Partnering with a Different Faith: Muslim American Women’s Experiences

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PARTNERING WITH A DIFFERENT FAITH: MUSLIM AMERICAN WOMEN’S EXPERIENCES

BY

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in The Department of Professional Psychology and Family Therapy

Seton Hall University
June 2019
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COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN SERVICES
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Abstract

The events of September 11, 2001 critically impacted the identity of Muslim Americans in the United States and spurred attention to their experiences within the psychological literature. Prior literature has rarely explored these individuals’ within-group differences, defined Muslim American identity as bicultural, or explored experiences of being in a romantic relationship. This study was intended to address the gaps in the literature by focusing on the bicultural identity and the experience of interfaith relationships among Muslim American women.

The following research questions guided this study: 1) How do Muslim American women experience their romantic relationship with a non-Muslim partner? 2) How do Muslim American women experience their identity in the context of their romantic relationship with a non-Muslim partner? 3) How do Muslim American women experience their family’s reactions and stigma within the family or community, if any, in regard to their romantic relationship with a non-Muslim partner? The research was conducted using qualitative methods.

The findings of the study revealed three contrapuntal voices, the Defenders of Cultural History, the Cloaking the Love, and the Voice of Rebellion which captured the collective experiences of six Muslim American women.

Limitations, implications for future research, and recommendations were discussed.

Keywords: Muslim American women, interfaith, relationship experience
Acknowledgements

First, I would like to thank my dissertation chair, and mentor throughout the doctoral program, Dr. Minsun Lee. Dr. Lee has been a major support from the very beginning. From the moment I met her in my second year, (a time of major change and uncertainty in our program) until graduation day, she encouraged me to find my own voice. Lending her patience, encouragement, and directions, she worked tirelessly with me through every step of my dissertation. I feel lucky to have benefited from her guidance which has led me to grow personally and professionally.

I would also like to thank my committee members beginning with Dr. Matthew Graziano, for taking the time to teach me to use the Listening Guide and cheer me on as I made discoveries. Drs. Corinne Datchi and Jason Reynolds (Taewon Choi), I am grateful for your support and feedback throughout the stages of my dissertation project.

Thank you, Pam Ward, for being a great friend, and supporting my writing. I am not sure I could have survived a second of graduate school without my amazing cohort members: Jiwon, Amanda, Christina, Vanessa and Ian. A special thank you goes to Alessandro who provided a lot of comedic relief, and much emotional support throughout this process. To my parents, who instilled the importance of education in my sisters and me and supported us for years through our academic endeavors. I could not be here without you. Finally, last but not least, to my sisters Selma and Seda. Words cannot express what a great gift it is to have you as my sisters. As I think on our relationship and shared upbringing, I recognize the initial motivator for my project. Through our life transitions, mistakes and successes, we have each other’s backs.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

According to the Pew Research Center (2017), Islam is the fastest growing religion in the world and second largest religion, after Christianity. In the United States, Muslims make up about one percent of the population, with a majority (63%) of them immigrants (Pew, 2017). Muslims come from a variety of racial and ethnic backgrounds, as well as different nations-of-origin (Pew, 2011). There are different sects of Islam, such as Shia and Sunni, and within these, Muslims greatly differ in terms of their beliefs and practices (Pew, 2017). The majority of Muslim Americans are Sunnis, and this is reflective of the global majority (Hodge, 2002; Pew, 2017). An increasing number of Muslims are born in the United States and identify with both Muslim and American identities, espousing different worldviews from their foreign-born parents (Hodge, 2002).

Yet, there is a lack of psychological research on the Muslim American population that attends to within-group differences and the unique experience of individuals. Sirin et al. (2008) described an overall lack of psychological research of the Muslim experience in North America versus Europe—especially research which conceptualizes Muslim American as a collective cultural identity not only impacted by religion, but also by specific historical and political contexts (e.g., 9/11). There is also a lack of focus on the variation of religiosity, the experience of bicultural identity, and interfaith marriage for Muslim American women (Bulut & Ebaugh, 2014; Sirin et al., 2008; Westfall, Welborne, Tobin, & Russell, 2016). Sirin et al. (2008) suggested that future research use qualitative methodology to address current limitations in understanding the nuances of Muslim American identity, including the ways in which gender intersects with this identity.
Statement of the Problem

The present study aims to address several significant gaps in the existing psychological literature on Muslim Americans, particularly attending to stigma, religiosity, identity, and gender. Although some studies in psychology have investigated the experience of Muslim Americans, most of the research has been in the field of sociology. The events of September 11, 2001 critically impacted the identity of Muslim Americans in the United States and drew attention to their experiences within the psychological literature (Khan & Ecklund, 2013; Rodriguez Mosquera, Khan & Selya, 2013). Before this event, Muslim Americans were nearly invisible in the field of psychology (Amer & Bagasra, 2013).

The psychological literature on Muslim Americans has largely focused on intergroup relations, culturally sensitive mental health practices, and terrorism and violence (Amer & Bagasra, 2013). Concerning intergroup relations specifically, attitudes of Muslims and attitudes towards Muslims have been investigated (Velasco González, Verkuyten, Weesie, & Poppe 2008; Verkuyten, 2007). The literature on terrorism has explored Muslims’ and other groups’ attitudes toward terrorism, “The War on Terror,” and on jihad (McCauley, Leuprecht, Hataley, Winn, & Biswas, 2011; Nadal, et al., 2012). The literature on culturally sensitive practice with Muslims has focused on describing Islamic culture or providing suggestions for therapists regarding how best to work with this population (Naeem, et al., 2015; Weatherhead & Daiches, 2015). Much of the literature on Muslims has been conceptual rather than empirical, focusing mostly on the authors’ personal experiences (Amer & Bagasra, 2013).

Psychological literature has investigated stigma, discrimination and microaggressions stemming from the perception of Muslim Americans as being connected to terrorism and violence (King & Ahmad, 2010; Kunst, Tajamal, Sam, & Ulleberg; 2012). The literature has
related much of the stigma to the effects of Islamophobia, especially post 9/11. Most of the research on stigma has focused on the unequal treatment of Muslims from other groups and how they cope with it (Abu-Ras & Suarez, 2009; Khan, 2014; King & Ahmad 2010); however, the literature does not attend to any intra-community stigma. Part of the reason this research has not been conducted is because of the fear that results may reflect poorly on the Muslim community (Amer & Bagasra, 2013). However, some research, albeit limited within psychology, has been conducted on mental health stigma within the Islamic community, and oppression based on gender (Amer & Bagasra, 2013; Ciftci, Jones, & Corrigan, 2013). Given the state of the extant literature, it is clear that new methods of sampling, design, and analysis, and a focus on stigma within Muslim families and communities are needed.

Experiences of stigma not only outside, but also inside the community are part of the shared cultural experiences Muslim Americans face. Because research on Muslim Americans has focused on this group as a whole, within-group differences have not been attended to, particularly regarding religiosity. For instance, in order to recruit individuals within this population for studies, most researchers have utilized mosques, Muslim student associations, cultural centers, and Islamic schools (Ali, Yamada, & Mahmood, 2015; Sirin & Katsiaficas, 2011; Nadal et al., 2012). Because of this recruitment method, participants tended to have a high level of religiosity, whereas the majority of Muslim Americans are not necessarily religious (Amer & Bagasra, 2013). Several studies accounted for some of the variation in religiosity by utilizing snowball sampling methods from the researcher’s network, as well as snowball sampling through social media (Aroian, Templin, & Hough, 2016). Yet, there are still no studies to date that target Muslim Americans who identify as non-practicing or low in religiosity. Studies regarding the expression of religiosity have centered on Muslim women’s experiences.
when wearing a hijab (Allen, 2015; Wagner, Sen, Permanadeli, & Howarth, 2012), with most of these studies focusing on the stigma surrounding their decision to wear a hijab (Eaton, 2015; Tolaymat & Moradi, 2011; Ghumman & Jackson, 2010). Although some of these studies have investigated the experiences of Muslim Americans (Haddad, 2007; Peek 2003), most studies have been conducted outside of the United States, usually in Canada or Europe (Litchmore & Safdar 2016; Swami, Miah, Noorani, & Taylor, 2014).

We can theorize that these experiences illuminate the duality of being Muslim and American and inherently pose conflict and struggle within an individual. Even though the literature has addressed the two cultural worlds of being Muslim and American, it has rarely defined Muslim American as a bicultural identity (Britto & Amer, 2007). There have been no studies that utilized the concept of bicultural identity integration, which defines identity on a continuum of blendedness and harmony between two cultures (Benet-Martínez & Haritatos, 2005). Although a bicultural Muslim American identity may be the most salient for an individual, Muslim Americans differ in other demographic factors such as race, ethnicity, and gender. Most studies look at Muslim Americans as a group, thereby disregarding differences in other demographic factors (Ali, Yamada, Mahmood, 2015). Rarely do studies use an intersectionality lens to explore the experience of holding multiple identities for individuals in this population (Rashid, 2017). Differences in gender are particularly are under investigated, evidenced by the lack of research on Muslim American women’s issues (Ali, Yamada, Mahmood, 2015).

Of those studies that do research Muslim American women, the topic of investigation is usually regarding their experience wearing a hijab, decision against it, and any discrimination they experience. (Ali, Yamada, Mahmood, 2015; Aziz, 2012; Bartkowski & Read, 2003; Read
& Bartkowski, 2000, Williams & Vashi, 2007). Fewer studies look at Muslim American women’s gender role attitudes (Ali, Mahmood, Moel, Hudson, Leathers, 2008; Read, 2003). Moreover, even fewer studies use a bicultural or intersectional lens to investigate Muslim American women’s experiences (Aziz, 2012; Mishra & Shirazi, 2010; Saran & Diaz, 2010).

At the core of bicultural identity for Muslim American women could be conflicts between gendered norms prescribed by value systems in Islam (i.e., expectation of modesty for women) and mainstream American values (Sirin & Fine, 2007). Part of the bicultural experience for a Muslim American woman may involve the experience of a romantic relationship. The norm of dating for Muslims is usually best described as talking. This includes a lack of physical contact, a heightened surveillance and visibility, and talking only with the intention of marriage (Mir, 2009). If the romantic relationship is with a non-Muslim partner, this could pose an inherent conflict for a Muslim American’s identity and experience. Despite the existence of broader literature on interracial, interethnic, and interfaith marriages, there have been no studies to date that investigate the experience of Muslim women who choose to pursue a relationship with someone of a different faith. It is known that it is rarer for Muslim women to marry outside of their religion compared to Muslim men (Van Tubergen, & Maas, 2007). There are multiple interpretations on the rules of marriage, but the general consensus has been that Muslim men can marry any woman of “the book” (Muslim, Christian, or Jewish), whereas women must marry another Muslim man (Shatzmiller, 1996). Furthermore, the religion is patrilineal, and therefore children with a Muslim father would also automatically be considered Muslim-born.

The psychological literature has tended to focus on Muslim Americans who have a high level of religiosity, which likely does not include women who date or marry outside of their faith. Cila & Lalonde (2014) demonstrated that a greater level of religiosity is related to a lack
of openness to interfaith dating and marriage among Muslims. In order to fill the gaps in the literature, a study that includes Muslim women of various degrees of religiosity and focuses on experiences of stigma, identity, and their experience of interfaith relationships is needed.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to explore Muslim American women’s experience of being in a romantic relationship with a non-Muslim partner, the resulting stigma they experience within their family or community (if any), and how these experiences subsequently impact their relationship as well as the women’s identity. Stigma was addressed through identification of micro-level acts of discrimination and microaggressions, which is tied to macro-level societal messages within the women’s narratives (Pescosolido, Martin, Lang, & Olafsdottir, 2008). The purpose of identifying potential stigma was to shed light on the psychological impact on participants. The researcher investigated how Muslim American women’s identity is a cultural identity composed of shared experiences, in addition to a religious identity. This study explored examined how religion impacts individuals regardless of the level of religiosity to which they ascribe, and gave room for Muslim American women to define religiosity for themselves. Because of the nature of the study, it was assumed that most Muslim American women in interfaith relationships may inherently be less religious due to their refusal to adhere to Islam’s marriage restrictions. It was also thought that these women may experience less bicultural identity integration due to potential conflicts related to being in interfaith relationships—which may subsequently impact these women’s experience of their identity. This study aimed to give voice to those Muslim Americans who may have little affiliation with their religion or may only culturally identify with the Muslim component of their identity as it relates to their heritage. In regard to biculturalism, the researcher used bicultural identity integration theory to explore the
nuances of holding two cultural worlds, and the tension individuals may feel navigating their family’s reaction to their romantic relationship. Additionally, an intersectional lens was used to explore how the multiple identities associated with being a Muslim American woman could impact each participant’s overall identity and experience.

By sampling women who are in a relationship with a non-Muslim person, not only was voice given to an area of interfaith relationship research that is lacking, but also to these women, who are often ignored or ostracized by their family and community members.

In order to fully capture the voice of these women, a qualitative study was conducted within a constructivist-interpretivist paradigm using narrative methods. The interpretivist-constructivist paradigm fully considers the socio-cultural influences in the individual’s lived experiences, such as the current political climate towards Muslims (Pontetotto, 2005). Narrative methods allowed for the researcher to bring forth the voice of Muslim American women and considered the role the researcher played in the study. By including what the participants said during their interviews verbatim, the researcher was able to demonstrate individuals’ unique experiences of bicultural and intersectional identity, of having a romantic relationship with a non-Muslim partner, and any experiences of stigma.

**Research Questions**

This study sought to answer three research questions:

1. How do Muslim American women experience their romantic relationship with a non-Muslim partner?

2. How do Muslim American women experience their identity in the context of their romantic relationship with a non-Muslim partner?
3. How do Muslim American women experience their family’s reactions and stigma within the family or community, if any, in regard to their romantic relationship with a non-Muslim partner?

Definitions of Constructs Related to Research

**Muslim American.** Muslim American can encompass any person who identifies as both Muslim and American.

**Bicultural Identity.** Bicultural identity is the experience of having two cultures or internalizing two cultural worlds. Usually, one of these cultures is the heritage culture, and the other is the dominant culture (Nguyen & Benet-Martínez, 2013).

**Religiosity.** Religiosity is the extent to which religion is a part of an individual’s daily life and may include behaviors such as attending religious services, participating in rituals, belief in the supernatural, and commitment to the religion, even when costly to the individual (Zuckerman, Silberman, & Hall, 2013).

**Gender.** Gender is a socially constructed binary, which involves social expectations and roles supporting male power and dominance (Crawford, 2001; Lorber, 2007). Aspects of gender include gender identity, which is the internal experience of how one identifies, and gender expression which involves masculine, feminine, and androgynous attitude, behavior, appearance, and emotional expression (Grossman, D'Augelli, Howell, & Hubbard, 2005; Puckett, Maroney, Levitt & Horne, 2016). The focus of this research is with women, a historically under researched group. Women’s development and identity, is linked to interconnection as well as responsibility and care in relationships (Gilligan, 1993).

**Stigma.** Similar to discrimination, stigma involves the unequal treatment of a population due to their membership in one group at the individual or societal level. Stigma can involve
interpersonal acts such as stereotyping, hate crimes, labeling, or sending negative and
denigrating messages to members of marginalized groups directly or indirectly (Hatzenbuehler,
Phelan, & Link, 2013; Nadal et al., 2012; Sirin & Katsiaficas 2011). These acts are socially
designed to reduce the resources and power of the group (Hatzenbuehler, Phelan, & Link, 2013).

**Intersectionality.** Intersectionality is the concept that individuals’ multiple identities
define their social location, with each identity mutually constituting one another. That is, the
meaning of one category is derived in relation to another category, and it is additive (Shields,
2008). Further, intersectionality allows room for a difference across categories and a dynamic
identity which inform individual inter- and intra-personal experiences (Collins, 1998; Shields,
2008). Intersectionality has its origins in feminism and Critical Race Theory (Cole, 2009;
Crenshaw, 1991). Crenshaw (1991) coined the term to describe the constraint in separating race
or gender as a core category of identity, and a need to account for an intersection when
describing the experiences of women of color (Crenshaw, 1991).

**Significance of the Study**

There are significant theoretical, empirical, and clinical implications of understanding the
experiences of Muslim American women who are in a romantic relationship with a partner
outside of their faith. This study explored the bicultural and intersectional identities of Muslim
American women and brought attention to complex experiences of tension and integration. As
Muslim American identity is typically defined in terms of carrying a strong religious component,
this study reveals how the identity could also be experienced as a cultural component related to
one’s heritage. Minwalla, Rosser, Feldman, and Varga (2005) demonstrated this cultural
component through interviewing gay Muslim men about their identity experience. They found
religion, ethno-cultural identity, and colorism as major themes in the way participants
conceptualized their Muslim identity (Minwalla et al., 2005). The present study contributes to an understanding of bicultural identity that is specific to Muslim American women which has not been explored extensively in previous literature. It further illuminates the significant challenges Muslim American women face when internalizing American values that encourage their freedom of choice while also being surrounded by stigma from families and communities who are against their romantic relationships.

Additionally, findings from this study highlight the need for research within this population on relationships, familial difficulties, and stigma, and calls for awareness and acceptance of interfaith relationships within Muslim communities. Clinicians who serve individuals or couples in this group can be better informed about their experiences and, as a result, use a culturally informed lens in their practice. In particular, clinicians can use the stories from this study to explore the layers of experience their own clients may face in regard to identity, stigma, and relationships. Pointed inquiry into their client’s experiences could allow clinicians to develop a comprehensive case formulation.
Chapter 2

Theoretical Framework

Muslim American women’s experiences and identity can be viewed through multiple lenses. My examination of Muslim American women’s identity and their experience of a relationship with someone outside of their religion is broadly framed by the theories of bicultural identity integration and intersectionality. In this chapter, I review these theories as they relate to the study at hand.

Bicultural Identity Integration

Biculturalism has appeared in various social science writings before its emergence in the psychological literature. DuBois (1903) used the term double consciousness to describe the experience of identity for African Americans. Double consciousness depicted the duality and internalized conflict of being both American and Black in a racist, White-dominated American society (DuBois, 1903).

Later, Berry (1980, 1997, 2001) was one of the first to develop a bidimensional, four-factor model of acculturation which proposed that individuals respond to the host culture and their culture-of-origin in four different ways: integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization (Berry, 1980, 1997, 2001). Integration refers to the maintenance of the cultural heritage while adopting the norms of the host society. Assimilation involves giving up ties to one’s heritage culture and adopting the values and norms of the host culture. Separation refers to the maintenance of ties to the culture-of-origin while rejecting the host culture. Marginalization occurs when individuals reject both their culture-of-origin and the host culture (Berry, 1997).

Before Berry’s four-factor model, previous research characterized acculturation as a unidimensional model, theorizing that individuals benefit most from full assimilation to the host
culture (Gordon, 1964; Sandberg, 1973). This misconception was later debunked by additional bidimensional models, indicating that most individuals adopt a more adaptive integrative strategy (Coatsworth, Maldonado-Molina, Pantin, & Szapocznik, 2005; Ward & Kennedy, 1994). This integrative strategy is often used synonymously with the term biculturalism. Biculturalism involves adherence to both the host culture and the culture-of-origin and has often been used in the psychological literature to describe the experiences of immigrants (Nguyen, & Benet-Martínez, 2013; Schwart & Unger, 2010).

Expanding upon the integration strategy proposed by Berry (1980, 2001) in his model of acculturation, Benet-Martínez, Leu, Lee, & Morris (2002) posited the construct of Bicultural Identity Integration (BII) as a framework for understanding how individuals conceptualize their dual cultural identities. BII represents the degree to which bicultural individuals experience the heritage and resident cultures as overlapping and compatible (Benet-Martínez, Leu, Lee, & Morris, 2002). BII is comprised of two factors: (1) blendedness versus compartmentalization and (2) harmony versus conflict (Huynh, 2009). Blendedness versus compartmentalization identifies the degree to which individuals perceive overlap between their two cultural orientations versus dissociation. Conflict versus harmony indicates the degree to which individuals perceive tension or compatibility between their cultural orientations (Benet-Martínez & Haritatos, 2005). High BII is defined by the experience of greater levels of blendedness and harmony, and low BII is defined by higher levels of perceived compartmentalization and conflict between the two cultural identities (Benet-Martínez & Haritatos, 2005).

The two BII factors are orthogonal and have different psychological correlates. Specifically, the blendedness versus compartmentalization factor is linked to behavioral or cognitive components, such as language barriers, perceived cultural isolation, or years of
residence in the United States. Conflict versus harmony is linked to affective and relational aspects, such as perceived discrimination, depression, and anxiety (Benet-Martínez & Haritatos, 2005).

Extant literature has indicated that BII has an impact on individual cognition, adjustment, and behaviors. In regard to cognition, researchers have found that BII is related to advanced perspective taking (Benet-Martínez & Haritatos, 2005; Mok & Morris, 2010; Tadmor, Tetlock, & Peng, 2009). In one study, East Asian undergraduate students were instructed to complete measures on acculturation and write responses to open-ended questions about their bicultural identity. Individuals who strongly identified with both East Asian and American cultures were more likely, in their written responses, to demonstrate integrative complexity—an ability to solve problems by referring to multiple dimensions of an issue, often through increased creativity (Tadmor, Tetlock, & Peng, 2009). Moreover, Asian Americans with high BII demonstrated increased novelty in thinking tasks when primed to American cultural cues, whereas Asian Americans with low BII demonstrated lower levels of novelty (Mok & Morris, 2010). Since high BII is usually associated with increased cognitive flexibility, it can be expected that there is a similar association to positive adjustment. It can be reasoned that the cognitive complexity and flexibility required of being involved romantically outside of one’s faith may be better managed by Muslim American women who are high in BII.

Indeed, research has indicated that high BII is associated with better psychological functioning in general (Ferrari, Rosnati, Manzi, & Benet-Martínez, 2015; Oppenheim-Weller & Kurman, 2017; Schwartz et al., 2015). A longitudinal study surveyed recently immigrated Hispanic adolescents and found that individuals scored consistently with either low or high BII levels over the course of three years. Those who scored with a high level of BII also had
increased scores of self-esteem, optimism, better family relationships, and more prosocial behavior (Schwartz et al., 2015). A survey of immigrants from Mainland China and living in Hong Kong indicated that greater psychological adjustment (e.g., low scores on depression and anxiety measures, low scores on loneliness, and high scores on satisfaction with life) was associated with perception of higher integration between their two cultural identities (Chen, Benet-Martínez, & Harris Bond, 2008).

Psychological adjustment for bicultural individuals can be reflected in their behavior. The way that low BII individuals respond and therefore adjust to their environment differs from high BII individuals. A sample of first-generation and second-generation bicultural Asian Americans were instructed to engage in several attribution tasks after being positively or negatively primed to Asian and American cultures, with the exposure of either negative or positive stereotypes related to each (Cheng, Lee, & Benet-Martínez, 2006). Those with high BII, responded in culturally congruent ways and those with lower BII responded in culturally incongruent ways when exposed to positive stereotypes. The opposite occurred when the researchers showed negative cues. That is, when the cues were negative in valence, high BII individuals responded in culturally incongruent ways, whereas low BII individuals responded in culturally congruent ways (Cheng, Lee, & Benet-Martínez, 2006). This finding suggests that adaptation to hostile, discriminatory environments occurs differently for high and low BII individuals. Low BII individuals may experience congruence when exposed to negative stereotypes because of past negative experiences of stigma, whereas high BII individuals are more likely to experience incongruence when encountering negative stereotypes (Cheng, Lee, & Benet-Martínez, 2006). Based on this literature, it can be inferred that depending on the level of BII, Muslim American women may be differentially affected by stigma within their community.
Although the literature on BII primarily investigates dual ethnic identities, BII has been posited to be applicable to dual identities from different categories, including religious identities (Benet-Martínez, Leu, Lee, & Morris, 2002). For example, Huynh, Nguyen, & Benet-Martínez (2011) suggested that Verkuyten and Yildiz (2007) could have incorporated the construct of bicultural identity when investigating Turkish-Dutch Muslim individuals with a further exploration of any conflict between holding a religious Muslim identity as well as a Dutch identity (mainstream Dutch culture is secular, as most Dutch do not practice organized religion) (Huynh, Nguyen, & Benet-Martínez, 2011). Unlike most of the bicultural literature, which explores a dual ethnic identity, the narratives in this study will investigate both the religious and cultural components of being Muslim and American, in addition to associated gender, ethnic, racial, and sexual identities.

**Muslim Americans and bicultural identity.** BII can be a useful way to conceptualize the identity of Muslim American women and their experiences in a relationship with a non-Muslim. Specifically, biculturalism can be a way to describe the experience of living in two worlds encompassing religious and cultural aspects of being both Muslim and American. The predominant use of biculturalism in the psychological literature is as a tool to describe immigrant experiences (Nguyen, & Benet-Martínez, 2013; Schwartz & Unger, 2010). This is consistent with the Muslim American population, as most are first- or second-generation immigrants (Pew Research Center, 2011). The literature on Muslim American identity has included discussions of Muslim American identity in a bidimensional way without using the construct of biculturalism. Even though the literature on Muslim American bicultural individuals has not used the construct of BII, there is literature that has conceptualized Muslim American identity as bicultural (Britto & Amer, 2007; Ozyurt, 2013; Sirin et al., 2008). Within this literature, there have been findings
on conflict between identities, as well as psychological adjustment (Britto & Amer, 2007; Sirin et al., 2008).

Many studies investigating the identity of Muslim Americans have utilized a unidimensional frame of acculturation rather than a bidimensional frame inherent to bicultural identity theory (Byng, 2010; Williams & Vashi, 2007). Within the unidimensional frame, some studies have referenced the public’s preference for assimilation of Muslims and Muslim Americans, especially concerning women’s decisions to wear a hijab (Byng, 2010; Williams & Vashi, 2007). A critical discourse analysis conducted on 72 news articles identified that these reports generally take on the view that Muslim women should assimilate to Western values and, therefore, not veil in public (Byng, 2010). In support, interviews with college-aged, second-generation Muslim American women indicated that their decision to wear a hijab is influenced by the public’s views in addition to their own religious values (Williams & Vashi, 2007).

There have not been any studies of Muslim Americans that specifically used the construct of BII. However, some of the literature that investigated Muslim American identity seemed to conceptualize Muslim American identity as bicultural, without using the term. For instance, in three studies by Verkuyten & Yildiz, (2007), Turkish Dutch Muslim individuals participated in a survey about their levels of Turkish group identification, Dutch group identification, and Muslim group identification. Participants also took measures on perceived discrimination and rejection. Results indicated that a stronger minority group identification (Turkish and Muslim) was related to weaker identification with the Dutch group as well as increased perceived rejection and discrimination (Verkuyten & Yildiz, 2007). Another study similarly surveyed Arab/Middle Eastern Americans on their level of cultural immersion and found that Muslims who reported a high level of dominant society immersion experienced the most discrimination, whereas
Christians who reported a high level of dominant society immersion reported less discrimination (Awad, 2010).

Among those studies that have conceptualized Muslim Americans as bicultural individuals, there has been an emphasis on the conflict inherent in holding both identities. A mixed-methods study had 97 Muslim American emerging adults create identity maps—a drawing which represented their personal experience of holding two identities—as well as complete a survey on identity, religiosity, acculturation, and discrimination experience. Results indicated that most individuals allowed their Muslim and American identities to co-exist, with a small number experiencing conflict between the two (Sirin et al., 2008). In their drawings, participants drew their Muslim and American identities as integrated through the use of overlapping and blending images. A smaller number of participants depicted a separation and conflict between the Muslim and American aspects of themselves through their drawings (i.e., by using lines to create a barrier in the middle of the page or drawing circles around each cultural identity). Participants who depicted a conflict between their Muslim and American identities also had greater experiences of discrimination-related stress than those participants who had integrated identity maps (Sirin et al., 2008). This finding is in line with the literature on BII, in which discrimination experiences have been found to be associated with the experience of conflict between the two cultural identities (Benet-Martinez & Haritatos, 2005).

Another study (Britto & Amer, 2007) surveyed 150 Arab Muslim American young adults on cultural identity, acculturation, family functioning, and amount of family support. Results indicated different patterns of identity among the participants, including moderate bicultural—participants who moderately identified with their heritage Arab Muslim and mainstream American culture, as well as high bicultural—participants who identified strongly with the Arab
Muslim and American cultures. Those individuals who were moderately bicultural, or less able to integrate their Arab and American identities than high biculturals, also experienced increased conflict; which, in turn, was related to experiencing higher amounts of familial acculturative stress than high biculturals (Britto & Amer, 2007).

As the literature on BII has linked level of integration to psychological adjustment (Chen, Benet-Martínez, & Harris Bond, 2008; Schwartz et al., 2015), we can also expect that Muslim Americans’ level of adjustment is linked to their identity. The studies reviewed thus far that investigated conflict between dual identities indicated that a greater amount of identity conflict—which can be conceptualized as a lower degree of identity integration—is linked to increased experiences of discrimination, familial stress, and acculturative stress (Awad, 2010; Britto & Amer, 2007; Verkuyten & Yildiz, 2007; Sirin et al., 2008). Given these findings, it is reasonable to infer that experiences of within-family stigma about one’s romantic relationship can create greater bicultural conflict for Muslim American women involved with non-Muslim partners. In addition to greater identity integration, stronger identification with ethnic or religious identity may also be linked to better psychological functioning. Britto and Amer (2007) surveyed 150 second-generation Arab Muslim Americans on bicultural identity and family life functioning measures. Participants who identified as high bicultural and high Arab cultural (feeling closer to Arab and Muslim identity than American identity) perceived more family support and reported being able to rely more on family and friends when in need of help, compared to low and moderate bicultural individuals (Britto & Amer, 2007).

Narrative analysis conducted with 85 Muslim immigrant women indicated that a positive experience of holding a bicultural identity was less about how well the two identities fit with one another, and more about if women were able to create narratives linking their bicultural identities.
together. Despite the perceived social clash of Muslim identity with American/Western identity made evident after 9/11, Muslim women tended to feel a strong sense of belonging to American society. This sense of belongingness was often tied to the country’s level of religious pluralism (Ozyurt, 2013). Thus, in regard to this study, Muslim American women who can construct positive narratives about their bicultural identity may be better able to manage the stress associated with having a non-Muslim partner and feel a sense of belongingness to both cultural worlds.

By combining what we know about Muslim American identity and BII, we can assume that the extent to which Muslim American women integrate their Muslim and American identities has implications for their psychological functioning, cognitive flexibility, and behavior. Moreover, the way that Muslim American women experience their bicultural identity most likely impacts how they experience their non-Muslim relationships. It is also likely that the relationship with a non-Muslim partner has an impact on Muslim American identity. In order to expand the literature on Muslim American bicultural conflict as well as the adjustment of Muslim Americans, it is important to investigate the impact that a non-Muslim relationship has on identity, adjustment, and familial functioning. Further, we can better understand Muslim American identity by considering its intersections with the other identities present in an individual.

**Intersectionality**

As seen in the extant literature, the experience of a bicultural Muslim American identity can also encompass multiple factors, such as gender, country of origin, and experience of discrimination (Ozyurt, 2013; Verkuyten & Yildiz, 2007). Intersectional theory allows us to
understand how the multiple identities associated with being a Muslim American woman can impact Muslim American women’s overall identity and experience.

Intersectionality, also known as intersectional theory, has its origins in feminism and Critical Race Theory (Cole, 2009; Crenshaw, 1991). Although it is rarely utilized in the psychological literature, it has been utilized in a variety of other disciplines, including history, sociology, law, literature, philosophy, and anthropology with attention to the multiple identities of race, gender, class, sexual orientation, ability, religion, and nationality (Cho, Crenshaw & McCall, 2013; Cole, 2009). Intersectionality has also been used to describe the dynamics of power in politics (Cho, Crenshaw & McCall, 2013). The concept of intersectionality often appeared in Black feminist writings in the 1970s and 1980s (Cole, 2009). King (1988) wrote about double jeopardy, which highlighted the interactive oppression that Black women face in terms of race and gender. She identified how social structure and liberation movements used a monist approach and failed to consider the multiplicity and interactions between race, class, and gender (King, 1988). Crenshaw (1991) is often recognized as the scholar who first coined the term intersectionality, in order to describe the constraint in separating race or gender as a core category of identity. Her well-cited article criticized how feminist and antiracist movements do not account for an intersection when describing the experiences of women of color (Crenshaw, 1991). She described the experience of being a Black woman as including racial discrimination similar to what men of color may experience, as well as oppression similar to what white women may experience. However, being a Black woman has its own separate experiences and oppressions. It is not just the sum of racism and sexism, but something entirely separate (Crenshaw, 1991).
Academic literature has utilized a variety of definitions and applications of intersectionality (Davis, 2008). Yet, overall, it posits that individuals’ multiple identities define their social location, with each identity mutually constituting one another. That is, the meaning of one category is derived in relation to another category, and it is additive (Shields, 2008). Similarly, the experience of being Muslim, American, female, and heterosexual is defined by the overlap rather than by the totality of monolithic group memberships (Rahman, 2017).

Further, identity is dynamic, as we are constantly engaged in maintaining, forming, and practicing our identities, which inform our individual inter- and intra-personal experiences (Collins, 1998; Shields, 2008). When an individual holds multiply oppressed identities, they typically do not fit the prototype of each identity group and will therefore experience intersectional invisibility (Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008). This experience is due to the patriarchal, heteronormative, and ethnocentric contexts (Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008). Cole (2009) pointed out that much of the intersectionality literature has investigated multiply oppressed identities, but failed to consider the privileged identities that some members of disadvantaged groups hold.

In the literature, intersectionality has primarily been used in investigating gender, LGBTQIA, racial, and ethnic identities (Parent, DeBlare, & Moradi, 2013; Warner & Sheilds, 2013). Studies have further connected individuals’ experience of intersectionality to identity salience, psychological functioning, discrimination, and perceptions of others (Bowleg, Teti, Malebranche, & Tschann, 2013; Crawford, Allison, Zamboni, & Soto, 2002; Garnet et al., 2014). Although the literature has investigated multiple groups, only a few studies have investigated religion as part of an intersectional identity (Hill, 2013; Nadal et al., 2015). Even fewer look at the experience of Muslim women or Muslim American women as an intersectional identity
Because of this, findings of the broader intersectionality literature, which covers a variety of identities, and how the findings of the present study could be related, will be discussed. Additionally, most intersectionality literature is theoretical rather than empirical (Crawford et al., 2002, Martinez & Sullivan, 1998). A review of the existing empirical literature is focused on.

**Empirical literature on intersectionality.** The empirical literature on intersectionality describes how the intersection of multiple identities affects identity saliency, influences positive psychological functioning, and contributes to discrimination experiences. In regard to salience, some studies identify the intersections of identity as most salient for participants (Settles, 2006). For instance, a mixed methods study investigating 89 Black women instructed participants to complete measures of identity importance developed specifically for this study, but normed on existing measures of racial and gender centrality. Results revealed that for these participants, the intersection of race and gender (e.g., a Black woman identity) was most important, or central to their experience, more so than an individual Black or woman identity alone (Settles, 2006). In other studies, however, one identity was demonstrated to be more salient over others. Bowleg (2013) conducted interviews with twelve gay and bisexual Black men living in the United States about the salience of their identities. Analysis revealed that the participants predominantly experienced being a Black man above other aspects of identity (Bowleg, 2013). For others, the intersectional experience of holding multiple identities included a constant negotiation. Interviews conducted with 13 Asian and Asian American women primarily living in the United States revealed a major theme of negotiating intersections of race, ethnicity, and gender role construction. This negotiation for participants was characterized by opposing their parents' values of deferring to men, asserting U.S. values of independence and pursuance of educational
and career goals, while also maintaining traditional maternal and supportive roles in addition to cultural values of femininity (Corpus & Milville, 2013).

Based on this literature, it can be inferred that Muslim American women may experience the salience of the intersectionality of their racial, ethnic, religious, and gender identities above and beyond each identity alone. Depending on context, there may be times participants experience the Muslim identity more than other aspects of their identity. Similar to the study by Corpus & Milville (2013), it is also likely that Muslim American women negotiate their intersectional identity between the U.S. values they identify with as well as more traditional Muslim values.

The investigation of positive psychological functioning and its relationship to intersectional identity is fairly common within the literature. Studies indicate that the less conflict within an intersectional identity, the better a person’s psychological functioning. The mixed-methods study by Settles (2006) discussed above also had the 89 Black women participants complete measures of clash between Black and female identities, and psychological well-being. It was found that perceiving more interference, or conflict of the Black identity towards the female identity was related to low self-esteem and depression (Settles, 2006).

Another study explored how a harmonious intersectional identity impacted psychological functioning. 151 Asian Americans complete measures of idealized identities, resilience and depression. Findings indicated that at the intersection between ethnicity and gender, participants held idealized gender identities—which were in turn related to increased ethnic pride, resilience, and lack of depression (Mahalingham, Balan, & Haritatos, 2008). Similarly, experiencing a lack of clash between the various groups of which a Muslim American woman may be a part could be due to holding idealized identities, resulting in positive psychological functioning.
**Intersectionality and discrimination.** Discrimination is often linked to lower levels of psychological functioning and is quite common to the experience of intersectionality (Garnet et al., 2014). Having multiple oppressed identities relates to the stigma an individual may experience. There is stigma associated with being a member of each separate marginalized identity, as well as a different type of stigma that involves the dynamic between multiple marginalized identities (Chambers & Erasquin, 2015). Garnet et al., (2014) sampled 965 adolescent students representing Hispanic, Black, female, and male identities on measures of perceived discrimination, bullying, sexual identity, race, ethnicity, depression, and suicidal ideation. Multiple categories of intersectional identities emerged from the data, with individuals at the intersection of bullying, racial discrimination, and weight discrimination being most likely to have increased depression and suicidal ideation (Garnet et al., 2014). The negative consequences of discrimination can extend to an individual’s construal of themselves. Pyke & Johnson (2003) interviewed 100 daughters between the ages of 18 to 34, of Korean and Vietnamese women, about their ethnic identity and experience in an immigrant family. Within the participants’ narratives, gender was constructed simultaneously with race and oppression. Grounded theory analysis revealed that participants perceive different treatment in different contexts: constructing the mainstream American context as gender equal, and their ethnic heritage culture as gender oppressive. Results highlighted the intersectionality of gender and race, as individuals often felt pressure to comply with submissive norms of Asian femininity—such as by being quiet and compliant—or to resist Asian norms—such as being assertive and loud within the mainstream White American context (Pyke & Johnson, 2003).

On the other hand, discrimination influenced by intersecting identities can lead to positive consequences, such as helping others. Interviews conducted with 40 men and women
residing or working in low-income housing communities investigated how intersectionality has an influence on altruism. Participants were asked about a time that they and other community members went out of their way to help others, as well as what motivated them to do so. Analysis revealed the intersection of multiple identities like gender, race, and socioeconomic class, which influenced experiences of vulnerability and motivation to be altruistic. For example, Black women in this community, particularly mothers, were often perceived by child welfare agencies as being unable to care for their children. Participants indicated that they often acted altruistically to protect mothers and children from the child welfare system by caretaking and providing needed food or belongings (Mattis et al., 2008).

The intersectionality literature delves into the experiences of discrimination as a result of being a member of multiple minority groups and being impacted by the social forces involved. Muslim American women belong to at least two marginalized groups—being a Muslim and being a woman. The phenomenon of Islamophobia impacts discrimination against these individuals (Navarro, 2010). The stereotypes of and perceptions by others of Muslim American women often consist of their being oppressed, victimized, or even aligned in some way to terrorists (Wagner et al., 2012). These perceptions may turn into discrimination, resulting in negative psychological consequences impacting the individual and their social network. In order to cope with experiences of discrimination, Muslim American women may internalize negative construals of themselves. These construals may negatively impact the relationships they have with others, including the relationship with their non-Muslim partner. Moreover, they may idealize the American cultural context as gender equal and view their Muslim culture as gender oppressive. Yet, a strength in their narratives may appear, similar to the findings by Mattis et. al
(2008), where discrimination experiences may lead to altruistic behavior, motivating Muslim
American women to reach out to similar others in order to obtain and provide support.

**Intersectionality and Muslim women.** There are few studies which use a Muslim
population to investigate the intersectionality of being Muslim and a woman, and even fewer
studies conducted in an American context using Muslim American women. Similar to the
intersectionality research at large, studies with Muslim women investigate conflicts associated
with intersectional identity and associated psychological adjustment, as well as discriminatory
experiences (Essers & Benschop, 2009; Ghabrial, 2016; Mirza, 2012).

Some studies explore the experience of Muslim women in the workplace, particularly, the
struggles they face in being career oriented, as this clashes with the gender norms of their
religion (Essers & Benschop, 2009; Mirza, 2012). A narrative analysis of four Muslim women
in the Netherlands investigated the intersectionality of being an immigrant, a businesswoman,
and an ethnic and religious minority. Participant stories described experiences of feeling
restricted in their female identity, feeling subordinated, and wanting to create their own
experience of what femininity means in Islam. As a result, the women seemed to either embrace
all their identities by engaging in a continuous struggle among them or distanced themselves
from aspects of femininity and ethnicity which clashed with their entrepreneurial context (Essers
& Benschop, 2009).

Discrimination is often linked to negative perceptions as well as mistreatment toward a
group of people. Perceptions and stereotypes also have an influence in the intersectionality
literature with regard to Muslim women. For instance, Greenwood and Christian (2008)
investigated the perception of 37 White, Scottish, female college students towards Muslim
women. By answering questionnaires, participants were primed with either their membership in
their oppressed female gender group, or with their membership intersecting both privileged White, and oppressed female groups. After priming, participants completed measures rating their impressions of Muslim women and attitudes on Muslim women covering, including wearing the hijab. Analyses revealed that participants who were primed to be aware of their intersectionality were more likely to exhibit positive impressions of Muslim women including increased confidence and a similarity to themselves, as well as having accepting attitudes for covering practices. These results were moderated by political orientation, with right-oriented individuals more likely to have lower acceptance for covering and perceiving less similarity to Muslim women (Greenwood & Christian, 2008).

Mirza (2012) used an intersectionality lens to investigate the narratives of three Muslim women living in Britain. Stories revealed feelings of belonging to their country of origin, experiencing their decision to wear a hijab as part of a racialized identity, and being discriminated against on the basis of being a Muslim woman (Mirza, 2012). Magearu (2018) extended this research by identifying the mechanism through which discrimination occurs. Phenomology was used to analyze cultural productions by Arab Muslim American writers, poets, and artists. Results indicated that race and gender are not only functioning through one another, but are additive in informing Muslim Americans’ discrimination experiences. In other words, Muslim American women experience gendered racialization due to the negative societal meanings ascribed to veiled Muslim women (Magearu, 2018).

Phenomological interviews with 15 Muslim American women identified the challenges they face at the intersection of their identities within the American Muslim community (Rashid, 2017). Results of this study indicated that diverse individuals in the Muslim community experience conflict and stigma. Diversity of gendered religious identity—the expression of
modesty, race, and sexuality—was all connected to participants’ experiences of stigma within Muslim American communities (Rashid, 2017).

Ghabrial (2016) linked discriminatory experience to psychological functioning. Using interpretative phenomenological analysis to uncover the marginalized intersectional experience of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, and Queer people of color, Ghabrial interviewed eleven participants with various identities, including one participant who identified as Muslim, Transgender, Indo-Caribbean, Latina, and Lesbian. Researchers found that the participants often experienced isolation from their community, stigma attributed to their identities and coming out in the context of cultural homophobia, as well as regular stress and anxiety (Ghabrial, 2016).

Summary

A unifying theme of the intersectionality literature is the idea that unique experiences and narratives are formed with the intersections of multiple and multiply oppressed identities across various individuals. These experiences are characterized by identity salience, psychological adjustment and discrimination experiences. It is helpful to understand Muslim American women’s identity using an intersectionality lens because this population holds various ethnic and racial identities as well as gender, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic statuses (Ajrouch, 2004; Sirin & Fine, 2007). The intersection of gender and religion is evident in how Muslim American women experience their religious identity—from the way they dress to how they socialize—since part of the experience of being female is synonymous with being Muslim (Bartkowski & Read, 2003). As an example, many Muslim women cover their hair using a headscarf, or hijab, in order to show their modesty, as instructed by the Qu’rean. This is different from the way Muslim men are expected to show modesty (Read & Bartkowski, 2000). The theory of intersectionality can be applied to Muslim American women’s experiences of identity
and experience of being in a romantic relationship with a non-Muslim partner. We can expect that Muslim, American, female, racial, and ethnic identities interact to form a specific experience for Muslim American women who are romantically involved with partners outside of their religion, including associated experiences of discrimination, psychological adjustment, and family and partner wellbeing. Perhaps the experience for this population is similar to some Muslim men who date outside of their religion, with the added pressure of possible resistance to prescribed gender norms.

The theories of intersectionality and bicultural identity integration together capture the experience of Muslim American female identity. Using both theories provides a comprehensive picture of an individual’s multifaceted, marginalized and privileged experiences, as well as gendered experience. As seen in both the intersectionality and bicultural literature, although individuals may hold a multiplicity of identities, a few (often two) may fluidly emerge as the most salient at any given time (Abes, Jones & McEwan, 2007). We can use bicultural identity integration to understand the duality in holding the two prominent identities of Muslim and American, while using intersectionality to conceptualize how the nuances of existing in a variety of contexts—and with additional identities which have an additive effect—impact an individual’s overall experience.

In the current study, sometimes individuals may experience their Muslim and American identities as most salient and unique given the existence of other multiple identities and contexts of their experience. This why the researcher used participants who identify as Muslim and American, while other demographic factors like race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status varied. The researcher also controlled for participant gender, (using individuals who identified as a woman), sexuality (heterosexual), and age (between 25-39 years old). A Muslim American
bicultural woman may experience a low level of integration between the two identities, but experience the oppression of gender role expectations differently according to a Muslim or American cultural context. Alternatively, an individual may experience the additive effect of the intersections of identity, which includes associated oppressive experiences impacting their psychological functioning. It is clear there are infinite ways and possibilities to possess an identity. Narrative analysis will provide a means by which to capture the unique individual experiences of Muslim American women holding a variety of BII levels and intersections among identities. This method will also be able to demonstrate how intersectionality and BII ultimately influence this population’s experience of non-Muslim intimate relationships.
Chapter 3

Method

The purpose of this study was to explore the psychological experience of Muslim American women with non-Muslim partners, giving voice to a perspective that had been missing in the literature. The following research questions guided this study: a) How do Muslim American women experience their romantic relationship with a non-Muslim partner? b) How do Muslim American women experience their identity in the context of their relationship with a non-Muslim partner? c) How do Muslim American women experience reactions and stigma (if any) within the family or community, in regard to their romantic relationship with a non-Muslim partner?

This study used qualitative methods, consistent with its aim of giving voice to underrepresented perspectives. Qualitative research by nature is exploratory and encourages a depth of understanding (Palinkas et al., 2015). This study used a narrative approach which provided rich insights into personal experiences and common themes across a small number of participants. In particular the Listening Guide, a Voice-Centered Relational Method was utilized to conduct the analysis and identify overarching themes and experiences (also known as contrapuntal voices) across the participants (Gilligan, 2003).

Paradigm

This study was situated within a constructivist-interpretivist paradigm, as described by Ponterotto (2005). Constructivist-interpretivist ontology sees reality as created within a socio-cultural context and as a result of interaction between the researcher and individual. Within a constructivist-interpretivist paradigm, the researcher-participant interaction was seen as critical to capture the experience under investigation. The axiology of the constructivist-interpretivist
lens maintained that the researcher’s values and biases are an inherent part of the research process and data. Constructivist research is often written in the first person in order to highlight the interaction between the researcher and participant as well as the researcher’s own experience, expectations, and biases (Ponterotto, 2005).

**Research Design**

Consistent with a constructivist-interpretivist paradigm, the study was conducted using narrative inquiry, specifically the Listening Guide, a Voice-Centered Relational Method (The Listening Guide) (Gilligan, 2003). Narrative inquiry is often positioned within the constructivist community due to its inherent focus on researcher reflexivity, experience, and representation (Savin-Baden, & Niekerk, 2007). Within this community, narrative inquiry adopts a postmodern perspective, which places knowledge in the context of the world today (Creswell, 2007).

Reflective of a constructivist-interpretivist approach, narrative research operates under five analytic lenses: a) a retrospective discourse communicating the narrator’s point of view; b) a means of communicating voice, which is a construction of the self; c) the act of creating stories that are constrained by social context d) narratives are shaped by the research interaction; and e) a construction that is also representative of the researcher’s own voice (Chase, 2005).

Within the constructivist-interpretivist community, the Listening Guide also takes a feminist approach. Feminist research seeks to understand the experiences of individuals in a social world, highlighting power dynamics within a patriarchal society and social devaluation on the basis of gender (Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 1997). Feminist research seeks to create collaboration between researcher and participants, make explicit the roles and responsibilities researchers and participants have in knowledge construction, and create a transformative interaction. By emphasizing researchers’ positionality, subjectivity, and reflexivity, feminist
researchers try their best to avoid objectifying the participants (Creswell, 2007; England, 1994). Specifically, the Listening Guide takes a feminist stance by making explicit the voices of the researcher and participants inside the narrative. Further, it clarifies what is outside the narrative, beyond the subjects, and in the social world (Doucet & Mauthner, 2008; Gilligan, 2003).

**Participants**

Purposeful sampling depends on the judgment of the researcher to select specific samples that fit the phenomena studied. Purposefully selected samples are typically rich with information, providing a way to study a research question and allowing investigation of a field where there are already limited resources (Palinkas et al., 2015). There were four necessary criteria for inclusion in this study: (a) aged 25-39; (b) currently in a romantic relationship with a non-Muslim male; (c) identifying as a heterosexual female; and (d) identifying as Muslim American or identifying as American and having Muslim heritage (coming from a predominantly Muslim family).

The age range of 25-39 years of age was chosen to reflect the age group of young adulthood, which occurs after the emerging adult period (Arnett, 2000, 2016). Arnett (2016) described emerging adulthood occurring between the approximate ages of 18-25 and sometimes extending to 29, where individuals fluidly explore possible directions in their love life, career, and worldviews. The emerging adulthood period exists in cultures which allow individuals some independence in exploration (Arnett, 2000). Because participants of the study will have defied the norms and expectations of Muslim identity through their current relationship, it can be assumed there was a sufficient period of independence leading to their worldview and love life decisions. Arnett (2016) asserted that emerging adulthood is markedly different from young adulthood, as this later developmental stage—typically closer to one’s 30s—reflects a more stable
period of commitment encompassed by solid decisions made in regard to love life, career, and worldview (Arnett, 2016). This study aims to target individuals who have already done some identity exploration in the emerging adult stage, are somewhat settled in their relationship with a non-Muslim, and have relatively clear ideas about their worldview. Further, it is expected that the age group of 25-39 is still young enough to be freshly impacted by the possible love life decisions made during the emerging adulthood period.

This study sampled six young adult women ranging from 25 and 39 years of age. A number of texts were consulted regarding the sample size best suited for this study. Practical limitations of collecting the data were also considered in this number. Creswell (2007) reported that narrative research methodology is best suited to capture the details of a single or small number of individuals. Qualitative research often uses the concept of data saturation to determine sample size. Data saturation ideally occurs during data collection as an iterative process, when there is no longer identification of new concepts (Sargeant, 2012).

Qualitative researchers have not agreed on the optimal number for data saturation (Kim, 2015). Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006) are often cited as a guide for qualitative researchers in determining their sample size. During their thematic analysis of 60 interviews, these authors found that saturation occurred at 12 participants. They suggested that this number can be used as a conceptual guide, but additional factors need to be considered when determining actual sample size for qualitative research (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006).

Data richness—or the amount of detail in the data—as well as data thickness—or the quantity of data—are additional factors to consider for saturation (Fusch, & Ness, 2015). Because narrative research methods produce immensely rich data and provide a detailed account of each case, an even smaller sample size is appropriate compared to other qualitative methods.
Additionally, sample size in narrative analysis can be as small as one (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998).

It is possible that data saturation can occur at a small number as long as there is thematic redundancy. It is suggested that this can occur anywhere between 6 and 12 participants, as long as themes are redundant (Beitin, 2012). For narrative inquiry in particular, it is suggested that a minimum number of three open or in-depth interviews should be conducted, while placing emphasis on the quality of the interviews (Kim, 2015). Further, it is possible that data saturation in narrative research can be conceptualized as the point when participants exhaust all of the relevant stories that they want to share, focusing on the rich aspect of data saturation (Suarez-Ortega, 2012). Yet, it is also suggested that the data in narrative inquiry can never fully reach saturation, as the data is always organic and unique for each individual (Kim, 2015). This is merely a challenge and limitation inherent in using narrative methods.

The Listening Guide is a method of psychological discovery that is influenced by both Freud and Piaget’s methods and theories (Gilligan, 2015). It seeks to uncover the underlying, dissociative experiences of participants as well as really listen to their voices by separating out the researcher’s experience as much as possible. This exhaustive method requires listening at least three listenings (often more) to each participant’s interview, and collaboration to triangulate data. It therefore results in many themes, interpretations and reflections. The lengthy process requires even more time than other qualitative methods. In this regard, this approach is well suited to be used with a small number of participants (Gilligan, 2015).

All of the aforementioned texts were used to support the decision to sample six participants. The smaller number is supported by the richness in the stories (Suarez-Ortega, 2012) and length of time it takes to use the Listening Guide Method (Gilligan, 2015). This
number also considers the practical limitations of gathering a sample that meets the specific requirements of the study. As the topics being investigated are typically taboo in the Muslim community, it was expected that many people who meet the criteria for inclusion would be hesitant to speak about their experiences to a researcher with whom the individual was unfamiliar.

I included women who identify as heterosexual to capture the unique experience they have in a romantic relationship with men outside of their religion. This study explored intersectionality between and among privileged (e.g., heterosexual, American) and marginalized (e.g., woman, Muslim) identities for individuals in a relationship with a non-Muslim man. In order to represent a variation of possible levels of religiosity in Muslim women, this study included individuals who identify as Muslim American or American and having Muslim heritage (coming from a predominantly Muslim family). Also, due to the potential difficulty with participant recruitment in an already specific study, the researcher chose not to control for other demographic factors such as participant’s race, ethnicity, immigration status, or partner’s race.

**Instruments**

The Bicultural Identity Integration Scale–Version 2 (BIIS-2; Huynh, 2009) was administered to gather supplemental information about the degree to which participants perceive their Muslim and American identities to be integrated. No statistical analysis was conducted using participant’s scores; instead, information from this measure was used as additional descriptive data to help confirm qualitatively identified themes during data analysis of participant transcripts. The BIIS-2 is a 20-item questionnaire, which is rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree. This scale measures perceived harmony versus cultural conflict (e.g., “I find it easy to balance both Muslim and American cultures”) and
perceived cultural blendedness versus compartmentalization (e.g., “I feel part of a combined culture that is a mix of Muslim and American”) of the two cultures to which participants belong. The total score for each subscale is calculated by adding the scores and dividing by the number of items. Huynh and Benet-Martínez (2010) reported internal reliability coefficients of .86 and .81 for cultural harmony and cultural blendedness, respectively (N= 1049 multi-ethnic biculturals). Results from exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses indicated a 2-factor structure of harmony and blendedness. Construct validity of BIIS-2 was evidenced by correlations with personality structure, psychological distress, and well-being (Huynh, 2009).

**Individual Interviews**

Semi-structured, individual interviews were conducted. A semi-structured interview guide was developed to encourage the participants’ narratives (see Appendix C). The broad field of narrative inquiry provides the conceptual framework for gathering the data. Narrative research turns the researcher and participant relationship into that of a narrator and listener and brings forth the particularity of the participant’s story and voice. Within a narrative approach, it is encouraged that the researcher conducts interviews in a way to invite participant stories, with the use of broad and straightforward questioning (Chase, 2005). Generating this form of narrative requires a longer talk time for the participant, which is atypical for the social norms of everyday discourse. Interviewees are also more likely to provide general accounts of their experience because they assume that this is what the researcher is looking for (Chase, 2005). Thus, the researcher’s role in inviting stories is critical. The researcher, as the authoritative figure, is required to give up control and take a collaborative stance while encouraging participants to speak in their own ways. If an interviewee provides a general account, the
researcher can intervene by asking about a particular example or why the experience stands out to them (Riessman, 2008).

**Procedure**

Participants were primarily recruited via email and online postings. Muslim American women attending universities around the United States were invited to take part in this study via announcements made to listserv members of Muslim student associations (e.g., NYU Muslim Students Association, Penn State Muslim Student Association). Participants were also recruited through community religious organizations, cultural organizations, as well as Internet organizations (e.g., Muslims for Progressive Values) and social media groups (e.g., Muslim-Christian Interfaith Support). Participants were asked to forward the study information and researcher’s contact information to others who may potentially meet study requirements. Additionally, information about the study was provided to the researcher’s personal and professional network to recruit individuals for this study. The researcher only recruited individuals with whom she did not have extensive prior interactions. It was at the discretion of those interested to forward the study information and researcher’s contact to others who may potentially meet study requirements. The purpose of utilizing a variety of sources was to gather a sufficient sample from this otherwise hard-to-reach population.

First, participants answered a few screening questions (see Appendix A) to determine if they met the study’s inclusion criteria. Women who were selected for this study received an informed consent form, which they were asked to sign and return. Then, the participants were instructed to fill out a demographic form (see Appendix B) and the Bicultural Identity Integration Scale–Version 2 (BIIS-2; Huynh & Benet-Martínez, 2010) to gather supplemental information via email to complete prior to the interview. During the interview, the forms were discussed, and
any remaining questions were answered. Several steps were taken in order to ensure participant confidentiality. Pseudonyms were assigned to participants, instead of using their real names. Participants’ interviews were recorded through Skype video conferencing software. The recordings and transcripts with only the pseudonyms used as labels were kept on a password-protected flash drive. The researcher and her advisor had sole access to this file. All of this was explained to the participants as part of informed consent.

Due to cost constraints of travel and in order to reach a broad range of participants, the interviews were conducted via Skype rather than in person and lasted 60-120 minutes. The researcher transcribed the video-recorded interviews into text. These texts, also called field texts, were read multiple times in order to code them during analysis (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). These field texts and notes were provided to the participants in order to gather any additional feedback or clarification. The preliminary analysis was also sent to the participants, which included the interpretation of the plot of the interview and themes heard in the data, as well as the I poems, and their meanings. The purpose of this member-check is to locate the researcher and participant on a similar power level (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Analyzed data is presented in a way that highlights the participant’s voice, as well as the surrounding contextual factors. The rhetorical structure when presenting narrative studies is often flexible in form and can use back and forth writing to depict the processes that take place during the research (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The presentation of results switched between participant’s words and researcher’s interpretations, common to the narrative approach (e.g., Way, 1997). Additionally, throughout the presentation of the dissertation, the researcher is transparent about her position and process during this study. Researcher transparency could also provide greater validity to the results.
Analysis

The Listening Guide, a Voice-Centered Relational Method (Gilligan, 2003) was used during the data analytic phase of the research process. This method attends to the relationship between researcher and participant, as well the cultural context of the study. The Listening Guide method attends to the psychological terrain of the participants’ stories, their first-person voices or associative stream of consciousness, and the multiple voices in the text that answer the researcher’s questions (Gilligan, 2015). The method uses four steps consisting of listening to the plot, identifying I poems, listening for contrapuntal voices, and analyzing data (Gilligan, 2003, 2015).

Listening to the plot. This two-step process consists of first listening to what is happening or what is being told in the narrative, through the recognition of metaphors, dominant themes, contradictions, and what is not expressed. The second step is for the researcher to attend to her own response to the narrative by making explicit related thoughts, feelings or associations that arise through the reading of the interview text. It is important to identify how subjective experiences could reflect the way text is interpreted, in order to highlight the researcher’s experience versus that of the participant’s (Gilligan, 2003).

I poems. Gilligan (2003) identifies the purpose of I poems to orient the researcher to the participant’s first-person voice, including what the individual says about their person. First, the researcher will underline each time the interviewee uses the word “I” along with the accompanying verb and any other relevant words. Next, this data is separated from the rest of the text with each I phrase listed on a separate line, like a poem; and the sequence with which I phrases appear in the text are maintained in order. Breaks in the I poems are placed as the researcher listens to the flow and rhythm of the voice. Each time there is a shift in direction,
similar to a person taking a breath, a break is placed. The I poems within several passages of the text were compared to one another to increase the ability to hear the participant and highlight the fluctuations in the first-person voice (Gilligan, 2003). Interpretations about the stanzas of the I poems are then made. Often these interpretations may capture hidden meanings and contrast with what a participant is speaking to in the narrative, or the interpretations made in the first step of the Listening Guide. The I poems offer a glimpse into an “associative stream of consciousness” underlying the narrative (Gilligan, 2003).

**Listening for contrapuntal voices.** This step consists of identifying other voices in the data, including the voices that answer the research question. These voices can be specified by the theoretical lens (e.g., bicultural identity integration and intersectionality), which guides the research question, and/or questions that arise from the previous readings of the interview text. These voices are the multiple facets of the data, which could be in opposition or in harmony with one another (Gilligan, 2003). Once these voices are identified, the text is read through, listening for one voice at a time. Triangulation plays an important role in this step of the method, as the researcher considers whether the I poems validate or conflict with what is being said in the narratives and what that could mean (Gilligan 2003). Features of these voices are also identified, including their emotional tone, their relationship to one another, and their relationship to the first-person voice (Kiegelmann, 2009).

**Analyzing data.** At this point in the process, the researcher has read the text at least three times and has marked the field text with underlines and notes. Using these sources, information related to the research questions is pulled together. What is learned through the research process is conveyed through summaries and interpretations. At this stage it may be
clear that the researcher needs to modify or change the research question in order to reconcile what was heard through the repeated readings (Gilligan, 2003).

Validity

In attending to issues of validity, the researcher considered validity specific to the constructivist-interpretivist paradigm. Within this paradigm, fairness, authenticity, and meaning are the criteria with which credibility is established (Morrow, 2005). Fairness is established through multiple constructions of the data (Morrow, 2005). Specifically, the researcher highlighted the multiple voices apparent in the narratives by making explicit what is coming from the interviewee and what is coming from the researcher or from society. Authenticity is composed of the ontological, educative, and catalytic. In order to address ontological authenticity, or an increased awareness about the area of study for participants (Onwuegbuzie, Leech, & Collins, 2008), during the interview, the researcher elaborated and expanded each construction by encouraging participants to speak about their experience in detail. Participants’ understanding of their own stories was enhanced by engaging in the process of construction of their narratives through the interview. During member checks, which occurred after the preliminary analysis, participants had the opportunity to become reacquainted with their stories as well as the interpretations that were rendered. This process served educative authenticity, or an increased awareness of other perspectives (Onwuegbuzie, Leech, & Collins, 2008). The researcher provided the interviewees with the transcripts of the interviews as well as preliminary interpretations, including the plot and I poems, and asked for any responses or reactions they had. Their input was considered in the final analysis. Catalytic authenticity speaks to the extent that action is stimulated (Onwuegbuzie, Leech, & Collins, 2008). Through this study, and
through the dissemination of results, it is hoped that these stories will encourage social action in Muslim communities toward an attitude of support.

As the population being targeted is prone to experience isolation and social rejection from the Muslim community, supportive groups are essential to individual, couple, and familial well-being. In regard to the meaning, it is important to accomplish a deep understanding of the data including that of the participant and that which is co-constructed between participant and researcher (Morrow, 2005). These are explicitly parsed out in the write-up which identifies multiple voices, including the interviewee, researcher, and society. Specifically, participant voices are presented through direct quotes from the interview transcripts, reflecting themes, or contrapuntal voices that appear multiple times in one interview and across multiple participant interviews.

Following the constructivist-interpretivist paradigm, the researcher’s voice is generally accepted to be inherently part of the data and analysis; however, the researcher makes attempts throughout the study’s process to identify her positionality and account for her voice and bias as much as possible. She does this through the analytic process by journaling her reactions to the participant interviews as part of the first listening. When interpreting the data, she revisits these journaled reactions in order to consider if the interpretation is more of a reflection of her own voice, or the participant’s. If themes were repeated throughout a participant’s text as well as across interviews, the researcher was more likely to consider these themes in the final interpretation of the data. The researcher further identified her position through the researcher reflexivity section by describing her identity and relationship to the research. Although additional coders or a research team was not used due to lack of availability and funding, the
The researcher used a member of her dissertation committee to serve as a reviewer of the interpretations and presented data to account for additional voices.

Creswell (2007) suggested that triangulation of the data take place by combining different sources of information in order to justify the themes identified. The researcher used demographic information, the BIIS-2 scale, and the multiple steps in the Listening Guide to validate themes that appeared in the results. Specifically, interpretations of the plot from the first step of the Listening Guide were compared to the interpretations of the I poems in the second step to validate themes that are repeated in the data and identify any conflicts. The researcher pointed out negative or discrepant information that ran contrary to themes to present a more realistic and valid interpretation. After the first and second listening of the analysis, the third step involved listening for contrapuntal voices, which were the overarching voices or themes that emerged across the participants’ stories reflecting themes validated in participant narratives and I poems. These voices answered the research questions. Portions of the interview transcripts that illustrate these contrapuntal voices were presented in the results section as well as their corresponding I poems. The four-step method of the Listening Guide combined with member checks and inclusion of participant words helped draw out participant voices, including what is said, not said, implied, and contradicted.

Although many themes were identified in the first step of the analysis, only the emerging contrapuntal voices were included in the results because these voices reflect a combined analysis of plots and I poems, with interpretations repeated within and across interviewees as well as information that relates to the research questions. Gilligan (2017) wrote about the importance of engaging in the process of listening without categorizing or coding immediately. The researcher was consistent with this in the analysis, opening herself up to discovery in her findings. Societal
voices are highlighted as a result of the third step of the Listening Guide (finding contrapuntal voices) combined with a guidance from the theoretical lens and background literature as they appeared in the stories that participants told.

**Researcher Reflexivity**

I became interested in this topic through my own experiences as a second-generation, Turkish American heterosexual female. Although I do not identify with the Muslim identity religiously, it is part of my cultural identity and is tightly enmeshed with my Turkish ethnic identity.

I grew up in the United States, in a suburban town, that was composed of a mostly White population. Throughout these years, I struggled to fit Islam into my identity as I shifted my religious identity from non-practicing Muslim, to practicing Muslim, to Agnosticism, and then to Atheism, which is currently how I identify. I have always felt a conflict arising from belonging to a Muslim family and living in a predominately Christian country, with most of my friends identifying as Christian. I shifted my religious orientation from a non-practicing to practicing Muslim when my mother became more religious, during my late middle school/early high school years. Later, as my mother maintained her religious adherence, I moved away from Islam as a religion, but currently recognize its continued impact on me culturally. My father’s relationship with religion, also shifted from non-practicing Muslim to Atheism, which eventually helped me feel supported in my move away from religion. Initially, I did not feel very supported in being Agnostic or an Atheist.

Sometimes it is difficult for me to distinguish a Turkish value from an Islamic value. This is understandable as most Turkish individuals identify with the Islamic religion. However, the country of Turkey maintains some mixed messages regarding Islam. I grew up spending
most of my summer breaks in Turkey, visiting family and hearing the sound of an Imam’s call to prayer throughout the day, wherever I was. To this day, that sound continues to give me peace and comfort. At the same time, for most of my life, I was very aware of the ban Turkey had on individuals working in the public sector to wear any type of religious dress, especially the hijab. This is because Turkey wanted to maintain its political secularism. Most of my relatives “cover up,” with the women wearing hijabs when praying, and wait to permanently cover their hair when they are older adults and no longer working. Although the religious dress ban was recently lifted in 2008, it is undeniable that those who wear religious dress to work are still oppressed. I interpreted this law with the high occurrence of Islam in Turkey as a dualistic message, which paralleled my own conflicting Muslim American identity. Because of this and the Islamophobia that arose after the September 11th attacks, I felt the pull to keep Islam a private factor of my identity, mainly folding it into my Turkish ethnic identity.

I have respect for this religion and believe that people should have the freedom to practice any religion. My decision to move away from the religion has been strongly influenced by witnessing instances of oppression within the religion (i.e., a lack of acceptance toward women seeking relationships outside of the faith, individuals that engage in pre-marital sex, or gay individuals). My own experiences of the difference between how my extended family has reacted to me versus Muslim women we know who date non-Muslim men led me to personally experience difficulty in my own non-Muslim relationships. Additionally, my experience witnessing the shame and pain that many of my female friends experienced consequent to dating non-Muslim men led me into this particular area of research. Most of these friends, although they come from Muslim families and have moved away from identifying as Muslims themselves, experience a continued cultural influence of Islam through their families. Muslim Americans are
of particular interest to me, as most of this population is first-, second- or third-generation immigrants, who may feel an added pressure of maintaining their heritage identity.

My own social position and identity as a Muslim American, coming from a split family of high and low levels of religiosity, undoubtedly contributed to all stages of the research process. This was reflected in the process of building rapport with my participants, as participants seemed to develop trust fairly quickly because I am also a part of the Muslim American group. I felt that many sensed my understanding of their experience—and the fact that I have my own similar experiences—throughout the interview, especially when comments such as “maybe in your culture” were made. It was visibly evident that I am not highly religious as participants saw the absence of a hijab during the interview. This most likely (and correctly) gave my participants the assumption that I am a secular Muslim American, who holds liberal values. This assumption may have allowed the participants to disclose more than they probably would to another researcher given that they saw me as accepting of their relationship, as well as potentially having a similar experience of relationships and identity to them.

It is also possible that for women who identified with high levels of religiosity and feel very conflicted about their relationship, they may have seen me as non-religious and assumed that I could not fully understand their experience. There were several participants who identified with high levels of religiosity. It is possible that they may have assumed that if I were in a non-Muslim relationship, my experience would be easier and less conflicting due to my low adherence to the Islamic religion. In this case, participants may have had a difficult time opening up to me or may even have felt feelings of envy. In anticipating this, I often expressed my positivity and curiosity during the interview. I considered that my positionality and identity could affect my readings of the interviews, through the emphasis of themes that I most connect
to in my own experience. I was especially tuned into the cultural conflict between Muslim and American identities, and any feelings of shame and guilt through my coding. One way I kept track of how my own experiences may be influencing what I see in the data was through reflection and journaling throughout the process.

Researcher reflexivity is inherent to narrative methods and is a crucial step of the procedure detailed in the Listening Guide. As mentioned before, one of the broad tasks of narrative researchers is to place the data in context, through highlighting the sociocultural context and the research interview context (Chase, 2005). During the first step of the Listening Guide, I explicitly stated my reactions to the data by journaling my own comments, emotional reactions, and thoughts about the interview. I also reflected on my own identity and social location in relation to the participant. With this awareness, I was better able to listen for the participants’ own voice, without confusing it as my own. Gilligan (2003) writes about this process as being similar to that of a therapist who identifies her countertransference in order to better work with a patient. Throughout the analysis, when interpreting the I poems and listening for contrapuntal voices, I kept these reflections in mind and returned to them as needed. I used this process in an effort to be as objective as possible, realizing that due to the nature of this research it is not possible to be fully objective or neutral (Gilligan, 2003).
Chapter 4

Results

The following results are broken into three sections, or three contrapuntal voices, which emerged from these data and further answered the research questions. These voices are, *Defenders of Cultural History, Cloaking the Love, and Voice of Rebellion*. Each woman’s interview was listened to a minimum of four times in order to identify these three overarching voices. The first listening focused on the plot as the women told the story of their romantic relationship, identity, and family and community reactions to their relationship. Findings from the BIIS-2 were incorporated into the analysis as descriptive data. For example, if what a participant was saying qualitatively sounded like a highly integrated bicultural identity, and the BIIS-2 also indicated high bicultural identity integration, I was more likely to identify a highly integrated bicultural identity theme in the data. Next, I responded to this listening as the researcher, and became aware of any opinions, conflicts and relation to the narrative by recording my own reactions to the data as I moved through the listenings. These reactions were considered in the final listening while analyzing the data. The second, third, and fourth listenings focused on I poems, finding contrapuntal voices, and analyzing all the data together. I have interwoven data from all stages of the analytic process using the Listening Guide, a Voice-Centered Relational Method (Gilligan, 2003) to validate the emergence of the three voices. Through this process, I provided a detailed account of the six Muslim American women’s narratives that explain how these women experience their romantic relationship, their identity, and reactions toward their relationship. I include the contrapuntal voices with the participants’ words interspersed throughout.
The *Defenders of Cultural History* emerged when participants described their Muslim American identity as one they cling onto despite the disconnection they feel to it. Often, these women offered strong statements, which sounded like they had something to prove. At times the clinging took a painful tone, as participants described feeling othered. *Cloaking the Love* emerged when participants discussed the hidden nature of their relationships. The *Voice of Rebellion* was a powerful voice, which embodied the agency of change. These women rebelled against norms of what it means to be a Muslim American and defined the identity for themselves.

**Participant Demographic Information**

**Nour.** Nour is a 27-year-old White, multiethnic, Egyptian and Italian Muslim American female who was born in the United States. She was raised by mixed faith parents, with a father who identifies as a Muslim and Egyptian and a mother who is Italian and Catholic. Her parents agreed to raise her and her siblings Muslim. She is married to a 28-year-old, Asian, Puerto Rican, and Chinese American male who identifies as Agnostic. They have been together for 9 years. Nour scored moderate on the BIIS-2 blendedness vs. compartmentalization subscale (3.43) and low on the harmony vs. conflict subscale (2.10). This indicates that her Muslim American identity is moderately integrated due to behavioral factors, and has low integration related to relational, and emotional factors.

**Azra.** Azra is a 29-year-old South Asian, Pakistani Muslim American female who immigrated to the United States with her family when she was 15 months old. She was raised by her mother and father, who both identify as Pakistani and Muslim. She has two younger siblings, a brother and a sister. She is married to a 31-year-old Latino, Ecuadorian, Catholic American male and they have been together for 12 years. Azra scored moderate on the BIIS-2
blendedness vs. compartmentalization subscale (3.57) and moderate on the harmony vs. conflict subscale (3.30). This indicates that Azra’s Muslim American identity is moderately integrated behaviorally, relationally, and emotionally.

**Saifa.** Safia is a 37-year-old Caucasian, multiethnic, Saudi Arabian and Cuban Muslim American female who was born in the United States. She was raised by a father who indentifies as a Muslim and Saudi Arabian and a mother who is Cuban and Muslim, but identified as Catholic before marriage. Her parents raised her, her two sisters and a brother with Islam and for a period of her life, she lived in Saudi Arabia. She is dating a 38-year-old White and Hispanic American male who identifies as Catholic and they have been together for 2.5 years. Saifa scored low-moderate on the BIIS-2 blendedness vs. compartmentalization subscale (2.71) and moderate on the harmony vs. conflict subscale (3.10). This indicates her Muslim American identity is moderately-low integrated behaviorally, and moderately integrated relationally, and emotionally.

**Humaima.** Humaima is a 26-year-old South Asian, Pakistani Muslim American female who was born in the United States. Her parents, who are Pakistani and Muslim, immigrated to the U.S. She has two sisters and two brothers. She is in a romantic relationship with a 26-year-old East Asian, Korean American male who identifies as Agnostic and loosely practicing Christianity. They have been together for 6 years. Humaima scored moderate on the BIIS-2 blendedness vs. compartmentalization subscale (3.43) and moderate on the harmony vs. conflict subscale (3.60). This indicates that Humaima’s Muslim American identity is moderately integrated behaviorally, relationally, and emotionally.

**Natalie.** Natalie is a 31-year-old African American Muslim female who was born in the United States. She described her parents as converting to Islam together before she was born.
Her father was originally a Jehovah’s Witness and her mother was Christian before becoming Muslim. She has three brothers and a half-sister. She is in a romantic relationship with a 35-year-old African American Methodist Christian male. They have been friends for the last 11 years, but recently started dating in the last 9 months. Natalie scored moderate-high on the BIIS-2 blendedness vs. compartmentalization subscale (3.71) and low-moderate on the harmony vs. conflict subscale (3.0). This indicates that Natalie’s Muslim American identity is moderately-high integrated behaviorally, and moderately-low integrated relationally, and emotionally.

**Fatima.** Fatima is a 37-year-old South Asian Indian Muslim female who immigrated to the United States at the age of 10. Both of her parents are Indian and Muslim. She has two siblings, and an older sister and younger brother. She is in a romantic relationship with a 40-year-old Ghanaian Bahá’í male and they have been together for the last six years. Fatima scored moderate-high on the BIIS-2 blendedness vs. compartmentalization subscale (3.86) and moderate on the harmony vs. conflict subscale (3.60). This indicates that her Muslim American identity is moderately-high integrated behaviorally and is moderately integrated relationally, and emotionally.

**Defenders of Cultural History**

All participants discussed ways in which they cling onto their Muslim American identity, despite being othered, feeling pain, and experiencing disconnection. These women discuss being Muslim and American, but also tell a story of how painful being different is. Their narratives tell the story of being Muslim and American, while their I poems contradict, describing a disconnection.
Through Nour’s narrative, she speaks about an oscillating Muslim American identity. Something that is tied to her father (who passed away) and something she feels differently depending on what environment she is in.

I, I dunno, I sometimes feel like this, the religion has just caused me so much pain. Uh, and I'm having a hard time at this point in recon, reconciling that pain. Like sometimes it brings me peace and sometimes um, it's just all about rules and it puts people into. I feel it puts people into boxes that they don't. Or the people put people into boxes that they don't necessarily belong in. And yeah, I mean I think my whole life that's just basically been, I don't fit into a box and you know, people's version of Islam. It's not mine.

I mean, I think that also comes from being mixed, you know, because when you're mixed you never really fit into either community perfectly. And it's a very, like I don't speak Arabic. Um, and that's always been one of my deepest regrets, but it. Not that it's my fault that I don't speak Arabic because my dad probably just didn't speak to me enough I was little for me to pick it up. I mean, he tried to teach me at some point, but yeah, like I just remember feeling so othered by that. With all of the Muslim and Arab friends that I had. Not that I had so many, but like with the family, whenever I would go to Egypt, I would really just, I felt like an American right? But then whenever I was with my American friends there was this, always this part of me that felt also on the outside where, oh, well that's Nour, she's kind of a prude about stuff. Uh, so it was always weird. And even with the Italian side of my family, like I felt like they compartmentalized my Muslim identity to a degree. And they, um, in order to make me, to kind of accept me, there were times
where I felt like, oh, she's one of the good ones or she's not like the rest of them. And I have felt that before.

I mean, yeah, growing up as a mixed kid. So, in the mosque, I always hated the mosque. It was just never a, it was, uh, I, I never really felt like I belonged there. It was a very Egyptian mosque, very Arab mosque. And uh, like I said, you know, everybody spoke Arabic. I didn't speak Arabic. I felt totally lost there. Sometimes my mom would take us there with her blonde hair, like poking out of hijab and like her blue eyes and she would just sit in the corner while everybody prayed. And all the Muslim women there would pretty much just ignore her. Like, um, when my mom was around our family, they would just ignore her and speak Arabic and just not even make an effort to talk to her and um pretty much just pretend she wasn't there and even if they accepted that she was married to my dad, they just really never treated her. Like they really never made her feel welcome except for that cousin that I mentioned. Um, but, you know, so I think growing up and seeing that as a kid, you know, you feel othered as well when people, uh, treat your mother that way. Um, but then, you know, on the flip side, I remember feeling really weird as a kid when I was with my Italian side of the family and for example, the not eating pork thing. Like to this day, every time I'm with someone who's not Muslim who it's like they're eating pork, I feel like they have to make such a show of it. Like this doesn't have pork. Like just so I know. And it just, it does make me feel, it's just like alright like there's a million other things to eat. Could we just like be discreet about this please? Like, you know, it's not that I'm ashamed of not eating pork
Nour describes what it feels like to live in two separate worlds. She begins by stating strongly that Islam “just caused me so much pain.” In the Muslim world, she is seen as American, someone who was born and raised in the U.S. of mixed parents, and someone who does not speak Arabic. She frequently engages in questioning her beliefs and values, identifying herself as “not fitting into a box” also serving to distance her from her Muslim identity. In the American world, she is seen as a Muslim, someone with a different perspective, more conservative about sex, and someone who does not eat pork. She speaks of feeling like an outsider in both worlds. It is interesting that Nour’s I poems tell a slightly different story. Her I poems, which tap into her associative logic and unconscious processes (Gilligan, 2017), do not portray the oscillating identity that she speaks about in her narrative, but a strong disconnection to Muslim identity.

I/I dunno

I sometimes feel

I’m having/I feel

I mean/I think/I don’t fit into a box

I mean/I think

I don’t speak Arabic/I don’t speak Arabic

I was/I mean/I just remember

I had/I had/I would go to Egypt

I would/I felt like an American

I was/I felt/I felt/I’ve felt/I mean/I always hated the mosque

I/I never belonged/ I said/I didn’t speak Arabic

I felt totally lost

I think
I remember/I was/I am/I feel/I know/I am ashamed

Nour’s I poems illustrate an unsteady feeling, (i.e., “I mean/ I think…I was/ I mean”) each time she makes a declarative statement about her disconnection to her Muslim identity. She disconnects, but does so painfully. This disconnection results in feeling more “American.” (i.e., “I don’t fit into a box…I don’t speak Arabic…I felt totally lost”). She identifies the Arabic language as a facet of Muslim identity, but a language she does not speak. She mentions it three times and clearly wants this fact to be known. Although she goes to Egypt, a place she connects with her Muslim identity, she identifies immediately afterwards that she feels American. She further expresses strong emotions, her “hate” for the mosque, and feeling “ashamed” in the context of dietary restriction around other Americans. These emotions are likely laden with anger and pain. Yet, through Nour’s narrative she still clings onto the faith, defending it as part of herself and part of what she uses to connect with her history, particularly memories of her father and of childhood.

Natalie speaks at length about having an invisible and disconnected identity.
Natalie tells her story of being a Black Muslim American. This story includes painful experiences of racism within the religion disconnecting her from the Muslim community at large, and feeling different from other Black Muslims who tend to cover their hair.

Well, I'm Black, which means that Indian and Pakistani and anybody else does not relate to me. So, so, uh, I feel like I'm lonely in the Muslim community. And then I'm a millennial and millennials don't tend to be in the masjid. So yet again, I also feel lonely when I go to the physical community of the, um, you know, of, Islam or of Muslim people. And what else? Oh, I don't cover. So, like Black girls that don't cover, I don't
even know who they are. Again, I just feel like I'm Muslim, but I'm Black. So like I'm kind of this outsider and I'm this young Muslim. It’s just; it's a really lonely identity. Her I poems further illustrate her disconnection, and yet the desire to hold fast to her Muslim identity despite the pain.

I am Black

I feel/I am lonely in the Muslim community

I am/I also feel lonely

I go/I don't cover/I don't

I just feel/I am Muslim/I am Black

I am

I am

She further describes her disconnection and illustrates her connection to her Muslim identity through holding a hope that her struggle is all for a greater reward.

Uh, I mean overall, it's tough. It’s really difficult. The day, like I'm surprisingly frustrated with being expected to marry a Muslim when there's racism in the religion. Like, if I wanted to be with a Muslim who wasn't African American, then you know. But if it wasn't for me being a Muslim, now I'm Black, or my family isn't from a pure Muslim background, I don't know. So many things. I don't cover. I’m not Muslim enough. And uh, yeah, otherwise I guess we're expected to suffer on earth. (Laughing). That is like religious expectations of anyone Christian or Islamic, so I'm like very kind of callous a little bit at this point. And then there's hope. Then there's also maybe, you know, I'll get a greater reward some point. So it's tough. That would be everything in a nutshell.
She continues to discuss what it is like holding multiple identities, feeling alone and the related pain.

Yeah, it's a, it's just crazy ‘cause there's a lot of. We’re just like the last to be picked for anything. So, we're not seen as attractive, uh being a Black woman. Um, we have lower incomes, so we're not seen as assets in terms of wealth. Uh, building wealth. We have the least exposure to international cultures. So, we're not seen as being able to relate, or be homemakers, or have some of the training that other cultures may have in common. Um, there's a language barrier. I don't speak many other languages naturally because I haven't been many places to learn. Uh, and then if there's like a immigration thing, I don't share that struggle on the other side. Like I don't know what that's like to be an immigrant. I don't have any of that opportunity to relate. So, like even if I was Haitian American or a African immigrant to America, that would at least be another layer to relate to someone. Um, but I'm not. I'm just the product of slavery in America. And that's all I know. You asked me my ethnicity. I don't even know what that is. We have a color. So (laughing) it's hard to relate to other ethnicities. Um, being that I'm limited in my own.

Natalie’s I poems strongly display her disconnection. Similar to Nour, there is an unsteadiness when she makes a declarative statement about her Muslim identity: “I’m not Muslim enough…I guess.” She’s saying she’s disconnected, but part of her is defending her Muslim identity.

    I mean/I am/I wanted/I am Black
    I don't know/I don't cover/I’m not Muslim enough
    I guess/I am like very kind of callous
    I will/I don't speak/I haven't/I don't share/I don't know
I don't/I was/I am not/I am the product of slavery

I know/I don't even know

I am limited

Similar to Nour, depending on the day, Saifa states that her identity oscillates. As a mixed individual of Cuban and Saudi Arabian ethnicities, she identifies being Muslim at times, but also feels a connection with her mother’s Catholic faith.

Okay. So let me go back a little bit. So like I said, my mom is Cuban American, she was born there, she came here when she was five. She lived in New York and then she came to Miami. My Dad is from Saudi Arabia. Um, he went to school in Lebanon and then he went to go to college in North Carolina, that's where my parents met and then we lived like a little bit everywhere. I grew up in Saudi Arabia though. Um, so I was raised Muslim. I’ve never completely identified. Well I've gone through phases where I was more like pious than other times and more practicing. Um, and not, I consider myself like I believe in God, I don't practice everything exactly the way you're supposed to though and I haven't for a long time. I, I, I didn't grow up here, but I've always, I like, this is how I introduce myself like my mom's Cuban American, my Dad’s from Saudi Arabia. And I don’t really put myself in the mix that much because depending on the day, depends on how much I relate to one culture or the other. And same with the religion it depends on the day. Because my mom was Catholic before she married. Um, I do feel a connection with like the Catholic faith too and stuff. So that varies like the level of identity with any particular religion or faith I think varies day to day, but I would identify as a Muslim like if it's a checkbox here, I would put Muslim so.
When listening to Saifa’s I poem, we hear her saying that she’s never completely identified with the Muslim American identity, although, she grew up in Saudi Arabia, and this is something she states twice. She used to be “pious” and doesn’t “practice everything.” Her voice becomes unsteady when she talks about connecting to the Catholic faith: “I relate, I do feel, I think;” and she also sounds somewhat unsure when ending the I poem with “would” identify as Muslim.

I said/I grew up in Saudi Arabia
I was /I’ve never completely identified
I’ve /I was more like pious/I consider/I believe in God
I don’t practice everything
I haven’t/I didn’t grow up here
I’ve /I /I
I don’t
I relate/I do feel/I think
I would identify as a Muslim
I would put Muslim

Saifa also describes feeling disconnected and spends a significant amount of time providing an explanation as to why this is. However, she feels the need to underline her identity as one in flux.

Um, I wasn't too attached to any of it before. I'd be like, okay, uh that's not a big. It wasn’t a big part of my life or like how I saw myself. Again, there were times where I did like if we went to visit Mecca or something like, obviously I'd feel it more, it would be a more of a factor in my identity. But day to day I think just because I live in a very multicultural city now, everybody's kind of like from someplace else, it wasn't too much
of a factor, um, because everybody's from somewhere, everybody. This is something or the other and. It's not perfect obviously because there are people who are very prejudiced against other people and stuff. But day to day I don't really see that. So I think just because I wasn't put in a situation where I felt like I had to defend who I am or anything, I didn't feel a need to be a representative. Like, hey, yeah, this is me and this is the only part of my identity. Also, I think because I, like, my mom is Cuban American and there's a lot of Cuban American's here that just goes with part of my identity, so I feel like it's all part of the knife, if that makes sense. Like compartmentalized, but I'm the same person but it’s different parts of me. Depending on the day, like one part comes off a little bit more.

Listening to her I poem, we hear Saifa’s voice become unstable when she asserts her disconnection.

I wasn’t too attached/I’d/I saw myself

I did/I'd feel

I think

I/I don't really see/I think

I wasn't/I felt/I had to defend

I am/I didn’t feel a need to be a representative

I think

I/I feel

I'm the same person

When she asserts “I wasn’t too attached…I didn’t feel a need to be a representative,” she follows up with “I think,” reflecting instability.
Saifa continues to describe a disconnection from her Muslim identity, even when there are societal injustices.

I remember after 9/11, I was in college and I didn’t do anything to stand up and be like, yeah, hey, I'm Muslim American and, or any of that. I just kind of like, not tried to blend in, but I, I blended in. I didn’t do anything to call attention to anything or bring it up or. I never denied that part of me because I know some people did. I never did that. Um, I never felt any danger in identifying as Muslim or anything. I just didn't see the need to draw attention to myself for that reason or be a representative for the community or anything. Like if it's something I feel very strongly about, um, then I will draw attention to, like not too much. I just, I don't like attention for the most part, but if I feel like there's somebody got, an injustice is being done to or um, a cause I feel strongly about, then I will talk about it.

She goes on to describe feeling othered by the assumptions people make about her and the questions which are asked of her.

I'm just me. I'm Saifa. Like it's just like I don't think people see me. Well, they might see me as something different. I do get asked sometimes like my friends for example, just this past weekend a friend was like, well, when you guys get married are you gonna have have like everybody covered up? And I was like, well, but I don't cover up. So why would I ask anybody else to? And they're like, well, but that sounds cool. Um, and yeah so. So it's just things like that. Like, okay, so what about this part of your religion? So some people are very interested and some people I think just don't see that as, they don't associate that with like that, the religion with me for whatever reason. And sometimes they're a little surprised like, oh yeah, wait, I could’ve have asked you. Um,
and some people are very inquisitive. Um, which I'm fine with if it's like getting to know me or they're really curious, but some, some people just. I don't know if it's ever happened to you. Um, but they just like ask questions, questions, questions, questions, questions. And it's not because they really care about you or they're curious about something. They just want that extra edge of information. And that annoys me.

In Saifa’s narrative she describes a disconnection, but in her I poem, we hear her become defensive after stating this disconnectedness.

I remember/I was/I didn't do

I/I blended in

I didn't/I never denied/I know

I never did/I never felt

I just didn't see the need to draw attention

I feel/I will/I don't like attention

I feel/I feel strongly

I will talk

I am/I am Saifa

I don't think people see me

I do/I was

I don't cover up

I ask/I think

I could have/I don't know
Saifa “blended in” after 9/11, and defensively states, “I never denied [her Muslim identity]” and she ascribes this to disliking “attention.” She continues to express her disconnection: “I am Saifa, I don’t think people see me…I don’t cover up,” and immediately after, her voice becomes unstable: “I ask, I think, I could have, I don’t know.”

**Cloaking the Love**

*Cloaking the Love* appeared when participants discussed their relationships and reactions of family and community toward their relationship. *Cloaking the Love* represents the hidden aspect of being with a non-Muslim partner. A cloak by nature serves to hide and protect. For participants this often involved hiding their partner from their family or hiding their family or aspects of themselves from their partner.

Nour narrates the reactions of her American and Muslim friends to her relationship. She begins by describing the support from her American friends (most of her friends were not Muslim). She follows it up by describing in detail the contrasting lack of support from the Muslim community. She discusses the taboo nature of having a boyfriend, meaning that although people knew about it, she could not really discuss it.

I mean they were all very supportive, but it's pretty worth mentioning that I didn't really have a lot of Muslim friends. Um, which in a way, you know, I think it kind of helped. Uh, but then, I mean I did have some cousins or slash friends of the family that I always felt like I couldn't be completely open with. Like it was always a taboo. They knew I had a boyfriend. We weren't really supposed to talk about it. Um, but they knew that we were together for a long time. And you know. Again, there’s, that, there's that feeling of being like the black sheep, like, you know. Here are my good Muslim friends. I guess maybe that we weren't really friends if I couldn't be honest with them about my lifestyle, but um
we just can't talk about this. Or oh well Nour’s different because, you know, she's mixed. You know, it was always like being on the outside of. So I think, you know, what people don't typically understand is that for me, you know, I have more in common with someone like (name) than I have with half of the Muslim people in my family. Like, I was always somewhat in between, um, those two worlds.

While her narrative reads more as a contrast between supportive relationships (American friends) and unsupportive relationships (Muslim friends, cousins), her poems strongly assert the hidden quality to her relationship and resulting feeling of being stuck in between.

I mean

I did/I always

I couldn’t be completely open

I had/I guess/I couldn’t be honest

I think

I have/I have/I was always somewhat between um, those two worlds

After marriage, Nour describes being acknowledged now: “they have to accept,” yet this acknowledgement is more like being “accepted as a sinner,” as she describes in a later section of the interview. She talks about how the Muslim community often makes assumptions that her husband underwent conversion in order to marry her.

Okay. Um, yeah. So I think with friends, um like, you know, the American friends. We have a very tight knit group of friends actually and we’re you know, they're from college so they've pretty much been with us since we've met. They've witnessed the entire start of our relationship and like. Um, you know, they're really important to us and they've been, you know, incredibly supportive throughout the whole thing. And um, you know
that, like I, I wasn't religious really when the relationship started so it wasn't even really
an issue at the time and they knew what was going on with the uncle who said what he
said and, you know, but, is he gonna to convert? Is he not gonna to convert thing? They
knew about that. I mean they were just kinda there for me. Like what could they do?
Um, when it comes to like, like Muslim friends though, it's a different story. Because
once you get married they do have to acknowledge it. It's not in hiding. You're not in
hiding anymore. And like, you know, even if they knew you had a boyfriend, it's like,
well now they're seeing him at things. Um, like, I took him to a couple of like, um, I
guess like events where there were like other Muslims there. And like you know, it's like
they're kind of, I think most Muslims if they see that you're with like a person from a
different cultural background. I think their default assumption is that that person
converted. I'm starting to realize that like, like because it's not like religion is just um,
like a part of the conversation from the start. If I say, oh, this is my husband [name],
right? They're probably like, oh, he probably converted for her. Okay. Or or you know,
maybe he was Muslim before. I don't really know what they think. Um but there are
times where I do feel like, oh, it's not as weird as I thought it would be.

In her narrative she describes how getting married freed her from hiding, however her I poem
suggests she is still hiding.

I think/I wasn't religious

I mean/I guess

I think/I'm starting

I say/I don't/thought
At the end she says, “I’m starting, I say/I don’t/I thought.” In her narrative she talks about how the assumption of conversion is made, but she does not reveal that he did not convert. This further implicates that there is an assumption made on their religiosity as a couple, which she does not correct. Interestingly, her I poem clearly states, “I wasn’t religious” and as we know from her narrative, her level of religiosity may be something she keeps hidden from community members in an effort to protect herself.

When Azra discusses her relationships with other people, similar to Nour, she describes hiding religiosity. This is in the form of hiding her progressiveness from conservative Muslims and hiding the lack of religious practice her husband engages in. She begins by talking about her relationship with progressive Muslims.

Um, well, when I think others, I think there’s a lot of others. When I think about other progressive Muslims, like other Muslims that I know have similar viewpoints, I encourage them. And I make sure to be a good role model for them. Um when it comes to my more conservative Muslim family members, I don't engage. Like in previous, when I was younger I would. But not to the point where, I don't need to engage with you, why your conservative thinking’s wrong. I've grown out of that. I'm at the point where like I'm happy with what I believe, what I think is me, and I don't need to justify that. So instead of engaging in those dialogues, I leave it alone. So yeah. Um, let's see who else? Yeah. And then when it comes to like my non-Muslim friends, um, some of them know about the work that I do, where I stand. Um, I don't. Outside of Ramadan, I really don't. And outside of eating Halal, there is not a lot of very Muslim-y engagement with non-Muslim friends. You know, like if we're going out to eat, they know there needs to be a seafood option. There needs to be a vegetarian option, because Azra is not gonna eat anything
then. You know, so that kind of thing. And you know, I'm grateful that they're very supportive and respectful, you know. Especially with new friends, like my husband's friends for example, for them obviously it's kind of weird, but they respect it. You know, the first two times they're like, oh, okay, blah blah blah. But then afterwards it’s like, okay, cool. Like, let's go somewhere that she can eat something, you know. So a lot of times they're very supportive and um, which is awesome. So I’m thankful for that.

She continues to express the secret lack of religious practice.

There are multiple occasions where I get reached out, especially by Muslim women. Specifically, South Asian Pakistani Muslim woman. And I feel for them. I, I, I wish I had known more examples that could have told me, hey, it's going to be okay, but I didn't. It's such, like these relationships are so hush hush, that you don't even know. You know, a lot of times. And like I said, like in my case, nobody knows outside of maybe you and a few other of my progressive Muslim friends. Do not know that my husband is not Muslim. That he converted just for us to get married and that's it. You know, to the rest of the world I married an Ecuadorian Muslim and that's it. And it's hard, you know, um. For the sake of my parents, and for their respect, I have to continue to be careful on who I tell. Who do I share this information with. The last one is for them. It took them a long time to accept him, to accept our relationship. The last thing I want to jeopardize that.

And there are other women who are in the same exact boat. And it happens.

Azra’s I poems communicate that although she keeps her progressive identity and her husband’s lack of religiosity hidden, there is no shame.

I think/I think/I think/I know/I encourage

I make sure/I don’t engage
Azra’s secrecy appears in the fact that she “don’t engage” because she has “grown out of” it and the fact that she needs to “continue to be careful.” Yet, her secrecy doesn’t hold her back. The typical emotions of shame and embarrassment that one may associate with hiding are not present for Azra. She is strong: “I don’t need to justify” and positive “I am happy.” Yet most importantly, she does not want it to be a complete secret, knowing that through sharing she can help other Muslim women who have the same experiences.

_Cloaking the Love_ for Azra lasts for years. She successfully hides her relationship from her parents and the Muslim community. The secrecy involves the fear of what could happen
when the truth is out. She not only fears not being accepted or being disowned, but she fears for her physical safety. When she tells her parents, it “blows up.” *Cloaking the Love* represents protecting herself.

Oh my God. It was. It blew up in my face. How dare you. You know, you know, we didn't raise you to go sneaking around with boys. We didn't raise you, uh, how do you think you're gonna have a future with someone like that? So I went ahead and out of fear of being retaliated against, or getting, you know, physically hit. I said, okay, you know, I won't see him anymore. It wasn't until, you know, at that time, you know, I'm a working professional at this point. You know, I'm not college, I’m not in high school. So I, and you know, I tell [husband] like I don't know how much longer I can get away with this, you know, I wanna marry you, I want to be with you, but like I can't do this anymore. So you know, [husband] like, you know, I think this might be the time for you to be honest with them. And I had to mentally prepare for what was gonna come with that. What, what you know, what was going to ensue after I told them, you know, were are they going to kick me out of the house? Was I, you know, at that time there was a lot of stories coming from the UK that there were Pakistani girls who would fall in love with British White guys and their families would find out and they would get killed. Or worse that they were, they would be told, oh yeah, let's go to Pakistan for vacation. And they would never return. So deep down in my gut I was deathly afraid. And very afraid that, would my parents take, go to that level of anger to do some crazy shit like that. I didn't know. I didn't know, and I needed to be well prepared for whatever was gonna come. So at that time, um, you know, I had told my sister who is three years younger than me, who at that time was also dating somebody outside of our faith and culture. And I had told her
hey, you know, I think I'm going to move out and I'm going to tell Mom and Dad and I'm going to move out. And so she was afraid of being retaliated against also as a result. So she's like, I'm moving out with you. (laugh)

Azra’s I poems further demonstrate a fear around the uncertainty. She wants to be with her partner, but she doesn’t know what will happen when her family finds out about her relationship:

“I don’t know. I can get away…I was deathly afraid, I didn’t know.” There is movement and courage because she will reveal the secret, she just “needed to be well prepared.”

I went/I said/I won't see
I'm/I'm/I'm/I tell
I don't know/I can get away
I wanna marry/I want to/I can't do/I think
I had/I told/I was deathly afraid
I didn't know/I needed to be well prepared
I had told/I had told/I think

I'm going to move out/I'm going to tell/I'm going to move out/I'm moving out

After Azra’s relationship is out in the open, there is still a level of hiddenness she maintains. This can be heard in the I poem each time that she tries to escape after telling or bringing her relationship into the open. Each time Azra says “I tell” or “I told,” she thinks about leaving either physically (e.g., “I can get away,” “I had to be well prepared,” “I’m going to move out”) and emotionally (e.g., “I was deathly afraid. I didn’t know,” “I think”). Next, Azra’s Cloaking the Love protects her husband from her Muslim family’s negative comments about his physical appearance.
And so he agreed to do the conversion and he witnessed. And so we did that at my home. And then, you know, we told my family. So they were very happy. They were all pleased. Um, and then the next month, we you know, told them to come and we had our nikah. And so that was a little nerve wracking because I had some members of my family that were really unhappy with (husband) and I getting married, you know. They didn't say anything, but you could see in their face their disappointment and. You know, it's one thing, you know, the biggest problem was outside of [husband] being from a different culture and him marrying within my family. My husband is a big guy. He and at that time he had lost weight and then gained a lot of weight. And so Pakistani’s are very crude when it comes to physical appearance, they tend to not be caring on how anybody else feels. They'll say it to your face as is. So it was very hard at that time because a lot of my family were not kind. You know, they wanted to see what he looked like. They thought he had a cute face, but he was a big man. And so that was a big issue. Um.

Oh. It was, I had to. I was trying really hard to protect [husband] from hurting his feelings. Because body image is a huge issue here in America, right? In Pakistan it's kind of like it's in your face, it's very blunt. But here it's like, it's a huge issue and you know, you don't wanna hurt anybody's feelings. So I tried really hard to protect him and not have him know what was happening. But eventually I had to tell him, and that kind of created a strife because obviously he had a bad taste in his mouth from my family. He didn't even meet them, all he knew is they judged him because of the way he looked. And um, so that was hard. We had just had our nikah, like religiously, we got married. And now here we are planning for our real wedding, would have been the next year. And we
were having these issues like, you know, he felt that I needed to stand up to my family more. Which eventually I had to. You know, I remember telling my dad, and I was crying, you know, because I'm like, it's not fair. Like I want to be, I want to love the the person I wanna love, but I don't want their or my feelings to be hurt by what everybody says. You know, because they, you know, they would make jokes about his being a big man and this blah, blah blah. So it was very painful. There was um, you know, like, I, I said, I tried really hard to shelter, [husband] away from that because I didn't want him to have a bad image about my family. He barely knew them, so I didn't want us like planning for our wedding and we're doing all this stuff and their viewpoint wasn't gonna change because of the way he looked. So yeah.

I had/I had to
I was trying really hard to protect
I tried really hard to protect
I had to/I needed to/I had to
I remember/I was /I am/I want/I want/I wanna/I don’t want
I/I said
I tried really hard to shelter
I didn’t want/I didn’t want

Azra’s I poem amplifies the protective element of hiding: “I tried really hard to protect…I tried really hard to shelter.” There is a strong sense of obligation to hide and protect (i.e., “I had to/I needed to/I had to”) in the face of what she “didn’t want” to happen, which would be to hurt feelings and further confirm to her husband the rejection from her family.
Humaima has not revealed her 6-year romantic relationship to her family or the Muslim community. For her, *Cloaking the Love* represents a form of protection from becoming disowned. Her oldest sister who had married a Muslim man, but did so out of love, had been disowned for seven years. Humaima identified arranged marriages as the norm for her culture. She talks about how she evades the question of marriage through being in school, but also indirectly communicates her partner preference.

Yeah. I'm pursuing another degree, so it was like, oh, okay. It's different, they'll be like, oh, it's different for you because you're, you're, you're still in your studies, you know? So, um, it's kind of been on the, uh, uh, under the radar a little bit. You know, it comes up every now and then. So when it does come up, I'll like, like my parent, my mom will be like, oh, we gotta find somebody or something. And I'll be like, okay, whatever. Like you can find somebody, but I don't want like another, like, I don't want to marry a brown person, I don't want to marry like a Desi person. Like I don't like, like Pakistani or Indian men, you know? And she'll be like, oh like, God forbid, like, what are you saying? And I'm like, I don't like, I don't like those people. Like I don't like, that's a personal bias and a prejudice that I have, you know, based off of my own experiences. So I'm like, I don't want to marry somebody who's Desi. I'll be like, if you find me somebody from China, Japan or Korea or somebody, you know, like, I'm like, okay, fine. Like, I'll consider it, right. But she, I, I don't know, she doesn't really take it seriously or she'll just say in her experience those who marry within the same culture, like the marriages last longer. The people who marry outside of their culture, like they end up in divorce. And I'm like, where are your statistics, Mom? (Laughing). So I didn’t say that, but like every time I'm still like, nah, I don't want to marry a brown guy. I don't. Every marriage that I see when
it’s people in the culture right, it just is never a healthy relationship. So I'm just like, I don't want that. Um. Go ahead. I think like there are times where I kind of want to tell them, but then, uh, every time I tell them like a truth, like it'll end up like blowing up in my face. You know? Even for like small things. I'll be like, oh, I'm gonna go hang out with my friend John. Then it'll be like a whole big deal. Like, oh my God, that's a guy. Like if people see you with another guy, like what are they gonna think and blah, blah, blah. And I'm like, first of all, John's gay second of all, like, I don't give a shit. Like I tell my mom now. Like, you guys hang out with friends too. Like, oh, that’s different, we're married, it’s different. I'm like, no, it's literally the same thing. You know? You know you have family friends or like they just have friends that they hang out or like other Desi parents or whatever. So like even for like little things like that. It like blows up in my face when I try to be truthful. Versus, so if I say I’m going to hang out with my friend like Sarah it’s like, okay, it's like not a big deal. Even like it won't be a big deal. Like it's like doesn't matter. So like if I just say it's a girl and I go hang out with a guy friend it's fine, you know? So it’s just like, because I've tried to like say the truth, I'm like oh I’m going to hang out with John. Or like, oh, I'm, I'm hanging out with like this person or like this group of friends, you know? And there's like guys and they make a big deal out of it. It’s just unnecessary stress and reaction for nothing.

Humaira clearly knows what she does not want and does not like, and she tries to tell the truth. She is not only hiding her partner, but she’s also hiding much more than that–she is hiding her beliefs. She goes against some of the gendered cultural beliefs, and decides it is just easier not to tell her parents everything. We hear her anger through her I poem: “I don’t give a shit.”
I am/I'll/I'll
I don't want/I don't want/I don't want/I don't like
I am/I don't like/I don't like/I don't like
I/I am/I don't want
I'll/I am
I'll/I/I don't know
I am/I didn’t say
I am still/I don't want/I don't
I see/I am/I don't want
I think
I kind of want
I told
I'll/I am/I am
I don't give a shit
I tell/I am/I try
I say/I/I just say
I go
I've tried/I am/I am/I am/I am

Out of hiding, comes a strength. It is clear Humaima has a secret, but she knows what she wants. Well, I don’t know, like it's just like, I really don't know what it is, but like anytime I tell them like a truth, like, oh, I’m gonna go stay at a friend's house. It's like, it's such a big deal, but nothing’s happening. Oh, it's, you know, it's like if you go with a friend, you know, it's not the end of the world is it? So if I, if I tell them something like that it may
become like a big deal. Like there's, there's like a, like a fight or like a conflict about it and then I still go and do what I'm gonna do anyways. But then it's just like you're in a bad mood, they're in a bad mood, and then it's like, I'm still gonna do what I'm gonna do, right? So I'd rather just not have the bad moods on both ends and still go ahead and do what I'm gonna do. I know that the life that they lived is very different from the one that I lived. And so for them to like have those thoughts and those kind of a reactions, it's normal because they lived, most of their lives in Pakistan growing up. Obviously the culture is very different over there and um, they’re just speaking based on life experience, so like I can understand where they’re coming from, but also at the same time I know what I want in my life.

We hear that Humaima will “still do” what she wants to do even if she is unable to really be honest, (e.g., “If I tell them something like that it may become like a big deal… So I'd rather just not have the bad moods on both ends and still go ahead and do what I'm gonna do.”) She has empathy for where her parents come from: “I understand;” and she remains strong: “I know what I want.”

I don’t know/I really don't know

I tell/I tell

I still go and do/I am gonna do/I am still gonna do

I'd rather/I am gonna do

I know/I lived

I can understand

I know what I want
Humaima goes on to discuss her relationship with her boyfriend, who also has not revealed the relationship to his family due to his family’s similar expectations for him to be with someone from his own culture.

**Voice of Rebellion**

The *Voice of Rebellion* appears in all the interviews when the women define their identity for themselves. These women rebel against cultural norms and refuse labels. There is pride in being different. Nour discusses her reaction to her Muslim cousin who is the first Muslim family member to acknowledge her boyfriend’s existence. When she discusses how different she is from the rest of her Muslim family members, it is clear that she is defining a Muslim identity unique to her, and rebelling against the norm. She refuses to “fit in a box,” she questions what is accepted in the religion—although this serves to distance her from her Muslim identity—the distance draws her closer to her personal, unique way of being Muslim American.

I think, I think it mainly just made me feel like, wow, she's, she, she's trying like. Um, I mean it made me feel a little bit more accepted because I've always felt growing up that their way of being Muslim was just so black and white and that anything outside of that, of their way was unacceptable. And, you know, that's why I never really fit in with them because I was not raised the way that they were and that, that's just what their Islam was not My Islam at all. Um, you know, I, I've found it to be really constraining and all, basically just all about rules and appearances. And it was like the first time that someone from that side of the family had sort of broken outside of that. You know, I also think that my dad had confided in her about a lot of his frustration about my relationship, so she knew about it anyway. I don't know. She was trying to help I suppose.
She continues to express how her Muslim American identity has changed over time, and how she would question things.

It's very complicated for me. Uh, I used to be a lot more religious than I am now. Um, it’s something that my dad gave me, um he never really said. My parents agreed to raise us Muslim um, before they got married. My mom wasn't really religious; she was Catholic, but not practicing. And I guess even though they had agreed on that and that we were Muslim by birth, um, my dad never really like made me pray. He never like actively sought me out and said, all right, I'm gonna to teach you how to do this. It was more like I watched him and was fascinated and wanted to learn and um, it became this thing that we had together when I was younger and um, you know, pretty well into middle school, uh, something that we, that really gave me a lot of peace. But then what happened is I started asking a lot of questions, um, and actually one of them being, why is it that a Muslim woman can't marry a non-Muslim man? I think that's really unfair. Um, you know, you married my mom. What's going on here? Why is there a separate set of rules for me? Um, and just a lot of questions that basically nobody had a good answer to. Right? Um questions about the Qur’an. Why is my testimony worth half of a man's? Or whatever the situation. So, you know, um, at some point I strayed from it because I just got really frustrated and nobody answered my questions and I basically just lived a completely secular life um. But it was weird.

Nour’s I poems convey her process of identity creation. After thinking she knows that she never “fit in,” and she finds the norm to be “really constricting.” Further, the more she watches and thinks, this drives her to ask questions about the norms, and pushes her towards leading a more secular life.
I think/I think/I mean/I’ve/I never really fit in
I was/I/I’ve found (it to be really constricting)/I also think
I don’t know/I suppose/I used/I am/I guess/I watched/I was/I started (asking a lot of questions)

I think

I strayed

I/I basically lived a completely secular life

Nour’s rebellion directly appears when she fights against bullies on the bus who just see her Muslim identity, even though Nour identifies as somewhere in between. She knows she is different, but to others “it does not matter that you’re not wearing a headscarf [or]…that your mother is blonde.”

Yeah. Um, I remember, I remember um we we got into quite a few fights just because people like kids were terrible. Um, you know, uh, we were kind of like on the nerdy side too, so they definitely picked on us because of that as well. Like we we were really weird kids. But um, I remember being on the bus, uh the school bus and there was like this group of boys that would sit in the back and uh, yeah, basically they were very like Italian pride, you know, like that was their whole thing. And I remember being called like a. Yeah, I think that was the, they would just call us Bin Laden be like, oh, Bin Laden’s here. And um, I mean I just, yeah, like I really remember them picking on us, but this is one moment though where I have to be honest with you, I was the violent instigator out of many other instances where I had to defend myself. There was just literally like this boy that was just like Bin Laden, Bin Laden, Bin Laden, and I literally just like went up to him, and I don’t even know how to explain it, but. We're on a school bus and I climb up onto his seat, where he's sitting and I just stomped on him a million
times and made him cry. And walked away and like, that was it. And that was like after, oh my goodness, like months of torture. Like that was me being the violent instigator. But yeah, there were many other times where like, you know, oh, a terrorist bitch, you should go kill yourself. Like terrible things. I mean really, really terrible things. Um, so, you know, you feel how Muslim you are in moments like that. Where it doesn't even matter that you're not wearing a headscarf. It doesn't even matter that like that your mother is blonde. They don't care, like you're tied to this and this is who you are. Um, yeah. I mean yeah. (Laughs). It was awful.

Her I poem further reveals her strength and agency. She is not someone who passively takes the bullying. She is the “violent instigator” who is ready to defend herself.

I remember/I remember/I remember/I remember
I think/I mean/ I just
I really/I have
I was the violent instigator/I had to defend myself
I/I don’t
I/I just
I mean/I mean

Nour’s rebellion is also in line with her questioning. It appears that she influences her dad to also question as she finds herself challenging his views openly; and later he comes around and tells her that maybe she was right. She talks about how towards the end of his life, his views are aligned with hers.

I think it just, it made me realize um, that not every Muslim person um, subscribes to and I already, I already knew this because I always knew that if there were people like me
that there were many others. And that's why, you know, it's been kind of nice to see like, other, to hear other Muslim voices and people who, who don't necessarily agree with the very orthodox interpretation of Islam. Um, you know, I, who don't take all these like patriarchal scholars as seriously as my family did. But, it was just really nice to really watch someone's views evolve. And yeah, obviously it's nice because they evolved and became closer in line with my views. But you know, um, he went through a process of like really asking difficult questions and, and I think being challenged and in ways that a lot of. I think, I think when you're a Muslim person and all you, all you surround yourself with this other Muslims, it's way harder to be challenged. But he was out there in the world and he had daughters who were mixed and, you know, his wife was of a different culture, and the only one thing they argued about the most was how to raise us. So he, he was challenged from day one and it was a pain in the butt and it was so hard. But like, I think it benefited him and his spiritual growth. And you know I, I mean if I'm being honest, I think at the end of his life I don't know how much he believed in religion anymore. Um, it got really into science and started really questioning things. Um, as I am but.

She continues to discuss what she would like Islam to be. This representation of her identity as someone who does not cover, who is less religious and asks questions.

Well, I think I'd like Islam to be kind of on the level with where Judaism is now. Where you can be Jewish, but you don't necessarily have to follow every single little thing. There's no like, you know, Judaism police let's say. Um, and you know, I do have a friend who, she comes from an Orthodox family and she's like kind of a pariah, just like me. She's very, um, she's kind of like a tomboy. She will never wear a skirt, ever. Her whole
family wear skirts. And, we were talking a little bit about that and what that's like and how it's like they accept her. But it's weird, and you know, um. Yeah, like I think I would, I would like for people, for it to be okay for Muslims to be a little more diverse. You know, like I just feel like this, this voice that people try to create of what Islam is and what it should be and how it should be seen and represented. I really just, I resent that so much. I want to see more women who aren't covering their hair. I want to see. Who are represented. I don't want to just see the one hijabi women as like sole representation of Islam. Like I'm tired of people asking me, oh, you're Muslim, where's your veil? It's exhausting, to hear that. You know, like there's other way. I want it to be okay for there to just be other ways to be Muslim and for us to like disagree about things. The same way that like people. There are more religious Jews and less religious Jews, there are more religious Christians and less religious Christians. But like you can still celebrate the holidays and and take part in them, and be part of a community. But like, yeah, we don't all have to believe the same things. Uh, and I think the problem sometimes comes from the view of the Qur'an is like this infallible thing. Everybody's just so afraid to question anything. And you know, I mean, when Islam first came, people were asking a lot of questions. I don't know why that's dead, you know. It's just, it really just has to be okay for people to be themselves. And and I don't feel like that's the current culture, which I. I think there's a lot of really brave people trying to change things, but. And then there's a lot of people like who, you know, they're so on the other side of criticizing Islam that they're like feeding Muslims to like right wing bigots and I don't agree with that either. It's like, there's a very fine line, you know, between like criticizing your people and also and challenging them, but also then just feeding them to
the wolves and all the people who won't understand and won’t be able to discuss these issues with any nuance whatsoever.

Her I poems reflects an underlying strong voice. Nour knows, she thinks, and she is. She “wants to see” Islam represented in the diverse way that she experiences it and she resents the way that the Islam currently is depicted in society. Nour is rebelling against the norm, she “doesn’t agree” with the norm.

I think/I already/I already knew/I always knew

I/I think/I think/I think/I think/I think

I/I mean/I think/I don’t know/I am/I think

I would/I do have/I think

I would/I would/I/ I resent

I want to see/I want to see/I just don’t want to see

I am/I want/I think

I mean/I don’t know/I don’t feel/I/I think

I don’t agree

Fatima describes the changes in her identity through her lifetime, rebelling against the norm of what she is expected to be.

Um, I think, um, my Muslim American identity to, I guess to answer more directly. I'm sorry, I think I strayed from your question was before. But it's, um, I think it has in the sense of practice. Um, my ability to, uh, to not be under one brush, to be able to be a progressive Muslim who says I believe in LGBTQ rights. To be very strongly and openly. To um, I think be my own person as the Muslim American. Again, like I was saying before was there's much more push for communal identity. Oh no. And I think
there's a lot of pressure and a lot of judgment. Um, and I don't feel like I have to defend myself that, oh, I'm still Muslim. If I do x, y, and z. Uh, internally and externally within the Muslim Community. Muslim American community. And so I feel that that is how the shift has happened is I'm able to, um, to, to present myself um as, you know my own set of interpretations. Um, and oh, so what you might wear a sleeveless shirt. So are you no longer Muslim, right? So I think I used to, it was much when I was younger, um, feel guilt or hide or whatever. Right? And I think I feel less of that now.

She continues to defy expectations of physically what it means to be Muslim American.

Yeah, I mean just simply like, um, like how I dress. Right like, oh, must be consistent. Like, oh, this is what Muslims are. And people will say, oh well, why, you’re not? Why are you wearing that? You're supposed to wear that. And. I mean, it’s happened so many times. I think over the course of like, I mean it's over like elementary school, high school, college, right? Like I think it was so many different points where it's like, oh, surprise. I think when people visually. So when they first see me, they’re like, okay, do you look at Indian, you look South Asian. They're like, are you an Indian or Pakistani? And then I say Indian and there's an assumption that I'm probably Hindu. And so, um, I've often um, people have, survey that assumption and then just not bother to ask. And then when they find out they're like, oh, but you can't be that. Like literally ask. Like you're Muslim? No, you're not Muslim, and adapt.

Fatima further defies the spaces she can occupy as a Muslim American.

Um, I would say perhaps in, in how it, um. I think it has to do to some degree with uh, religious figures. Muslim imams in the United States. And um the lack of progressive imams. Or the lack of female imams for example. And um, lack of spiritual alignment.
Uh sorry. Spiritual, religious and cultural alignment or examples of how you live your life. Uh, so like, oh, you're going to prom or you're going to I don't-, just giving examples of things that would be like, oh, that's haram. Like, you can't do that. Right. And um, uh, I think contradictions in that sense, like certain, just certain things like playing sports and playing like in a short skirt, field hockey or like, I dunno. Um, yeah, like being at a bar, like whatever that may be. You know, like how, what that is, um feeling that a space doesn't make you suddenly now become Muslim. Right. And um so conflict in the sense that like oftentimes there's a lot of guilt. People talk about Jewish guilt, but I think there's a lot of Muslim guilt (laughing). There's like hah words. You must feel bad that, you know, this is, and I think where that conflict exists is where there's. Um, I think you're made to feel a sense of guilt through societal pressure. One can do that individually, but where their societal pressure uh that you must feel bad about certain actions. Um, I think some of them are. Um, you go to a club, right? Like when you go out to um, when your dance, when you. Yeah. Any of those things which are like abso- supposedly. Absolutely unacceptable in Islam, right? You dance with another person of the opposite gender. You embrace or give a kiss to somebody who's the opposite gender. You, um it just action day to day actions which um, may seem absolutely normal and comfortable and whatever, but then you feel like, oh wait. Because the pressure is to be like, oh no, but that's not right. You sort of pause back. You're like, oh, am I supposed to feel bad about this? I would feel you know, like. You sort of hesitate. You pause.

While her narrative reads as a strong voice of rebellion, through Fatima’s I poems one can hear a voice of hesitancy. For example, Fatima becomes unstable (“I guess/I am/ I think...I mean/I think”) each time she declares the way in which she is defying norms.
I think/I guess/I am/I think
  I strayed/I think
  I believe in/I think
  I was/I think/I think
I don’t feel /I have to defend
  I am still Muslim
  I feel/I think
  I/I was/I feel/I mean/
    I dress
    I mean/I think
  I mean/I think/I think
  I say/I am/I have/I would/I think
    I don’t/I think/
  I dunno/I think/I think/I think/I think
    (Am) I supposed to feel bad?
    I would

In addition to feeling hesitant, Fatima also feels some guilt: “Am I supposed to feel bad? I would.” The fact that Fatima continues to defy norms by defining herself as a “Progressive Muslim,” despite the hesitation and guilt communicates her strong and rebellious nature.
Chapter 5

Discussion

The focus of this research was to give voice to the psychological experience of Muslim American women in a relationship with non-Muslim partners. Six Muslim American women participated in this study. These women varied across all demographics (e.g., race, ethnicity, age, relationship status, etc.) and presented a complex picture of relationship experience and identity. The research questions this study sought to answer were: 1) How do Muslim American women experience their romantic relationship with a non-Muslim partner?; 2) How do Muslim American women experience their identity in the context of their romantic relationship with a non-Muslim partner?; 3) How do Muslim American women experience their family’s reactions and stigma within the family or community, if any, in regard to their romantic relationship with a non-Muslim partner? From the results of the interviews, three voices emerged from the data which captured the experiences of this group of women. These voices, Defenders of Cultural History, Cloaking the Love and Voice of Rebellion, answered the original research questions about how Muslim American women experience their relationship, their identity, and reactions from others toward their relationship. I present a discussion of how the data was interpreted using the Listening Guide, an overview of the findings, a discussion of the results in the context of the literature, clinical implications, limitations of the study, and areas for future research.

Using the Listening Guide Method

An analysis of all of the data together informed an overall master narrative of what it could mean to be a Muslim American woman in an interfaith relationship. The interviews of six Muslim American women were analyzed using the four steps of the Listening Guide Method. The first step consisted of listening to the plot, where the researcher listened for and recorded the
psychological terrain of the interview (e.g., dominant themes, symbols, emotions) as well as journaling her own reactions. The researcher considered how her own experiences could affect the interpretation of the narratives at this stage and continued to consider this throughout the analytic process. I poems were created by listing I statements from the entire interview by separating out every time the interviewee says “I” and the following verb. Sometimes additional seemingly important words were also included in the phrase, especially when it was related to the research questions (e.g., “I am American”). The phrases are maintained in the same order in which they appear in the text. The researcher looked at the I poem and created breaks depending on the flow and rhythm of the participant’s voice. I poems were interpreted and compared to the interpretations of the plot in the first step. This process allowed the contrapuntal voices to emerge (the voices that answered the research question) to emerge (Gilligan, 2003, 2015, 2017).

The results of this study are considered to be reflective of the human experience of this group of six Muslim American women, the relationship the participants have to themselves, to others, to the researcher, and to the larger social and cultural context. Inherent to this approach is the importance placed on the researcher to present findings so that readers can follow the evidence of the interpretations and ask questions. This study is by no means reflective of all Muslim American women and could appear differently if interpreted by researchers with different identities, in a different time, or a different place (Gilligan, 2017).

Overview of Significant Findings

Muslim American women are the Defenders of Cultural History when they defend their Muslim American identity despite feeling disconnected. They are defending against this disconnection and any perception that they are not Muslim. Their disconnection is a way of connection, and these women prove to themselves that they are indeed Muslim and American
when they use the *Voice of Rebellion* to define their own unique, progressive, Muslim American identity.

The *Defenders of Cultural History* express their disconnection through 1) identification with the American identity (i.e., “I felt like an American”) and 2) the pain that they felt from being different (i.e., “I am lonely in the Muslim community”), which was influenced by negative treatment by either Muslims or Americans. The defensiveness related to the contradiction of the narratives that often voiced either a dual Muslim American identity or an oscillating identity (feeling Muslim or American depending on the context), stood in contrast to the I poems, clearly indicating a disconnection. A further indication of the defensiveness was when women offered a declarative statement about feeling disconnected, and their voices became unstable (“I mean/I think… I didn’t speak Arabic/I felt totally lost/I think”).

The *Defenders of Cultural History* answers the question about how these six Muslim American women experience their identity in the context of their relationship. Nour states, “I sometimes feel like this, the religion is just caused me so much pain.” The pain associated with their identity involves the fact that these women hold more progressive identities which allow them to be in interfaith relationships in the first place. Despite the pain that comes with the identity, there is a need to cling onto the faith because it defines who these women are; and not to do so would negate their history. For Nour, it’s a connection to her father: “It’s something that my dad gave me.” Both of Azra’s parents were raised Muslim, and this is something they passed onto her and her sister. For Saifa, it’s a connection to her country of origin: “I grew up in Saudi Arabia though. Um, so I was raised Muslim.” For Natalie, it’s the connection to her parents as well as the hope that her spirituality will lead to, “a greater reward some point.”
A defining feature of these Muslim American women’s experience of their romantic relationship was through *Cloaking the Love*. These six women all used *Cloaking the Love* in regard to their relationship, to protect and hide. The secrecy involved 1) hiding their partner (i.e., “I was trying really hard to protect”) or 2) hiding their own beliefs (i.e. “I wasn’t religious”) or their partner’s lack of religious beliefs (i.e., “I continue to be careful on who I tell”) from Muslim family or community members. When there is secrecy, these women’s narrative—and especially their poems—reveal emotions of fear (i.e., “I was deathly afraid”), pain, and anger which lead to the desire to protect.

These women are serving to protect their partners and mostly to protect themselves from mistreatment. *Cloaking the Love* answers the two research questions about how these women experience their relationship with a non-Muslim partner as well as how these women experience their family’s reactions and any stigma within the family or community in regard to their romantic relationship.

Despite the loneliness that many participants described, they possess a hidden strength. The *Voice of Rebellion* is used by Muslim American women to express the way in which they define their identity. The examples offered by the women displayed a tendency to shatter norms, to refuse definitions, and to state an acceptance of who they are. The *Voice of Rebellion* appeared when participants 1) departed from the norm (i.e., “I strayed...I never really fit in”) and 2) asserted what they believe in (i.e., “I don’t agree... I believe”).

The *Voice of Rebellion* also answers the research question of how Muslim American women experience their identity. As mentioned earlier, this voice is related to the *Defenders of Cultural History*. When the Muslim American women feel disconnected from their identity, they
cling to stronger. It is through this defensiveness that they develop the agency to break norms and define their own identity.

**Discussion of Findings in the Context of the Literature**

These findings echo the bicultural identity integration literature, on what it means to hold dual cultural identities, of being Muslim and American. When asked about the experience of being Muslim American, participants told stories about experiencing these identities together or in an oscillating manner. However, their I poems often indicated that they experienced their Muslim and American identities as separate. Theoretically, BII conceptualizes resident and heritage identities to be overlapping and compatible to differing levels (Benet-Martínez et al., 2002).

It was clear through the narratives which participants experienced higher levels of bicultural identity integration versus those with lower levels. High BII, defined by greater levels of blendedness and harmony, was evident in those participants who verbalized examples of how their Muslim and American identity coexisted. These findings were backed by participant scores on the BIIS-2. Blendedness, connected to behavior, appears in Fatima who described feeling more connected to her Muslim American identity when seeing an increase in Muslim figures in the media and Muslim immigrants in American society. She integrated her Muslim American identity through her discussions with her partner, activism (e.g., attending protests), and connection with other progressive Muslims. Harmony, which is linked to affective and relational factors, is observed when Humaima stated that she values “accepting people for who they are;” which, she finds is both an American and Muslim relational trait. Emotionally, she described how happy she felt when finding a Christian-Muslim interfaith group which validated the way
she integrated her Muslim and American values in the context of being in a relationship with a non-Muslim man.

Participants who experienced lower levels of bicultural identity integration reflected identity stories of compartmentalization and conflict. Compartmentalization, another behavioral and cognitive factor, appeared in Saifa’s story as she described feeling more Muslim when around her partner. She even described cognitively her Muslim and American identities existing separately: “I feel like it’s all part of the same knife if that makes sense. Like compartmentalized, but I’m the same person, but it’s different parts of me. Depending on the day, like one part comes out more.” Conflict, a relational and affective factor, appeared in Nour’s story when she experienced a significant amount of pain due to being othered by both Muslims and Americans. She described times where she did not fit in with other Muslims because she did not speak Arabic and because she was with a non-Muslim man. She also told a story about a time in childhood when she was bullied by Americans, and when in adulthood, she was tolerated as “one of the good ones” among the Italian side of her family. Further she described a conflict due to gender expectations from the religion, enforced by her father which conflicted with Nour’s American values (e.g., to date, to drink, to have sex).

The data support the idea that unique narratives are formed at the intersections of identities across individuals. The Muslim American women in this study described the experience of belonging to two marginalized groups: being a Muslim and being a woman. Zuckerman (1997) describes a master narrative of gender regulation that exists within religion. Gender regulation involves ideology and norms indicating what is appropriate behavior based on gender. Participants in this study voiced the awareness of gender regulation, and many resisted. For instance, Humaira discussed how parents often supervise their female children more closely,
and frown upon cross gender interactions. Her parents reacted negatively when she disclosed her male friendships: “And there’s like guys and they make a big deal out of it.” Fatima stated so clearly “they think I wish I was a guy,” when discussing how her siblings perceive her as she struggles with different expectations for men and women in regard to marriage.

When studying Muslim women university students, Gilat (2015) stated that only when there is an awareness of gender regulation can women actively work towards resisting it in their lives. Many participants identify traditions and taboos that they are both aware of and that they resist among their interactions with family and friends. After experiencing a negative reaction toward her relationship from her father, Nour described the double standard of dating in college and having an interfaith relationship. She observed how the rule of abstaining applies only to women, as compared to men. “I think I always felt like he was a little bit of a hypocrite because he got to do whatever he wanted. And a lot of what he was saying to me was very much based on. It, it was very much based on gender, you know, because these are things that people don’t really tell boys. Young boys.” She later described how her resistance to gender norms led to a distanced relationship from her father for a period of time.

A main theoretical tenet of intersectionality is that intersectional identities are defined in relation to one another (Shields, 2008). Natalie described the experience of being a Black Muslim American woman. “Yeah, it's a, it's just crazy ‘cause there's a lot of. We’re just like the last to be picked for anything. So we're not seen as attractive, uh being a Black woman. Um, we have lower incomes, so we're not seen as assets in terms of wealth.” Afterwards she pointed out how as a Muslim American, it is difficult for her to connect to other Muslim Americans, because they are usually immigrants or speak another language. Additionally she experienced the masjid, her place of worship, as being made up of mostly members of an older generation. All of the
Black Muslim women she knows cover their hair. As someone who identifies with a moderate level of religiosity, she finds herself disconnected. She continues to discuss how at the intersections of her identities, it is a lonely place because there is a lack of people who are similar.

Nour described the intersections of being an Italian and Egyptian Muslim American woman. After 9/11, she had an experience of being labeled as a terrorist on the school bus. Being part Italian, she described “did not matter” to the other children, who were Italian American themselves, because all they saw was her Muslim identity: “They don't care, like you're tied to this and this is who you are.”

Saifa described the intersections of being a Saudi Arabian and Cuban American Muslim woman. She states, “Depending on the day, depends on how much I relate to one culture or the other. And same with the religion it depends on the day. Because my mom was Catholic before she married. Um, I do feel a connection with like the Catholic faith too.” Saifa described the ways these identities intersect, and that is the way she lives her daily life, participating in Muslim prayer and holidays, going to mass, participating in the Cuban New Year’s tradition, and eating cultural foods.

Participants identified racially as White, Asian, South Asian, and Black as well as ethnically Pakistani, Indian, and mixed (Italian and Egyptian, Saudi Arabian and Cuban). Narratives did differ based on these demographics when participants discussed their identities, especially when describing the intersectionality of their multiple identities. In addition to interfaith relationships, some participants were in interracial and interethnic relationships. However, the specific experiences of participants due to the differences of their partner’s race or ethnicity was not explicitly discussed. Most of what participants attended to in the interviews
was in the context of their partner’s faith differences. Nevertheless, these differences remain, and likely have an impact on these women. Many studies in the larger interracial marriage and family literature indicate that interracial couples often discuss experiences of discrimination with one another, which causes strain on the relationship. Oftentimes, discrimination experiences come from the couples’ family members (Killian, 2003; Seshadri & Knudson-Martin, 2013).

The six women’s voices build on one another to form a grander narrative of collectively what it means to be a Muslim American woman in an interfaith relationship. Their voices capture connections and disconnections that they have with others and with themselves. Gilligan (1993) described this well, when she wrote of women’s experiences of relationships as reflecting “the paradoxical truths of human experience—that we know ourselves as separate insofar as we live in conjunction with others, and that we experience relationship only insofar as we differentiate other from the self.” These women collectively embody resistance, which allows them to differentiate from family, partners, friends, and community. Differentiation allows them to begin to define who they are and live according to this definition.

Limitations and Future Research

The limitations of this study include the small sample size, and the complexity of the method of analysis. Small sample sizes are inherent to many qualitative studies, especially for narrative research. As this sample is limited by gender and sexual orientation, it is not representative of the entire Muslim American community who are in interfaith relationships. By no means do the findings of this study speak for all Muslim American woman in an interfaith relationship. Through sampling six participants, I was interested in a rich and detailed understanding of each case versus the variability and patterns among participants. As one
participant points out so well, “I think this is my experience today.” The findings of this study are likely influenced by time and context.

The method of analysis, the Listening Guide, presents a lengthy, time-consuming approach due to the requirement of multiple readings of the text. The rich, detailed data that results may be difficult to repeat, as each story is presented to reflect the uniqueness of the individual. However, congruent with the constructivist paradigm, generalizability was not my aim, as I was interested in bringing forth the unique voices from this group of women. The Listening Guide is the most appropriate method to explore individual identity narratives, first person voices, and related associative logic and unconscious processes.

As the sole researcher of this study, the researcher attempted to be mindful about not overly privileging her own voice and interpretations. However, this study would have benefited from having a team in which researchers could compare their interpretations at various stages of the Listening Guide approach, consolidate their interpretations, discuss contrapuntal voices that are heard, and make decisions about what to include in the final results. This would increase fairness, allowing multiple researcher voices in constructing the realities.

This research is a starting point to continued exploration into the experience of diverse Muslim American women, particularly, their identity experiences and navigating stigma within their family and communities in the context of interfaith relationships. Because this study recruited participants from various racial and ethnic backgrounds, future research could limit the population of study to Muslim American women in interfaith relationships from one racial/ethnic group to better understand their experiences. Some of the study’s participants were in interracial (in addition to interfaith) relationships. In order to understand the experiences of these women better, future research could limit the study to Muslim American women in interracial
relationships. In addition to the Listening Guide, other qualitative methodologies could be used to explore Muslim American women’s experiences. The literature would also benefit from quantitative research which investigates more participants and may include a greater range of age, race, ethnicity, religiosity, and sexual orientation. The experience of Muslim American men could also be investigated to broaden this area of study. It would be interesting to conduct a focus group on the specific population in this study to explore emerging themes and voices from a group of women relating to one another in the moment. It would also be interesting to track participant voices over time to see how their experience changes through the course of their lifetime. Some of the women in this study spontaneously discussed their ideas about raising children and potential conflicts that could arise given their own identity experiences and relationships with a partner of a different faith. Future research could explore the experiences of an older population of women focusing on their experiences of raising children, their decision-making process, partner’s input, familial and community reactions, as well as their identity experiences.

Clinical Implications

Multicultural counseling competencies and social justice are major areas of focus in the counseling psychology literature (Arredondo et al., 1996; Sue, Arredondo, & McDavis, 1992; Vera & Speight, 2003). This study provides directive for counseling psychologists working with this specific population to provide culturally sensitive treatment by offering a necessary and in-depth exploration into the lived experiences of diverse Muslim American women in interfaith relationships—a perspective that is missing in the literature. Findings of this study express that these women have complex and often distressing psychological experiences. Therapy could be an important resource to process difficult identity as well as familial or other cultural
experiences. In particular, Muslim American women could benefit from exploring the nuances of navigating intersectional and bicultural identities, coping with negative familial and community reactions, and being supported in defining their own identities through the therapeutic process.

With the lack of diverse representation of Muslim American women and existing negative views of Muslims and Islam perpetuated through media in mainstream society, counseling psychologists can also make efforts to promote social change in academic, clinical and community settings. This is aligned with Sue’s (1995) argument for counseling psychologists to proactively address systems of oppression as a preventative measure. In particular, counseling psychologists can facilitate raising consciousness by leading discussions or presentations which reflect the diverse identities of Muslim American women and identify how to provide support for those struggling with issues related to interfaith relationships. Running a process group with this population in clinical settings, such as college counseling centers or referring these women to local progressive Muslim communities, could be extremely affirming and provide a necessary space for Muslim American women who feel alone—as all the participants in this study ultimately reflected feeling at one point.
Table 1

**Participant demographic information**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Age of immigration</th>
<th>Marital status</th>
<th>Length of relationship</th>
<th>Level of religiosity</th>
<th>Partner’s age</th>
<th>Partner’s religion</th>
<th>Partner’s race</th>
<th>Partner’s ethnicity</th>
<th>Partner’s level of religiosity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nour</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Italian &amp; Egyptian</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Agnostic</td>
<td>Hispanic &amp; Asian</td>
<td>Puerto Rican &amp; Chinese</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Azra</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>Pakistani</td>
<td>15 months</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>Ecuadorian American</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saifa</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Saudi Arabian &amp; Cuban American</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humaima</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>South Asian</td>
<td>Pakistani</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Agnostic/loosely practicing Christian</td>
<td>East Asian</td>
<td>Korean American</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natalie</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>9 months</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Methodist Christian</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fatima</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>South Asian</td>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Cohabitating</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Baha’i</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Ghanaian</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Level of religiosity is on a scale from 1-5 (1 lowest). Length of relationship is in years.
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Appendices

Appendix A: Screening Questions

1) Are you between the age of 25-39?

2) Are you currently in a relationship with a non-Muslim male?

3) Do you have a Muslim heritage (i.e. does your family identify with the religion?)

4) Do you identify as a heterosexual female?
Appendix B: Demographic Questionnaire

1. Age: ____________

2. On a scale of 1-5, with 1 being the weakest and 5 the strongest:
   a. How strongly do you identify with the Muslim identity?
   b. How strongly do you identify with the American identity?

3. At what age did you immigrate to the United States? (Enter age 0 if born in U.S.).

4. Please indicate your household income level:

5. What is your highest level of education?

6. How long have you been in your current relationship with a non-Muslim partner?

7. What is your partner’s age?

8. What is your marital status? (single, married, cohabiting, separated, divorced, widowed)

9. How many children do you have?

10. List the ages of your children and indicate which are with your current partner.

11. What is your partner’s ethnicity?

12. What is your partner’s race?

13. What is your partner’s highest level of education?

14. What religion does your partner identify with?

15. How religious on a scale of 1-5 (1 lowest), is your partner?

16. What is the number of past partners you have had which were non-Muslim? (Do not include current).
Appendix C: Letter of Solicitation

Hello,

My name is Beyza Sinan, and I am a student in the Counseling Psychology Ph.D. program in the Department of Professional Psychology and Family Therapy, in The College of Education and Human Services, at Seton Hall University.

I invite you to participate in a research study on the psychological experience of Muslim American women with non-Muslim partners. I am interested in the experience of the romantic relationship, identity, and reactions or stigma within the family or community (if any).

To qualify for this study you must:

(a) be 25-39 years old.
(b) currently be in a romantic relationship with a non-Muslim male.
(c) identify as a heterosexual female.
(d) identify as Muslim American or identify as American and having Muslim heritage (coming from a predominantly Muslim family).

If you are interested in participating and meet the criteria for this study, you will be sent a demographic form to complete, to gather basic information like age, education level, and income. You will also be asked to complete the Bicultural Identity Integration Scale-Version 2 to gather information about how you experience your cultural identities. Then, you will be invited to participate in an interview with me using Skype at a time that is convenient for both of us. It is predicted that the study will last 60-120 minutes. Participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at anytime.

Because this study includes an interview, the video recording will have information about you. However, I will keep the data strictly private. The data will be kept in a password protected memory stick. The memory stick will be kept in a locked, secure place. The data will be safely stored for three years and destroyed after. Only my advisor and I will have access to the data. The results of the study may be reported on at public meetings or papers. Identifying information will be removed from the product.

If you meet this criteria, and are interested in participating in this study, please contact the researcher, Beyza Sinan, M.S. at beyza.sinan@student.shu.edu.

Feel free to forward this letter to any who may fit the eligibility criteria.
Please contact the researcher (Beyza Sinan: beyza.sinan@student.shu.edu) or her advisor (Minsun Lee, Ph.D.; minsun.lee@shu.edu; 973-275-4822) for more information or questions. Questions about the rights of research participants may be directed to the Director of the Institutional Review Board (Mary F. Ruzicka, Ph.D.; irb@shu.edu; (973) 313-6314).

Thank you,

Beyza Sinan, M.S.
Counseling Psychology Doctoral Student
Department of Professional Psychology and Family Therapy
Seton Hall University
beyza.sinan@student.shu.edu
Appendix D: Semi-Structured Individual Interview Protocol

1) Tell me the story of how you met your non-Muslim partner.

2) Tell me about how your family reacted
   a) How did you feel about it?
   b) How did that affect your relationship with your partner?
   c) What about your friends?

3) Tell me about your identity as a Muslim American
   a) Has this been consistent through time?
   b) How do others see your identity?
   c) Do others see your identity differently?
   d) How does being with a non-Muslim partner affect your identity?

4) How do all of these experiences affect your relationship with your partner?

5) How do these experiences affect your relationship with others?
   a) How do these experiences affect your relationship with friends, family, and community members?

6) Is there anything else you would like me to know about your experience?
Appendix E: Permission to use Bicultural Identity Integration Scale–Version 2

Re: BIIS-2 permission to use

Q / Que-Lam Huynh <huynh.quelam@gmail.com>
Wed 3/7/2018 4:44 PM

To: Beyza Sinan <beyza.sinan@student.shu.edu>

Hi Beyza,

My apologies for the delayed response. Yes, you have my permission to use the BIIS-2. Please find attached the items along with scoring instructions. Please let me know if you have any questions, and good luck on your dissertation project! It sounds really interesting!!

Take care,
Prof. Huynh

On Fri, Mar 2, 2018 at 1:35 PM, Beyza Sinan <beyza.sinan@student.shu.edu> wrote:

Dear Dr. Huynh

I am a Doctoral student doing my Ph.D. in Counseling Psychology at Seton Hall University, in New Jersey. I was wondering if I could use the Bicultural Identification Scale–Version 2 for my dissertation? I will be investigating bicultural identity with Muslim American women.

If possible could I also get a copy of the measure with the instructions?

Thank you so much for your time and support!

Beyza Sinan
Doctoral Student
Counseling Psychology
Seton Hall University

**
Q / Que-Lam Huynh, PhD
Associate Professor
Department of Psychology
California State University, Northridge
18111 Nordhoff Street
Northridge, CA 91330-8255
USA

Voice: 818-877-3560
Fax: 818-877-2829
Office: Sierra Tower 301
Appendix F: Informed Consent

Informed Consent

Researcher's Affiliation
The researcher, Beyza Sinan, is a doctoral student in the Counseling Psychology Ph.D. program in the Department of Professional Psychology and Family Therapy, in the College of Education and Human Services, at Seton Hall University.

Purpose of Research
This study looks at how Muslim American women experience their identity and relationship with a non-Muslim partner.

Procedure and Instruments
This study will ask participants to fill out a basic information form with questions about their age and education level, etc. Participants will also be asked to complete the Bicultural Identity Integration Scale - Version 2 to gather information about how they experience their cultural identities. Then, the participant will be invited to take part in an interview using Skype. The interview will be videotaped. The researcher will put the interview in written form and share it with the participant.

Voluntary Nature of Participation
Taking part in this study is by choice. Participants may skip any question they do not wish to answer. Individuals may leave the study at anytime. There is no penalty for not completing the study.

Duration of Research
It is predicted that the study will last 60-120 minutes.

Anonymity and Confidentiality
Because this study involves a video recording of the interview, it will have identifying information. However, the information will be kept private. Data will be kept on a memory stick with a password. The memory stick will be placed in a locked and secure office. Only the researcher and her advisor will have access to the information. Results of the study may be reported in public meetings and papers. However, the researcher will remove identifying information from the results.

Risks
There is very little risk to participants of this study. If participants want to receive emotional support they may contact the American Psychological Association at 1-800-984-2000. Participants may also use the psychologist locator at http://locator.apa.org to find a psychologist.

Benefits
There is no direct benefit from participating in this study. Participants may benefit from knowing about what is learned in the research.

Contact Information
Please contact the researcher (Beyza Sinan: beyza.sinan@student.shu.edu) or her (Minsun Lee, Ph.D.; minsun.lee@shu.edu; 973-275-4822) for more information or questions. Questions about the rights of research participants may be directed to the Director of the Institutional Review Board (Mary F. Ruzicka, Ph.D.; irb@shu.edu; (973) 313-8314).

By signing this form, participants agree to take part in the study and be video-recorded during the interview. Please mail the signed Informed Consent Form and Demographic Questionnaires with the self-addressed stamped envelope provided by the researcher. Participants will get a copy of the signed and dated Informed Consent Form.

Participant __________________________ Date __________________________

Department of Professional Psychology and Family Therapy
400 South Orange Avenue • South Orange, New Jersey 07079-2685 • Tel: 973.761.9400 Seton Hall University
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Appendix G: IRB Approval

REQUEST FOR APPROVAL OF RESEARCH, DEMONSTRATION OR RELATED ACTIVITIES INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS

All material must be typed.

PROJECT TITLE: Partnering with a different faith: Muslim American women’s experiences

CERTIFICATION STATEMENT:

In making this application, I (we) certify that I (we) have read and understand the University’s policies and procedures governing research, development, and related activities involving human subjects. I (we) shall comply with the letter and spirit of those policies. I (we) further acknowledge my (our) obligation to (1) obtain written approval of significant deviations from the originally-approved protocol BEFORE making those deviations, and (2) report immediately all adverse effects of the study on the subjects to the Director of the Institutional Review Board, Seton Hall University, South Orange, NJ 07079.

_Beyza Sinan M.S._ 3/13/18
RESEARCHER(S) DATE

**Please print or type out names of all researchers below signature.
Use separate sheet of paper, if necessary.**

My signature indicates that I have reviewed the attached materials of my student advisee and consider them to meet IRB standards.

_Minsun Lee, Ph.D._ 3/13/18
RESEARCHER’S FACULTY ADVISOR (for student researchers only) DATE

**Please print or type out name below signature**

The request for approval submitted by the above researcher(s) was considered by the IRB for Research Involving Human Subjects Research at the _March 2018_ meeting.

The application was approved [ ] not approved [ ] by the Committee. Special conditions were [ ] were not [ ] set by the IRB. (Any special conditions are described on the reverse side.)

_Nancy J. Furgie, Ph.D._ 3/28/18
DIRECTOR DATE
SETON HALL UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD FOR HUMAN SUBJECTS RESEARCH

Seton Hall University
3/2006