“WE ARE NOT THAT DIFFERENT FROM YOU”: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL
STUDY OF UNDERGRADUATE MUSLIM INTERNATIONAL STUDENT CAMPUS
EXPERIENCES

by

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“We are not that different from you”: A phenomenological study of undergraduate Muslim international student campus experiences

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ABSTRACT

Undergraduate Muslim international students in American universities continue to grow in large numbers, however, this population of students face several challenges related to their racial/ethnic, religious, and gender identities. These challenges tend to influence their academic and social experiences and, ultimately, their overall integration on campus. Yet, much of the research has not focused specifically on this population of students even though their experiences are unique and worthy of exploration. Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to understand and describe the lived experiences of degree-seeking undergraduate Muslim international students on American campuses. Specifically, the study explored the racial/ethnic, religious, and gender experiences of this population, as well as the influence of those experiences on their academic and social integration. This phenomenological study included semi-structured interviews with eight students who attended four-year public national universities in the Western region of the US.

The concept of Islamophobia and the Campus Climate Framework were employed to uncover how this population of students experience and perceive their campuses. Eight themes emerged from this research study and represented the undergraduate Muslim international students’ experiences. First, students’ faced
classroom challenges related to linguistic abilities and other’s perceptions of their academic performance based on their racial identity. They reported that the expression of their Muslim identity through the hijab and the thobe result in exclusion and feelings of resistance. These students encountered microaggressions, overt prejudice on campus, and hostility off campus due to their racial and religious identity. The national political climate also caused feelings of intimidation, marginalization, fear, and discrimination. Although students received institutional, faculty, and individual support, as well as perceived the Muslim Student Association as a strong support system, they advocated the need for religious and cultural integration.
DEDICATION

I dedicate my dissertation work to the Triune God of the Bible, my strength and refuge. I also dedicate this work to my ever faithful and encouraging parents, Thompson Olatunde and Comfort Oluwamo Ogunbowo, who have supported me through all levels of education and through all my endeavors. A special thank you and gratitude to my brilliant, loving, and supportive husband, Jerry Wembi Dimandja, for the sacrifices he has made for the last three years as I pursued this degree. You are indeed a treasure from the Lord.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background

Over the past three decades, the number of international students worldwide has increased significantly. An international student has been defined by some researchers as an individual studying at an institution of higher education in the US on a temporary visa who is not a citizen or permanent resident of the US and is not legally permitted to remain indefinitely (Allum, 2014; Institute of International Education [IIE], n.d.). The percentage has increased from 0.8 million in 1975 to 4.5 million in 2012, approximately a 5% increase (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2014). Particularly, the population of international students in the US continues to grow significantly (IIE, 2015). New international student enrollment in the 2014/15 academic year was 293,766 compared to 270,128 in 2003/04 (IIE, 2015). In addition, the total population of all international students increased from 572,509 of the total population of higher education students in 2003/04 to 974,926 in 2014/15 (IIE, 2015).

The US in 2013 was rated as one of the top five (US, U.K., Australia, France, and Germany) destinations for tertiary-level international students (OECD, 2015). The country hosted the largest percentage (19%) of international students studying at the tertiary level compared to other OECD or non-OECD countries in that same year (OECD, 2015). A 2015 report on the perceptions of prospective international students relative to US higher education indicated that 65% of these students perceived the US as welcoming compared to other countries such as Canada (40%), Australia (34%), or the U.K. (30%)
While international students (57%) perceived US higher education institutions as having adequate student support services, 46% considered it to be a safe country in which to study (IIE, 2015). It is worth noting that the influx of this group of students has not only increased the academic and cultural value of American society, it also has contributed immeasurably to the country’s economic value (National Association of Foreign Student Advisers, n.d.). During the 2014/15 academic year, 974,926 international students at American colleges and universities contributed $30.5 billion and over 373,000 jobs to the US economy (National Association of Foreign Student Advisers, n.d.).

In particular, the number of Muslim international students continues to grow in American colleges and universities. In the 2013/14 academic year, 127,332 student visas were issued to individuals from 43 predominantly Muslim countries (Horowitz, 2015; IIE, 2015), excluding students from Turkey and India, which would have resulted in a total of 240,826 student visas issued in the same year (IIE, 2015). However, in year 2014/15, 284,420 students from 45 predominantly Muslim countries (including Turkey and India) received student visas, to include East Africa, North Africa, the Middle East, South and Central Asia, South East Asia, West Africa, and Europe (IIE, 2015). Specifically, during the 2014/15 academic year, countries with the largest Muslim populations, i.e., Indonesia, India, Nigeria, Iran, and Turkey, (Pew Research Center, 2015) and Muslim countries in general, ranked as some of the leading places of origin for international students coming to the US. India ranked second with 132,888 students, followed by Saudi Arabia (59,945 students), Iran (11,338 students), Turkey (10,724 students), Nigeria (9,494 students), Kuwait (9,034 students) Indonesia (8,188 students),
and Malaysia (7,231 students) (IIE, 2015). International students from these Muslim
countries also contributed to the economic value of the US. In the 2014/15 academic
year, students from India, Iran, Turkey, Nigeria, Kuwait, Indonesia, and Malaysia in US
colleges and universities contributed over $4 billion to the US economy (IIE, 2015).

Social and Academic Challenges of International Students

Over the past few decades, studies have shown that most international students
experience various levels of social and academic challenges in US colleges and
universities (Bai, 2016; Banjong, 2015; Campbell, 2015; Ejiofo, 2010; Gautam, Lowery,
Mays, & Durant, 2016; Geary, 2016; Gebhard, 2012). Some of these students experience
challenges with developing social relationships within the campus community (Korobova
& Starobin, 2015; Li, 2013); have limited social interactions with their domestic
counterparts (Campbell, 2015; Le & Gardner, 2010; Lin & Scherz, 2014; Sato & Hodge,
2009); experience social ostracism from the mainstream student population (Li, 2013);
encounter difficulty adapting to the social norms of their campus community (Gebhard,
2012; Li & Collins, 2014; Lin & Scherz, 2014); and have feelings of loneliness and
homesickness (Banjong, 2015; Ejiofo, 2010; Gautam et al., 2016).

Previous research also has focused on the academic challenges faced by many of
these students. These challenges include their limited ability to use the English language
to communicate with supervising professors, to understand instruction, to participate in
classroom discussions, and to interact socially within the classroom context (Banjong,
2015; Campbell, 2015; Campbell, 2016; Ejiofo, 2010; Gautam et al., 2016; Gebhard,
2012; Kim, Ates, Grigsby, Kraker, & Micek, 2016; Kuo, 2011; Li, 2013; Lin & Scherz,
2014; Zhang, 2016; Zhao, 2013). Studies have indicated that some students possess an
inadequate understanding of the academic culture and expectations (Banjong, 2015; Campbell, 2015; Li, 2013; Valdez, 2015; Zhang, 2016); experience a lack of support (Zhang, 2016); face negative situations in the academic settings (Campbell, 2015; Valdez, 2015); have a high sense of invisibility and a low sense of belonging in the classroom (Erichsen & Bolliger, 2011; Zhang, 2016); and encounter disregard for their knowledge (Valdez, 2015).

These studies have focused on international students’ experiences, as well as the difficulties they encounter on their college campuses, but they have examined international students as a homogeneous group. They have not differentiated the experiences Muslim international students face nor the various identities that these students embody (Cole & Ahmadi, 2003) – experiences that may differ significantly from their non-Muslim international peers. As such, these students’ experiences may be particularly important to understand in the current political climate in the US.

**Muslim American Students’ Campus Experiences**

Research on Muslim American students has shown that students may encounter discrimination and prejudicial treatment due to their Muslim identity (Nasir & Al-Amin, 2006; Shammas, 2015). Following the events of September 11, 2001, and other national political terrorist attacks, the renewed interest in the religion of Islam and in Muslims in general, has been largely negative across the country (Nasir & Al-Amin, 2006). Racially motivated attacks were unleashed on certain groups who bore a resemblance to terrorists, which further heightened the racial problem in American society (Rana, 2011) and in American colleges and universities. Muslim students may be perceived as having connections to terrorism, are viewed as security threats, and continue to experience
Islamophobia within their campus communities (Kishawi, 2012, 2016). These students encounter anti-Muslim conduct that may have been masked as freedom of speech from their non-Muslim peers (Kishawi, 2012, 2016). They experience negative stereotypes and discrimination due to their religious, racial, and gender identities and feel threatened in practicing their religion and identifying as Muslims (Kishawi, 2016; Nasir & Al-Amin, 2006; Shammas, 2015). Of more concern, some of these students face a hostile campus environment that negatively influences their academic and social integration (Kishawi, 2016; Nasir & Al-Amin, 2006; Shammas, 2015).

**Muslim International Students’ Experiences**

The experiences of Muslim American students are similar for Muslim international students in American colleges and universities as well. Despite the increase in Muslim international students, research related to their perceptions of campus experiences has indicated that some of these individuals face a myriad of academic and social challenges. They face challenges related to their racial/ethnic identity (Brown & Jones, 2013; Rich & Troudi, 2006, Heyn, 2013; Tummala-Narra and Claudius, 2013); religious identity (Asmar, 2005; Brown, 2009; Brown & Jones, 2013; Brown, Brown, & Richards, 2015; Erickson, 2014; Tummala-Narra & Claudius, 2013); and gender identity (Asmar, Proude, & Inge, 2004; Cole & Ahmadi, 2003; Gregory, 2014; Lefdahl-Davis & Perrone-McGovern, 2015; Tummala-Narra & Claudius, 2013).

This population of students often experiences overt and covert discrimination due to their various identities. Some encounter incidences of Islamophobic abuse, prejudice, racism, and discrimination and have feelings of discomfort, both within and outside the campus community (Abualkhair, 2013; Cole & Ahmadi, 2003; Gregory, 2014; Heyn,
As a result, they face social isolation and experience challenges with developing social networks with non-Muslim peers, leading them to socialize exclusively with fellow Muslims (Cole & Ahmadi, 2003; Gregory, 2014; Heyn, 2013; Lefdahl-Davis & Perrone-McGovern, 2014; McDermott-Levy, 2011; Seggie & Sanford, 2010; Schatz, 2008). Regarding gender differences, Muslim males and females have to negotiate not only their religious identities, but also their gender identities, which often can be conflicting (Nasir & Al-Amin, 2006). Research has shown that Muslims differ in their experiences (Rana, 2011; Shaheen 2003); e.g., male and female Muslim international students often have different social and academic experiences (Asmar et al., 2004; Gregory, 2014; Lefdahl-Davis & Perrone-McGovern, 2015) and are perceived different by their non-Muslim peers (Ali, 2014; Cole & Ahmadi, 2003; Tummala-Narra & Claudius, 2013). The increasing racialization and demonization of Muslims as criminals, militants, radicals, terrorists, fundamentalists, violent, barbaric, hetero-patriarchal, etc. (Rana, 2011) continues to stigmatize this group of students on American campuses.

Therefore, understanding and describing the ways in which race/ethnicity, religion, and gender intersect in a discourse of Islamophobia is critical to this study (Rich & Troudi, 2006). The concept of race is embedded in historical contexts and interpretations that cut across religion, culture, and gender, identities that are significant to the discussion of anti-Muslim racism and the phenomenon of Islamophobia (Rana, 2011). Additionally, understanding the racialization of Muslim international students is of significant importance to this study, as racialization emphasizes the need to understand
race and racism as a permanent, socially constructed reaction to political, historical, and sociocultural contexts at a particular given time (Rich & Troudi, 2006). Racialization aids in comprehending the way in which several societal dialogues can link race/ethnicity identity, religious identity, and gender identity to the concept of race and racism in subtle and complex ways (Rich & Troudi, 2006). Finally, it is important to understand that these Islamophobic remarks in some way connect to race and toward the othering of certain groups (Rich & Troudi, 2006). In this study, I intend to contribute to some of these gaps in the literature through this research on Muslim international students’ experiences on American campuses.

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study is to understand and to describe the common and lived experiences of degree-seeking undergraduate Muslim international students at four-year public national universities in the western region of the US. *U.S. News & World Report, (n.d.)*, defined these institutions as universities that are committed to producing revolutionary research and offering an array of undergraduate majors, including master’s and doctoral programs. The focus is to help this group of students integrate academically and socially. Data was collected through multiple semi-structured interviews with eight participants who have experienced the phenomenon. The study employed criterion, purposeful sampling and includes students who all experienced this phenomenon (Creswell, 1998). Specifically, the study focused on exploring the research questions outlined in the next section.

**Research Questions**

The following research questions guided this study:
RQ1. What are the experiences of undergraduate Muslim international students at four-year public national universities in the Western region of the United States?

RQ2. What can policymakers and higher education practitioners learn from undergraduate Muslim international students’ experiences?
Additionally, the research questions include eight sub-questions.

1. How do undergraduate Muslim international students perceive their religious identity as influencing their academic and social experiences?

2. How do undergraduate Muslim international students perceive their racial/ethnic identity as influencing their academic and social experiences?

3. How do undergraduate Muslim international students perceive their gender identity as influencing their academic and social experiences?

4. How do undergraduate Muslim international students perceive the campus climate as influencing how their identities (racial/ethnic, religious, and gender) are perceived by members of the campus community?

5. How do undergraduate Muslim international students also perceive others’ perceptions of their identities as influencing their academic and social experiences?

6. What experiences of Islamophobic sentiments (if any) do undergraduate Muslim international students perceive on American campuses?

7. What coping mechanisms do Muslim international students employ in navigating their academic and social experiences?

8. What recommendations do Muslim international students have for US universities?
Delimitations of the Study

The scope of this study is narrowed to eight participants who are Muslim international students at four-year public national universities in the Western region of the United States. The participants each spent at least one year of their academic program in an American undergraduate program. To ensure data saturation (Creswell, 2013), students were selected from various undergraduate programs as well as from diverse ethnic backgrounds and regions.

Significance of the Study

The experiences of undergraduate Muslim international students in American higher education is worthy of exploration as their experiences are different from their graduate counterparts (Tummala-Narra & Claudius, 2013). This is because these students generally have spent more time in the US compared to their graduate counterparts (Tummala-Narra & Claudius, 2013). Thus, they may have unique and extensive racial/ethnic, religious, and gender experiences on campus. Although these students live and study within a context in which their religious community often is scrutinized and monitored (Tummala-Narra & Claudius, 2013), much of the research has not focused specifically on undergraduate Muslim international students (Abualkhair, 2013; Gregory, 2014; Heyn, 2013; Tummala-Narra & Claudius, 2013). This study seeks to examine the experiences of this subgroup of students. The unique contribution of this research is the focus on exploring the intersectionality of race/ethnicity, religion, and gender identities and their influences on the academic and social integration of undergraduate Muslim international students. The study will contribute to understanding the extent to which campus climate influences the construction of undergraduate Muslim international
students’ identities by members of the campus community and the way in which they influence students’ academic and social integration.

Despite the challenges and the hostility toward Muslim international students (in general), little research exists on the experiences of these students in American higher education (Tummala-Narra & Claudius, 2013). Scholarly literature relating to Muslim international students in American colleges and universities is sparse, as the majority of the studies on this group of students have focused on their experiences in other countries such as the U.K., New Zealand, Finland, etc. (e.g., Asmar, 2005; Asmar et al., 2004; Bahiss, 2008; Brown, 2009; Brown & Jones, 2013; Brown et al., 2015; Gardner, Krägeloh, & Henning, 2014; Rich & Troudi, 2006; Rissanen, Tirri, & Kuusisto, 2015). Other studies have focused specifically on the experiences of American Muslim students (En-Nabut, 2007; Kishawi, 2016; Mubarak, 2007; Nasir & Al-Amin, 2006; Shammas 2009; Shammas, 2015).

Existing research on Muslim international students in America have explored mainly the experiences of Arab Muslim international students (Abualkhair, 2013; Heyn, 2013; Lefdahl-Davis & Perrone-McGovern, 2014; McDermott-Levy, 2011) or Muslim international female students who veil (Cole & Ahmadi, 2003; Gregory, 2014; Seggie & Sanford, 2010). Specifically, most studies have focused on Muslim international graduate students (Abualkhair, 2013; Tummala-Narra & Claudius, 2013); postgraduate students (Brown, 2009; Brown & Jones, 2013); undergraduate and graduate students (Heyn, 2013); undergraduate and English language learning program students (Gregory, 2014); or undergraduate and postgraduate students (Bahiss, 2008). Few have examined specifically undergraduate Muslim international students who may have unique
experiences compared to their graduate counterparts. These gaps should be explored; therefore, I intend to contribute to the gaps in the literature with this study.

This research is unique in that it views undergraduate Muslim international students as diverse individuals differentiated by their national, racial/ethnic, religious, and gendered identities (Rana, 2011). As the Muslim international student also is a “transmigratory” figure – an international figure that moves through multiple territories (Rana, 2011, p. 29), this study focuses on understanding the experiences of undergraduate Muslim (male and female) international students from Europe, Asia, Africa, and other parts of the world who come to study in the US. It also seeks to understand whether there are common experiences across students that may be rooted in their identity as Muslims.

The current political climate in the US makes this study timely and critical to the ways in which universities serve undergraduate Muslim international students. The rhetoric on Muslim immigrants, particularly after several terror attacks such as the attacks in Brussels on March 22, 2016 (Hume, Ap, & Sanchez, 2016), or in Orlando, Florida, on June 12, 2016 (Ellis, Fantz, Karimi, & McLaughlin, 2016), including the revised executive ban on six Muslim majority countries (Zapotosky, Nakamura, & Hauslohner, 2017; Qiu, 2016), may have an influence on how undergraduate Muslim international students perceive and experience American campuses.

The need for undergraduate Muslim international students’ academic and social integration warrants that institutions of higher education take special interest in this group of students. Thus, the focus on understanding the experiences of undergraduate Muslim international students will help American colleges and universities that have difficulties hosting the growing number of these individuals (Perrucci & Hu, 1995) to provide
effectively to their social and academic needs. In addition to that, this study focuses on informing and enhancing campus policies and practices on the experiences, perceptions, and influence of campus climate on the academic and social integration of this population of students.

**Definition of Terms**

**Muslim International Student**

A Muslim international student is defined as an individual who practices Islam, is studying at an institution of higher education in the US on a temporary basis or on a student visa, is not a citizen or permanent resident of the United States, and is not legally permitted to remain indefinitely (Allum, 2014; En-Nabut, 2007; IIE, n.d.).

**Muslim**

A Muslim is an individual who believes the tenets and doctrines of Islam (Cecil, McDermott, & Winland, 2015).

**Islam**

Islam is the religion of Muslims of the world, as well as their way of life. It means submission to the Will of Allah (God) and to Muhammad. The Islam religion believes that there is no deity except Allah and that Muhammad is His last prophet (Research Islam, n.d.).

**Islamophobia**

Although scholars and policymakers do not agree on the meaning of Islamophobia, the neologism denotes several forms of anti-Muslim sentiments, conducts, or policies (Ciftci, 2012).

**Hijab**
The hijab commonly represents the headscarf or other type of head covering Muslim women wear globally (Cecil et al., 2015).

**Microaggressions**

Microaggressions are “subtle, innocuous, preconscious, or unconscious degradations; and putdowns, often kinetic but capable of being verbal/and or kinetic” (Pierce, 1995, p. 281).

**Microinsult**

Microinsult is a form of macroaggression that refers to subtle, offensive, and insensitive communications that ridicule an individual’s racial culture and identity (DeAngelis, 2009).

**Academic Integration**

Academic integration refers to the “contacts related to studying and the institute itself” (Severiens & Schmidt, 2009, p. 60). Also, it is the interaction between teachers and students outside the direct learning context.

**Social Integration**

Social integration refers to students’ levels of integration to the social way of life at an institution (Rienties, Beausaert, Grohnert, Niemantsverdriet, & Kommers, 2012).

**Micro-coding**

Micro-coding is an in-depth form of coding focused on uncovering meanings from data (Simmons-Mackie, 2014).

**Macro-coding**
Macro-coding is a general and non-specific form of coding aimed at summarizing the comprehensive, yet fundamental, meaning of a phenomenon (Simmons-Mackie, 2014).

**Pattern coding**

Pattern coding allows for the classification of data summaries into more meaningful themes or smaller categories (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2013).
CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter discusses scholarly research that investigated the experiences of Muslim international students. The literature review is divided into three areas. The first examines the overall campus experiences of international students. The second is focused on the overall campus experiences of American Muslim students; and the third section explores the racial/ethnic, religious, and gender experiences of Muslim international students. The concept of Islamophobia also is discussed, followed by the examination of campus racial climate and discussion of the campus climate framework.

International Students’ Campus Experiences

Previous studies have explored the campus racial climate of African-American, Asian-American, and Latino students (Ancis, Sedlacek, & Mohr, 2000; Hurtado, Carter, & Spuler, 1996; Nora & Cabrera, 1996; Smedley, Myers, & Harrell, 1993). However, research is sparse relative to international student perceptions of campus racial climate. Existing research has indicated that these students experience difficulties adjusting to their new social and academic environment in American higher education (Al-Sharideh & Goe, 1998).

Ejiofo’s (2010) qualitative study on international student experiences suggested that some students perceive academic discrimination and cultural insensitivity by their professors, compared to their American peers, and were denied on-campus jobs because of their cultural backgrounds. Similarly, several qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-
methods studies have shown that some international African students experience racial discrimination (Boafo-Arthur, 2014; Constantine, Anderson, Berkel, Caldwell, & Utsey, 2005; Hoffsis, 2016; Mwaura, 2008; Smith & Khawaja, 2011); issues of prejudice (Boafo-Arthur, 2014; Constantine et al., 2005; Hoffsis, 2016; Manguvo, 2013); alienation (Evivie, 2009), stereotypical views (Manguvo, 2013); cultural insensitivity (Constantine et al., 2005; Hoffsis, 2016; Mwaura, 2008); feelings of loneliness and isolation (Evivie, 2009; Hoffsis, 2016; LaFleur, 2010; Lacina, 2002; Smith & Khawaja, 2011); and inadequate social support (Constantine et al., 2005; Evivie, 2009; LaFleur, 2010).

International students struggle with participation in the classroom. Some researchers have argued that this may be a result of their unfamiliarity with the language and culture of classroom interaction (Wadsworth, Hecht, & Jung, 2008). Others have attributed their lack of or low participation to language barriers or differences in academic culture (Mukminin & McMahon, 2013). Diangelo (2006) asserted that the reason for students’ silence is due to cultural stereotype, a form of prejudicial treatment that assumes international students prefer not to engage in classroom interaction, which is a stereotype generally attributed to Asian international students. A qualitative exploration of the classroom experiences of undergraduate Chinese international students at a US university showed that, while participants perceive classroom practices (group discussion, oral presentation, peer collaboration, etc.) as positive, they indicate that these academic cultural practices, such as the over dependence upon oral participation required for satisfactory grades, as culturally insensitive and non-inclusive in their instructional-cultural experiences. These issues further exacerbate the stereotype that Chinese
international students are incapable of participating in classroom-based activities (Lin & Scherz, 2014; Valdez, 2015; Zhang, 2016).

Furthermore, some scholars have reported that White students and faculty not only render international students as invisible and disregard their knowledge (Diangelo, 2006; Zhang, 2016), but also they often ascribe this racial inequity to the discourse of “cultural preference” (Diangelo, 2006, p. 1994). Cultural preference, or viewing the absence or low international student participation in the classroom as due to cultural and linguistic differences, thereby absolves faculty from creating equitable pedagogy inclusive of international students and not dominated by White students. Additionally, institutional practices and procedures have continued to support the culture of Whiteness (a racial element that advances White people above people of color) in classroom interaction and learning, a situation in which White students dominate resources without consequences and regard as irrelevant the voices and viewpoints of international students (Diangelo, 2006). Diangelo (2006) maintained that “dynamics of inequality are a complex mesh of practices, institutions, assumptions, and beliefs that have the overall effect of giving more power to some groups and less to others” (p. 1997).

Conversely, research on international students has shown that they also experience social and academic support. A qualitative study on international female graduate students' experiences of sense of belonging and identity indicated that they receive support from faculty and major advisors (Le, LaCoste, & Wismer, 2016) and reported developing a close relationship with their faculty and major advisors. They perceived their faculty as open toward supporting them and viewed their major advisors as mentors and role models. Similarly, a qualitative study on the impact of student-
faculty interactions on international students’ sense of belonging showed that, overall, most of the students find their faculty as supportive (Glass, Kociolek, Wongtrirat, Jason Lynch, & Cong, 2015). As such, their faculty found culturally sensitive avenues to foster their inclusion by expressing appreciation, laying emphasis on their classroom participation, and paying special attention during one-on-one conversations before and after class (Glass et al., 2015). They developed meaningful relationships with faculty, which increased their confidence to construct knowledge. They also perceived their faculty as strong role models who influence their behavior (Glass et al., 2015). Another qualitative research study on the acculturative stress and adjustment experiences of Greek international students also indicated that, while faculty and mentors are rarely utilized, they are perceived as possible and adequate resources in place of professional help. Greek international students often consider seeking the support of their faculty and staff, a possible and initial step they take in adjusting to acculturative stress (Poulakis, Dike, & Massa, 2017).

**Campus Racial Climate**

Earlier studies have indicated that racially diverse students do not experience positive campus racial climate, particularly in predominantly White institutions (PWIs) (Ancis et al., 2000; Cabrera & Nora, 1994; Museus & Truong, 2009). While PWIs appear to represent diversity in their recruitment booklets, they may not be committed to “genuine racial diversity” (Yosso, Smith, Ceja, & Solórzano, 2009, p. 664) because it may threaten their deeply rooted racial culture. Genuine diversity requires PWIs to intentionally promote equitable opportunities for students of color and fosters a positive campus racial climate (Yosso et al., 2009). Harper and Hurtado (2007) echoed that a
disconnect exists between institutionally espoused and enacted values and policies regarding diversity, indicating that leaders lack the ability to provide avenues in which a diverse group of students can participate in quality interaction in order to increase their understanding of racial issues.

Of additional concern is the inability of international offices to adequately address issues of race relations; rather, they focus on general intercultural relation issues (Althen, 2009) that merely foster the celebration of multiculturalism – the celebration of different cultures through food and events (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005; Milem, Chang, & Antonio, 2005). Therefore, in order to maximize the benefits that international students contribute to US campuses (Melnick, Kaur, & Yu, 2011), institutional stakeholders must create measures that help this group feel secure in sharing their voices with staff and faculty to provide support and guidance (Brown & Jones, 2013). These measures can foster racial dialogue and aid international student practitioners in their understanding of these students’ campus racial challenges (Brown & Jones, 2013).

**American Muslim Students’ Campus Experiences**

Some studies have shown that campus climates tend to be negative for Muslim students in American colleges and universities. Research has shown that a majority of these students experience discrimination, microaggression, harassment, racism, and xenophobia (Koller, 2015; Severson, 2011). Indeed, the current political climate in the US is unfavorable and biased toward Muslims (Severson, 2011); among other experiences, Muslim American students struggle with balancing their American and Muslim identities (Stubbs & Sallee, 2013). Research on American Muslim students has indicated that they encounter a myriad of experiences within and outside the classroom
environment. An exploration of 10 American Muslim students at one university suggested that, although participants experienced discrimination and prejudice, they often overlooked and rationalized the behavior of the perpetrators. Rather than react against overt forms of anti-Muslim sentiments, participants ignored and avoided perpetrators (Stubbs & Sallee, 2013). In another study, research indicated that American Muslim students often are perceived as potential security threats to their country, perceptions that rendered them as subjects of scrutiny and set them as targets of hate crimes, verbal harassments, and physical assaults (Mubarak, 2007).

In a phenomenological study that examined the campus experiences that shaped the identity perception of six traditional age American female Muslim students at two public four-year universities in California, findings revealed that while some students who wore the hijab were able to find commonalities with individuals within their religious groups, other hijab-wearing students experienced isolation and barriers in forming new relationships (Koller, 2015). Most Hijab-wearing students experienced harassment, abuse, and microaggressive incidences on and near campus due to their physical appearances as devoted Muslims, but they noted that these experiences did not impact their academic and social experiences. Also, non-hijab-wearing students’ fear was heightened on campus due to their Muslim identity as indicative of their Islamic practices and affiliations. Some participants perceived that faculty disregarded their opinions due to their Muslim identity and also because of faculty’s ignorance of Islam and Muslims (Koller, 2015). Although the campus was diverse, participants perceived that they were not treated equally compared to other minority groups on campus. They expressed a deep personal and spiritual identification with their faith and requested campus space for this
expression. The study indicated that some faculty and students were ignorant of and made assumptions about Muslim cultural practices abroad, as well as mistook them for Islamic religious practices (Koller, 2015). They linked practices such as the oppression of women to the religion of Islam; i.e., they assumed that Muslim men are abusive toward women and perceived it as an Islamic religious practice.

A study that investigated the relationship between Muslim identity, adherence to Islamic standards of physical appearance, and college adjustment of 53 Muslim American female students revealed that participants felt isolated from conventional ideas and culture, isolation which impeded their adjustment to college (Rangoonwala, Sy, & Epinoza, 2011). These students struggled with developing relationships with the opposite sex compared to their male peers. Conversely, Muslim female students’ practicing the observance of the Islamic norm of dressing (the use of the hijab) reported higher levels of college adjustment and suggested their visibility allowed them to connect with female peers within their religious group. However, this was not the case for those who did not adhere to the Islamic norm of dressing (specifically, the wearing of the hijab), as they were unable to make similar social connections (Rangoonwala et al., 2011).

American Muslim students’ experiences may differ by college type. Shammas (2009) investigated Arab and Muslim students’ perceptions of discrimination on a community college campus. Specifically, the author explored the connection among students’ level of perceived discrimination, the degree of diversity of campus friendships, and their sense of belonging to the college. Using a mixed-methods design, survey results revealed an overall lower level of perceived discrimination, suggesting that racial tension and discrimination are less explicitly displayed on community college campuses.
However, Arab and Muslim students reported non-significant higher levels of discrimination compared to their non-Arab and non-Muslim peers. Focus group results also indicated a few isolated instances of perceived discrimination, as students exhibited some form of resistance to perceiving discrimination on campus. Shammas attributed students’ invulnerability to their ability to self-segregate into same-ethnic and same-faith friendship groups.

**Muslim International Students’ Campus Experiences**

Limited research exists on Muslim international students’ experiences and, more specifically, on undergraduate students at American universities; however, some studies have focused on their experiences in other countries (U.K., Australia, etc.), as well as on graduate or postgraduate student experiences. Muslim students are an integral part of the international student population on university campuses (Speck, 1997), and the majority of this group is not familiarized with the diverse, secular, American culture (McDermott-Levy, 2011). Some studies have indicated that Muslim students (including those from international countries) perceive higher levels of prejudice and are significantly less acculturated compared to those from other religious groups (Sodowsky & Plake, 1992).

**Racial/Ethnic Experiences**

Over time, a rise has occurred in the number of reported racially motivated attacks against Muslims (Ali, 2014). Some scholars have argued that this may be attributed to the political and military difficulties between the US and some Muslim countries (Sodowsky & Plake, 1992). It also is possible that Americans’ projections of their sentiments about Muslim extremists in the Middle East are influencing the experiences of discrimination and prejudice that Muslim visitors encounter (Sodowsky & Plake, 1992). Some Muslim
international students indicated race-based discrimination (discrimination based on ethnic, cultural, or linguistic distinctions [Trenerry, Franklin, & Paradies, 2012]) rather than religious-based discrimination (the unfavorable treatment of an individual because of religious beliefs [U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, n.d.]). Findings from 15 Muslim international graduate students’ experiences of acculturation, religious engagement, and negotiation of social support in programs in the US showed that some participants reported race-based rather than religion-based discrimination, which led to feelings of *othering* (Tummala-Narra & Claudius, 2013). Several participants appeared to experience discrimination because of their phenotypical features (skin color, accents, etc.). In contrast, participants without specific visible features, such as those perceived as European American, were less likely to report overt experiences of discrimination (Tummala-Narra & Claudius, 2013).

A qualitative study on five male Muslim Saudi Arab TESOL students’ experiences of racialization and othering at a university in the United Kingdom indicated that some participants, due to their racial/ethnic identity as Arabs, experienced incidences of othering in the ways in which individuals interacted with them, particularly in the classroom environment (Rich & Troudi, 2006). They perceived being categorized as lazy and having limited knowledge of classroom work due to skin color. They also believed a link exists between the fact that many of the 9/11 events’ perpetrators originated from Saudi Arabia and the ways in which Saudi students are treated in higher education. These racialized experiences not only influence the ways in which participants interact with their peers and interpret their own experiences, but they heighten the sense of paranoia and fear of being attacked (Rich & Troudi, 2006). Heyn (2013) also found that the
experiences of nine male Saudi Arabian international students in American universities were characterized with perceptions of racism, prejudice, discrimination, social ostracism, and the fear of being physically harassed within the classroom and outside the campus community. However, these students were motivated to continue their studies given their challenges due to their desire not to disappoint their families and their home government.

A study on the racial experiences of 143 international Muslim postgraduate students at a university located in the South of England reported incidents of racist abuse (physical assault and verbal abuse), which left students fearful of their environment (Brown & Jones, 2013). Participants’ experiences of racism, as well as others’ stories of discrimination, fueled their suspicion that prejudice is embedded within their community. These racial experiences strongly influenced participants emotionally, often resulting in negative feelings about the host country and leading to changes in their behaviors (such as maintaining an alternative identity to guarantee their safety). In an effort to avoid these racial-based attacks, participants tended to withdraw from environments regarded as dangerous or risky out of fear for their safety (Brown & Jones, 2013).

**Religious Experiences**

The role of religion is fundamental to an individual’s ethnicity and recently has garnered awareness in American higher education (Astin et al., 2005). The religious identity of individuals has been debated as an important aspect in the lives of this generation’s college students, particularly as it encompasses their political, social, psychological, and physical welfare (Astin et al., 2005). Following the 9/11 attacks, the religion of Islam has come to receive international attention, making its tenets, laws, and
history the subject of global interests and scrutiny in the media, the classroom, and among the campus community (Mubarak, 2007). Specifically, Muslim students often face questions regarding their faith. Some questions may focus on issues relating to terrorism, while others focus on anti-Muslim sentiments or misconceptions about Islam – misconceptions that assume Islam is a religion of violence. These misconceptions at times have linked Islam to terroristic events and have viewed Muslim countries as religiously conservative and homogenized (Brown et al., 2015).

Research on Muslim international students’ perceptions of British media representations of Islam in a non-Muslim country showed that they experience verbal and physical abuse, as well as face distress related to their encounter with shocking representations of their faith (Brown, 2009; Brown et al., 2015; Brown & Jones, 2013). According to findings, participants experienced discrimination and disparaging behaviors from members of the host community due to the “systematically validated” view (propagated by media) that Muslims are not to be trusted (Brown et al., 2015). Apart from the prejudicial treatment Muslim international students frequently encountered, they sometimes concealed their Muslim identity by making their physical appearances look less Muslim in order to protect themselves from retaliation incidents. Despite the discriminatory attacks, some of these students attached importance to their religious identity and sought to maintain a positive self-perception while identifying with their religion. They constantly had to engage in self-explanation to individuals with whom they came in contact, acting as ambassadors in order to restore the image of their religion and to gain acceptance given the stigmatizing impact of British media portrayal of Islam. These experiences, specifically the perceptions of media content on Islam, influenced the
well-being and mental health of the students included in the research (Brown et al., 2015).

An ethnographic study on the adjustment experiences of postgraduate international students at a university in the South of England indicated that Muslim international students encountered incidences of Islamophobic abuse because of their religious identity (Brown, 2009). Participants reported that their prayer room was destroyed. This group faced harassment as a result of demonstrating their religious affiliation through their physical appearances or by having physical dissimilarities from the host community. Conversely, participants were less vulnerable to prejudicial experiences when their external appearance did not differ from that of the host community or when their religious identity was not reflected outwardly. Thus, the growing association of Islam with terrorism continues to threaten students’ confidence and security, leading to the fear and shame of revealing their Islamic identity (Brown, 2009). This is similar to Erickson’s (2014) view that Muslim international students may struggle with expressing their religious identity in the US due to stereotypical perceptions of Muslims as terrorists.

Another study by Asmar (2005) examined the differences in international and domestic Muslim students’ experiences at an Australian university. Findings revealed that religious difference is a key issue in their social integration, as they were less likely to feel a sense of belonging compared to their domestic Muslim peers. Religious differences related to alcohol consumption ostracized some Muslim international students from the rest of the campus community. As a result, they students were perceived as abnormal and anti-social. Also, they (international and domestic students) were
concerned about inadequate praying facilities and found it difficult to leave their classrooms for prayers. However, these (international and domestic) students reported a strong sense of academic commitment.

Research on the experiences of domestic and Muslim international students on American college campuses, specifically within the residence hall environment, showed that they were apprehensive about others’ perceptions of them due to their Muslim identity (Calkins et al., 2011). Female Muslim participants were inconvenienced by the physical arrangements of public restrooms and bathrooms, as these arrangements are not accommodating to some of their needs as Muslim women. In addition, participants perceived being treated different, questioned regularly, or stared at because of their Muslim identity. Some were often excluded from social activities due to assumptions about Islamic religious beliefs that leave these students socially isolated (Calkins et al., 2012).

Muslim international students’ experiences of religious identity include difficulty in practicing their faith in the new environment. They struggle with balancing academic requirements with fulfilling their spiritual requirements. They also report a lack of transportation and access to mosques close to their homes or schools (Tummala-Narra & Claudius, 2013). Researchers Nasir and Al-Amin (2006) reported on Muslim international students and noted that they are burdened with feelings of being judged by others based on negative stereotypes about Islam. They are fearful of being perceived as potential threats while engaged in their religious practices (such as when praying on campus), which leaves them exposed and susceptible to attacks.
Seggie and Sanford (2010), in a qualitative study, investigated the opportunities and challenges of female international and American Muslim students that veil in a predominantly Christian research university. One of the prominent themes revealed from the findings was the perception of discrimination, marginalization, and prejudice reported by some of the participants. These perceptions (which often are a result of religious identity) influenced participants’ social and academic integration. Some contributed less in class for fear of being noticed and viewed as fanatics because of their racial background. These perceptions also hampered their ability to develop friendships or professional relationships with non-Muslim peers and limited them to forming relationships with their Muslim peers with whom they enjoyed feelings of comfort and understanding.

**Gender Experiences**

Research has shown that treatments of elements of Muslim masculinities and femininities differ; the gendered constructions of Muslims vary significantly (Downing, 2007; Rana, 2011; Shaheen 2003). The media portrayal of Muslim males and females has influenced the ways in which members of the campus community perceive Muslim students (Ali, 2014). Muslim men, for example, often are perceived as domineering as well as socially and politically violent. They are viewed as being in some type of hostile relationship with their female peers (Ali, 2014; Asmar et al., 2004), while Muslim women often are depicted as uneducated and submissive, lacking agency and voice (Ali, 2014). According to Fayad (2010), the West view all Arab Muslim women who veil as voiceless, passive, and helpless, although they are not a homogenous group. The author noted that the West veils the Arab woman, constructs her as a passive victim, and
silences her. Many female Muslim international students enter into a new context in which their gender identity has been socially fabricated based on negative stereotypes that stigmatize them as fanatics (Gregory, 2014).

In a study by Tummala-Narra and Claudius (2013), discrimination experiences differed between Muslim male and female international students. Some female students reported negative responses directed toward them as a result of wearing a headscarf, while their male counterparts reported being perceived as terrorists. Many participants appeared to encounter higher levels of obvious forms of discrimination connected to experiences related to having specific visible markers such as veiling, rather than those related to their Islamic beliefs. The hijab is an obvious representation of Muslimness (Ali, 2014; Tummala-Narra & Claudius, 2013) and represents female’ sense of pride; however, it became a representation of othering and isolation (Tummala-Narra & Claudius’ 2013). Seggie and Sanford (2010) further confirmed the hostile experiences of some female Muslim international students from their non-Muslim peers on American college campuses. Due to their hijab-wearing practices, some of these students experience overt and covert forms of microaggression and microinsult within the campus environment.

To echo previous studies, Asmar et al. (2004), Asmar (2005), Ali (2014), and Lefdahl-Davis and Perrone-McGovern (2015) suggested that a larger proportion of female hijab wearers expressed negative views, had uncomfortable experiences on and off campus, and experienced discrimination as a result of their hijab-wearing practices compared to their uncovered female counterparts. A lower proportion of female hijab wearers perceived limited opportunities and felt less positive about their academic experiences (Asmar et al., 2004). Many of the female Muslim hijab-wearing students,
more than their male counterparts, perceived that they are not valued. However, female Muslim students who do not wear hijabs do not perceive those negative attitudes and mistreatments (Asmar et al., 2004). Muslim men also feel more comfortable interacting with non-Muslim students compared to their female counterparts, as practicing female Muslim students’ experience higher levels of cultural distress when interacting with a gender of the opposite sex and developing relationships with their non-Muslim peers in general (Asmar et al., 2004; Gregory, 2014; Lefdahl-Davis & Perrone-McGovern, 2015).

In a similar study, the experiences of Muslim women that veil on a large campus revealed stereotypical behaviors directed toward them (Cole & Ahmadi, 2003). Their veiled appearances trigger suspicion and fear in non-Muslim students and fuel the perceptions of male dominance and female oppression. Participants also perceived that their veiled appearances limit their interactions with non-Muslim men and women who view them as religiously conservative. Some perceived that their veiling practices may have triggered employment discrimination experiences and isolation from extra-curricular campus activities; consequently, they reconsidered their veiling practices to avoid discriminating circumstances. In contrast, other participants continued to veil regardless of the negative college experiences they encountered, as they regarded these experiences as manageable and ineffectual on their academic and social development (Cole & Ahmadi, 2003).

**Summary**

Overall, research on international students has shown that Muslim international students experience various academic and social challenges, and the campus climate may not be favorable to them; still, the US continues to recruit them. Studies also have shown
that, while international Muslim students confront some challenges similar to their non-international Muslim and American Muslim counterparts, their racial/ethnic background, religious affiliation, and gendered identities intensify their experiences, thereby making it more distinctive. Although previous studies have explored the racial, religious, and gendered experiences of Muslim international students in different countries and on their graduate or postgraduate groups, a gap exists in the literature on the experiences of these students in American higher education (Bryant, 2006; Heyn, 2013; Severson, 2011; Shammas, 2009; Tummala-Narra & Claudius, 2013) and on those enrolled in undergraduate programs. Thus, this study focuses on understanding the racial, religious, and gendered experiences of undergraduate Muslim international students from Europe, Asia, Africa, and other parts of the world who come to study in the US. Also included is an exploration of these students’ perceptions of the campus climate, particularly their experiences of Islamophobia on American campuses and the perceived influence of these experiences on their academic and social integration.

**Conceptual/Theoretical Framework**

In this study, Islamophobia is integrated into the campus climate framework to develop a useful framework for this study (Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, & Allen, 1998, 1999). In this section, Islamophobia also is utilized as a conceptual framework to understand the experiences of international Muslim students within the context of American campuses. The concept of Islamophobia is discussed in order to understand the criticisms surrounding it, as well as to logically frame and to adequately contextualize its meaning (Allen, 2010). The concept, as defined by Allen (2010), is then integrated into the campus climate framework (Hurtado et al., 1998; 1999) in order to better understand
the way in which international students may experience their campus climates in American universities.

**What is the Concept of Islamophobia?**

Western countries’ perceptions of Muslim individuals as violent has led to the general attitude of Muslim communities and the Islamic religion as internationally aggressive and threatening; these developments have been categorized under the neologism “Islamophobia” (Imhoff & Recker, 2012). The term Islamophobia has existed as a conceptual framework (Rana, 2011). Although the origin of Islamophobia can be traced to the periods of colonization and the crusades (Said, 1978), the term emerged in the 1970s and grew in popularity in the 1980s and 1990s among European anti-racism activists (Rana, 2011). It developed due to the need to address the growing violence and hostility directed toward Muslim migrants in European countries (Rana, 2011). Although some critics have questioned the existence of Islamophobia, Allen (2010) and Schiffer and Wagner (2011) posited that adequate evidence exists (theoretically and empirically) to conclude that it is a real phenomenon. Islamophobia is the most globally recognized member of an international group of terminologies (such as “anti-Muslim racism, anti-Muslism, anti-Muslim prejudice, Muslimophobia, anti-Islamism, anti-Muslim bigotry,” etc. [Richardson, 2012, pg. 1]) used to denote negative attitudes and sentiments toward Muslims and Islam (Richardson, 2012). Yet, at the moment no consensus can be reached on an acceptable definition of the term (Faruqi, 2014). Indeed, there are several criticisms against the definition and use of Islamophobia (Faruqi, 2014; Forum Against Islamophobia & Racism [FAIR], n.d.; Richardson, 2012).
First, critics opposed to the term have argued that the word “phobia,” which means a severe psychological disease contracted by a minority group of people, reduces the anxiety about Muslims to a mere mental illness involving a small number of individuals, thereby inaccurately representing tensions about Muslims as a minor condition (Richardson, 2012). Second, the term accuses individuals or groups who may have legitimate criticism against Islam of having a mental disorder. Some critiques have explained that this is not only an act of abuse, but it also hinders insightful dialogue and the possibility of critiquing the Islamic religion, the opportunity to logically understand and show empathy as to why people think and act in certain ways, and the responsibility to seek the modification of their perceptions through debate (Richardson, 2012).

Several criticisms also surround the meaning of Islamophobia as defined by the Runnymede Trust report. The report, *Islamophobia: A Challenge for Us All*, has been regarded as perhaps the most prominent document of its kind (Allen, 2007). Produced by the Commission for British Muslims and Islamophobia, the report described the nature of Islamophobia by focusing on two key points. First, it defined Islamophobia as the irrational fear of Muslims and also presented it as a dichotomy of “open” and “closed” views of Islam. The report equated Islamophobia with the closed view, a situation in which Islam and Muslims are viewed as monolithic; separate from other cultures; inferior to Western culture; violent, threatening, and aggressive; and a manipulative political ideology. Islam was viewed as rejecting the criticisms of the West *a priori*, hostility and discrimination against Muslims are justified, and Islamophobia is accepted as normal and natural (Commission on British Muslim and Islamophobia, 1997). Islamophobia, as
defined by the Runnymede report, is regularly characterized by these closed views of Islam (Allen, 2007).

The Runnymede report has been significant to the study of Islamophobia, as it contributed to the understanding of Islamophobia as well as afforded its prevalence in both public and political discourse (Allen, 2010). The report has been useful in the identification of Islamophobia in specific contexts, such as the media. However, it may not be relevant in explaining how Muslims experience discrimination in other equally important contexts, such as in the field of education or the workplace, given that the term tends to shroud other context-specific origins from which hostility or discrimination can be observed (Allen, 2007; Richardson, 2012). Questions remain as to whether current debates concerning Islamophobia and the usage of the term are any more informed than years ago (Allen 2007). Critics have contested the ambiguity of the term and the lack of clarity in its definition, its proliferation, its complex nature, and its existence (Allen 2010). This is due to the “good and bad” typology of the love or hate of Islam and Muslims, which ignores the subtlety or gray areas that characterize Islamophobia (Allen, 2007). Overlooking these gray areas sets a precedent and has permitted more indirect forms of the term. Indeed, it has contributed to a climate in which the niqab (a covering worn by Muslim women similar to a hijab) is viewed as impeding social integration or when campus students who look a certain way are monitored and surveilled for signs of radicalization (Allen, 2007). The simplistic definition and conceptualization of Islamophobia as “good” or “bad” is damaging to understanding and rests on an uncritical ideology that views it as simply bad and nothing more (Allen, 2007).
According to critics, the Runnymede report basically concealed the discrimination and prejudice experienced by Muslim immigrants by simply implying that the religion of Islam is the target when, in fact, Muslim individuals are those who experience these exclusionary practices (Imhoff & Recker, 2012). Rather than address hostility toward Muslims, the term Islamophobia addresses hostility toward Islamic beliefs and practices (Richardson, 2012). This suggests that Islam is no longer the primary focus, rendering the applicability and relevance of the concept as questionable (Imhoff & Recker, 2012). The Runnymede report also failed to distinguish between Islamophobia and other comparable phenomena based on racial or ethnic markers by suggesting that hostility toward Muslims is different than other forms of hostility such as racism, or with matters that involve power, class, or political conflict (Richardson, 2012). The report did not account for the varying forms of racism that Muslims face, even as the concept should acknowledge its subtleties and complexities (Allen, 2007). As such, viewing Islamophobia as solely a religiously-based hatred can prevent the consideration of other non-religious forms of discrimination and prejudice (Faruqi, 2014).

These criticisms have birthed alternative terminologies such as “Anti-Muslimism,” which premises that exclusionary practices are targeted primarily toward Muslims rather than Islam (Halliday, 1999). Also, Imhoff and Recker (2012) advocated referring to a prejudiced view of Islam as Islamoprejudice, rather than Islamophobia, in order to differentiate between a prejudiced view of Islam from a logical and secular viewpoint. This is because some critics believe that term Islamophobia is unsuitable for describing criticisms that are anti-religion and not anti-Islam (Richardson, 2012). However, some have found Islamophobia as proper for describing anti-Muslim
sentiments, as these sentiments are not rational but emotionally based, even as attitudes of prejudice result from an emotion of fear and are resistant to information (Basu, 2014). Despite these alternative descriptors, Islamophobia as a term may be here to stay, as it has gained legitimacy among those who suffer anti-Muslim hostility and prejudice (Bevelander & Otterbeck, 2012). Thus, the word continues to be employed interchangeably with terms such as anti-Muslim sentiments (Basu, 2014); anti-Muslimism (Halliday, 1999); Islamoprejudice (Imhoff & Recker, 2012); etc., suggesting that they are regarded as synonymous or complementary (Allen, 2007; Nabi, 2011).

According to Allen (2010), Islamophobia currently remains the most appropriate if not the only option that could be pragmatically employed. Similarly, authors such as Nathan Lean (2012), who wrote The Islamophobic Industry, do not fully support the use of the word but have yet to find a worthier alternative (Basu, 2014). According to Lean, abandoning Islamophobia would deny the presence of an existing threat against Muslims (Basu, 2014).

Nonetheless, these criticisms call into question the entire notion of Islamophobia, as critics have deemed the report and its model of Islamophobia as impractical, incongruous, lacking depth, and theoretically and conceptually inadequate (Allen, 2010). Therefore, a radical approach, a refined etymology, and more informed knowledge are required to combat Islamophobia and to clarify, as well as to respond, to the subtleties and nuances that characterize Islamophobia but are presently overlooked and allowed to thrive (Allen, 2007). A more appropriate definition and conceptualization of Islamophobia would require the historical and contemporary contexts within which Islamophobia becomes manifested (Allen, 2010; Carr, 2016).
History influences and provides a framework for understanding all anti-Muslim and anti-Islamic forms and should not be ignored or rejected (Allen, 2010). Therefore, in an effort to logically frame and adequately contextualize its meaning, Allen (2010) conceptualized it in three dimensions. The first identified Islamophobia as an ideology that influences meanings about Islam and Muslims; the second conceptualized it as a sequence of distinctive methods of operation involving diverse and varying strategies through which ideological meaning is preserved; and the third, although not currently proven empirically, involved a sequence of exclusionary practices. Thus, from this conceptualization, Allen (2010) posited an encompassing definition that considers exclusionary practices while capturing the conceptual, racialized, and affective dimensions of Islamophobia (Carr, 2016). According to Allen (2010):

Islamophobia is an ideology, similar in theory, function and purpose to racism and other similar phenomena, that sustains and perpetuates negatively evaluated meaning about Muslims and Islam in the contemporary setting in similar ways to that which it has historically … subsequently pertaining … shaping and determining understanding, perceptions and attitudes in the social consensus – that inform and construct thinking about Muslims and Islam as Other. Neither restricted to explicit nor direct relationships of power and domination but instead, and possibly even more importantly, in the less explicit and everyday relationships of power that we contemporarily encounter … As a consequence of this, exclusionary practices – practices that disadvantage, prejudice or discriminate against Muslims and Islam in social, economic and political spheres ensue … An acknowledged ‘Muslim’ or ‘Islamic’ element … nuanced through meanings that are ‘theological’, ‘social’, ‘cultural’, ‘racial’ and so on … (p. 190)

This definition conceptualizes Islamophobia as an ideology; thus, its definition and conceptualization are no longer oversimplified, viewed as a dichotomy of “good” or “bad,” or defined as a “phobia” (Allen, 2010). Through this definition and conceptualization, Islamophobia now concerns the way in which Muslims and Islam are perceived, discussed, included, and excluded and can focus on every real and unreal
assumption or action that relates to Muslims or Islam (Allen, 2010). Combating Islamophobia no longer can be a cause that stifles legitimate arguments that disagree with Muslim practices, beliefs, and actions. Contemporary Islamic and Muslim societies recognize the importance of disagreements, discussions, and debates as requirements to sustain the relevance of the Islamic religion (FAIR, n.d.). Allen’s definition clearly identified the processes that underlie anti-Muslim sentiment and their characteristics (Carr, 2016). The definition highlights the framing of Muslims as the Other as well as the exclusionary practices they face (Carr, 2016).

**Racial microaggressions: Evidence of Islamophobia.** A way Islamophobia is demonstrated on American campuses is through the perpetuation of racial macroaggressions. The term “microaggressions” was first introduced in 1969 by Chester Pierce, a professor of psychiatry and education at Harvard (Yosso et al., 2009) who defined it as a persistent system of attack directed toward Blacks on a daily basis to make them feel inadequate and irrelevant. Racism in the form of microaggression often exists subtly and covertly in private interactions and discussions and often is overlooked as being harmless (Solórzano, 1998; Sue et al., 2007). Indeed, microaggression includes “brief, everyday exchanges that send denigrating messages to people of color because they belong to a racial minority group” (Sue et al., 2007). It involves intentional or unintentional humiliations expressed verbally, behaviorally, or environmentally and conveys unpleasant, offensive, or negative racial insults toward people of other racial groups (Sue et al., 2007). Microaggressions are damaging to people of color, as they harm performance by creating discrimination and undermining the psychological and spiritual energy of those at the receiving end (Sue, 2010).
Sue et al. (2007) described three forms of racial microaggression. The first, microassault, represents verbal or nonverbal attacks that are overtly and racially derogatory and designed to harm the recipient through insults, avoidant conducts, or deliberate discriminatory actions. The second, microinsult, refers to subtle insults, often unconsciously perpetrated, but overtly communicates a hidden offensive message to people of color. Microinvalidations as the third form of racial microaggression denote communications that invalidate and exclude the psychological viewpoints or experiences of a person of color. In this study, the focus is to utilize the concept of Islamophobia to uncover undergraduate Muslim international students’ experiences of racial microaggressions and the ways in which these experiences influence their academic and social integration on American campuses.

**Framing Islamophobia within the Context of Racism and Campus Racial Climate**

Based on the definition and conceptualization of Islamophobia discussed in the previous section, this study frames Islamophobia within the context of racism to aid the understanding of the multidimensionality that characterizes the discriminatory experiences Muslim international students may encounter in American colleges and universities (Faruqi, 2014). Islamophobia shares many similarities with other forms of prejudice such as racism, discrimination, stereotyping, and harassment (FAIR, n.d.; Faruqi, 2014); identifying the concept as racism may be beneficial, as it would consider other non-religious-based forms of prejudice (Faruqi, 2014). This is because the racialization of a group has more to do with the way individuals are perceived and treated based on their obvious differences, physical appearance, and ancestry, than on only their biological features (Meer & Modood, 2010). According to Schiffer and Wagner (2011),
the critical representation of Muslims from an anti-racist viewpoint strongly indicates that Muslim individuals experience negative attacks due to their identification as Muslims. Perpetrators of Islamophobic behaviors often justify their racism by arguing that their problem is not with immigrants but with Muslims. Although features of anti-immigration discourse can be recognized as facets of racism, Islamophobia cannot be fully equated with the definition of racism. This is because the history of anti-Muslim perspectives influences, structures, and broadens the existing discussions, thereby giving anti-Muslim racism a peculiarity that differentiates it from other forms of racism (Schiffer & Wagner, 2011). According to Schiffer and Wagner (2011), Islamophobia is regarded as a new form of racism (cultural racism – a mixture of race and religion) that directs discrimination toward a group viewed as a religious community rather than a supposed race.

A common and obvious criticism against anti-Muslim racism is the assumption that Muslims are not a race, as their Muslim identities are not ascribed involuntarily; thus, the hostility they experience cannot be related to that experienced by racial minorities (Meer & Modood, 2010; Richardson, 2012). Racial and gender-based identities are considered as involuntarily ascribed, while being a Muslim is a choice and therefore cannot be equated with other forms of identities (Meer & Modood, 2010). However, this argument ignores the fact that individuals do not have control over the family or society into which they are born; they have no control over whether they are born into a Muslim family or a society in which being a Muslim or having a Muslim-like resemblance results in hostility and discrimination (Meer & Modood, 2010). Another similar argument is that Muslims are not a race and the hostility often experienced by them cannot be related to a
form of racism (Richardson, 2012). Regardless, it is important to understand that Muslim identity has more to do with a sense of belonging to an extensive cultural tradition than to holding specific beliefs or practicing specific customs (Richardson, 2012).

This study employs campus climate as a framework, with an emphasis on Islamophobia, to understand the ways in which Muslim international students are perceived and included on American campuses. As Islamophobic discourses are racialized incidences (Rich & Troudi, 2006) and the racialization of Muslims and Islam developed from the concept of race (Rana, 2011), this study uses campus climate framework to examine exclusionary practices that discriminate against Muslims and Islam, enacted either implicitly or explicitly; overtly communicated or covertly concealed; or subtly expressed through racial, religious, gendered, cultural, and social meanings in the context of American higher education and in everyday power relationships these students encounter on campus (Allen, 2010). The campus climate framework helps to understand the way negative attitudes are perpetuated toward Muslim international students in the contemporary setting. It sheds light on the manner in which historical contexts inform and structure, as well as influence and shape perceptions, attitudes, social action, interaction, and responses about Muslim international students.

**Definition of Campus Climate**

Organizational climate has become one of the most active fields of academic and pragmatic research (Peterson & Spencer, 1990). The focus on the concept of climate transcends a mere scholarly interest about theoretical changes and the need to develop novel research approaches. The concept of climate is critical to understanding the complexities that characterize organizational processes. Having emerged primarily from
social and cognitive psychology, including the field of organizational behavior, the concept of climate can be defined as an existing shared pattern of significant elements of organizational life or the perceptions and attitudes of organizational members toward those elements. Climate emphasizes individuals’ shared perceptions of a series of organizational events compared over time and among groups. It is susceptible to change and focuses on existing models of behaviors and beliefs. Although climate is extensive, it can be easily aimed or suited for individual interests. The concept also can be viewed as the daily organizational atmosphere or pattern (Peterson & Spencer, 1990).

Although the concept of campus climate has gained relevance in higher education (Jayakumar & Museus, 2012), it is a complicated and confounding instrument, particularly when utilized to explore the changing campus behavior and to promote development (Peterson & Spencer, 1990). As climate is critical to understanding college and university environments, it involves some compelling implications for institutional research. Campus climate, for example, can foster understanding of vital climate elements. It also can be used to build standards, to refine institutional image, to remedy institutional climate, and to effectively change the environment of a college or university. Thus, it is important to encapsulate its fundamental meaning and to discuss certain dimensions crucial to providing useful insights to higher education institutions (Peterson & Spencer, 1990).

**Campus Climate Framework**

In order to understand the multiple internal and external forces that influence the campus climate (Milem et al., 2005), this study draws upon the work of Hurtado et al. (1998, 1999), which provides a framework for understanding campus racial climate. The
The campus climate framework allows for concrete examinations of higher education institutions, as well as their stakeholders (students, faculty, staff, etc.), as it underscores campus climate elements that require attention, including strategic and pragmatic solutions (Hurtado et al., 1999). The framework is empirically based on multiple studies that have focused on the impact of campus climate on student learning and growth (Milem et al., 2005). Specifically, the framework underscores four elements: (1) the historical legacy of inclusion and exclusion, (2) structural diversity, (3) the psychological component, and (4) the behavioral component, as well as other environmental elements that may be difficult to understand (Hurtado et al., 1998, 1999; Milem et al., 2005). These elements underline other environmental factors that surpass the view of diversity at a numerical level and require consideration (Hurtado et al., 1998).

**External Institutional Components**

According to Hurtado et al. (1998, 1999), students learn and socialize in distinct sub-environmental racial contexts influenced by larger external and internal institutional components. The external components, or elements of climate, are divided into two areas: government/policy context and sociohistorical context. In this study, the concept of Islamophobia is used to inform these two key external institutional components. As Islamophobia perpetuates practices that disadvantage Muslims in political spheres (Allen, 2010), the first area highlights the role of governmental policy and programs (such as Homeland Security policies targeted toward Muslim immigrants post 9/11 [Abdullah, 2013]; state and federal policy related to student access; etc.) in fostering Islamophobic behaviors and ultimately influencing climate for diversity.
The second area identifies the role of sociohistorical forces that influence campus climate. These forces include social events and issues relating to individuals’ perceptions or experiences regarding racial diversity (Milem et al., 2005). These social-historical events may influence Islamophobic thinking about Muslims as Other (Allen, 2010). Although these forces occur in the larger societal context and indirectly on college campuses, they trigger events, discussions, and other activities on campus (Milem et al., 2005). The 9/11 events; the terror attacks in Paris, France, on November 13, 2015; the terrorist-instigated shootings in San Bernardino, California, on December 2, 2015; the terror events in Brussels on March 22, 2016; and, recently, the Pulse night club terror attack in Orlando, Florida, on June 12, 2016 – including society’s reaction to these events – are sociohistorical forces (Milem et al., 2005) that may have promoted anti-Muslim rhetoric and intensified both covert and overt acts of discrimination against Muslim international students on campus. These two external components of climate influence one another, as covert and overt acts of prejudice often are converted into actions that assume structural forms and often are replicated through educational, political, cultural, and economical institutions (Al-Sharif & Pasque, 2016). While the concept of Islamophobia influences the external institutional components, these components interact and influence the internal institutional components to create the climate of a campus (Hurtado et al., 1998, 1999); i.e., the concept not only influences the external institutional components, but also the internal institutional components. This study attempts to understand the way in which Islamophobia is perpetuated (through external institutional components) in the historical legacy of inclusion and exclusion, the structural diversity, the psychological climate, and the behavioral dimension of American universities.
Internal Institutional Components

The institutional climate results from four elements (see figure 1): campus history and legacy of inclusion and exclusion of diverse racial/ethnic groups, the structural diversity of the campus, the psychological climate, and the behavioral climate (Hurtado et al., 1998, 1999). These dimensions are interconnected; e.g., an institution’s history of inclusion and exclusion can influence the representation, perceptions, and experiences of underrepresented racial/ethnic groups. Thus, it is important to understand the subtleties that characterize these interconnected dimensions of the campus climate. Employing a multi-dimensional approach toward diversity assessment on American campuses aids in understanding those subtleties and ultimately contributes to student overall development (Hurtado et al., 1998; 1999).

![Campus Climate Framework](image)

The historical legacy of inclusion and exclusion. The preservation of archaic campus policies and programs that cater mainly to a homogeneous population, including behaviors that include multicultural interaction, are exclusionary practices that reflect a historically segregated culture (Hurtado et al., 1998, 1999; Milem et al., 2005). These practices connote Muslim international students as the Other, as those who do not belong, which demonstrates the existence of Islamophobia and is based somewhat on the Orientalist View (Edvardsson, 2008). Edward Said (1997) explained that “the general basis of Orientalist thought is an imaginative and yet drastically polarized geography dividing the world into two unequal parts, the larger, ‘different’ one called the Orient, the Other, also known as ‘our’ world, called the Occident or the West ...” (p. 4). Said clearly articulated a power relationship in which Muslim international students represent the “Orient” and the West embodies the “Occident.” Experiences of discrimination and prejudice that some Muslim international students face may be perpetuated by campus policies and programs (Occident) that are either consciously or unconsciously designed, based on a history of terror incidences that have covertly influenced a climate of anti-Muslim views and suspicion (Allen, 2010). Similarly, a study by Schatz (2008) on Muslim international students indicated an increase in anti-Muslim sentiments within the campus environment as a result of institutional policies that intensified security measures following the 9/11 terrorist attacks. This Islamophobic reaction is summarized by Said: “from at least the end of the eighteenth century until our own day, modern Occidental reactions to Islam have been dominated by a radically simplified type of thinking that may still be called Orientalist …” (p. 4).
**Structural diversity.** Understanding racial/ethnic students’ enrollment changes, or the lack thereof, can impact students’ educational benefits (Hurtado et al., 1998, 1999). Improving the climate of a campus necessitates an increase in structural diversity, as those lacking a diverse student population may encourage the stereotyping and social stigma of underrepresented groups. However, increasing the enrollment of underrepresented groups has its own problems; specifically, it can fuel conflict among minority/majority groups, particularly when no provisions or programs are designed to cater to the needs of these students (Hurtado et al., 1998, 1999). In the case of undergraduate Muslim international students, increasing their population is not the problem, as their numbers continue to grow in American colleges and universities (Open Doors, 2015; Pew Research Center, 2015). The issue remains that international Muslim students may experience a myriad of academic and social challenges as a result of their racial/ethnic identity, religious identity, and gender identity, indicating that these students may not be adequately integrated and that American colleges and universities may be lacking in their efforts to accommodate their needs (McDermott-Levy, 2011; Tummala-Narra & Claudius, 2013). While campus leaders are more inclined to focus on increasing the numerical composition of racial/ethnic students, they must first consider the consequences of increasing campus structural diversity and must focus on other climate elements that require attention (Hurtado et al., 1998, 1999).

**The psychological dimension of the climate.** The psychological dimension of the climate refers to individual perceptions of cross-racial relations, institutional response to issues relating to diversity, and perceptions of prejudice or racial tension and feelings or thoughts held toward the Other – individuals from groups that differ from the majority
(Hurtado et al., 1998, 1999). The campus climate framework builds on the earlier work of Peterson and Spencer (1990) related to campus climate that defined it as the general perceptions, observations, and attitudes of stakeholders about the campus environment. However, the framework does not limit campus climate to common perceptions and attitudes; it emphasizes that racially and ethnically diverse groups (student, faculty, and staff) are more likely to possess distinctive views of the climate (Hurtado et al., 1998, 1999; Milem et al., 2005). This is because students’ racial/ethnic backgrounds, religious backgrounds, or differing power position (majority/minority) may influence the ways in which they experience and perceive their campus climate and the consequences that result (Hurtado et al., 1998, 1999). These unique views shatter assumptions about common perceptions of the environment that may describe the psychological climate (Hurtado et al., 1998, 1999; Milem et al., 2005); they indicate that perceptions about campus racial climate are not only psychologically based, but also are connected to institutional structures, history, and cross-racial contacts. In the same way, this study focuses on undergraduate Muslim international students’ campus experiences and perceptions of the overall campus climate based on the intersectionality of their racial/ethnic, religious, and gender backgrounds, including their cross-racial contacts, history of racialization, and other campus elements (Hurtado et al., 1998; 1999; Milem et al., 2005). The study seeks to explore the way in which these students perceive others’ perceptions of and attitudes toward them that may have been shaped and determined by Islamophobic beliefs.

**The behavioral dimension of the climate.** The behavioral component of the campus climate involves concrete accounts of general social relations between and
among different racial/ethnic groups and the nature of intergroup contact on campus (Hurtado et al., 1998, 1999). The lack or inadequate intergroup and intragroup contact can influence students’ perceptions of others who are different. Thus, the need for this type of dialogue is critical in building a positive campus climate. Campus leaders must provide opportunities for cross-racial contacts, whether within the classroom or in the larger campus context (Hurtado et al., 1998; 1999). This study examines the social and academic experiences of undergraduate Muslim international students and the way their experiences are influenced by their multiple identities as well as by Islamophobia.

**Chapter Summary**

The literature review on the experiences of international students suggests that this group has been examined as a homogenized group, often lacking the specificity of Muslim international students and the peculiarity of their experiences. Although research on Muslim American students has discussed experiences that may be similar to that of Muslim international students, these experiences may differ from that of their Muslim international counterparts. Students from diverse racial and ethnic groups possess distinctive views of the campus climate (Hurtado et al., 1998, 1999; Milem et al., 2005); as such, Muslim international students have unique experiences different from their American Muslim peers (Tummala-Narra & Claudius, 2013). Therefore, it is important to critically examine the unique racial, religious, and gendered experiences of Muslim international students who come from diverse national contexts to study in the US. Although studies have highlighted the racial, religious, and gendered experiences of Muslim international students, these studies were limited and did not explicitly address
the distinctive and collective influence of these areas on students’ academic and social integration.

By framing Islamophobia within the context of the campus climate framework, an attempt is made to explore the way in which governmental policies and programs, as well as sociohistorical context, influence an institution’s history of inclusion and exclusion, its structural diversity, psychological climate, and behavioral climate. The framework may help to show the way these campus racial climate elements shape undergraduate Muslim international students’ experiences and perceptions. Understanding the experiences of this group within this framework can help to examine the discriminatory practices against Muslims that are either implicitly or explicitly enacted, as well as subtly expressed through racial, religious, and gendered meanings (Allen, 2010).
CHAPTER III

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Qualitative Research Design

Rationale for Qualitative Research Design

This study sought to understand and describe the lived experiences of undergraduate Muslim international students on American campuses through a qualitative approach to research. The use of a qualitative approach allowed for the exploration and provision of a deep understanding (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Creswell, 1998) of the essence of this population of students’ racial/ethnic, religious, and gender experiences and their influence on academic and social integration. A qualitative approach aided in the discovery and description of participants’ perspectives, as well as allowed for an extensive exploration of social phenomena (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). For these reasons, the qualitative approach was best suited for this study.

Qualitative research was employed due to the nature of the research questions. The research questions asked “how or what” to describe the experiences of undergraduate Muslim international students in American colleges and universities (Creswell, 1998). Specifically, the research questions explored two overarching research questions:

RQ1. What are the experiences of undergraduate Muslim international students at four-year public national universities in the Western region of the United States?

RQ2. What can policymakers and higher education practitioners learn from undergraduate Muslim international students’ experiences?

This study also investigated eight sub-questions:
1. How do undergraduate Muslim international students perceive their religious identity as influencing their academic and social experiences?

2. How do undergraduate Muslim international students perceive their racial/ethnic identity as influencing their academic and social experiences?

3. How do undergraduate Muslim international students perceive their gender identity as influencing their academic and social experiences?

4. How do undergraduate Muslim international students perceive the campus climate as influencing how their identities (racial/ethnic, religious, and gender) are perceived by members of the campus community?

5. How do undergraduate Muslim international students also perceive others’ perceptions of their identities as influencing their academic and social experiences?

6. What experiences of Islamophobic sentiments (if any) do undergraduate Muslim international students perceive on American campuses?

7. What coping mechanisms do Muslim international students employ in navigating their academic and social experiences?

8. What recommendations do Muslim international students have for US universities?

As qualitative research broadly examines social phenomena and is largely grounded in a constructivist or critical perspective (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012), the aim of this study was to understand undergraduate Muslim international students’ subjective meanings of their racial/ethnic, religious, and gendered experiences and the way in which they influenced their academic and social integration (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). A qualitative approach was utilized because it facilitated the study of students in their natural setting, thereby permitting the gathering of information and the gaining of access
into the field of study (Creswell, 1998). More important, the use of qualitative research was relevant, as little is known about undergraduate Muslim international students’ campus experiences. This topic has not been well explored in research (Seggie & Sanford, 2010; Tummala-Narra & Claudius, 2013). In qualitative research, the researcher collects extensive data from the field and engages in a comprehensive analysis of data (Creswell, 1998). The focus on the pragmatic and interpretive study of individual lived experiences made a qualitative approach central to this research (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012).

Found within the qualitative approach to research is the phenomenological method of inquiry that focuses on investigating the lived experiences of individuals, the core essence of their experiences, and their interpretation of these experiences (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Patton, 2002). Phenomenology recognizes the significance of qualitative designs and methodologies, centers on inquiries that examine human experiences, and emphasizes the wholeness of human experience rather than an exclusive focus on its parts (Moustakas, 2011). For these reasons, phenomenology was used as the method of inquiry in this qualitative study.

**Understanding a Phenomenological Study**

The purpose of a phenomenological study is to carefully examine the meaning of the lived experience of individuals and to describe the fundamental essence of a phenomenon or experience (Creswell, 1998; Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Smith, Flower, & Larkin, 2009). Moustakas (1994) posited that a phenomenological study involves an extensive and continuous engagement with a small number of participants in order to create patterns and connections of meaning. Van Manen (2007) viewed a
phenomenological study as a “project of sober reflection on the lived experience of human existence …” (p. 12). A reflection on individuals’ lived experiences must be meticulous; uninhibited by theories, prejudice, and suppositions; and motivated by a fascination with interpreting meanings (Van Manen, 2007; Stone, 1979). Stone (1979) referred to phenomenology as a study to understand human consciousness and perceptions (based on one’s lived experience) as central to their reality; i.e., modern phenomenologists believe that the knowing of any process is based on the perceptions of those involved. Thus, the goal of a phenomenological study is to explore the fundamental perception or consciousness of the individual under observation to identify and interpret their perceptions (Stone, 1979).

Phenomenology involves looking beyond everyday experiences or natural mindset to allow for the examination of those experiences (Smith et al., 2009). Specifically, Husserl focused on transcendental phenomenology, which involves the description of human experiences (Moustakas, 1994). According to Husserl, adopting a phenomenological mindset allows for a reflexive action that aims one’s view inward toward the perception of an experience: the subjective rather than on the physical experience (Smith et al., 2009). This means that a phenomenologist must disengage from the activities in the world and focus on the experiences of the world that often are taken for granted (Smith et al., 2009). In the same way, transcendental phenomenology was used to uncover the experiences of undergraduate Muslim international students who often are taken for granted through their individual descriptions of these experiences.

Using the term intentionality of consciousness, an individual’s experience or consciousness is the experience or consciousness of something – i.e., an individual’s act of seeing, remembering, thinking, wishing, and judging is always the seeing, remembering, thinking, wishing, and judging of something – the object of an individual’s consciousness (which may be real or imaginary) (Moustakas, 2011; Smith et al., 2009). This object, according to Husserl, may have been provoked through an act of remembrance, through thoughts, or through the perception of an actual object in the world (Smith et al., 2009). Every conscious act can never be properly divorced from a person’s nature and volition, as no specific act is isolated or random. Indeed, every conscious act shows a high level of internal reliability and integrity, it involves intentionality (Stone, 1979). Therefore, only after having described and interpreted an individual’s intentionality, examined the ranges of their lived experiences, and
investigated the boundaries of their consciousness or perceptions can one begin to grasp the meaning of their psychological and behavioral acts (Stone, 1979). Similarly, the phenomenon involved undergraduate Muslim international students’ academic and social integration; these experiences of integration are intentional: deliberate experiences that are outside of students’ non-mental activities (Yüksel & Yıldırım, 2015).

A phenomenological inquiry focuses on the conscious experience of an individual. Phenomenology seeks to understand the noesis, a Greek word meaning “mental perception, intelligence, or thought” (Stewart & Mickunas, 1990, p. 37), which relates to “the activity of consciousness” (p. 37) – the act of the experience. Phenomenology also seeks to understand the noema, “that which is perceived or thought,” i.e., “the essence to which this mental activity is correlated” (p. 37) or the object of experience. These two dimensions are related, as experience incorporates the outward or physical appearance of a phenomenon or concept and the inward consciousness based on meaning or memory (Creswell, 1998). This indicates that the act of experience (the noesis) is connected to the meaning of the phenomenon (noema) (Yüksel & Yıldırım, 2015). Similarly, the noetic (the adjective form of noesis) and the noematic (the adjective form of the noema) can never be isolated from one other, as they are always connected (Stewart & Mickunas, 1990).

In this study, while undergraduate Muslim international students’ academic and social integration was the noema of the experiences, the way in which these students experienced their academic and social integration was the noesis of the experiences (Yüksel & Yıldırım, 2015). Although an individual’s understanding initially emanates from the physical circumstance of a phenomenon or a concept, it must be described,
elucidated, and interpreted (Patton, 2002). Phenomenologists emphasize knowledge based on the perceived meaning of an object rather than the examination of the physical object (Moustakas, 2011). The noetic activity does not focus on the psychological processes but rather on the meaning of those processes (Stewart & Mickunas, 1990). In the same way, the noematic focuses on the meaning of an individual’s experience rather than on the physical experience itself (Stewart & Mickunas, 1990). Stated in a different way, both interpretations and descriptions of experience are interwoven, as interpretation is key to understanding it and an experience is comprised of the interpretation (Patton, 2002). Consequently, a phenomenologist focuses on the way individuals construct the phenomena they experience in order to make sense of the world and to ultimately cultivate a worldview (Patton, 2002).

A phenomenologist does not focus on an objective reality, but rather on an individual’s understanding of his or her experience and its meaning (Patton, 2002). This is because individuals’ experiences, and their interpretations of the world based on them are central to a phenomenological inquiry (Patton, 2002). Therefore, this research sought to understand and describe what undergraduate Muslim international students encounter (the noema) and how it is that these students experience what they experience (the noesis), thereby focusing on the essence of their shared experiences (Moustakas, 2011; Patton, 2002). Through transcendental phenomenology, a rigorous and constant engagement was utilized with undergraduate Muslim international students so as to create forms and connections of meaning. The focus in this study concerned going outside of ourselves to view the world (Yüksel & Yıldırım, 2015) in order to describe the essence of undergraduate Muslim international students’ academic and social integration.
Phenomenology as a Research Design

The transcendental phenomenological philosophy theorized by Edmund Husserl was chosen as the research design for this study, as it posits that one must transcend experience in order to discover reality (Creswell, 2013; Kafle, 2011). To attain the Husserlian phenomenological attitude, one must understand the method to recognize the fundamental structures and elements of human experience (Smith et al., 2009). According to Husserl’s phenomenological principles, a valid scientific investigation is when knowledge (pure datum—the immanent thing) is obtained through descriptions, allowing for an understanding of the meanings and essences of a person’s experience (Husserl, 1990; Moustakas, 2011). To obtain this pure datum, a phenomenologist must undergo several steps: the Epoche, phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and synthesis of meanings and essences (Husserl, 1990).

Epoche. Husserl referred to the Epoche as the freedom from presupposition (Moustakas, 2011). For Husserl, a phenomenologist must suspend all beliefs that are characterized by the “natural attitude” (Crowell, 2009, p. 19; Husserl, 1990, p. 17). Indeed, a phenomenologist must bracket “the taken-for-granted-world” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 13) – one’s familiar way of knowing things, people, and events, or the habits of doing things in the world (Husserl, 1990; Crowell, 2009; Moustakas, 2011; Smith et al., 2009) – in order to focus on the perception of that world (Smith et al., 2009). In the Epoche, the taken-for-granted world along with its theories, biases, prejudgments, and preconceived ideas about things, is bracketed from the phenomenological field (Moustakas, 2011; Smith et al., 2009). This clears the world in a bracket of familiar thought and presents a phenomenon that one can freshly and naively understand through
a pure or cleansed consciousness (Moustakas, 2011; Smith et al., 2009). The point of the Epoche is then to nullify the tendency intrinsic to the natural attitude: familiar recognition of the world that one tends to use as the foundation for truth and reality (Crowell, 2009; Moustakas, 2011).

In Moustakas’ (2011) reflection on the nature and meaning of the phenomenological Epoche, it was viewed as a process of inhibiting prejudices and predispositions and allowing events and people to enter newly into consciousness – gazing upon this consciousness with an openness and a freshness and not being fettered by past or present knowledge or voices that may dictate one’s thinking. Although this may be a difficult task to achieve as noted by some philosophers (e.g., Merleau-Ponty) (Crowell, 2009; Moustakas, 2011), a phenomenological study requires that “we allow a phenomenon or experience to be just what it is and to come to know it as it presents itself” (Moustakas, 2011, p. 3); i.e., meaning that one brackets prejudices and focuses on the experiences of individuals in its purest form (Moustakas, 2011). However, bracketing does not indicate that one’s familiar way of seeing, thinking, and doing things dissapears (Smith et al., 2009). It is rare to perfectly achieve the Epoche. However, the vigor, intent, attitude, intensive work, and attention involved in the process of reflection and internal dialogue significantly leads the phenomenologist away from and reduces the influence and distraction of their preconceptions, judgments, and assumptions (Moustakas, 2011; Smith et al., 2009). Thus, practicing the Epoche on a regular basis leads the inquirer toward the core of the experience of a given occurrence or phenomenon by increasing the ability to attain a state of no presuppositions and helping to be open anew to their consciousness (Moustakas, 2011; Smith et al., 2009).
To practice the Epoche, I was intentional in being intellectually flexible and reflexive in order to move away from my natural attitude and perceptions to view the real existence of the world (Morley, 2010). I recognized that the process of the Epoche is not an easy cerebral procedure, nor a professional technique that can simply be instructed in an official manner (Morley, 2010). The process of the Epoche required an awareness of my biases, as well as engagement in the intensive and intentional process of reflection and self-dialogue (Moustakas, 2011; Smith et al., 2009) through journaling a situation in which I journaled about my experiences on academic and social integration, as well as biases and pre-judgments toward undergraduate Muslim international students (Creswell, 2013). Next, I journaled about how these personal experiences and biases may influence or shape my interpretation of students’ academic and social integration (Creswell, 2013).

**Phenomenological reduction.** In phenomenological reduction, the focus is accessing the essence, core, or depth of experience (Crowell, 2009; Smith et al., 2009). The transcendental phenomenological reductions supplement the Epoche as they describe the seeing of the external object and the internal act of consciousness in textural language, a situation in which the intentional correlation between phenomenon and self is made thematic (Crowell, 2009; Moustakas, 2011). Stated differently, the phenomenological reduction “is this change of focus, from our object-directed attitude to an act-directed attitude” (Føllesdal, 2006, p. 111), a situation in which focus is on describing the noema and the noesis just as they appear and reducing them to horizontal and textural language (Moustakas, 2011). The focus is on describing the overall structure of them, eliminating all that is outside, not directly within one’s conscious experience (Moustakas, 2011). Thus, each time we describe an experience, we are opened to new
understandings and new ways of seeing that are interrelated with one another and that we elucidate as we continue to look – ensuring that our eyes are fixed on the core of the experience, examining and describing the act as it appears before us (Moustakas, 2011). In this study, repetitive, overlapping, and vague expressions were eliminated from participants’ data, expressions that were not directly related to their academic and social integration (Creswell, 2013; Yüksel & Yıldırım, 2015). Participants’ data were reviewed and significant statements or relevant expressions were identified about how undergraduate Muslim international students experience their academic and social integration (Creswell, 2013; Terrell, 2016; Yüksel & Yıldırım, 2015). These significant statements were then treated as having equal value and were grouped into larger, common themes (Creswell, 2013; Yüksel & Yıldırım, 2015). I then provided a description of “what happened” – a textural or narrative description of that which the participants experienced or perceived about their academic and social integration with verbatim quotes from their interviews in order to obtain the essence of participants’ experience (Creswell, 2013; Yüksel & Yıldırım, 2015).

**Imaginative variation.** The goal of imaginative variation is to explore potential meanings through the use of imagination, differing perspectives, different frameworks and positions, and viewing the phenomenon through polarities in order to attain essential structural descriptions of an experience or phenomenon. This entails understanding the way in which the experience or the phenomenon came to be what it is (Moustakas, 2011). Through the process of imaginative variation, “the world disappears, existence no longer is central, anything whatever becomes possible …in this instant intuition is not empirical but purely imaginative in character.” (Moustakas, 2011, p. 14). In imaginative variation,
the phenomenologist through phenomenological reduction is able to develop structural themes from the textural descriptions, while understanding that numerous roads to truth exist that are closely linked to the meanings and core of a phenomenon or experience (Moustakas, 2011). To practice the imaginative variation, I reflected on the setting in which participants’ experienced incidences of academic and social integration in order to describe how the occurrence (Creswell, 2013; Yüksel & Yıldırım, 2015). These structural descriptions aided the understanding of the location where participants’ experiences of academic and social integration happened (Creswell, 2013).

**Synthesis of meanings and essences.** The synthesis of meanings and essences involves the intelligent combination of the essential textural (the description of what participants experienced) and structural descriptions (how they experienced it in terms of various levels or characteristics – context, situations, etc.) into an integrated statement that characterizes the essences of the phenomenon studied (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 2011; Stewart & Mickunas, 1990). Although it is impossible to exhaust all essences of any phenomenon, the synthesis of the fundamental textural and structural descriptions signifies the phenomenon from the viewpoint of the phenomenologist resulting from a thorough imaginative and reflective examination of the phenomenon under study (Moustakas, 2011). In synthesizing the essence of undergraduate Muslim international students’ academic and social integrations, a composite narrative was developed that combined the textural and structural descriptions of participants’ experiences to obtain the true essence: the core of “what” and “how” participants experienced their academic and social integration (Creswell, 2013; Yüksel & Yıldırım, 2015).
The exploration of this phenomenological framework by Moustakas (2011) was significant to this study. It guided the phenomenological examination of academic and social integration (Faid-Douglas, 2000), with a focus on understanding the essence of undergraduate Muslim international students’ lived experiences and perceptions of campus climate through their viewpoints (Faid-Douglas, 2000). The goal was to understand undergraduate these students’ experiences to reveal the fundamental nature of their academic and social integration, and to provide an in-depth explanation of their real experiences (Kafle, 2011) to better help them succeed academically and socially. Thus, transcendental phenomenology was appropriate, in that it provided the tools to develop a rich examination of the lived experiences of these students.

**Positionality of the Researcher**

Qualitative research requires that the researcher describe his or her education, professional, and background experiences, as well as openly disclose interest and knowledge about the topic under study, presuppositions, biases, and assumptions in order to inform the reader about the researcher’s knowledge and contribution related to the study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). It also allows the reader to form ideas related to the training or qualification of the researcher to conduct a study on that specific topic (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). However, in phenomenological research, the researcher also is required to bracket these biases, presuppositions, and assumptions to meaningfully describe the phenomenon of academic and social integration (Moustakas, 2011).

My interest in this topic emerged from my research focus on international students’ experiences in American universities over the past two years as well as my extensive experience as an international student who shares similar academic and social
experiences with other international students. The interest in Muslim international students’ academic and social integration originated from a desire to help international students who struggle with integrating into the campus community as a result of their racial/ethnic, religious, and gender affiliations. My intent was to identify recommendations that will better inform institutional leaders, faculty, and staff on these students’ perception of their academic and social integration, ways to connect with them, and ultimately to foster their integration and overall positive campus experiences.

Through this research, the needs of Muslim international students were detailed to influence campus administrators on their roles as agents of change and the significance of developing new programs and strategies to promote their academic and social integration.

During the process of obtaining my degree in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), I was able to develop relationships with some of my colleagues who identify as Muslim international students. Also, the attainment of the degree provided the opportunity to teach English as a Second Language to predominantly international students seeking admission to US universities, many of whom were Muslim. In addition, I grew up in Nigeria, a country in which the Muslim population is 50% percent of the overall population. Thus, I have family and friends who identify as Muslims. These experiences allowed me to connect with Muslim international students and may help in viewing their realities with more clarity.

I entered this study with some biases, prejudgments, presuppositions, and beliefs about Muslim international students’ racial/ethnic, religious, and gender experiences, as well as their academic and social integration. However, through the process of the Epoche, I acknowledged these biases and consistently and intentionally bracketed my
everyday worldview and prejudgments in order to understand the essence of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 2011; Smith et al., 2009). These biases include a belief that Muslim international students encounter racial/ethnic, religious, and gender discrimination in American universities, and I believe these experiences in some way influence their academic and social integration on campus. Conversely, while I do not share the religious beliefs of Muslim international students, my religious identity as a Christian who believes in the Triune God of the Bible drives me to demonstrate love, even to those with whom I do not share similar religious views. It is within this context that I believe undergraduate Muslim international students should have a positive experience in American universities and be able to fully integrate academically and socially.

**Data Collection**

The data collection process in a qualitative study is viewed as a sequence of interconnected activities designed to gather meaningful information in order to answer evolving research questions (Creswell, 1998; Creswell, 2013). The qualitative researcher, thus, engages in a sequence of actions during the data collection process. These series of activities include locating a research site or context, gaining access to study the site, identifying a sampling strategy, and identifying the forms of data collection (Creswell, 1998; Creswell, 2013). In this section, various components of the data collection process employed in this study are discussed.

**Research Sites**

This phenomenological study aimed to understand and describe the lived experiences of Muslim international students at four-year public universities in the
Western region of the country because there is a growing number of the Muslim population in the Western part of the US. The 2015 percentage of the Muslim population in the Western part of the country ranged from (less than) 0.5% to 1% of the entire population, which indicates that this group in some of these states is growing beyond the national percentage of the Muslim population (0.9%) (The American Values Atlas, n.d.). For this study, participants were recruited from three campus sites to allow for varied contextual information; all experienced the phenomenon of academic and social integration and were capable of vocalizing their racial/ethnic, religious, and gender experiences (Creswell, 1998).

**General description of research sites.** The three universities in which the study was conducted were established in 1870, 1876, and 1912, respectively, and are categorized by Carnegie as Doctoral Large Higher Research institutions. These universities are located in the Mountain West area of the United States, and participants were selected from the undergraduate degrees offered at each. According to Fall 2016 enrollment reports (see Table 1), these universities include approximately 3,264 degree-seeking international undergraduate students (compared to their domestic counterparts whose combined population is 56,859 students). Specifically, over 1,418 of international students come from predominantly Muslim countries (such as India, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Malaysia, Iran, Indonesia, Oman, Nigeria, Pakistan, Libya, Palestinian territory, Iraq, Bahrain, United Arab Emirates). These institutions were chosen due to their large numbers of Muslim international students, as this characteristic of the research sites not only allowed for a better understanding of these students’ experiences of American
campuses compared to their domestic and non-Muslim international students, but it informed how to better serve this growing population.

Table 1

*Fall 2016 Enrollment Profile of Research Sites*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research sites</th>
<th>Year founded</th>
<th>Domestic enrollment</th>
<th>International enrollment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Northern Mountain university</td>
<td>1870</td>
<td>22,418</td>
<td>848</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rocky Mountain university</td>
<td>1876</td>
<td>24,543</td>
<td>1,890</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Downtown City university</td>
<td>1912</td>
<td>9,898</td>
<td>526</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Specific description of research sites.** The first research site is a public, four year research university in Northern Colorado (pseudonym: Northern Mountain University [NMU]) with an undergraduate international enrollment of 848 students. Founded in 1870, the university is located in a midsize city at the base of the Rocky Mountains. It is considered one of the leading research universities, with more than 350 campus organizations, including approximately 35 fraternities and sororities.

During data collection the campus was very quiet, as students from all levels were walking back and forth busy attending classes, which made the environment seem cold and unwelcoming toward visitors. It was rare to find international students walking around the campus, although occasionally I was able to meet and talk with an international student either leaving or going to class. Most of the undergraduate Muslim international students I interviewed live off-campus because of the financial convenience. Also, most of them are devoted members of the Muslim Student Association (MSA). The MSA at Northern Mountain University is highly committed to organizing programs that educate the mainstream population about issues related to the religion of Islam, as well as
other religions. The MSA also strives to educate American students about international students from Muslim countries.

The second research site also is a public, four year research university located in Northern Colorado (pseudonym: Rocky Mountain University [RMU]). The university is set against the magnificent scenery of the Rocky Mountains, within a lively college town known for its biking and walking trails. The university has over 300 student clubs and organizations and approximately 40 fraternities and sororities. During data collection, I noticed that most students either walk or ride their bikes to school rather than drive due to little to no parking spaces around the campus area. Students were seen walking to and from classes, and some were having classes outside in the beautiful courtyards. Aside from the numerous restaurants housed in the cafeteria, students also have choices with the great amount of restaurants, coffee shops, clothing stores, etc. that surrounds the campus.

The MSA office is housed within the Student Government building, and participants were interviewed within the confines of the office, a place where they felt comfortable. Several undergraduate Muslim students were seen visiting the office to attend meetings or to ask questions related to their religion. The undergraduate Muslim international students who were interviewed live off campus because of financial reasons and all are devoted members of the MSA. At the time of data collection, the MSA at Rocky Mountain University continues to have challenges with securing a prayer room.

The third research site is a four year public research university founded in 1912 and located in Northern Colorado (pseudonym: Downtown City University [DCU]). Known as a commuter campus that may not focus as much on students’ college experiences, the university is viewed as urban and caters to non-traditional students.
While the university is close to the city, the option is always available to escape to the mountains. Various outdoor activities are available such as hiking and sports in which students can engage. During data collection, undergraduate Muslim international students were interviewed on campus where they felt comfortable. These students reside off campus but are very involved in the MSA.

Access. Obtaining access to the research sites required several steps. Prior to commencing the data collection process, a detailed proposal for research was submitted to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the research sites to ensure it met the specified ethical standards (Creswell, 1998). Data collection began after receiving IRB approval (see Appendix F) to recruit participants, distribute the consent forms, receive completed consent forms, and provide interview questions (Creswell, 1998). The processes began at the time of IRB approval at each campus; the processes were not simultaneous between the sites.

Sampling

The purposeful selection of participants is a significant decision in qualitative research (Creswell, 1998), as these individuals can provide clarification of the central phenomenon in the study (Creswell, 2013). Polkinghorne (1989) suggested that phenomenologists interview between 5 to 25 individuals who have experienced the circumstances. In this phenomenological study, the intent was to recruit 12 (at least four per research site) undergraduate Muslim international students to participate; however, during the data collection process, interest from only eight students was received (four males and four females). Expanding the participant pool was considered to reach the target of 12 participants, but time was limited and undergraduate students have busy
schedules. Therefore, a confined scope of sampling strategies was adopted (Creswell, 1998). Specifically, a criterion purposeful sampling strategy was used (a narrower range sampling strategy that can purposefully broaden understanding on the phenomenon or research problem in a study [Creswell, 2013]). This method was suggested as appropriate for a phenomenological study (Creswell, 2013), as all eight participants had experienced the phenomenon of academic and social integration and met the criterion of being Muslim international students enrolled in undergraduate programs. They also had encountered racial/ethnic, religious, and gender experiences on their current campus (Creswell, 1998).

Prior to recruitment, prospective participants were informed of the initial sample size limit (12) and that indicating willingness may not guarantee they would be invited to participate in the study (Heyn, 2013). Specifically, those who indicated interest were contacted by telephone or email to clarify any preliminary questions they may have had about the study. They also were asked if they had fully completed the English language proficiency requirements at their institutions, had been regularly admitted as undergraduate students, had studied in the United States for at least one year, and were able and willing to discuss their experiences on campus (see Appendix A) (Heyn, 2013). Additionally, equal racial/ethnic and gender representation of participants from the three universities was used to determine the individuals to be included in the study. Data saturation was achieved, as similar codes and themes occurred repeatedly and the eight participants provided valid findings that conveyed the essence of the phenomenon. Thus, additional prospective participants were not contacted (Creswell, 2013).
No pre-established relationships existed between me as the researcher and any of the students. Participants were drawn from the pool of over 1,418 undergraduate Muslim international students at the three institutions, with the help of International Services and Recruitment Coordinators, Office of Cultural Programs, and Muslim Student Association leaders who sent out the recruitment emails (see Appendix B). All students were invited via email to take part in the study and were reminded three weeks later. After the initial recruitment emails were sent out, individuals who volunteered to participate were contacted again through emails or telephone in order to further discuss the research study in detail. Individuals were sent a request to schedule a time for the interviews, and a copy of the consent form (Appendix C) for signature was provided at the beginning of the interviews. Table 2 represents a profile of the participants that includes students’ pseudonyms, gender, age, hijab status, country, program, number of years spent at current university, on-campus job status, and campus affiliation.

Table 2

**Sampling of Participants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Gender/ Hijab</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Year(s) at school</th>
<th>On-campus job</th>
<th>Campus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Danber</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Saudi Arabia</td>
<td>Biochemistry</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>RMU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reeba</td>
<td>Female/ Yes</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Egypt</td>
<td>Biology</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>NMU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rasheed</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>United Arab Emirate</td>
<td>Finance</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>NMU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meera</td>
<td>Female/ No</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Oman</td>
<td>Computer science</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>NMU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abdulfatai</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Saudi Arabia</td>
<td>Health &amp; exercise science</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>NMU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bara</td>
<td>Female/ No</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Saudi Arabia</td>
<td>Architecture</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>DCU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kazim</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Saudi Arabia</td>
<td>Architecture</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>DCU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maridya</td>
<td>Female/ Yes</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>Chemistry</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>RMU</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Danber is a quiet, young 23-year-old man who is married to an American Muslim-born woman, also a significant member of the MSA at RMU. He is of medium height and average build; his caring heart was most noticeable, as he offered to navigate me through the University for the entire day. Danber enjoys attending the MSA and loves meeting different people from diverse cultures. His love stems from his desire to come to the United States to study and to experience a new life. As a young man, Danber lost his father and soon became the father figure to his siblings. While it was difficult to leave his family in Saudi Arabia to study in the United States, Danber’s dream to experience the world prevailed. As soon as he arrived, Danber studied the English Language for a year, after which he attended a community college to study some preliminary science courses before transferring to RMU to study Biochemistry. In his down time, Danber loves to play soccer with his Muslim friends.

Reeba is a stunningly beautiful 20-year-old young woman with a wide smile that keeps you interested in talking to her. Although she wears a hijab around her head, Reeba’s flawless skin was visible. Reeba has a close relationship with her parents, especially her father whom she calls “Baba.” Reeba hails from Egypt but lives in Saudi Arabia with her family. She began her foundational science courses in the United Kingdom (UK) but later opted to join her brother, Mohammad, in the United States to continue her studies in Biology at NMU. Although she is currently studying for a Biology degree, she hopes to study Medicine and follow in her mother’s footsteps or be a professor, which she considers as her plan B. She believes that communication will heal the gap between Muslim and non-Muslim students, although she knows this will take
time. Reeba is a devout Muslim woman who is strong in her religious stance and refuses to minimize her Muslim identity.

**Rasheed** is a sweet, 21-year-old young man. Upon meeting him at a coffee shop off campus, he presented me with a cup of dates mixed with coconut, which tasted wonderfully sweet! I immediately saw his braces-filled teeth whenever he smiled, which made me smile when I looked at him. Rasheed has a lean build, which he covered with a red hoodie and blue jeans. Born and bred in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Rasheed is the first born and first son of seven siblings (five younger brothers and one younger sister) to travel to the United States for study. He came to this country in 2014 and spent a year studying the English Language before he joined NMU to study finance. He joked about his inability to say a word when he arrived in the United States compared to his present growing linguistic abilities. Rasheed has a passion for helping people in need. He also loves to attend any program or institutional initiatives that help him develop his linguistic abilities and knowledge of other cultures and religion. As an outgoing person, Rasheed loves to meet new people and make new friends.

**Meera** is the first Omani young Muslim woman I have ever met. Although she lived in the UK for over three years as a child, she chose to come to the US on scholarship from the Omani government to study Computer Science at NMU. She desires to experience a new country. Her lean figure and introverted personality may fool one to assume she is weak. However, she is not. Meera is not shy and openly discusses and expresses her Muslim identity as a woman. While she does not cover her hair with the hijab, because she does not believe in such practice, Meera considers herself a devout
Muslim woman. As a 20-year-old young woman, she strongly believes that not wearing the hijab does not define her Muslim identity.

At first glance, I noticed Abdulfatai’s petit stature with a wide smile on his long face. He wore blue jeans and a gray t-shirt, which he paired with his white canvas shoes. His jovial attitude immediately was apparent in his ability to begin a conversation as soon as we said “hello” to one another. As a 24-year-old senior studying Health and Exercise Science at NMU, Abdulfatai would love to grow his career as a public health administrator as he continues to obtain a Master’s degree. Born in Saudi Arabia, Abdulfatai dreamed of studying abroad since his high school days and, by sheer luck, was able to study in the United States. Abdulfatai is very interested in the current immigration reform in the US and hopes to complete his studies without fear of being deported to Saudi Arabia.

Bara is a very beautiful, intelligent young Muslim woman with dark locks that adorn her head. Her smile and brown eyes draw you in immediately when she begins to speak, especially when she squints them. Bara moved to the United States to study Architecture at age 20 along with her siblings (four sisters and one brother) and, since then, has remained in the States studying Architecture at DCU. Her intelligence and creativity in architecture is demonstrated by some of her designs on Saudi Arabia displayed in areas of the university. As a 25-year-old woman, she is engaged to marry her third cousin after she completes her undergraduate education in the United States. As a free-spirited individual, Bara chooses not to cover her hair despite her parent’s and fellow Muslim students’ disapproval of this decision. Although free-spirited, Bara takes her time developing close relationships that result in friendships; according to her, it takes
time to trust people. Despite her financial, academic, and social challenges in the United States as an undergraduate international Muslim student, Bara remains strong in the face of overwhelming struggles.

**Kazim** is a fun 24-year-old young man! He is not shy to approach people and interact with them, as he is able to begin a conversation with a stranger at any time. He has a very beautiful smile that makes you feel comfortable when talking to him. He is a light skinned young man with a round face and a set of teeth that flashes occasionally. Kazim has a very close relationship with his father, to whom he looks to for ideas and guidance in his studies and life. His father’s support (as well as that of his mother) means the world to him! Although he says he is not a very religious individual, he strives to pray five times per day and to fulfill his religious responsibilities. Kazim’s motivation is characterized by his drive to work hard and to improve on his past accomplishments. His love to acquire knowledge and to understand other cultures is demonstrated in his passion for learning, which brought him to the United States to study Architecture at DCU! As the oldest of three siblings – a younger brother in first grade and a younger sister in college – Kazim seeks to be an inspiration to them.

**Maridya** is shy and soft spoken, but underneath those attributes lies a very strong and intelligent young, 21-year-old Muslim woman studying Chemistry at RMU. Her smile and occasional shrill laughs accentuate her round face underneath the hijab adorning her head. She is a devout Muslim whose religious obligations are equally (if not more) as important as her educational responsibilities. Maridya is very aware of her Muslim identity, especially as a woman, and its influence on other people’s behaviors and attitudes toward her; however, she remains strong in her Islamic faith. She loves to
cook Malaysian food and enjoys it more than American delicacies. Maridya longs for opportunities to discuss her religion with other non-Muslims and hopes to foster a better world view of Islam.

**Data Collection Strategies**

The qualitative approach to inquiry involves several strategies of data collection, although they are not fixed guidelines (Creswell, 1998). In alignment with phenomenological study, one-on-one, in-depth, semi-structured interviews were employed to collect information to understand the essence of international Muslim students’ experiences of the phenomenon (Creswell, 1998). The semi-structured interviews accommodated a variety of research goals evident in its use of various questions, supplementary tools, prompts, and resources to elicit information from participants and to focus their attention on the topic under investigation. The nature of semi-structured interviews included questions that are open-ended and theoretically-based to draw information grounded in participants’ experiences (Galletta, 2013).

The initial methodology by Seidman (1998) suggested three consecutive in-depth interviews with each of the participants in a phenomenological study. My intent was that participants undergo three one-on-one, in-depth, semi-structured interviews. The expectation was that the first interview would assess undergraduate Muslim international students’ previous experience with the topic of interest, while the second would be based on their current experience. The third interview would synthesize the data obtained from the previous two interviews in order to describe the essence of the phenomenon (Seidman, 1998). The first and second interviews were anticipated to approximately one hour each (Polkinghorne, 1989). The third interview was expected to last 30 minutes,
resulting in a total of 2 hours and 30 minutes of data collection with each participant. However, it became apparent early in the process that the three stages of contact interview structure by Seidman (1998) was unrealistic and somewhat impossible to execute with undergraduate Muslim international students’ busy schedules. As a result, the interview structure was limited to a single in-depth session. Additionally, all three sets of questions were posed in one interview session ranging between 40 to 60 minutes, as it was impractical for each individual to participate in two 60-minute and one 30-minute interview due to their busy schedules. The implementation of Seidman’s (1998) multiple interview structure of creating context, understanding current descriptions, and synthesizing meaning was maintained. However, participants were asked the three sets of interview questions and urged to provide detailed information within a single session.

The interviews were conducted in each participants’ location of choice of which was a distraction-free area (Creswell, 2013). Each was compensated with a $20 gift card. Prior to the interviews, the purpose and structure of the interview, including the risks and benefits, the safeguards, and the ground rules, were discussed. Participants were provided a confidentiality agreement, as well as information about the use of a recording device after obtaining their consent to participate in the study and to utilize the device (Creswell, 1998; Creswell, 2013). At this point, participants were allowed to choose a pseudonym by which to be identified in order to avoid any breach of confidentiality. In addition, the interview included questions as well as probes that focused on the perceptions of undergraduate Muslim international students about their racial/ethnic, religious, and gender experiences on campus and the influence of these experiences on their academic and social integration (Appendix D). The participants were presented with questions
Generally in a sequential order (while using follow-ups and probes as necessary). Although the wording of the questions was not stated exactly as the written form, any simplification did not impact the meaning of the original phrasing. During the interviews, I focused on the interview questions; was polite and courteous; paid attention to participants’ cues in order to suggest some questions or advice; and, ideally, completed the interview within the specified time (Creswell, 1998). At the end of the interviews, participants were asked to complete a demographic form.

Data Analysis Procedures

The nature of qualitative research is one in which the data analysis occurs along with the data collection process, resulting in a continuous process. As data analysis is iterative, data were constantly analyzed and re-analyzed throughout the data collection process to understand the meaning of undergraduate Muslim international students’ academic and social integration (Galletta, 2013). As noted in the previous section, this qualitative phenomenological study included in-depth semi-structured interviews with eight individuals who had experienced the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). Data were transcribed and imputed into NVivo 11 data analysis software for easy access (Creswell, 1998, 2013). Following this, the entire interview transcript was read to obtain a sense of the whole data (Creswell, 1998, 2013). The data were described, classified, and interpreted through the formation of codes (to summarize into smaller units of information), themes were developed (to create a common idea), data were interpreted (to make sense of the larger meaning of the data), and the representation of data was adopted (Creswell, 2013). For the purpose of this study, the phenomenological data analysis strategies were adopted (Epoche, phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and
synthesis of meanings and essences) that were proposed by Moustakas (1994) as the 
general approach to coding data. Additional strategies based on the Miles et al (2013) 
data analysis process were employed as the specific method for coding data.

Based on Moustakas’ (1994) strategies, prejudgments, biases, and preconceived 
ideas about the phenomenon were bracketed in order to view the phenomenon in a new 
way. This process was implemented throughout the data analysis process. In 
phenomenological reduction, consistent reflection on the interview data (through 
journaling) was utilized to describe the experiences of participants as they appeared in 
order to explain the true meaning of the phenomenon. All statements were treated with 
equal value while being reduced to significant statements and quotes that provided rich 
descriptions of the participants’ experiences or perceptions of the phenomenon, a process 
called horizontalization (Moustakas, 1994; Ruiz, 2013). The significant statements were 
then combined and quotes organized into themes to develop a full textural description of 
participant experiences/perceptions.

Emerging themes also were used to develop a full structural description of the 
context that shaped participants’ experiences/perceptions of the phenomenon, a process 
known as imaginative variation (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). Through imaginative 
variation, several possible meanings were captured by approaching the phenomenon from 
varying lenses and perspectives through the use of my imagination; the phenomenon was 
examined through differing perspectives and polarities in order to attain essential 
structural descriptions (Moustakas, 1994; Moustakas, 2011; Yüksel & Yıldırım, 2015). 
Lastly, the textural (description of participants’ experiences) and structural descriptions 
(the various contexts or situations in which they experienced the phenomenon) were
combined into an integrated statement that represented the essence or core of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994; Moustakas, 2011; Stewart & Mickunas, 1990).

**Coding Guide**

In this study, I grounded coding strategies (see Appendix E) in the coding process of Miles et al. (2013). The process included coding in cycles; conducting both inductive and deductive data analysis simultaneously with data collection, and employed micro-coding (an in-depth form of coding that aids in finding meanings from data), macro-coding (a general and non-specific form of coding that comprehensively summarizes the essence of a phenomenon), and pattern coding (the categorization of data into meaningful themes) (Miles et al., 2013; Simmons-Mackie, 2014). Specifically, the data were coded in two iterative cycles. In the first cycle, an initial read-through of the interview data was conducted to be familiarized with and immersed in the data (Creswell, 2013; Miles et al., 2013). Inductive and deductive descriptive coding was employed by assigning labels or symbolic meaning to summarize data that emerged during the process and data based on the conceptual/theoretical frameworks and research questions (Miles et al., 2013). This form of coding aided in revealing patterns of emerging concepts, and thus, formed the primary codes. In the second cycle, deductive pattern coding was conducted using the conceptual/theoretical frameworks to combine similar codes from the first cycle into more meaningful units of analysis. This interpretive act resulted in themes. Overall, the significant statements (represented by the cluster of codes or meanings) and themes that united these codes were used to write a description of participants’ experiences and the context in which they occurred. Additionally, the combination of the textural and structural descriptions was used to describe the essence of the phenomenon under study.
Validation Standards and Strategies

To assess the validity of this qualitative study, several validation strategies were utilized because a valid research study suggests that the description of participants’ experiences be accurately represented and interpreted (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). In a phenomenological study, validation strategies and standards are based mainly on the researchers’ interpretation (Creswell, 1998). Thus, I assessed the internal validity (the extent to which findings truly reflect or represent participants’ reality [Denzin, 1970]) through member-checking, whereby participants were given access to data, analyses, interpretations, and conclusions in order to “judge the accuracy and credibility of the account” (Creswell, 2013, p. 252). Specifically, they were given access to each of their interview transcriptions or verbatim data to verify their responses and my understanding of their experiences (Yüksel & Yıldırım, 2015). The member-checking strategy also helped to further confirm the interpretations of the findings, as it had was noted to be the most prominent and important strategy in determining trustworthiness (Creswell, 2013).

Participants were purposefully selected in order to provide comprehensive and genuine information. The eight individuals represented various undergraduate Muslim international students from diverse racial/ethnic background, degrees, programs, and gender. This ensured generalizability of the study to other contexts and situations and its triangulation through multiple participants (Faid-Douglas, 2000). Although I had some biases as an international student with existing views about academic and social integration, the presuppositions and prejudgments were constantly bracketed to ensure participants’ reality was represented. Further, the qualitative study was peer-reviewed,
which allowed for data triangulation and critical examination of the methods, meaning, interpretations, and conclusions included in the study (Creswell, 2013; Yüksel & Yıldırım, 2015).

**Ethical Considerations**

Qualitative research requires researchers to consider ethical issues that surface when conducting a study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Patton, 2002), particularly during the data collection process (Creswell, 2003). Therefore, participants chose a pseudonym by which to be identified in transcriptions, and data were labeled using their pseudonyms to safeguard against any breach of confidentiality. Participant information also was de-identified. Additionally, a copy of the consent form for signature was provided at the start of each of the interviews and consent were received immediately before commencing the interviews. The informed consent adequately informed individuals about the scope of the study to allow them to make an informed decision about their participation. Also, any questions were answered that participants may have emerged about the informed consent during the time when it was reviewed with the participants. The consent forms, transcripts, and key linking pseudonyms to actual first names were stored on a password-protected computer in a locked office accessible only by me.

Further, participants may have developed emotional discomfort as a result of reflecting on their own or others’ campus experiences. Anyone who developed such discomfort as a result of reflecting on their individual campus experiences was provided the contact numbers of counseling services, international student services, multicultural affairs offices, and/or specific Muslim student organizations at the respective institutions. At the time of data collection, an international student advisor declined my request of
data at one of the campuses due to the political rhetoric against Muslim immigrants in the country. However, participants were able to be recruited through the school’s MSA. This influenced my interview with undergraduate Muslim international students. In order to be sensitive to their approach culture, I carefully listened to their experiences and engaged with them based on their individual values and dispositions (Mack, Woodsong, MacQueen, Guest, & Namey, 2005). Also, rapport was built through modesty in behavior and dressing style during the interview (Ebrahim & Sullivan, 1995). Also, during data collection, two of the participants requested to be interviewed in places in which they felt safe because of the current political climate; e.g., Danber and Maridya opted to interview at their MSA office. Individuals had the opportunity to decline participation without any repercussions; the minimal risk of a breach of confidentiality did not outweigh the benefits of reflecting about their racial/ethnic, religious, and gender experiences influence their academic and social integration.

**Chapter Conclusion**

Qualitative research, specifically the transcendental phenomenological method of inquiry, was employed in this study. The sample size included eight undergraduate Muslim students from three American universities. In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted to collect data; the phenomenological data analysis strategies, including the process outlined by Miles et al. (2013), were employed. Also, several validation methods were utilized to ensure the accurate representation and interpretation of participants’ experiences. Finally, ethical issues were considered and addressed in order to be sensitive to the needs of participants.
CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to describe and understand the lived experiences of degree-seeking undergraduate Muslim international students on American campuses. Specifically, their racial/ethnic, religious, and gender experiences were examined, as well as the influence of these experiences on their academic integration and social integration. This study viewed academic integration as the connections related to studying and the institution, while it viewed social integration as the level of student integration to social life on a campus. Interviews with eight (four men and four women) undergraduate Muslim international students were conducted in an effort to understand their lived experiences and in an attempt to answer the following research questions:

RQ1. What are the experiences of undergraduate Muslim international students at four-year public national universities in the Western region of the United States?

RQ2. What can policymakers and higher education practitioners learn from undergraduate Muslim international students’ experiences?

Additionally, the research questions include eight sub-questions.

1. How do undergraduate Muslim international students perceive their religious identity as influencing their academic and social experiences?

2. How do undergraduate Muslim international students perceive their racial/ethnic identity as influencing their academic and social experiences?

3. How do undergraduate Muslim international students perceive their gender identity as influencing their academic and social experiences?
4. How do undergraduate Muslim international students perceive the campus climate as influencing how their identities (racial/ethnic, religious, and gender) are perceived by members of the campus community?

5. How do they perceive others’ perceptions of their identities as influencing their academic and social experiences?

6. What experiences of Islamophobia sentiments (if any) do undergraduate Muslim international students perceive on American campuses?

7. What coping mechanisms do Muslim international students employ in navigating their academic and social experiences?

8. What recommendations do Muslim international students have for US universities?

This chapter discusses findings that provide a new outlook on issues relative to the way higher education institutions should begin to view the racial/ethnic, religious, and gender experiences of undergraduate Muslim international students. The findings of this study reflect participants’ perceptions of their lived experiences in US institutions and the influence of these experiences on their academic and social integration. Themes were largely determined by using significant verbatim quotes from individuals, as phenomenology was utilized to understand the fundamental essence of undergraduate Muslim international students’ campus experiences. Given that the participants come from non-native English-speaking countries, the direct quotes may include some grammatical errors; however, participants’ comments are presented as stated in order to retain their genuineness and authenticity.

In the course of the analysis, eight central findings emerged that are related to each of the research questions:
1. **Classroom Challenges:** This theme is related to the way in which undergraduate Muslim international students perceive their racial/ethnic identity as influencing their academic integration. It also highlights how they regard others’ perceptions of their racial identity as influencing their academic integration.

2. **The Influence of Religious/Cultural Indicators (such as the hijab and the thobe) on Students’ Experiences:** This theme answers the question of undergraduate Muslim international students’ perceptions of their gender identity as influencing their social experiences. It also explores how they regard others’ perceptions of their identities (religious, racial/ethnic, and gender) as influencing their academic and social experiences.

3. **Experiences of Microaggressions:** This theme focuses on how undergraduate Muslim international students perceive others’ perceptions of their religious and racial identity, including the subtle ways in which they are made to feel minoritized.

4. **Experiences of Overt Prejudice On-Campus and Religious Hostility Off-Campus:** This theme emphasizes students’ experiences of Islamophobic sentiments and shows how undergraduate Muslim international students perceive their religious identity as influencing their academic and social experiences. It also answers the question of how they perceive others’ perceptions of their religious identity.

5. **National Climate’s Influence on Campus Experiences:** This theme examines how undergraduate Muslim international students perceive the campus climate as influencing the perceptions of their racial/ethnic and religious identities by members of the campus community.
6. **Perception of Institutional, Faculty, and Individual Support:** This theme explores the coping mechanisms employed by undergraduate Muslim international students in navigating their academic and social experiences.

7. **The Need to Foster Religious and Cultural Integration on Campus:** This theme explores the recommendations of undergraduate Muslim international students for US universities.

8. **Perception of the MSA as a Strong Support System:** This theme focuses on the coping mechanisms employed by undergraduate Muslim international students in navigating their academic and social experiences.

In this chapter, these findings are outlined and discussed in further detail.

**Outline of Findings**

A. Classroom Challenges
   
a. Linguistic challenges
   
b. Perception of racial identity

B. The Influence of Religious/Cultural Indicators on Students’ Experiences
   
a. The hijab: A visible Muslim identity
      
   i. Reasons for not wearing the hijab and experiences not wearing the hijab
      
   ii. The hijab and the thobe: Perception of overt discrimination and perception of resistance to inclusionary practices

C. Experiences of Microaggressions

D. Experiences of Overt Prejudice On Campus and Religious Hostility Off Campus

E. National Climate’s Influence on Campus Experiences

F. Perception of Institutional, Faculty, and Individual Support
G. The Need to Foster Religious and Cultural Integration on Campus

H. Perception of the MSA as a Strong Support System

Classroom Challenges

Some of the participants experience linguistic challenges and perceive that their racial identity influences their classroom instructors’ and American peers’ expectations of their academic performance. In terms of their linguistic challenges, three struggle with adapting to the American academic culture that requires the skill of note-taking during classes while listening to lectures at the same time. Participants also struggle with expressing and describing their ideas during classes due to their limited English vocabulary compared to their American peers who, according to the participants, may not necessarily possess their level of intelligence but have the vocabulary to express their ideas. Other students are challenged with taking the responsibility of a group leader to not disappoint their American peers due to their limited linguistic ability. Undergraduate Muslim international students also regard American faculty members’ and students’ perceptions of their academic intelligence as lacking; they believe this perception may be due to preconceived ideas about their racial/ethnic identity.

Linguistic challenges.

“Sometimes I just prefer to not speak. I wanna speak about something but I feel my English is not supporting me to say these things.” (Danber)

Three of the participants – Danber, Rasheed, and Abdulfatai – expressed that they are challenged in using the English language to take notes during class work, to communicate their ideas, or to assume the responsibility of a group leader. Danber
struggles with the tasks of taking notes and listening to lectures at the same time.

According to him:

I had like little struggle with English. Now I think it’s still the same and my English is getting better but still like I think taking notes was my struggle. We type faster. I don’t know how to type fast. I don’t know how to write fast. I don’t understand that quick like how they (Americans) understand. Especially in math, people like typing and listening at the same time –I have to choose. I try to do half and half, like I skip some examples. Sometimes, I decided to not take notes just to understand. Sometimes, he (a teacher in one of his classes) was just writing from the beginning of class to the end. I decided not to go to class because I just write stuff and I can’t understand.

Danber’s inability to adapt to the American academic culture of taking notes while listening to lectures is due to his limited linguistic ability to process both tasks at the same time compared to American students who possess the ability to do both tasks. As a result, he resigns himself to choosing one task over the other, working on half of each of the tasks, or making a decision to avoid attending classes. These choices may influence his learning and, ultimately his success and academic integration. This also is similar to Reeba’s experience of struggling with taking notes while listening to lectures. According to her, it is impossible to engage in both tasks at the same time; hence, she resorts to listening to lectures and then requests lecture slides from her professors.

Rasheed also faces some challenges with using his limited English vocabulary to communicate his ideas during class presentations. He noted:

Something I feel that maybe the American students don’t feel that. The international students, they always like when we have a presentation, we get an idea. We’re always shy because the American students, they have like good vocab, even like if my ideas is the strongest than him but I don’t have a good vocab to describe that but American students, they can say anything because they know like many words to describe.
Rasheed added: “Like for example, if I’m doing like presentation and they have American students. First of all, I will be super shy about my accent. The hardest thing to me is to remember good vocab and it’s hard.” He struggles with expressing his academic ideas and making class presentations due to his limited English vocabulary skills and accent. This limitation influences his academic integration as it restricts him from contributing his ideas in class, unlike his American peers who have a strong command of English to express their ideas. It also contributes to his withdrawal from participating during classes.

Abdulfatai had a similar experience:

It’s (group work) not great because there’s kind of like a miscommunication usually in the groups because sometimes, you get those students who want everything right. For me as an international student, it’s not easy for me to be like a group leader because I have the least communication. I can’t really be like a public speaker especially since I don’t speak English fluently compared to my other American peers.

Abdulfatai finds it difficult to fulfill the responsibility of a group leader when assigned group work. He believes his inadequate linguistic ability may cause miscommunication within the group and may offend his English-speaking American peers who expect perfection. Due to this limitation, Abdulfatai finds himself withdrawing from participating in group work.

Overall, participants not only perceive their limited linguistic abilities as inhibiting them from demonstrating their academic potentials, they also perceive their American peers as judgmental of their limited English vocabulary. In addition, the American academic culture of note taking, presentation, and group work occasionally makes participants uncomfortable and makes it difficult for them to participate in classroom work and to engage with their instructors and peers. Although some of these
students struggle with familiarizing themselves with classroom requirements, American faculty and peers also tend to make assumptions of students’ knowledge of the academic culture, thereby making it difficult for them to integrate academically.

**Perception of racial identity.**

“I think in the class, they try to do like group work and stuff but I hate that because I know like other like group members they think that they won’t expect much from us (international students) and even like if someone won’t expect much from you, I won’t give anything.” (Bara)

Bara and Reeba perceive that their racial identity influences some of their instructors’ and American peers’ expectations of their intelligence and overall academic performance. They believe they are being discriminated against and perceived as less intelligent because of their Arab identity. Reeba described one of such situations she experienced in one of her classes:

I had this class. There’s this Art teacher . . . I had a problem with taking notes. So I went to one of the classes and just sat down. I was like “ok I need to talk to her after class cause I can’t take note. She goes so fast and she doesn’t put her slides online and I’m gonna ask her to give me the slides and I’ll print them because I can’t concentrate and write at the same time. I can’t do it.” So that only class I did not write anything and I was like “ok, I’m gonna close, I’m gonna go straight and talk to her.” And then after class, I went to her and I was like “excuse me, like I want to talk to you, like I have some problems with taking notes and everything.” And then, she was like “yes, I notice you weren’t taking any notes. Why are you coming and asking this from me and obviously you are an Arab” and I’m like “ok, first of all, I do take notes” and I opened my books and I was like “see, I’ve taken all the notes. It’s just today because I couldn’t do it.” And then she just looked at me and I’m like “I just need help. I’m really slow. My brain works slowly. I cannot write and listen to you at the same time. I just want to take your slides from you and like print them and stuff.” And then it was obvious that she had this Arab stereotype that “all of you don’t study. You don’t take notes. You sit at the back and hold your phone.” I was like “I was literally translating a word you said that I did not know in my language so I can understand what she’s saying.” She was like “oh that’s okay. Sure I would help you. I would send you the slides.” Only then did she understand that I’m actually trying to get a good grade in the class.
Reeba’s experience confirms Danber’s struggle described in the previous section about the American academic culture of taking notes while listening to lectures. According to Reeba, she also had some difficulty in undertaking both tasks at the same time; however, her discussion of her classroom struggles with her instructor was met with a stereotypical and discriminatory attitude, one that perceives Arabs as a lazy group of students who avoid performing their academic responsibilities. This stereotypical attitude includes a low expectation of Arab students’ intelligence and underestimates their ability to learn. Reeba’s experience may have prevented her from integrating academically, especially in an environment that views her as less than her American peers.

Reeba also believes her American peers do not view her as academically capable. She said this about them:

Yeah. Most of them (most of her American peers) think that I wouldn’t try to study or I wouldn’t try to do anything but then when I would get like a B+ like this is my major grade or like an A-, so they would ask me and I would get like higher than most of them and then they’ll be like “How did you do that? You should come and study with us now.” Just because they know I got a good grade. So they always like expect you to get really low grades.

According to Reeba, the perception of Arab students as less intelligent and incapable of performing higher academically compared to American students is a view shared by her American peers.

Due to this preconceived notion of Arab students, Reeba experienced feelings of exclusion, a situation in which she was excluded from participating in reading groups with other American peers until they observed proof of her academic excellence. Reeba believes the invitation to join her American peers in their reading groups was not genuine and was based only on her peers’ realization of her exceptional academic ability. Bara had a similar experience:
I had some trouble. You know the past last semester - like last year. So I’m really a great student. I just you know work hard and I do all of my best. And last year, I remember like I got the best project and then, one of the students there, she just went to the director. She told him that I was cheating. So there’s an idea about like “internationals like cheat a lot and everything.” But the thing was that I had that good grade or like that achievement in the studio (architectural class), it’s not something that I would cheat on . . . because it was like a project (a group project). And like it was something that you do it. It’s not like a test or anything . . . but I think the thing happened because she (the person who made the report) did not like me or like she did not – she might be racist. Because I know like she did a lot of stuff to other Saudi Arabians . . . I was really pissed off because you know, for me, I’m supposed to get encouraged for that achievement and not be discouraged . . . I got like a lot of negative energy, you know, but at the same time, I got like, I took it as a positive that because I did something great and you know that pissed people off -it must be something.

The perception of Arab international students as frauds influenced Bara’s experience within the classroom environment. Due to her Arab identity, she felt she was viewed by one of her American peers as incapable of scoring high in her academic work. Rather than being applauded for her achievement, she was met with negative and prejudicial attitudes that influenced her academic integration.

The experiences described by these students demonstrate the way participants regard American instructors and students perceive the intelligence and academic ability of undergraduate Muslim international students. According to participants, they are stereotyped as lazy, frauds, and incapable of excellent performance in academic work. Unlike their American counterparts, these students find themselves in situations in which they feel they have to prove their intelligence and academic ability to their American instructors and peers. While these experiences often discourage them and may impede their academic integration, this group of students expressed their motivation to continue to advance in their academic endeavors in spite of the negative classroom climate.
In summary, this theme focuses on the way in which undergraduate Muslim international students regard others’ perceptions of their racial identity as influencing their academic experiences. These students struggle with their ability to integrate academically due to their limited linguistic ability. This is because many of these students learn English within a year of their arrival to the US and are immediately expected to integrate into the American system of education, a task that is difficult for most and may take some time to adjust. Although these students have linguistic challenges, their ability to succeed academically cannot be underestimated. According to the participants, it seems American faculty and peers have limited expectations of their academic ability due to assumptions about their racial/ethnic backgrounds, assumptions that view this group of students as frauds and lazy. These assumptions about their racial/ethnic backgrounds influence their ability to integrate academically, especially when they perceive that they are being viewed as academically incompetent; i.e., they may tend to isolate themselves from their American peers or try to navigate their academic challenges without the help of faculty.

The Influence of Religious/Cultural Indicators on Students’ Experiences

This section includes a discussion on how religious and cultural indicators such as the hijab (a headscarf or a head covering Muslim women wear globally) and the thobe (a long white robe mostly made of white cotton) influence the experiences of undergraduate Muslim international students. First, the effect of the hijab as a visible Muslim identity is discussed. Then the reasons for not wearing the hijab and the experiences of female students who wear it are explored. Also examined is the perception of exclusionary practices (excluding a group of people due to their religious or racial/ethnic identities)
toward female students who wear the hijab and the perception of resistance to inclusionary practices (resisting the inclusion of religious or racial/ethnic minorities) toward male students who have difficulty expressing their Muslim/cultural identity through the wearing of the thobe.

**The hijab: A visible Muslim identity.** Participants believe that the hijab is a distinctive identifier of the Muslim identity. They perceive that the wearing of the hijab immediately distinguishes female Muslim students as a religious minority and, thus, exposes them to scrutiny by non-Muslim and Muslim members of the campus community. Reeba explained:

> Well I believe females are more obvious than males just because they’re more obvious. So, people would pretty much notice you because I have a brother, until he says his name, people won’t know his Muslim because his name is like “Mohammad.”

Maridya also noted: “The boys (male Muslims) are okay because you can’t see the boys as Muslims but you can see directly me as a Muslim because I wear hijab.” As the hijab is an easy identifiable marker for a Muslim woman, Meera feels uncomfortable wearing it. In her words: “When I first came, I kind of felt uncomfortable. It was because it was easy for me to be identified as a Muslim because I wore the head scarf”; female Muslim students feel the hijab easily identifies them as Muslims, unlike their male counterparts who do not wear the hijab and, thus, are not easily identified. The wearing of the hijab makes the female students easy targets of religious scrutiny and may influence their academic and social integration on campus. The obviousness of the hijab may drive their American peers away from them, whether within or outside the classroom area, as they may regard them as fanatics or unsociable individuals based on preconceived notions about Muslims. Also, in a way they alienate them in classroom work or social
Male participants had similar views to their female counterparts. According to Kazim:

The difference between male and female is that as a Muslim female, she wears hijab. You know like she cover her hair, and people see her as different. But as a male, we just wear regular clothes. With girls, they can know physically “Oh she’s a Muslim” and they’re not gonna ask her because they already know.

Rasheed echoed Kazim’s statement:

I think it’s easier for men unlike females because females they have many things like the hijab. It’s easy for me because I don’t wear the hijab first of all. Even, that helps me when I don’t want to explain to someone that I’m Muslim.

According to male participants, the hijab not only identifies females as Muslims, it also exposes them to public probes, a situation that male Muslims rarely experience because they wear “regular attires.” According to the participants, male Muslims also find it easier to avoid explaining their religious identity to non-Muslims on campus because they are not easily identified, making their integration less difficult, unlike their female counterparts.

**Reasons for not wearing the hijab and experiences not wearing the hijab.**

Female participants who chose to stop wearing the hijab cited personal decisions and beliefs about the Islam faith as reasons for not wearing it. While two of the female participants stopped wearing it at some point in their lives, only one – Bara – experienced instances of discrimination within the Muslim community.

The wearing of the hijab is significant in the Muslim community, as it demonstrates a sense of religious commitment to Islam; to some in the Muslim community, not wearing it means one is not committed to the religion of Islam, which may incite attitudes of discrimination. When asked the reason she began and then stopped
wearing the hijab, Bara explained:

My mom said “If you wanna study here (in the US), you should wear it.” So you know, I was like I would do anything to be here so it’s like I would do it. But then, I was like it’s not up to you anymore (after spending some time in the US) . . . I remember me and my sister because you know sometimes we wear it (the hijab) and sometimes we don’t. If we travel (outside Saudi Arabia) or anything, we don’t. So I told her “What’s the point if we’re not into it.”

According to Meera, she is no longer comfortable wearing the hijab in the US She explained:

Well, I just from the beginning, I wasn’t really comfortable with it (wearing the hijab). Like I wasn’t really committed to it. I didn’t really like wearing it. When I was in Oman, wore it (the hijab). When I came here I started wearing it but then I took it off. It kind of made me feel uncomfortable. I don’t know, I just didn’t really believe in it I guess. I don’t think it’s something I’d wanna do. I don’t think it aligns with my beliefs. I mean the hijab wasn’t really pressure from anyone. It was like me and my thoughts.

These female participants’ decisions to cease wearing the hijab were not influenced by any external forces; rather, their choices were personal to them and to their Islamic beliefs. Bara began wearing the hijab as a condition she had to meet before coming to the US.; however, after spending some time in the US she chose to stop wearing it because she does not identify with it as a Muslim woman. Similarly, Meera wore the hijab in Oman, and after some time in the US ceased wearing it because it does not align with her Muslim beliefs and also makes her uncomfortable. Bara and Meera wore the hijab in their countries of origin because it was mandatory regardless of their personal beliefs about it. However, coming to the US gave them the freedom to make their own choices.

The decision to not wear the hijab influenced Bara’s religious and social experiences. Bara, a senior-year student majoring in architecture, perceives she is judged by both male and female Muslim students for not wearing the hijab. According to her:

I face a lot of problems here of being like judged by Muslim people because you
know like we’re not allowed to do that (not wear the hijab) and it’s not like they call me “bitch bitch bitch” but there’s a lot of people that gave me that look. Yeah, I mean, if I’m not wearing the hijab, it’s showing to other Muslims that I’m not religious—more religious . . . I feel like I’m judged so I hate that . . . I mean, I face like a lot of trouble. You know I just hate being here. I hate being given that look . . . but I’m like I’m not gonna listen to anybody. I’m gonna do whatever I want.

Bara feels she is perceived as uncommitted to the religion of Islam because of her choice to not wear the hijab. She is shunned and ignored by other Muslim females who wear the hijab and by conservative Muslim men who believe a Muslim woman must cover. As a result, her religious integration into the Muslim community on her campus was difficult, leaving her isolated.

Bara’s experience also influenced her social relationships within her cultural community. Her social integration was influenced not only because of her decision to not wear the hijab. As a free-minded individual, Bara converses with male students, an act that is prohibited in the Muslim community. Muslim women are not allowed to talk to any male outside their families and the violation of this Islamic rule and the decision to not wear the hijab placed Bara in a situation in which she was ostracized by her cultural community. When asked how this experience influenced her, she stated: “Socially. Yeah, in terms of like other Arabs because when like they see me talk to like any guy . . . they’re like (mimicking other Arabs), ‘she’s talking to that guy.’ You know.” Bara’s definition of her religious, racial/ethnic, and gender identities are different than that of her peers and, thus, she believes they perceive her as dishonoring the Muslim and Arab communities.

Meera, a junior-year student studying Computer Science, had a similar experience; however, her reaction differed from Bara’s. When asked whether not wearing
the hijab had any effect on her being a part of the Muslim community with other women who veil, Meera replied, “It didn’t really make a difference. They don’t really judge me. I mean if someone were to judge me for taking it off, I’d stop being their friends.” While Meera did not experience any form of explicit discrimination from her Muslim peers, she emphatically stated that she would change relationships if and when she is criticized for the way she identifies as a Muslim woman. Also, although the feeling of judgment by Bara’s Muslim peers and being perceived as less committed to Islam influenced her socially with other Arab-Muslim students, Bara’s definition, as well as that of Meera of their Muslim identity continue to make them confident in their choice to not wear the hijab.

**The hijab and the thobe: Perception of overt discrimination and perception of resistance to inclusionary practices.**

I realize that sometimes people don’t want to sit beside me in the class . . . yeah but if I go there . . . if they sit there and then, I go beside them, they just sat normally . . . they’re okay with that but they will not come and sit beside me… maybe they look at us (Muslims with hijab) differently. Yeah, maybe because I’m Muslim-is what I think because I think they speak well with other countries so but for Muslims, they sort of . . . it’s kind of like they put a barrier. (Maridya)

I would wish that I can wear my cultural clothes . . . you know my normal clothes that I wear back home (the thobe – a long white robe mostly made of white cotton and the Shamal – a male headwear). I always wear it in the international day . . . it looks nice. On international day, it looks nice because everyone is wearing the thing but normal life, they don’t perceive it like . . . I don’t know how they’re gonna react to it so I don’t prefer to put it on. I don’t know . . . I’ll be putting myself in a dangerous spot. (Danber)

Female and male participants, including Maridva and Danber, articulated some experiences in which they perceived overt discrimination and resistance to inclusionary practices on campus. Female students who wear the hijab experience feelings of
exclusion, while male students experience feelings of resistance in their efforts to be
included through their expression of their religious/cultural identity. Specifically, female
participants perceive their expression of their Muslim identity through the wearing of the
hijab excludes them from social life on campus. According to Maridya:

I’m really not sure why they (American non-Muslim students) sometime don’t
wanna come to me (sit with her) . . . that’s not making me okay but I try to go and
talk with them although they sort of ignore me but I have to try and say
something.

Maridya perceives feelings of exclusion when she finds that her American non-Muslim
peers try to avoid sitting next to her during classes. She also perceives being ignored
when she tries to initiate conversation with them. These experiences of overt
discrimination impede her academic and social integration in such a way that she
wonders why she is being excluded and isolated, which ultimately could cease
communication between her and her American peers. Feelings of isolation may influence
an individual to withdraw from classroom and social participation so they do not continue
to feel excluded. Reeba echoed Maridya’s statement, as she noted:

First of all, you can notice like they (American non-Muslim students) don’t
approach you as easily as other people. I don’t know, for some reason. Like they
wouldn’t, talk at the beginning. I don’t know if it’s just me but I get this feeling
that when you meet people, they would rather not sit next to you and sit next to
others.

Reeba further explained:

I had like a single room and I shared it with two other American girls. So
when they came and started talking to me about “Oh . . . you were just like very
different from us and we were like kinda scared to talk to you” . . . I got it when
she said that. I was like “That’s why people don’t approach you as easily”
because like it’s very obvious . . . I’m wearing like around my head – a hijab
around my head and so it’s obvious that I’m different.
Reeba’s experience was similar to that of Maridya’s, in the sense that she also feels overtly discriminated as her American non-Muslim peers would rather approach and sit next to others. They were see her as different and are scared to approach her because of her visible Muslim identity – the hijab.

Female participants who no longer wear the hijab perceive a difference in their social experiences when they wore the hijab and when they ceased wearing it. According to Meera, she felt overtly discriminated and excluded when she wore the hijab. In her own words, “It just made me feel like I stood out…like I didn’t blend in…like I’m not a part of that community.” When asked about how she regarded others’ perceptions of the expression of her Muslim identity through the hijab, Meera explained:

> Well it depends on people – Some of them would just ignore me if I wore it but if I didn’t wear it, they’ll talk to me more . . . I think people would just tend to like look at you more, interact with you more. This is what I feel.

According to Meera, wearing the hijab not only makes her perceive feelings of exclusion, but she also feels disregarded by her American peers when she wears the hijab but included into the social circle when not wearing it. Bara also noted that when she is not wearing hijab she feels “more welcomed to be honest. I feel like when they see person wearing the hijab, they feel like they’re restrictive or whatever but when they see someone who’s not (wearing the hijab), they know that they’re open.”

Female participants’ reported that the expression of their Muslim identity through the hijab excludes them from the social circle on campus and influences the ways in which their peers behave toward them. They regard others’ (their American non-Muslim peers) perceptions of their religious identity as terrifying and dangerous. They also regard other’s perceptions of their gender identity (Muslim females) as restrictive when they
wear the hijab but approachable without it. They hinder the social and academic integration in such a way that it limits their interactions and isolates them from their American non-Muslim peers within and outside the classroom context. Female Muslim students who express their Muslim identity through the hijab also may be influenced by these experiences to stop wearing it. Conversely, female Muslim students who stopped wearing the hijab feel like they were excluded from the Muslim community as they were regarded as non-religious, i.e., the model Muslim woman due to their choice not to wear it. This creates a dichotomy, a situation in which Muslim females feel included by their American peers when they are without the hijab, but they are excluded by their Muslim peers when they choose to stop wearing it.

Some participants believe that attitudes of overt discrimination are directed mostly toward female students due to their obvious physical religious identity (wearing the hijab). They believe the wearing of the hijab further draws prejudicial attacks toward females. As Abdulfatai explained:

I think women experience it far worse than us. I think we don’t really get a lot of backlash. I think it’s mostly females especially when they’re wearing hijab. There’s like a lot of hate crime incidence based on against Muslim women wearing hijab. My ex she’s a Muslim convert, when she would drive around, people would throw eggs at her and you know shout at her like “Go back home.” You know one other time, a person gave her the middle finger in the middle of the road just for her being a Muslim . . . just for her identity. So, I think most female Muslim women experience it the worst.

Kazim corroborated Abdulfatai’s statement: “Some girls – Muslim students – they get attacked here. I think they (the perpetrators) think because women are more soft.” In Meera’s words, “Yeah, I guess people would assume like “Oh she’s Muslim, she’s a terrorist or something.” As a result of these prejudicial treatments, Reeba believes some of the female Muslims she knows try to hide their Muslim identity. According to her:
I honestly, like I know a lot of girls who actually took off their scarves just because they were afraid of people and what would happen to them. Like I respect their choice, this is their choice and they can do that. They were afraid because as I told you, it’s very noticeable when you’re wearing a scarf. They just know you’re Muslim. Like your identity is just there and they thought that if we took it off, we won’t be as obvious and we would like blend in with the crowd and we wouldn’t get like problems or people talk about us and all that. So I know like three girls to be exact who did that.

The perceptions of female Muslim women as terrorists and as passive due to their visible Muslim identity continue to influence experiences of outward prejudice, a situation in which they could be physically attacked or verbally insulted. As a result, some of these students attempt to be less obvious by withdrawing from wearing the hijab, based on the fear that they could be physically or verbally attacked due to the way they are treated. The other students’ or community members’ perceptions of female Muslim women as terrorists generate feelings of hurt in these students and can result in their isolation from the mainstream campus community. Yet, the perceptions of them as passive creates the fear of being more overtly discriminated compared to their male Muslim counterparts.

Male participants also experience instances of resistance to their inclusion on campus. As a result, they articulated their hesitation to express their Muslim identity, especially through the display of their cultural clothes on campus. According to Danber:

I prefer myself not wearing my identity – like my culture clothes and stuff. I wear it inside the house but if I go out, I can’t wear it because I don’t want to put myself in a position . . . I’m student and scared of my visa to be taken away from me. So I don’t want to bother with anything.

Danber believes expressing his Muslim identity through cultural clothing in everyday life may result in the cancellation of his student status and the denial of his student visa in the US. Thus, he chose to limit the expression of his Muslim identity to his home, leaving him
without an expression of his identity when within the campus community. Rasheed also noted the resistance he perceives against the expression of his Muslim identity.

According to him:

That’s the hardest thing here. If I wear like a dressing like in my country…like a thobe, it will be big trouble here, I will get trouble here. I don’t know why, they will think “There’s something wrong with this guy- why is he wearing like a thobe?” Here I feel like I have a limit to express myself.

He further explained:

It’s like I can’t wear the thobe because I’ll look different and I don’t want to be different. I want to be normal – like everyone. Nothing different. But when we have the international day like last semester, we wore the thobe because it’s like kind of excuse. They will know it’s for the international student day. It’s stupid.

These students perceive some resistance in expressing their Muslim identity through their cultural clothing. According to them, the expression of their identity is limited to the international student’s day event, a day when students are allowed to express their identities outside their homes. However, in everyday life on campus they find it difficult to express their Muslim identity physically, as wearing the thobe or hijab influences the way others perceive them – different. They do not want to be perceived as different; therefore, they limit their expression of their Muslim identity. On the one hand, their religious identity as Muslim and their racial/ethnic identity as Arabs influence their social and academic integration; conversely, others’ perceptions of these identities also influence their overall integration. Although female participants perceive instances of exclusionary practices as a result of wearing the hijab, male participants face some resistance in expressing their Muslim identity physically.
Overall, the experiences were explored of Muslim females who wear the hijab specifically in relation to the way they are easily identified and distinguished as Muslims, as well as how they are exposed to scrutiny by their non-Muslim peers, scrutiny that may lead to social and academic exclusion based on biased notions about Muslims. Also discussed were the experiences of Muslim females who stopped wearing the hijab after spending some time in the US and their reasons for not wearing it. One of the participants, Bara, was religiously and culturally shunned from her Muslim and Arab communities, leaving her socially isolated. Bara’s Muslim peers considered her unreligious and uncommitted to the Arab customs because of her decision not to wear the hijab and her choice to converse with men who are not members of her family. Another participant – Meera – who also chose to not wear the hijab, did not experience any explicit confrontation from her Muslim peers. She is resolved in her decision regardless of other individuals’ opinions about her expression of her Muslim identity as a woman. An examination was conducted on the way female students who wear or wore the hijab regard others’ (non-Muslim peers) perceptions of their Muslim identity, as well as how male Muslim students regard others’ perceptions of their expression of their Muslim and cultural identity through the wearing of the thobe. While female Muslim students perceive social exclusion due to the wearing of their hijab, male Muslim students perceive some resistance when wearing the thobe. Although the theme “The hijab: A visible Muslim identity” provides a foundation for the way in which the hijab visibly identifies female participants as Muslims, the other two subthemes of “Reasons for not wearing the hijab and experiences not wearing the hijab” and “The hijab and the thobe: Perception of overt discrimination and resistance to inclusionary practices” explore the
nature of female students’ experiences who wear or wore the hijab, as well as the experiences of male Muslim students who desire to express their religious/cultural identity.

**Experiences of Microaggressions**

Participants in this study perceive microaggression (“subtle, innocuous, preconscious, or unconscious degradations; and putdowns, often kinetic but capable of being verbal/ and or kinetic” [Pierce, 1995, p. 281]) toward Islam and Muslims on campus. The students reported that these attitudes are perpetuated primarily by students or members of the community off campus. Bara described her experience:

> You know I remember like when I was a first year...or like second year...there was like one of the students...you know, it was just like just a joke...he said that “if they did not like your project, you just like you know, tell them that I’m gonna just, you know, I have a bomb and I want to explode it” like that. I was like “What?” And everyone was laughing. They’re gonna say whatever they say because I’m not believe in that concept and so I don’t care.

In this instance Bara experienced a clear microaggression when one of her peers directed verbal insults toward her because of her religious and racial/ethnic identities. The other students’ perceptions of these identities as radical and fanatical in nature led to the degradation of her Muslim and Arab identities. Although Bara does not appear to care about what others say or how others perceive her identities, these verbal attacks influence her social integration with other non-Muslims on campus, as she avoids interacting with them unless it deals with group work. She also discontinued any discussions related to her Muslim or Arab identities.

Rasheed had similar experiences with his American friends:

> Yes, sometimes my friends on campus, they say “oh you’re Arab, you’re Muslim, make a bomb!” I said “What the fuck? Why do you say that?” Like that (him
making a bomb) has never happened. I said “Why do they think I would do that?” They said “We were joking.” I said “No that make me like feel so bad.” I get angry. When they say that, I go back to my apartment and think on why they said that or why is the first thing they think about?

Similar to Bara, Rasheed’s experiences of this microaggression confirm that these overt verbal insults promoting the view that all Muslims are capable of acts of terror are directed at participants due to their racial/ethnic and religious backgrounds. This encounter left Rasheed feeling infuriated by the fact that his American non-Muslim “friends” would say such terrible things and classify it as a joke. Rasheed and Bara believe these subtle verbal attacks disguised as jokes communicate negative slurs toward Islam and Muslims and indirectly or directly impede their social integration.

Overall, Bara and Rasheed felt that their American peers perceived their racial/ethnic and religious identities as fanatical. This demonstrates the ways some American non-Muslim students regard the religion of Islam and Arab Muslims. These perceptions are masqueraded as jokes when they are indeed verbal insults that debase Islam and Muslims and ultimately ostracize Muslim international students from their American non-Muslim peers. A verbal attack on their religious and racial/ethnic identities isolates them from others who do not share their beliefs and prevents them from integrating into the campus community. As a result, these perceptions influence undergraduate Muslim international students’ view of their campus and communities as not welcoming.

**Experiences of Overt Prejudice On Campus and Religious Hostility Off Campus**

When I see people screaming against Muslims, that makes me uncomfortable. That like by hard core conservatives Christian personnel that go out. Like you see them on campus screaming “You’re going to hell-you don’t follow Jesus”. That happens pretty much every day here. So
I remember passing by them every day and they’ll be screaming against Allah or like Muslims and stuff. So, I feel terrified whenever I pass. (Abdulfatai)

Some of the participants also experience attitudes of overt prejudice toward their religious identity, attitudes based on preconceived opinions about Muslims and Islam.

Maridya noted:

They say like “uhm...I don’t like it (Islam) because you can’t eat bacon, you can’t party, you can’t drink,” that sort of thing . . . I kinda feel bad for them but I do believe that that’s their belief so I don’t care whatever they want to say just as long as they don’t do anything bad to me.

Maridya’s American peers disapprove of her religious identity because they perceive Islam as restrictive, a religion that limits followers from eating certain food or doing certain things. While these perceptions are based on preconceived notions about Islam, it influences Maridya’s social experiences and generates feelings of hurt. Also, Maridya’s statement that she does not care about her peers’ perception of her religious identity, as long as she is not physically attacked suggests that she believes there is a possibility she could be physically attacked due to her religious identity. She is relieved that these students are going only as far as to criticize her religion, rather than hurt her because of it. Maridya’s perception of her non-Muslim peers may hinder her from connecting socially with them and isolating herself during class work to avoid any overt prejudice toward Islam or Muslims, as well as any possible feelings of hurt that may result, whether verbally or physically.

Bara similarly indicated that other students view Muslims as possible terrorists: Actually, there’s a lot of people that did not know much about Islam or about everything. I think they have like that, how I can say it, like that misunderstanding that we’re like terrorist or whatever but I’m just a girl you know. Why would I do anything like that? I’m just like here for like school and education.
Bara perceives the campus members as having little to no knowledge about the religion of Islam, hence the view of Islam as a radical religion and Muslims as terrorists. Bara’s statement, along with Maridya’s and the other participants’, indicates that other students’ perceptions of their religious identity shape the campus climate, which in turn influences their integration in a way in which Muslim students do not feel welcomed by members of the campus community.

Reeba experienced dual prejudicial confrontation with her peers who identify as Christians. Her attempt to engage in an intelligent conversation about her religion led to the bashing of Islam and Muslims. According to Reeba’s experience:

I was stopped by two girls two times, twice, the same girls and they just stop you and they were like “Do you got a minute?” and I was like “Ok. Yeah, sure.” And then they were like “Oh so I just want to talk to you about what you believe in” and I’m like “ok.” I did not know that happens so I was just like “it’s fine.” But then she was like, I think from a Christian major or something and she was like talking to people about it but then I just noticed that when I told her like what I believe in – this and this and this and that, then she got frustrated in front of me. I was like “Why do you do that?” and she was like “Why do you believe that?” “Why do you believe you’re a slave?”…she just made a lot of assumptions. I was like “I gotta go” and I just left.

Reeba’s experience shows that the campus climate may not be favorable toward Muslim students, as some members of the campus community feel comfortable cornering Muslim students to berate their religion based on prejudicial notions about Islam. These prejudicial views make it socially difficult for Muslim students to engage in educated conversations with other non-Muslims about the true meaning of their religion.

These experiences of overt prejudice based on students’ Muslim identities demonstrate Islamophobic sentiments (indirect or direct exclusionary practices that disadvantage, prejudice or discriminate against Muslims and Islam) toward Muslims and Islam. The perceptions of Muslims as terrorists, fanatics, passive, or as slaves, whether
covertly concealed or overtly communicated, indicate prejudice against Muslims and Islam, leading to a climate that is perceived as not welcoming toward Muslim students and their beliefs and, ultimately, causing integration to be difficult on campus.

The prejudicial attitudes toward Muslim students are not limited only to the campus. Indeed, some of the participants also experience attitudes of prejudice off campus. For example, Abdulfatai’s experienced religious hostility off campus. His experience clearly demonstrates these attitudes:

I remember, when I first came here, I went to a host family, so I lived with this lady, who would just like harass me every day with like Islam or stuff. She would insult the Prophet. She was actually trying to get me to convert. I remember, in Ramadan, we were fasting, she was like “Why are you fasting?” I remember another time, she got all like physical like banging the table and stuff, and then, she kicked me out.

This religious hostility from Christians in the community shows one way that undergraduate Muslim international students face Islamophobia off campus. Abdulfatai, as previously shown, experienced harassment as well as verbal and physical attacks due to his Muslim identity. Danber had a similar experience:

I actually was with a (Mexican-American) family. She (the woman he lived with) was nice and then, she’s not happy before I leave. She told me-asked me to leave. I remember there was a beginning of Trump years. She was always talking about Christian and I just open my ears for her and listen. She talk about anything and I just respond to her in a nice way. I don’t go like arguing. So one time, she just arguing and she said like “Oh your God is not as good as my God.” He can’t do this. Then I was like “okay okay.” Then I get out. I don’t want to talk more anything – like a respect but later, she’s like “I’m asking you to leave.” I’m like “okay, I’ll leave.”

This is similar to Abdulfatai’s experience of religious hostility, which may be a result of the overarching political rhetoric in the country. Several of these students endure attitudes of prejudice against Muslims and Islam and are overtly discriminated against because of the negative perception of their religious and racial/ethnic identities. These experiences
limit the social integration of this group of students within the community, as they may create the perception that non-Muslim individuals tend to be hostile toward Muslim individuals and, therefore, may increase feelings of isolation.

As another example of the overt prejudice that Abdulfatai and Danber experienced, Bara and her friend experienced another instance of prejudice off campus due to their linguistic preference and racial/ethnic backgrounds. According to Bara:

I was like in a store-and one my friends and we were talking in Arabic and there’s an old lady, she said “Where are you from?” And I told her like “I’m from Saudi, she’s from Kuwait” and she said “Why are you not speaking English?” I was like uh “because it’s easier.” And she said “You’re in America, you should speak English!” She was like you know screaming and she said “You know just go back home” and I’m like “I’m gonna go home when I’m finished”.

Experiences like this further remind this group of students that their presence is not universally welcomed in this country. These experiences also hinder students’ social integration into campus life because of the fear that they would not be accepted by non-Muslim students.

Overall, these experiences show that Muslim students often face instances of overt discrimination and prejudicial treatments on and off campus, a situation in which they are branded as terrorists and threats to the American society and their religion is perceived as disruptive and radical. This group of students feel unwelcomed and viewed as fanatics because of their religious and racial/ethnic backgrounds. Their fear of experiencing overt discrimination and prejudice on or off campus may further isolate them to their Muslim communities and influence them to integrate only with their Muslim or international peers, thereby making it challenging for them to integrate into the American society.
National Climate’s Influence on Campus Experiences

It’s just like the politics stuff and other people because I’ve heard like other states, there are a lot of problems happening. I’ve heard like girls (Muslim girls) get like stabbed. I heard another one got her scarf ripped out of her. Yeah, it was like really horrible. It made me scared. (Reeba)

Participants perceive the current political climate in the US as tense and negative toward Muslims and the religion of Islam. As a result, participants experience instances of intimidation and feelings of marginalization, fear, and discrimination. During his presidential campaign, specifically after the San Bernardino 2015 shooting, Donald Trump pledged to completely ban Muslim immigrants in the US; since his ascension to presidency, he has committed and recommitted to the ban (Qiu, 2016). As a result, the current political climate in the US., especially the political view of immigrants as outsiders who should be banned from the country and the revised executive order signed by Donald Trump temporarily restricting immigration from six majority Muslim countries (Iran, Syria, Somalia, Sudan, Libya, and Yemen) (Zapotosky, Nakamura, & Hauslohner, 2017), has restricted some Muslim international students from entering the US. It also has subjected this group of students to further scrutiny, leading to the intimidation, marginalization, and discrimination of Muslim students. Maridya explained a situation she experienced on campus with some of her friends:

My friends and I, we experienced it in the toilet. Some girls say something like “Oh good luck in America, good luck in here” because you know Trump has led a propaganda against immigrants and Islamic and all those things and the way they say that, it’s like a warning for us. There’s something about the girl is she wear a Trump shirt and she just say “Good luck in America” but I think she means that about what Trump will do because it’s out of the norm-when someone says “Good luck in America.”

This statement shows the level of intimidation some Muslim international students experience on campus due to the perceived hostile political rhetoric in the country. The
political tension also generates feelings of marginalization, as some participants perceive they are being excluded and ostracized from the campus community or from the country.

As Meera noted:

I guess when the elections were going on and then like the day of the election, there were people with Trump signs and stuff that made you feel uncomfortable. Because like I know that if these people support Trump, then they’re definitely against Muslims and against like people of color and like just walking past them made me feel uncomfortable because I knew they were judging me.

She added:

I just sometimes feel like even though the election is over, of course there’s gonna be like Trump supporters everywhere and I feel like sometimes, I just get these vibe from people like “Oh, she’s not White. Let’s leave her out, let’s not talk to her, let’s just be awkward to her.” I just feel like that vibe from some people. They just maybe look at me funny or like they talk to other people who are like sitting there and they exclude me.

Meera feels uncomfortable because of the political tension especially when she sees individuals who supported Trump during this past election. According to her, supporting Trump is equivalent to standing against Muslims and the religion of Islam. She expressed feelings of exclusion even after the election and feels discriminated against on campus due to her racial/ethnic and religious background.

Reeba had a similar experience in her Politics class that demonstrated some of the political tensions and negative perceptions of Arab Muslims. She explained:

Well, I’m in this politics class and we were talking about what’s happening with Trump and everything and some of the students made it extremely obvious that they hate all Muslims and they’re like in support of the ban. People were talking about the ban and some of them was like “Well, uhm, in 9/11, it was recognized that the person who did it (caused the 9/11 events) is a Saudi. Why is Saudi not on the list?” So they recognize it as an Islamic ban. It’s not like a Middle Eastern or whatever and they’re just like very supportive of it but the professor was like “Why did he (the Saudi that was said to have caused the 9/11 events) do it?” The professor was trying to be neutral but he (one of the supporters of the ban) was like, obviously he’s not agreeing with what’s happening. So the student just like got pissed at him and was like “Why did you say it’s all fine? It’s not fine. This is
good. I like that he’s banning them.” I was really awkward in the class. I was like “Oh my God.” Everyone is like looking at me and I’m like really obvious. I was like “Oh my God, I want this class to end right now.” But I stayed all through because I would have drawn more attention if I stood up and left.

Reeba’s experience shows that the political tension in the country has influenced the perceptions of other non-Muslim students, and these perceptions are unfavorable toward Muslim international students. This situation increases the tension within the academic environment and fosters feelings of anger on the part of those who support the Muslim ban and feelings of discomfort and exclusion on the part of Muslim international students.

Overall, the political climate in the country has influenced these students’ perceptions of the campus climate and the ways in which members of the campus community regard the racial/ethnic and religious identities of undergraduate Muslim international students. Some of these perceptions foster negative and discriminatory attitudes toward Muslim international students, thereby making it difficult for them to integrate socially and academically. Specifically, the climate of Islamophobia that Muslim students perceive in the country – one in which negative perceptions of Muslims and Islam are disseminated – influences the way the campus climate and others’ perceptions of Muslim immigrant students are shaped. This shaping of the campus climate against Muslim immigrant students further constructs perceptions about Muslims and Islam as Other.

In addition to feeling they are not welcome in the current political climate, some of the participants also experience feelings of fear related to losing their student status or being deported to their home country. In a way, this destroys their dreams of studying in the US, as well as everything for which they have worked. Abdulfatai explained:
I was actually afraid it’s gonna affect me because if they do the ban to seven Muslim countries, they probably can expand it and I saw a lot of people saying they should include Saudi Arabia. So, I was actually terrified, especially that I’ve studied here for six years and I can’t really destroy my dream in less than three months. It’s insane. You feel like everything you worked for is gonna perish at any moment. So, it creates a sense of fear.

A sense of fear characterizes Abdulfatai’s experience. He expressed fear at the possibility of the Muslim ban being extended to Saudi Arabia, which could influence his immigration status and his academic dream in the US. The racial/ethnic identity of Abdulfatai as a Saudi Arabian national appears to be threatening his dream of realizing his academic achievement. Bara also expressed this fear, saying:

I feel like there’s a lot of people – they’re more stronger - they feel like they can say their opinions more because you know, I feel like Trump gave them the freedom to say that. You know it’s not like it used to be, like you shouldn’t say but now I feel like there’s a lot of international students that are scared. And actually, I read the news and there’s a girl, she’s a PhD student from Libya and she did not enter the US. Me too I’m supposed to go back home but I can’t.

According to Bara, the political climate supporting the exclusion of immigrant Muslims has given confidence to several individuals who support the ban to express comments that are unfavorable toward Muslims. This generates fear among Muslim international students. In addition, these students must battle the negative comments directed toward them and their religious identity, as well as the fear of leaving the country without being allowed to return.

While others expressed feelings of intimidation, marginalization, and fear, one of the participants experienced feelings of discrimination from some institutional leaders who support the current rhetoric against Muslims and Islam. According to Danber:

We trying to find a prayer room for this semester. The other people (the Jewish students) have a washing station but it was given by a Rabbi. We been trying to get a prayer room – like a reflection room but it’s been a challenge because the University is so conservative and most of the board (members) really Trump
Danber believes members of the Muslim Student Association on campus are being discriminated against due to their religious identity. Specifically, he believes this discrimination occurs because the university leadership generally supports the current political rhetoric and attempts to minimize Muslim activity on campus. Although no specific evidence exists for this, Danber’s perception is that his religious practices are not welcome on campus, which influences his view of the campus climate.

In summary, the political tension in the country has generated various negative perceptions among Muslim international students, which has been challenging for their academic and social integration on campus. The political tension continues to promote Islamophobic sentiments on campus, leading to a climate that generates fear among Muslim students, discrimination against them due to their religious identity, and worry related to their immigrant status in the US.

**Perception of Institutional, Faculty, and Individual Support**

“I think here, they care about diversity the most. I don’t know but like they value international students.” (Danber)

The perceptions of institutional support and faculty support were obvious in participants’ concept of campus diversity. Some participants experience their institution’s value of diversity through the support of their campus president, while others perceive their faculty and staff members as those who value diversity. According to Abdulfatai:

I think this university’s president is trying very hard to promote diversity especially after the Muslim ban. The president sent us an email saying that he would help us in any way he can. Also, I think the school thinks that all the international students and the foreigners here have made this university like a
great University, especially most of the students and professors here are internationals. So, I was really happy after I got the email. They were like “You guys are welcome here, don’t be afraid and we’re gonna find anyway to help you.”

The support expressed through the campus president, especially during the turbulent political climate, further promotes a climate of diversity, one in which Muslim international students feel reassured of their safety on campus despite experiences with students and external members of their campus community that have been described.

Reeba also discussed a similar institutional action that increased her comfort and campus integration:

There was an orientation thing and people were really nice. They were welcoming. They really made me feel like calm because I just came and I didn’t know anyone but my brother and it was kind of like “What I’m I doing here? Why I’m I here?” But then they really help you and they always like, they always give you like support. (Mimicking those who were of help to her), “If you need anything, just text us or email us and we’ll help you.” And they actually listen. When I email my advisor something, she immediately just set up appointment. (Mimicking her advisor), “Let’s talk about this.” So yeah, they are very supportive.

Reeba also perceives staff members, specifically her advisor, as supportive. She feels welcomed during orientation, especially because she knew no one on campus other than her brother and has continued to receive maximum support from her advisor.

Some of the participants noted that the faculty are supportive as well. Rasheed added:

They (faculty) gave us like advice like “If you have like any trouble with anything, just let us know and we will help you.” I feel here like understand. They give us advice. Even like I went to the mosque and I was late about five minutes. I just explain to the teacher. They’ll understand. Then like the school program, they have like many students, they help others like for teaching, for home work, for anything, and at the same time, they say like “You’re welcome anytime” even especially for Muslim who’s feeling like something is wrong with him. They say like “Just tell us. Sit with me and relax, explain to me.”
Further, when Meera was asked how she perceives the campus environment based on faculty and staff members, she replied, “Like you can just go to them, talk to them and they’ll help you out.” Kazim agreed, stating, “Most of my professors that I’ve met are so helpful even like when they know that English is your second language and that you’re not from this country.” Rasheed, Meera, and Kazim perceive their faculty members as approachable and ready to lend their support in any way they can. According to these students, they provide academic and emotional support and also understand their religious responsibilities, giving them the opportunity to express their Muslim identity.

Overall, students perceive their environment as diverse and view their campus leaders as supportive toward their academic and social experiences, as well as toward their religious challenges on campus. These experiences of support encourage students in their academic and social endeavors and help them navigate the challenges they face on campus. In short, institutional and faculty support are paramount to students’ success and overall integration on campus.

Although many of the participants perceive a negative political climate on campus, some also perceive support from members of the campus community despite the socio-political climate. Due to the negative political climate against immigrant Muslims, a considerable amount of support has been directed toward undergraduate international students by individuals who do not agree with negative treatment of this group of people. While the political climate has influenced some members of the community to view immigrant Muslims as dangerous to the country, some perceive otherwise and have begun to show support to Muslim international students. According to Reeba:

I think because people understand like I’m scared, I don’t feel comfortable anymore because I’m just like different. I just pop out of the crowd, like I’m there
- it’s obvious I’m there. So people will come and be like “I love your hijab. You look so pretty in it.” People will be like “Don’t worry, you’re fine, like don’t worry about it. I’m here if you wanna talk.” Yes, they actually understand.

Reeba expressed her fear as a Muslim woman during this political climate, as the cultural signifier (the hijab) that is associated with her gender and her religious identity makes her obvious as a Muslim and more susceptible to religious-based attacks. However, she believes some members of the campus community understand her fear; because of this they have shown support to her and have offered their assistance through this time.

Meera also noted some positive interactions with others on campus. She explained:

Today, something funny . . . like before I came here, I was just sitting with my friend and she was (inaudible) and this guy just came up to us and he was like “Oh, I’m so sorry about what you went through and the Muslim ban.” So, I guess in a way like being a Muslim female is positive because people get to sympathize with you.

Meera believes that being obvious as a Muslim woman draws support from some members of the campus community who do agree with the ban against immigrant Muslims.

Abdulfatai also echoed Meera’s and Reeba’s statements, explaining that he has experienced some positive interactions as well. He stated:

I have actually found a positive attitude towards internationals. I think this ban went against him (Trump). I think people are actually more understanding at this point. Actually seeing people standing with US (Muslims), has been a blessing. When I first came, I thought nobody was standing with us because I was like kind of afraid.

He further noted, “I met one of my other professors who was actually a Canadian and we talked about the ban and she was kind of vocal about it. She showed support.” Abdulfatai considers it a blessing to see the amount of support from some members of the campus
community, specifically from his faculty. This show of support has helped in subsiding his fears of losing his education in the US.

These positive attitudes toward undergraduate Muslim international students help to promote perceptions of solidarity and camaraderie that may aid in their academic and social integration, as well as foster a campus experience devoid of fear, intimidation, marginalization, and discrimination. When this group of students perceive support, they tend to integrate better without fear of being excluded.

The Need to Foster Religious and Cultural Integration on Campus

Well, I don’t think there anything you can change. I think it’s just something that’s gonna happen with time. If people talk to each other more and try to understand others before just like saying or like judging each other and just like communicate-socialize. (Reeba)

Some participants believe their campus environment is lacking in educating other non-Muslims and other non-international students about various religions and culture. They perceive this absence as one of the problems that inhibit religious and cultural integration on campus and, thus, indirectly leads to religious and cultural tension. According to Meera, “I feel like I just want people to be more aware and more educated about Muslims and other cultures and religions and not just like exclude themselves. Like the atmosphere should be more diverse and more acceptable.” She explained:

Maybe like teach American about other culture - about other religions and like not tell them false information and yeah, just educate them more because a lot of American don’t actually know correct fact about other religions and culture and they just like believe what they’re told.

Meera believes members of the campus community should be provided factual education about other religions and cultures, as many American students know little to nothing about diversity.
Rasheed echoed Meera’s statements, explaining: “I would like them to invite all religions and sit in the same place and describe to everyone about each religion. Learn more about different religions.” Maridya also noted, “I think it will help if people know more about Islam because they sort of assume everything and what the media is saying right now is not Islam.” In the same way, Rasheed and Maridya perceive the climate as needing religious education, specifically on Islam, as the media’s portrayal of Muslims and Islam has been negative. Abdulfatai suggested there should be more opportunities for students to be connected to one another and to campus. He explained:

Make them more connected within the campus. Like me like at the beginning, I did not really - I did not find a way to connect with other students on campus. I think if there was a way to create a club for both internationals and American students.

Similarly, Reeba is of the opinion that, while the institution has little to no power over people’s beliefs and thoughts, they could influence their beliefs by providing safe spaces to educate individuals about other cultures and religion. She stated:

I would say they (institutional leaders) can’t do anything. Like the University cannot control what people believe. So, it’s just like there’s nothing in their hand to do unless you can like bring people together and try to explain more about what’s happening to them- that’s it.

Abdulfatai and Reeba expressed the need to integrate and to connect international students with their American counterparts in order to foster a unified and peaceful community.

The students in this study expressed the urgent need for a campus that is religiously and culturally integrated. According to them, it is the responsibility of the campus leaders to foster programs that focus on educating the community about their religions and culture. While these programs may not change individual beliefs, they will
help to clarify misconceptions about other religions and culture that seem foreign to American students.

**Perceptions of the MSA as a Strong Support System**

A way in which these students feel they could better integrate into the campus culture is through the Muslim Student Association (MSA). Three of the participants – Maridya, Reeba, and Meera – perceive the MSA as a major way by which they navigate their social and religious experiences on campus. They view the MSA as a safe place to express their religious identity through prayer. They also view it as a place to connect with other Muslim international students. The MSA also allows for the organization of programs that seek to integrate other cultures and religions. Maridya explained:

> I’m not sure about other universities but I think in here I’m actually thankful because I have this organization (MSA) but I’m not sure about other universities. Because at least we can come here and pray and I met a lot of international students who are a lot of Muslims and we do exchange stories.

Maridya perceives the MSA as a coping mechanism that provides the opportunity to express her Muslim identity without fear and allows her to share stories with other Muslim international students. Reeba noted that the MSA is providing opportunities to connect with other American non-Muslims to learn about the culture of students from other international countries, as well as the religion of Islam. She acknowledged:

> Yeah. So, MSA is really helping. We’re doing this something like with the international organization where we’re gonna make a café and people are gonna come in and ask us questions about whatever – Islam culture or different international students – like whatever you wanna know, just come and ask us and I think this is really good. People are gonna know about us. They’re gonna understand us a lot. It’s gonna help a lot.

The MSA here is perceived as an organization that fosters diversity on campus through their integration programs which seeks to educate American students about other
international culture and religion. Further, Meera acknowledged the role of the MSA in facilitating social connections between them and the Jewish student community in order to learn about the Jewish religion. She noted:

There are a lot of programs – I think MSA of course and we just had a dinner with Jewish students and that was really good because we got to find out about their religion and learn more about them too.

The MSA provides a safe haven for these students – a place where they can perform their religious responsibilities, connect with other international students, organize programs that foster knowledge about their religion and culture, and learn about other religions that differ from their own. The provision of these experiences helps Muslim international students to integrate with the campus community, as they are able to understand the perspective of others who are not Muslims. The MSA also aims to help other non-Muslims understand factual information about their religious, racial/ethnic, and gender identities, as well as to clarify any perceptions of Islamophobic sentiments.

**Conclusion**

This chapter detailed the experiences of eight undergraduate Muslim international students attending four-year public universities in the Western region of the US. The findings are based on personal interviews regarding their experiences on campus and suggest that this group of students faces a myriad of experiences that influence their academic and social integration. Specifically, they struggle with their limited linguistic ability and experience academic discrimination due to their racial identity. These students encounter instances of exclusionary practices, face resistance to inclusionary practices, combat microaggression, and encounter attitudes of prejudice due mostly to their religious identity. Although many perceive a negative campus climate due to the political
tension in the country, they also perceive a sense of support from some non-American Muslims. This group of students view their campus leaders and some individuals as supportive and diverse, but they continue to advocate for a campus that is more religiously and culturally integrated. Finally, they view the MSA as a strong support system to help navigate their religious and social experiences on campus.

Chapter five includes a discussion of the findings presented through the lens of campus climate framework and the concept of Islamophobia. This discussion helps in understanding the essence of undergraduate Muslim international students’ racial/ethnic, religious, and gender experiences and the way in which the experiences influence their academic and social integration on American campuses. Additionally, chapter five considers the relationship of the findings to that of the literature discussed in this study.
CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to understand and describe the lived experiences of degree-seeking undergraduate Muslim international students on American campuses. An examination was conducted of the essence of these students’ racial/ethnic, religious, and gender experiences and the influence of these experiences on their academic and social integration. A qualitative phenomenological method of inquiry was employed in order to extensively explore undergraduate Muslim international students’ campus experiences.

Findings show that these students face several challenges on American campuses. Undergraduate Muslim international students experience classroom challenges related to linguistic abilities and other’s perceptions of their academic performance based on their racial identity. Students reported that the expression of their Muslim identity through the hijab and the thobe result in exclusion and feelings of resistance. These students face microaggressions, overt prejudice on campus, and hostility off campus due to their racial and religious identity. The national political climate also causes feelings of intimidation, marginalization, fear, and discrimination. Although students receive institutional, faculty, and individual support, as well as perceive the MSA as a strong support system, they advocate the need for religious and cultural integration.

This chapter first integrates the discussion of prior literature and the campus climate framework. It considers the relationship of the findings to that of the literature discussed in this study while it simultaneously examines the findings through the lens of campus climate framework and the concept of Islamophobia. This allows for the understanding of the essence of undergraduate Muslim international students’
racial/ethnic, religious, and gender experiences and these experiences’ influence on their academic and social integration on American campuses. Second, practical and theoretical implications of the findings are described for institutional leaders, international student practitioners, student affairs administrators, and educators on more effectively catering to undergraduate Muslim international students. Finally, a discussion is included on limitations and recommendations for further research, concluding with a summary of the study.

**Relationship of the Findings to Literature, the Concept of Islamophobia, and the Campus Climate Framework**

**Classroom Challenges**

**Linguistic challenges.** Undergraduate Muslim international students face linguistic challenges with adjusting to the American academic culture of taking notes while listening to lectures. They also struggle with verbalizing their ideas during classes due to their limited English vocabulary. This finding echoes the report that international students in general struggle with classroom participation. Research has indicated that students with limited English language often struggle in communicating with faculty, contributing to classroom discussions, and comprehending instruction related to academic integration (Banjong, 2015; Campbell, 2015; Ejiofo, 2010; Gautam et al., 2016; Gebhard, 2012; Kuo, 2011; Li, 2013; Lin & Scherz, 2014; Zhang, 2016; Zhao, 2013). Some scholars have attributed this struggle to linguistic differences, the foreignness of the classroom expectations and culture of interaction, as well as differences in the overall academic culture (Banjong, 2015; Campbell, 2015; Li, 2013; Mukminin & McMahon, 2013; Valdez, 2015; Wadsworth et al., 2008; Zhang, 2016). Other scholars have argued
that international students experience inadequate academic support (Zhang, 2016) and possess a low sense of belonging within the classroom context (Erichsen & Bolliger, 2011). Specifically, Diangelo’s (2006) study on undergraduate Chinese international students at a US university confirmed that, while this group of students find the American academic culture of group presentation or oral presentation as academically progressive, they view the overreliance on oral participation as culturally insensitive and exclusively tailored to the needs of their American peers. This study affirmed Diangelo’s findings, demonstrating that undergraduate Muslim international students regard note taking, oral presentation, and group work as occasionally uncomfortable, which hinders their participation in class work and communication with their instructors and peers. Given that undergraduate Muslim international students reported withdrawing from engaging during classes or avoiding attending classes, the findings in this study express how they perceive their classroom culture in US universities to be non-inclusive. Diangelo maintained that, while American faculty view international students’ low classroom participation as the result of cultural and linguistic differences, often they do not adjust their pedagogy or classroom activities to meet the needs of these students, leading to inequitable classroom activities that exclude them, disregard of their voices and viewpoints as irrelevant, and catering to their American peers.

Similarly, the campus climate framework, specifically the internal institutional components of “structural diversity” and the “historical legacy of inclusion and exclusion,” challenge the inequitable treatment of undergraduate Muslim international students within the academic context. An institution’s structural diversity should not be focused only on increasing the enrollment of underrepresented groups; the focus also
should be on meeting their needs (Hurtado et al., 1998, 1999). In the case of undergraduate Muslim international students who struggle with the American academic culture, it indicates that American campuses may be lacking in their efforts to consider the pedagogical needs of this group of students (McDermott-Levy, 2011; Tummala-Narra & Claudius, 2013), as little or no provisions or programs exist designed to accommodate their alternative ways of learning that are culturally sensitive and inclusive (Hurtado et al., 1998, 1999). The absence of pedagogy that provides alternative ways of learning for undergraduate Muslim international students may be due to the perpetuation of archaic academic policies and programs that favor their American peers – programs and policies that exclude these students, view them as the Other, and mirror a historically segregated culture of exclusion (Hurtado et al., 1998, 1999; Milem et al., 2005).

**Perception of racial identity.** Undergraduate Muslim international students also face challenges with the way some of their American instructors and peers perceive their intelligence and overall academic ability. According to participants, they believe they are perceived as academically incapable, are viewed as classroom cheats, and are assumed to be lazy based on their racial/ethnic identity. International students in general tend to experience a disregard for their knowledge (Valdez, 2015); perceive a high sense of invisibility (Erichsen & Bolliger, 2011; Zhang, 2016); and encounter negative situations within the academic settings (Campbell, 2015; Valdez, 2015). This has been demonstrated in research on the racialized and othering experiences of male Muslim Saudi Arab TESOL students at a university in the United Kingdom (Rich & Troudi, 2006). These students perceived that were viewed as lazy and academically limited in their knowledge to undertake classroom work due to their racial/ethnic identity (Rich &
Troudi, 2006). These racialized experiences negatively influenced participants’ interactions with their American peers (Rich & Troudi, 2006). In the same way, the undergraduate Muslim international students in this study resorted to isolating themselves and undertaking their academic challenges singlehandedly, as they felt they had been stereotypically underestimated because of their Arab identity.

The psychological dimension of the campus climate framework stresses that racially and ethnically diverse groups of people tend to perceive the campus climate different as their racial/ethnic identities, differing power position (majority/minority), inter-racial interactions, and institutional history affect the ways in which they experience and perceive the campus (Hurtado et al., 1998, 1999; Milem et al., 2005). As such, students in this study experienced and perceived others’ perceptions of their racial/ethnic identities as negative within the classroom context. An institution’s historical legacy of exclusion further promotes practices that view racial minority groups, such as undergraduate Muslim international students, as the Other due to their racial/ethnic identity (Hurtado et al., 1998, 1999; Milem et al., 2005). These students are perceived as different and academically limited because they do not belong in the majority.

**The Influence of Religious/Cultural Indicators on Students’ Experiences**

Female undergraduate Muslim international students regard the wearing of the hijab as an obvious representation of Muslimness. The hijab makes them feel easily targeted as a religious minority, visible to probes about their identity as Muslims, and perceived as radicals and passive based on prejudiced views about Muslims. Specifically, the female undergraduate Muslim international students in this study experienced overt discrimination, as their visibility as Muslims excluded them from social life on campus,
heightened their fear of being physically or verbally attacked, and ultimately may have influenced some of them to limit their Muslim identity by ceasing to wear the hijab. Conversely, students who chose not to wear the hijab perceived inclusion and felt integrated into the social circle on campus. Existing research on female Muslim international students has indicated that the wearing of the hijab exposes them to experiences of obvious discrimination, othering, and isolation (Ali, 2014; Asmar et al., 2004; Asmar, 2005; Lefdahl-Davis & Perrone-McGovern, 2015; Tummala-Narra & Claudius, 2013). They face overt and covert forms of macroaggression and microinsult, have a low sense of belonging as they do not feel valued, and possess less positive feelings of their academic experiences (Asmar et al., 2004; Seggie & Sanford, 2010; Tummala-Narra & Claudius, 2013). Due to their veiled appearance, this group of students are not only excluded from campus activities, but they are perceived as oppressed or passive and considered as religious conservatives (Cole & Ahmadi, 2003; Fayad, 2010; Gregory, 2014). These experiences influence some female students to reexamine their veiling practices in order to avoid discriminating incidences (Cole & Ahmadi, 2003). However, female Muslim students who do not wear hijabs have no experiences of negative attitudes and mistreatments directed toward them (Asmar et al., 2004).

Although the male Muslim students in this study do not have challenges with being visibly identified as Muslims, unlike their female counterparts, they struggle with expressing their Muslim identity through their cultural marker, the thobe. According to participants, they perceive resistance to their inclusion on campus, which results in their hesitation to express their Muslimness through visible identity. This is similar to Erickson’s (2014) work that demonstrated Muslim international students face challenges
with expressing their religious identity in the US due to perceptions of Muslims as terrorists.

These experiences demonstrate elements of Islamophobic sentiments toward the undergraduate Muslim international students in this study. These are sentiments that perpetuate negative meanings about Muslims and Islam, create views that characterize Muslims and Islam as Other, and promote practices that overtly or covertly discriminate and prejudice against Muslims and Islam (Allen, 2010). More important, these Islamophobic sentiments inform the sociohistorical forces, an external institutional component, that occur in the larger societal context, indirectly influencing their campus community and triggering incidents or actions against Muslim international students on American campuses (Milem et al., 2005). Societal responses to events such as the terror attacks in Brussels on March 22, 2016 (Hume, Ap, & Sanchez, 2016), or in Orlando, Florida, on June 12, 2016 (Ellis, Fantz, Karimi, & McLaughlin, 2016), are sociohistorical forces that influence anti-Muslim perceptions and instigate discriminatory and prejudicial treatments that exclude or resist the inclusion of undergraduate Muslim international students on campus (Milem et al., 2005). As Islamophobia informs sociohistorical forces such as the terror attacks, these attacks sequentially influence the psychological climate of an institution; they affect the way in which others perceive undergraduate Muslim international students and the ways in which these students perceive their experiences on campus. Given that the campus climate framework dimensions are interconnected (Hurtado et al., 1998, 1999), it shows that Islamophobic sentiments also indirectly influence the psychological climate of an institution. Islamophobia shapes the perceptions of discrimination or prejudice of other individuals toward undergraduate Muslim
international students. Also, the religious identity of these students as a religious minority
influences the ways they experience and perceive the campus as the Other (Hurtado et al.,

Islamophobia also can influence the behavioral dimension of campus climate,
particularly when intergroup and intragroup contacts are lacking. When inadequate
contact exists between undergraduate Muslim international students and their American
peers, generally perceptions are present that view these students as radicals, passive,
religious conservatives, or violent (Hurtado et al., 1998, 1999). For example, participants
in this study – Danber and Rasheed – found it difficult to express their Muslim identity
through the thobe because they believed they were perceived different and could be in
danger of losing their student status or could encounter some difficulty as a result of
wearing their cultural marker. These perceptions lead to attitudes of prejudice and
discrimination that exclude the students from campus, influence fear of being physically
or verbally attacked, heighten their paranoia of being deported and, ultimately, impede
tem from integrating with their American peers.

Findings in this study also show that two undergraduate Muslim international
female students (Bara and Meera) chose not to wear the hijab due to personal decisions
and beliefs about the Islam faith. While one of them, Bara, faced discrimination within
the Muslim community, as well as her cultural community, because of her decision not to
wear the hijab and her free-minded personality, Meera, on the other hand, did not face
any form of explicit discrimination from her Muslim peers. This is similar to Koller’s
(2015) study on the identity perception of American female Muslim students, in which
students who chose whether to wear the hijab expressed their reasons as deeply personal
and spiritual; however, those who wore the hijab were perceived as religious. Similar to Bara’s experience, one non-wearer of the hijab perceived less respect from her own Muslim community because of her decision not to wear it. While her experience of disrespect from some members of the MSA did not cause her to withdraw from the group, she was encouraged to serve in a leadership position in order be perceived seriously and viewed as a committed Muslim woman (Koller, 2015). Contrary to Bara’s experience, yet similar to Meera’s, most non-hijab wearers in Koller’s study noted that the choice to not wear the hijab did not result in discrimination and also had no diminishing effect on their religious self-perception. Conversely, the research by Rangoonwala et al. (2011) on 53 Muslim American female students revealed that, while female hijab wearers reported that their visible marker (the hijab) facilitated their connection with female peers within their religious group, those who chose not to wear the hijab encountered difficulty initiating similar social connections with their female Muslim peers.

The promotion of intragroup contact on campus would facilitate the inclusion of female Muslim students who choose not to wear the hijab, as it would help Muslim communities on campus understand that female Muslim students negotiate their Muslim identities differently, and these negotiations are personal to them and to their spiritual beliefs. Muslim communities must begin to embrace diversity by supporting multiple female Muslim identities rather than a single Muslim identity (Koller, 2015). They must understand that undergraduate Muslim international female students originate from diverse cultural backgrounds and negotiate their Muslim identities in diverse ways (Koller, 2015).
Experiences of Microaggressions

This study shows that undergraduate Muslim international students perceive instances of microaggression on campus. For instance, Bara faced a situation of microaggression when one of her American peers overtly suggested that she is a radical and a fanatic due to her religious and racial/ethnic identities. These experiences of microaggression included overt verbal insults toward students’ religious and racial/ethnic identities. Although these offensive verbal attacks are masqueraded as jokes, these types of comments degrade Muslims and the religion of Islam, demonstrating that others perceive them as fanatical and radical in nature. This finding resonates in the way in which Muslim students face harassment on issues regarding their religious beliefs, harassment based on misconceptions about Islam classified as a religion of violence and about the link between Muslim students and terrorism based on their religious identity (Brown et al., 2015).

Attitudes of microaggression toward undergraduate Muslim international students originate from Islamophobic ideologies that influence meanings about Islam and Muslims (Allen, 2010). This involves societally constructed thinking about Islam and Muslims that students encounter covertly and in their daily contacts with their American peers (Allen, 2010). Given that Islamophobia focuses on how Muslims and Islam are perceived, examined, integrated, or desegregated (Allen, 2010), experiences of microaggression demonstrate negative preconceptions of Muslims and Islam as dangerous to the mainstream society. The perception of undergraduate Muslim international students as terrorists result from sociohistorical forces that shape the psychological climate of a campus (Milem et al., 2005). For example, current rhetoric in the US portrays Muslims as
threats to the security of the nation (Nelson, 2016). This type of sociocultural climate can create misperceptions among non-Muslim students and can influence the treatment of Muslim international students on campus. Also, societal reaction to social events such as terror attacks promote anti-Muslim rhetoric that indirectly influences the ways in which undergraduate Muslim students are perceived and discussed (Milem et al., 2005). Rasheed’s encounter with microaggression showed that his American peers’ perception of him as a terrorist may have been influenced by societal reaction to terror attacks believed to have been perpetrated by individuals of Arab and Muslim identities.

Experiences of Overt Prejudice On Campus and Religious Hostility Off Campus

Participants experienced overt prejudice toward their religious beliefs based on that which they see as preconceived notions about Muslims. Undergraduate Muslim international students believe that non-Muslim individuals perceive Islam as restrictive, a religion that restricts followers from participating in certain social activities or eating certain food. This finding is mirrored in Asmar’s (2005) work, which revealed that religious difference inhibits the social integration of Muslim students. Students are perceived as anti-social and strange because of their restriction from alcohol consumption as Muslims; as a result, they are excluded from much of the campus community, leaving them with feelings of a low sense of belonging.

Undergraduate Muslim students in this study also were confronted by Christian members of the campus community who berated the religion of Islam based on prejudicial notions. These experiences left Muslim students uninterested in engaging in educated conversations with other non-Muslims about the true meaning of Islam. In addition, participants faced Islamophobia off campus – experiences of religious hostility
that led to harassment as well as verbal and physical attacks due to their religious and racial/ethnic identities. Abdulfatai reported that a Christian individual he had lived with off campus expressed her disapproval of his Muslim identity by slamming on tables and other physical objects. Muslim international students often are cornered and questioned regarding their religious identity (Calkins et al., 2012). This is evidenced in Reeba’s report of the confrontations she experienced with Christian students who had prejudicial notions about the religion of Islam. They perceived her as a slave and questioned why she believed the same. These questions tend to focus on issues relating to terrorism or anti-Muslim sentiments that assume Islam to be a radical religion (Brown et al., 2015). Based on these assumptions, research has shown that Muslim international students find themselves constantly engaged in debates with their American peers in order to restore the image of their religion (Brown et al., 2015). However, undergraduate Muslim students in this study are met with berating views of their religion that leave them socially disengaged from their American peers. To further substantiate these findings, other research on Muslim international students’ showed that they experience discrimination and ridicule from members of the host community due to negative views perpetuated by the media that Muslims are not to be trusted (Brown et al., 2015). They face verbal and physical attacks as well because of their Muslim faith (Brown, 2009; Brown et al., 2015; Brown & Jones, 2013).

The concept of Islamophobia perpetuates the overt prejudice and hostility that undergraduate Muslim international students encounter in social spheres due to their religious identity (Allen, 2010). The findings in this study clearly demonstrate that Islamophobic sentiments can influence an institution’s historical legacy of exclusion.
(Hurtado et al., 1998, 1999; Milem et al., 2005). Practices such as the confrontation of Muslim students about their religious beliefs by their Christian peers on campus are designed, either consciously or unconsciously, to promote a climate of anti-Muslim sentiments (Allen, 2010). These practices demonstrate a perception that Muslim students are different and promote a historically segregated religious culture on campus (Hurtado et al., 1998, 1999; Milem et al., 2005).

The findings in this study also show that Islamophobic sentiments can influence the psychological dimension of a campus when the behavioral dimension is lacking; for example, the absence of intragroup or intergroup interactions may shape the way in which non-Muslim American students perceive the religious beliefs of Muslim international students (Hurtado et al., 1998, 1999). In this study, Maridya’s American peers expressed their disapproval of her religion because they believed Muslims are not allowed to eat bacon, attend parties, or drink socially. While some of these may be true, understanding the reasons behind Maridya’s religious tenets and her choices to express herself as a Muslim would have afforded her American peers with a better view of her religious identity. When dialogue between groups of different religious affiliations or racial/ethnic backgrounds is missing, assumptions and negative perceptions about others perceived as different from the mainstream likely will be present within a campus climate (Hurtado et al., 1998, 1999). The negative perceptions of those viewed as different will remain, especially when Islamophobic sentiments continue to influence the psychological dimension of a climate, as perceptions of groups viewed as the Other are not only psychologically based but also are linked to cross-racial contacts (Hurtado et al., 1998, 1999; Milem et al., 2005). In addition, the experiences of religious hostility off campus
toward undergraduate Muslim international students confirm the way in which larger
socialhistorical events shape the perceptions of non-Muslim members of the community
and the way they perceive and react to Muslim students (Milem et al., 2005). Bara’s
account of hostility at a store off campus shows that she and her friend were perceived by
the perpetrator as threats to the American society due to their Arab identities.

National Climate’s Influence on Campus Experiences

The students in this study perceive the current political climate in the US as
unfavorable and tense toward Muslims and the religion of Islam. To a greater extent, they
perceive that the political tension has influenced negative perceptions about Muslims and
Islam and has instigated attitudes of intimidation, marginalization, and discrimination of
Muslim international students. Participants in this study have been cornered on campus
and intimidated with the current political propaganda against Muslim immigrants, which
resulted in their fear of being deported or not being allowed to return to the country. They
felt uncomfortable and excluded because of the political tension, specifically with
individuals who supported Trump during the 2016 presidential election. Meera felt
uncomfortable during the election; when she was with those who supported Trump, she
believed their support meant that they were against Muslims. Participants also perceived
that the political tension has influenced a climate of Islamophobia on campus, one in
which students felt the Muslim Student Association had been discriminated against by
institutional leaders who supported the current political rhetoric. Participants felt this
climate of Islamophobia further promoted anti-Muslim rhetoric on the part of those who
support the Muslim ban and increased their feelings of exclusion.
The findings in this study are similar to other research on the experiences of Muslim American students that found the political climate in the US as unfavorable and biased toward them (Severson, 2011). These Muslim American students also are perceived as potential threats to the security of the country and, thus, are subjected to scrutiny and targeted for hate crimes, verbal harassments, and physical assaults (Mubarak, 2007). Following the 9/11 terror attacks, international attention has begun to focus on Islamic beliefs and has subjected the religion to scrutiny on the campus community (Mubarak, 2007). This shows that international Muslim students are not the only ones experiencing issues of prejudice. Their American Muslim student counterparts experience these as well, with the result that some undergraduate Muslim international students’ challenges are strictly about their religious identity. Thus, the discrimination and prejudice that Muslim immigrants encounter are triggered by Americans’ projections of their sentiments about Muslim extremists in the Middle East (Sodowsky & Plake, 1992). This was demonstrated in Brown’s (2009) ethnographic study on the adjustment experiences of postgraduate international students at a university in the South of England. Findings indicated that Muslim international students encounter incidences of Islamophobic abuse due to their religious identity (Brown, 2009). Similarly, a report on Muslim international students noted that they consistently experience feelings of judgment from other non-Muslim students based on negative stereotypes about Islam (Nasir & Al-Amin, 2006). Participants also reported fear of being viewed as potential threats, particularly while engaged in their religious practices (such as when praying on campus), leaving them visible and vulnerable to attacks.
The findings in this study confirm that Islamophobic sentiments influence the external institutional campus climate, specifically the government/policy context. Islamophobic practices in the political arena discriminate against Muslims (Allen, 2010); e.g., Donald Trump’s commitment and recommitment to the Muslim ban (Qiu, 2016). Specifically, the revised executive policy restricting immigration in six Muslim countries (Zapotosky et al., 2017) continues to promote Islamophobic sentiments. Given that the external institutional elements interact and shape the internal elements to construct the campus climate (Hurtado et al., 1998, 1999), this finding shows that governmental policies can influence the psychological dimension of the climate and an institution’s historical legacy of exclusion. The national political tension has influenced the way undergraduate Muslim international students view others’ perceptions of them, as well as how this group of students experience and regard the campus climate and others’ perceptions of their religious identity (Hurtado et al., 1998, 1999). While these students feel they are prejudicially considered as threats to society, they personally encounter and perceive attitudes of intimidation and marginalization from non-Muslim members of the campus community. The political tension also has influenced a campus history of exclusion at one particular university, a situation in which institutional leaders believed by participants to be supporters of the current political rhetoric against Muslims are regarded as discriminatory against the Muslim Student Association in order to suppress Muslim activity on campus.

Perceptions of Institutional, Faculty, and Individual Support

The findings of this study suggest that undergraduate Muslim international students perceive academic and social support from their institutional leaders (such as the
president), faculty members, and individuals. These students find their advisors and faculty as supportive through the course of their educational journey. Also, one of the participants, Abdulfatai, perceived support from his institutional leader; and two individuals (Reeba and Meera) perceived other members of the campus community as supportive, especially during the current and tensed political rhetoric. These supports promote a climate of safety and inclusion. The experiences of the students in this study are similar to research on other international students’ experiences. For example, findings on the acculturative stress and adjustment of Greek international students also showed that they considered seeking the help of their faculty or staff as possible resources in their adjustment to acculturative stress (Poulakis et al., 2017). Similarly, a qualitative study on international female graduate students' experiences of sense of belonging and identity showed that these students receive support from faculty and major advisors (Le et al., 2016). They viewed their faculty members as opened towards helping them succeed and perceived their advisors as mentors and role models (Le et al., 2016). In another qualitative study on the impact of student-faculty interactions on international students’ sense of belonging, findings showed that most perceived their faculty as supportive (Glass et al., 2015). Their faculty were culturally sensitive and fostered their inclusion by expressing appreciation toward them, paying special attention during one-on-one conversations before and after class, and emphasizing their classroom participation. They developed meaningful relationships with faculty, which increased their confidence to construct knowledge, and they viewed faculty as strong role models who influenced their behavior (Glass et al., 2015). These findings contradict research on African students in which they perceived inadequate social support (Boafo-Arthur, 2014; Constantine et al.,
Likewise, a quantitative research study on 186 international students’ acculturative stress and its predictors indicated that international students, specifically, students from the Middle East, demonstrate high levels of acculturative stress, with perceived support as the only significant predictor of that stress (Bai, 2016).

Although an increase in the number of underrepresented groups can improve the diversity of a campus climate, problems may arise when no adequate support programs are designed to cater to a diverse population (Hurtado et al. 1998, 1999). According to Bai (2016), institutional, faculty, administrative, and student support are critical to international students’ acculturative process. These students not only need cultural support in terms of providing a friendly environment and facilities, they also need moral support from faculty, classmates, and staff members. When international students receive adequate support from school, they begin to experience positive acculturation and lower stress levels (Bai, 2016). The findings discussed in chapter four established that undergraduate Muslim international students face academic, social, religious, racial/ethnic, and gender challenges and, therefore, need to be supported in those areas in order to be adequately integrated into the campus community. Rasheed, Meera, and Kazim, perceive academic support from their faculty and also experienced emotional and religious support from advisors and staff members. They considered them as welcoming and willing to render their help in any way possible.

The Need to Foster Religious and Cultural Integration on Campus

The students in this study perceived the need for institutional leaders to foster religious and cultural integration on campus based on their racial/ethnic, religious, and
gender challenges. Four participants believed their campus communities are in need of educative programs to clarify misconceptions about other religions and culture. They advocated for programs to promote the integration of international students with their American counterparts in order to foster a campus community devoid of microaggression, harassment, prejudice, and discrimination. This need for religious and cultural integration shows that campus leaders may not be providing adequate opportunities for intra- and intergroup contact. According to Harper and Hurtado (2007), leaders face challenges with providing avenues for diverse groups of students to participate in educative dialogue to increase their understanding of cultural issues. More concerning is the focus on general intercultural relation issues, such as the celebration of multiculturalism through food (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005; Milem et al., 2005) rather than a focus on addressing issues of cultural relations (Althen, 2009).

In this study, undergraduate Muslim international students’ experiences of Islamophobic sentiments discussed in the previous sections and also in Chapter four, necessitate the need to promote a climate that encourages religious and cultural integration. Campus leaders must ensure that the behavioral component of the campus climate advances authentic relations between and among different religious and cultural groups, as the lack of or inadequate contacts can influence individual perceptions of others considered as different from the mainstream population (Hurtado et al., 1998, 1999). Opportunities for cross-racial or religious contacts promote dialogue and build a positive campus climate (Hurtado et al., 1998, 1999). Campus leaders can create centers designed to promote multifaith and multicultural lectures, forums, and presentations in
order to enhance the education and understanding of students and community members about different religions and cultures (Koller, 2015).

**Perception of the MSA as a Strong Support System**

Three female participants perceived the MSA as an institution that supports the navigation of their religious and social experiences on campus. They viewed it as a safe space in which they could freely express their religious identity without being discriminated against, easily make social connections with other international Muslim students, and connect and interact with others from diverse religious and cultural backgrounds. Similarly, research on the self-perception and campus experiences of traditional age Muslim American women showed the MSA as a support system for these students (Koller, 2015). They indicated the MSA provided a sense of community, support, and opportunities for spiritual growth through a safe space to pray and learn (Koller, 2015).

The MSA as a support system for undergraduate Muslim international students, especially in the organization’s promotion of cross-racial contact, contributes to building a positive behavioral dimension of the campus climate. According to participants, the MSA is focused on promoting real social relations between and among Muslims and non-Muslims, as well as between individuals from Muslim countries and those from non-Muslim countries. This initiative aims to clear misconceptions and perceptions about Muslims and the religion of Islam. It also aims to help this group of students understand other religious and cultural groups, thereby promoting a unified and peaceful campus climate (Hurtado et al., 1998, 1999).
Theoretical and Practical Implications of the Findings

Several implications for theory and practice arise as a result of the findings from this study. It is my hope that these implications will benefit international student practitioners, student affairs administrators, and educators, as well as aid them in addressing undergraduate Muslim international students’ needs. It is evident that undergraduate Muslim international students face linguistic challenges within the classroom context; however, this is not a new finding as far as challenges faced by international students. Studies have shown that international students possess limited English ability to understand lectures, communicate with faculty, contribute during classes, and interact with their peers within the classroom (Banjong, 2015; Campbell, 2015; Campbell, 2016; Ejiofo, 2010; Gautam et al., 2016; Gebhard, 2012; Kuo, 2011; Li, 2013; Lin & Scherz, 2014; Zhang, 2016; Zhao, 2013). This finding begs the question: Why do these students continue to face linguistic challenges in the academic context? One of the answers may rest on the historical legacy of inclusion and exclusion of a campus community. Classroom practices such as taking notes while listening to class lectures or oral presentations indulge only a homogeneous population such as American students, while it excludes and disadvantages international students, many of whom are developing their English language skills.

According to Campbell (2016), it is difficult for international students who have limited linguistic ability and working knowledge of standard communication skills to succeed in a western-style communicative classroom, as these individuals come from diverse international contexts and employ distinct communication standards. The finding in this study related to limited linguistic ability is important because international
students may not feel included within the classroom context, and practices that exclude them should be reevaluated. Faculty must be aware that international students differ in linguistic competence, cultural understanding, and learning styles and, as such, must adapt and improve their pedagogical philosophies. Faculty also can meet with international students one-on-one to offer additional coaching and instructions in order to help them prepare for the complexity of communication-based classroom work. Faculty and international student staff can accompany these students to writing or communication centers where they can help them improve their speaking and writing skills on a personal level (Campbell, 2016). Although English language requirement is a part of international students’ admission process, faculty members cannot assume that all international students are linguistically equipped to navigate the American academic culture immediately when they begin their education, particularly if they come from a different academic culture. Some international students may need more time to develop linguistically and to adjust to the academic culture; faculty must provide alternative yet equitable ways for these students to meet the academic requirements.

The structural diversity component of the campus climate framework (Hurtado et al., 1998, 1999) established that increasing the structural diversity of a campus is insufficient to foster a diverse campus community. It is imperative that campus leaders create and provide programs that address the linguistic needs of undergraduate Muslim international students so they can feel academically included on American campuses. As cultural change agents, faculty can position students in small groups and encourage culture-specific conversations to build rapport between diverse students and to boost communication skills. While it is possible for American students to be insensitive toward
their international peers due to language barriers, faculty can serve as cultural guides by initiating questions related to family and cultural backgrounds that international students would feel comfortable answering (Campbell, 2016). These strategies may decrease international students’ challenges with group or pair conversations (Campbell, 2016) or oral presentations. Similarly, faculty can help to improve these students’ classroom participation by employing ice-breakers, small group-based classroom work, and technology (Kim et al., 2016). According to Kim et al. (2016), utilizing ice-breakers before classes facilitates student-to-student understandings of one another and fosters several avenues for communication. Using an ice-breaker activity may help students feel more comfortable to orally present their ideas in the classroom. Also, international students can be assigned to small discussion groups in which the members remain the same throughout a course to help promote a relaxed, safe space and to allow students to feel more comfortable with their group peers. Faculty also can allow undergraduate Muslim international students to put their ideas in writing before sharing their work in both small and large group settings. Allowing students to first express their ideas in writing gives them the opportunity to reflect on their thoughts, and if possible, to reconsider or modify them before presenting orally. Students can read directly from their written notes, rather than summarize them verbally (Kim et al., 2016). Kim et al. suggested that faculty employ technology to improve their participation as this provides alternative ways to implement online discussion threads or blogs in which students can be a part of different discussions and forums.

Undergraduate Muslim international students perceive others as regarding them as academically incapable due to their racial/ethnic identity. This reveals the legacy of
exclusion and the negative psychological climate that perpetuates American campuses. According to participants, they perceive being segregated and viewed as academically limited in meeting classroom expectations because they originate from a cultural background that does not belong in the mainstream world – the West (Said, 1997). For this group of students to better succeed academically, faculty need to be reminded of their responsibility as agents of change to nurture these students into success. American faculty must be trained on being culturally sensitive to these students and must be ready to equitably cater to their needs. Institutional leaders must be intentional in their efforts to invest in cultural sensitivity trainings, as well as pedagogically comprehensive professional development programs, that will help faculty incorporate innovative classroom methods (Campbell, 2016) in order to meet the needs of undergraduate Muslim international students. In terms of their American peers’ perceptions of their academic abilities, faculty as well as institutional leaders must promote a behavioral component that encourages social relations between these students and their American peers. This is particularly important especially within and outside the classroom context, as the lack of this component may continue to preserve negative perceptions about these students (Hurtado et al., 1998, 1999); for example, the implementation of a diversity course requirement for all undergraduate students in racial/ethnic, gender, and religious diversity can foster a tolerant campus climate (Koller, 2015).

The experiences of overt discrimination (exclusion from social life on campus, heightened fear of being physically or verbally attacked and, ultimately, the possibility of limiting their Muslim identity) female undergraduate Muslim international students face due to their visible marker, the hijab, indicate that American campuses continue to
preserve their history and legacy of exclusion against Muslim immigrant students (Allen, 2010). This demonstrates the existence of Islamophobia and highlights a history of segregation (Rich & Troudi, 2006; Said, 1997) in which female hijab wearers perceived they are considered “different” in the Western world because of their physical identity as Muslims (Ali, 2014; Cole & Ahmadi, 2003; Tummala-Narra & Claudius, 2013). While these experiences of overt discrimination may have been influenced based on a history of terror incidences, it is the responsibility of campus leaders to increase their efforts in creating a safe environment in which these Muslim female students can thrive. It is insufficient to increase the numbers of undergraduate Muslim international students in order to create a diverse environment. Institutional leaders, faculty, and staff must be proactive and intentional in their efforts to dispel a climate of discrimination toward these students by providing and supporting programs that facilitate intergroup contacts and clear misconceptions about female hijab wearers to improve the religious climate of the campus. Similarly, undergraduate Muslim international male students should feel safe to express their Muslim identity through their cultural attire, the thobe, as the findings of this study show that they perceive resistance to their inclusion when wearing traditional garments. Integrating this group of students into the American campus requires that they feel accepted as Muslim men from Muslim countries. The expression of their religious identity through the thobe should be limited not only to their homes or to certain events such as the international student day, but also they should be able to express their religious identity physically when they choose. However, this can be achieved only in a climate of inclusion that does not discriminate or view Muslim students as outsiders or threats due to their physical expression of their identity.
These students’ experiences of microaggression, overt prejudice on campus, intimidation, marginalization, and discrimination reveal the influence of the larger political context on the psychological dimension of the campus climate. They feel they are viewed as terrorists, individuals capable of bringing harm to their American faculty and peers, as well as members of the public. They also report they are constantly antagonized because of their religious affiliation. The continuous negative perception of these students within and outside the campus context fuels religious and cultural conflict among minority/majority groups, leading to a tense campus climate. More importantly, these negative experiences have led to undergraduate Muslim international students’ pleas for religious and cultural intervention on their campuses. Thus, it is important that campus leaders focus on improving the religious and cultural climate by integrating programs that will sensitize the campus community about the religion of Islam and the culture of immigrants who come from Muslim countries.

Furthermore, undergraduate Muslim students need adequate academic and social support from members of the campus community to integrate fully into the campus. Institutional leaders could invest in providing intensive English as a second language courses and programs as requirements to prepare students academically and culturally. These courses and programs should be designed to provide students with the foundation needed to make their conversation and communication experiences comfortable. Campus leaders could initiate an international student dormitory that assigns undergraduate Muslim international students with their American peer using a personality survey. This initiative would foster authentic interaction and genuine relationships over time (Geary, 2016).
International students feel supported when the academic practices employed within the classroom context are sensitive to their cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Academic practices, such as the western style of communication (oral, written, or visual), that do not provide an excellent environment for success (Campbell, 2016) and that frustrate as well as discriminate against these students, must be reconsidered for their inclusion. Also, to foster social support, institutions must be intentional in creating authentic programs that integrate these students with their American peers. Campus leaders could create semester-long multicultural fraternity/sorority groups that facilitate intercultural relationships. These initiatives could pair undergraduate Muslim international students with their Americans peers in the same room in which they could share the tasks of maintaining the apartment, deciding on meals, as well as determining social events to promote (Geary, 2016).

Finally, the MSA as a strong support system for undergraduate Muslim international students shows the importance of the organization for the religious and social development of these students. Rather than minimize Muslim activities on campus, as perceived by one of the participants in this study, campus leaders must strive to support this organization by providing them with financial and other resources they may require to continue to support undergraduate Muslim international students. MSA leaders also must be intentional about including female students who choose not to wear the hijab. They must create a relaxed and non-judgmental atmosphere for this group of students to grow socially and spiritually.
Limitations of the Study

It is important to note that there is much to be learned from phenomenological studies; however, this study was limited in several ways. First, time was a limitation, as participants could not commit to the initial interview specified time of 2 hours and 30 minutes due to their busy schedules. Although data saturation was achieved because similar codes, categories, and themes were consistently observed and the researcher collected comprehensive and varied details about the phenomena (Creswell, 2013; Polkinghorne, 1989), obtaining a larger sample size may have provided a more diverse group of students. Also, as this study was confined to undergraduate Muslim international students studying at three four-year public national universities in the Western region of the US, it does provide insights into the experiences of these students that can be transferable to all other American colleges and universities. In addition, a misunderstanding of word pronunciation between myself and the participants may have existed due to participants’ linguistic differences in terms of their native language and accents. However, member-checking was conducted, as participants were provided access to their interview transcription or verbatim data to verify their responses and my understanding of their experiences (Yüksel & Yıldırım, 2015). Also, the possibility of bias(es) existed based on my existing views about international students’ academic and social integration, although I consistently bracketed my presuppositions and prejudices through reflexive journals to ensure participants’ reality was represented.

Recommendations for Future Research

The purpose of this study was to investigate the lived experiences of degree-seeking undergraduate Muslim international students at three four-year public national
universities in the Western region of the US. Based on the findings of this study, conducting qualitative or mixed-methods research with a larger sample would yield additional responses on the way in which these students perceive their racial/ethnic, religious, and gender experiences and their influence on their academic and social integration. Future research is needed to further examine the depth of these students’ academic challenges in American universities and the ways in which they can be assisted. Further research should explore the perceived influence and significance of Muslim student organizations on students’ academic, social, and spiritual development to provide policymakers and student affairs personnel with information on ways to adequately support these organizations. Also, there is much to be learned about the experiences of undergraduate Muslim international female students who choose not to wear the hijab. Understanding the negotiation of their religious identity may educate other Muslims on their choice whether to wear the hijab and may assist MSA leaders in meeting their unique needs. Undergraduate international students’ perceived institutional, faculty, and individual support requires further research in order to understand the level of support provided to these students on American campuses and to equip institutional leaders, as well as international student personnel, with data on ways to provide for this group of students. It would also be interesting to conduct a companion study that explores the perceptions of non-Muslim students’ about their Muslims counterparts. Finally, since all the participants live off campus, it would be interesting to see if their counterparts who live on campus have similar or different campus experiences.
Conclusion

This study examined the phenomenon of eight undergraduate Muslim international students’ racial/ethnic, religious, and gender experiences on American campuses. The literature review showed that Muslim international students may find the campus climate unfavorable as they face various academic and social challenges. This research also has shown that, while the experiences of international Muslim students may be similar to their non-international Muslim and American Muslim counterparts, their racial/ethnic background, religious affiliation, and gendered identities reinforce their experiences, thereby making it unique.

The concept of Islamophobia was framed within the context of the campus climate in order to explore the way in which governmental policies and programs, including sociohistorical context (external institutional components), influence an institution’s historical legacy of inclusion and exclusion, structural diversity, psychological climate, and behavioral climate (internal institutional components). Also, the study focused on understanding the concept of Islamophobia and its influence on internal institutional components through external institutional components of a campus. The framework also demonstrated how campus climate elements shape undergraduate Muslim international students’ experiences and perceptions.

The findings of this study confirm that undergraduate Muslim international students experience classroom challenges in terms of their linguistic struggle and their perceptions of the negative way in which their American faculty and peers view their academic abilities based on their racial/ethnic identity. These students also perceive obvious discrimination and exclusion due to their expression of their Muslim identity
through the hijab and the thobe. Undergraduate Muslim international students experience microaggression, overt prejudice on campus, religious hostility off campus, and realized the influence of the national political climate on the way they experienced the campus. Although these students believed they received institutional, faculty, and individual support and viewed the MSA as supportive in developing them spiritually and socially, they advocated for immediate religious and cultural integration on campus.

The findings clearly demonstrate that Islamophobia, governmental policies and programs, sociohistorical context, an institution’s historical legacy of inclusion and exclusion, structural diversity, psychological climate, and behavioral climate shape the campus racial/ethnic, religious, and gender experiences of undergraduate Muslim international students on American campuses. Institutional leaders must recognize the challenges faced by this group of students and must continue to facilitate their academic and social integration on campus. As indicated in the implications section, it is imperative that faculty provide equitable pedagogy sensitive to students’ linguistic background. Campus leaders must provide religious and cultural sensitivity training for faculty, staff, administrators, and students in order to foster positive campus experiences. Campus leaders also must support the MSA by providing opportunities that will help them continue to contribute to students’ religious and social development. Finally, campus leaders must reach out to community leaders in order to clarify misconceptions and negative perceptions about Muslim international students.
REFERENCES


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Appendix A

Screening Protocol

1. Have you fully completed the English language proficiency requirements at your institution? ☐ Yes or ☐ No.

2. Have you been regularly admitted as an undergraduate international student? ☐ Yes or ☐ No.

3. Have you studied in the United States for at least one year? ☐ Yes or ☐ No.

4. Are you able and willing to discuss your experiences on campus? ☐ Yes or ☐ No.
Appendix B

Recruitment Email

Initial Email

Hello Undergraduate Muslim International Students,

I am writing to request your participation in a research study to explore the racial/ethnic, religious, and gender experiences of undergraduate Muslim international students and the influence of these experiences on student academic and social integration.

Your participation in the study would include committing to three interviews. The first interview as well as the second interview will last approximately one hour each, while the third interview will last for 30 minutes. In exchange for your time, those who choose to participate in the interviews will be compensated with a $20 gift card.

If you choose to participate, the interviews will be conducted in your choice of place. Should you have any questions about the study, please do not hesitate to contact Fola Ogunbowo Dimandja (a female researcher) at oogunbow@uccs.edu. To participate, please email Fola Ogunbowo.

Thank you,

Fola Ogunbowo Dimandja

Reminder email

Hello Undergraduate Muslim International Students,

This email serves as a friendly reminder and follow up to the email sent two weeks ago regarding participation in the research study exploring the racial/ethnic, religious, and gender experiences of undergraduate Muslim international students and the influence of these experiences on student academic and social integration.

As a reminder, your participation in the study is completely voluntary and if you choose not to participate, you will not experience any repercussions. Your time and perspectives are highly valued and I hope you are willing and able to share about your perceptions of racial/ethnic, religious, and gender experiences in your respective campuses.

Should you have any questions about the study, please do not hesitate to contact Fola Ogunbowo Dimandja at oogunbow@uccs.edu. To participate, please email Fola Ogunbowo.
Thank you,

Fola Ogunbowo Dimandja
Appendix C

Consent Form

University of Colorado
Colorado Springs (UCCS)
Consent to be a Research Subject

Title: Campus Experiences of Undergraduate Muslim International Students

Principal Investigator: Fola Ogunbowo Dimandja

Funding Source: None

Introduction
You are being asked to be in a research study. This form is designed to tell you everything you need to think about before you decide to consent (agree) to be in the study or not to be in the study. A member of the research team will describe this study to you and answer any questions. It is entirely your choice. If you decide to take part, you can change your mind later on and withdraw from the research study. You can skip any questions that you do not wish to answer.

Before making your decision:
- Please carefully read this form or have it read to you.
- Please ask questions about anything that is not clear.

Feel free to take your time thinking about whether you would like to participate. By signing this form you will not give up any legal rights. If you are completing this consent form online, you may want to print a copy of the consent form for your records.

Study Overview
This study plans to understand and to describe the common and lived experiences of degree-seeking undergraduate Muslim international students at four-year public national universities in the Western region of the US. Ultimately, this research may be published in a journal, as part of a book, or presented at a conference.

Procedures
You are being asked to be in this research study because you are an undergraduate Muslim international student. You are being asked to participate in three, one-on-one, in-depth, semi-structured, open-ended (includes a background/demographic questionnaire), audiotaped interviews. The first interview, as well as the second interview, will last approximately one hour each, while the third interview will last for 30 minutes, making it a total of 2 hours, 30 minutes of data collection with each participant.

The first interview will assess your previous campus experiences while the second interview will be based on your current experiences on campus. The third interview will focus on the combination of your past and current experiences in order to understand
your overall integration on campus. The interviews will include questions as well as probes which focus on your perceptions about your racial/ethnic, religious, and gender experiences on campus and the influence of these experiences on your academic and social integration.

**Other people in this study**: Up to 12 people will participate in this study.

**Risks and Discomforts**  Participation is completely voluntary and there will not be any repercussions in relation to student academic progress or future references/recommendations if you decline participation in the study. There is always a slight risk for a breach of confidentiality but all your information will be deidentified and pseudonyms will be used. Further, If you have encountered any challenges concerning religious, racial/ethnic, or gender experiences on campus, the interview questions may bring up feelings that cause discomfort as you may develop emotional discomfort as a result of reflecting on your own or others’ campus experiences, however the researcher will provide the contact numbers of counseling services, international student services, multicultural affairs offices, and/or specific Muslim student organizations at the respective institutions. These are the following specific contact information for the various counseling services and other international student resources:

- University of Colorado Denver: Student and Community Counselling Center - Phone: 303-556-4372; International Student and Scholar Services - Phone: 303-315-2230; and President of Muslim Student Association (Aisha Mohamed) - Email: AISHA.MOHAMED@ucdenver.edu.
- University of Colorado Boulder - Counseling and Psychiatric Services Phone: 303-492-2277; International Student and Scholar Services - Phone: 303-492-8057; and Muslim Student Association - Email: cumuslims@gmail.com.
- Colorado State University Fort Collins: Counseling Services - Phone: 970-491-6053; President of Muslim Student Association (T’Hani Holt Middleton) - Phone: 970-491-1682; and Office of International Programs - Phone: 970-491-5917.

You may decline participation without any repercussions and the minimal risk of a breach of confidentiality does not outweigh the benefits of understanding how religious, racial/ethnic, and gender experiences influence academic and social integration in order to help improve your experiences (undergraduate Muslim international students) by informing your staff and faculty of your struggles and challenges.

**Benefits**  This study is designed for the researcher to learn more about how undergraduate Muslim international students perceive their religious, racial/ethnic, and gender experiences and how these experiences influence their academic and social integration as the goal of this research is to help improve the experiences of undergraduate Muslim international students by informing their staff and faculty of their struggles and challenges.

**Compensation**  For completing (2 hours, 30 minutes) three, one-on-one, in-depth, semi-structured, open-ended, audiotaped interviews, you will be compensated with a $20 gift card.
Confidentiality
The interview data will be transcribed. The raw data, transcribed documents, and tapes will be kept for three years and destroyed by the researcher three years after the completion of the research. Any identifying information in the transcription will be replaced with a pseudonym as participants will choose their own pseudonym. The consent forms, transcripts, and key linking pseudonyms to actual first names of participants will be stored on a password-protected computer in a locked office only accessible to the PI.

Certain offices and people other than the researchers may have access to study records. Government agencies and UCCS employees overseeing proper study conduct may look at your study records. These offices include the UCCS Institutional Review Board, and the UCCS Office of Sponsored Programs and Research Integrity. UCCS will keep any research records confidential to the extent allowed by law. A study number rather than your name will be used on study records wherever possible. Study records may be subject to disclosure pursuant to a court order, subpoena, law or regulation.

Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal from the Study
Taking part in this study is voluntary. You have the right to leave a study at any time without penalty. You may refuse to do any procedures you do not feel comfortable with, or answer any questions that you do not wish to answer. If you withdraw from the study, you may request that your research information not be used by contacting the Principal Investigator listed above and below.

Contact Information
Contact (PI’s info): oogunbow@uccs.edu
- if you have any questions about this study or your part in it,
- if you have questions, concerns or complaints about the research, or
- if you would like information about the survey results when they are prepared.

Contact the Research Integrity Specialist at 719-255-3903 or via email at irb@uccs.edu:
- if you have questions about your rights as a research participant, or
- if you have questions, concerns or complaints about the research.

Consent
A copy of this consent form will be provided to you.

Are you interested in being contacted about future research? ☐ Yes or ☐ No.

I understand the above information and voluntarily consent to participate in the research. By signing this consent, I am confirming that I am 18 years of age or older.

Signature of Participant
Date

_________________________________________________________  ___________
Appendix D

Interview Protocols

Interview Protocol One

1. Tell me about your educational journey.
   a. How did you decide to study in the US? How did you first learn about undergraduate study at your university?

2. How would you describe your previous group work experiences in class?
   a. How would you describe your previous interactions with other students in your classroom?

3. How would you describe the previous campus climate (the daily campus atmosphere or pattern in relation to race/ethnicity, religion, and gender)?
   a. How about the previous institution’s value of diversity? What did you think of the real representation of diversity on campus? How would you describe your previous perception of the value of diversity among faculty, staff, students, and members of your school environment?
   b. Tell me how you perceived the campus climate as influencing how your identities (racial/ethnic, religious, and gender) are perceived by members of the campus community?

4. How would you describe your previous experiences on campus in relation to your racial/ethnic background?
   a. In your opinion, do you think these experiences influenced your academic and social integration on campus? If yes, please describe how they influenced your integration.
   b. In the past, how well did you think you were integrated into the campus? Could you describe the previous racial climate of your campus?

5. Tell me what it was like to identify as a Muslim on this campus.
   a. How would you describe your religious experiences in the past? In your opinion, do you think these experiences influenced your academic and social integration on campus? If yes, please describe how they influenced your integration.

6. Tell me what it was like to be a (male or female) Muslim student on this campus.
a. How would you describe your previous gender experiences as a Muslim international student?

b. In your opinion, do you think these experiences influenced your academic and social integration on campus in the past? If yes, please describe how they influenced your integration.

7. How did your identity as a Muslim influence your classroom instructor’s expectations of your academic performance in the past? Could you give an example?
   a. In the past, how did your Muslim identity influence other students’ assumptions about you and their attitude toward you? How? Could you give an example?
   b. Did you ever feel pressured to minimize various qualities of your identity? What or who made you feel pressured? How?

8. Did you ever experience any form of Islamophobic sentiments (indirect or direct exclusionary practices – practices that disadvantage, prejudice or discriminate against Muslims and Islam)?
   a. Did you ever experience obvious discrimination, derogatory comments, and injustice from your faculty, classroom instructors, staff, and students in the past?
   b. If yes, please, describe your experience(s)? How did it make you feel? How did you react?

9. Could you describe a situation or experience on campus that made you uncomfortable or excluded from the mainstream student population in the past? If so, in what ways?
   a. Could you describe positive experiences that made you feel valued as well as included in the past?

10. What coping techniques did you employ in navigating your academic and social experiences?

Demographic Questionnaire for Interview (Muslim International Students)

Note: Demographic questions include personal and perhaps sensitive information.
This information will be used to determine how campus racial climate is perceived by Muslim international students on campus. Responses are confidential.
DEMOGRAPHICS: PLEASE INDICATE THE ANSWERS THAT APPLY TO YOU

1. How old are you? _________________
2. What is your country of citizenship? ______________
3. What is your field of study? _________________
4. How many years have you been at your university?
   _________________
5. Are you currently working at a job on-campus?
   Yes
   No
6. Indicate the average number of hours you work on-campus or off-campus?
   ____________________________________
7. Based on your experience at your university, how likely are you to stay in touch with the university after you complete your degree?
   ____________________________________
8. Based on your experience at your university, which organizations on campus would you like to stay in touch with after you complete your degree?
   ____________________________________

Interview Protocol Two

1. Tell me about your experience at your university.
   a. Describe a typical day on campus for you.
2. How would you describe your current group work experiences in class?
   a. How would you describe your current interactions with other students in your classroom?
3. How would you describe the current campus climate (the daily campus atmosphere or pattern in relation to race/ethnicity, religion, and gender)?
   a. How about the current institution’s value of diversity? What do you think of the real representation of diversity on campus currently? How would you describe your current perception of the value of diversity among faculty, staff, students, and members of your school environment?
b. Tell me how you currently perceive the campus climate as influencing how your identities (racial/ethnic, religious, and gender) are perceived by members of the campus community?

4. How would you describe your current experiences in relation to your racial/ethnic background?
   a. In your opinion, do you think these experiences influence your academic and social integration on campus? If yes, please describe how they influence your integration.
   b. How well do you think you are integrated/welcomed into the campus? Could you describe the racial climate of your campus?

5. Tell me what it is like to identify as a Muslim on this campus.
   a. How would you describe your current religious experiences? In your opinion, do you think these experiences influence your academic and social integration on campus?
   b. If yes, please describe how they influence your integration.

6. Tell me what it is like to be a (male or female) Muslim student on this campus.
   a. How would you describe your current gender experiences as a Muslim international student?
   b. In your opinion, do you think these experiences influence your academic and social integration on campus? If yes, please describe how they influence your integration.

7. How has your identity as a Muslim influenced your classroom instructor’s expectations of your academic performance? Could you give an example?
   a. How has your Muslim identity influenced other students’ assumptions about you and their attitude toward you currently? How? Could you give an example?
   b. Do you feel pressured to minimize various qualities of your identity? What or who made you feel pressured? How?

8. Do you currently experience any form of Islamophobic sentiments (indirect or direct exclusionary practices – practices that disadvantage, prejudice or discriminate against Muslims and Islam)? If yes, please describe your experiences.
a. Do you currently experience obvious discrimination, derogatory comments, and injustice from your faculty, classroom instructors, staff, and students?
b. If yes, please, describe your experience(s)? How did it make you feel? How did you react?

9. Could you describe a current situation or experience on campus that made you uncomfortable or excluded from the mainstream student population? If so, in what ways?
   a. Could you describe current positive experiences that made you feel valued as well as included?

10. What coping techniques do you currently employ in navigating your academic and social experiences?
   a. If you could change some things about your experience as a Muslim international student at this university to make it more successful or fulfilling, what would they be?
   b. Tell me about institutional policies, programs or initiatives that you think either contribute to or inhibit your academic and social integration on campus? How?

11. What recommendations do you have for American universities?

   Interview Protocol Three

1. Reflecting on what you have said about your group work experiences in class and your interactions with other students in the past and given what you have said about these experiences now, how would you describe your group work experiences and interactions with other students?

2. Reflecting on what you have said about your past and current description of the campus climate, how would you describe the campus climate at your university?

3. Reflecting on what you have said about your past and current racial/ethnic experiences and the influence of these experiences on your academic and social integration, how would you describe your integration on campus?

4. Reflecting on what you have said about your past and current religious experiences and the influence of these experiences on your academic and social integration, how would you describe your integration on campus?
5. Reflecting on what you have said about your past and current gender experiences and the influence of these experiences on your academic and social integration, how would you describe your integration on campus?
Appendix E

Coding Guide and Data Analysis Process

Overview

This study focused on understanding and describing the lived experiences of undergraduate Muslim international students on American campuses through a qualitative phenomenological approach to research. Specifically, I focused on students’ racial/ethnic, religious, and gender experiences, as well as the influence of these experiences on their academic and social integration. In this study, I employed the concept of Islamophobia and the Campus Climate Framework as conceptual and theoretical lenses to uncover the campus experiences of undergraduate Muslim international students. These conceptual and theoretical lenses highlighted how undergraduate Muslim international students perceive and experience American universities. Specifically, the ways in which they negotiated their racial/ethnic, religious, and gender identities on campus.

Thus, this coding guide aided my understanding of the following research questions:

RQ1. What are the experiences of undergraduate Muslim international students at four-year public national universities in the Western region of the United States?

RQ2. What can policymakers and higher education practitioners learn from undergraduate Muslim international students’ experiences?

This study also investigated eight sub-questions:

1. How do undergraduate Muslim international students perceive their religious identity as influencing their academic and social experiences?
2. How do undergraduate Muslim international students perceive their racial/ethnic identity as influencing their academic and social experiences?

3. How do undergraduate Muslim international students perceive their gender identity as influencing their academic and social experiences?

4. How do undergraduate Muslim international students perceive the campus climate as influencing how their identities (racial/ethnic, religious, and gender) are perceived by members of the campus community?

5. How do undergraduate Muslim international students also perceive others’ perceptions of their identities as influencing their academic and social experiences?

6. What experiences of Islamophobic sentiments (if any) do undergraduate Muslim international students perceive on American campuses?

7. What coping mechanisms do Muslim international students employ in navigating their academic and social experiences?

8. What recommendations do Muslim international students have for US universities?

Definition of Terms

Sub-coding. Sub-coding is a method of coding applied after a primary or general code to further categorize or subcategorize codes in to levels of hierarchies (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2013).

Deductive coding. The creation of codes from conceptual frameworks, research questions, theories, and any list of codes based on the researcher’s presuppositions that he or she brings to the study (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2013).
**Inductive coding.** This is the interaction of the researcher with the data which allows for additional codes to emerge during the data collection and data analysis processes (Creswell, 2013; Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2013).

**Micro-coding.** This is an in-depth form of coding that is focused on uncovering meanings from data (Simmons-Mackie, 2014).

**Macro-coding.** This is a general and non-specific form of coding aimed at summarizing the comprehensive, yet fundamental meaning of a phenomenon (Simmons-Mackie, 2014).

**Pattern coding.** Pattern coding allows for the classification of data summaries into more meaningful themes or smaller categories (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2013).

**Path through Data**

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological method design as it particularly helped to give voice to the participants. This qualitative phenomenological study included a one-on-one, in-depth, semi-structured interviews with eight individuals who have experienced the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). Data was transcribed and then organized in to NVivo 11 for easy access. Following this, I read the entire interview transcript to get a sense of the whole data. Next, I described, classified, and interpreted the data through the formation of codes (to help summarize data into smaller units of information), the development of themes (to create a common idea), the interpretation of data (to make sense of the larger meaning of the data), and the representation of data (Creswell, 2013).

**General Approach to Coding**
For the purpose of this study, I adopted the phenomenological data analysis strategies (epoche, phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and synthesis of meanings and essences) proposed by Moustakas (1994), with additional strategies based on Miles, Huberman, & Saldana’s (2013) data analysis process. Based on Moustaka’s (1994) strategies, I bracketed my prejudgments, biases, and preconceived ideas about the phenomenon in order to see the phenomenon in a new way. This process of bracketing was implemented throughout the data analysis process. In phenomenological reduction, I consistently reflected on the interview data to describe the experiences of participants just as they appear in order to explain the true meaning of the phenomenon, by treating every statement with equal value while I reduced the data to significant statements and quotes that provide rich descriptions of how the participants experienced or perceived the phenomenon, a process called horizontalization (Moustakas, 1994; Ruiz, 2013). Then, I combined these significant statements and quotes into themes to develop a full textural description of participant experiences/perceptions.

These themes were also used to develop a full structural description of the context that shaped participants experiences/perceptions of the phenomenon, a process known as imaginative variation (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). Through imaginative variation, I was able to depend solely on my imagination in order to capture several possible meaning by approaching the phenomenon from varying lenses and perspectives (Moustakas, 1994; Yüksel & Yıldırım, 2015). Lastly, I combined the textural and structural descriptions into an integrated statement that represented the essence or core of the phenomenon examined (Moustakas, 1994). Thus, I grounded my coding strategies on Myles, Huberman, & Saldana’s (2013) coding process. I coded in cycles as well as
conducted both inductive and deductive data analysis simultaneously with data collection.

**Specific Approach to Coding**

Coding occurred in two iterative cycles.

**First cycle.** I conducted an initial read-through of the interview data in order to be familiarized with and immersed in the data (Creswell, 2013; Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2013). In the first cycle of coding, I employed inductive and deductive descriptive coding by assigning labels or symbolic meaning to summarize data that emerged during the coding process and data based on the theoretical frameworks and research questions (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2013). This form of coding helped reveal patterns of emerging concepts and thus, formed my primary codes (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2013).

**Specific approach to macro-coding:**

- Code for Linguistic Challenges (Macro-code I)
- Code for Instructor's Assumptions about Student's Intelligence and Other Students Assumptions of Students Intelligence (Macro-code II and III)
- Code for The hijab as a Visible Muslim Identity (Macro-codes IV).
- Code for Experiences of Islamophobia (Macro-code V).
- Code for Attitudes of Prejudice toward Muslims and Attitudes of Prejudice toward Islam (Macro-code VI and VII).
- Code for Political Tension Influences Fear and Political Tension Influences Feelings of Exclusion (Macro-code VIII and IX)
• Code for Perception of Support Among Faculty and Staff and Perception of Individual Support (Macro-code X and XI)

• Code for Perception of Changes Needed on Individual Campus and Perception of Changes on American Universities (Macro-code XII and XIII)

• Code for Campus Involvement and Diversity and Coping Techniques (Macro-code XIV and XV)

After reading through the data the second time, I conducted inductive and deductive sub-coding (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2013). This allowed me to further categorize macro-codes in to in depth and highly detailed codes.

**Specific approach to micro-coding:**

• Sub-Code for Perception of Racial Identity (under Macro-code II and III)

• Sub-Code for Reasons for not wearing the Hijab and Experiences not wearing the Hijab and The hijab and the Thobe: Perception of Overt Discrimination and Perception of Resistance to Inclusionary Practices (under Macro-code IV)

• Sub-Code for Microaggressions (under Macro-code V).

**Second cycle.** I conducted deductive pattern coding using my theoretical frameworks to combine similar codes from the first cycle into more meaningful units of analysis (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2013). This interpretive act resulted into themes.

**Specific approach to pattern coding:**
- Cluster 1 (Linguistic Challenges and Perception of Racial Identity). Upon reflection, these two codes seem to have an ACADEMIC CHALLENGES theme that united them.

- Cluster 2 (The hijab as a Visible Muslim Identity, Reasons for not wearing the Hijab and Experiences not wearing the Hijab, and The Hijab and the Thobe: Perception of Overt Discrimination and Perception of Resistance to Inclusionary). Upon reflection, these three codes seem to have – THE INFLUENCE OF RELIGIOUS/CULTURAL INDICATORS (SUCH AS THE HIJAB AND THE THOBE) ON STUDENTS’ EXPERIENCES as a theme that united them.

- Cluster 3 (Experiences of Islamophobia and Microaggressions). Upon reflection, these two codes seem to have an – EXPERIENCES OF MICROAGGRESSIONS theme that united them.

- Cluster 4 (Attitudes of Prejudice toward Muslims and Attitudes of Prejudice toward Islam). Upon reflection, these two codes seem to have an – EXPERIENCES OF OVERT PREJUDICE ON-CAMPUS AND RELIGIOUS HOSTILITY OFF-CAMPUS theme that united them.

- Cluster 5 (Political Tension Influences Fear and Political Tension Influences Feelings of Exclusion). Upon reflection, these two codes seem to have a – NATIONAL CLIMATE’S INFLUENCE
ON CAMPUS EXPERIENCES theme that united them.

- Cluster 6 (Perception of Support among Faculty and Staff and Perception of Individual Support). Upon reflection, these two codes seem to have a – PERCEPTION OF INSTITUTIONAL, FACULTY, AND INDIVIDUAL SUPPORT theme that united them.

- Cluster 7 (Perception of Changes Needed on Individual Campus and Perception of Changes on American Universities). Upon reflection, these two codes seem to have a - THE NEED TO FOSTER RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL INTEGRATION ON CAMPUS theme that united them.

- Cluster 8 (Campus Involvement and Diversity and Coping Techniques). Upon reflection, these two themes seem to have a – PERCEPTION OF THE MSA AS A STRONG SUPPORT SYSTEM theme that united them.

Overall, the significant statements (represented by the cluster of codes or meanings) and themes that united these codes, were used to write a description of what participants experienced and the context in which the experiences occurred. Additionally, the combination of the textural and structural descriptions were used to describe the essence of the phenomenon studied.

Definition of Actual Codes

1. Academic Challenges: I coded for students’ overall perception of their academic experience which includes their linguistic challenges and others’
perception of their racial identity.

a. **Linguistic challenges:** I coded for students’ linguistic struggles with taking notes while listening to lecture, their limited English vocabulary to express their ideas, and their challenges with oral presentation.

b. **Perception of racial identity:** I coded for the way in which undergraduate students regard their faculty and peers’ perceptions of their academic intelligence.

2. **The Influence of Religious/Cultural Indicators (such as the hijab and the thobe) on Students’ Experiences:** I coded for the ways in which students’ religious and cultural markers (the hijab and the thobe) influence students’ experiences.

a. **The hijab as a Visible Muslim Identity:** I coded for the visibility of the hijab as a Muslim marker on American campuses.

b. **Reasons for not wearing the Hijab and Experiences not wearing the Hijab:** I coded for the reasons some female students choose not to wear the hijab and their campus experiences not wearing the hijab.

c. **The hijab and the Thobe: Perception of Overt Discrimination and Perception of Resistance to Inclusionary:** I coded for the experiences of overt discrimination that those who wear the hijab encounter. I also coded for the experiences of resistance male Muslims perceive when they choose to express their Muslim
identities through their cultural marker.

3. **Experiences of Microaggressions**: I coded for experiences of racial jokes or subtle verbal attacks that students experience on campus.

4. **Experiences of Overt Prejudice On Campus and Religious Hostility Off Campus**: I coded for experiences of discrimination, prejudice, and hostility students experience on and off campus due to their racial/ethnic and religious identities.

5. **National Climate’s Influence on Campus Experiences**: I coded for the racial/ethnic, religious, and gender experiences students encounter on campus due to the tensed national political climate.

6. **Perception of Institutional, Faculty, and Individual support**: I coded for students’ experiences and perceptions of support from campus leaders, faculty, staff, and other members of the community.

7. **The Need to Foster Religious and Cultural Integration on Campus**: I coded for students’ advocacy for and recommendations on how to promote religious and cultural integration.

8. **Perception of the MSA as a Strong Support System**: I coded for students’ perceptions of the Muslim Student Association and the influence of the organization on their religious and social development.
Appendix F

IRB Approval

University of Colorado
Colorado Springs
Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Subjects

Date: 2/6/2017

IRB Protocol Number: 17-103
Protocol Title: Campus Experiences of Undergraduate Muslim International Students
Principal Investigator: Oluwafolakemi Ogunowo Dimandja
Faculty Advisor if Applicable: Dr. Andrea Bingham
Application: New Application
Type of Review: Expedited 6
Risk Level: No more than Minimal Risk
Renewal Review Level (If changed from original approval) if Applicable: N/A No Change
This Protocol involves a Vulnerable Population: N/A (No Vulnerable Population)
Expires: 5 February 2018

*Note, if exempt: If there are no major changes in the research, protocol does not require review on a continuing basis by the IRB. In addition, the protocol may match more than one review category not listed.

Externally funded: ☒ No ☐ Yes
OSP #: Sponsor:

Thank you for submitting your Request for IRB Review. The protocol identified above has been reviewed according to the policies of this institution and the provisions of applicable federal regulations. The review category is noted above along with the expiration date, if applicable.

Once human participant research has been approved, it is the Principal Investigator’s (PI) responsibility to report any changes in research activity related to the project:
- The PI must submit all protocol, recruitment, advertising, and consent form amendments/revisions to the IRB for approval.
  - The IRB must approve these changes prior to implementation.
  - If you are a student, please note that it is required to include the IRB approval letter to the library when you submit the dissertation/thesis.
- The PI must promptly inform the IRB of all unanticipated serious adverse (within 24 hours). All unanticipated adverse events must be reported to the IRB within 1 week (see 45CFR46.103(d)(5)). Failure to comply with these federally mandated responsibilities may result in suspension or termination of the project.
- Renew study with IRB at least 10 business days prior to expiration.
- Notify the IRB when the study is complete

If you have any questions, please contact Research Integrity Specialist in the Office of Sponsored Programs and Research Integrity at 719-255-3903 or irb@uccs.edu

Thank you for your concern about human subject protection issues, and good luck with your research.

Sincerely yours,

Melissa J. Benton
Melissa Benton, PhD
IRB Committee Member