

DISSERTATION

MUSLIM INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN THE U.S.:
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL INQUIRY INTO THE EXPERIENCE OF IDENTITIES

Submitted by

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ABSTRACT

MUSLIM INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN THE U.S.: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL INQUIRY INTO THE EXPERIENCE OF IDENTITIES

The number of Muslim international students in the U.S. has grown considerably in recent years, however these students face unique challenges related to their religious, racial/ethnic, and gender identities. By better understanding how Muslim international students experience their identities on U.S. campuses, university practitioners can better meet the unique needs of Muslim international students and assist them in succeeding and graduating. The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to better understand how Muslim international students experience their identities at four-year universities in the Midwestern U.S. using Kim's (2012) International Student Identity (ISI) model as a guiding framework. Specifically, the study explored how Muslim international students experience their religious, ethnic/racial, and gender identities prior to coming to the U.S. and as students in the Midwestern U.S. This phenomenological study included semi-structured interviews with ten students who attended four-year institutions in the Midwestern U.S.

Significant findings in this study emerged from six themes and included: (1) difficulties in practicing Islamic prayer in the Midwestern U.S., (2) Islam as a flexible religion, (3) racial construct as a new and troubling concept, (4) male/female interactions on campus and in the classroom, (5) perceptions of veiling in the Midwestern U.S., (6) stereotypes of Muslim international students based upon their national identity, (7) fear of practicing Islamic prayer due to stereotypes of Muslims, (8) coping with acts of discrimination, and (9) impact of Trump

administration rhetoric and policies. Emergent themes in this study were viewed through Kim's (2012) International Student Identity model.

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DEDICATION

To the Muslim international students who shared their lived experiences for this study

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Your love and support has made this journey a wonderful reality.

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DEFINITION OF TERMS

There are a number of terms and concepts associated with the Islamic religion, Muslim culture, and international students. The following include, but are not limited to, terms, individuals, and groups mentioned in my study that relate to Muslim international students.

International Student

An international student is an individual studying in the U.S. on a non-immigrant, temporary visa that allows for academic study at the post-secondary level. This includes both degree- and non-degree-seeking students. Immigrants, permanent residents, citizens, resident aliens, and refugees are excluded from this definition (IIE, 2017).

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 there is no deity except Allah and that Muhammad is His last prophet (Research Islam, n.d.).

Muslim

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

Muslim American Student

A Muslim American student is defined as an individual who practices Islam or identifies as Muslim, is studying at an institution in the U.S. and is a U.S. citizen, U.S. permanent resident or green card holder. They may have been born inside of the U.S. or outside of the U.S.

Muslim International Student

A Muslim international student is defined in this study as an individual who practices Islam or identifies as Muslim, is studying at an institution of higher education in the U.S. on a non-immigrant visa or a student visa, is not a citizen or permanent resident of the U.S., and is not legally permitted to remain in the U.S. indefinitely (IIE, n.d.).

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Recent globalization and internationalization has led to an increase in student mobility worldwide (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Nuqul, 2015) and the number of international students studying in the United States continues to grow. Comprising 5.5% of the U.S. higher education enrollment, a record high 1,094,792 international students were enrolled in the U.S. during the 2017-2018 academic year, compared to 623,805 ten years prior (IIE, 2018). Braskamp and Engberg (2011) argued the need for all students to develop a global perspective. Given our pluralistic and global society, we need “[t]o understand and empathize with persons who differ dramatically in terms of national origin, ethnicity, and religious or spiritual orientation as well as in terms of race, gender, and sexual orientation” (Braskamp & Engberg, 2011, p. 34). Integration of international students into U.S. campuses and classrooms has encouraged interaction with their U.S. peers, and increased the likelihood of cross-cultural exchange and understanding between the U.S. and other cultures (IIE, 2018).

The number of Muslim international students in the U.S., in particular, has grown considerably in recent years. In the 2013-14 academic year, 240,826 student visas were issued to students from 45 predominantly Muslim countries to study in the U.S. (IIE, 2015). In 2014-15 academic year, 284,420 student visas were issued to students from the same 45 predominantly Muslim countries to study in the U.S., representing an 18.1% increase over one year (IIE, 2015). International students from these predominantly Muslim countries contributed to the U.S. economy. In 2014-15 academic year, students from India, Indonesia, Iran, Kuwait, Malaysia, Nigeria, and Turkey studying at U.S. higher education institutions contributed more than \$4 billion to the U.S. economy (IIE, 2015).

Problem Statement

Many U.S. institutions of higher education have spent significant resources to attract international students to their campuses (Altbach & Knight, 2007). In addition to bringing diverse global perspectives to U.S. campuses, international students have made vital contributions to campus life and to dialogue within classrooms, diversifying our student bodies, and contributing to the economy at local, state, and national levels. When international students are not able to graduate due to challenges that impede their ability to succeed, it is a loss to both the student and the institution (Altbach & Knight, 2007).

The Trump administration's travel ban on individuals from six predominantly Muslim countries has called into question whether Muslim international students are truly welcome to study in the U.S. (Liptak, 2017). Liptak posited that the ban made it difficult for universities to (re)assure international students, especially those from predominantly Muslim nations, that they are welcome in the U.S. While international students from Muslim-majority countries, with the exception of Syria, are still able to apply for a student visa to study in the U.S., anti-Muslim rhetoric and policies coming from the Trump administration has created an unwelcoming environment for Muslim international students and a chilling effect on international student recruitment (Fischer, 2017; Saul, 2018). Fischer (2017) noted that despite this slowdown, the U.S. remains the top destination for international students, offering a quality of education and diversity of options unmatched by other countries. Saul (2018) argued the Trump administration is more closely reviewing visa applications and making it more difficult for international students to stay in the U.S. after graduation.

Enhancing the development of students has been a central concern of student affairs practitioners at U.S. campuses (Erikson, 1969; Torres, Jones & Renn, 2009). Understanding

how students discover their abilities, strengths, and goals, and thereby socially construct their identities, can aid practitioners in helping students maximize their potential (Torres, Jones & Renn, 2009). By better understanding how Muslim international students' experience their identities on U.S. campuses, university practitioners can better meet the unique needs of Muslim international students and assist them in succeeding and graduating.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to better understand how Muslim international students experience their identities at four-year universities in the Midwestern U.S. using Kim's (2012) International Student Identity (ISI) model as a guiding framework.

Research Questions

The following was the overarching research question guiding this study:
How do Muslim international students studying at four-year institutions in the Midwestern U.S. experience their identities? The overarching research question specifically examined the following two research questions:

1. Prior to studying in the Midwestern U.S., how did Muslim international students experience their religious, ethnic/racial, and gender identities?
2. How do Muslim international students experience their religious, ethnic/racial, and gender identities as students in the Midwestern U.S.?

Kim's (2012) International Student Identity Model

College student identity models historically have focused on single identities in U.S. American culture and do not recognize nor discuss the complexities and nuances of being an international student in the U.S. In response to this gap, Kim (2012) proposed an International

Student Identity model as an alternative theoretical view for inclusion in American social identity models. To date, Kim's model has been used in only one empirical study looking at international student identity. Kim's model directly related to my study of Muslim international students and how they experience their identities as students at Midwestern U.S. four-year institutions and was appropriate for use with my study.

Delimitations of the Study

The scope of this study was narrowed to participants who identify as Muslim and were studying on a non-immigrant F-1 or J-1 student visa at four-year universities in the Midwestern U.S. at either the undergraduate or graduate level. The participants had spent at least one year of their academic program in the U.S. and were able to conduct interviews in English.

Limitation of the Study

As a non-Muslim American raised in the Christian tradition, I had little knowledge about Islam and Muslim culture and at times found it difficult to establish appropriate prompting questions to get at the core of my research inquiry. I was mindful that my personal values and beliefs could influence the way I asked questions. As a result, I did my best not to use leading questions or biased statements that could influence the way participants responded. I continually reminded myself that the main purpose of this phenomenological study was to hear the voices of Muslim international students in order to better understand the essence of their lived experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As director of the international programs office on my campus, I hold significant power. Although I did my best to reassure students that participation in the study was completely voluntary and there would be no repercussions in relation to academic progress, immigration status, or future references/recommendations, some students may have chosen not to participate in the study or limited what they shared during the interviews as a result of this

power dynamic. Another limitation was the availability of female participants. The vast majority of Muslim international students enrolled at universities in my study were male. Additional targeted outreach was required to increase the number of female participants in the study from one to three.

There are also limitations inherent to qualitative research. Limitations of time and space made it impossible to investigate all aspects of participants' religious, ethnic/racial, and gender identities. Two of my participants were unable to participate in the second interview due to time constraints and commitments at the end of the semester. Due to this constraint, I was not able to gather as much in-depth information about the experiences of these two students as I was about the other eight students. Finally, as reflective interpretation changes recollection of original events, oral histories provided by participants altered the original experience and, therefore, the meaning of the original event (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2002).

Significance of the Study

Few studies have looked at Muslim international student identity experiences despite the increase in students from Muslim-majority countries in the U.S. in recent years (IIE, 2017). Additional research was needed to further examine how individual Muslim international students experience their identities while studying in the U.S. Through this study, I hoped to contribute to understanding how Muslim international students experience their religious, ethnic/racial, and gender identities and, in doing so, provide insights to higher education professionals to appropriately support to Muslim international students in their campus communities.

Researchers Perspective

As a white, heterosexual, able-bodied, European-American, cisgender, female from a middle class, Christian, suburban family, I have always had significant privilege. This privilege

included opportunities to become aware of the world around me through interactions with others from outside of the U.S. as well as time spent in more than 40 countries engaging in work, study, or personal travel. My personal experiences in higher education administration prompted the current study. I have witnessed the importance of better understanding the lived experiences of international students. As a higher education professional I have worked to provide a safe, welcoming environment where all international students can persist and succeed. I felt obligated to learn more about Muslim international students in order to better serve their needs, especially given the current socio-political landscape where Muslim travel bans and anti-Muslim rhetoric created a less than welcoming environment in the U.S. for these students.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review has been divided into a number of sections informing the research topic of Muslim international student identity experiences. The first section considers literature about psychosocial student identity development theories including early identity development theories, racial and ethnic identity theories, cross cultural adjustment theories, and identity models. The second section highlights studies of international students' shared and divergent experiences, including experiences of discrimination. The third section addresses how Muslim American students' identity experiences are both similar to and different from Muslim international students' identity experiences. The final section focuses on the Trump administration and anti-Muslim rhetoric in the U.S. This overall review will highlight the lack of research done on Muslim international student identities and how international students have been treated as a homogenized group. As there were limited studies in the U.S. on Muslim international students, the review drew upon other empirical work done outside the U.S. that provided insight for this topic.

Psychosocial Student Identity Development

A significant body of literature exists on U.S. college student identity development; however international student identity development has been largely ignored despite the growing presence of international students on U.S. campuses. Review of literature on identity development theories ranged from mid-20th century theorists such as Erikson (1959) and Chickering (1969), who focused research on psychological dimensions of identity development in predominantly white, male U.S. student populations, to social identity theories focusing on race and identity in U.S. student populations as the lens for psychological identity development

such as Phinney (1990), Cross (1991), Ferdman and Gallegos (2001), and Horse (2001). Identity theorists focusing on identity development of U.S. student populations provided a growing body of literature and theories applicable to specific U.S. student populations. Analysis of literature in this section is organized by early identity development theories (Chickering, 1969; Erikson, 1959), racial and ethnic identity theories (Cross, 1991; Ferdman & Gallegos, 2001; Horse, 2001; Phinney, 1990), and cross-cultural adjustment theories (Adler, 1975; Oberg, 1960).

Early Psychosocial Identity Development Theories

Psychosocial identity theories proposed that identity development results from various experiences encountered by individuals throughout their life (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton & Renn, 2010). Psychosocial development theorist Erikson (1959) proposed eight stages of psychosocial development beginning in infancy and extending through adulthood. Erikson, heavily influenced by Freud, assumed a psychosocial crisis occurs at each stage of development and that successful completion of each stage resulted in a healthy personality and basic virtues. Building off of Erikson's theory, Chickering (1969) described seven dimensions of development occurring during college years in an attempt to make connections between student change and educational policy. Chickering's theory of psychosocial development aided in understanding the basic themes of college student psychosocial development and how it influenced academic and non-academic factors.

Various critiques of psychosocial identity development have been made over the years. Erikson's initial theory has been criticized for being too general and complex (Rodgers, 1980) and biased against women (Gilligan, 1982; Josselson, 1996). Chickering has been used multiple times with mixed results. A study with 247 students at one institution resulted in partial support of Chickering's theory (Foubert, Nixon, Sisson, & Barnes, 2005). Studies by Martin (2000) and

White and Hood (1989) found some support of Chickering's proposed relationship between psychosocial development and college experiences. Finally, Mather and Winston's (1998) study supported Chickering's proposed developmental process.

Social identity theories have focused their research on specific U.S. populations of students and are, therefore, not applicable to international students studying in the U.S. because they fail to take into consideration the cultural differences and intersecting identities of these students. Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton and Renn (2010) suggested:

Rather than trying to fit Chickering's theory onto groups different from that on which it is based researchers need to independently determine what is important in the lives of people from different backgrounds, a goal best accomplished using phenomenological techniques. (p. 81)

Additional research is needed to look specifically at how Muslim international students in the U.S. experience their identities given their unique circumstances of crossing cultures and navigating intersecting identities within the context of U.S. higher education.

Racial and Ethnic Identity Theories

Kim (2012) argued racial and ethnic identity models apply to international students who may be coming from countries outside of the U.S. where race and ethnicity issues are less prominent and issues pertaining to race and ethnicity can surface after students arrive in the U.S. International students coming from African countries, for example, may not identify as a racial minority in their home country if they are Black and in the majority. When they arrive in the U.S., they may find that they are no longer in the majority, but in the minority and treated as a minoritized individual.

Racial identity development as a social identity model, gained increasing attention in literature during the latter part of the 20th century and early 21st century (Cross, 1991; Evans et

al., 2010; Ferdman & Gallegos, 2001; Forney, Guido, Patton & Renn, 2010; Helms, 1990; Horse, 2001; Kim, 2001; Rowe, Bennett & Atkinson, 1994). Phinney (1990) posited that ethnic identity was critical to the development of positive self-concept in U.S. minority youth. Cross's (1991) Black racial identity model provided a framework of how African Americans move from being identity unaware to incorporating identity in a multicultural context. Ferdman and Gallegos (2001) offered a model of Latino identity development for understanding Latinos racialized experience in the U.S. Kim (2001) introduced an Asian American identity development model to address how Asian Americans understand their racial identity. Horse (2001) developed a framework to understand American Indian racial identity through individual and group consciousness. Helms (1990) proposed a white racial identity development model showing movement toward a non-racist white identity. All of these models focused on single identities in American culture, however, and do not recognize the complexity of multiple, intersecting identities of individual students, nor do they discuss the nuances of being an international student in the U.S. as discussed by Kim (2012). In response to this gap, Kim proposed an International Student Identity model as an alternative theoretical view for inclusion in American social identity models. Kim's model is discussed in detail later in the literature review.

Cross-Cultural Adjustment Theories

As mentioned earlier, what sets international students apart from their U.S. student cohort is the cross-cultural adjustment that must occur when they begin their journey to the U.S. and continue after arriving in the U.S. Oberg (1960) coined the term "culture shock" and also developed early international transition adjustment models. Oberg's four-stage model of culture shock, often referred to as the U-curve, included the following stages: a) honeymoon, b) culture shock, c) adjustment, and d) adaptation. Adler (1975) expanded Oberg's model into a five-stage

model: a) honeymoon, b) distress, c) re-integration, d) autonomy, and e) independence, noting that individuals move back and forth between the stages. Brown and Holloway (2007), however, noted in their findings that the initial stage of international postgraduate students' sojourn was not marked by feelings of excitement as suggested by the U-curve, rather students were overwhelmed by negative symptoms of culture shock. Skinner (2010) found comments by participants in her study reflected the initial honeymoon stage followed by culture shock. Kim (2012) recognized this movement between stages and incorporated the cross-cultural adjustment that occurs with international students in the International Student Identity model.

International Student Identity Model

A psychosocial identity development model for international students was proposed by Kim (2012) as an alternative theoretical viewpoint. The study sample included 22 undergraduate international students from nine countries at one large, Midwestern public research university and, therefore, cannot be generalized to all international students. As a result of the data analysis process, Kim proposed a six-phase International Student Identity (ISI) model consisting of the following phases: a) pre-exposure, b) exposure, c) enclosure, d) emergence, e) integration, and f) internationalization. Table 1 describes each of the six phases of the model. Kim noted that students move through the stages at various rates and may be in more than one phase simultaneously.

Kim's (2012) study laid the foundation for additional research on international student identity development, a population historically ignored by student development theorists. Kim's model departed from existing student psychosocial development theories by proposing specific attributes of identity development experienced by international students in her study. Scholars such as Hoare (1991) argued that identity reflects the culture in which one is immersed and each

society has different cultures shaping the identity of its citizens. Karkouti (2014) posited that by understanding the phases international students move through, student affairs professionals could provide specific support to students for a smoother transition and increased retention and success.

Table 1

International Student Identity Model (Kim, 2012)

Phases of Development	Description
Pre-Exposure	In the initial phase, international students plan to study abroad with the intention of experiencing the U.S. educational system.
Exposure	International students at this stage arrive in the U.S. and discover their belief system diverges from the unfamiliar educational and cultural environment. During this phase, students begin developing an independent personality away from parental guidance.
Enclosure	In this phase, international students withdraw from the outside environment in an attempt to adjust their academic performance.
Emergence	During this phase, international students begin building social networks and engaging in extracurricular activities on- and off-campus.
Integration	At this phase, international students overcome major challenges, manage to restructure their identities, and resolve identity crises.
Internationalization	The final phase reflects an achieved identity where international students create their own belief system that acknowledges diversity and values individual differences in academic and cultural contexts.

Turner's (2018) research was the only study found in this review of literature using Kim's (2012) International Student Identity model. Turner conducted a qualitative study examining the identity development process of 13 international students at two private comprehensive U.S. institutions. Turner's study examined how students' identity development was or was not consistent with the Enclosure phase of Kim's model which is characterized by

“poor English speaking confidence, limited social networks with non-conationals, and minimal participation in out of class activities” (Turner, 2018, p. 31). Unlike participants in Kim’s study, Turner found participants in her study did not exhibit behaviors consistent with the Enclosure phase.

The Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity

Abes, Jones and McEwen (2007) conceptualized a model incorporating meaning-making capacity into Jones and McEwen’s (2000) model of multiple dimensions of identity (MMDI). Jones and McEwen’s model of multiple dimensions of identity conceptually depicted relationships among college students’ socially constructed identity dimensions. The model described the changing make up of identity and the impact of various contexts such as family background, sociocultural conditions, and current experiences on identities such as race, religion, sexual orientation, culture, and social class. Abes et al.’s conceptualized model differed from the original model in that it added a meaning-making filter through which contextual influences such as peers, family, norms, stereotypes, and sociopolitical conditions passed to varying degrees depending on the complexity of the contextual influences.

The model of multiple dimensions of identity (MMDI) may be relevant for international student populations because the MMDI was able to accommodate a large spectrum of individual responses for its use (Jones & Abes, 2013). The model allowed for a dynamic process where identities were shaped and reshaped given changing contexts and the influence of contexts on the student’s core and identity salience (Jones & Abes, 2013). As international students represented a wide spectrum of contexts and identities as well as changing contexts and identities given the cross-cultural nature of their study in the U.S., the MMDI seemed appropriate for their use. Abes, Jones, and McEwen’s (2007) theory was particularly pertinent for participants in Malcolm

and Mendoza's (2014) study of Afro-Caribbean international students in the U.S. as they explored the intersection of racial and ethnic dimensions of their self.

What is different for international students versus U.S. students, is the cultural adjustment and culture shock that may impact the salience of international student identities during their time in the U.S. Although U.S. students who may have grown up in ethnically, racially, and culturally segregated contexts and attend college in more ethnically, racially, and culturally diverse campus settings may also experience cultural adjustment and culture shock, the experience of international students is different in that they experience different stressors than U.S. students. These differences are explored in the next section on international student experiences.

International Students' Shared and Divergent Experiences

U.S. students coming to U.S. campuses have grown up in the U.S.-American culture for all or a portion of their lives. While U.S. students, especially those coming from ethnically, racially, and culturally segregated contexts to more diverse campuses, must adjust to college life, they do not have to go through the cross-cultural adjustment international students must make in addition to adjusting to being at college. International students must overcome various obstacles and stressors their U.S. counterparts may not encounter, such as applying for visas, extensive test preparation, learning English, and paying higher tuition than their U.S. counterparts.

Acculturative stress (Constantine, Okazaki, & Utsey, 2004) can lead to manifestation of physical, social and psychological problems. Higher education professionals at U.S. universities sometimes consider international students as a homogenous group with similar needs, yet as revealed in the following studies, students from various countries and regions experience unique stressors, worries, and aspirations. The analysis of literature in this section is organized by

international student adjustment studies, international student experiences and identities, and international student discrimination experiences.

International Student Adjustment

When looking at international student identities, understanding how these students experience adjustment to their campus environments and host country culture was important. Like U.S. students, international students' experience of transitioning to U.S. campus life can be both exciting and stressful (Skinner, 2010). Unlike their U.S. counterparts, international students must overcome additional hurdles given their unique status and as a result, tend to experience higher levels of stress and issues with adjustment than U.S. students (Constantine, Okazaki, & Utsey, 2004).

Studies of international students from African countries in the U.S. have focused on sociocultural adjustment struggles including feeling isolated from others, having difficulty making friends (Constantine, Anderson, Berkel, Caldwell, & Utsey, 2005; Manguvo, 2014), difficulties adjusting to food and language (Manguvo, 2014), and challenges with health, finances, and education (Mebuin, 2017). Research has demonstrated some students from Africa avoided professional help through campus support services; preferring instead to obtain peer support from other African students (Constantine et al., 2005; Manguvo, 2014; Mebuin, 2017). Mebuin (2017) also reported that students adopted numerous coping mechanisms or adjustment strategies through church, school and family to help them mitigate the challenges. Literature pertaining to international students from East Asian countries also found students had a less favorable attitude toward seeking professional counseling compared to international students from South Asian and Southeast Asian countries (Santiago, 2006). The Mebuin and Santiago studies highlighted how some support services, such as counseling, found on most U.S.

campuses may not meet the needs of some international students from African and East Asian countries.

International Student Experiences and Identities

Studies conducted in the U.K. and Australia started the conversation about international students' experiences and identities (Brown, 2009; Brown & Brown, 2009; Brown, Brown & Richard, 2015; Kashima & Pillai, 2010; Kenway & Bullen, 2003; Kettle, 2005; Koehne, 2005). Although Kashima and Pillai's (2010) study was conducted at Australian universities, it was significant as one of the only studies that looked at factors contributing to international student identity development. Kashima and Pillai examined the function of friendships and need for cognitive closure (NCC) in international student identity development. The need for cognitive closure is the need to eliminate ambiguity and find definite conclusions. In Kashima and Pillai's study, Asian international students studying at Australian universities completed four measures: NCC, friendship ties, perceived cohesiveness, and identification with international students. Kashima and Pillai found that students with high NCC identified more strongly with international students and that this held true three months later. Kashima and Pillai's study pointed to distinct factors by which international students may develop social identities while studying abroad depending upon their level of NCC. Evidence from the Kashima and Pillai study suggested that students in their study with higher NCC related more strongly with co-national students and perceived cohesiveness among their international student group. Evidence also suggested nonnative speakers of the local language and students from lower uncertainty avoidance cultures tended to be higher in NCC. The research was significant in that it demonstrated how differences in NCC impacted identity development of international students.

Quantitative studies have looked at the connection between international students' identity and a number of factors. Based mainly on the social identity/self-categorization stress model (Haslam, O'Brien, Jetten, Vormedal, & Penna, 2005), a study by Cho and Yu (2014) examined how international students' well-being was impacted by support from the university. Cho and Yu noted university identification (identifying with one's university) had positive effects on university support and campus life satisfaction was meaningful in helping to understand the connection between international students' identity and well-being. The study provided evidence to support claims that it is necessary to develop programs that assist international students in actively engaging with other students and instructors in order to increase each student's university identity.

Poyrazli (2003) conducted a study of international students at four universities in the U.S. analyzing whether psychosocial adjustment was predicted by their search for ethnic identity and English language proficiency. Poyrazli found that students with higher English proficiency who comprehended the purpose of their ethnic identity and endeavored to understand more about their background reported better psychosocial adjustment. A study by Zimmerman (2008) examined whether time at a higher education institution in the U.S. influenced international students' national cultural identity. Data from students representing 13 countries were categorized into five groups: U.S., East Asia, West Europe, South Asia, and Japan. Zimmerman found the national cultural identity of international students pursuing degrees in the U.S. were unlikely to change. Instead, most students possessed a stronger sense of national cultural identity when they returned to their home countries. It is unclear whether the models used in these studies, such as the social identity/self-categorization stress model used in Cho and Yu's (2014) study, are appropriate for use with international students. Cultural variation among international

students can impact the relationships among variables in the study. In the Cho and Yu study, for example, students from Asian countries may interact less with professors than students from European countries due to the significance of power distance in collectivist cultures. Future studies need to be mindful of these cultural differences and how they may impact models being used.

Hardy's (2011) study explored ways in which international students from multiple countries understand and express their national and gendered identities in the U.S. Research data informed how decisions on identity, nationality and gender were influenced by social circles. Through Hardy's study, four types of experiences emerged: a) how students formed a significant sense of national identity while living in the U.S., b) difficulties integrating into life in the U.S. while maintaining ties with individuals in their national social networks, c) how students successfully integrated into social networks in the U.S., but were conflicted about how that related to their national identities, and d) how students created ties with multiple social networks, became more aware of national belonging, and spoke of generating an international identity. Although these studies helped inform this research, a gap remained in understanding how Muslim international students' experiences informed their identities.

International Student Discrimination Experiences

International students encountered many difficulties during their transition to the U.S. These difficulties included perceptions of unfairness and inhospitality as well as cultural intolerance and confrontation (Lee, 2010; Lee & Rice, 2007). While some of these difficulties were problematized in research studies as adjustment issues, some more critical problems stemmed from inadequacies within the host country. Few of these studies examined experiences of discrimination by international students and the resulting impact on their identities.

A study by Malcolm and Mendoza (2014) examined how ethnic identity development is shaped by ethnically homogeneous institutional discourse in 14 undergraduate Afro-Caribbean international students at a public U.S. research university. Malcolm and Mendoza noted that students' experiences were marginalized and their identity shaped by perceived homogenous and overgeneralized institutional context. Similarly, Manguvo (2014) conducted a mixed methods study to explore the perceptions, feelings, and experiences of 135 African students at six universities in the U.S. as well as the relationship between perceived acceptance, ethnic identity, and sociocultural adjustment of African students. Manguvo's study found that African students negotiated two main identities, the African identity and the Black racial identity. Students in the study reported being viewed as "Africans" and not identified by their national or tribal identities. Most participants internalized this new identity and started seeing themselves as Africans. According to Manguvo, this new identity assisted the students by: a) enabling some to view issues affecting the African continent from different perspectives; and b) shielding them from negative stereotypes related to their Black identity typically found in the U.S. Manguvo argued the students' "Ambassadorial role" was seen in four ways: a) outspoken critics – critical of post-colonial African governance, b) avoidant critics - disengaged from the discussions focusing on African affairs, c) dignifiers - presenting a positive image of Africa, and d) objective engagers - representing Africa with realism and optimism. The Manguvo study revealed very little solidarity between African students and native-born Blacks in the U.S. Students noted the prevalence of racial issues in the American society, but believed that racial issues were often exaggerated. Manguvo's study reinforced the complexities of racial identity developed in African international students. Based on Manguvo's study, it appeared the participants did not share the same experience as African American students in the U.S.

A quantitative study by Leong and Ward (2000) using Baumeister's (1986) model of identity conflict explored prediction of identity conflict in 106 Chinese undergraduate and graduate students in Singapore. According to Baumeister, identity conflict occurred when an individual was faced with too many commitments, each requiring different ways of behaving, and the individual felt they must betray one or more commitment in order to resolve the crisis. An administered survey was completed by participants and measured "tolerance of ambiguity, attributional complexity, host and co-national identification, quality and quantity of host and co-national contact, perceived discrimination, cultural distance, length of residence abroad and identity conflict" (Leong & Ward, 2000, p. 763). The study found that greater tolerance of ambiguity, attributional complexity, and co-national identification correlated to less identity conflict. The results also showed more perceived discrimination and interaction with host nationals correlated with higher identity conflict.

Wong, Pei-Chun, Tao, Qingqing, and Meifen (2014) conducted a quantitative study with 160 male Asian international students from two large universities in the Midwestern U.S. Students were from countries such as China, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, South Korea, and Thailand. Using a moderated mediation model, Wong et al. (2014) examined student views of a) racial discrimination, b) subjective masculinity stress, c) centrality of masculine identity, and d) psychological distress. According to Wong et al. (2013), subjective masculinity stress was men's evaluation of stress related to their lived experiences of being male. Masculinity stress study results showed a positive relationship between how participants' perceived racial discrimination and subjective masculinity stress for students with strong masculine identities. In addition, the study showed psychological distress was positively related to subjective masculinity stress. Wong et al. (2014) posited that although the study focused on male Asian international

students, the premise that under some conditions, racial and masculinity-related stressors may be linked could apply to other men of color as well.

Studies conducted with Muslim international students as well as Muslim American students found experiences of discrimination showing evidence of stress and resilience by participants (Seggie & Sanford, 2010; Shammas, 2015; Tummala-Narra and Claudius, 2013). Discussing research on Muslim American and Arab American student identities was relevant to my study as they helped to inform the topic of Muslim international students through a shared religious identity and shared experiences of religious discrimination. Shammas (2015) conducted a study of 753 Arab American, Muslim American, non-Arab American, and non-Muslim American students from 15 community colleges in California and Michigan. Shammas' study found that Arab American and Muslim American students were twice or more likely to perceive ethnic or religious discrimination than non-Arab and non-Muslim students. Shammas also found that a sense of belonging on campus was lessened by perceived discrimination for all students in the study. The findings suggested that students are more likely to form friendships with others sharing their ethnicity and to integrate with the larger university community when they have a strong ethnic identification. Shammas noted that for Arab and Muslim Americans, religious identity was frequently embedded within ethnic identity making it difficult to measure. Shammas also noted the value of same-ethnic friendships for students in her study as a means of self-preservation. The study demonstrated that Arab and Muslim students are not a homogeneous group. Not all Muslims are Arabs, and not all Arabs are Muslims. Shammas observed that among Muslim American and Arab American students "ethnic and religious homophily [the tendency of individuals to associate with similar others] need not be viewed in

deficit terms, but rather as a positive means of forging a sense of connectedness to the campus and the institution” (p. 83).

A qualitative study by Fries-Britt, George Mwangi and Peralta (2014) examined how 15 foreign-born students of color view and react to racialized experiences and their status as racial minorities in the U.S. The study, conducted over a 5-year period, focused on undergraduate and graduate physics students who identified racially minoritized and were born and raised outside of the U.S. The students were from African and Caribbean countries, many of which had black majority populations. This study is different than my research topic, but relevant to international Muslim students many of whom were students of color from countries with black and brown majority populations. The study found that typical race and racial identity development frameworks do not completely capture the behaviors and perceptions of foreign-born students of color. Fries-Britt et al. (2014) offered a framework on Learning Race in a U.S. Context (LRUSC) from emerging patterns in the data.

Lee and Rice (2014) conducted a study of 24 international students at a large public research university in the Southwestern U.S. Lee and Rice’s study considered multiple difficulties encountered by international students including those ranging from views of unfairness and unwelcoming campus climates to cultural intolerance and confrontation. The study found that not all issues faced by international students pertain to matters of adjustment, but rather relate to inadequacies within the host society. For example, the study found students from Western and English-speaking countries experienced little to no discrimination compared to students from other regions. Lee and Rice offered neo-racism as a theoretical lens through which to view international student experiences. The neo-racism framework:

helps to identify direct and indirect undermining of international students’ capacity to become fully participating members of their host community, disadvantaging institutional

policies, hostility towards cultural attributes (e.g. language barriers and foreign accents), and the negative stereotyping of whole nations or cultures, all of which hinder intercultural diplomacy and friendship and obstruct intellectual growth. (Lee & Rice, 2014, p. 403)

Lee and Rice noted that socio-economic status may also play a role in perceived discrimination as many, though not all, international students in the U.S. come from high socio-economic backgrounds. As such, international students may be particularly “sensitive to prejudices that place them beneath the dominant culture in the U.S. in economic and social terms” (Lee & Rice, 2014, p. 391) and, therefore, some claims of discrimination may be perceptions versus actual.

Schmitt, Spears and Branscombe (2003) investigated how 98 international students’ from 32 different countries perceived rejection from the host community related to increased identification with other international students at a U.S. university. Schmitt et al. (2003) found international students identified more with other international students when perceiving prejudice from the host community and found increased identity with other international students’ lessened negative perceptions of exclusion by the host community.

A study by Wadsworth, Hecht and Jung (2008) involving 218 international students used Communication Theory of Identity framework to examine international students’ educational satisfaction. Results showed education satisfaction was significantly related to acculturation and perceived discrimination. Data also showed the perceived personal enacted identity gap was also related to education satisfaction. Jung, Hecht and Wadsworth (2007) also conducted a study using the same data from 218 international students that examined contributing factors to international students’ depression levels, looking specifically at the gaps between aspects of identity. Results showed the perceived discrimination and acculturation level significantly predicted identity gaps. Levels of depression as well as acculturation effects and perceived discrimination were also significantly predicted by the personal-enacted identity gap.

A study by Bagley and Copeland (1994) compared 34 African and 48 African-American graduate students using the Racial Identity Attitude Scale (RIAS). Results showed significant differences on the preencounter and internalization scales of the RIAS. Additionally, African students experienced an acculturation effect as time in the U.S. extended past three years.

Muslim Students' Identity Experiences

Literature suggested Muslim students in the U.S. have been researched as a homogenized group of students, without specifically looking at Muslim international students and their experiences. Although this study looked specifically at Muslim international students, it was useful to include a review of studies pertaining to Muslim American students' identity experiences to compare and contrast with Muslim international students' identity experiences in the U.S. It was useful because the ethnic/racial dynamics in the U.S. mean that Muslim international students, despite their immigration status, would likely share some similar experiences with Muslim American students.

At the same time, the immigration status of Muslim international students set them apart from Muslim American students. In this study, Muslim international students were students who identified as Muslim and were studying on non-immigrant student visas (F-1 or J-1) in the U.S. Muslim American students were defined in this study as students who identified as Muslim and were U.S. citizens, residents, or green card holders studying in the U.S. The next section will look at studies of Muslim American students' identity experiences, Muslim international students' identity experiences, and female Muslim international students' gender identity experiences.

Muslim American Students' Identity Experiences

In an effort to gain an understanding of how late adolescent Muslim women negotiated cultural interactions and made meaning of their identities, Cerbo (2010) conducted a study of how 14 female Muslim American students at a public Southeastern university constructed identity within oppressed social statuses. Findings from the Cerbo study suggested that: a) identity exploration and commitment were essential to the formation of individual beliefs and goals; b) female Muslim identity cannot be described by one identity only; and c) female Muslim students used a religious lens to make meaning of their interactions with others, of self, and of group membership.

Neider (2011) conducted a study exploring the experiences of 12 students and 2 staff members of Middle Eastern heritages from a U.S. research university within the current socio-political context in the U.S. Three themes emerged from Neider's data: a) students had to renegotiate previously held beliefs about America and Americans to navigate within the U.S. higher education system, b) these new understandings of America and Americans impacted the construction of their own identity as well as the identities of others, and c) claiming or reclaiming spaces as their own.

Dey (2012) conducted a study to develop a theoretical model to describe how Muslim American college students constructed their identity using 14 undergraduate Muslim American students at a four-year university in the U.S. Four important identity dimensions emerged: a) religion, b) citizenship, c) culture, and d) gender. Contextual factors found to influence these dimensions were: a) family, b) 9/11 backlash, c) Muslim-on-Muslim prejudice, d) peer support via Muslim Student Associations, and e) university support. Dey proposed a new theoretical model to describe five stages of identity formation for Muslim American college students: a) reluctance, b) identification, c) immersion, d) negotiation, and e) integration.

A study by Ali (2014) explored racialized portrayals of 24 Muslim American undergraduate students from four higher educational institutions in Southern California. Ali found great diversity in how the participants defined themselves as Muslims and what being Muslim meant to them. Ali focused on three emerging themes the participants noted as central to the identity construction of Muslims in public interactions: a) Muslims as a pre-modern figure, b) Muslims as an expressed physical threat, and c) gendered treatment of Muslim identities. Participants reported feeling that their peers viewed them through these images as well. Ali noted the need for additional studies exploring how Muslim youth make meaning of their identity.

The studies of Muslim American students' identity experiences in this review of literature connect in a variety of ways and help to inform Muslim international student identity experiences. Gender identity of Muslim American students was discussed as complex and often influenced by others (Ali, 2014; Cerbo, 2010). Participants found great diversity in how they defined themselves as Muslim (Ali, 2014) and how they constructed their identities through a religious lens (Cerbo, 2010). Finally, the intentional process of exploring identity, (re)negotiating beliefs, and considering factors contributing to identity experiences were also cited as common experiences (Cerbo, 2010; Dey, 2012; Neider, 2011).

Muslim International Students' Identity Experiences

While research on Muslim American students examined identity experiences that may share similarities with Muslim international students, Muslim international student identity experiences are unique and different from their Muslim American peers (Tummala-Narra & Claudius, 2013). Few studies were found that examine how Muslim international students

experience their identities in the U.S., however more seem to be emerging in recent years (Dimandja, 2017; Erickson, 2014; Tummala-Narra & Claudius, 2013).

A study by Erickson (2014) focused on the experiences of twelve international Muslim or former Muslim students at two Midwestern U.S. universities. Erickson found students experienced a shift in their Muslim or cultural identities when they went through the process of independence, exposure, questioning, and discernment. As a result of going through this process, most participants in the study grew stronger in their Muslim identity and experienced a weakened cultural identity.

Schatz (2008) explored ways a U.S. university's organizational communication shaped the experience and expression of identity among 17 Muslim international students studying at a Western U.S. university following the attacks on September 11, 2001, as well as ten employees at the institution supporting these students. Schatz found increased security and surveillance measures on campus post-9/11, and emergence of anti-Muslim feelings among select student and staff groups as well as external constituents. Schatz' postcolonial and poststructural look at the identity data indicated a concept of "U.S. and/vs. Them."

A study by Tummala-Narra and Claudius (2013) focused on the experiences of 15 Muslim international graduate students in the Northeastern U.S. with a goal of increasing current knowledge about: a) cultural and religious identity development, b) adjustment to living in the U.S., and c) availability of social support in the current sociopolitical climate in order to find culturally appropriate ways of assisting this population of students. International graduate students differ from international undergraduate students in that they are likely to have spent more time in their countries of origin and come to the U.S. with family members, such as spouses and children (Tummala-Narra & Claudius, 2013). Five major categories emerged from

the study: “diverse views of the new cultural environment, social isolation, experiences of discrimination, religious identity, and protective factors in adjusting to living in the U.S.”

(Tummala-Narra & Claudius, 2013, p. 138).

Using the concept of Islamophobia and the Campus Climate Framework, Dimandja (2017) studied the lived experiences of eight undergraduate Muslim international students on three Mountain West U.S. campuses. Dimandja’s study explored the racial/ethnic, religious, and gender experiences of these students and the impact of those experiences on their social and academic integration. Emerging themes included: a) classroom challenges related to linguistic abilities and other’s perceptions of their academic performance based on their racial identity; b) expression of their Muslim identity through the hijab and thobe resulting in exclusion and feelings of resistance; c) experiences of microaggressions, overt prejudice on campus, and hostility off campus due to their racial and religious identity; d) national political climate causing feelings of intimidation, marginalization, fear, and discrimination; and e) the need for religious and cultural integration.

Several shared themes emerged from the studies by Schatz (2008), Tummala-Narra and Claudius (2013), and Dimandja (2017) on Muslim international students’ identity experiences. Participants in all three studies expressed feeling like a minority on their campus and being viewed as Other. Various forms of discrimination by gender, ethnicity, and religion were reported by participants (Dimandja, 2017; Schatz, 2008; Tummala-Narra & Claudius, 2013). In particular, some women who wore the hijab reported negative responses (Dimandja, 2017; Tummala-Narra & Claudius, 2013) and some men reported being perceived as terrorists (Nasir & Al-Amin, 2006; Schatz, 2008; Tummala-Narra & Claudius, 2013). Participants reported less discrimination related to Islamic beliefs and more related to being a visible minority (e.g. veiling,

skin color, accent) (Dimandja, 2017; Tummala-Narra & Claudius, 2013). Identity gaps (inconsistencies between self-perceptions and others' perceptions of participants) were reported by some participants (Dimandja, 2017; Schatz, 2008; Tummala-Narra & Claudius, 2013). For example, some participants reported they wore the hijab to be perceived as a committed Muslim woman, but were instead perceived as being forced to wear the hijab by men or their families (Dimandja, 2017). Finally, some participants reported dynamic shifts in their identities as Muslim international students and a feeling of becoming versus being due to ongoing negotiation of their identities (Schatz, 2008; Tummala-Narra, 2013).

Female Muslim International Students' Gender Identity Experiences

In the Western world the view of Muslim women is often as being oppressed (Andrea, 2009; Gregory, 2014; Ozyurt, 2013). This assumption leads some to see study abroad in a Western culture as an opportunity for Muslim women to escape this imagined oppression and experience freedom. Recent studies show female Muslim international student experiences are more nuanced and complex than this dualistic thinking suggests.

Gregory (2014) interviewed eleven female Muslim international students at two Southeastern U.S. universities. Two participants in the study chose to wear Western clothing, did not cover, and socialized regularly with U.S. peers. Gregory found their experiences suggested "their ease of adaptation is facilitated by racial passing strategies" (p. 89). Gregory's study also found participants engaged in religious strategies (e.g. wearing the hijab, praying) as a way of educating non-Muslims about Islam. Study participants engaged with clubs and organizations to counter negative stereotypes of Muslims. Key findings from Gregory's study included: (1) Muslim women "actively synthesize traditional gender norms from their countries with new identity formations" (p. 108), (2) Some Muslim women police others to ensure

compliance with traditional gender expectations, (3) Some Muslim women “learn and apply American racial schemas within a context of constructing the U.S. as a racial and religious paradise” (p. 108), (4) Some Muslim women feel obligated to counter stereotypes about Muslims, (5) Some Muslim women maintain connections with home through daily prayer and wearing the hijab, (6) Some Muslim women engage in emotional work to make their circumstances more manageable, and (7) Some Muslim women embraced new identity formation in the U.S. (e.g. constructed future plans on professional and educational goals, engaged in activities prohibited in their home countries).

Lefdahl-Davis and Perron-McGovern (2015) conducted a grounded theory study to investigate the cultural adjustment experiences of Saudi women international students in the U.S. Twenty-five Saudi female international students studying at universities across the U.S. participated in the study. Seven themes emerged from Lefdahl-Davis and Perron-McGovern’s study: (1) expectations versus reality about the United States – expected U.S. to be more dangerous and unwelcoming than it turned out to be in reality, (2) acculturative stress, (3) cultural differences between Saudi Arabia and the United States, (4) experiences of discrimination and/or curiosity – want to dispel myths that they are oppressed, forced to cover, and unequal to men, (5) English language issues – English proficiency key factor for adjustment, (6) relationships and help-seeking behavior – stigmatized in Saudi culture, and (7) the experience of being a Saudi woman in the U.S. Similar to the Gregory (2014) study, some participants in the Lefdahl-Davis and Perron-McGovern (2015) study liked being an ambassador for their home country and Muslim religion and help educate others about Islam.

Alruwaili (2017) conducted a study of 14 Saudi female international students in the U.S. about their personal identities in Saudi Arabia and the U.S., their social media use in Saudi

Arabia and the U.S., their experiences with online communities, and experiences with educational social media. Participants in Alruwaili's study experienced their most salient identities as Saudi, female, Muslim and student. Similar to the Lefdahl-Davis and Perron-McGovern (2015) study, some participants in the Alruwaili (2017) study reported becoming more independent after living in the U.S.

Female Muslim international students in Dimandja's (2017) study who wore the hijab reported being subject to overt discrimination, excluded from campus social life, and having a greater fear of being verbally or physically attacked. Other research on female Muslim international students indicated that wearing the hijab subjected students to experiences of discrimination, isolation, and othering (Ali, 2014; Lefdahl-Davis & Perron-McGovern, 2015; Tummala-Narra & Claudius, 2013).

Trump Administration Anti-Muslim Rhetoric

Beutel (2018) argued that words have impact and "[h]eated political rhetoric, especially derogatory language toward groups of people, can create all kinds of unintended consequences, including sometimes physical violence" (para. 1). Commentators and activists have asserted that Trump's rhetoric has emboldened others to commit hate crimes in the U.S. against minorities, including Muslims (Beutel, 2018). Recent studies in this review of literature address Trump's use of anti-Muslim rhetoric and its potential impact on Muslims.

In 2015, presidential candidate Trump called for a ban on Muslims coming to the U.S., proposed the creation of a registry for Muslims in the U.S., and recommended the surveillance of mosques (Potok, 2017). Potok (2017) noted FBI reports showing anti-Muslim hate crimes increased by 67% in 2015, the highest number reported since 2001. Potok tied the increase to anti-Muslim rhetoric from Trump in the lead up to the 2016 presidential campaign as well as

Islamic State atrocities. In the days immediately following the election between November 23 and December 2, 2016, multiple letters describing Muslims as “Children of Satan” and “vile and filthy people” were received by 15 mosques and Islamic centers throughout the U.S. (Potok, 2017). During the same period, 57 occurrences of posters with extremist messages against Muslims appeared on 34 U.S. campuses by emboldened white nationalists (Potok, 2017).

A study by Müller and Schwarz (2018) found Trump’s Tweets on topics of Islam were highly correlated with hate crimes targeting Muslims after the start of his presidential campaign in U.S. counties with high Twitter usage. Müller and Schwarz noted that hate crimes against Muslims were not higher in these same counties during previous presidencies, suggesting it was unlikely that people in some areas of the U.S. dislike Muslims more than in others.

Summary

This chapter sought to review literature related to or addressing the identity experiences of Muslim international students in the U.S. The purpose of this study was to build upon current literature in order to better understand how Muslim international students’ experience their identities on U.S. campuses so university practitioners will be better able to meet their unique needs and assist them in succeeding and graduating. Although studies on Muslim international student identity experiences provided some understanding of their lived experiences in the U.S., research found in this review of literature failed to address how students experience their identities prior to arriving in the U.S. as well as while studying at universities in the U.S. None of the studies of Muslim international students found in the review of literature used Kim’s (2012) International Student Identity model as part of the data analysis process. Incorporating this framework into a study of Muslim international students’ identity experiences acknowledged

that establishing identities is a fluid, dynamic, and ongoing process occurring in different contexts (Jones & McEwen, 2000).

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I provide a description of the methods I used in my dissertation research of how Muslim international students studying at four-year institutions in the Midwestern U.S. experienced their identities. The following sections include a description of analyses, reflections, and rationales related to the epistemological framing, research design, data collection, and data analysis strategies used in my study.

Research Questions

The study explored the overarching research question: How do Muslim international students studying at four-year institutions in the Midwestern U.S. experience their identities?

The overarching research question included the following two research questions:

1. Prior to studying in the Midwestern U.S., how did Muslim international students experience their religious, ethnic/racial, and gender identities?
2. How do Muslim international students experience their religious, ethnic/racial, and gender identities as students in the Midwestern U.S.?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to better understand how Muslim international students experience their identities at four-year universities in the Midwestern U.S. using Kim's (2012) International Student Identity (ISI) model as a guiding framework. Because I sought to better understand how Muslim international students experience their identities, I designed this study grounded in a philosophical lens of social constructivism. As Crotty (1998) explained, social constructivism as "the view that all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out

of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context” (p. 42).

Methodology

The underlying philosophical approach to my qualitative study was social constructivism. Social constructivist research by definition relies upon the researcher and the researched joining together in exploration of an evolving, shared reality. A social constructivist approach was suitable for my study as I sought to better understand how Muslim international students experience their identities at four-year institutions in the Midwestern U.S. Attempts to understand the world around me place an emphasis on individual experience while seeking, validating, and reconstructing those aspects of experience which are shared (Lincoln & Guba, 2000).

Found within the qualitative approach to research is the phenomenological method of inquiry that focuses on identifying and describing the subjective experiences of participants (Schwandt, 2015; Wertz, 2011). Phenomenological research seeks to describe “the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 75). My research sought to understand the ways that individual Muslim international students experience their identities. Phenomenological research best suited my area of interest because I wanted to know how individual factors - namely religion, race/ethnicity, and gender - contributed to a student’s way of experiencing their identities as Muslim international students studying in the Midwestern U.S.

A number of approaches to analyzing the data for this phenomenological study were explored (Finlay, 2009) including Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009), hermeneutic or interpretive phenomenology (van Manen, 2014), and

transcendental or descriptive phenomenology (Giorgi, 2009; Moustakas, 1994). This study used transcendental phenomenology which focuses on a description of participants' experiences through epoche, or bracketing (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). Practicing epoche required me to set aside biases and prejudgments and see the phenomenon in question with new and receptive eyes (Moustakas, 1994).

Research Site

The primary university for my study was a predominantly white, regional, rural, public university located in the Midwestern U.S. where I serve as director of international programs. The campus enrollment is approximately 8,000 and nearly 65% of the students are male. International students account for less than 2% of the student body. International students from predominantly Muslim countries such as Saudi Arabia and Kuwait account for approximately 40% of the degree-seeking international student population, but are not the only countries represented by Muslim international students at the institution. For this study, participants were recruited from the primary university as well as three additional campuses to allow for varied experiences. All participants experienced the phenomenon of identifying as a Muslim international student studying at a Midwestern U.S. campus on a non-immigrant student visa for a minimum of one year (Creswell & Poth, 2018). All participants were able to conduct the interviews in English.

In addition to recruiting students at the primary university site, I also reached out to the international offices at other nearby campuses to see if they would be willing to send an email (see Appendix A) to their international students inviting their participation in the study and providing them my contact information. These participants were from three additional campuses. The campuses were a small, private, liberal arts college in a suburban setting; a small,

private, professional university in an urban setting; and a large, public, research university in an urban setting. Upon receiving names and contact information for possible participants, I contacted them via email to provide more details about the study and data collection methods, and asked them to take part in my research.

Sampling

Using the descriptive/constructivist paradigm, purposive sampling was used as participants were selected based upon their relevance to my research question (Schwandt, 2015). Students were recruited using snowball sampling, “an approach for locating information-rich key informants or critical cases” (Patton, 2002, p. 237) where initial participants are asked to help identify additional participants. Polkinghorne (1989) recommended interviewing 5 to 25 participants who have experienced the phenomenon in question in order to reach saturation and redundancy. I interviewed 10 participants for my study (see Table 2). The students identified as Muslim and had studied in the U.S. on a non-immigrant student visa (e.g. F-1 or J-1) for a minimum of one year at the undergraduate or graduate level. Nine participants were undergraduate students and one was a graduate student. Students in advanced intensive English language programs with a reasonable command of the English language were also eligible to participate. Participants were required to be at least 18 years of age and currently enrolled or registered at a four-year university in the Midwestern U.S. to participate. One participant in the study was traditionally aged (18-23 years old) and nine participants in the study were non-traditionally aged students (24+ years old).

Table 2

Sampling of Participants

Pseudonym	Religious Identity	Gender	Country of Citizenship	Year(s) in U.S.	UG/GR/ESL	Campus
Bob	Sunni Muslim	M	Bangladesh	9	UG	Midwest State Univ.
Faisal	Sunni Muslim	M	Saudi Arabia & Kuwait	3	UG	Univ. of the Midwest
Hannah	Shia Muslim	F	Kuwait	2	UG	Midwest State Univ.
Michael	Sunni Muslim	M	Saudi Arabia	4	UG	Midwest State Univ.
Michelle	Shia Muslim (Non-practicing)	F	Iran	7	GR	Midwest Univ.
Nicholas	Sunni Muslim	M	Saudi Arabia	6	UG	Univ. of the Midwest
Oscar	Sunni Muslim	M	Saudi Arabia	8	UG	Univ. of the Midwest
Rachel	Sunni Muslim	F	Saudi Arabia	3.5	ESL	Midwest State Univ.
Sam	Muslim (Preferred not to identify sect)	M	Saudi Arabia	5	UG	Midwest State Univ.
Tyler	Sunni Muslim	M	Saudi Arabia	6	UG	Midwest College

Data Collection

In order to understand the phenomenon of how Muslim international students experience their identities at four-year institutions in the Midwestern U.S., I conducted individual interviews in an effort to best understand the personal experiences of each participant. For this study, I used semi-structured interviews following established interview protocol (see Appendix D).

Schwandt (2015) noted that in-depth, semi- or unstructured interviews strive to elicit stories of experience. The interviews were guided by my overarching research question: How do Muslim international students studying at four-year institutions in the Midwestern U.S. experience their identities? Participants were asked to commit to two 90-minute interviews in which they answered interview questions pertaining to how they experienced their identity with a specific focus on religious, ethnic/racial, and gender identities.

The initial interview focused on setting the tone and establishing rapport with the participant to build trust. Questions in the initial interview were constructed to reflect key points

of the study: (1) how the participant experienced their religious, ethnic/racial, and gender identities prior to studying in the Midwestern U.S. and (2) how the participant experienced their religious, ethnic/racial, and gender identities now as a student in the Midwestern U.S. Questions in the second interview were based on additional questions looking more deeply at key points of the study, but also grew out from responses provided in the initial interview I wished to examine more deeply with the participant. The guiding questions for the interviews are located in Appendix D.

Each participant was given a consent form providing an overview of the study and informing them of their rights as participants in the study. Personal information including demographic questions, personal and educational background was collected in order to gain an understanding of the student's identities. Participants were asked to assign themselves a pseudonym and identifiable information was kept confidential (see Appendices B and C). During the interviews, participants were encouraged to elaborate on their comments and to clarify responses. Summarizing and probing techniques were also used. The interviews took place in a private, mutually agreed upon location. Interviews were audio-recorded using two audio-recording devices to assure no data was lost. After conducting each interview, I transcribed it into written form. A copy of the transcribed interview was provided electronically to each participant after each interview and each participant was asked to verify their statements through member checking. Audio recordings will be destroyed at the conclusion of the research. All collected data was stored securely in my locked home office. All transcriptions were on a computer which only I am authorized to use. No reference was made in oral or written reports which could link the participant to the study. If individual quotations were used in reports, the participant's identity was protected by a pseudonym.

A small pilot study was conducted to try out intended research protocol. The results of the pilot study were used to revise and strengthen the protocol described in Appendix D. After IRB approval, interviews were conducted between March and May of 2018. Likely benefits of participation in the study were included in the interview protocol such as, opportunity for self-reflection on their own identities as well as an opportunity for me as the researcher to better understand their identities and consider how that knowledge could impact programming and policy on campuses to better serve their needs.

Data Analysis

Moustakas' (1994) method of analyzing phenomenological data was used to analyze the interview transcripts. Moustakas' approach provided structure for a novice researcher like me (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The entire analysis process was guided by my research questions. I used Dedoose software to create meaning units and organize my data for analysis. Themes were generated from the analysis of significant statements that I developed into clusters of meaning to provide an understanding of how participants experienced the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994; Polkinghorne, 1989). Textual and structural descriptions were developed from the significant statements and themes and used to describe the context that influenced how participants experienced the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). As required by Moustakas' (1994) approach, I reflected upon the situations and context that influenced my experiences during my research. Identified themes from the analysis of interview transcripts were viewed through the lens of Kim's (2012) International Student Identity (ISI) model. Kim's model helped guide the interpretation of the themes found after the initial analysis of data was completed.

Positionality and Ethics

As director of international programs at the campus where the research occurred, I had a unique and privileged relationship with the Muslim international student participants in my study. My privileges were connected to various forms of systemic power inequalities. In addition to my social identities of power, I also served as a Designated School Official (DSO) at my university. As a DSO, I had power to impact the immigration status of international students on my campus. The DSO is authorized by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security to verify and certify documents for F-1 international students. Due to my positions of power, it was imperative that my research protocol make clear that student participation was wholly voluntary and would not impact their immigration or academic status at our institution. It was also essential that I create a judgement-free space for my participants to share their experiences by emphasizing there were no right or wrong answers. Although studying my own institution removed barriers for access to data collection as I knew many of the students, researchers have issued caution about studying one's own organization as the study may produce knowledge considered political or risky for an internal researcher (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). As such, it was imperative to utilize multiple strategies of validation to produce accurate participant accounts (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Trustworthiness Strategies

In order to verify participant responses and my understanding of their responses, I used member checking by soliciting feedback from participants on my findings after the first and second interviews (Schwandt, 2015). Member checking helped to minimize any difficulties the participants or I had in understanding each other. Using multiple sources of information from ten participants studying at four different campuses provided stronger conclusions and better understanding of the phenomenon being studied (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

I brought to my study biases, prejudgments, and beliefs about Muslim international students' racial/ethnic, religious, and gender experiences on U.S. campuses. My biases included a belief that some Muslim international students encounter religious, racial/ethnic, and gender discrimination on U.S. campuses. I believed these experiences impacted how they viewed themselves and how they perceived others viewed them. Through the process of Epoche, the disciplined and systematic effort of setting aside prejudgments about the topic of my study, I worked to identify these biases and intentionally bracketed my worldview in order to understand the essence of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 2011). The process of Epoche required intensive and intentional reflection and self-dialogue (Moustakas, 2011) as I identified these biases throughout the research process. I reflected regularly through self-dialogue and with trusted colleagues about how my personal experiences and biases might influence my interpretation of my participants' identity experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Review of the Research Design

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to better understand how Muslim international students experience their identities at four-year universities in the Midwestern U.S. using Kim's (2012) International Student Identity (ISI) model as a guiding framework. The main research question for this study was how do Muslim international students studying at four-year institutions in the Midwestern U.S. experience their identities? The overarching research question included the following two research questions:

1. Prior to studying in the Midwestern U.S., how did Muslim international students experience their religious, ethnic/racial, and gender identities?
2. How do Muslim international students experience their religious, ethnic/racial, and gender identities as students in the Midwestern U.S.?

The participants of this study were self-identified Muslim international students studying at four-year institutions in the Midwestern U.S. Based on semi-structured interviews with ten Muslim international students, this study explored how the participants experienced their religious, ethnic/racial, and gender identities prior to studying in the Midwestern U.S. and as students in the Midwestern U.S. The data were analyzed using Moustakas' (1994) method of analyzing phenomenological data. Identified themes from the analysis of interview transcripts were also viewed through the lens of Kim's (2012) International Student Identity (ISI) model.

Emergent Themes

Semi-structured interviews provided me with the ability to identify frequently occurring themes across participants. Using Dedoose software, I analyzed each set of transcripts and

generated themes to provide an understanding of how Muslim international students studying at four-year institutions in the Midwestern U.S. experienced their religious, ethnic/racial, and gender identities. Over the course of the analysis, six central themes emerged related to the research questions:

1. Changes to Practicing Islamic prayer in the Midwestern U.S.: This theme is related to how Muslim international students in this study experienced practicing Islamic prayer prior to studying in the Midwestern U.S. and how Muslim international students experienced difficulties or flexibilities in practicing Islamic prayer in the Midwestern U.S.
2. Racial Construct as a New Concept: This theme is related to how Muslim international students in this study viewed their ethnic or racial identity prior to studying in the Midwestern U.S. and how Muslim international students viewed their ethnic or racial identity while studying in the Midwest. Racial identity was often a new concept for participants in the study.
3. Male/Female Interactions on Campus and in the Classroom: This theme is related to how Muslim international students in this study experienced male and female interactions prior to studying in the Midwestern U.S. and how Muslim international students experienced differences between male and female interactions on campus and in the classroom in the Midwestern U.S.
4. Choosing to Veil or Not to Veil: This theme is related to female Muslim international students in this study and their decision to veil or not to veil prior to studying in the Midwestern U.S. and female Muslim international students and their decision to veil or not to veil while studying in the Midwestern U.S.

5. **Stereotypes and Coping with Discrimination:** This theme is related to how Muslim international students in this study perceived they are viewed in the Midwestern U.S. and coping strategies employed by participants while studying in the Midwestern U.S.
6. **Impact of Trump Administration Rhetoric and Policies:** This theme is related to how Muslim international students in this study were impacted by the Trump administration's rhetoric and policies pertaining to the travel ban on predominantly Muslim-majority countries and general anti-Muslim sentiments.

Resulting Themes

This section includes a presentation of the six themes emerging from interviews with ten Muslim international students studying on four different campuses in the Midwestern U.S.

Changes to Practicing Islamic Prayer in the Midwestern U.S.

For the majority of the Muslim international students participating in this study, religious identity was often one of their most salient identities and often inseparable from their ethnic or national identity. Many of the participants explained what it meant to be a Muslim did not change for them when they came to the Midwestern U.S. to study. However, how the participants continued practicing their religion often did change. This theme is related to how Muslim international students experienced difficulties and flexibilities in practicing Islamic prayer in the Midwestern U.S.

Difficulties in practicing Islamic prayer in the Midwestern U.S.

Yeah, well back home, if my dad hears this he would be upset, but we're taught to pray at the same time when the prayer time comes, but again, um, because of school, I can't just stand up, go to the back of the class and pray. (Oscar)

At least half of the Muslim international students participating in the study talked about the difficulties they encountered trying to continue the important practice of Islamic prayer five

specific times each day as well as Friday prayer each week while studying at universities in the Midwestern U.S. For Bob, having to choose between prayer and school work was especially difficult. In Bob's home country of Bangladesh, everything closed during prayer times to make space for this important Islamic practice. However, Bob found the Midwestern U.S. culture was not conducive to making space in the daily schedule for those who practiced Islamic prayer.

Being forced to choose between attending class and going to pray created a difficult dilemma.

Bob explained:

Last year I skipped my prayer because I just didn't have the time of day. ...that would never happen back home because everything is closed. So that culture is set up that way. Being in school over here, if I choose to go to prayer, I have to make up the work I'm skipping. So, the student, it feels that a bargain.

Bob felt he should not have to choose between practicing his prayers and fulfilling his obligations as a student. He knew he should practice his prayers and conveyed that he wanted to pray, but he also knew he did not want to have to make up school work he would miss if he went to pray.

As a student from Kuwait, Hannah was accustomed to a regular call to prayer five times per day. In the Midwestern U.S. where there was no regular call to prayers, there was nothing to remind her to stop and pray. Hannah described the experience:

Like every day they call and they call five times to pray and leave everything you are doing. Like if you are studying or anything you are doing, eating, something like that, you should leave everything and go to prayer. But here we don't have this, so kind of strange for us because usually hear that five times in a day and here there's no noise, no something to remind you.

Hannah explained how her mother would sometimes call her from Kuwait to remind her to pray, but not at the five prescribed times each day. Like Bob, Hannah experienced difficulty finding time to pray due to school and other commitments. Hannah shared, "Like sometimes you have a chance to study or something like that and you can't leave everything and go to pray."

As a woman attending ESL classes from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. each weekday on a Midwestern U.S. campus, Rachel found it was difficult to find time to pray as well as a place that would be comfortable for a woman to pray. Rachel explained, “I think the Muslim women here need some place, some comfortable place to pray, because I can’t pray in the university and I go to the university from 9 to 3 and it’s hard, it is a long time.” Midwest State University, where Rachel attended school, had a multifaith room with limited hours, but did not afford the privacy needed for her to pray comfortably and discreetly, separate from the men as was expected.

Sam and Oscar also shared difficulties they encountered trying to fulfill the need to participate in Islamic prayer while studying in the Midwestern U.S. Sam reflected back on how everyone attended prayer times back home in Saudi Arabia, even if they did not want to go. Now in the Midwestern U.S. Sam explained how it is impossible to attend every prayer, but how God perhaps understands the circumstances of being in an environment which makes adherence to regular prayer times difficult. Sam shared:

Sometimes, let’s be honest, I thought people, when they say, “let’s go to prayer,” that even if you’re lazy, you’re going to jump up and go, because everyone is going. But here - forgive me if I’m bad, but I’m being honest with you – perfection is impossible and sometimes I think God knows that things change and the impact of the environment, you know, absolutely.

Oscar also recalled the special importance of Friday prayers and the rituals surrounding that time to gather every Friday with family back home in Saudi Arabia. Here in the Midwestern U.S. busy schedules did not allow for regular participation in Friday prayer, even though the local Muslim community tried to accommodate busy schedules by offering an abbreviated Friday prayer time at the mosque. Oscar said:

Um, well, Friday prayer is, um, considered back home as a holiday. ...and it has a lot of, um, rituals to it, seeing everybody in your family, getting to stay at the mosque for an hour to read Koran, pray for God. I miss that, that’s not presented in here due to being busy with school or, um, being busy in general, even the Muslim community here in

[name of city], they don't try to make it last that long. They try to shrink it down so people can come and pray and go continue to work. That's one of the things I miss.

Like other participants, Oscar also discussed how praying at the designated time for Muslim prayers each day is challenging as prayer times often fall during class time. It was important to Oscar not to disrespect his professors by leaving class to pray even if the professor had granted him permission. Oscar noted that because it could be seen as disrespectful to leave during class, God was merciful and understanding of the circumstances and it would be acceptable to pray later on in the day. Oscar explained:

It might be something that I have to do, but I don't want to disrespect my professor and just stand up, leave the class, even if they did want me to pray in here, just leave the class, pray and come back. It might be considered a disrespect thing, that's why it's understandable by God that if you got busy or something, a hospital visit, for example, you can pray later on. And that's what I do, I pray if I'm available on the right time, if not, then God is merciful, I'll pray later on in the night.

Bob and Nicholas emphasized the importance of being able to pray during the two main Muslim holidays, Ramadan and Hajj. Bob explained, "Giving the time off for the holidays would be a big thing. A very, very big thing." Because Muslim religious holidays often occur during regularly scheduled class days in the U.S., those are days that class work and exams would need to be made up if Muslim students missed class to fulfill their prayer obligations. Nicholas explained the importance of these two holidays in this way:

Because that day we have to pray in the morning. All of us, we will go and meet in a big open area or in the mosque. Not only for Saudis – all of the Muslim – they will go and pray at that time between 7:00 – 8:00. It's good to pray, it's not required but it's very nice if you pray. So, I'm not sure about the time because I didn't go the last two years because I had classes, but each semester, I mean, each time we have the holiday, we have to talk with every professor... for the holiday, you know it's, you know it's only two holidays for us. We want to celebrate it.

Bob and Nicholas emphasized that for prayers on other days of the year, most Muslim students make adjustments to their prayer times to accommodate class obligations in the U.S. They said it

would mean a lot to Muslim international students if campus administrators would allow Muslim students to have these two days off to practice their religion in the same way Christians have Christmas off to practice their faith.

Many participants in this study found it difficult to continue the important practice of Islamic prayers while studying in the Midwestern U.S. Prayer times often occurred at the same time as class or other school commitments. Some participants felt they had to make a difficult decision about whether to leave what they were doing to go and pray. If they left a class or study group to pray, they were faced with having to make up the work they missed while they were gone. Some participants were also concerned about disrespecting their professors if they prayed during class. In addition, some participants had difficulty finding an appropriate place to pray discreetly while on campus. Participants from three campuses said they had access to a prayer space located near the international student services office on their campuses. Participants from the other campus had access to a multifaith room in their student center, but it was only available during the midday prayer time and did not provide a private area for females to pray.

Islam as a flexible religion.

The idea about religion is not to make it hard, [but] make it easy for you. So if you want to pray, you can pray. Before coming to my classes or after my classes, or you can pray on campus. (Michael)

As noted by Bob, Hannah, Oscar, Rachel, and Sam in the previous section, busy student schedules at Midwestern U.S. universities make it very difficult to practice Islamic prayer five times per day. At the same time, several of those students stated they believed God recognizes and understands this difficulty, just as God would understand having to miss prayers back in their home countries due to being sick or in the hospital. Islam, therefore, was seen by many of the participants as a flexible religion, allowing for exceptions to the strict practice of prayer at

specific times each day in the Midwestern U.S. environment where Muslim prayer times are not a regular part of the culture.

More than half of the participants in the study discussed the flexibility of practicing Islam in the Midwestern U.S., especially Islamic prayer. Faisal reflected on how he has the freedom to practice Islam, including prayer, in a way appropriate for his life as a student in the Midwestern U.S. Faisal explained:

So, really, I can pray sometimes, with me, I practice my religion. I'm not a very rigid guy, you know – I have the freedom, the freedom to practice my religion and the way that keeps me continuing my whole life.

Michael also discussed the flexibility of Islam in the context of his personal, social life and prayer. Noting that he sometimes cannot pray on time, especially in the Midwestern U.S., Michael shared:

Like, for example, today we want to go out before the sunset. You know we have a prayer on that time. And we have another prayer, we have to pray before midnight. So, I'm going out – you know – I have to pray before. And, uh, because our religion make it easier for us. You can make it together when you are traveling – when you can't, like, I can't find a place to pray. So you can pray together when you are traveling you can pray the prayers together. You can combine. Yeah. Uh...so, this is something I like about Islam.

Nicholas shared similar thoughts about being able to pray at different times of the day if class schedules prevented prayer during class times. Reflecting on the requirement back in Saudi Arabia to go to the mosque each time for prayer, Nicholas discussed how he accommodated prayer at his Midwestern U.S. campus:

But here in the U.S. it's different. ...the mosque it's far away from me so I can't go every time to pray. ...So I try to pray as soon as I can. Some professors here in this school, they don't prefer for us to go out during class to do my prayer cause different time of day. So that's ok for us as a Muslim. It's ok to delay the prayer until we're finished from the class and do it. Pray as soon as we can. ...Here in the school they understand that and they give us a small room to prayer if you want.

While Bob said he felt torn by having to choose between attending class and going to pray, Oscar explained that his studies must take precedence even though prayer is no less important. Oscar explained:

Your first priority is study, get your degree, either go back and support your family or work from here and support your family, but now your main focus is school. Therefore, Friday prayer, I'm not saying it comes next or second, but Friday prayer in particular, God said, if a little bit of us prayed, that would be enough, therefore if you're not in class, then you can pray.

Oscar found comfort from a passage in the Koran that allowed for exemptions noting that even if he could not get to prayers, others praying at that time who did not have class would be enough and God would understand.

In summary, this theme focused on the way in which Muslim international students experience practicing Islamic prayer prior to coming to the U.S. and changes to practicing Islamic prayer as students on Midwestern U.S. campuses. The students in this study struggled with being able to continue practicing their prayers at the regularly scheduled times each day due to needing to attend class and not being able to find a comfortable space to perform their prayers, especially as a woman. This is because Islam is not the dominant religion in the Midwestern U.S. and calendars and schedules in the Midwestern U.S. region are dictated mainly by the Christian calendar. Because Christians do not practice regularly scheduled prayers each day as Muslims do, classes are scheduled continuously throughout the day and do not create a space when everything closes and people stop what they are doing and pray. In addition, no classes are held on Sundays when Christians attend church, but classes are held on Fridays when Muslims attend congregational prayer. Despite these challenges, Muslim international students in this study found ways to practice Islamic prayer by delaying prayers until after classes were over or combining prayers together when they were able to pray. Students in the study believed that

God understood their circumstances of not being able to pray always at the designated time and that it was acceptable when they made these adjustments.

Racial Construct as a New and Troubling Concept

“I didn’t realize these words, what they meant until I came here, because to me, this Arab is just another human.” (Bob)

This theme is related to how Muslim international students viewed their ethnic or racial identity prior to studying in the Midwestern U.S. and how Muslim international students viewed their ethnic or racial identity while studying in the Midwest. Racial identity was often a new and unfamiliar concept for participants in the study. Some students found the use of racial categories to be troubling. When asked to describe themselves racially, several students expressed they were unfamiliar with this construct before coming to the U.S. Michael shared, “We don’t have something like this in Saudi.” The term racial identity was also new for Michelle who, originally from Iran, had lived in another Asian country before coming to the U.S. to study. Michelle explained:

...that concept was new to me when I came to the U.S. I knew the different racial groups in [country in Asia], I never heard about these things in [country in Asia]. But when I came to the U.S., it was like hyphenized, African-American, or it was a question. So it was a very new concept for me when I came here.

Two students, Bob and Rachel, found the use of racial categories in the U.S. troubling or unacceptable. Like Michelle, Bob had never heard of the term racial identity before coming to the U.S. The idea of categorizing humans based upon ethnic or racial differences was very upsetting to Bob as he shared:

I didn’t realize these words, what they meant until I came here, because to me, this Arab is just another human, he could be Muslim, he could be Sunni, he could be Shia... I didn’t care. An African, just like an African. He makes good food, he has his own business, that’s all I care. I didn’t realize this was an issue. ...That really upsets me that

we categorize everything! Why?! ...Sometimes we say a few words from here or there, but it didn't really occur to me that our difference ethnically or racially, it didn't really make a huge difference back home. ...So these ethnic, racial questions - I don't really know how I define myself other than being a human.

Like Bob, Rachel expressed distaste for the use of racial categories, noting that Islam says all people are the same. Rachel explained:

I hate this kind of describe. ... I don't like to – like African-American or White or something, yeah. We all – all of the people, we have eight, nine month before they're born. So all the people have hand, all the people have head, all the people have eyes, so why the people, some people like [use labels], yeah, like White... Black, yeah, I don't like. But for me, I am normal person. ... Some can say black, we have black people there, but when you say black you need to..., yeah you shouldn't say that because the Islam says all the people is the same.

Noting that while racial constructs do exist in her home country, Hannah, like Rachel, shared that as Muslims they are encouraged not to judge others based upon their appearance, but on their character. Hannah shared:

We also have Black Muslim and White Muslim. But, we... Muslim encourage us to not judge people with the color or something like that. You should judge people on how they... like talk to you or respect you. ...talk to the people, see how they deal with life and how they work and... everybody have many points to see that, like, many people see the way that you think, how you think of other people, and judge you by that. Other Muslim... there are many Muslim judge by what you look like, but ...Islam encourage us to not do that. You should know how the people think, not how they look like.

Another student, Michelle, noted that the concept of the classification of race was something perhaps unique to the U.S., and perhaps a few other countries, such as Canada and Australia. "And race... all Persians are Aryans. And they consider, um, Caucasians from that area, Aryans, so they consider them Caucasians, so that is something that is just... I think I've seen this racial classification just in the U.S." Michelle explained further:

Yes, we don't have, we really... I think it's not just in Iran... in one of my classes and we were talking about U.S. higher education and I was talking about diversity and its impact in students' academic success and how minority students are disadvantaged. And so we were reading an article and one of my students, so she's Japanese, and she asked me, why... I still can't understand why, because they are brown or they are black or their

color is black, why must be treated this way. So that different color and its impact on your life is very peculiar concept outside of the U.S. Maybe in Australia you would see that struggle or in Canada, but at least to my understanding in Middle East or in Asia, it's something very unusual to say you are not as worthy ...because you are black or brown.

As a graduate student who had been in the Midwestern U.S. for seven years and been exposed to concepts and literature concerning equity and diversity in the U.S., Michelle understood the significance and meaning of racial categories in the U.S. and other western cultures where non-Whites are minoritized and oppressed. However, coming from a non-western culture, she also understood how strange the concept of racially constructed identity could be to others from non-western countries, especially upon first arriving to the U.S. or discovering the concept of race.

Although most of the student participants did not discuss their racial identity in terms of skin color, one student, Oscar, discussed his racial identity in this way:

I'm darker than, yeah, I would say I'm darker than normal Saudis. My whole family is white, super white. Actually, if you see my mom, you would think she's American. She's actually, she has yellow hair, yeah, blonde hair. And she's as white as you! And walking in malls and stuff, they always thought I was adopted. My family would tease me with that, yeah, you're adopted, and stuff. But, yeah, I think I'm typical Saudi. My look is typical Saudi. But, here in the U.S., I'm more viewed as an Indian. Yeah.

As someone with darker skin coming from a family with white skin, Oscar had experienced being viewed as not being a blood relative of his family. Due to this difference, Oscar had a more heightened awareness of racialized identity both in Saudi Arabia and in the U.S. than other participants in the study, especially as connected to skin color.

Overall, participants in the study did not know about racial constructs and categories used in the U.S. until after arriving in the U.S. Students' ethnic identities such as Arab, Bengali, or Persian were more salient to them than any racial identity. The routine use of racial categories to classify individuals in the U.S. was a very new and often troubling concept to students. As noted

by several of the participants, Muslims are taught not to judge others by their appearance, including their skin color.

Male/Female Interactions on Campus and in the Classroom

“I study high school with women and study elementary school with women and also university with women, but I came here the teacher is man. It’s hard.” (Rachel)

This theme is related to how Muslim international students in this study experienced differences between male/female interactions on campus and in the classroom in the Midwestern U.S. Two of the female students in the study, Rachel and Hannah, discussed difficulties navigating interactions with males while attending university in the Midwestern U.S. and how those interactions differed from their interactions with males in their home country where cross-gender interactions were limited and closely monitored.

Growing up in Saudi Arabia, Rachel only had female teachers in school as male/female interactions are not permitted in the school environment as well as in many places outside of the home. Now studying in the U.S. and having a male teacher for the first time, Rachel found interactions with her male teacher presented difficulties and discomfort. Rachel explained:

Some teacher didn’t understand I can’t connect with men. I couldn’t. I tried, but it’s so hard. In the first time, my teacher asked us to go to the lunch [program held during lunch hour]. And it was so hard because a lot of men and they talking about marriage and how you meet your husband and I really, I shy [to] talk, and they ask about some things not comfortable to talk to anyone how to meet her husband. I don’t know, my feeling it’s, uh - and I didn’t know English very well. And I think some teacher didn’t understand that. There is a space between male and female in the Islam.

Moving from spaces in Saudi Arabia where the only males Rachel spoke with were her husband or other male members of her family, to spaces in the Midwestern U.S. where she was expected to interact with male teachers was difficult and contrary to her Islamic culture and values.

Rachel described how her husband helped her frame this new and uncomfortable relationship with a male teacher in a way that made it possible for her to participate in the classroom:

...when I came to the U.S. when I talk with man I am so shy, because I don't talk with man a lot in Saudi Arabia, I just talk with my family or my husband. So, uh, there were a teacher, he teach me and I, it's hard to me to sit and have any question ask him. But then I thinking about, I didn't do something wrong, I just came to here to learn and, but my husband says, it's ok. He is a teacher, he's not anyone, but I feeling so shy to do that. But when I thinking and doing I change my mind and change my, some idea in mind, it helps me a lot to be comfortable to talk with man in the education, just in the education.

Rachel's husband helped her to feel that it is acceptable to be taught by a male professor, because she would be interacting with him only for the purposes of her education. There would be no intention for an inappropriate relationship that would go against her Islamic values and because of this she was able to reframe this male/female relationship in her mind so it was acceptable.

Like Rachel, Hannah was also aware of male/female relationships on campus. Hannah described how Kuwaiti females are not able to have friendships or dating relationships with males in the way that other non-Muslim female international students can have friendships or dating relationships with males on Midwestern U.S. campuses. Hannah said:

Also, um, like the relationship with the male and female, maybe it's ok for other international students to meet with males with females, like males can meet with females and sitting with each other and knowing each other and they may marry each other, but Kuwaiti Muslims they are not so. We can't do that we can't, um, meet with other people like males cannot meet with females and have a relationship or something like that. We don't have that.

As she was not supposed to interact with male students on campus, Hannah needed to find other female students for friendship. Being one of the only Kuwaiti female students on campus presented unique challenges for Hannah and made her experience as a student very isolating.

Hannah described her experience trying to find other women for friendship:

I don't have anybody here. I don't know anybody here. When I start to connect with somebody here I was looking for a woman, because in our society we don't have like relationships with men and women, women alone with men, like that. But, yeah, I try to

find a Kuwait woman, but I just found one. But she is really different than me, like, we are not friends. So, that's why it's hard, like, um, I really feel uncomfortable because I don't have friends here. If I want friends, I should go to the guys here, Kuwaiti guys, because they know, we know each other, but...

For Hannah, finding other Kuwaitis who understood her culture and religion was important.

Hannah was able to form friendships with male Kuwaiti international students on campus to help fill some of the void of not having any female Kuwaiti friends. By viewing the relationship with male Kuwaiti international students as platonic and strictly within the context of studying for school or helping each other when in need, Hannah was able to form friendships with some male Kuwaiti international students on campus. Hannah shared, "I think nowadays people are more open minded and think more before doing something like, if we talk about the school and study and something like that, he shouldn't think 'I love you.'" Although in Kuwait a woman would not go to a man and talk to him or a man go to a woman to talk to her, Hannah felt that she was able to develop a trusting relationship with some male Kuwaiti students on campus. Hannah explained, "But when I talk to them now, they understand me and respect me totally. ...I see them like girls. ...I give them what they want and then everybody go to their side. It's ok, it's fine with me." Hannah was able to justify the relationships with her male peers and gain her mother's approval. Hannah said:

And I told my mother. I'm straight with my mother. I talk to this guy and he wants me to help him with this thing. Or I want to sit with him at the library to study that. She understands that because there is no one here to help me if I... it's really hard if I do it alone. So, yeah, if she can only call them and talk to them, like, to kind of tell them that I know, you can't do something, you know. Yeah, I like it. I like this thing.

Like Rachel, Hannah was able to overcome a difficult situation where she needed to interact with men. In Hannah's case, she was able to form friendships on campus with male Kuwaiti students who understood her culture and religion since there were no female Kuwaiti students who could fill that role. Like Rachel, Hannah felt it was alright to interact with men as long as it was within

the context of helping each other with school. Both Rachel and Hannah received approval to interact with men within these contexts, Rachel from her husband, and Hannah from her mother. This validation and support allowed them to have these interactions with men that they normally would not have had back home in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait.

One of the male students, Nicholas, discussed how interactions with females on Midwestern U.S. campuses has and has not changed from how he was raised to interact with females in Saudi Arabia. Nicholas shared what has and has not changed for him in the U.S. regarding interactions with females:

One example of what is not ok – it's not ok to sit alone if I'm a man and you're a female, but for this studying thing, it's ok, it's not a problem. But it's not good to stay like very far away in a room, nobody can see us, it's kind of protecting us from something else.

Like Hannah, Nicholas noted that at his campus the U.S. it is alright for men and women to study together for school as long as they are in spaces where others can see them so they are not tempted to interact in ways that are not appropriate or acceptable in Islam. Nicholas shared that he felt confident that females he interacted with on his campus, mainly U.S. students, understood his intentions and that he made very clear that he would not interact with them in ways that could be seen as disrespectful or in violation of his Islamic values.

In summary, the common thread between Rachel, Hannah, and Nicholas as it pertained to male/female interactions in the Midwestern U.S. was that it was alright for females to sit or interact with males or males with females as long as it was for purposes of studying or school. Rachel and Hannah came to this decision after talking with a spouse or parent who told them it would be alright to interact with men for purposes within the classroom or for studying. For Nicholas, he came to this decision independent of others, but with a clear understanding that he must always interact with women in spaces and ways that would not violate Islamic values.

Choosing to Veil or Not to Veil

“I think Islam look like, um, Islam don’t say you should do that or don’t should do that. Islam say there are many reason to do that, but you have a choice.” (Rachel)

This theme is related to female Muslim international students and their decision to veil or not to veil prior to studying in the Midwestern U.S. and their decision to veil or not to veil while studying in the Midwestern U.S. Female participants discussed cultural expectations to veil in their home countries, choosing whether or not to veil in the U.S., and perceptions of veiling encountered in the Midwestern U.S.

Cultural expectations to veil. Female participants in the study shared cultural expectations to veil in their home countries and how they experienced those expectations. Hannah and Michelle described how they experienced the cultural expectation to veil in their home countries of Kuwait and Iran.

Reflecting back on her childhood in Kuwait, Hannah discussed how girls are expected to begin wearing the hijab when they are nine years old and the changes in behavior expected when girls begin wearing the hijab. Hannah shared:

And when we wear it, we can’t touch any men that we don’t know. Even if he’s my cousin, I play with them when I was child, but now, when I wear hijab, there’s no nothing like that. ...yeah, [my mother] said that, you should, if you want to wear it, you can’t do that, you can’t do that. I said, ok, that’s fine. She said, you should wear it everywhere you go outside your home. You can just drop it off when you are in home with your brothers, sisters – girls is fine – but when we have a strange boy, you can’t do this. ...here’s the first time my mother says, you are female, you can’t do this.

Cultural expectations surrounding wearing the hijab were explained to Hannah by her mother and Hannah accepted and agreed to those expectations. Her mother held a special gathering when Hannah began wearing the hijab inviting close friends to help celebrate the occasion. Hannah explained, “People brought presents to, like, encourage me to not drop it off. You can

drop it off if you want, but that is not a good thing. Kind of support me of this point.” For Hannah, this was a rite of passage to adulthood and made her feel more like a grown up. Hannah noted, however, that boys at that age do not have similar expectations placed upon them. Hannah said, “Like men, even if he’s nine years old, he don’t have to do something. Just the normal life.” Hannah explained the reason for wearing the hijab was to protect women from unwanted attention from men. Hannah shared:

...you don’t know the men, how he’s looking for you. Maybe he’s thinking of you in different way than you are looking for and you can’t be like very beautiful... you shouldn’t show all your beautiful things – your hair, and your beautiful shapes or something like that – you can’t do that.

For Hannah, wearing the hijab was something she wanted to do, although she noted that boys did not have something similar they were expected to do.

Michelle discussed how even though her home country of Iran is in the Middle East, it does not share the typical Middle Eastern culture. Like other Middle Eastern countries, Iran is a collectivist society, however women in Iran are typically more liberal than in other Middle Eastern countries. Michelle explained that although the cultural expectation for women in Iran is to cover their hair, not all women want to cover. Michelle shared:

So women are more liberal and even, uh - so apart from religious restraints or limitations that are imposed on the women and they have to be maybe in Iran, even in Iran - a woman that you see [is] just superficial identity of her that you are watching. It is superficial, is not what she wants to be. But you cannot - a very simple example is that you are expected to cover your hair. I would say 80% of women do not want to do that, but you must cover your hair.

Michelle later shared how she believes women were discriminated against in Iran because they did not have the freedom to wear what they want to wear due to laws requiring all women to cover their hair. Michelle explained, “And why they are discriminated? Because if, say, for

instance, you show your hair, men would be attracted, so that is a discrimination that you restrict or limit a gender because another gender wants to be free.”

Hannah and Michelle both shared cultural expectations from their home countries for women to veil. For Hannah, the cultural expectation to veil was a rite of passage the adulthood and one she accepted. For Michelle, the cultural expectation to veil was viewed as discriminatory against women and one she pushed back against.

Choosing to veil or not to veil in the Midwestern U.S. Female participants in the study shared about choosing to veil or not to veil in the Midwestern U.S. Hannah, Rachel and Michelle described how they experienced their decisions.

Before Hannah left Kuwait to study in the U.S., she heard stories about women choosing not to wear the hijab once they arrived in the U.S. Hannah explained, “many people, like, say that if you are going to America, you will drop off your hijab because then no one will see you like, no one will like – you don’t have your mother and father behind you, they won’t see you, like, you can do anything you want.” However, Hannah shared that she really likes wearing the hijab and chose to continue wearing it in the U.S. Hannah explained that she believes Muslim women have the right to choose whether or not they want to veil and the Koran allows women to choose. Hannah said, “And we have women who don’t wear hijab... everyone think he’s the right one. ...As I said Muslim and Koran said, like, each one have free what he think, like, he is free to think about – if you don’t destroy other like, you can do what you want.”

While many Muslims wear only the hijab, Rachel, who chose to wear the abaya, hijab, and cover her face while in Saudi Arabia, discussed her decision to continue wearing the abaya, hijab, and covering her face while studying in the U.S. Rachel explained:

I believe that this is my clothes in Saudi Arabia, why I don't change it here, because God is there, everywhere. Like some people go to the church every Sunday, but some people

go to the church once a month, but like they go to the church. Islam says, you wear what you like, what is comfortable for you, yeah. I choose to, I chose to cover my face and wear the abaya. I don't care about the people who thinking about something bad, cause I love to answer the people question.

For Rachel, it was important to continue practicing Islam in the U.S. in the same way she did in Saudi Arabia as her faith had not changed as a result of moving to the Midwestern U.S. Rachel also did not mind if people looked at her strangely in town and did not care what they thought about her wearing the abaya and covering her face. Rachel viewed this as an opportunity to educate others about Islam and why she chooses to veil. At the same time, Rachel acknowledged that being a Muslim woman who chooses to veil in the Midwestern U.S. was harder than being a Muslim man who can wear clothing like local men in the Midwestern U.S. Rachel explained, "... the man, there isn't nobody, you can't know if he's a Muslim or no. Because the same clothes. But the woman is more different because you should wear hijab. ... maybe Muslim woman is more hard than man." While Rachel was proud to be a Muslim women in the Midwestern U.S. and proud to wear the abaya and cover her face, she saw that Muslim men did not have to overcome the same struggles as Muslim women who chose to veil.

As a woman in Iran, Michelle had eventually chosen not to veil, despite strong cultural expectations for her to do so. Now in the Midwestern U.S., Michelle continued to choose not to veil. Michelle explained, "I do not care if there is ...men around. I don't cover my hair. I don't wear like pants. I have like my skirt. I don't cover the way traditional men are looking for that." As Michelle shared earlier, pressuring women to veil if they did not want to veil was a form of discrimination.

Perceptions of veiling in the Midwestern U.S. Female participants in the study shared how they believed veiling was viewed in the Midwestern U.S. Hannah, Rachel and Michelle shared how they thought others viewed them as Muslim women who veiled as well as general

perceptions about Muslim women who veil in the Midwestern U.S. When asked how she thought Muslims were perceived in the Midwestern U.S., Hannah shared that most people are not comfortable with her wearing the hijab, but are respectful of her. Hannah explained, “They see me like, what’s she wearing? ... I see it, I realize it, but I’m fine. ...but they don’t ask about that, they respect that. I see that they respect what I wear, what I do.”

Rachel discussed how in Saudi Arabia there are many women who cover their faces and because it is popular to do so, it is easy to also cover her face in Saudi Arabia. However, here in the Midwestern U.S., Rachel said, “but here you are different and when you walk everyone see you and maybe they talk, maybe they say something.” Being in spaces in the Midwestern city where she studies, Rachel noticed some people were surprised to see a woman wearing an abaya and covering her face. Rachel shared, “Like, I think the people that work in the farm, because there is surprise and some of them smile, some of them didn’t smile. Just surprised.”

Sometimes Rachel would be with her friend who does not wear an abaya, only a hijab, and people would question why they were dressed differently. Rachel said:

...people ask us in the [café], you are Muslim? And you are Saudi? In the same country, why it’s different, hijab? I tell to him that Islam says choose what you want. Just if you feel comfortable with something, just do it. And I choose cover my face and she, she choose hijab.

For Rachel, this was not problematic or bothersome. Instead she viewed these questions as an opportunity to help people in her community understand Islam and Muslim women’s ability to choose if or how they wish to veil.

Reflecting on her experiences, Michelle shared how she believed veiling was perceived in the Midwestern U.S. In her experience, people she encountered did not understand Muslim women had the ability to choose to cover. Michelle explained:

Like, when they know I am Muslim, they are asking me, oh, you don't cover? Do you cover with burqa or hijab? Then, so that is the perception that they have about Muslims, about Muslim women that they are suppressed, they are just housewives, and they are submission without having any ideas of what's happening around the world.

Although Michelle chose not to cover and believed that pressuring Muslim women to cover their hair so that men would not be attracted to them was a form of discrimination, she believed veiling should not be viewed as a tool of oppression, but rather as a choice. Michelle shared her thoughts in this way:

Like a nun, if you see a nun, you respect her, because you think she is pure. But we don't have the same respect for Muslim women, because you see that hijab as an oppressive tool on the woman. But some of them, I would say, it's their choice, they want to wear that way, but we usually ignore that part.

The female participants in the study came from three different countries with different cultural expectations for veiling. All three female participants in the study believed that veiling was a choice for Muslim women. All three participants were comfortable with their own choice to veil or not to veil and respected the choices of other Muslim women to veil in different ways or not to veil at all. The participants, Hannah and Rachel, who chose to veil, experienced for the most part respectful curiosity from others in their communities regarding their veils. While the participant who chose not to veil, Michelle, encountered questions about her decision not to veil and perceptions of veiling as a tool of oppression.

Stereotypes and Coping with Discrimination

“And I've noticed that Muslim are being judged, just for the sake of being Muslim. And it is a prejudice – I would say they are labeled...” (Michelle)

This theme is related to how Muslim international students perceive they are stereotyped in the Midwestern U.S. and coping strategies for discrimination employed by participants while studying in the Midwestern U.S. Within this theme, participants noted stereotypes of Muslim

international students based upon their national identities, fear of practicing Islamic prayer due to stereotypes of Muslims, and coping with acts of discrimination in the Midwestern U.S.

Stereotypes of Muslim international students based upon their national identity.

Four students in the study discussed how their national identity was viewed either positively or negatively in the Midwestern U.S. Nicholas and Oscar shared how Saudi students in the Midwestern U.S. tend to be viewed by others as either “good” Saudi students or “bad” Saudi students. Nicholas shared that some Saudi students on his campus drink and smoke weed which is taboo for Muslims and does not fit the stereotype of how Americans in the Midwestern U.S. think of Muslims. As a Saudi Muslim who does not drink or smoke, Nicholas challenged the new perception many on his campus held that all Saudi students drink and smoke weed.

Nicholas said:

The American people and other people from different countries, what they know about Muslims and they see the Saudi guys here in the Midwest, they change their idea about us as Muslims from Saudi Arabia. And when they meet me, they see something different, so they get confused. They had an idea before – as a stereotype – and then when they meet other people, their ideas change. And when they meet me, kind of they have three different ideas. But... how Americans see me? They see me as different because most of them here, they drink a lot and they kind of change their mind. They change their... because the Saudis drink and smoke weed, they change the mind in other people.

Oscar shared similar sentiments about how he believed Saudi students are viewed as either good or bad in the Midwestern U.S.:

... either they're, um, seen as being perfect, um, a good Saudi, no problems, no fights, no, ah, partying, focus on school. Or, the opposite. The total opposite. Partying 24/7, smoking, drinking, missing classes. That's how I see Saudis are viewed in the U.S. Either this or that. And some of them are viewed as bad people. I don't like to use that word, but they are viewed as terrorists ... yeah, they're viewed as terrorists. In a very bad way. Just because you're Saudi. Or, in some way, because you're a Muslim.

In addition to being stereotyped as a good Saudi student or bad Saudi student, Oscar noted some in the U.S. view Saudis as terrorists, simply because they are Saudi or Muslim.

Rachel, Tyler, and Michelle talked about how people in the U.S. viewed their ethnic or national identity positively or negatively depending upon how old or young they were and how much they remembered about historical events involving individuals from those ethnic or national groups. Rachel shared how she believes Saudis are viewed by those who remembered the events of September 11, 2001, and those who did not:

I think some old people see me... bad things... because do you remember September 11? I ask someone, why the old people always hate, not hate, but don't like us Saudis? Do you remember September 11? They think the Saudis do that, they remember, but I think the younger people don't remember that. Yeah, they sometimes, they look at me like - do you know like how do the people look at you? Like you are... you don't like it, you don't like it here.

Before coming to the U.S., Tyler expected to encounter much hate and discrimination for Muslims in America. However, his personal experience was mainly positive as he found most people to be nice. Like Rachel, however, Tyler noticed differences in how Muslims were sometimes viewed negatively by older Americans. Tyler shared:

I would say... it's not what I expected before I come here. I expected like when I see the news, American hates Muslims, but when I came here they were really nice. I expected there would be some discrimination and things, but they were nice. I would say, just maybe the old people, older people are discriminating toward Muslims. The other people are nice.

Originally from Iran, Michelle discussed how she found Persians were viewed either positively or negatively by different generations in the U.S.:

So Persians... either people know them very well, which is people who are a little, so not the younger generation, they know them because of Iran and the U.S. close relationship before Iran's revolution. So they know them and they say, like, I've been in Iran, or my father was there. And they have such a good perception about Persians. Or the younger generation, they, when they say Iran, they are like, oh, Iran, that has nuclear power, or wants nuclear power, or dangerous. So these very contradictory perceptions that I've noticed people have...

Fear of practicing Islamic prayer due to stereotypes of Muslims. At least four students talked explicitly about being afraid to pray in public in the U.S. or altering where and

how they pray so as not to raise fear in those around them who hold negative stereotypes of Muslims. Rachel described her fear of praying in the Midwestern U.S. this way:

Ok, it's so difficult in the U.S. to do the prayer. I am scared to pray here in the U.S., like in a part of something because some people think it's bad thing or something. And maybe because I saw a video of some people pray outside and someone is hurt him or do something to him and that make me comfortable to [only] do that in my home. Yeah, I think that might be kind of hard.

Oscar discussed his initial fear of practicing Islamic prayer in the U.S. and how he gained the courage to eventually pray on his campus:

Um... when I first, couple of months here, I didn't pray in front of everybody. I was, I wouldn't say terrified of being judged, but I didn't want to be stereotyped, I didn't want to be hated, because of the last incident [9/11] that happened before I came, a couple of years before I came. ... I only would pray my prayers at night. Just add them up together, whenever I finish, I would pray. But then I started seeing... a lot of the Muslim community members would pray separately in between classes if it's a long class, the professor would allow them to stand up, five minutes, just go back, pray in the corner, 'cause we pray silently. And I remember it was the first semester in my college, um, what I felt like, wow, they're standing for their religion, for the things that they should be doing. They didn't, uh, feel or they didn't feel terrified to be judged and stuff, they put God first and I felt like I should do it too. ... Although I didn't pray in class, I didn't have the gut to do it, but I would pray in between classes right next to my car, if it's the prayer time, because I felt like I should stand for my religion and continue my bond with God.

Nicholas described his concern about making others feel afraid if they saw Muslims praying on campus:

...if we want to prayer, we will not prayer in front of the people. Kind of go in the corner or something so we will not disrupt them or stand in their way. And kind of I have this feeling I'm not sure, maybe I'm wrong, like, you know when you see, because you know that American people they have this stereotype about Muslims and mostly it's bad. So that I'm just trying to be normal and not make anything kind of, make them afraid.

Michelle talked about her observations of how Muslim international students are viewed on Midwestern U.S. campuses. Specifically misconceptions about Muslims and prejudices they face in the U.S. as a result of how Muslims are portrayed in the media. Like other students in the

study, Michelle also noted the negative association between Muslim activities such as Islamic prayer and terrorist activities:

And I've noticed that Muslim are being judged, just for the sake of being Muslim. And it is a prejudice – I would say they are labeled... because specifically Muslims that have explicit Muslim identifiers like... praying, even sometimes Muslims that practice of praying is, um, maybe is sending negative signals and making around, like non-Muslims, scared or making them feel unsafe around them because they associate every Muslim's activities with terrorist attack.

Coping with acts of discrimination. Despite being stereotyped and facing discrimination as Muslim international students in the Midwestern U.S., participants found ways to cope with the impact, often with assistance from other Muslim international students. Rachel described her first encounter with discrimination on campus and how she coped with the experience in this way:

Yes, so first time was when I start to study in the classes... I go to the student center with my friend – also, she is from Saudi Arabia... and she wear hijab and she wear pants and leggings and sweaters and I wear abaya and cover my face. So I don't know anything in English. Someone [said something]... and she says, do you listen what he says? No, what he says? And she says, no, I don't tell you that. Why? It's bad things? And I asked her, please tell me. And she says, he says you look like a garbage... your clothes like a garbage – abaya. And so I really [feel] bad – I feel sad and I feel not safety in the university, but when I'm back here in my home and I tell to my husband that he says, maybe he talking about the garbage or maybe your friend listened that wrong or... Then I dropped the classes. I don't feel safety and I want to go back to Saudi Arabia. But my husband tell me to go there and know good people and in the restaurant and in the bar to know another people. Don't keep just bad people in my mind. If I [knew] English in this time, I want to [tell the man in the student center], so the garbage is good for clear your home, clear anything. It's good to look like a garbage – yeah. It's not bad things. So, yeah, my husband helped me a lot to change everything in myself. And now I love to stay in the United States.

This biased, hateful incident left Rachel feeling sad, afraid and ready to return to Saudi Arabia. Instead of getting angry, her husband found all the good and positive he could from the event and ultimately helped Rachel change her perspective. Looking past this bad experience and looking for good and positive people to interact with became a coping mechanism for Rachel.

Michael shared that “Sometimes you can feel the small things” when he described an incident of discrimination in his campus community and how he coped with the incident.

Michael explained:

I was with a friend in a restaurant in the main street and there was some, a woman there with two guys... and I was talking with my friend in Arabic. When we finished eating and we go outside they were standing there... we're talking together and she came to us. She was not ok, she... was on drugs or something. She came to us and asked... where are you from? ...She said, I think you are from, what they call it, terrorist country. ... But when she said this sentence, the guys with her start to apologize to us. We're sorry, we respect you, we respect your culture, she's crazy. ...I'm not expecting everyone is perfect here. ... I was expecting to face things like this when I came here. Here you have freedom of speech. ...But now, I don't care, I don't care any about anything now. Because I know most of the people here are nice and they don't, they respect me. And they can tell I'm Muslim because of my name... But to me it don't, I didn't feel anything like, don't trying to do bad things for me. Here the professors are very nice for me... everywhere.

Although the biased incident Michael and his friend experienced was disturbing, Michael coped by recognizing that most people in his Midwestern U.S. city are nice and respectful to him, even when they know he is Muslim.

Oscar described an experience when he encountered discrimination on his campus and how he coped with the incident:

I was giving a training to a couple of old people who don't know how to use technology. ...we finished this first session, it was two hours, perfectly fine, they gave me the best attitude. The next day, um, she enjoyed the session so much to the point where, um, she started asking me, how old are you? Do you have a wife? 'Cause she really liked my personality. And as soon as I said, I'm from the Middle East, she paused and looked up... where in the Middle East? And I said, Saudi. And that acceptance just went away. Although she didn't say something bad, she didn't insult me or gave me a bad look, but the disappearance of that acceptance, that bond, that laugh, that smile... you can see it. But I don't judge, I don't judge. It's alright.

This more subtle example of discrimination experienced by Oscar was still impactful. Oscar coped by withholding judgement, saying things were alright, and moving on.

Finally, Faisal discussed how Muslim international students on his campus help one another in coping with discrimination from faculty:

Um... sometimes here in the campus... I don't know if it's ok to share, but racism is everywhere. Sometimes that makes it very hard for us to complete courses with special type of professors. We know them. We are, as Saudi students, we have the group here. We help each other. Who are good professors, who's not? So, the group gonna stay alive until there is no more Saudi students here.

The Saudi student community on Faisal's campus is a tightly knit group who have committed to helping each other by sharing information about professors who are good at working with Saudi students as well as professors who are not. In this way, Saudi students on Faisal's campus are able to support and help each other cope with acts of discrimination.

Some participants in the study described being stereotyped based upon their ethnic or national identities. Some participants reported Saudi students on their campus were either stereotyped as good Saudis or bad Saudis depending on whether or not they drank, smoked weed or partied. Other participants described being stereotyped positively or negatively by older or younger generations of Americans based upon their ethnic or national identity of Saudi or Persian. Four participants discussed how they had been afraid to practice Islamic prayer due to stereotypes held about Muslims in the U.S. Some of the participants were afraid to say Islamic prayers in public spaces as they did not want to be labeled as terrorists. Finally, participants in the study who experienced incidents of bias and discrimination found ways to cope that often included assistance from other Muslim students or family members.

Impact of Trump Administration Rhetoric and Policies

Like if the current president does not welcome us, what should I do? I have no other option, like, should I stay in my home and not do anything or something like that? I don't know. It is very hard thing. (Hannah)

This theme is related to how Muslim international students were impacted by the Trump administration's rhetoric and policies pertaining to the travel ban on individuals from predominantly Muslim-majority countries and general anti-Muslim sentiments. Participants in the study reported impact from the Trump administration ranging from severely negative impact to hardly any impact.

Life-changing negative impact of Trump rhetoric and policies. Two participants in the study shared how the Trump administration's policies negatively affected them personally, financially, psychologically, and emotionally. Bob, a senior from Bangladesh, explained how the Trump administration's travel ban on individuals from predominantly Muslim countries created a fear in his life and caused his parents to miss his graduation ceremony. Bob shared:

[The travel ban] is stopping me to visit my parents back home. I am afraid that I wouldn't be able to get back in the country if I leave the country. For the same reason, my parents did not even apply for a visa to come visit me for my graduation. They did not want to waste the money to apply for visa knowing that they would get rejected under this discriminatory practice.

Although Bangladesh was not on the list of countries affected by the travel ban, it was a Muslim-majority country which created enough fear for Bob and his parents that they did not attempt to travel to or from the U.S. during that time, even though it meant they would not see each other and they would miss seeing their son graduate.

A citizen of Iran, Michelle was the only participant in the study whose home country was on the list of countries whose citizens were banned from traveling to and from the U.S. For Michelle, everything changed for her due to Trump's travel ban policy - financially, emotionally, and psychologically. Michelle had entered the U.S. in 2011 for graduate studies and planned to graduate in 2015. Having not returned home to Iran this entire time, Michelle had planned to

travel back to Iran after graduation while doing her Optional Practical Training (OPT). Michelle described what happened next:

Then I couldn't [return to Iran] ...because of all these political situations and we weren't sure what would happen with OPT for students, will it be granted or not? Because that new administration was talking about how the foreigners are taking away Americans' jobs. And so that's why, that's the reason I had to postpone my graduation. I was done and my dissertation was done, I had to postpone my defense by two semesters, because I wasn't sure. It started from the time that [Trump] was a candidate... and it went to the time he got elected. So it for sure impacted me at one point for my graduation and second, that financial put me, because I had to enroll at the university and it was unexpected and I had to enroll, I had to pay the university and be on campus. ...so it impacted me financially, it impacted my education... kind of stopped me from travelling and I haven't travelled yet because they say even now that I will be an H1B there is zero chance that I could return if I go back. So it's kind of, you are being I'm trapped and can't do anything.

For Michelle the impact of the Trump administration's travel ban had severe consequences.

Unable to return home to Iran due to the travel ban she was unable to visit her family, some of whom she had not seen since 2011, and her family could not visit her in the U.S. Due to the uncertainty of what would happen to the OPT program if Trump was elected, she had to delay her graduation by two semesters and pay additional tuition to remain enrolled during that time creating a financial hardship. The emotional and psychological stress this placed on Michelle was significant and life changing.

Initial fear and then nothing; focus on degree. Half of the participants in the study described feelings of fear experienced by themselves and their family during the time leading up to the 2016 presidential election and for several months afterward caused by Trump's anti-Muslim rhetoric and policies. This period of fear was eventually allayed when they realized the travel ban policy would not negatively impact their ability to stay in the U.S. and conduct their studies.

Hannah was still in Kuwait waiting to begin her studies in the U.S. when the Trump administration announced the travel ban. Although Kuwait was not on the list, Hannah did not know if she should come to the U.S. given the anti-Muslim rhetoric creating an unwelcoming environment for Muslims in the U.S. Hannah shared:

... we don't know how to deal with that, ... I am still a freshman, I am still don't have a university... Like if the current president does not welcome us, what should I do? I have no other option, like, should I stay in my home and not do anything or something like that? I don't know. It is very hard thing. But my mother said you have to go, like you have to do it. You have to go. And, yeah, many of my friends also go and there is nothing. It's kind of talking, just talking, but there is no anything that they did it, like. We just afraid of that and then, it's gone.

As a student being sponsored by her government to attend university in the U.S., Hannah did not have the option to stay in Kuwait and attend school there. Urged by her mother to go to the U.S. and not to lose her scholarship, Hannah came to the U.S. along with several of her peers. After it was clear that nothing bad was going to happen to Hannah, her fear went away.

Already in the U.S. studying ESL while her husband studied for his bachelor's degree, Rachel experienced a range of emotions during and after the Trump administration's announcement of the travel ban on individuals from predominantly Muslim-majority countries. Rachel expressed feelings of sadness that perhaps her home country, Saudi Arabia, would be added next to the list of banned countries. Describing how some people in the U.S. already viewed Saudis as dangerous people, she feared the travel ban would only reinforce this perception of Muslims as dangerous people and make it more dangerous for her in her Midwestern community. Rachel shared:

I afraid to go out... They say hate Muslims on the Twitter. ...And I couldn't go outside because I didn't know what the people here believe. So, I am not sure and now I am not alone, I have a baby so I need to more safety and maybe that time it made me afraid. And my husband asked me to stay in the home. ... In these days, I'm thinking about I want to go back to Saudi Arabia.

Rachel's family in Saudi Arabia also worried about her safety in the U.S. at this time. Rachel explained, "...my mother say that what happened and she says she is also afraid because she just tell me, why are you going to the United States?" After a few days, Rachel made a decision that she would not be afraid to attend classes and be present in the community as she normally would, even if wearing the hijab in public meant something bad would happen to her. Rachel described her conviction:

I chose to come to the United States and wear hijab so I am strong to see any people say and see. Also to the people, say to the people, I am Muslim and everything is not wrong with us, with the Muslims women. Saudi Muslim people, there is a bad Muslim, [there] is a good Muslim.

Rachel resolved to be strong in spite of her fear. Rachel also found solace in the fact that she lived in a small community. She explained, "I live in a small town, the people know each other. I didn't live in the big city, there is a lot of people with many countries. So I feel safe in the [name of city]."

A Saudi student at Midwest College, Tyler described how the climate in his community changed after Trump became president and how he began to experience incidents of bias as a Muslim:

Uh... to be honest... before when Obama was in the office, uh, so... was normal, but when the next president took the office, people looked at me in a different way. What I mean, maybe like, maybe I see in their look, what am I still doing here, why don't I go back home. Not a lot of people, just a few. I could see it, like, by their eyes, they look at me.

What had been a welcoming place for Tyler in the Midwestern U.S. began to change as the socio-political climate changed with the Trump administration.

Like Rachel, Nicholas began to fear for his safety after Trump was elected and the travel ban on individuals from predominantly Muslim countries was announced. At first he relaxed a bit knowing his home country, Saudi Arabia, was not on the list, however the increasing anti-

Muslim rhetoric from the Trump administration emboldened others to show hatred and bias toward Muslims in the U.S. made him afraid in his Midwestern community. Nicholas shared:

...make me kind of afraid, because some of the racist people who don't like Muslims, they start like kind of to show more, to get out of the street, they made a lot of problems. Make me kind of afraid, I would say. Because anything could happen to me. Especially for me, I like to walk a lot. I like, I mean, at night, nobody with me. So kind of, I'm alone. They could attack me. So that make me afraid.

Like Rachel, Nicholas' family in Saudi Arabia also worried about his safety in the U.S. after the election and announcement of the travel ban. Nicholas explained:

...my family pushing a lot on me. Be careful, don't go out. ...So actually he (my father) was worried and thinking and follow up with the election here a lot. Because he knows the system and also he knows about the U.S. system. So, kind of, he's worried more.

Like other Muslim international students in the U.S. at that time, Nicholas expressed concern over the uncertainty of what would happen if he went back home. Nicholas shared:

So, most of it at that time, it was kind of summer or at the end of the year and most of us want to go back. And we heard that if we go back, we will not come back. And most of us had only one year left or one semester. So most of us just stayed here. We didn't want to go out. Just want to finish and go back. But, uh, after he gets president, I mean, after he won the election, weren't nervous about the people hate the Muslims, at least now. I was nervous about them. Two months. After that it was ok for me.

For Nicholas, like Rachel and Hannah, the fear of what would happen to them as Muslim international students in the U.S. lasted for a relatively short period of time and then it was gone. The focus for Nicholas was on finishing his degree and then returning to Saudi Arabia.

Like Nicholas, Oscar, who was also from Saudi Arabia, was initially afraid when the ban on individuals from predominantly Muslim countries was announced and his family members in Saudi Arabia also expressed fear for his safety. Oscar shared:

I know that when the Muslim community got banned, um, I was terrified, yes. Um, 'cause there was a lot of rumors that we will be, we will get kicked out. And I remember my mom calling and saying, right before he won the election, she said, if that woman doesn't win, come back. And she was referring to Clinton. And I'm like, do you want me to come back because she didn't win because you were a female or because you really

hate Trump? [Smiling] And she goes, I don't hate anybody, I'm just scared, I don't want anything to happen to my son. And I'm like, if there's anything, trust me, I'll come back on the first plane. But, you know, there isn't... I truly want to continue my school. And, she was against it, but you know with time, I was able to convince her. Let them be them and let us be us.

For Oscar, Trump's election and the subsequent travel ban was one of many obstacles he had to overcome in order to reach his goal of obtaining a degree in the U.S. Oscar explained how he viewed the challenge:

I thank God that I made it this far and, uh, every time I see an obstacle ahead of me and I pass it, I never look back. And I think that Trump's election was one of 'em. Since it passed I tried my best not to look back and I gain focus on getting my degree. 'Cause every time something happens, I say to myself, I have passed or been through worse and have gotten through that, I must go through this one...

Conflicted feelings or no feelings of impact. Two participants in the study expressed conflicted feelings or no feelings of impact from the Trump administration's travel ban. Michael, from Saudi Arabia, shared how he felt sorry for innocent people affected by the policy, but also believed Trump had the right to protect America by implementing the policy. Michael explained:

The first time I heard about the ban from countries, I felt like bad. But when I read about it and think about it, no, I think he (Trump), he has something... he wants like to protect his... like Homeland Security... his land, from his position as a president. But I feel sorry about this that people are from these countries, because I know there are many innocent people, and there are people from the two countries they can't move like their families and like this. But this is something like, if you think about it without emotions, it's because they think he say this, it was the countries who are, uh, who are in crisis zones or something. Yeah. Conflict zones. So, if you think about it from this angle, you'll understand.

Michael, who was interested in U.S. politics, explained why he preferred Trump over Obama and why he believed the Trump administration was better for Saudi Arabia than the Obama administration:

Now I don't like Obama because I think Obama, he did bad things to the Middle East, because he was the president of the strongest country in the world and he didn't take any

actions... Like the Iranian deal. It was not good. I think he was thinking like this will make them more open to the world and they will not try to create this what they want to create. But still, in Syria he didn't make any actions. He was like to try to not get involved. But if you are United States and not getting involved this is not good. ...Trump, now he is, I think he is thinking to do something about Syria after chemical warfare, last two days. ...I think that we have the strongest relationship between U.S. and Saudi Arabia now with Trump.

Michael acknowledged Trump said negative things about Muslims during his campaign, but reconciled Trump's negative comments in this way:

... he said bad things, by the way, about us in his debate and I don't like, but every president change their point of view after being president.

Like Michael, Faisal, agreed that Trump had the right to keep people out of the U.S. that could be a threat to national security. Faisal explained that, in his opinion, nothing had really changed for Saudi international students with Trump as president:

...as a Muslim international student, as a Saudi especially, there is nothing have been changed for us as a Saudi students. ...in my mind really this is just very simple rights for American government to do. Because they're trying to avoid the, you know, avoid any bad people coming to America. ...This is American rights to do, I think, my personal idea. So, yeah, but being a Muslim, as a Saudi student here ... I haven't facing any issue at all...I'm not a political guy, just watching my country news only. That's what I care about more.

In summary, participants in the study were impacted in a variety of ways by the Trump administration's rhetoric and policies pertaining to the travel ban on individuals from predominantly Muslim-majority countries and general anti-Muslim sentiments. For Bob from Bangladesh and Michelle from Iran, the impact was negative and life-changing, causing personal, emotional, psychological, and financial hardship. For Hannah from Kuwait, as well as Rachel, Tyler, Nicholas and Oscar from Saudi Arabia, the impact of Trump's rhetoric and policies caused fear for their personal safety, increased incidents of discrimination and bias, and uncertainty about their future as a student in the U.S. For Michael and Faisal from Saudi Arabia, the impact was minimal or absent with an understanding and support of Trump and his policies.

Addressing the Research Questions

This study was guided by the overarching research question: How do Muslim international students studying at four-year institutions in the Midwestern U.S. experience their identities? The overarching research question includes the following two research questions guided by the lens of social constructivism:

1. Prior to studying in the Midwestern U.S., how did Muslim international students experience their religious, ethnic/racial, and gender identities?
2. How do Muslim international students experience their religious, ethnic/racial, and gender identities as students in the Midwestern U.S.?

A summary of general findings from the participants addressing the two research questions are shared in the following sections.

Addressing Research Question 1

Muslim international students participating in this study shared how they experienced their religious, ethnic/racial, and gender identities prior to studying in the Midwestern U.S. For students in this study, religious identity was often one of their most salient identities and often inseparable from their ethnic or national identity. Nine of the ten participants identified themselves as practicing Muslims prior to coming to the U.S. In particular, they practiced Islamic daily prayers in their home countries at the regular prayer times and prayer was an important part of their ethnic/national identity as well as their religious identity.

Participants in the study typically did not have a strong racial identity prior to coming to the U.S. In fact, most of the participants in the study were unfamiliar with the concept of racial identity prior to coming to the U.S. At least one participant, Michelle who is from Iran, noted that racial constructs appear to be unique to the U.S., Canada, Australia, and other western

countries. Most of the students from Saudi Arabia identified as Saudi or Arab and at least two participants viewed their ethnic and religious identities as synonymous and equally important.

For most of the participants in the study, their gender identity experience prior to coming to the U.S. was closely tied to traditional Muslim values and expectations for males and females within Muslim culture. Many male Muslim international students in the study expressed their gender identity as being tied to traditional Muslim values such as being responsible to work outside the home to earn wages, protecting and honoring women, and taking care of their families. Most, although not all, followed traditional gender roles and gender expectations for males in their countries. Bob grew up in a less traditional Muslim home in Bangladesh where things such as household chores were shared between male and female siblings.

The three female Muslim international students in the study experienced their gender identities in distinctly different ways prior to coming to the U.S. Rachel expressed her gender identity as closely tied to traditional Muslim values and expectations in Saudi Arabia. She chose to cover her face and wear the abaya and shared how lucky she felt to be a woman and be taken care of by her father and husband. Hannah also expressed her gender identity as tied to traditional Muslim values and expectations in Kuwait. She chose to wear the hijab and discussed how today in Kuwait, men and women are more equal than in the past as it pertained to working outside of the home, attending college, and other activities. Michelle, being an older non-traditionally aged student from Iran, had more life experience than the other participants. As the only female child in her family, Michelle remembers being very well taken care of and pampered by her father. However, Michelle did not agree with the expectations placed on women in Iran. Due to Iranian laws requiring women to wear a headscarf, Michelle was required to cover her

hair while she lived in Iran, but she did not want to cover her hair. Michelle also did not want to be restricted to only having friendships with other women, but no men.

Addressing Research Question 2

Muslim international students participating in this study shared how they experienced their religious, ethnic/racial, and gender identities as students in the Midwestern U.S. For students in this study, what it meant to be Muslim did not change for them when they came to the Midwestern U.S. to study, although at least one participant reported becoming a stronger Muslim as a result of interactions with others in the Midwestern U.S. However, how participants practiced their Muslim religion did change as they encountered difficulties practicing Islamic prayers, such as prayer times conflicting with class times. Participants in the study found ways to adjust and cope with these difficulties, in part by acknowledging that Islam is a flexible religion allowing them to pray outside of the standard times when conflicts with school do not exist.

For students in this study, how they experienced their racial/ethnic identity did not change for them once they were studying in the U.S. Students continued to identify as Saudi, Arab, Kuwaiti, Bangladeshi/Bengali, or Persian. Several students discussed how their ethnic and religious identities were synonymous. Tyler, for example, explained that being Saudi in Saudi Arabia means being a Muslim in Saudi Arabia. At least half of the participants found the use of racial constructs or use of racialized labels in the U.S. to be offensive or inappropriate. Only one participant, Oscar, discussed how he was perceived by others in the U.S. based upon his skin color.

Participants in the study shared how they experienced their gender identity as students in the Midwestern U.S. For male Muslim international students, most shared they experienced their

gender identity in the U.S. in a similar way as they did in their home country. For at least one participant, Bob, he explained that he learned a different way of being respectful of women in the U.S. because relationships with women in the U.S. are much closer and more equal than in his home country of Bangladesh.

For the female Muslim international students in the study, each experienced their gender identity differently in the Midwestern U.S. For Rachel, being a woman in the Midwestern U.S. was more unique and harder than being a woman in Saudi Arabia because she was one of the only women in her Midwestern U.S. town who chooses to cover her face and wear the abaya. In addition, it was difficult for Rachel to navigate close interactions with male teachers and shopkeepers in the Midwestern U.S. – something she did not have to do in Saudi Arabia. For Hannah, being one of the only Kuwaiti women on her Midwestern U.S. campus was very challenging because she did not connect with any other Kuwaiti Muslim women. As a result, Hannah explored ways to form friendships with male Kuwaiti international students on her campus in ways acceptable within her culture. For Michelle, being a woman in the Midwestern U.S. changed her identity as a woman significantly. She reported becoming stronger and more self-sufficient, did not have to cover her hair and could wear the clothes she chose to wear, and was able to appreciate her relationships with men more because she felt more valued as a person.

Summary

This section included findings from the six themes emerging from interviews with ten Muslim international students studying on four different campuses in the Midwestern U.S.: (1) Changes to practicing Islam in the Midwestern U.S., (2) Racial construct as a new concept, (3) Male/female interactions on campus and in the classroom, (4) Choosing to veil or not to veil, (5) Stereotypes and coping with discrimination, and (6) Impact of Trump administration rhetoric and

policies. When presented collectively, these themes provided a better understanding of how ten Muslim international students participating in this study experienced their religious, ethnic/racial, and gender identities at four-year universities in the Midwestern U.S.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to better understand how Muslim international students experience their identities at four-year universities in the Midwestern U.S. using Kim's (2012) International Student Identity (ISI) model as a guiding framework. The research question guiding the study was, how do Muslim international students studying at four-year institutions in the Midwestern U.S. experience their identities? This chapter first provides a summary of the study's significant findings and how the findings related to the literature discussed in this study as well as Kim's (2012) International Student Identity model. Second, implications for theory, practice, and policy are described for international student practitioners, student affairs administrators, and institutional administrators on more effectively serving and including Muslim international students on Midwestern U.S. campuses. Finally, suggestions for future research are offered.

Summary of Significant Findings

The findings in this study illustrated how Muslim international students studying at four-year universities in the Midwestern U.S. experience their religious, ethnic/racial, and gender identities. Significant findings in this study emerged from six themes. The first finding, difficulties in practicing Islamic prayer in the Midwestern U.S., grew out of the first theme of changes to practicing Islam in the Midwestern U.S. The second finding, Islam as a flexible religion, also came from the first theme of changes to practicing Islam in the Midwestern U.S. The third finding, racial construct as a new and troubling concept, grew out of the second theme of racial construct as a new concept. The fourth finding, male/female interactions on campus and in the classroom, came from the third theme of male/female interactions on campus and in

the classroom. The fifth finding, perceptions of veiling in the Midwestern U.S., grew out of the fourth theme of choosing to veil or not to veil. The sixth finding, stereotypes of Muslim international students based upon their national identity, came from the fifth theme of stereotypes and coping with discrimination. The seventh finding, fear of practicing Islamic prayer due to stereotypes of Muslims, grew out of the fifth theme of stereotypes and coping with discrimination. The eighth finding, coping with acts of discrimination, also grew out of the fifth theme of stereotypes and coping with discrimination. The ninth finding, impact of Trump administration rhetoric and policies, grew out of the sixth theme of impact of Trump administration rhetoric and policies.

Outlying Participants

It is important to recognize two outlying participants in the study, Michelle and Bob, as their identity experiences tended to fall outside of those of the other participants. Michelle and Bob had been in the U.S. longer than most of the other participants, seven and nine years respectively. As a result of being in the U.S. longer than most of the other participants, Michelle and Bob tended to demonstrate a familiarity with the ways identity is conceived in the U.S. culture that enabled them to provide a greater depth and breadth in their identity experiences. Being in the U.S. longer, Michelle and Bob also tended to provide more examples of identity experiences ranging into Phase 4, Phase 5 and, occasionally, Phase 6 of Kim's (2012) International Student Identity model whereas the other participants who had not been in the U.S. as long did not show this depth and breadth of identity experiences. Michelle was the only graduate student in the study. Michelle was also the only non-practicing Muslim in the study. Michelle from Iran and Bob from Bangladesh were both from non-Arab nations while all of the other participants were from the Arab nations of Saudi Arabia or Kuwait.

While all but one participant (Hannah) in the study were non-traditionally aged students (age 24+), Michelle was the only student who was an older non-traditionally aged student in the study which also contributed to her depth and breadth of experience. Oscar, from Saudi Arabia, had been in the U.S. for eight years and also showed greater depth and breadth of identity experiences than other Saudi participants in the study who had been in the U.S. for shorter periods of time. Finally, Michelle and Bob were the only participants in the study who were not financially sponsored by their home country governments. All of the Saudi and Kuwaiti participants in the study were financially sponsored by their governments.

Difficulties in Practicing Islamic Prayer in the Midwestern U.S.

Many participants in this study found it difficult to continue the important practice of Islamic prayers while studying in the Midwestern U.S. Prayer times often occurred at the same time as class or other school commitments. Some participants felt they had to make a difficult decision about whether to leave what they were doing to go and pray. If they left a class or study group to pray, they were faced with having to make up the work they missed while they were gone. Some participants were also concerned about disrespecting their professors if they prayed during class. In addition, some participants had difficulty finding an appropriate place to pray discreetly while on campus.

According to Baumeister (1986), identity conflict occurred when an individual was faced with too many commitments, each requiring different ways of behaving, and the individual felt they must betray one or more commitment in order to resolve the crisis. My study affirmed Baumeister's findings, as many students in my study faced identity conflict when they had to choose between the commitment of attending class and the commitment of praying. Muslim international students in Asmar's (2005) and Dimandja's (2017) studies shared concerns about

inadequate prayer space on campus and difficulty praying during class. The students in Asmar's study also reported a strong commitment to their academic programs. Participants in my study also shared concerns about accessing appropriate space for prayer and difficulty praying during class, as well as a strong commitment to their academic programs.

Islam as a Flexible Religion

The students in this study struggled with being able to continue practicing their prayers at the regularly scheduled times each day due to needing to attend class and not being able to find a comfortable space to perform their prayers, especially as a woman. This is because Islam is not the dominant religion in the Midwestern U.S. and calendars and schedules in the Midwestern U.S. region are dictated mainly by the Christian calendar. As Christians do not practice regularly scheduled prayers each day as Muslims do, classes are scheduled continuously throughout the day and do not create a space when everything closes and people stop what they are doing and pray. In addition, no classes are held on Sundays when most Christians attend church, but classes are held on Fridays when Muslims attend congregational prayer. Despite these challenges, Muslim international students in this study found ways to practice Islamic prayer by delaying prayers until after classes were over or combining prayers together when they were able to pray. Students in the study believed that God understood their circumstances of not being able to pray always at the designated time and that it was acceptable when they made these adjustments.

Just as participants in this study had to renegotiate how they practiced their beliefs through prayer, the intentional process of exploring identity, (re)negotiating beliefs, and considering factors contributing to identity experiences were cited as common experiences in a number of studies mentioned in the review of literature (Cerbo, 2010; Dey, 2012; Neider, 2011).

However, the theme of Islam as a flexible religion, especially when it comes to prayer and prayer times, was not found in any of the literature reviewed for this study. Cerbo (2010) suggested exploring in future research “how Islamic practices such as prayer five times a day may interfere with course scheduling and campus activities” (p. 229). Previous research has identified Muslim international students’ challenges in fulfilling the obligation of daily prayer, but have not considered the students’ adaptation strategies related to prayer. My study helps to fill this gap in the research by identifying how some Muslim international students in the Midwestern U.S. renegotiate daily prayer. By identifying flexibilities within Islam, some students in my study were able to find workable solutions despite studying on campuses and in communities that did not provide adequate access or space for daily prayer and communal Friday prayers.

Racial Construct as a New and Troubling Concept

Overall, participants in this study did not know about racial constructs and categories used in the U.S. until after arriving in the U.S. Students’ ethnic identities such as Arab, Bengali, or Persian were more salient to them than any racial identity. The use of racial categories to classify individuals in the U.S. was a new and often troubling concept to students. Students recognized the categories were connected to a racial hierarchy. As noted by several of the participants, Muslims are taught not to judge others by their appearance, including their skin color. As students in this study learned more about racial constructs in the U.S., they identified these as problematic.

Like participants in Fries-Britt, George Mwangi and Peralta’s (2014) study, some of the students in my study found that typical race and racial identity development frameworks in the U.S. did not capture the behaviors and perceptions of foreign-born students of color. Although most of the students in my study did not identify as students of color, they were noticeably from

a different ethnic background than the majority white students with European ancestry on their Midwestern campuses. One of the students, Oscar, discussed being seen as Hispanic or Indian on his campus. Another student, Bob, said local students on his campus had difficulty identifying where he was from based upon his skin color. As international students, some participants in my study did not have an understanding of the racialized history of Blacks, Latinx, or Indigenous peoples in the U.S. Only Michelle, who was an older non-traditionally-aged student and had been exposed to racial identity frameworks in the U.S. in her graduate studies, expressed an understanding of the complexities of racialized identities in the U.S. Like students in Zimmerman's (2008) study, participants in my study experienced consistent ethnic identities that did not change, despite exposure to U.S. ethnic identities.

As I did not specifically ask the question, most participants in my study did not discuss whether or not subordinated groups based on racial or ethnic identity existed in their home countries. This is not surprising given that eight of the participants came from the ethnically homogenous countries of Saudi Arabia and Bangladesh. Michelle, from Iran, and Hannah, from Kuwait, were from more ethnically diverse countries, but neither participant discussed if nor how ethnic minorities in their home countries were racialized or minoritized groups.

Male/Female Interactions on Campus and in the Classroom

The common thread between Rachel, Hannah, and Nicholas as it pertained to male/female interactions in the Midwestern U.S. was that it was alright for females to sit or interact with males or males with females as long as it was for purposes of studying or school. Rachel and Hannah came to this decision after talking with a spouse or parent who told them it would be alright to interact with men within the classroom or to study. Nicholas, came to this

decision independent of others, but with a clear understanding that he must always interact with women in spaces and ways that would not violate Islamic values.

Like female participants in Cerbo's (2010) study, Hannah and Rachel used a religious lens to make meaning of their interactions with others. Hannah in her relationships with male Kuwaiti international students and Rachel in her relationship with a male teacher. Nicholas went through an intentional process of exploring his Muslim identity and negotiating his beliefs (Cerbo, 2010; Dey, 2012; Neider, 2011) as he started dating a female U.S. student on his campus. As long as they did not violate their Islamic values, Hannah, Rachel, and Nicholas were able to navigate relationships with the opposite sex in ways that would not have occurred in their home countries of Kuwait and Saudi Arabia.

Unlike some participants in Alruwaili's (2017) and Lefdahl-Davis and Perron-McGovern's (2015) studies, neither Hannah nor Rachel in my study reported becoming more independent after living in the U.S. Michelle reported becoming more independent and less dependent on males when she left Iran and lived in another country before coming to the U.S., and reported her independence continued to develop and strengthen in the U.S. However, neither Hannah nor Rachel reported becoming more independent and less dependent on males as a result of living in the U.S. Although the permission Hannah and Rachel were given to interact with men in ways to pursue their education demonstrated some level of new independence while living in the U.S.

Perceptions of Veiling in the Midwestern U.S.

The female participants in the study came from three different countries with different cultural expectations for veiling. All three female participants in the study believed that veiling was a choice for Muslim women. All three participants were comfortable with and valued their

own choice to veil or not to veil and respected the choices of other Muslim women to veil in different ways or not to veil at all. The participants who chose to veil, Hannah and Rachel, experienced for the most part respectful curiosity from others in their communities regarding their veils. While the participant who chose not to veil, Michelle, encountered questions about her decision not to veil and perceptions of veiling as a tool of oppression.

Like participants in the Dimandja (2017) study, one participant in my study, Rachel, reported two incidents when her expression of her Muslim identity through the hijab resulted in feelings of resistance from members of her Midwestern community. Another participant, Hannah, reported negative responses to her hijab when visiting a mall in a larger nearby city similar to participants in the Dimandja (2017) and Tummala-Narra and Claudius (2013) studies. Like participants in Dimandja and Tummala-Narra and Claudius' studies, Rachel and Hannah also reported the discrimination related more to being a visible minority (e.g. veiling) and less to their Islamic beliefs. It may not be possible to know for certain, however, whether Rachel and Hannah were discriminated against due to their ethnic minority status or their religious beliefs and practices. Despite these incidents, Rachel and Hannah both stressed that most of the people they encountered in their Midwestern community were kind and accepting of them as Muslim women who veiled.

Although one female participant in my study, Michelle, chose not to veil, she was often confronted with perceptions from others in her Midwestern community that Muslim women were forced to wear the hijab by men or their families instead of being seen as committed Muslim woman who wore the hijab by choice. This inconsistency between self-perception and others' perceptions was also reported by participants in studies by Dimandja (2017), Schatz (2008), and Tummala-Narra and Claudius (2013).

A number of key findings from Gregory's (2014) and Lefdahl-Davis and Perron-McGovern's (2015) studies were also reflected in the Muslim women in my study. All three of the women in my study felt obligated to counter stereotypes and educate others about Muslims and Islam, especially as it related to veiling (Gregory, 2014; Lefdahl-Davis & Perron-McGovern, 2015). In addition, Rachel and especially Hannah maintained connections with home through daily prayer and wearing the hijab as did some participants in Gregory's study.

Stereotypes of Muslim International Students Based Upon Their National Identity

Some participants in my study described being stereotyped based upon their ethnic or national identities. Several participants reported Saudi students on their campus were either stereotyped as good Saudis or bad Saudis depending on whether or not they drank, smoked weed or partied. Other participants described being stereotyped positively or negatively by older or younger generations of Americans based upon their ethnic or national identity of Saudi or Persian.

While none of the participants in my study reported feeling unfairly discriminated against as a whole in their Midwestern communities, some participants reported feeling unfairly discriminated against by specific faculty or segments of the population. For example, some older individuals in the Midwestern U.S. who remembered the events of September 11, 2001, were more likely to unfairly discriminate against some Saudi participants in my study. This was also seen in Dey's (2012) study. Similar to participant experiences in studies by Lee (2010) and Lee and Rice (2007), these acts of discrimination included perceptions of unfairness and inhospitality as well as cultural intolerance and confrontation. Several male Saudi participants in my study also reported judgment of one another based upon whether they were a "good" Saudi or a "bad"

Saudi. Muslim-on-Muslim prejudice was also found in Dey's (2012) study as one of the contextual factors found to influence how Muslim American students constructed their identity.

Several participants in my study, including Hannah, Rachel, and Tyler, discussed how they expected to find more discrimination against Muslims in the U.S. based upon what they had seen and heard in their home countries prior to coming to the U.S. This finding was similar to that of participants in Lefdahl-Davis and Perron-McGovern's (2015) study who expected the U.S. to be more dangerous and unwelcoming than it turned out to be in reality. In addition, participants in both my study and the Lefdahl-Davis and Perron-McGovern study shared that when they experienced discrimination and/or curiosity, they wanted to dispel myths about Islam or what it means to be Muslim.

Fear of Practicing Islamic Prayer Due to Stereotypes of Muslims

Four participants in my study discussed how they had been afraid to practice Islamic prayer due to stereotypes held about Muslims in the U.S. Some of the participants were afraid to say Islamic prayers in public spaces as they did not want to be labeled as terrorists. Fear of being labeled as a terrorist was similar to one of the emerging themes of participants in Ali's (2014) study of Muslim American students who said they felt they were seen as a physical threat by others. Muslim international students in Nasir and Al-Amin's (2006) study also reported being afraid of being seen as a threat while engaging in religious practices like praying on campus.

The fear of practicing Islamic prayer in public has certainly increased in the post-9/11 U.S. given the rise of anti-Muslim sentiment stemming from those events. The fear may be even more acute in small Midwestern U.S. communities similar to those where many of my participants were studying, especially given that some of those communities did not have a

mosque nor a proper prayer space on their campuses, thereby making it even more difficult to find a safe and comfortable place to engage in prayer.

Coping With Acts of Discrimination

Despite being stereotyped and facing discrimination as Muslim international students in the Midwestern U.S., participants found ways to cope with the impact, often with assistance from other Muslim international students and family members. Like participants in studies conducted by Seggie and Sanford (2010), Shamma (2015), and Tummala-Narra and Claudius (2013), participants in my study who experienced incidents of bias and discrimination showed evidence of both stress and resilience. Like participants in Shamma's (2015) study, participants in my study, particularly those from Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, were more likely to form friendships with those sharing their ethnic identity. Shamma also noted the value of same-ethnic friendships for students in her study as a means of self-preservation. Hannah, Nicholas, and Oscar all provided examples of how friendships with other Kuwaiti or Saudi international students helped them to cope with discrimination and other difficulties on their campuses.

I was struck by how resilient students in my study were as they encountered bias and discrimination due to their various identities. It seemed that much of their resilience was related to the fact that they did not intend to stay in the U.S. as immigrants. Rather, most of them planned to complete their degrees and return home to work. Some participants, like Rachel, were unaware of discriminatory things being said about them due to their lack of English proficiency, particularly early in their time in the U.S.

Impact of Trump Administration Rhetoric and Policies

Participants in this study were impacted in a variety of ways by the Trump administration's rhetoric and policies pertaining to the travel ban on individuals from

predominantly Muslim-majority countries and general anti-Muslim sentiments. For Bob from Bangladesh and Michelle from Iran, the impact was negative and life-changing, causing personal, emotional, psychological, and financial hardship. For Hannah from Kuwait, as well as Rachel, Tyler, Nicholas and Oscar from Saudi Arabia, the impact of Trump's rhetoric and policies caused fear for their personal safety, increased incidents of discrimination and bias, and uncertainty about their future as a student in the U.S. For Michael and Faisal from Saudi Arabia, the impact was minimal or absent with an understanding and support of Trump and his policies.

Like participants in Dimandja's (2017) study, most of the participants in my study found Trump's ban on individuals from Muslim-majority countries as well as general anti-Muslim sentiment caused feelings of marginalization, fear, and discrimination. Unlike Dimandja's participants, one of my participants, Michelle, was from a country named in the travel ban (Iran). The impact on Michelle was severely negative and life-changing personally, professionally, economically, and psychologically. Most of the participants in my study from Saudi Arabia and Kuwait were afraid when the travel ban was first announced, but then relaxed after they saw they would not be impacted negatively. I was surprised that two of my participants, Michael and Faisal, not only did not feel threatened by the Trump administration's policies and rhetoric, but actually supported Trump's decision to enact the policy even though they themselves were Muslim. Given that Faisal and Michael were both from Saudi Arabia and given Trump's positive and close relationship with the Saudi Crowned Prince, they may have been less likely to feel threatened than individuals from other Muslim-majority countries whose leadership does not share close relations with the Trump administration.

Emergent Themes Viewed through Kim's (2012) Model

The findings from the data analyses (Moustakas, 1994) yielded six major themes related to the guiding research questions of this study: How do Muslim international students studying at four-year institutions in the Midwestern U.S. experience their identities? Table 3 provides a representation of the emergent themes as viewed through the lens of Kim's (2012) International Student Identity model. Each theme was viewed through the lens of Kim's six phase model: pre-exposure, exposure, enclosure, emergence, integration, and internationalization (see Table 1 for Kim's, 2012, International Student Identity Model). Phases of Kim's model found in each theme were briefly described and a select quote from one of the participants reflecting each phase of the model was provided, although more than one student typically reflected the phases found in each theme.

Changes to Practicing Islamic Prayer in the Midwestern U.S.

This emergent theme related to how Muslim international students in the study experienced changes to practicing Islamic prayer in the Midwestern U.S. Emerging sub-themes included the difficulty of practicing prayer in the Midwestern U.S. and Islam as a flexible religion. In this theme, three phases of Kim's (2012) International Student Identity model were seen in experiences shared by participants, Phase 2: Exposure – Opening Self, Phase 3: Enclosure – Securing Self, and Phase 4: Emergence – Disclosing Self.

In Phase 2: Exposure – Opening Self, Kim (2012) described how international students' often found their heritage was inconsistent with the unfamiliar educational and cultural environment. At least half of the participants in the study discussed how their Islamic tradition of praying five times each day at regular prayer times changed when they attended school in the U.S., a majority Christian nation, where class times conflicted with Islamic prayer times making

it difficult to continue this important religious practice as an international student in the U.S.

Sam shared:

...you sometimes get busy and sometimes prayers get really close to each other because of the difference in the time... I don't have any problem with the one in the morning and the one at night, but the one in the middle and the one in the day, you know – sometimes you get stuck with it.

In Phase 3: Enclosure – Securing Self, Kim (2012) found international students sought security through family and peers as well as the closeness of self-ethnicity, country of origin, and religious communities. Oscar expressed a longing for the ritual of Friday prayer time in community with family. Now an international student in the Midwestern U.S. where the nearest mosque was several miles away and difficult to get to amidst busy student schedules, Oscar desired that feeling of closeness with others from his religious community. Faisal explained how back home in Saudi Arabia all Muslim people connected with each other during Friday prayer. Faisal shared, “Sometimes when, you know, usually like people in the Friday prayer, all the Muslim people connected with each other, in my country back home... That’s how people always together, especially Friday.” Now in the Midwestern U.S., busy schedules made it difficult to come together and pray together in community.

In Phase 4: Emergence – Disclosing Self, Kim (2012) found international students began to break their psychosocial closure and seek distinct yet integrated identities. In this phase, Kim posited that students appreciate the values of tradition, but also explore other ways of thinking and being in their multicultural surroundings. Nicholas and Oscar recognized that some professors at their Midwestern U.S. university preferred Muslim international students not leave to pray during class at the regular prayer times. Acknowledging that not leaving class to pray is alright for them as Muslim international students, Nicholas and Oscar explained how it is acceptable for Muslim international students to delay praying until classes are over and praying

as soon as possible afterwards. Nicholas shared, “You can delay the prayer. It’s ok because we understand that as a country. And some professor, they don’t like you to skip the class. So after we finish the class, we go to prayer.” Nicholas and Oscar found another way to think of fulfilling the important Islamic tradition of prayer within their new surroundings in the Midwestern U.S.

Racial Construct as a New Concept

This emergent theme related to how Muslim international students in the study experienced racial construct as a new concept in the Midwestern U.S. In this theme, two phases of Kim’s (2012) International Student Identity model were seen in experiences shared by participants, Phase 1: Pre-Exposure – Inheriting Self and Phase 2: Exposure – Opening Self.

In Phase 1: Pre-Exposure – Inheriting Self, Kim (2012) described the identity of international students as being constructed around cultural values, viewpoints, and traditions. Bob talked about his cultural values back home in Bangladesh and how there was no emphasis placed on ethnic or racial difference. Bob shared, “...it didn’t really occur to me that our difference ethnically or racially, it didn’t really make a huge difference back home.” Rachel and Hannah noted that while they have black and white people in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, their Muslim values taught them not to judge or label others based on their appearance. Rachel shared, “... you shouldn’t say that because the Islam says all the people is the same.”

In Phase 2: Exposure – Opening Self, Kim (2012) found international students’ cultural heritage was inconsistent with the new and unfamiliar cultural environment. For Michelle, the concept of racial identity was new when she came to the U.S. Hyphenated terms such as African-American and other racialized constructs were new and unfamiliar from her cultural upbringing in Iran. Michelle shared, “In Iran, we have different people... different skin color

tones. But we usually don't care." Bob, Rachel, and Hannah expressed how different the use of racial constructs in the U.S. was from their home cultures in Bangladesh, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait. Bob shared, "I didn't realize these words... to me, this Arab is just another human... I didn't realize this was an issue."

Male/Female Interactions on Campus and in the Classroom

This emergent theme related to how Muslim international students in the study experienced male/female interactions on campus and in the classroom in the Midwestern U.S. In this theme, three phases of Kim's (2012) International Student Identity model were seen in experiences shared by participants, Phase 1: Pre-Exposure – Inheriting Self, Phase 2: Exposure – Opening Self, and Phase 3: Enclosure – Securing Self.

In Phase 1: Pre-Exposure – Inheriting Self, Kim (2012) described how international student identity is constructed around cultural values, viewpoints, and traditions. Rachel and other students in the study shared that there is a space or a separation between male and female in Islam. For Rachel and Hannah, this separation between males and females extended into the classroom as children growing up in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait and became a part of their cultural values and traditions. Rachel shared, "I study in high school with women and study elementary school with women and also university with women."

In Phase 2: Exposure – Opening Self, Kim (2012) found international students' cultural heritage diverged from their unfamiliar educational environment, that they responded to new challenges using familiar academic and cultural approaches from their own heritage, opened themselves up to unforeseen possibilities as challenges and obstacles were encountered, and made decisions about academic and social matters without losing their own culture and self. Hannah provided a good example of this phase in Kim's model as she discussed the challenge of

trying to find another Kuwaiti woman to connect with at her new and unfamiliar university in the Midwestern U.S. Finding another woman to connect with was important as Kuwaiti women do not have friendships with men in the same way that non-Muslim women and men have relationships. There was only one other Kuwaiti female student on campus, but their differences prevented them from becoming friends. However, there were Kuwaiti male students on campus. Hannah opened herself to the unforeseen possibility of forming a friendship with the Kuwaiti male students on campus because they would understand her cultural background. In doing so, Hannah made a decision about academic and social affairs without losing her own culture and self. Rachel also shared how difficult it was to have a male teacher, but how she was able to approach this challenge without compromising her Muslim values. Rachel shared, “I didn’t do something wrong, I just came to here to learn... when I... change my mind and change my some idea in mind, it helps me a lot to be comfortable to talk with man in the education.”

In Phase 3: Enclosure – Securing Self, Kim (2012) described international students as withdrawing by not socializing with those from different backgrounds, focusing on academic adjustment while distancing themselves from their surroundings, and seeking security through the comfort of family/peer bonds, self-ethnicity, and country of origin. When she was unable to find other Kuwaiti females to socialize and study with on her Midwestern U.S. campus, Hannah shared how she reached out to other Kuwaiti males who understood her culture and background instead of students from the U.S. or international students from other countries who came from different backgrounds. Hannah received approval from her mother to study with males from Kuwait as her mother understood Hannah’s need to receive help from other Kuwaitis who shared her culture even though males and females in Kuwait would not typically interact in this way. Hannah shared, “...we are connected together for the whole day so she knows what I do... I told

her when I talk to some guy. ...she look at the picture and say, yeah, ok, talk to him, it's fine."

Rachel also sought security and comfort from loved ones as she focused on adjustment to classes in the U.S. Rachel shared how her husband reassured her that she could interact with her male teacher and she would not be doing anything wrong because the interaction was for her education, not for other reasons that would not be acceptable.

Choosing to Veil or Not to Veil

This emergent theme related to female Muslim international students in the study and their decision to veil or not to veil prior to and while studying in the Midwestern U.S. In this theme, two phases of Kim's (2012) International Student Identity model were seen in experiences shared by participants, Phase 1: Pre-Exposure – Inheriting Self and Phase 2: Exposure – Opening Self.

In Phase 1: Pre-Exposure – Inheriting Self, Kim (2012) found international students in the pre-departure period often were seen as the chosen ones among peers. Kim also found international students in this phase continue to construct their identity around cultural values, viewpoints, and traditions. Hannah explained that prior to leaving Kuwait to study in the U.S. many people told her she would stop wearing her hijab in the U.S. because her parents would not know if she chose to stop wearing her hijab. However, Hannah's identity was strongly constructed around her Kuwaiti values and traditions and she knew that she would continue wearing her hijab in the U.S. even though she could have stopped wearing it without anyone knowing about it back home. Like Hannah, Rachel's identity was also strongly constructed around her Saudi values and her choice to cover reflected her values. Rachel shared, "So I wear the clothes I believe and I choose my clothes. I choose the hijab, I choose to cover my face."

In Phase 2: Exposure – Opening Self, Kim (2012) described how international students' heritage differs from their new and unfamiliar cultural environment, how students respond to new challenges with familiar cultural strategies, open up to unforeseen possibilities as challenges are encountered, and begin making decisions without losing connections to their own culture. As a Muslim female international student in the Midwestern U.S., Rachel chose to continue to cover her face and wear the abaya which made her stand out and sometimes receive negative or unwanted attention in her small rural community. Despite these difficulties, Rachel remained strong in her decision to continue wearing the clothes she would normally wear in Saudi Arabia because she believed God is everywhere and she wanted to share her culture with others. Hannah also chose to continue to wear the hijab at her university in the Midwestern U.S. and responded to challenges of being one of the only students who covered on her campus while remaining connected to her culture. Hannah explained, "Most people like when they see me, they are not comfortable with what I wear...I'm comfortable with that and if they want to look... ok... I see that they respect what I wear, what I do."

Stereotypes and Coping with Discrimination

This emergent theme related to how Muslim international students perceive they are stereotyped in the Midwestern U.S. and coping strategies for discrimination employed by participants while studying in the Midwestern U.S. In this theme, three phases of Kim's (2012) International Student Identity model were seen in experiences shared by participants, Phase 2: Exposure – Opening Self, Phase 3: Enclosure – Securing Self, and Phase 4: Emergence – Disclosing Self.

In Phase 2: Exposure – Opening Self, Kim (2012) described how international students' heritage diverges from their new unfamiliar environment. When he first arrived in the U.S.,

Oscar shared how practicing Islamic prayer as he did back home in Saudi Arabia was not possible in his new environment. Oscar said he did not practice Islamic prayer in front of people out of fear of being judged, stereotyped, or hated. Rachel shared a similar experience and said, “Ok, it’s so difficult in the U.S. to do the prayer. I am scared to pray here in the U.S. Like in a part of something because some people think it’s bad thing or something.”

In Phase 3: Enclosure – Securing Self, Kim (2012) found international students withdrew from their outside environment and did not socialize with others from different backgrounds, sought security from family and peers, and strongly reflected their heritage and cultural values in their identity. An example of this phase of Kim’s model was shared by Rachel. When Rachel encountered an experience of discrimination and bias at her Midwestern U.S. campus as a Muslim female who wore the abaya, she withdrew to her home, wanted to return to Saudi Arabia, and sought security with her husband. Rachel shared, “I don’t feel safety and I want to go back to Saudi Arabia.” Faisal shared how Saudi students on his campus seek security from each other when faced with racism and discrimination from faculty, “We are as Saudi students, we have the group here. We help each other. Who are good professors? Who’s not?”

In Phase 4: Emergence – Disclosing Self, Kim (2012) described how international students sought distinct yet integrated identities, made conscious efforts to build trustworthiness among different groups, got involved on and off campus to discover more about themselves, and explored unfamiliar settings. After the same incident of bias and discrimination shared above by Rachel, Rachel’s husband helped her by encouraging her to go out and get to know other people, people who would not discriminate against her based upon her decision to wear the abaya. In doing so, Rachel was able to get to know and build trust with others in the community and change her perspective about her environment. Oscar described a bias incident that occurred

while providing technology training to an older couple from the community in his Midwestern U.S. city. Oscar explained how much the couple appreciated his help and engaged him further in conversation. However, as soon as they learned Oscar was from Saudi Arabia, “that acceptance just went away... that bond, that laugh, that smile, you can see it. But I don’t judge. It’s alright.” Although Oscar experienced discrimination, it did not stop him from engaging with members of the community, working to build trust with others outside from different groups, and exploring unfamiliar settings.

Impact of Trump Administration Rhetoric and Policies

This emergent theme related to how Muslim international students were impacted by the Trump administration’s rhetoric and policies pertaining to the travel ban on predominantly Muslim-majority countries and general anti-Muslim sentiments. In this theme, four phases of Kim’s (2012) International Student Identity model were seen in experiences shared by participants, Phase 1: Pre-Exposure – Inheriting Self, Phase 2: Exposure – Opening Self, Phase 3: Enclosure – Securing Self, and Phase 4: Emergence – Disclosing Self.

In Phase 1: Pre-Exposure – Inheriting Self, Kim (2012) found as international students prepare to study in the U.S., cultural values and family influences their identities and direction of their lives. As Hannah was preparing to come to the U.S. to study through a scholarship provided by the Kuwaiti government, the Trump administration placed a travel ban on individuals from seven majority-Muslim countries. Although Kuwait was not one of the countries on the list, the anti-Muslim rhetoric coming from the Trump administration created a climate unwelcoming to all Muslims. This feeling of uncertainty and no longer being welcome in the U.S. produced concern for Hannah as she did not have any other options for pursuing her university education in Kuwait. Hannah shared, “Like if the current president does not welcome

us, what should I do?” Hannah’s mother stepped in and directed Hannah to go to the U.S. despite the concerns, thereby influencing the direction of Hannah’s life.

In Phase 2: Exposure – Opening Self, Kim (2012) described international students opening up to unforeseen possibilities as they encounter challenges, developing independence, separating from parental guidance, and making academic decisions without losing their own culture. When the Trump administration announced the travel ban, Rachel initially was afraid to go out into her community and wanted to return home to Saudi Arabia. However, after reflecting on her reasons for being in the U.S., Rachel decided to stay and be proud, brave, and wear her abaya in public. Rachel shared, “I chose to come to the United States and wear hijab so I am strong to see any people say and see. Also... say to the people, I am Muslim and everything is not wrong with us...”

In Phase 3: Enclosure – Securing Self, Kim (2012) found international students withdraw from their outside environment and avoid socializing with others from different backgrounds, focus their attention on academic adjustment, and seek comfort from family and peers. In the wake of the Trump administration’s decision to impose the travel ban on individuals from Muslim-majority countries, Nicholas recalled many of the Saudi students at his U.S. institution wanted to go back home and be with their families who were concerned about them. However, the students learned they may have difficulty reentering the country if they left and since most of the students had only one year or one semester of school remaining before graduating, they remained in the U.S. and focused on completing their studies before returning home. Nicholas shared, “And most of us had only one year left or one semester. So most of us just stayed here. We didn’t want to go out. Just want to finish and go back.”

In Phase 4: Emergence – Disclosing Self, Kim (2012) described how international students break psychosocial closure and seek distinct integrated identities, make an effort to discover more about themselves and others, and appreciate their traditional values while also examining other ways of thinking. When Michael first learned about the Trump administration’s travel ban he felt bad for the innocent people who would be impacted. However, as Michael read and learned more about the decision to impose the travel ban, he came to understand the perspective of the Trump administration and why they might feel the need to impose such a travel ban. Michael shared, “But... if you think about it without emotions, it’s because... it was the countries who are, uh, who are in crisis zones or something. Yeah. Conflict zones. So, if you think about it from this angle, you’ll understand.”

Table 3

Emergent Themes Viewed through Kim’s (2012) International Student Identity Model

Emergent Theme	Description/Example	ISI Model Phase
Changes to Practicing Islamic Prayer in the Midwestern U.S.	(2) Heritage diverges from unfamiliar cultural environment. <i>We’re taught to pray at the same time when the prayer time comes, but again, um, because of school, I can’t just stand up, go to the back of the class and pray.</i> (Oscar)	Phase 2: Exposure – Opening Self
	(3) Seek security through family, peers, self-ethnicity/country of origin, religious communities. <i>Friday prayer is, um, considered back home as a holiday. ...and it has a lot of, um, rituals to it, seeing everybody in your family, getting to stay at the mosque for an hour to read Koran, pray for God. I miss that, that’s not presented in here due to being busy with school.</i> (Oscar)	Phase 3: Enclosure – Securing Self
	(4) Begin to break psychosocial closure & seek distinct yet integrated identities. <i>Some professors here in this school, they don’t prefer for us to go out during class to do my prayer cause</i>	Phase 4: Emergence – Disclosing Self

	<p><i>different time of day. So that's ok for us as a Muslim. It's ok to delay the prayer until we're finished from the class and do it. Pray as soon as we can. (Nicholas)</i></p>	
Racial Construct as New Concept	<p>(1) Identity constructed around cultural values, viewpoints, and traditions. <i>...it didn't really occur to me our difference ethnically or racially, it didn't really make a huge difference back home. (Bob)</i></p> <p>(2) Cultural heritage diverges from unfamiliar cultural environment. <i>...that concept was new to me when I came to the U.S. ...when I came to the U.S., it was like hyphenized, African-American, or it was a question. So it was a very new concept for me when I came here. (Michelle)</i></p>	<p>Phase 1: Pre-Exposure – Inheriting Self</p> <p>Phase 2: Exposure – Opening Self</p>
Male/Female Interactions on Campus and in the Classroom	<p>(1) Gender identity constructed around cultural values, viewpoints, and traditions. <i>There is a space between male and female in the Islam. (Rachel)</i></p> <p>(2) Cultural heritage diverges from unfamiliar educational environment. Respond to new challenges using familiar academic and cultural assets from own heritage. Open up to unforeseen possibilities as challenges/obstacles encountered. Make decisions about academic/social affairs without losing connectedness to own culture/self. <i>When I start to connect with somebody here I was looking for a woman, because in our society we don't have like relationships with men and women... I try to find a Kuwaiti woman, but I just found one. But she is really different than me, like, we are not friends... If I want friends, I should go to the guys here, Kuwaiti guys, because they know, we know each other... (Hannah)</i></p> <p>(3) Withdraw by not socializing with those from different backgrounds; focus on academic adjustment while distancing from surroundings; seek security through comfort of familial/peer bonds, self-ethnicity, and country of origin. <i>And I told my mother. I'm straight with my mother. I talk to this [Kuwaiti] guy and he wants me to help him with this thing. Or I want to sit with him at the library</i></p>	<p>Phase 1: Pre-Exposure – Inheriting Self</p> <p>Phase 2: Exposure – Opening Self</p> <p>Phase 3: Enclosure – Securing Self</p>

	<p><i>to study that. She understands that because there is no one here to help me ...if she can only call them and talk to them, like, to kind of tell them that I know, you can't do something, you know? (Hannah)</i></p>	
Choosing to Veil or Not to Veil	<p>(1) Isolated from peers, chosen ones among peers. Identity continues to be constructed around cultural values, viewpoints, and traditions. <i>...many people say that if you are going to America, you will drop off your hijab because then no one will see you... you don't have your mother and father behind you, they won't see you, like, you can do anything you want. But, no... I really like hijab. (Hannah)</i></p> <p>(2) Heritage diverges from unfamiliar cultural environment. Response to new challenges using familiar cultural assets from own heritage. Open up to unforeseen possibilities as challenges encountered. Make decisions about social affairs without losing connectedness to own culture. <i>I believe that this is my clothes in Saudi Arabia, why I don't change it here, because God is there, everywhere. ... I chose to cover my face and wear the abaya. I don't care about the people who thinking about something bad, cause I love to answer the people question. (Rachel)</i></p>	<p>Phase 1: Pre-Exposure – Inheriting Self</p> <p>Phase 2: Exposure – Opening Self</p>
Stereotypes and Coping with Discrimination	<p>(2) Heritage diverges from unfamiliar environment. <i>Um... when I first, couple of months here, I didn't pray in front of everybody. I was, I wouldn't say terrified of being judged, but I didn't want to be stereotyped, I didn't want to be hated. (Oscar)</i></p> <p>(3) Withdraw from outside environment not socializing with others from different backgrounds. Seek security through familial and peer bonds. Heritage and cultural values strongly reflected in identity. <i>I don't feel safety and I want to go back to Saudi Arabia. (Rachel)</i></p> <p>(4) Seek distinct yet integrated identities. Make conscious efforts to build trustworthiness among different groups; get involved in activities on and off campus to discover more about themselves. Exploration of unfamiliar settings.</p>	<p>Phase 2: Exposure – Opening Self</p> <p>Phase 3: Enclosure – Securing Self</p> <p>Phase 4: Emergence – Disclosing Self</p>

	<p><i>But my husband tell me to go there and know good people and... know another people. Don't keep just bad people in my mind. ... So, yeah, my husband helped me a lot to change everything in myself.</i> (Rachel)</p>	
Impact of Trump Administration Rhetoric and Policies	<p>(1) Students prepare for overseas experience of U.S. educational system. Cultural values and family influences basis of identification and direction of lives. <i>Like if the current president does not welcome us, what should I do? I have no other option, like, should I stay in my home and not do anything or something like that? I don't know. It is very hard thing. But my mother said you have to go, like you have to do it.</i> (Hannah)</p> <p>(2) Open up to unforeseen possibilities as they encounter challenges. Develop independence, separate from parental guidance. Make academic decisions without losing own culture. <i>In these days, I'm thinking about I want to go back to Saudi Arabia. But after that... I say, I choose that...I chose to come to the United States and wear hijab so I am strong.</i> (Rachel)</p> <p>(3) Withdraw from outside environment not socializing with others from different backgrounds. Focus on academic adjustment. Seek comfort from family and peers. <i>... at that time...most of us want to go back. And we heard that if we go back, we will not come back. And most of us had only one year left or one semester. So most of us just stayed here. We didn't want to go out. Just want to finish and go back.</i> (Nicholas)</p> <p>(4) Break psychosocial closure and seek distinct integrated identities. Effort to discover more about selves and others. Appreciates values of tradition, but also examines other ways of thinking. <i>The first time I heard about the ban from countries, I felt like bad. But when I read about it and think about it, no, I think he (Trump), he has something... he wants like to protect his... like Homeland Security... his land, from his position as a president. But I feel sorry about this that people are from these countries, because I know there are many innocent people.... But this is something like, if you think about it without emotions</i></p>	<p>Phase 1: Pre-Exposure – Inheriting Self</p> <p>Phase 2: Exposure – Opening Self</p> <p>Phase 3: Enclosure – Securing Self</p> <p>Phase 4: Emergence Disclosing Self</p>

	<i>...it was the countries who are, uh, who are in crisis zones... So, if you think about it from this angle, you'll understand. (Michael)</i>	
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Implications

The results of this study provided awareness about the religious, ethnic/racial, and gender experiences of ten Muslim international students studying at four-year institutions in the Midwestern U.S. The lived experiences shared by these participants provided insights and implications for theory and practice. As demographics increasingly change and internationalize on U.S. campuses, higher education theory and practice is at a pivotal moment. Theory and practice must continue to change in order to reflect the heterogeneous nature of students on U.S. campuses today.

Implications for Theory

In examining identity experiences of Muslim international students in the Midwestern U.S., currently accepted theories of psychosocial identity development (Chickering, 1969; Erikson, 1968) do not take into consideration identities within social groups based on religion, race/ethnicity, and gender. As these early theories were based mainly on norms and values of the dominant culture and samples that primarily reflected that population of white U.S. males, they were not appropriate for Muslim international students. Kim's (2012) International Student Identity model was designed to look specifically at international students from different parts of the world and, therefore, a better fit for my population of students.

While Kim's (2012) International Student Identity model showed how participants in my study experienced components of identity beyond what Chickering (1969) and Erikson (1968) theorized, additional factors made it difficult to apply. Some of the complexities of participants were captured using Kim's model. In Phase 1 of Kim's model, Pre-Exposure – Inheriting Self,

participants shared (1) how their identities were constructed around cultural values, viewpoints, and traditions from their home countries, (2) how they were isolated from peers and viewed as chosen ones among peers, and (3) how cultural values and family influences were the basis of their identification and the direction of their lives as they prepared for their overseas experience of the U.S. educational system. In Phase 2 of Kim's model, Exposure – Opening Self, participants reported (1) how their religious and ethnic heritage varied from the unfamiliar cultural environment found in the Midwestern U.S., (2) how they responded to new challenges using familiar academic and cultural assets from their own heritage, (3) how they opened up to unforeseen possibilities as challenges/obstacles were encountered, (4) how they developed independence separate from parental guidance, and (5) how they made decisions about academic/social affairs without losing connectedness to their own culture/self.

In Phase 3 of Kim's (2012) model, Enclosure – Securing Self, participants shared how they (1) sought security through family/peers and closeness of self-ethnicity/country of origin and religious communities, (2) withdrew by not socializing with those from different backgrounds, (3) focused on academic adjustment while beginning to distance themselves from their surroundings, and (4) reflected heritage and cultural values strongly in their identities. In Phase 4 of Kim's model, Emergence – Disclosing Self, participants reported (1) how they began to break psychosocial closure and seek distinct yet integrated identities, (2) made conscious efforts to build trustworthiness among different groups, (3) got involved in activities on and off campus to discover more about themselves and others, (4) explored unfamiliar settings, and (5) appreciated values of tradition, but also examined other ways of thinking.

Kim's (2012) model, however, did not always fit well with this population of students. Participants in this study did not express experiencing certain elements of Kim's Phase 1: Pre-

Exposure – Inheriting Self. Participants, for example, did not report experiencing conflict with their parents while selecting their U.S. university or major nor did they express enduring rigorous competition with their peers or, spending extra time working to meet university eligibility requirements. Perhaps this is because the majority of the students were from countries where they were financially sponsored by their governments and were able to choose from a list of approved U.S. universities and majors, thereby removing the element of competition that is typically present for students coming from East Asia and other Asian countries where competition for scholarships and prestige associated with getting into highly ranked universities is more prevalent.

Participants did not express concern that U.S. students and instructors might falsely attribute their limited English proficiency to academic incompetence as found in Phase 3: Enclosure – Securing Self of Kim's (2012) model. However, it is possible that this concern would have emerged if the question had been asked of the participants. The study focused on the students' religious, racial/ethnic, and gender identities and did not ask about academic or language acquisition experiences, which may explain why this competence concern did not emerge in the study. Only a few students who had been in the U.S. for longer periods of time provided examples of identity experiences falling into Kim's Phase 5: Integration – Internalizing Self and only one student, Michelle, provided examples of identity experiences falling into Kim's Phase 6: Internationalization – Globalizing Self due to her breadth and depth of experience as an older, non-traditionally aged graduate student who had been in the U.S. for a longer period of time and had studied identity development theory.

Implications for Practice

Several implications for practice arose from the findings of this study. These findings suggested that student affairs professionals, administrators and policy-makers might address the needs of Muslim international students on their campuses in a variety of ways. It was apparent that Muslim international students face difficulties in practicing Islamic prayer on Midwestern U.S. campuses given that classes are scheduled during regular prayer times. While students in my study reported Islam is a flexible religion and Muslim international students in my study adapted by delaying prayers until after classes, there is still a need for flexibility around two major Islamic holidays, Eid Al-Fitr at the end of Ramadan and Eid Al-Adha on the tenth day of Dhu al-Hijjah, the month when the Hajj takes place (Mutakabbir & Nuriddin, 2016). Campuses need to take into consideration holidays other than Christian holidays when creating academic calendars. Building in accommodations, such as no class or exams on major religious holidays, eliminates the need for students to have to choose between their education and their faith. It also eliminates the need for students to have to talk with each of their professors each semester to request special accommodations. If cancelling classes or exams is not possible due to small numbers of students observing a particular holiday, a campus-wide announcement could be sent out identifying the holiday and describing its significance and explaining how it is celebrated (Mutakabbir & Nuriddin, 2016). This practice could allow students and employees who celebrate a religious holiday to be excused from class and work commitments for that day. This practice acknowledges the holiday and informs campus constituents without placing the burden on the student to request permission to miss class (Mutakabbir & Nuriddin, 2016). Such policies do not create much of an inconvenience for campus communities, especially communities desiring to encourage and celebrate the presence of religiously diverse populations on their campus.

Creating space where Muslim international students can gather for prayer on campus meets another important need for Muslim international students, as well as Muslim faculty and staff. A dedicated multifaith room that can be used not only by Muslim international students, but students of any faith or belief system, is perhaps the number one need of Muslim students as well as all religious minorities on college campuses (Asmar, 2005; Dimandja, 2017; Mutakabbir & Nuriddin, 2016). Mutakabbir and Nuriddin (2016) argued that “Student affairs administrators and practitioners should not wait until the demand for prayer room accommodations are overwhelming or contentious” (p. 101). Mutakabbir and Nuriddin recommend the following for multifaith rooms: be located near a restroom for students who would like to perform ablution (washing oneself) prior to praying, a curtain or divider be provided in the space for those who would like to be separated from the opposite sex while praying, a shoe rack to store shoes be provided as people enter the room to keep the floor clean, and the space’s availability be advertised to students on campus.

Providing flexible options for female Muslim international students to engage in group work with other female students inside and outside of the classroom is needed on U.S. campuses. The need is especially great in the first days, weeks, and months of students’ time in the U.S. Many female Muslim international students are coming to the U.S. from countries where schooling occurs only with other female students and female teachers. For many female Muslim international students, their U.S. university experience will be the first time they have shared a classroom with male students and the first time they have had a male professor and it may be very difficult and uncomfortable for them. Faculty at U.S. universities should be aware of this dynamic and provide options and opportunities for female Muslim international students to work with other females inside and outside of the classroom, particularly when group projects or labs

are required. These options and opportunities to work with other females should be provided by faculty without placing the burden of making the request directly on the student.

Additional recommendations alluded to by students in the study included a number of suggestions for faculty on U.S. campuses. Faculty should make efforts to familiarize themselves with their roster of students prior to the start of each term and note any students they may have from other countries. The International Student Services office on campus can provide faculty with a list of international students enrolled in their courses each term, including their country of origin. Faculty should work to include in their course design something related to these students' backgrounds. For example, a course discussing the U.S. education system could include and comparative article about the education system in one of the Middle Eastern countries. Without this intentionality, only U.S. culture is typically embedded in the course. When faculty design their courses in a way that brings in examples from other cultures, especially cultures reflecting the students in their course, it helps international students understand the course content and sends a positive message that the faculty has thought about them as individuals. Including readings about course topics from the countries and cultures of international students in the course will help all students gain an understanding of what is happening around the world, not just in the U.S. Being able to find similarities and difference between the U.S. and other cultures also will help international students speak up and participate in class, especially when English is not their first language. Although the most scholarly articles may be written by U.S. and European authors, it is important to include articles from Asian, Middle Eastern, or other non-Western authors to provide all students with a broader and more inclusive perspective. The benefit extends to U.S. students who will learn from an internationalized curriculum and classroom exposing them to new ideas and diverse

perspectives. Many excellent resources exist to guide faculty in creating inclusive classrooms for international students as well as internationalizing the curriculum (Bond & Scudamore, 2010; Campbell, Strawser, & George, 2016).

Campus administrators and faculty could promote positive change by designing programs and curriculum in a way that brings international and domestic populations together. One goal of having a diverse populations on our campuses is that they interact freely and learn from each other both inside and outside of the classroom. Muslim international students are naturally drawn to interactions within their own ethnic group. They provide support to one another which is good, however the down side is when they only interact with other students ethnically similar to them they do not learn the culture of their new environment. Muslim international students could learn much from their U.S. peers, because their peers are part of and familiar with this culture, specifically with the educational system. U.S. peers can teach Muslim international students what to do in the classroom setting, help explain the professor's examples, and demonstrate how to write a simple email to the professor. In the U.S. higher education system, students can and are expected to engage openly with and seek clarification from their professors by asking questions. However, Muslim international students may be coming from cultures, especially Middle Eastern and Asian cultures, where it is not expected to be active in this way in the classroom. Muslim international students who do not communicate regularly with U.S. students may miss out on a valuable educational resource as well as rewarding interactions and even friendship.

Finally, it is extremely important for faculty, administrators, and student services professionals to approach conversations with Muslim international students with openness and honesty, taking time to have conversations in an authentic way when students need to bring up

issues they are facing inside and outside of the classroom. Many Muslim international students come from countries where there is a strong culture of negotiation, something quite unfamiliar and/or unattractive to many U.S. professionals. Individuals in the Midwestern U.S. may find this culture of negotiation to be uncomfortable and even inappropriate at times. Faculty, administrators, and student services professionals may not feel they can take the time to listen and explain a policy or expectation to students or may feel the student is using an aggressive tone of voice. Being able to recognize culturally different ways of communicating (direct vs. indirect, expressive vs. restrained) and being patient with students when they have questions or issues that need resolution is an important first step. However, even patience looks different in different cultures. Stepping back from challenging situations involving Muslim international students and recognizing that some problems may be systemic and not just individual problems, may help faculty, administrators, and student services professionals find new ways to address student needs more broadly and successfully.

Implications for Policy

Several implications for policy arose from the findings of this study. Although international students contribute billions of dollars to the U.S. economy each year (IIE, 2018), the real value of international students on our campuses is the diversity they bring. Given the current anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant socio-political climate in the U.S., it is important for institutions to be clear that international students are welcome on campus. The #YouAreWelcomeHere campaign movement is an example of how institutions can spread the message that they are diverse, friendly, safe, and committed to international students.

Institutional policies should ensure that international students, especially government-sponsored students like the Saudi students in this study, are not viewed merely as “cash cows.”

Institutions should reinvest part of the international tuition fees back into international student recruitment efforts, scholarships, retention services, and broadening access to students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. This is important not only to sustain a diverse international student population but also to avoid becoming dependent on any single sending country. Finally, institutions should create opportunities for international students to gain valuable work experience and recover a part of their investment (Choudaha and de Wit, 2019).

Suggestions for Future Research

The purpose of this study was to better understand how Muslim international students experience their identities at four-year universities in the Midwestern U.S. using Kim's (2012) International Student Identity (ISI) model as a guiding framework. Based on the findings of this study, further qualitative research with a larger sample would provide additional responses on how Muslim international students experience their identities. A grounded theory study could be used to develop a Muslim International Student Identity model. This could conceptually bring together Kim's (2012) International Student Identity model, Dey's (2012) model of identity development of Muslim American students, and/or elements of other models.

Future studies should consider the socioeconomic status (SES) of participants and whether or not they were self-funded or government-funded. Lee and Rice (2014) noted that SES may also be tied to perceived discrimination as many international students come from high socio-economic backgrounds. It would also be good to include questions in future studies that address whether or not U.S. students or faculty might falsely attribute Muslim international students' limited English proficiency to academic incompetence as found in Phase 3 of Kim's (2012) model. Finally, as it pertains to Islam as being a flexible religion, future research could explore the degree of religious flexibility and accommodations made in home cultures and then

explore any additional religious flexibilities and accommodations made while studying in the U.S.

Conclusion

This study examined the phenomenon of ten Muslim international students' religious, ethnic/racial, and gender identity experiences at four-year institutions in the Midwestern U.S. The review of literature showed that although studies on Muslim international student identity experiences provided some understanding of their lived experiences in the U.S., research found in this review of literature failed to address how students experience their identities prior to arriving in the U.S. as well as while studying at universities in the U.S. None of the studies of Muslim international students included in the review of literature used Kim's (2012) International Student Identity model as part of the data analysis process. Incorporating this framework into a study of Muslim international students' identity experiences acknowledged that establishing identities is a fluid, dynamic, and ongoing process occurring in different contexts (Jones & McEwen, 2000).

This research produced nine significant findings that grew out of six themes and included: (1) difficulties in practicing Islamic prayer in the Midwestern U.S., (2) Islam as a flexible religion, (3) racial construct as a new and troubling concept, (4) male/female interactions on campus and in the classroom, (5) perceptions of veiling in the Midwestern U.S., (6) stereotypes of Muslim international students based upon their national identity, (7) fear of practicing Islamic prayer due to stereotypes of Muslims, (8) coping with acts of discrimination, and (9) impact of Trump administration rhetoric and policies. The emerging themes from this research were viewed through the lens of Kim's (2012) International Student Identity model. The resulting analysis showed phases of Kim's model found in various themes including: Phase

1: Pre-Exposure – Inheriting Self, Phase 2: Exposure – Opening Self, Phase 3: Enclosure – Securing Self, and Phase 4: Emergence – Disclosing Self. Most of the students shared experiences corresponding with Phase 2: Exposure – Opening Self and Phase 3: Enclosure – Securing Self although some also shared experiences corresponding with Phase 1: Pre-Exposure – Inheriting Self and Phase 4: Emergence – Disclosing Self. Only two students shared some experiences corresponding with Phase 5: Integration – Internalizing Self. Some of the complexities of participants were captured using Kim’s model, although Kim’s model did not always fit well with this population of students.

The findings of this study support other findings within the literature that Muslim international students studying on four-year Midwestern U.S. campuses encounter difficulties participating in Islamic prayer, difficulties with male/female interactions inside and outside of the classroom, face stereotypes and discrimination based upon their religious, ethnic, and gender identities, and demonstrate resilience and the ability to cope with discrimination encountered in the Midwestern U.S. communities. Ultimately, this research is related to improving the experiences and outcomes for Muslim international students studying at four-year universities in the Midwestern U.S. These experiences and outcomes include successful completion of academic programs and earning their degrees, reduced incidents of racism and discrimination, and a safe and healthy environment for growing and learning. Institutional leaders, student services professionals, and faculty should recognize the challenges faced by Muslim international students on their campuses and be intentional about implementing changes to policies, programming, and curriculum to create a climate where all Muslim international students can succeed.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Initial Recruitment Email

Dear Muslim International Students,

Peace be with you. I am a researcher in the School of Education from Colorado State University. I am writing to request your participation in a research study to gain a deeper understanding of how Muslim international students studying at four-year institutions in the Midwestern U.S. experience their identities. I am seeking to interview Muslim international students who have studied in the U.S. for at least one year on a non-immigrant (e.g. F-1 or J-1) visa and are able to be interviewed in English. Your time and perspectives are highly valued and I hope you are willing and able to share about how, as a Muslim international student, you experience your identities. I am conducting this research under the guidance of my advisor, Linda Kuk, Ph.D., Associate Professor in the School of Education.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you have the right to be a part of this study, to choose not to participate, or to stop participating at any time. If you choose not to participate, you will not experience any repercussions or penalties. If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in two 90-minute interviews in which you will answer interview questions pertaining to how you experience your identity with a specific focus on religious, ethnic/racial, and gender identities. The interviews will take place in a private, mutually agreed upon location.

To participate or if you have any questions, please contact Donna Anderson (a female researcher) at anderdon@rams.colostate.edu; 563-581-0534 (mobile).

Thank you,

Donna Anderson
Co-Investigator
Graduate Student
anderdon@rams.colostate.edu
Colorado State University, School of Education

Linda Kuk, Ph.D.
Principal Investigator
Associate Professor
Linda.kuk@colostate.edu
Colorado State University, School of Education

Reminder Email

Dear Muslim International Students,

Peace be with you. This email serves as a reminder and follow up to the email sent two weeks ago requesting your participation in a research study to gain a deeper understanding of how Muslim international students studying at four-year institutions in the Midwestern U.S. experience their identities. I am seeking to interview Muslim international students who have studied in the U.S. for at least one year on a non-immigrant (e.g. F-1 or J-1) visa and are able to be interviewed in English. Your time and perspectives are highly valued and I hope you are willing and able to share about how, as a Muslim international student, you experience your identities.

As a reminder, your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you have the right to be a part of this study, to choose not to participate, or to stop participating at any time. If you choose not to participate, you will not experience any repercussions or penalties. If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in two 90-minute interviews in which you will answer interview questions pertaining to how you experience your identity with a specific focus on religious, ethnic/racial, and gender identities. The interviews will take place in a private, mutually agreed upon location.

To participate or if you have any questions, please contact Donna Anderson (a female researcher) at anderdon@rams.colostate.edu; 563-581-0534 (mobile).

Thank you,

Donna Anderson
Co-Investigator
Graduate Student
anderdon@rams.colostate.edu
Colorado State University, School of Education

Linda Kuk, Ph.D.
Principal Investigator
Associate Professor
Linda.kuk@colostate.edu
Colorado State University, School of Education

Appendix B

Consent Form

**Colorado State University
Fort Collins
Consent to be a Research Subject**

Working Title: Muslim International Students in the U.S.: A Phenomenological Inquiry into the Experience of Identities

Principal Investigator: Linda Kuk, Ph.D., Associate Professor, linda.kuk@colostate.edu;

Co-Principal Investigator: Donna Anderson, Graduate Student,
anderdon@rams.colostate.edu; 563-581-0534

Funding Source: None

Introduction

You are being asked to take part in a research study. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to be a part of this study, to choose not to participate, or to stop participating at any time. The purpose of research studies is to gain a better understanding of a certain topic or issue. You are not guaranteed any personal benefits from being in a study. Research studies also may pose risks to those that participate. In this consent form you will find specific details about the research in which you are being asked to participate. If you do not understand something in this form it is your right to ask the researcher for clarification or more information. A copy of this consent form will be provided to you. If at any time you have questions about your participation, do not hesitate to contact the researcher(s) named above.

Purpose of this Study

The purpose of this study is to gain a deeper understanding of how Muslim international students experience their identities while studying at four-year institutions in the Midwestern U.S. Ultimately, this research may be published in a journal, as part of a book, or presented at a conference.

Procedures

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in two interviews in which you will answer interview questions pertaining to how you experience your identity with a specific focus on religious, ethnic/racial, and gender identities. The interviews will take place in a private, mutually agreed upon location. The interviews will last approximately 90 minutes. The interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed. You will be provided with a copy of the transcribed interview after each interview and asked to verify your statements. Audio recordings will be erased at the conclusion of the research.

Other Participants in this Study

Up to 15 students will participate in this study.

Benefits

This study is designed for the researcher to learn more about how Muslim international students experience their religious, racial/ethnic, and gender identities in order to improve the experiences of Muslim international students on U.S. campuses. The indirect benefit is the knowledge gained can benefit subjects through self-reflection, future students, and higher education institutions by informing higher education professionals and practice.

Risks

Participation is completely voluntary and there will not be any repercussions in relation to student academic progress, immigration status, or future references/recommendations if you decline participation in the study. There is always a slight risk for a breach of confidentiality, but all of your information will be de-identified and you will be asked to choose a pseudonym. 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 and you may experience emotional discomfort as a result of reflecting on your own experiences. Should you feel emotional distress at any time during your participation, please contact the following support services:

- University of Wisconsin-Platteville Counseling Services – 608-342-1891 – 220 Royce Hall
- University of Wisconsin-Platteville International Student & Scholar Services – 608-342-1726 – 100 Royce Hall

You may decline participation without any repercussions. The minimal risk of a breach of confidentiality does not outweigh the benefits of understanding how Muslim international students experience their identities and how this knowledge can inform higher education professionals to better support students.

Confidentiality

The information in the study records will be kept confidential. The consent forms, transcripts, and key linking pseudonyms to actual first names of participant will be stored on a password-protected computer in a locked office only accessible to the researcher. All transcriptions will be on a computer which only the researcher is authorized to use. No reference will be made in oral or written reports which could link the participant to the study. If individual quotations are used in reports, the participant's identity will be protected by a pseudonym.

Compensation

No compensation will be given for participating in the study.

Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal from the Study

Taking part in this study is voluntary. You have the right to leave the study at any time without penalty. You may refuse to do any procedures you do not feel comfortable with, or answer any questions you do not wish to answer. If you withdraw from the study, you may request your

research information not be used by contacting the Co-Principal Investigator/researcher listed above and below.

Contact Information

If you have any questions about this study or your participation in it, you may contact the researcher, Donna Anderson at 563-581-0534 or anderdon@rams.colostate.edu

If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of the project, you may contact the CSU Institutional Review Board (IRB) at: RICRO_IRB@mail.colostate.edu; 970-491-1553.

Consent to Participate

“I have read and understand the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study with the understanding that I may withdraw at any time. By signing this consent, I am confirming that I am 18 years of age or older.”

Participant's signature _____ **Date**_____

Appendix C

Demographic Questionnaire

1. How old are you?
2. What is your gender? e.g. male, female
3. Where were you born and raised?
4. What is your country of citizenship?
5. What is your first language?
6. What is your field of study?
7. How many years have you been in the U.S.?
8. Is this your first time in the U.S.?
 - a. If no, when was your first time in the U.S.?
9. How many years have you been at your current U.S. University?
 - a. What is the name of your U.S. University?
10. Is this your first time studying in the U.S.?
 - a. If no, when was your first time studying in the U.S.?
11. What is your marital status? e.g. single, married, divorced
12. Do you identify as Sunni, Shiite, or other? If other, please specify:
13. In order to protect your identity, what pseudonym (alternate name) would you like assigned to you for this study?

Appendix D

Interview Protocol for Semi-Structured Interviews

Initial Interviews

Prior to the initial interview the interviewer will distribute and receive the following from potential participants:

- Consent form
- Demographic Questionnaire

The interviewer will bring the following to the initial interviews:

- Audio recording devices
- Interview guide

During the initial interview, the interviewer will do the following:

- Greet the participant.
- Reintroduce topic briefly and explain interview procedures.
- Answer any questions.
- Provide participant with a copy of their informed consent.
- Explain that some questions may cause momentary discomfort or unhappiness and participants can refuse to answer any questions they perceive as embarrassing or threatening.
- Explain that the interviewer is interested in hearing about their personal experiences and that there are no right or wrong answers.
- Ask the participant to please refrain from disclosing their name or the names of friends, relatives, faculty members, or anyone else during the interview in order to preserve confidentiality.
- Start audio recording devices.
- Conduct interview.
- At the conclusion of the interview, thank the participant and explain next steps in the research process, e.g. member checking and second interview. Obtain the participant's contact information and schedule the second interview, if possible. Ask the participant if they know of other Muslim international students who they would recommend I contact to participate in the study.

Initial interview potential questions include:

1. Let's start by learning a little bit about each other.
 - a. Why did you decide to study in the U.S.?
 - b. Why did you choose to study at [U.S. University]?
 - c. How would you describe yourself?
 - d. Tell the participant about who I am.
 - e. Do you have any questions about this interview? This research? Me?

I am going to ask you about three areas relating to how you see yourself (your identities), and after that I will ask if there are other areas you would like to discuss.

2. I assume you are Muslim, right? When did you realize you were a Muslim?
 - a. What does it mean to be a Muslim? What does it look like?
 - b. What Islamic traditions and rituals are important to you?
 - i. Are there any traditions and rituals that have changed as a result of being a student in the U.S.? If so, in what ways?
 - c. Has what it means to be a Muslim changed for you as a result of being a student in the U.S.? If so, can you provide an example or describe an incident in which you noticed change in your Muslim identity?
 - d. How do you think Muslims are perceived here in the Midwestern U.S.?

Next, let's talk about how you would describe yourself ethnically and/or racially. By ethnicity, I mean a social group that shares a common culture including religion or language, e.g., Arab, Kurd, Egyptian, or Semitic. By racial, I mean characteristics used to categorize people, e.g. white, black, or mixed.

3. How would you describe your ethnicity or race? When did you first realize you were [self-identified ethnicity and/or race]?
 - a. What does it mean to be [self-identified ethnicity and/or race] in your country? What does it look like?
 - b. Has the way you identify ethnically and/or racially changed as a result of being a student in the U.S.? If so, can you provide an example or describe an incident in which you noticed a change in your ethnic or racial identity?
 - c. How do you think [self-identified ethnicity and/or race] are perceived here in the Midwestern U.S.?

Now let's talk about your gender identity.

4. You identify as a [man/woman], yes? When did you first realize you were a [boy/girl]?
 - a. What does it mean to be a [man/woman] in your country? What does it look like?
 - b. As a [man/woman], how do you describe yourself now in the U.S.?
 - i. How have you changed as a [man/woman]?
 - c. Has what it means to be a man/woman changed for you as a result of being a student in the U.S.? If so, can you provide an example or describe an incident in which you noticed a change in your gender identity?
5. Describe a situation or person that greatly influenced who you are.
6. Do you have any additional thoughts about:
 - a. how religion fits into your identities either before coming to the U.S. or currently?
 - b. how ethnicity/race fits into your identities either before coming to the U.S. or currently?
 - c. how gender fits into your identities either before coming to the U.S. or currently?

7. We've talked about your religious, ethnic/racial, and gender identities. Are there any other identities you would like to talk about?

Note: Due to the exploratory nature of this study, other questions may arise in the context of the interview.

Follow up Interviews

The interviewer will bring the following to the follow-up interviews:

- Audio recording devices
- Interview guide
- Completed demographic questionnaire
- Notes on any issues that need clarification or expansion as a result of the first interview

During the follow-up interview, the interviewer will do the following:

- Greet participant.
- Reintroduce topic briefly and explain interview procedures.
- Answer any questions.
- Remind the participant that some questions may cause momentary discomfort or unhappiness and participants can refuse to answer any questions they perceive as embarrassing or threatening.
- Remind participant that the interviewer is interested in hearing about their personal experiences and that there are no right or wrong answers.
- Remind participant refrain from disclosing their name or the names of friends, relatives, faculty members, or anyone else during the interview in order to preserve confidentiality.
- Start audio recording devices.
- Conduct interview.
- At the conclusion of the interview, thank the participant and explain next steps e.g. member checking.

Follow-up interview potential questions include:

1. I'd like you to expand a little more about how you think about your identity as a Muslim.
 - a. Describe an experience back home before you came to the U.S. when you were aware of being a Muslim.
 - b. Describe an experience as a student in the U.S. when you were aware of being a Muslim.
2. Next, I'd like to expand a little more about how you think about your identity as [self-identified ethnic and/or racial identity].
 - a. Describe an experience back home before you came to the U.S. when you were aware of being [self-identified ethnicity and/or race].
 - b. Describe an experience as a student in the U.S. when you were aware of being [self-identified ethnicity and/or race].
3. Finally, I'd like to expand a little more about how you think about your identity as a [man/woman].

- a. Describe an experience back home before you came to the U.S. when you were aware of being a [man/woman].
 - b. Describe an experience as a student in the U.S. when you were aware of being a [man/woman].
4. When you are not in class, how do you spend your time? What do you do? What kinds of events do you attend?
5. When you are not in class, who do you spend time with?
6. How do these interactions with others confirm or validate who you are?
7. What do you think are the needs of Muslim international students at Midwestern U.S. universities? How are they similar to other international students' needs? How are they different?
8. What recommendations do you have for policymakers and administrators at U.S. universities to better meet the needs of Muslim international students and help them succeed?
9. Is there anything else you would like to add?

The follow-up interview will provide an opportunity for the participants to reflect upon their initial interview, as well as further elaborate on their self-perceptions. This reflective process may elicit additional insights and information on identity experiences, the main focus of this research.