for Muslim women.

This chapter describes how college provides a space for Muslim women to challenge and reflect on their religious identities, in ways that can lead them to move away from a more traditional practice of Islam. Education presents complex binds for Muslim women between the expectations of academic and career achievement along with

the opportunities for religious questioning juxtaposed with the gendered expectations placed on them by their families. The religious, cultural and gender identity development of Muslim women in higher education are the outcome of the navigational efforts they must exercise when maneuvering these difficult binds.

In the following chapter, I will discuss my findings, providing an overview and analysis of the data as a whole, as well the specific themes and patterns discussed in each chapter. I will also provide suggestions for future research and describe the implications that this dissertation has for higher education institutions in how they serve their Muslim women students.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

CONCLUSION

College educated Muslim women in this study consistently demonstrated a thoughtful understanding of the way they experience their multitude of identities and social contexts. Such an understanding was, in fact, necessary for strategizing and negotiating the multiple binds they faced. These women demonstrated what is known, but perhaps not emphasized in current studies—that is, Muslim women are not defined by their Muslim identity, nor is there a single understanding of what it means to be a Muslim woman.

Participants placed emphasis on the fact that religion may not have been at the core of their experiences, but that familial dynamics and cultural values often convoluted and contradicted what they believed to be the core teachings of Islam. In consistently making this clarification at various points of their interviews, Muslim women were accomplishing two things simultaneously: 1) actively managing stereotypes that exist about Islam and Muslims, even as they recounted their own personal experiences and 2) separating the Muslim identity they had defined and curated for themselves from what has been placed upon them by family, peers and society at large. This perfectly demonstrates what Muslim women do in their daily lives, which is find ways to creatively straddle the lines between the conflicting expectations they face from their families as they pursue careers in higher education.

Using intersectionality to frame the methods and data analysis of this study, I placed Muslim women and their voices at the center. In doing so, the agency and autonomy of each participant is visible throughout. Muslim women are not passive victims who are unconsciously shaped by their religious identity, familial expectations, and social environments. Instead, they are active agents not only in their own lives, but also in the lives of other Muslim women around them, such as sisters, cousins, and friends.

The social spaces that Muslim women occupy are structured by patriarchy. Intersectional work consistently demonstrates that women find methods to exercise resistance within patriarchal constraints (Baca Zinn et al. 1986; Collins 2000; hooks 1984). Since patriarchal systems intrinsically benefit men, they are less likely to criticize it than women (Collins 2000). The women in this study are deeply aware of the patriarchal systems they occupy, so much so that they recognize the ways it limits men as well. Many women recognized that men ultimately benefitted from their families' gendered values but were also cognizant of the constraints placed on men by these gendered values, including the pressure to financially support their family and the expectation to work within the family business rather than pursue their own educational and career goals.

Research has found that patriarchy is so salient in the lives of Latinx women, for example, that it holds generational implications (Baca Zinn et al. 1986; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1992; Peña 1991). Some Latinx women pursue higher education to gain independence that their mothers did not have, often at the encouragement of their mothers who recognize their own limitations and desire more for their daughters (Ovink 2014). The women in this study similarly saw the generational effects of patriarchal values in

their families. They cited the difficult circumstances their mothers had to navigate as motivation for their own educational and career pursuits.

Participants noted instances in which their mothers or other women in their family encouraged them to pursue academic success, which was in and of itself an act of resistance, but these acts of resistance were still constrained by generational patriarchal thinking. Mothers would encourage their daughters for academic success, but still expect marriage to be prioritized. In other instances, they would not place value on marriage, but they would still expect their daughters to stay close to home. While parents presumed that marriage would be where their daughters found a financial caretaker—and that education could even increase the possibility of finding a financially successful spouse—participants themselves engaged in pragmatic mobility, in which they did not assume that they would rely financially on men and relied primarily on their own self sufficiency (Hamilton 2014). Where parents attempted to engage in the concept of pragmatic mobility for their daughters, they seemed to fall back into traditional gendered notions of relying on the husband as the primary financial provider. These gendered values were so intrinsically linked into some of these women's family values that even where they found some leeway, there was still patriarchal thinking below the surface.

The findings of this dissertation demonstrate that Muslim American women must navigate a multitude of conflicting expectations as they attempt to develop their own identity. Du Bois presents the notion of double consciousness, explaining that Black individuals must operate with the awareness that their identity is shaped by the oppressor while also maintaining their own self-identification (Du Bois 1994). I posit that Muslim American women must operate with a triple consciousness, in which they must consider the gendered expectations of their family as it relates to concepts of reputation, the Islamophobic rhetoric around them, as well as what their religious identity means to them.

Through this dissertation, Muslim American women demonstrate the processes by which they must redefine and reclaim their Muslim identity amongst these conflicting narratives in the various social contexts they occupy. They must balance the reputational concerns of the family within the Muslim community, these concerns being perpetuated in a way that serves to convolute religion with cultural and familial values. In describing these values, participants are careful to clarify that Islam is not at the root of these values and that it stems from individual family dynamics and cultural values. In doing so, they continue to manage stereotypes about Islam so that they do not contribute to existing rhetoric about Islam as an oppressive religion. Research has previously found that Muslim women take on the work of being ambassadors for their Muslim community and actively seeking to break existing stereotypes (van Es 2017). I argue that the gendered labor placed upon Muslim women to be the maintainers of their family's reputation within the Muslim community transfers into the responsibility that Muslim women tend to take in breaking existing stereotypes about Islam and Muslims.

In this study, participants who identified as African American described less concern with the Muslim community's perceptions on women's religious piety and more with their children's ability to succeed. These participants seemed to have more leniency in the way they practiced their faith, regardless of the level of religiosity of their parents. Thus, race and ethnicity complicates the way in which gender impacts notions of

"reputation." In addition, the Black-identified women in this study recognized that their racial identity was the most salient identity among both non-Black Muslims and non-Muslims alike. One participant was aware of the privilege she attained by not wearing the hijab, explaining that she could choose when to bring forward her marginalized Muslim identity, whereas she had no way of concealing her identity as a Black woman.

The Black-identified participants in this study also described the way anti-Blackness permeated through Muslim communities. They described instances in which their Muslim identity was perceived as secondary to their Black identity, by both Muslims and non-Muslims. More concerning, however, was that Black women in this study felt that non-Black Muslims regarded their connection to the Muslim faith as less than simply because of their racial identity. A majority of the non-Black Muslim women in this study who did not strictly practice the Muslim faith stated that they found acceptance from their Muslim peers and that they did not experience judgement for the way they chose to practice their faith. The Black women in this study, however, told a different story. While they did not experience judgement from their Muslim peers for how they practiced their faith, they witnessed a default assumption that they would not have a strong connection with their faith because they were Black. Their experiences suggest that non-Black Muslims may actually be surprised if they encountered a Black Muslim who practiced the faith in a more traditional way.

Because a majority of Muslims are of Arab or South Asian descent, the Black Muslim identity is often forgotten or "other-ed." Thus, the Black Muslim woman's experience is painted by patriarchy, Islamophobia, and anti-Black racism. The perceived salience of a Black identity complicates how Black Muslim women develop both their religious and racial identity. This furthers our knowledge on the ways in which Black Muslim identities are delegitimized by both non-Muslims and non-Black Muslims (Guhin 2018; Khabeer 2016). Where the racialization of Muslims does occur (Garner and Selod 2015; Selod 2015; Selod and Embrick 2013), it does so in a way that perpetuates the divide between the perceived legitimacy of a South Asian or Arab Muslim identity, and further erases the Black Muslim identity (Guhin 2018; Khabeer 2016).

In what follows, I summarize the core findings from each of the three empirical chapters, how these findings fit into what we know from existing literature, as well as how they complicate both what we know about Muslim American women and what we know about the identity development of other marginalized groups. Then, I discuss suggestions for future research and how it can expound upon these initial findings. Lastly, I outline the implications that this study has for higher education institutions and how they can better serve their Muslim American women students and begin to deinstitutionalize the implicit Islamophobia that exists on these campuses.

Hijab

In exploring the role that the hijab played in the lives of Muslim women, findings supported existing research, but with more representation from Muslim women who did not currently wear the hijab most of the time. Because of this methodological innovation, I realized that the hijab is better conceptualized not as a binary experience (i.e., you either wear it or not) but as a spectrum of experiences, in which women may go back and forth between choosing to wear the hijab and not wear it. Notably, these transitions shaped

their perception of what the hijab meant in their personal lives, and those of Muslim women in general.

As previous studies highlight, Muslim women who wear the hijab are more likely to experience discrimination because of the hypervisibility that the hijab brings to their religious identity (Tariq and Syed 2017; Vickers et al. 2012). The type of discrimination that hijabis in this study experienced was more often in the form of tokenization, in which they became representatives who were expected to speak for all Muslims when they occupied spaces with non-Muslim peers. This tokenization is the result of the gendered racialization of Muslim women (Selod 2018), which is due to the centralization of the Muslim woman's body in the perpetuation of Islamophobia (Jiwani 2006; Mirza 2013; Razack 2008). This gendered racialization is used in the categorization of Muslims as the Other by painting the hijab as a focal point of a Muslim woman's identity in an act of oppression (Abu-Ali and Reisen 1999; Ali 2014; Mir 2014; Paz and Kook 2020). It ignores the agency of Muslim women as they actively make decisions and ascribe meaning to their religious identities and practices.

As a result of the hypervisibility that the hijab brings and the fear of potential discrimination, some participants noted that their parents expressed concern over their daughters wearing the hijab and even discouraged it in some instances. This goes against many existing tropes in which the hijab is painted as a tool of oppression placed on Muslim women without their choice. These conversations, in which Muslim women made an active choice about wearing the hijab, led them to ascribe their own personal meanings to the hijab. Participants in this study discussed a number of meanings for the hijab, including a socio-political statement, a confidence boost, and/or a tool that brought them closer to God.

While Muslim women who wear the hijab experience hypervisibility and even a reduction of their identity to Muslim and nothing else, Muslim women who did not wear the hijab found that their religious identity was entirely overlooked (Jeldtoft 2011). Some found this to be problematic, and would ensure that they identified themselves as Muslim or at least present their ethnic identity when they could. Others saw the benefits that came with this, particularly if they had transitioned between not wearing the hijab and wearing it. In the same way that some hijabis enjoyed the opportunity to answer non-Muslims' questions about their faith, some non-hijabis enjoyed being able to select the situations in which they made their religious identity known. Non-hijabis in this study ultimately recognized the privilege that they had amongst non-Muslims. They recognized that they were less likely to face discrimination compared to hijabis and emphasized that wearing the hijab was a brave choice.

As noted earlier, hijabis and non-hijabis alike took the time to explain that the hijab is ultimately a choice and that it carries different meanings from one Muslim to another. While some believed that Islam required the hijab, others interpreted Islamic teachings of the hijab to be around other notions of modesty that did not relate directly to the headscarf.

Family

In the same way that notions and experiences of the hijab varied among the Muslim women in this study, so did their experiences with familial dynamics and expectations. All the participants in this study, to varying extents, experienced familism.

Familism is when an individual's values and behavior are determined by relatives, and includes strong ascribed values on the concept of family loyalty (Desmond and López Turley 2009; Sabogal et al. 1987). Previous work already identified that family ties were strong among Muslim families (Tirmazi et al. 2012); however, this study demonstrates how familism manifests in the lives of college-educated Muslim women, specifically with underlying patriarchal values that perpetuate Muslim women as gatekeepers of their family's reputation.

Muslim women in this study faced a number of often conflicting expectations from their families that they had to strategically navigate. Notions of reputation often led families to expect their Muslim daughters to present themselves as religiously pious and not engage in behaviors that would cause other Muslims in their community to question their family's piety as a whole. Previous work has demonstrated that Muslim women feel liberated when they are removed from a tightly-knit Muslim community as the pressure to be a "good" Muslim is reduced (Bibi 2020). At the same time, there were instances in which Muslim women found their families to expect them to be academically successful.

Studies had found that Muslim families do place value on education and careers (Ahmad 2001), but it was typically underscored by expectations of marriage, which ultimately took priority (Ahmad 2001; Ahmad and Sardar 2012; Gale and Hopkins 2009). Similarly, the women in this study had to navigate these conflicting expectations, in which their families placed value on academic success, but the ultimate definition of success was the ability to marry and have children.

I contribute to existing notions of cultural capital by demonstrating how status operates within the lives of Muslim women based on their family's values. During its origins, cultural capital was denoted by the knowledge of and participation in what was considered high-status art (Bourdieu 1984, 1986; Bourdieu and Passeron 1977). This original conceptualization was class-based and was eventually expanded to understand how status operates within groups of African American youth, for example (Carter 2003). We see that second-generation youth cultures ascribe values to cultural practices that differ from the dominant group, and may also differ and overlap with the meaning-making of adult culture (Warikoo 2011). Muslim families often place value on the religious piety of their daughters and this value ascription ties back to the family's status within the Muslim community. While the larger Muslim community places value on notions of education and success, it is from the lens of status within the Muslim community, rather than class-based status for Muslim women themselves. As such, the women in this study had to find creative ways to strategize around the conflict between these values as they develop their own cultural meanings alongside or separate from those of their families.

In some instances, women pushed back against expectations of marriage entirely. In others, they leveraged these values to gain what they wanted—i.e. getting engaged with the condition that they had to complete graduate school before marriage, convincing their family to let them to take part in extracurricular activities because it would lead to an earlier graduation and thus an early marriage, or expediting the marriage process entirely so that they could attend a university in a different city that they would live in with their husband.

These creative leverages gave many Muslim women the opportunity to pave the way for other Muslim women in their family. Some also experienced having the path made easier by older siblings or relatives. In some instances, it was as simple as older siblings having to explain certain activities and their necessity to their parents, and so when their younger sibling eventually took part in these activities, they had less explaining to do. In other instances, it was much more strategic.

Previous studies have found that Muslim women feel pressure to pave the way for other Muslim girls in their families by demonstrating that education is not a source of "corruption" or "westernization" (Ahmad 2001; Oplatka and Lapidot 2012). Similarly, some Muslim women in this study had families who were concerned about the potential negative impact that education would have on their religious identity. Being that they were the first in their family to either pursue higher education as a whole or attend a university that was farther than home, they knew that they had to present themselves as more religious than they might have been in order to quell fears. This benefitted the participants themselves, but even more so, it sometimes convinced families to allow other Muslim women to pursue these same opportunities.

The familism chapter demonstrated the creative ways in which Muslim women navigated their strong familial ties, and ultimately found a way to attain their own goals, whether or not they aligned with their families' goals. Some Muslim women found that their relationship with their families were ultimately weakened, but others were still able to maintain the close family ties. For Muslim women on either end of that spectrum, this resulted in much self-reflection on their identities as Muslim women. Many emphasized that while their families may have used religion to perpetuate some of these gendered expectations, cultural and individual family dynamics were at the center of these values. Others even found solace in their religious identity, seeking out the central tenants of Islam to guide them through these moments of strategic navigation.

Education

Higher education was one social context in which this study took place. Research has found that higher education leads to the strengthening of ethnic identities for other groups, including Latinx students (Tovar and Feliciano 2009) and Asian American students (Gap Min and Kim 2000). The ethnoracialization that takes place in higher education is dialectical, in which individuals navigate between their own self-identification as well as ascribed definitions of their identity (Brown and Jones 2015; Reyes 2018). For Muslim American women in this study, the type of identity development that occurred during college varied.

In his analysis of Black gay Christian men, Pitt (2010) provides us with a useful framework to understand the processes of identity management in instances where there may be conflicts that exist across identities given a particular social context. We see that Muslim women in this study encounter similar steps in the process of identity negotiations, including the rejection of an identity, leading double lives and compartmentalizing, and the integration of identities (Pitt 2010). Some Muslim women did find that their connection to their religious identity grew when they attended college, particularly as they had the opportunity to learn more about what it meant to be Muslim in a predominantly non-Muslim space. Muslim women who wore the hijab and experienced tokenization often found themselves learning even more about Islam as they

felt pressured to find the answers to many of the questions they were receiving. For other Muslim women, college was an opportunity to redefine what their Muslim identity meant to them, separate from the way it had been taught by their family. While on the surface it may appear that their religious identity was dwindling, what was actually occurring was a reclaiming of their Muslim identity in a way that did not fit into the description their family or larger Muslim community had created. Some Muslim women struggled with this realization, finding that they pushed away from their Muslim identity entirely, before reclaiming it in a way that fit the life they wanted to live.

Before reaching this opportunity to develop and redefine their identities, many of the Muslim women in this study had familial considerations. Women often found that their families placed value on the type of institution their daughters attended and the career paths they pursued. For example, they pushed their daughters to attend a school in the University of California (UC) system over a school in the California State University (CSU) system or a community college because of the prestige that was associated with UC schools. Similarly, there were values placed on traditionally successful career paths, such as doctors, engineers or lawyers. These expectations of success and the prestige that could come with it, however, are still underscored by gendered values.

Many of the Muslim women in this study found their families simultaneously pushing for academic success and being concerned with the distance their daughters would have to travel for school. Some women could not attend a school if it required them to live outside the home; others could attend a school that was away from home as long as it was a specific distance away; and others were able to convince their families to accept a school regardless of distance. In some instances, families were very explicit about their argument for a school in close proximity, tying it back to reputation and the concern that being away from home would increase the likelihood of their daughters engaging in behavior that would tarnish the family's reputation. Others were less explicit about their reasoning, expressing that they feared for their daughters' safety as women—these concerns still being underscored with gendered values as the men in the family were allowed to live away from the home. As a result, Muslim women enacted strategic negotiations, as outlined earlier, to balance the conflicting expectations of success with the gendered notions of religious piety.

Higher education has been outlined as a path towards liberation for various marginalized communities. Stemming from Du Bois's (1935) exploration of Black slaves being barred from education by white supremacists in order to maintain the existing racial hierarchy, we see it presented as a tool for upward mobility amongst Black communities (Cottom 2017) and a path towards independence for Latinx women (Ovink 2014). The Muslim women in this study occupy a unique place in this Du Boisian view of education as a tool of liberation.

The families of many of the Muslim women in this study adhere to Cottom's (2017) application of the Du Boisian framework of education as a tool for social mobility. Many of the families recognize education as a source of both financial and social upward mobility, with emphasis being placed on the prestige of certain schools or career paths. Some of the women in this study, however, described higher education as an opportunity to discover their identity independent of their family's influence and gendered notions of being Muslim. The conflict arises when these two conceptualizations

of college as liberatory clash. The Muslim women in this study then find themselves dealing with a double bind of "contradictory cultural rules" that they have to navigate (Hamilton and Armstrong 2009: 604). The Muslim women in this study often acted as cultural straddlers, in which they navigated between both dominant and nondominant cultural capital across various social contexts (Carter 2006). Participants skillfully navigated their parents' expectations, the expectations of their university and larger society, as well as their own goals and expectations for themselves.

These conflicting expectations weigh on Muslim women during their time in higher education. More often than not, they must manage difficult binds without guidance from an experienced mentor. While a small number of Muslim women had positive experiences with mentors on their campuses, a large majority had no mentorship and sought guidance from their Muslim women peers. In some instances, they had negative experiences with mentors who seemed more concerned with pushing Muslim women out of their comfort zone rather than meeting their needs.

A pervasive trope of Muslim women is that they are vulnerable and submissive victims who need saving from their oppressive fathers and husbands (Abu-Ali and Reisen 1999; Abu-Lughood 2002; Mir 2014; Mirza 2013; Zahedi 2007). Unfortunately, some Muslim women sought guidance from faculty who ultimately painted them in this same image. Both Muslim and non-Muslim faculty alike seemed more concerned with "saving" the Muslim women students who came to them, rather than listening to their needs and acknowledging them as autonomous beings who have made active decisions about their own life. In these instances, the Muslim women were stripped of their agency without these potential mentors recognizing that they were making a choice—and have been consistently making the choice—to strategize around the values of their families.

A large number of the Muslim women in this study thus sought support from other Muslim women around them, whether that was Muslim women in their family or other Muslim women students. These relationships and connections were invaluable. Students of color in higher education experience issues with marginality, isolation, hypervisibility, and discrimination, often in the form of microaggressions (McCabe 2009; Smith, Allen, and Danley 2007; Solórzano, Ceja, and Yosso 2000). As a result, they bond with one another in very tight-knit groups (Martinez Alemán 2000; Solórzano et al. 2000; Stearns, Buchmann, and Bonneau 2009; Tatum 1997; Willie 2003). These racially homogenous friend groups are necessary for self-preservation (Villalpando 2003). While Muslim women students in this study may not have found a sense of belonging amongst faculty or others in positions of power, they cultivated a sense of social belonging, in which they created valuable and genuine connections with peers that were key to their ability to succeed (Nunn 2021; Strayhorn 2019).

The friendship groups that Muslim women in this study developed were not always racially, ethnically or even religiously homogenous, but they specifically sought out friendships with peers they knew would share some level of understanding. Not only were participants able to find a level of understanding for religious and cultural expectations, but these connections played a role in the strategies participants enacted with their families. Women would use connections with other Muslim women to alleviate familial concerns around the loss of their Muslim identity, while pursuing their personal goals.

Future Research

This study suggests valuable implications for future research. First and foremost, a sample that matches the nation-wide percentages of the racial and ethnic identities of Muslim Americans would help to parse out the contradictions that many participants outline between religion, culture and family. Having a further understanding of the way race and ethnicity impact specific familial and cultural dynamics would make a clearer delineation between those and religion.

It is also important to further explore how Black Muslims navigate notions of anti-Blackness that they might encounter amongst other non-Black Muslims. The Black-identified participants in this study did point out situations in which their Muslim identity was perceived as secondary to their Black identity or that their connection to their religious identity was looked at as less than. It is also important to speak to Black Muslim women who wear the hijab most of the time, as having these identities at the forefront will impact how they are perceived by both Muslims and non-Muslims alike.

Future studies should also include a sample of Muslim American women students in other parts of the US. Women in this study mostly attended colleges in California; they acknowledged that the diversity present amongst the students on their campuses shaped their experiences and contributed to the low amount of anti-Muslim discrimination that they encountered. Only one participant attended a predominantly white institution (PWI) and she touched briefly on the fear she felt when Trump was elected, unsure of where her predominantly white peers stood on political matters. Participants at non-PWIs noted a similar fear following Trump's election, but these fears were often quelled by the large numbers of students of color coming together to support one another through this time.

Lastly, all future research conducted on Muslim individuals in general, but Muslim women in particular, should use an intersectional lens. As the literature on Muslim women grows, it is critical that it no longer paints Muslim women with one broad stroke without taking into account the complexities of their various identities. Even within one racial or ethnic group, we can see a number of variances, and so the potential differences across racial or ethnic groups must be accounted for. At the same time, taking into account other facets of Muslim women's identities gives us the opportunity to see where their experiences do align. When we consider these similarities, we must do so carefully and with just as much consideration for the differences. An intersectional framework would also require future work to center Muslim women and their voices, thus avoiding the possibility of painting them into the existing images of victimhood.

Implications for Colleges and Universities

While this study used higher education as a contextual setting for the experiences of Muslim women, it still revealed an important way in which higher education institutions do not provide ample support for Muslim women. The experiences I outlined regarding Muslim women and their experiences—or lack thereof –with mentorship on their campuses highlights that these institutions are not resourced with the type of support and cultural knowledge that Muslim women students need.

Participants experienced faculty members (both non-Muslim and Muslim) who could have been in a position to provide them with much-needed guidance, but instead these faculty treated women as passive victims. Participants sought advice from a faculty member on how to navigate challenging situations—i.e. applying to graduate school and

being the only Muslim woman occupying some academic spaces or familial concerns around pursuing degrees in schools that were far from home—and were met with faculty who felt that these women were trapped by the obedient Muslim girl narrative. Instead of meeting these Muslim women where they were and assisting them in their difficult strategizing, many potential mentors took on a savior role for women that did not want or need saving.

Some research claims that to have a successful mentoring relationship requires the mentor and mentee to share the same ethnicity and gender (Davis 2008; Orland-Barak 2003). Not all research agrees with this, however, with others proposing that what is more valuable is for mentors to maintain cultural understanding and sensitivity (Earley and Ang 2003; Earley and Mosakowski 2004). This is complex, of course, because perhaps cultural understanding and sensitivity is something that comes from one's own experience and not something that a mentor can be trained to have. Training mentors to demonstrate understanding is not the same as understanding via experiences.

This study indicates that even having Muslim women faculty in mentor-like positions did not solve the issue. These Muslim women faculty did not share those experiences with their Muslim students. They had chosen to push against cultural, religious and familial expectations and thus expected the Muslim women students they encountered to do the same. They did not have the experiential understanding of what it meant to navigate complex familial, cultural and religious dynamics, and so they encouraged participants to push against their identity entirely. These experiences complicate this idea that identity-matching is beneficial to positive mentor-mentee relationships. Although participants were grateful to have encountered Muslim women faculty and found this representation to be important, they ultimately knew they would not find the guidance they needed in these faculty members.

My findings suggest that staff, faculty and leadership at colleges need to be aware of their biases regarding the perceived victimhood of Muslim women students, as both Muslim and non-Muslim individuals can perpetuate this stereotype while they think they are helping. It is necessary that we hear students when they share their experiences. Muslim women make conscious and strategic choices around how to navigate the familial, religious and cultural expectations around them, and individuals in mentor positions have much to learn from these Muslim women and their experiences.

The participants in this study consistently demonstrated their agency and autonomy in how they navigated the complex dynamics of their identities. The Muslim women in this study were not passive victims to the social contexts around them; they engaged in creative strategizing and re-strategizing to ensure not only their own success, but the path to success for other Muslim women around them.

Each Muslim woman had defined her own identity, and some defined themselves in a way that aligned with their family, while others found their own entirely independent definition. Both of these occupy their own place on the spectrum of what it means to be Muslim, as there can be no one clear definition of it. Participant Noor states it perfectly:

> For years, I was like, "I don't really practice anything." That always felt like a vacant thing to say, but I do definitely still identify as Muslim, and I take a lot of pride in it now. I do think it's important that after having experienced being marginalized from my own peer group, you have to broaden that definition of

> people, because otherwise you're just one type of people . . . We don't really accept that there is a continuum of these types of people, that we exist in different ways. I have reclaimed it, for sure.

Many participants, including Noor, seemed hesitant to participate in my study, expressing that they were concerned that they would not qualify, that their experiences "did not count," or that they could not provide me with what I was looking for. These concerns came from participants who did not practice Islam in a traditional manner. Although they identified as Muslim—and proudly, as Noor mentioned—they were still concerned with what my definition of Muslim woman was and whether or not they could fit into it.

After hearing this concern more than once, I began explaining to participants before the interview took place that I was interested in understanding every version of the Muslim woman experience, no matter how seemingly traditional or non-traditional it was. I found time and time again that so many participants, even with their initial hesitance, had found a way to reclaim their Muslimness.

Muslim American women strategically and creatively navigate their various identities and the unique ways in which they intersect depending on the given social context. They balance complicated and often contradicting expectations of religion, family, culture and education. They are conscious and aware of the way the axes of oppression within the matrix of domination shift from one setting to the next, and use this knowledge to their advantage to attain what they themselves define as success. As mentioned in the opening of this dissertation, Faruqi (2019) had to actively seek out Muslim women role models for her daughter, because representation was lacking in mainstream media. Not only do we need to see Muslim women represented in all facets of society, but we need to see and recognize the various ways Muslim women have chosen to define their own identities.

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